

## Airman by Eoin Colfer

**Subjects:** Flying machines—Juvenile Fiction; Prisoners—Juvenile Fiction; Adventure stories; Inventors—Juvenile Fiction; Islands—Juvenile Fiction

**Awards:** Best Books for Young Adults

**Book Lists:** Europe, Gifted, Grade 6, Europe, Middle School, Reluctant Readers

**Props:** Pirate hat



Conor Broekhart was born to fly or more accurately, he was born flying. The story of his birth is long and complicated, fraught with peril. Let me sum up—It's Paris, 1878, the World's Fair; Conor's mother and father are in a hot air balloon; they are attacked by gun fire; Conor's mother goes into labor; Conor is born just before they manage to land safely; crowds surround them, people gasp; a child born in the sky, imagine that. It was a remarkable beginning.

Skip forward 9 years. Conor is the son of affluent parents on the Saltee Islands off the coast of Ireland. These islands are ruled by the good and wise King Nicholas who has a daughter, ten-year-old Princess Isabella. She is a pretty thing, with an elfin face and round, brown eyes. Conor and Princess Isabella are great friends and are rarely seen without each other. They often spend their time exploring, being covered in mud and playing adventure games. But then one day they each changed. Isabella became less fond of adventure games and Conor became a hero. On that day, Isabella told Conor she no longer wanted to be Captain Crow, (*wear pirate hat*) the evil pirate. "Arrr." She wanted to be a princess hostage. Conor argued, "There be no princess hostages." Isabella belligerently replied, "Of course there is. There is because I say there is, and I am an actual princess, whereas you were born in a balloon. And don't forget that I can have you executed if you displease me."

Conor was not unduly concerned about Isabella having him executed, as she ordered him hung as least a dozen times a day and it hadn't happened yet. "Fine," Conor replied, "you're a princess hostage, but I be a deadly

pirate in search of a flag to capture." He ran up the stairs to the top of the tower. The kingdom's flag stood perfectly rectangular, crimson and gold, held rigid by a bamboo frame so that it flew straight and proud no matter what the weather. (*Sweep off hat to chest in respect*) Isabella emerged onto the rooftop, and disaster struck. A dull thump sounded from below that shook the blocks beneath their feet. A cloud of purple smoke oomphed through the doorway, then the blocks shook again and crumbled. Orange and blue flames surged through the holes and the children heard the snap and grind of breaking glass and twisting metal. They were trapped. Unless, perhaps, they flew. Conor reached for the flag and wrenched it free of the flag pole. He used his belt to strap himself to the bamboo frame, grabbed Isabella, and jumped. Against all odds, they landed safely and Conor was heralded as a hero. The king was overjoyed and as a reward offered Conor the opportunity to study the science of flight, martial arts, and fencing. Their lives had changed, and the future was bright.

Skip forward 5 years. Conor is now 14 and his future has recently grown less bright. He has discovered a conspiracy against the king. He tries to help, but the king is murdered and he is branded a traitor. He is disowned by the princess and his parents. Thrown into prison by the villainous Marshall Bonvilain and forced to endure inhuman conditions on an island where there is no escape, unless you can fly. Conor is remarkable, he was a hero once, can he be one again? Can he find a way to fly to freedom, save the kingdom, and win the hand of the princess? (*Hold up book*) *Airman* by Eoin Colfer.