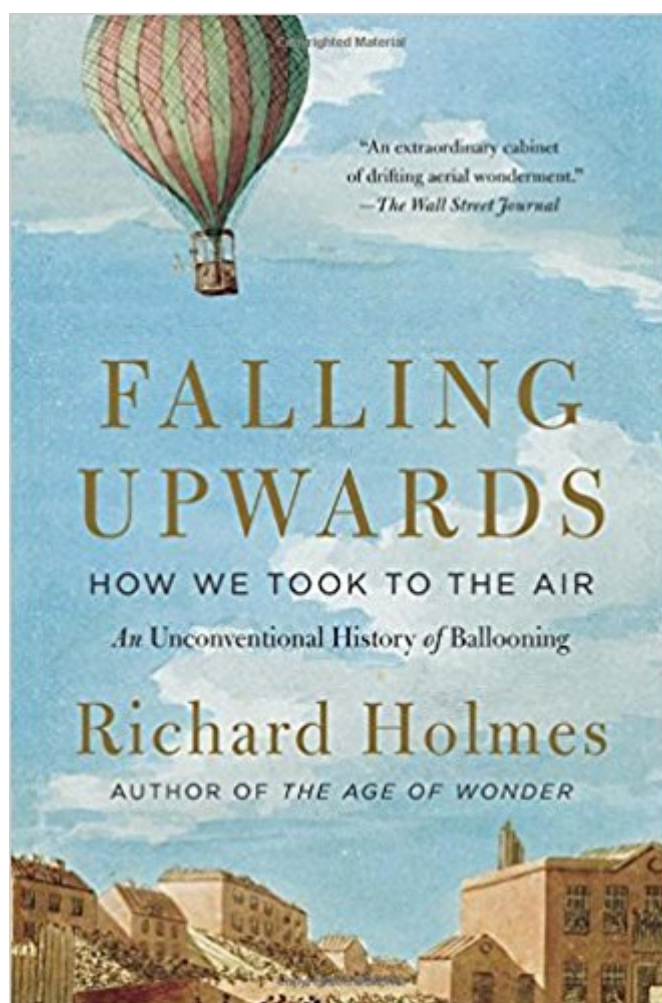


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Falling Upwards: How We Took To The Air: An Unconventional History Of Ballooning



Synopsis

****Time Magazine 10 Top Nonfiction Books of 2013****The New Republic Best Books of 2013****Kirkus Best Books of the Year (2013)****In a dazzling fusion of history, art, science, and biography, *Falling Upwards* resurrects the daring men and women who first risked their lives to take to the air in balloons. Richard Holmes gives us another of his unforgettable portraits of human endeavor, recklessness, and vision, weaving together exhilarating accounts of early balloon rivalries, pioneering ascents over Victorian cities, and astonishing long-distance voyages. The terrifying high-altitude flights of James Glaisher helped to establish the science of meteorology as well as the notion of a fragile planet, while balloons were also used to observe the horrors of modern battle during the American Civil War. Here too are the many writersâMary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Jules Verne, and moreâwho felt the imaginative impact of flight and allowed it to soar in their work. Holmes tells the history of ballooning from every angleâscientific to poeticâthrough the adventurers and entrepreneurs, scientists and escapists, heroes and fools who were possessed by the longing to be airborne. (With 24 pages of color illustrations, and black-and-white illustrations throughout.)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ballooning attracts romantics who believe the experience of floating is worth the risk of death and injury. In the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries, it also drew dreamers who believed ballooning was the key to advancing transportation, scientific exploration, and military surveillance. Why bounce along in a horse-drawn coach when you could glide quickly through the

air to your destination? Optimists foresaw great profits for anyone who could develop dependable balloons that could be steered to appointed cities, delivering people, goods, and messages. Ambitious scientists rose above the clouds to test the qualities of air, while brave generals floated over enemy lines to watch troop movements. In the style of his *The Age of Wonder* (2010), Holmes, fellow of the British Academy, recounts adventurous stories of balloon pioneers in France, Britain, and the U.S., who built and tested airships, gloriously setting records for speed, distance, and height, sometimes at the cost of their own lives. Filled with period drawings and early photographs, this entertaining history will be popular with history readers. --Rick Roche --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

