

The Pilot and the Little Prince

The Life of Antoine De Saint-Exupéry

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Who doesn't love the story of The Little Prince, the narrator of which decides as a 6 year old that the adults in his world lacked imagination? How else, after all, could they mistake his drawing of a snake which had eaten an elephant for a hat?

The narrator grows up to become an aircraft pilot and engine fixer. He encounters the Little Prince, with his intriguing and mysterious stories of life on other planets, in the Sahara Desert, where he has crashed his plane.

It is tale where flights of fancy meet an actual flight – and engineering triumphs.

The Pilot and the Little Prince is a children's biography of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of The Little Prince, and a pilot and engineer. He was born in France in 1900 when aircraft and flight were in their infancy. It is a tale of childhood adventure, albeit in a very privileged world, and grown-up achievements. Engineers, the book convinces, are adventurers, discoverers, and dreamers of things not yet invented.

'It was an exciting time of discovery in the world. Things people had only dreamed about were being invented – included flying machines.'

Antoine became a mechanic, then moved on to test planes and eventually became a pilot whose first job was to deliver the mail.

'He flew in Europe and then along the West African coast, where sometimes two planes travelled together in case one broke down or crashed. When the stars began to light up in the sky he knew it was time to land.'

Antoine eventually settled in France and married but always the skies called him.

'He had become a well-known pilot and a celebrated writer. Through it all he continued to fly – for work, pleasure and adventure'.

And adventure was never far away.

'His most famous adventure came when he tried to win a prize for the fastest flight from Paris to Saigon. He and his mechanic were ahead of the existing record when suddenly, in the middle of the night, they were engulfed in layers of clouds. Antoine

thought he saw a beacon of light. He tried to reach it, got lost and crashed in North Africa. The plane was destroyed but the two men were not hurt. They wandered in the desert for days before being rescued.

Antoine and his plane disappeared without trace in July 1944 on an Allied mission to photograph enemy positions in southern France.

'Maybe Antoine found his own glittering planet next to the stars.'

The illustrations, some sepia toned, fascinating and delightfully detailed – drawn to prompt questions from children: How? Why? Can I? They contrast beautifully with the matter of fact tone of the text.



This book, for school children of all ages, will inspire conversations about family, ideas, possibilities, determination, courage, geography, history, adventure, dreams, artand engineering.

I ordered from my local indie bookshop (Bridge Street Books, Wicklow town) and although they didn't have it in stock they had it and many others to me within a week. It is now part of our school library collection.

Annette Black