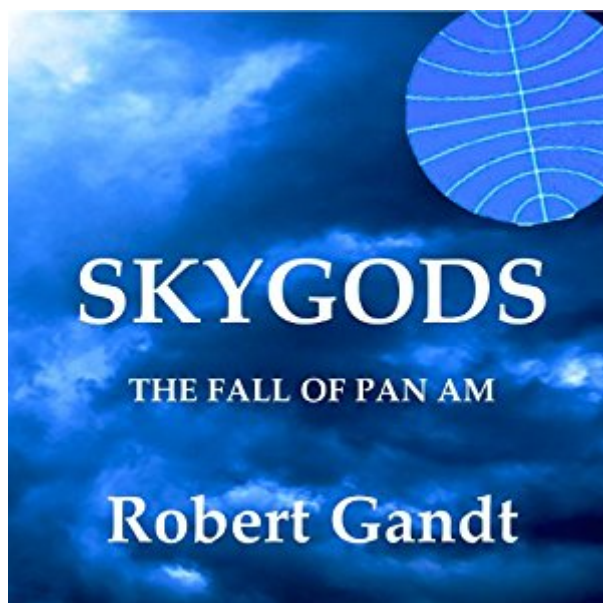


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Skygods: The Fall Of Pan Am



Synopsis

Originally published by Wm. Morrow, in 1995, Skygods is the saga of America's most glamorous airline - from its meteoric ascent to its plunge to extinction. Pan Am blazed the way across the world's oceans with its magnificent Clipper ships, launched the first international jet service, was the first to fly the behemoth 747, was the lead customer for America's SST and the Concorde, and was even taking reservations for the first commercial flights to the moon. Told from multiple viewpoints - pilots, stewardesses, management executives - Skygods is the life story of an American icon.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The story of Pan Am's downfall is tragic. My father was so proud to have worked there as a mechanic for 31 years. But as a kid, I remember how scared he was for more than a decade that he could lose his job. Then one day he did. I will never forget coming home from school as he sat on the couch staring blankly out the living room window. All he said was "It's finally over." By that time I was a freshman in college. He made me promise to finish my degree. He didn't have one and he said, "they can take away your job, but they will never take away that piece of paper that says you accomplished something. A college degree means you have options." He died 5 months later at the age of 53. I remember him saying how an announcement was made telling them to leave that last day. "Pan Am is bankrupt and out of business. You have 15 minutes to leave the building." There were armed security guards pad locking all the doors behind them. This book not only details the tragedy, but makes me understand my father more. It had to have been hell to have pride in a place

you worked for 31 years only to have it end in the most undignified manner ever. Pan Am stole from their employees. What happened to all those employees was criminal.

If you read "American Saga" on Juan Trippe and the history of Pan Am, this is the perfect follow-on book to read, providing strong detail to the final years of Pan Am as Robert Daley did for its earlier years in American Saga. I particularly liked this, written from the aviator's perspective. Gandt's story telling style was well paired to the history he's reporting. Even though I knew how it was going to end, I was cheering and optimistic that somehow the Pan Am execs would pull it out...was hoping for an alternate ending. It's just that kind of book. Because I so enjoyed Gandt's story-telling style, I'm now reading his "Twilight Warriors" written from the Navy aviators' point of view on the Battle of Okinawa, and plan to also read his "China Clipper."

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It's not the glossy glamour recounting recipe that many others have followed, but rather the view from a 60's pilot as he signed on and hoped to make some rank with Pan Am. I found it very candid in the recounting of operations and showed that the airline was a collection of humans, all of whom have the potential to run amok at times. This is a great book that I've already loaned out for the enjoyment of others.

For many years, I have been collecting books of airline histories. More than several are about Pan Am, once commonly referred to as America's Chosen Instrument because of its reach and influence around the world. While not strictly a history of the airline from gestation to expiration, Skygods: The Fall of Pan Am by Robert Gandt is nevertheless the best of the bunch in focusing on and explaining the slow and tortuous disappearance of this once proud and ubiquitous US-based global carrier. Of course, what goes down must also go up, especially in aviation. And Gandt also gives readers enough information about the airline's rise to appreciate its historical significance in the development of commercial aviation. By book's end, readers should feel as if they know Pan Am intimately - from the legendary founder, Juan Trippe; to Pan Am's near demise before it ever took off; to its pioneering of transoceanic travel via the flying boat; to its part in the development of revolutionary aircraft like the 707 and the 747 and the engines that powered them. The heart of the book - Pan Am's downfall - is told from the perspective of its Skygods and goddesses, the pilots who made the airline their lives. Like any success or failure, ego plays a big part. It was no different with Pan Am. Trippe manipulated and bullied people, including politicians across the globe, to make the carrier what it was, but it was hubris that brought it down, starting with his purchase of so many

747s that couldn't be filled. And after Trippe reluctantly relinquished control of Pan Am, a revolving door of CEOs was set in motion. Unfortunately, most of them had little business (or experience) running an airline, including William T. Seawell whose purchase of National Airlines (better known as "Seawell's Folly") only furthered Pan Am's descent. Then there was the government's and unions' considerable culpability in bringing down the airline. The government because of politics, its tortoise-like operation, and disregard for business; unions because of their quest for power and turf rather than concern for workers. While terrorism played a part in Pan Am's demise, it certainly can't be considered a primary cause. Nevertheless, the chapter on the 1988 Lockerbie disaster, "A Village in Scotland", is perhaps the most riveting and poignant in the book. The murder of 270 people - 259 passengers and crew and 11 people on the ground - by Libyan terrorists, in the words of one pilot, "was the day the heart of Pan American died." Gandt's description of the emotional and physical impact is overwhelming. Skygods is a fascinating, spellbinding read that is well researched and written.

A great history of PanAm. He takes the skygods thing a bit too far, as if arrogance alone was responsible for the downfall. No doubt PanAm was the most arrogant, with the most arrogant pilots, and the transition from elite to busdriver is something all pilots still struggle with, but it gets old in the book. It is a good chronicle of the early days, and the external events that led to the bankruptcy. It's good to read, and remember that the message as an employee will always be hang in there, hang in there, hang in there, be out of the building in 15 minutes.

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