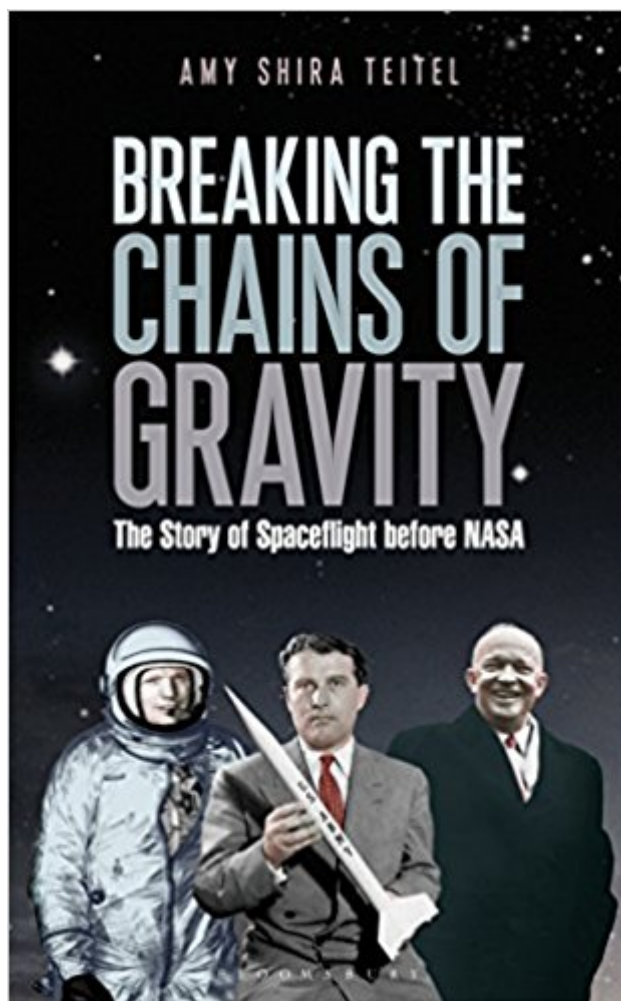


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Breaking The Chains Of Gravity: The Story Of Spaceflight Before NASA



Synopsis

NASA's history is a familiar story, one that typically peaks with Neil Armstrong taking his small step on the Moon in 1969. But America's space agency wasn't created in a vacuum. It was assembled from pre-existing parts, drawing together some of the best minds the non-Soviet world had to offer. In the 1930s, rockets were all the rage in Germany, the focus both of scientists hoping to fly into space and of the German armed forces, looking to circumvent the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. One of the key figures in this period was Wernher von Braun, an engineer who designed the rockets that became the devastating V-2. As the war came to its chaotic conclusion, von Braun escaped from the ruins of Nazi Germany, and was taken to America where he began developing missiles for the US Army. Meanwhile, the US Air Force was looking ahead to a time when men would fly in space, and test pilots like Neil Armstrong were flying cutting-edge, rocket-powered aircraft in the thin upper atmosphere. *Breaking the Chains of Gravity* tells the story of America's nascent space program, its scientific advances, its personalities and the rivalries it caused between the various arms of the US military. At this point getting a man in space became a national imperative, leading to the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, otherwise known as NASA.

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Customer Reviews

Well written history first of Von Braun's work and then expands to early (pre-NASA) rocket and hypersonic development and flight testing. A story about people and circumstances, not about technologies and technical development.

A very detailed but generally accessible account of the early days of rocketry. At times it was engrossing but sometimes a little tedious. This is not a technical book. It follows the people, the geopolitical environment, and the military ambitions related to the evolution of early rocketry. Amy does a great job of presenting the numerous contemporary schemes and proposals for advanced flight and rocketry without needlessly explaining how many actually came to fruition (the space shuttle), in the years to come, and how some were just plain ridiculous (the antipodal bomber). I enjoyed this book and look forward to Amy's next book.

I just finished reading this book and found it very entertaining. First off, it is a very good general history of rocketry and the first halting steps toward manned space flight in the first half of the 20th Century. The section covering German rocketry from the '20's to the '40's is very comprehensive and includes many of the familiar people as well as some of the lesser known ones. After the war it covers the US's use of V-2 rockets and the US's first steps into building original rockets. It also covers the development of the X-1 and the race to break the sound barrier and the development of the X-15. Interestingly, it also covers other, more unknown steps toward a future space program. Among these the development of high altitude balloons and high speed rocket sleds designed to test human G loads. It also goes into some of the dead ends pursued in this time period, such as the Dyna-Soar and other space plane concepts abandoned in favor of the capsule approach to manned space flight. Second, it goes into depth about the people and their personalities and motives at the time. From the Nazi links of the German scientists to their desire to surrender to the Americans and not the Russian, British, or French armies for fear of retribution for their V-1 and V-2 terror bombings. It also explores the conflicts between the various US service branches and their desire to out perform one another to be the first to put a satellite in orbit. Also, she paints a vivid picture of the fear and panic the US felt when the Soviets get into space first with their Sputnik

satellite that orbits over the US, sending its beeping signal out for the whole world to hear. The only thing I can fault her for is the book being too short. Just as you get all wrapped up in the upcoming manned spaceflight struggle between the US and the USSR, the book ends with the creation of NASA and the selection of the Mercury astronauts. Obviously, the book is about the beginnings of the race to put people in space, it even says so right on the cover with its subtitle: "The Story of Spaceflight before NASA." But still, she's done such a fine job with the pre NASA story, it just cries out for another book about the early days of NASA up till, at least, the final Apollo flights. I have no idea if she is working on such a book, but one can hope.

I'm enjoying this book a lot. Amy has done a great deal of research and woven the stories of the history of rocket development and experimental space flight in a really compelling way, with great backstories and deep coverage of the personalities (individual and institutional) that drove the development of this period of history. Because it covers so many parallel and overlapping threads, flow is a bit of an issue in places, and the book could have benefited from shorter chapters to help its organization, but that's definitely not enough for me to take a star away from my rating. I anxiously await Amy's next book and watch her YouTube videos weekly with great interest. She's remarkably enthusiastic and brings great research to her work. We need more people like her in the world of science and history education!

This is a great account of rocket science leading up to the formation of NASA and the "race to the moon" that we all hear so much about. I think there are some fairly large omissions (the author says so too), but this is a very interesting read with lots of details to make it accessible and fascinating.

A great read. I like Amy's YouTube channel which got me to look at this book. It fills in a lot of background that other books barely mention regarding the history of the space program.

An easy read covering some of the unknown pre history of NASA and humankind's biggest accomplishment. Fun to see how the program came together, including the issues that kept the US from being first. A must read for space nerds, US history buffs and any fan of the space program. Thanks Amy for a fun and interesting read!

Without being overwhelming this book offers a wealth of background into the journey to space. It is a highly readable interweaving of the stories of many actors from several continents who take part in

this real drama. I thought I was well informed. Now that I have had the pleasure of reading the book I am much more informed that I was at the beginning. For anyone who would like to know just how we got off the ground in the first place you cannot go wrong reading this. Great job Amy! I'll be looking for your next effort.

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