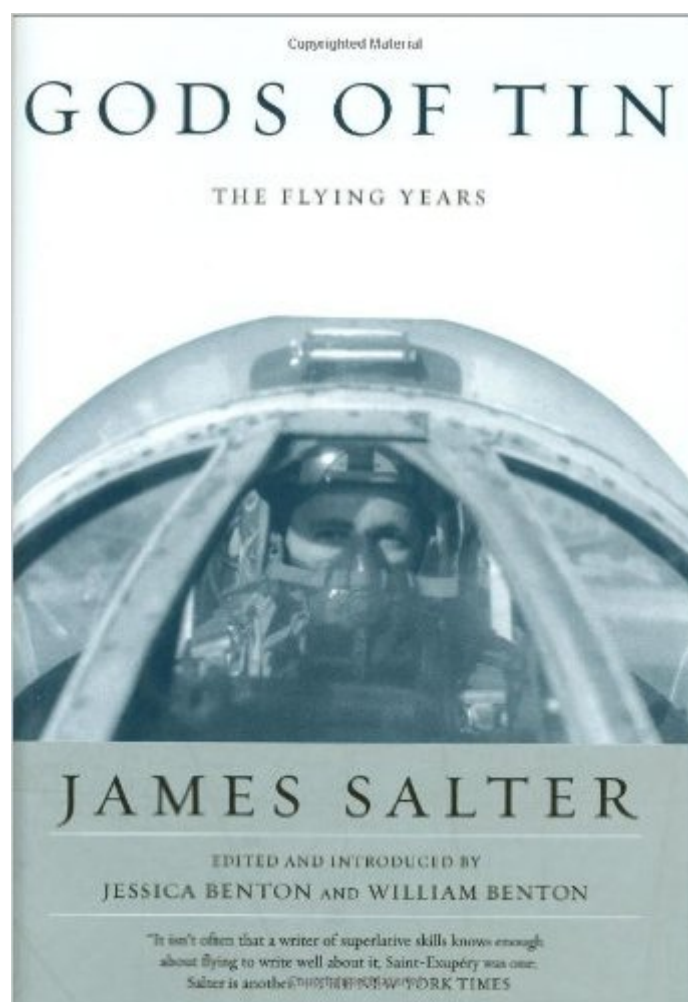


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# Gods Of Tin: The Flying Years



## Synopsis

A singular life often circles around a singular moment, an occasion when one's life in the world is defined forever and the emotional vocabulary set. For the extraordinary writer James Salter, this moment was contained in the fighter planes over Korea where, during his young manhood, he flew more than one hundred missions. As The New York Times noted, "It isn't often that a writer of superlative skills knows enough about flying to write well about it; Saint-Exupery was one; Salter is another." The editors have gathered selections from a journal Salter kept during the Korean War, published here for the first time, and assembled selections from two novels, *The Hunters* and *Cassada*, and from the author's celebrated memoir, *Burning the Days*. As the editors comment in a brief introduction, "It is, as a record of the day-to-day, mission-to-mission life of a young fighter pilot, a remarkable document by any standard. But it provides as well a view into the crucible of a writer's beginnings, like pencil studies that precede a painting, in which the essential qualities of the artist's hand are unmistakable."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

James Salter ranks among the finest writers in America, a stylist of extraordinary skill, and this new book about his F-86 flying experiences in Korea demonstrates his remarkable abilities. However seeming simple the basic act, writing well is as difficult as flying well, and flows from a lifetime of patient, humble practice and learning. The precision with which Salter puts words together, and the pleasure and satisfaction a reader derives from assimilating those words, transcend the subject matter and move to the sublime. Salter is a master craftsman who works with a deceptive

effortlessness that distills essence and emotion into forms that drive directly to the point. Every reader who likes great writing will enjoy this book and will learn from it not just about the subject matter but about the art of literary composition. In other words, one need not be a pilot to enjoy Salter's work in this new book, assembled from material that is now half a century old. He does not clutter it up with unnecessary technicalities (flying jet fighters is complex). His book SOLO FACES (see my review) shows that he is a writer who can capture the heart of the matter and convey it to the reader's mind with lyrical literary skill. The production values of this book deserve mention: Shoemaker/Hoard is a relatively small Press who obviously lavishes meticulous attention on their work, and it shows. Why "Sun, stars, water and clouds" as the title of this review? The words are taken from Salter's book, page 121, describing what the ancients claimed are the greatest things to be seen. What better place to see them than from a fighter cockpit?

