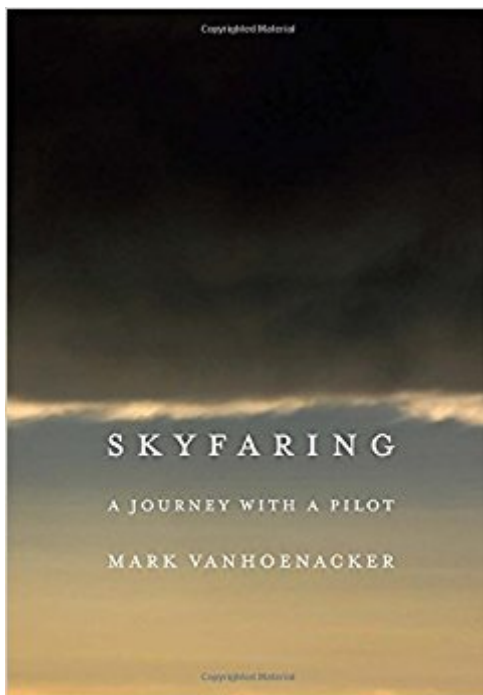


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# Skyfaring: A Journey With A Pilot



## Synopsis

A poetic and nuanced exploration of the human experience of flight that reminds us of the full imaginative weight of our most ordinary journeysâ ”and reawakens our capacity to be amazed.Â The twenty-first century has relegated airplane flightâ ”a once remarkable feat of human ingenuityâ ”to the realm of the mundane. Mark Vanhoenacker, a 747 pilot who left academia and a career in the business world to pursue his childhood dream of flight, asks us to reimagine what weâ ”both as pilots and as passengersâ ”are actually doing when we enter the world between departure and discovery. In a seamless fusion of history, politics, geography, meteorology, ecology, family, and physics, Vanhoenacker vaults across geographical and cultural boundaries; above mountains, oceans, and deserts; through snow, wind, and rain, renewing a simultaneously humbling and almost superhuman activity that affords us unparalleled perspectives on the planet we inhabit and the communities we form.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*\*A New York Times Notable Book of 2015\*\*\*\*An EconomistÂ Bestseller and Best Book of 2015\*\*\*\*AÂ Wall Street Journal Best Book of 2015\*\*\*\*The Sunday Times (UK) Book of the Week\*\*\*\*BBC Radio Book of the Week\*\*\*\*A Guardian Favorite Book of the Year\*\*\*\*A GQ Best Book of 2015\*\*\*\*AÂ Bloomberg Best Book of 2015\*\*\*\*A San Francisco ChronicleÂ Recommended Book\*\***Dwight Garner, The New York Timesâ œVanhoenackerâ |can put one in the mind of Henry Jamesâ |.His is a big-hearted bookâ |.Vanhoenacker is a talented writer, and we greet him at the start of what I hope is a career of writing about life in the heavensâ |.marvelously literateâ |If his book

had been around in the mid-80s, I suspect I wouldn't have been afraid to fly in the first place.

• Tom Zoellner, *The New York Times Book Review* "Superb". Vanhoenacker writes in a richly ethereal style, with the confidence of a professional who knows his subject well. It's an elegant, nonlinear reflection on how flying on a commercial airliner "even while painfully folded into a seat in coach" can lift the soul and inspire an awareness of the wonderfully improbable, of the state of "in-betweenness" in which air travelers routinely hover.

• Rinker Buck, *The Wall Street Journal* "[Vanhoenacker is] an exceptionally lucid and philosophically minded writer. He has spent the past several years taking notes about his life in the air and meditating on both the ethereal beauties and contradictions of flight. He reminds me of a brainy college physics major who actually wants to be a poet."

• *The Economist* "Mr Vanhoenacker, fortunately for his readers, has lost none of his sense of wonder at the miracle of flight itself...a beautifully observed collection of details, scenes, emotions and facts from the world above the world."

Emily St. John Mandel, *The Millions* "Skyfaring" is a love letter to flight, to a profession, and reading it was a balm. Vanhoenacker slips easily between poetic meditation into the nature of travel and technical explanations of the mechanisms of the 747, and I found all of it fascinating.... The book's meditative pacing isn't dissimilar to the rhythms of flight itself, to the way landscapes gradually unspool far below. There's tremendous pleasure in coming across the explanations for aspects of flight I'd never quite understood.... It was easier, after reading it, to forget my exhaustion and the small annoyances of the world and lose myself again in the beauty of the flight.

• Geoff Dyer, *The Guardian* "There is always something uplifting about people in love with their work, and on becoming an airline pilot Vanhoenacker (now a senior first officer with British Airways) seems to have attained a state of enviable grace.... Beautifully, because simply, put. As the principles of aerodynamics act 'as a kind of natural sculptor' to create the elegance of aircraft design, so Vanhoenacker's prose has a functional eloquence that carries the reader along for the ride."

