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Up in the Air: A Novel

By Walter Kirn

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Ryan Bingham's job as a Career Transition Counselor—he fires people—has kept him airborne for years. Although he has come to despise his line of work, he has come to love the culture of what he calls “Airworld,” finding contentment within pressurized cabins, anonymous hotel rooms, and a wardrobe of wrinkle-free slacks. With a letter of resignation sitting on his boss's desk, and the hope of a job with a mysterious consulting firm, Ryan Bingham is agonizingly close to his ultimate goal, his Holy Grail: one million frequent flier miles. But before he achieves this long-desired freedom, conditions begin to deteriorate.

With perception, wit, and wisdom, **Up in the Air** combines brilliant social observation with an acute sense of the psychic costs of our rootless existence, and confirms Walter Kirn as one of the most savvy chroniclers of American life.

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Up in the Air: A Novel By Walter Kirn Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #293556 in eBooks
- Published on: 2002-08-13
- Released on: 2002-08-13
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The hero of Walter Kirn's novel *Up in the Air* inhabits an entirely new state: Airworld, where the hometown paper is *USA Today*, the indigenous cuisine wilts under heat lamps, and the citizenry speaks a Byzantine dialect of upgrades, expense accounts, and market share. Airworld even has its own nontaxable, inflation-free currency in the shape of bonus miles, which Ryan Bingham calls "private property in its purest form." Officially, Bingham is a management consultant, specializing in the lugubrious field of career transition counseling (i.e., he fires people for a living). But what Kirn's airborne protagonist is really doing is pursuing his own private passion, his great white whale: accumulating one million miles in his frequent-flyer account. As *Up in the Air* opens, Bingham has set out on a final, epic traveling jag. He intends to visit eight cities in six days, thereby achieving his own vision of Nirvana somewhere over Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Mocking the euphemisms of business speak is as easy as shooting fish in a designer barrel. But Kirn also takes on the corporate world's weirdly mystical and paranoid side, its rhetoric of personal empowerment and its messianic devotion to gurus. "Business is folk wisdom, cave-born, dark, Masonic, and the best consultants are outright shamans who sprinkle on the science like so much fairy dust," declares Bingham. (This doesn't stop him from working on his own book about "the transformational journey of one mind wholly at peace with its core competencies.") Meanwhile, his junket becomes progressively more surreal, complete with an evil nemesis as well as a mysteriously powerful firm called MythTech that's working behind the scenes. And what's worse, someone seems to have stolen his identity, assuming control of his credit cards and his all-important miles.

Is this model consumer being tracked as he makes his purchasing decisions, like an elk tagged by wildlife biologists? Or is he merely losing his mind? The ending answers these questions perhaps a little too neatly, but Kirn's disturbing satire packs a mighty wallop nonetheless. The writing is as sharp as a tack, punctuated by character sketches as brilliant as they are quick. Bingham and his ilk are modern nomads, dispossessed of physicality but not quite of their bodies. His simulated environment is not mimicking an actual place but replacing it--and that, to the author, is the scariest part of Airworld: "This is the place to see America, not down there, where the show is almost over." --*Mary Park*

Up in the Air is now a major motion picture starring George Clooney, Jason Bateman, and Anna Kendrick, and directed by Jason Reitman. Enjoy these images from the film, and click the thumbnails to see larger images.



From Publishers Weekly

The message of Kirn's new novel is that the "dark Satanic mills" that power the capitalist system no longer run on the sweat of the laboring masses they are now fueled by the hot air of the therapeutic-industrial

complex, that weird construct made of a thousand management strategy companies and their attendant conferences. In this world, being fired has been euphemized into "career transition." Ryan Bingham is a career transition counselor for a firm based in Denver. His ultimate goal is accumulating one million frequent flier miles, but he has a few other projects he hasn't told headquarters about. He's written a business allegory, for one thing, which he hopes to place with a management science publisher. He also wants to market Sandor Pinter, a Peter Drucker-like management guru, through posters, coffee cups and the usual familiar detritus of pop culture. His most important and hush-hush project is to jump ship to MythTech, a mysterious Omaha company renowned for its esoteric management consulting. On the periphery of Ryan's consciousness is his sister Julie's upcoming wedding, but his disconnection from his family is evident. Kirn is trying to create the New Economy Babbitt, the perpetual haunter of first class and airport bars. Unfortunately, Ryan is not only an uninteresting character, bloated, shallow and incorrigibly explicative tell (and tell and tell...), not show, seems to be his motto but is uninterested in others. Crowding the page, he smothers Kirn's bursts of astringent humor and obscures any broader perspective on 21st-century corporate culture. (July)Forecast: Much will be expected of this novel by the literary editor of GQ and the author of the New York Times Notable novel Thumbsucker. Media world curiosity and the appeal of the book's subject matter to corporate management masses may generate respectable sales, but no more this is not one of Kirn's better efforts.

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From Library Journal

In this quirky and unsettling novel (his third after Thumbsucker), Kirn manages to capture on paper much of what is worst about our present age. Ryan Bingham, a business flyer, is six days from attaining his personal goal of one million miles on his frequent-flyer account. He's in the air so much that he has no actual real-world address, having become, instead, a resident of "Airworld," where "my hometown papers are USA Today and the Wall Street Journal." Bingham's job is CTC (Career Transition Counseling) helping large companies fire their executives with minimal legal risk. The job is wearing him down, but he's determined to reach his mileage goal, and this determination, amazingly, provides sufficient suspense to carry the reader along from airport to airport. Kirn has a gift for exploiting telling details about our consumption-mad culture, hinting at dark marketing conspiracies that will have us all buying strange items within the month, as though we were simply puppets of the marketing companies, one of which Bingham aspires to: MythTech. Harrowing reading, but worth the turbulence. Recommended for most fiction collections.

- David Dodd, *Marin Cty. Free Lib., San Rafael, CA*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Margaret Williams:

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or all their friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book could be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of publication that you should read. If you want to attempt look for book, may be the reserve untitled Up in the Air: A Novel can be excellent book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

Tameika Ahmed:

Up in the Air: A Novel can be one of your starter books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to place every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Up in the Air: A Novel yet doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be one of it. This great information could drawn you into fresh stage of crucial thinking.

Stephanie Bush:

In this age globalization it is important to someone to get information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information easier to share. You can find a lot of references to get information example: internet, paper, book, and soon. You can observe that now, a lot of publisher this print many kinds of book. Typically the book that recommended for you is Up in the Air: A Novel this e-book consist a lot of the information on the condition of this world now. That book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some research when he makes this book. Here is why this book suited all of you.

Darrel Mason:

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