

## Beyond the Saga of Rocket Science: The Dawn of the Space Age

**Walter Sierra**

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*Beyond the Saga of Rocket Science: The Dawn of the Space Age is a compelling account of rocketry and space flight that brings scientific exploration to life.*

One does not have to be a rocket scientist to appreciate Walter Sierra's *Beyond the Saga of Rocket Science: The Dawn of the Space Age*. The first book in the Beyond the Saga of Rocket Science series, it is a fascinating history of how humanity sent rockets, missiles, and spaceships soaring into the heavens.

The book charts the trajectory of the development of rockets in a way that's easily accessible, but that would likely still hold the interest of those with more technical expertise. It's a detailed, thorough history that's impressive in its global sweep and the diligence of its research.

Sierra documents the birth of rocketry from the first rudimentary projectiles and fireworks that flew over China around 228 CE. He also covers the work of seminal figures, including the Wright Brothers, Octave Chanute, William Boeing, and Jack Northrop.

The volume goes into great detail regarding Robert Goddard, the inventor of the modern rocket, and the advances made with the V1 and V2 rockets during World War II. The book also chronicles early spaceflights, such as NASA's Project Mercury.

This sweeping account does not stint in scientific detail, either. Sierra explains the mechanical side of how flight works, breaking down concepts like lift, airfoils, centrifugal force, and escape velocity.

Laid out like a textbook, the material relies on many visual aids, including historic photos, maps, family trees, sketches, and charts, to elucidate its esoteric subject matter. Such illustrations make the book more inviting, while an extensive glossary of key terms and acronyms helps to break down technical nomenclature for a general audience.

The writing conjures realistic portraits through exacting detail. Sierra breathes life into characters like Orville and Wilbur Wright, shown arguing with each other across the dinner table, and Goddard, who is sketched out as a sickly child whose imagination was stoked by H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. The text dramatizes how Goddard first imagined a rocket taking flight:

*While suspended there, a fantasy shape took hold in the mirrors of his mind, an image sharp enough to shut out the surrounding scene. A mechanical device materialized from nowhere, functioning perfectly. Faster and faster it whirled until it began to lift, twirling and spinning above Worcester and sickness and fruit trees, upwards into space!*

The book shifts well between intimate peeks into the psyches of pioneering innovators and broader social context, such as explanations of why particular technological discoveries proved significant.

*The Dawn of the Space Age* is a compelling account of rocketry and space flight that brings history and scientific exploration to life.

JOSEPH S. PETE (October 12, 2017)

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