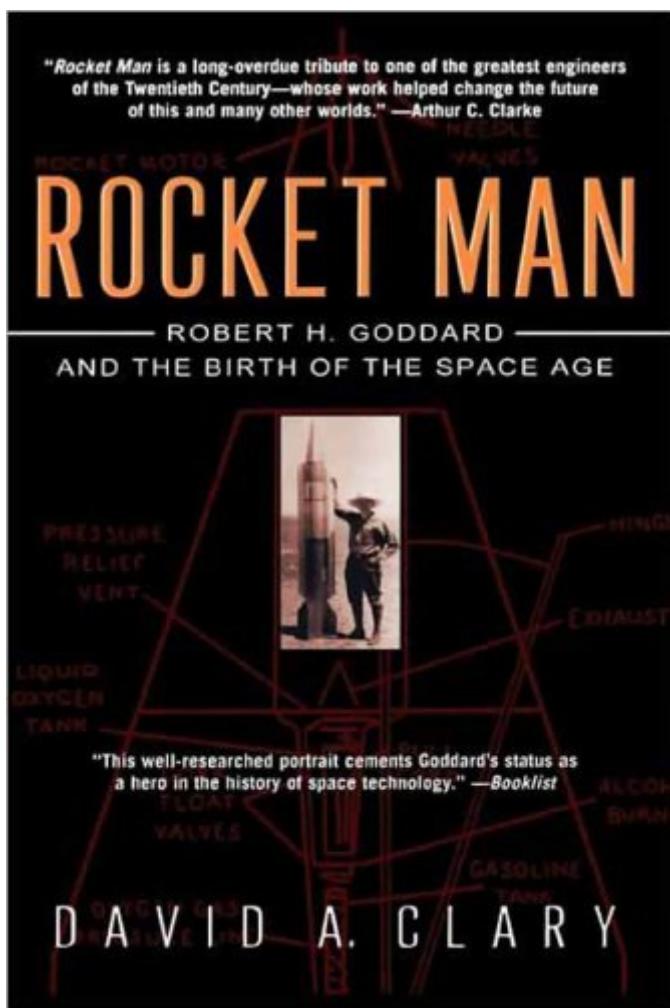


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Rocket Man: Robert H. Goddard And The Birth Of The Space Age



Synopsis

More famous in his day than Einstein or Edison, the troubled, solitary genius Robert H. Goddard (1882-1945) was the American father of rocketry and space flight, launching the world's first liquid-fuel rockets and the first powered vehicles to break the sound barrier. Supported by Charles Lindbergh and Harry Guggenheim, through fiery, often explosive, experiments at Roswell, New Mexico, he invented the methods that carried men to the moon. Today, no rocket or jet plane can fly without using his inventions. Yet he is the "forgotten man" of the space age. His own government ignored his rocketry until the Germans demonstrated its principles in the V-2 missiles of World War II. The American government usurped his 214 patents, while suppressing his contributions in the name of national security, until it was forced to pay one million dollars for patent infringement. Goddard became famous again, monuments and medals raining upon his memory. But his renewed fame soon faded, and Goddard's pivotal role in launching the Space Age has been largely forgotten.

Book Information

File Size: 3274 KB

Print Length: 352 pages

Publisher: Hachette Books; 1 edition (August 6, 2003)

Publication Date: August 6, 2003

Language: English

ASIN: B0042XA376

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #448,399 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #66 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Aerospace > Propulsion Technology #119 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Aerospace > Aircraft Design & Construction #190 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Science > Astronomy & Space Science > Aeronautics & Astronautics

Customer Reviews

This book contains some valuable history. America led the world in rocket research and didn't take

advantage of it.

This was an interesting story about an interesting man. Goddard comes across as quite stubborn and pretty selfish, as he takes all credit for even joint developments. But even with that said, he certainly was a pioneer in the rocketry arena.

A good read about the man, his dream, and his pluck and those that believed in him. I enjoyed this book.

