



Book Review

The wild black yonder

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Introduction to the Author: Jared Leidich is an aerospace engineer and author known for his involvement in high-profile space-related projects. Born in 1985, in Colorado, USA, he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2009. He initially participated in projects such as designing life-support systems and working on National Aeronautics and Space Administration's microgravity airplane. In 2014, he played a leading role in the Stratospheric Explorer (StratEx) program. This project aimed to design life-support and pressure suits for a world-record stratospheric jump and Leidich was the lead engineer for the design of life-support system, pressure suit, and parachute.

Brief of the Book: The Wild Black Yonder by Jared Leidich offers a fascinating insider's perspective on the technical, scientific, and human challenges behind Alan Eustace's record-breaking skydive from the stratosphere.

The book comprises 16 chapters, and the initial chapters deal with Alan Eustace's vision of exploring the stratosphere using only a spacesuit, technical aspects of creating the life-support system, pressure suit, and parachute that would protect Eustace from the perils of the stratosphere. Leidich, as one of the engineers, explains the science behind extreme altitude, cold temperatures, and freefall spinning hazards. He also brings out design considerations and building of suit as per the technical specifications.

The later chapters of the book are based on his experiences of testing and trial of the suit. These chapters focus on the grueling testing phase, author himself served as a body double during the tests, giving the reader a first-hand experience of what it was like to suit up and prepare for the unknown. The book also portrays his disappointment with regular failed tests and emphasizes how perseverance, meticulous planning, and redesigns were a key in overcoming the many obstacles. The team was constantly learning from failed tests, which makes these chapters particularly suspenseful and engaging. The book concludes with Eustace finally taking the jump, from 135,000 feet. The author masterfully narrates the tension, fear, and excitement of this historic moment highlighting the enormous risks and the delicate dance between life and death.

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Opinion about the Book: The book encompasses the meticulous 3-year effort by a small team of engineers, to design and build a life-support suit capable of protecting Eustace during his freefall from the edge of space. The author's narrative captures the intense collaboration, repeated failures, and eventual triumphs of his small team. His writing captures the intensity of working in a high-stakes environment where failure can have fatal consequences. Through his firsthand experiences, readers can gain a sense of the immense responsibility engineers bear when creating life-critical systems.

Recommendation: This book offers a deep dive into the technical challenges of space exploration, including designing life-support systems, parachutes, and other vital components. With recent ventures into space by private companies such as Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic, space tourism has become a reality. The book provides a visionary glimpse into what StratEx could look like. The images and illustrations in the

book help in the easy understanding of the matter. Beyond the technical marvel, the book is about the human desire to push the boundaries of exploration. Hence, studying this book is recommended for every person who has ever dreamt of space travel.

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