



They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus: An Incurable Dreamer Builds the First Civilian Spaceship

Elizabeth Weil

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This is a classic American tale of dreams and obsession--the suspenseful, brilliantly written account of one eccentric man's hunger to open space travel to us all: to let us rocket into orbit, return to earth, and soar yet again--thus transforming space travel forever.

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Gary Hudson was seven years old when Sputnik flew, nineteen when Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, and all he ever wanted to do was to travel into space. Between 1970 and 1996 he founded and disbanded five separate rocket-building companies, none meeting with much success. Then, in 1997, at the age of forty-seven, he launched Rotary Rocket. His goal was to develop and build the Roton, the world's first manned, single-stage-to-orbit, fully reusable spaceship, capable of shuttling ordinary people into orbit and back in a single day. Elizabeth Weil followed Gary for two years, and in this book she brings to vivid life a seductively--perhaps delusionally--optimistic world where science and science fiction meld and fuse, and where imagination and invention collide.

In California's bleak and windswept Mojave Desert, Gary assembled a fanatical, mismatched crew of engineers and technicians, and Weil bears witness to their Roton endeavor, from first conception to final test flight. The cast includes a pyromaniacal engineer, a world expert on composite airframes, two former Navy test pilots, Gary's infinitely patient wife, a third-generation Mojave motel owner, and an enigmatic and resourceful financier. At their center shines Gary himself, a man eternally reflecting the glow of a better, lighter, higher world--a world that, despite his flaws and failures, he perpetually convinces us we're all about to reach.

From the Hardcover edition.

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