I enjoyed this book and got to learn a lot about Dr Goddard and given I grew up in the town where he set off his first rocket the book had my total focus and interest.

Our son loves book about people who had a vision on sending people into space. Rocket man is about an author who developed rockets and how he did it.

I bought this as a gift for my father, who was with NASA during the salad days of the 1960's.

Too often, the great inventors of history get lost in a cloud of myth which hides their essential humanity. Such is the case with Robert Goddard, the "father" of modern rocketry. He was a man of great vision and persistence, who substantially contributed to the development of rocket technology. After his death, his widow Esther and powerful patrons Charles Lindbergh and Harry Guggenheim fostered the image of Goddard as a solitary genius who single-handedly created the liquid fueled rocket. But he had his flaws. Greatly concerned with establishing the priority of his work, possessive of his field of research, and with a tendency to lose focus and dilute his effort, he nonetheless made more theoretical and experimental contributions to the development of rocketry than anyone else of the early twentieth century. Author Clary does a wonderful job of stripping away the myth and letting us discover the man who, as much as any individual, made spaceflight possible. Clary's book also brings out two of the essential features of technological development. It is rare that an invention is created in isolation. In the first half of the twentieth century, the idea of spaceflight was in the air. Rocketry clubs were popping up in Germany and the United States. The British Interplanetary Society was formed. Konstantin Tsiolkovsky in the Soviet Union, Hermann Oberth in Germany, and Robert Esnault-Pelterie in France, among others, were laying the foundations of rocketry. Had Goddard not lived, the development of the liquid fueled rocket would have occurred nonetheless,

and within the same time frame. The other point is that in such a complex task as the development of the rocket, there are limits to what one person, no matter how inspired or creative, can do. Indeed, any difficult research project is greatly enhanced by the combined efforts of many bright minds. Anyone who has had the pleasure of a successful scientific collaboration can affirm how much more productive are two minds than one. Working in isolation, it is easy to follow unproductive paths or to become the victim of erroneous thinking. With another person to challenge assumptions and with whom to argue critically, great progress can be made. After reading Clary's book, one can't help but wonder how much more Goddard could have achieved had he been less concerned with priority and been willing to work with others as peers. The sad part of his story is that at the end of his life, he was no longer in the van of rocket development. Von Braun in Germany, Malina and von Karman at GALCIT, were forging ahead, while Goddard's work was becoming a backwater. Clary writes with clarity and insight, bringing the essential Goddard to light. The portrait that emerges is sympathetic, but not at all hagiographic. Clary's discussions of Goddard's flaws provide illumination, not condemnation. This book is neither a history of Goddard's technical contributions, nor a detailed discussion of his rockets. However, his contributions to rocketry are presented in a historical context, making it clear that the significance of his work was sufficient to have made his reputation, without the need for the mythologizing by his supporters after his death. Other than a couple of minor errors in the text (Clark Millikan was Robert Millikan's son, not his brother; Jimmy Doolittle was not a "World War I flying ace"), this book reflects careful, in depth research.

Clary's *Rocket Man* is a fine biography of Robert Goddard. The work is eminently readable. Clary does a fine job of recounting the technical challenges that Goddard faced yet never lets the technology overwhelm the biography. The key in a biography is to get to the underlying person and Clary does this very well. Goddard sits on the transition between the age of the individual inventor and "big science". In the era of "big science" projects may be lead by a person of singular genius, but the scale and scope is too big for person working alone to achieve mastery. Thus, while Goddard achieved first success with most aspects of liquid fueled rocketry, his rockets remained small while Germany pushed ahead to the larger V-2. Clary touches on this issue but does not make it explicit. Similarly, in weapons development and post-war sounding rockets the U.S. developed solid fuel rockets. Clary writes of Goddard turning away from solid fuel, but a Cal Tech team coming back to it. More development of the changes that made solid fuel viable in the '40s or why liquid fuel was desirable for later rockets would have been welcome. These concerns are minor. Enjoy Clary's work and insight into this pioneer of rocketry.

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