

Strange and Dangerous Dreams: Journeys Along the Fine Line Between Adventure and Madness

Geoff Powter

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The benchmark triumphs of mankind evoke images of snapping flags atop devastating pinnacles, world records falling before stunning, unrelenting challengers, and technologies remolding once impossible feats into merely deadly endeavors. Enter the visionary. With a dash of talent, a shower of luck, and the right tools, there may just be room for one more hero worthy of glory and the history books. But, "Some silver clouds have dark linings," warns the author of this collection.

Powter is a clinical psychologist and Outward Bound collaborator, a contributing editor to the Canadian adventure magazine *Explore*, and a member of over a dozen expeditions to the Himalayas. From his first chapter, readers are plunged into the murky minds of adventure's most eccentric luminaries and misfits. Eleven unsettling tales arise, reborn from obscuring protectionist family accounts and glossed-over histories. All have found a place within this book's three sections: The Burdened, The Bent, and The Lost.

Terrifyingly, readers are reintroduced to Meriwether Lewis of Lewis and Clark fame. No longer just the other half of an expedition name, he becomes a man devoid of purpose after his return to civilization. Despite having introduced 300 plant and animal species to science and having anchored America's vast Western land claims, Lewis and his triple demons of drink, depression, and drugs determine the transcontinental exploration to be a failure. During a trip East at the behest of Thomas Jefferson, Meriwether Lewis arrives at innkeeper Mrs. Grinder's wilderness cabins. There the landlady witnessed Lewis's final unraveling.

Lady aviator Jean Batten survived her dangerous push to fame, but left a trail of destroyed relationships in her wake. Every discarded person became a stepping-stone towards Jean's next accolade. After beating her own flight record between Australia and England, Jean spent the rest of her life in "hibernation with her mother," writes Powter. "She was twenty-eight years old, and she never flew again."

Finding relief in extreme climbing, the Waterman family (Guy, Johnny, and Bill) seem to have found their salvation from life's ills. But the mountain gods had something else in mind. From father Guy ("an excellent climber, a superb wilderness writer") to sons Bill and talented, but doomed Johnny, all three men eventually gave their lives to the very wilderness that had once sustained them.

This insightful compilation of eleven cautionary tales will appeal to readers who want to know not only what makes this planet's foremost risk-takers tick, but also if that incessant drumbeat of time presages an anticlimactic winding down or ominously marks the moments before an inevitable implosion.

SCOTT DOWNING (August 7, 2006)

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