*The Times Literary Supplement* "A Senior First Officer flying 747s for British Airways, he explains that many pilots regard aeroplanes as 'the first thing they loved about the world'. His abiding attachment is likely to make this masterly, beautifully written book one of aviation's classic texts. "Saint-Exupéry seventy years on, and with more to say."

Sarah Larson, *The New Yorker*, "What We're Reading This Summer" "[Vanhoenacker] seems to have the mind of a scientist and the heart of a poet."

John Wilwol, *San Francisco Chronicle* "Skyfaring" artfully demystifies the fascinating technical aspects of commercial flight while delivering poetic insights straight from the cockpit.

• Bill Prince, *GQ* "Both a manual for infrequent flyers (wherein the physics and metaphysics of time and space are for once essayed

in a perfectly straightforward manner) and a skilful meditation on the glories of traversing the earth at the helm of mankind's greatest technological achievement that - yes - flies from the page.â

•Pico Iyer, author of *The Man Within My Head* "Poets are pilots of a kind, teaching us to navigate the world anew; Mark Vanhoenacker is a pilot with the spirit, the wide-open eyes, the rare feel for beauty and discovery of an accomplished poet. Imagine Henry David Thoreau reflecting on the wonders of the lights of Oman as seen from the cockpit of a 747, and you begin to have something of the fresh magic of this exceptional debut. This is a work for anyone who longs to learn how to see again, and to live.â

•Alain de Botton, author of *How Proust Can Change Your Life* "One of the most constantly fascinating, but consistently under-appreciated aspects of modern life is the business of flying. Mark Vanhoenacker has written the ideal book on the subject: a description of what it's like to fly by a commercial pilot who is also a master prose stylist and a deeply sensitive human being, familiar with great art and literature and always willing to tease out the psychologically resonant implications of his job. This is a man who is at once a technical expert (he flies 747s and Airbuses across continents) and a poet of the skies. This couldn't be more highly recommended.â

•James Fallows, author of *China Airborne* "Skyfaring" is a beautiful, revelatory work of observation, thought, and expression. The experience of traveling through the air, which would have seemed miraculous in any previous moment of human existence, has been drained of its wonder through the drear of the modern airline experience. From his seat in the front of the airplane, Mark Vanhoenacker captures and conveys the magic of seeing the world from above.â

•Patrick Smith, author of *Cockpit Confidential* "Mark Vanhoenacker is the thinking man's pilot, and his is a rare and refreshing perspective in an age when commercial flying is taken almost entirely for granted. Through prose as passionate and erudite as it is informative, he describes not merely the mechanical workings of flight, but will rekindle, in those who care to listen, a lost appreciation for the marvel of global air travel." *The Times* (London) "A 330-page ode to the wonder of flight in the tradition of the great pioneer pilot-author Antoine de Saint Exupéry and Charles Lindbergh....Like the best pilot writers, Vanhoenacker paints humanity seen from the aviator's perch, woven together with a fascinating layman's account of the mechanics of flight, the feat in which a 380-tonne jet can lift people and cargo away from the ground and across the sky....Vanhoenacker invokes philosophers, music, history, and his own past and family to convey the sense of discovery and disorientation that he feels crisscrossing the globe between Tokyo, Johannesburg, Los Angeles, London and the Arabian Gulf....a riveting practitioner's account of a human achievement that has been rendered humdrum by its own success.â

•The Scotsman 'Wonderfully evocative and clear-eyed...fascinating.' *Giles Foden, Conde Nast*

Traveller (UK) "Not since Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic *Vol de Nuit*...has there been such a fantastic book about flying as Mark Vanhoenacker's *Skyfaring: A Journey With a Pilot*....What marks this book out is its author's ability to bring a genuine poetic sensibility to the experience of flying and the feelings of strangeness and beauty that it engenders....*Skyfaring* takes the genre to a whole new level. I found myself turning over the corners of almost every page with excitement and admiration."

• The Bookseller (UK) "This airborne odyssey in [Vanhoenacker's] company is enthralling, from the physics of lift and the vicissitudes of flight paths, to St Elmo's Fire, the Aurora Borealis, pristine sunsets, and the fellow pilots he passes like ships in the night sky. Read it, and you'll find yourself requesting a window seat every time you fly."

• Erica Wagner, The New Statesman (UK) "Mark Vanhoenacker's *Skyfaring* reminds us of the magic of aviation...fluid and elegant...full of information that is wonderful in its simplicity...Flying planes isn't just his job: it remains his passion."

Libby Purves, BBC Radio 4 (UK) "A longhaul airline pilot whose vision is unexpectedly poetic and romantic...what stood out for me was that sense of wonder up there...a rather lovely book."

Pilot Magazine (UK) "A great read for absolutely everyone with an interest in flying...a beautiful odyssey of observation...if you believe that airline flying has become a monotonous, humdrum experience, the victim of its own success perhaps, then reading this book will take you to a fresh and thoughtful appreciation of the magic and excitement of flight."

• Ian Critchley, The Sunday Times (UK) "Engaging, even poetic...Vanhoenacker's passionate and beautifully written book will remind even the most jaded traveller of the wonder of flight."