Salter is a fine writer and an elegant stylist, with the ability to blend exquisite imagery and brute, violent action effortlessly, so that the reader feels transported into the situation he sets up. This edition of excerpts from three previous books, however, leaves me with a "Rip Off" feeling. Why not just read the books the two editors have ripped this material out of? The bonus I guess is the frank Korean War journal which has not been published. In his declining years Faulkner published a similar book BIG WOODS, composed largely of excerpts from books still in print, given his imprimatur as a volume of hunting stories, and his publishers encouraged Faulkner's audience to think of it as a new book by virtue of its new juxtapositions. Now Salter is getting the Faulkner treatment. So be it, but don't expect all the readers to be happy about paying money once again to a speciality publisher for a lot of stories we heard just a few years back when Salter published BURNING THE DAYS (1997). He's great and all but he's no William Faulkner.

This was my introduction to James Salter and it was the book that made me interested in his writing. One of the wonderful aspects about Gods is not simply that it contains Salter's wonderful writing, but also that the editors have managed to collect the best passages from a number of his books. After reading Cassada, Burning the Days and the Hunters, I returned to this volume and found that nearly every one of my favorite passages on flying (achieving competence or learning "equitation" as he puts it at one point) from these books appears in Gods. And a bonus are the excerpts from Salter's journals as a fighter jock driving F-86s in combat in Korea: these sometimes read like poetry leaving an image that has the feel of a Turner watercolor -- a couple of colorful strokes that still give a strong sense of the energy and paradoxically tranquility of moments flying. Originally in Burning: "I

will never see it again or, just this way all that is below. Some joys exist in retrospect, but not this, the serenity, the cities shining in detailed splendor."

Being a pilot myself, James Salter's description of his first solo was spot on. More's the pity, he died recently leaving a canon of work which puts him right up in the top category of fiction and non-fiction writers. A much neglected writer who has recently received a lot of very well-deserved attention. As one commentator said, he lived the life Hemingway thought he had led and his writing is on a par. I'd thoroughly recommend both his "flying" books and his novels. I'm at present half way through he and his wife's 'Life is Meals' and loving it. Like all his (and in this case her) writing, it is taut - actually much like Hemingway, in the best sense. Given the spread of his writing and his other activities, he is a writer of whom many more should be aware. Whether flying and 'Gods of Tin' is up your alley or not, please introduce yourself to this wonderful writer.

I first became aware that James Salter was a writer the umpteenth time I watched the credits at the start of the movie "THE HUNTERS", one of two of the finest films on Korean War aviators. Salter wrote the book the screenplay was based on, and in the 1990s I started seeking the book to read it for myself. Lucky for me, it had been reissued in 1997, so I got it and did so. A good read, a bit different from the movie story. More in depth about the feeling of flight and combat experiences. Salter is a fine writer and his command of the words can put you in the cockpit with the pilot, be he real or fictional. This book collects passages from two other books he wrote about his military flight career and entries from his personal journal kept during his tours of military flying duty through flight training in late WWII, into combat duty in Korea in 1952, and through his post war flying up into the early 1960s. Masterfully edited by Jessica and William Benton, it has been organized chronologically and simply is wonderful. You can read from the journal entry, and then it is followed by fiction he created using that experience. His mastery of the written image is beautiful and above all one senses his love of flying and all it entails. Salter has written other books, and reading the literary reviews of them, one learns he is an American literary master but has maintained a low profile..."off the radar"..to too many common readers. If you love aviation, follow history of flying or not, the words in this book will take you for a great experience in the "blue yonder" that is not always so wild, but always captivating and awe inspiring. Reading this book has led me to searching out his other works to add to my library. I think you will too.

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