• "An extraordinary cabinet of drifting aerial wonderment." • "The Wall Street Journal" • "Out of an ostensibly placid, dreamy activity . . . Holmes conjures an extraordinarily vivid, violent, thrilling history, full of bizarre personalities, narrow escapes and fatal plunges." • "Time" • "No writer alive writes better about the past than Holmes. . . . The stories are remarkable." • "The New York Times Book Review" • "Holmes has a rare and infectious capacity for wonderment. . . . He tells his balloon stories with inimitable zest. . . . A heady, swooping aerodynamic book." • "The Observer (UK)" • "Holmes's writing is a carnival of historical delights; at every turn there is a surprise. . . . He sneaks the whole trajectory of mankind into three hundred and fifty pages." • "The New Yorker.com" • "Enthralling, picaresque history. . . . Holmes cuts his thrilling set-pieces with haunting images. . . . Appropriately, his prose is lighter than air, elegantly traversing aviators and eras. It means that as his balloonists embark on journeys full of danger and wonder the reader is suspended in the basket alongside them." • "Financial Times" • "The book that gave me the most unadulterated delight this year. . . . The book is nominally a history of the hot air balloon, but it would be more accurate to describe it as a history of hope and fantasy" and the quixotic characters who disobeyed that most fundamental laws of physics and gave humans flight." • "Chloe Schama, The New Republic" • "Holmes's passion for the topic comes through in this rich and often entertaining chronicle of intrepid vertical explorers who risked (and in many cases lost) their lives lifting human flight out of the realm of mythology and into the air." • "Discover" • "Holmes is a charming and impassioned guide. . . . His prose often reaches a moving pitch." • "Newsday" • "Holmes's love for the balloon . . . is obvious. . . . A fine addition to his already extraordinary oeuvre." • "Cleveland Plain Dealer" • "A book as delightful as it is unexpected, one that is a testament to the sheer pleasures of writing about what you know, about what excites you and what gives you joy. And what more joyous a topic than the hilarious insanities of "Falling

upwardsâ™!â•â”The Wall Street Journal”Gripping. . . . Meticulous history illuminated and animated by personal passion, carried aloft by volant prose.â•â”Kirkus”A full-blown, lyrical history . . . investigating the strangeness, detachment and powerful romance of falling upwardsâ™ into a seemingly alien and uninhabitable element. . . . Holmes is a truly masterly storyteller.â•â”London Evening Standard”The human drama”is marvelously handled. . . . Holmes has made a subtle and captivating whole of this series of aerial adventures.â•â”Times Literary Supplement (London)”A captivating and surely definitive history of the madness of pre-Wright brothers ballooning.â•â”The Times (London), Book of the Week”Endlessly exhilarating. . . . Packed full of swashbuckling stories. . . . A singularly beautiful book, quite clearly a product of love.â•â”Mail on Sunday (UK)”The delight [of] the author . . . carries over to the reader. Above all what Holmes teases out . . . is the very interesting idea that ballooning gave us, quite literally, a different point of view [and] a wholly novel experience of sublimity. This exhilarating book, wonderfully written, generously illustrated and beautifully published, captures all that and more.â•â”The Spectator”

Richard Holmes is the author of several detailed insights into the Victorian military but none touches the wit, style and detailed research available here. If you ever wondered what those loonies are doing floating over Temecula every year, this book goes a long way toward explained why. It arrived on time for a great price.

Gildart Jackson does an admirable job of reading Richard Holmes early history of gas ballooning, supplying different voices for the different historical quotes. This for me, made listening to the book much more engaging. It is somehow very appropriate for an English actor to read an English author. The audio production quality is high through the 11 disks, but the disks seem flimsy and the label nearly transparent. I am concerned to take these in my truck on the long road trips - but time will tell. This is one minor glitch at the beginning of one of the disks where the author says several seemingly unrelated numbers (e.g., to chapter or section), perhaps it was a recording level check, that somehow made it through to production. This history is focused on gas early ballooning, stopping about the development of the dirigibles and zeppelins of the early 1900's. Other than an anecdote regarding a cluster balloon flight South America, almost no modern activities and records are described, such as the stratospheric tests of the 1950's or the cross oceanic flights. The development of the modern hot air balloon is entirely omitted. My associates who fly gas balloons (and are mentioned in the acknowledgments later in the book) indicate that there are some minor

inaccuracies that us laymen may not recognize. I found this informative and mostly enjoyable, but not always an "easy read". I recommend this.

This wonderful, historic story about the unrecognized role the hot air and gas balloon played in man's view of life, our planet, science and our universe. I once went aloft in a hot air balloon and was stunned at the early date other men found the silence and perspective of a view from on high broadens one's sense of being. I had no idea man had ascended over 20,000 feet in the early 1800s or flew distances in the 1780s!

This book sometimes drifts and gives you too much information about things you don't really care about such as too much details about characters that don't really matter. However, it makes up for it with fascinating accounts of daredevil balloon flights and the siege of Paris during the war with Prussia in 1870. Overall it was a fun read with a lot of interesting History.

It is a little disjointed. A bunch of disparate stories bound together. Each pretty independent of the others. But most of the stories are good. Does not try and really explain the science and progression of ballooning as I would have expected. Rather a series of extended anecdotes. Based on the character of ballooning, the author makes social commentaries about the times and places embraced ballooning, and I liked that.

Fascinating historical review of ballooning, highlighting key people and individual stories that make the pages jump to life. Luck, misfortune, bravery, scientific acumen- it's all in there. Mr. Holmes is a gifted storyteller, with a great sense of fun and humor.

whimsical background material. good biographical sketches. easy reading of what could be very dry material. makes one enthusiastic about subject matter

Interesting book full of historical information I had not found elsewhere.

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