Monocle "What a great idea this is...a masterpiece of time, distance, palm trees, frosty mornings, lofty ambition and self-effacing charm."

• Dan Glaun, MassLive.com "A lyrical meditation on his work as a pilot for British Airways, and takes readers through the routines and wonders of life in the cockpit."

• Karen Brown, New England Public Radio "Skyfaring | is essentially a love letter to the skies."

• Booklist "Vanhoenacker invites readers to join him in the cockpit of a 747 so that we might experience the oft-forgotten magic of flight. In elegant and balanced prose, he meditates on every aspect of aviation. The lift Vanhoenacker creates with his language is due to the carefully constructed machinery of each chapter – the way in which he balances personal narrative, research, and reverential reflection | It is an artful and elevated look at the soul in flight."

• Kirkus "starred review" "This pilot is an accomplished stylistic acrobat who flies "and writes "with the greatest of ease. The anatomy of an airliner and peripatetic aerial travel, as well as sophisticated worldview, combine for first-class reading "sure to enhance your next flight."

Publishers Weekly "In this intimate, often illuminating piece," Slate columnist

Vanhoenacker takes readers on a personal tour of his world as an airline pilot....Vanhoenacker conveys that sense of freedom, wanderlust, and traversing a large world made small by travel, while at the same time demystifying the inside of the cockpit and humanizing the all-powerful pilots within....Packed with eloquent insight into a high-flying world.â •

MARK VANHOENACKER is a pilot and writer. A regular contributor to The New York Times and a columnist for Slate, he has also written for Wired, the Financial Times, the Los Angeles Times, and The Independent. Born in Massachusetts, he trained as a historian and worked as a management consultant before starting his flight training in Britain in 2001. His airline career began in 2003. He now flies the Boeing 747 from London to major cities around the world.

Pleasant reading from a warm and friendly pilot. If you're interested in what goes on in a cockpit of a 747 (and some other equipment) this book is a good start. It is not technical however the author is very good at explaining technical concepts such as air speed vs. ground speed or how air, moisture, temperature, etc. all affect flight. What makes this an interesting read is that the pilot shares his personal relationship with flying and traveling, going into his family history and past flights and trips, as well as reporting on his time in the cockpit. In fact, for the first two chapters I was thinking that this would be more an autobiography and travelogue than what I expected it to be. In the end, it is a nicely balanced book; you get to know the author and, like him (or at least I did) and you get to know more about what happens in the front of the plane as well as how the pilots spend their time on the ground. A good read, As a very frequent flier (many years of 100k-350k miles) I would have liked there to have been a bit more mechanics, but I was satisfied with what was there. I learned a bit more about what was happening as I slept at 40,000 feet. Capt. Vanhoenacker is obviously well educated, has a feel for the arts and expresses himself in a manner that is pleasant to read as well as educational.

If you enjoyed "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevsky, you may enjoy Skyfaring. This is both a testament to the author's skill and the reason you may end up abandoning the book after the first couple of chapters. This book is not so much about aviation as about the author. Most of the prose is dedicated to his personal experience... not even flying, but living: the childhood memories, his sense of time, place, purpose of life and so on. As other reviewers have noticed, there is very little about technical aspects of flying, although some random bits are unexpectedly well covered in great detail, comparable even to textbooks: for example he goes into explaining indicated vs actual

airspeed. I actually managed to read all of it, but not because I was enjoying the endless self-reflection of the author, but because I was looking for a specific answer to the obvious question of how did he manage to become a major airline pilot so quickly and so late in life? There are myriads of private pilots with multiple ratings racking up their CFL hours in hopes of joining a regional airline some day, but in his case it was more like "I decided to become a pilot at 26 and here I am flying a jet on international routes 4 years later". Perhaps the job market for pilots was better in the UK in 2004?

This is an unusual book that might appeal to a wide range of readers: Those interested in aircraft, airliner passengers, and those who enjoy good writing irrespective of the subject. The author is a US-born pilot who, after starting his career as a business consultant, took commercial pilot training in the UK and now flies 747s for British Airways as a First Officer. The book ranges widely over the author's experiences as a pilot and as a passenger. The technical aspects of pre-flight, flight, and the duties of the pilot are described but are not the focus of the story. Instead, the author muses on his reactions to the strange life of a pilot in which one crosses immense stretches of the globe in less than a day, crossing time-zones, weather patterns, deserts, and mountain ranges with often only a brief contact with the destination before returning to the point of departure. Strange, too, that a pilot rarely flies with the same crew again. Instead, this small group of professionals, in the cockpit and in the cabin, coalesce in the preflight briefing, perform as a unit for the duration of the flight, and then disband, maybe never to reunite again. Mr. Vanhoenacker brings a literary background and a poet's sensibility to his writing. But, perhaps, the most remarkable aspects of the book are his powers of observation coupled with an introspection that vividly conveys how he is affected by what he sees. We share his delight at the changing light, at multiple sunrises and sunsets on the same journey, at the moon on the ocean nearly 40,000 feet below, and at an aircraft, coming to meet its shadow as it lands.

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