



# Reach for the Skies: Ballooning, Birdmen and Blasting into Space

*By Sir Richard Branson*

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## **Reach for the Skies: Ballooning, Birdmen and Blasting into Space** By Sir Richard Branson

As far back as stories go, pioneers have reached for the skies. In the last two hundred years, they have mastered the air and made the modern world possible. Reach for the Skies is my look at the history of flight through the stories and people who have inspired me throughout my life. It is a story of pioneers, and of course it includes the world famous Montgolfiers and the Wright brothers, but I also want to describe some of the lesser-known trailblazers. People like Tony Jannus, who in 1914 created the first scheduled commercial flight, flying his passengers over the waters of Tampa Bay at an altitude of just fifty feet; the ‘bird man’ Leo Valentin, who in the 1950s jumped from 9,000 feet with wooden wings attached to his shoulders; and my friend Steve Fossett, who dedicated his life to breaking records and having adventures. This is their story. It is also, in a small way, my own. — Richard Branson

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## **Reach for the Skies: Ballooning, Birdmen and Blasting into Space** By Sir Richard Branson **Bibliography**

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### **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

The Virgin Atlantic Airlines founder and billionaire adventurer celebrates the exploits of airborne daredevils—his own prominently among them—in this lively history of aviation pioneers. Branson ranges from the Montgolfier brothers' 1783 invention of the hot-air balloon to today's nascent space tourism industry—tickets on his Virgin Galactic space liner will run ,000—highlighting men and women who risked their money and lives to advance aerial technology or just put on a good show. It's a colorful assemblage of engineers, test pilots, barnstormers, and fighter aces; there are asphyxiated high-altitude balloonists, ultra-light enthusiasts who fly lawn chairs, and the "birdman" who jumped from an airplane wearing only wooden wings and glided safely to the ground. Into the soaring, crashing, and burning, Branson inserts his own extreme-ballooning adventures—"I opened the hatch, climbed out on top of the capsule, and hacked away at the cable with my knife"—and much interesting lore of aero-space design. Like everything the author does, the book is, in part, an advertisement ("Over the years, pioneered comfortable reclining seats"). Still, Branson's enthusiasm for avant-garde flight and his firsthand understanding of its rigors make this a rousing—sometimes even elevating—read. Photos. (Apr. 28)

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#### **About the Author**

Sir Richard Branson is a businessman, investor and entrepreneur. He holds Guinness World Records for crossing the Atlantic by hot air balloon in 1987 and crossing the Pacific by hot air balloon in 1999.

### **Users Review**

#### **From reader reviews:**

##### **Evan Hinson:**

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##### **Arthur Smith:**

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**Lisa Robinson:**

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**William McCoy:**

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