



Birdmen: The Wright Brothers, Glenn Curtiss, and the Battle to Control the Skies

Lawrence Goldstone

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From acclaimed historian Lawrence Goldstone comes a thrilling narrative of courage, determination, and competition: the story of the intense rivalry that fueled the rise of American aviation.

The feud between this nation's great air pioneers, the Wright brothers and Glenn Curtiss, was a collision of unyielding and profoundly American personalities. On one side, a pair of tenacious siblings who together had solved the centuries-old riddle of powered, heavier-than-air flight. On the other, an audacious motorcycle racer whose innovative aircraft became synonymous in the public mind with death-defying stunts. For more than a decade, they battled each other in court, at air shows, and in the newspapers. The outcome of this contest of wills would shape the course of aviation history—and take a fearsome toll on the men involved.

Birdmen sets the engrossing story of the Wrights' war with Curtiss against the thrilling backdrop of the early years of manned flight, and is rich with period detail and larger-than-life personalities: Thomas Scott Baldwin, or "Cap't Tom" as he styled himself, who invented the parachute and almost convinced the world that balloons were the future of aviation; John Moisant, the dapper daredevil who took to the skies after three failed attempts to overthrow the government of El Salvador, then quickly emerged as a celebrity flyer; and Harriet Quimby, the statuesque silent-film beauty who became the first woman to fly across the English Channel. And then there is Lincoln Beachey, perhaps the greatest aviator who ever lived, who dazzled crowds with an array of trademark twists and dives—and best embodied the romance with death that fueled so many of aviation's earliest heroes.

A dramatic story of unimaginable bravery in the air and brutal competition on the ground, *Birdmen* is at once a thrill ride through flight's wild early years and a surprising look at the personal clash that fueled America's race to the skies.

Praise for *Birdmen*

"A meticulously researched account of the first few hectic, tangled years of aviation and the curious characters who pursued it . . . a worthy companion to Richard Holmes's marvelous history of ballooning, *Falling Upwards*."—*Time*

"The daredevil scientists and engineers who forged the field of aeronautics spring vividly to life in Lawrence Goldstone's history."—*Nature*

"The history of the development of an integral part of the modern world and a fascinating portrayal of how a group of men and women achieved a dream that had captivated humanity for centuries."—*The Christian Science Monitor*

"Captivating and wonderfully presented . . . a fine book about these rival pioneers."—*The Wall Street Journal*

"[A] vivid story of invention, vendettas, derring-do, media hype and patent fights [with] modern

resonance.”—*Financial Times*

“A powerful story that contrasts soaring hopes with the anchors of ego and courtroom.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“A riveting narrative about the pioneering era of aeronautics in America and beyond . . . Goldstone raises questions of enduring importance regarding innovation and the indefinite exertion of control over ideas that go public.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

From the Hardcover edition.

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