

AIRWORLD

In Walter Kirn's novel *Up in the Air* the protagonist Ryan Bingham, 35, is an American business consultant who travels by plane so frequently that he reaches for his special goal of one million frequent flyer miles.

Planes and airports are where I feel at home. Everything fellows like you dislike about them – the dry, recycled air alive with viruses; the salty food that seems drizzled with warm mineral oil; the aura-sapping¹ artificial lighting – has grown dear to me over the years, familiar, sweet. I love the

5 Compass Club lounges in the terminals, especially the flagship Denver club, with its digital juice dispenser and deep suede sofas and floor-to-ceiling views of taxiing aircraft. I love the restaurants and the snack nooks near the gates, stacked to their heat lamps with whole wheat mini-pizzas and gourmet caramel rolls. I even enjoy the suite hotels built within sight

10 of the runways on the ring roads, which are sometimes as close as I get to the cities that my job requires me to visit. I favor rooms with kitchenettes and conference tables, and once I cooked a Christmas feast in one, serving glazed ham and sweet potato pie to a dozen janitors and maids. They ate with me in rotation, on their breaks one or two at a time, so I really got to

15 know them, even though most spoke no English. I have a gift that way. If you and I hadn't hit it off like this, if the only words we'd passed were "That's my seat" or "Done with that Business Week?" or just "Excuse me," I'd still regard us as close acquaintances and hope that if we meet again up here we wouldn't be starting from zero, as just two suits. [...]

20 Fast friends aren't my only friends, but they're my best friends. Because they know the life – so much better than my own family does. We're a telephone family, strung out along the wires, sharing our news in loops and daisy chains. We don't meet face-to-face much, and when we do there's a dematerialized feeling, as though only half of our molecules are

25 present. Sad? Not really. We're a busy bunch. And I'm not lonely. If I had to pick between knowing just a little about a lot of folks and knowing everything about a few, I'd opt for the long, wide-angle shot, I think.

I'm peaceful. I'm in my element up here. Flying isn't an inconvenience for me, as it is for my colleagues [...] I've never aspired to an office at

30 world headquarters, close to hearth and home and skybox, with a desk overlooking the Front Range of the Rockies and access to the ninth-floor fitness center. I suppose I'm a sort of mutation, a new species, and though I keep an apartment for storage purposes – actually, I left the place two weeks ago and transferred the few things I own into a locker I've yet to

35 pay the rent on, and may not – I live somewhere else, in the margins of my itineraries².

I call it Airworld; the scene, the place, the style. My hometown papers are *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*. The big-screen Panasonic in the club rooms broadcast all the news I need, with an emphasis on the
 40 markets and the weather. My literature – yours, too, I see – is the bestseller or the near-bestseller, heavy on themes of espionage, high finance, and the goodness of common people in small towns. In Airworld, I've found, the passions and the enthusiasms of the outlying society are concentrated and whisked to a stiff froth. When a new celebrity is minted in the movie
 45 theaters or ballparks, this is where the story breaks – on the vast magazine racks that form a sort of trading floor for public reputations and pretty faces. I find it possible here, as nowhere else, to think of myself as part of the collective that prices the long bond³ and governs necktie widths. Airworld is a nation within a nation.

Source:

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Annotations:

- 1 aura-sapping – hier: nivellierend
- 2 itinerary – Reiseplan
- 3 long bond 30-jährige Staatsanleihe