



Willy Ley: Prophet of the Space Age

Jared S. Buss

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“Willy Ley has been a mystery among spaceflight historians for many years. His role as science writer, advocate, and popularizer is known to many but understood by few. This book unpacks that story.”—Roger D. Launius, associate director for collections and curatorial affairs, National Air and Space Museum

“Ley lit the fire of interplanetary enthusiasm in the hearts of generations of young space cadets. Long overdue, this biography establishes the details and the ups and downs of Willy Ley’s career.”—Tom D. Crouch, author of *Lighter-Than-Air: An Illustrated History of Balloons and Airships*

“An insightful biography of one of the great popularizers of space exploration. Beyond recovering the fascinating and many contradictory aspects of Willy Ley’s extraordinary life, Buss has provided a valuable case study of the complex relationship between science popularization, mass media, and scientific advocacy in the twentieth century.”—Asif A. Siddiqi, author of *The Red Rockets’ Glare: Spaceflight and The Soviet Imagination, 1857–1957*

“Beautifully written. Reveals the vicissitudes of an extraordinarily interesting life.”—Michael J. Neufeld, author of *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War*

Science writer Willy Ley inspired Americans of all ages to imagine a future of interplanetary travel long before space shuttles existed. This is the first biography of an important public figure who predicted and boosted the rise of the Space Age, yet has been overlooked in the history of science.

Born in Germany, Ley became involved in amateur rocketry until the field was taken over by the Nazi regime. He fled to America, where he forged a path as a weapons expert and journalist during World War II, and as a rocket researcher after the war. As America’s foremost authority on rockets and space travel, he wrote many books and articles for science fiction magazines. He was a consultant for television’s *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* and the Disney program *Man in Space*, thrilling public audiences with a romanticized view of what spaceflight would be like.

Yet as astronauts took center stage and scientific intellectuals such as Wernher von Braun became influential during the space race, Ley lost his celebrity status. He was ignored by younger historians who saw his style of popular writing as old-fashioned. This book returns Willy Ley to his rightful place as the energizer of an era—a time when scientists and science popularizers shared prestige and mixed ranks to make outlandish dreams come true.

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