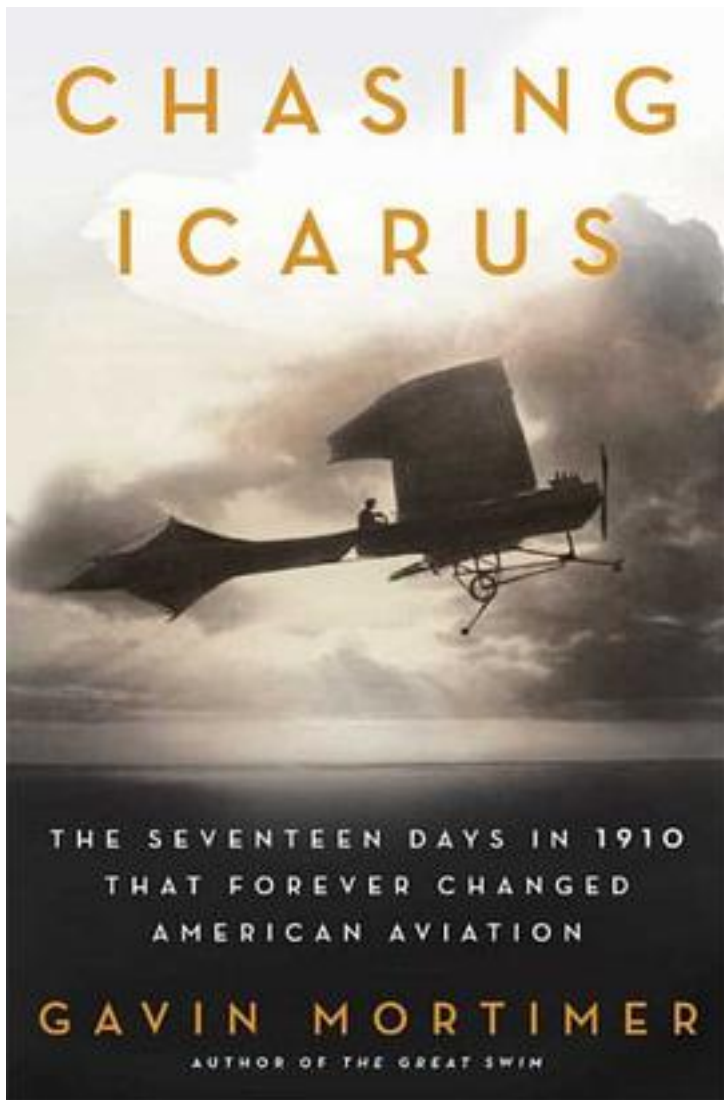


The Chasing Icarus



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A dramatic chronicle of a pivotal moment in the history of aviation. By 1910--seven years after the Wright brothers first lifted a plane off the ground at Kitty Hawk--America and the world were transfixed by the danger and challenge of mastering the air. Yet which form of flight would predominate was far from clear--dirigibles, balloons, and airplanes all had their passionate advocates. Emblematic of this uncertainty, the precursor of the U.S. Air Force owned one plane and two dirigibles. During the seventeen days in October 1910 that Gavin Mortimer vividly recounts in "Chasing Icarus," the question of primacy in the air was on full display, after which the future of aviation was never in doubt. The great dirigible "America," captained by Walter Wellman, lifted off from New Jersey and for several turbulent days attempted to be the first flying machine to cross the Atlantic. From St. Louis, ballooning teams from around the world took off in pursuit of the Gordon Bennett International Balloon Cup, given to the team that traveled the farthest distance, with a denouement featuring Americans Alan Hawley and Augustus Post that would stun the country. And at the famed racetrack at Belmont Park, New York, huge crowds gathered to watch airplane pilots race above the oval and attempt to set speed, altitude, and distance records. Newspapers everywhere, even in the smallest of towns, made headlines of the results, and the public treated all aviators as matinee idols. Interweaving the dramatic narratives of these three astonishing events, bringing to life powerful personalities (the ruthlessly competitive Wright brothers, the debonair Englishman Claude Grahame-White, the ultra-confident John Moisant), Gavin Mortimer reveals the pioneers of flight as fitting descendants of the legendary Icarus, risking all in pursuit of glory. "Chasing Icarus" captures both a pivotal moment in the history of aviation and the end of the gilded era that would soon descend into the devastation of World War I; indeed, within four years dogfights over France had replaced air shows.

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