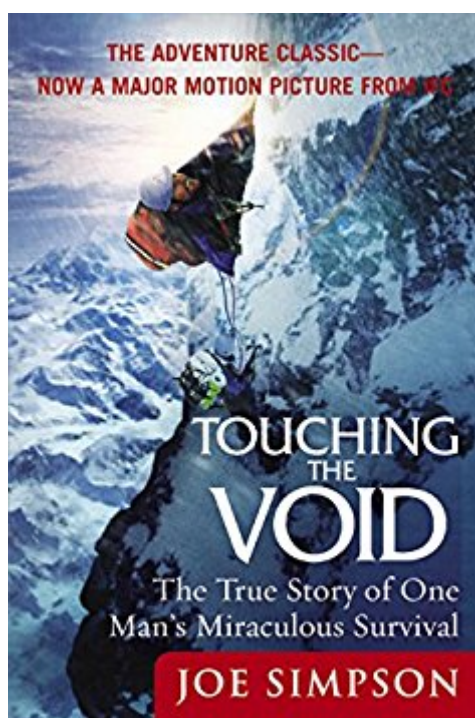


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Touching The Void



Customer Reviews

An amazing tale of courage, fortitude, and a desire to live, despite dire circumstances. The author, Joe Simpson and his climbing partner, Simon Yates, ascend a perilous section of the Peruvian Andes. Near the summit, tragedy strikes when Joe, up over 19,000 feet, falls and hits a slope at the base of a cliff, breaking his right leg, rupturing his right knee, and shattering his right heel. Beneath him is a seemingly endless fall to the bottom. Simon reaches him but knows that the chances for Joe to get off the mountain are virtually non-existent. Yet, they fashion a daring plan to do just that. For the next few hours, through a snow storm, they work in tandem, and manage a risky, yet effective way of trying to lower Joe down the mountain. About three thousand feet down, Joe who is still roped to Simon, drops off an edge, and finds himself now free hanging in space six feet away from an ice wall, unable to reach it with his axe. The edge is over hung about fifteen feet above him. The dark outline of a crevasse lies about a hundred feet directly below him. Joe couldn't get up, and Simon couldn't get down. In fact, Joe's weight began to pull Simon off the mountain. So, Simon was finally forced to do the only thing he could do under the circumstances. He cut the rope, believing that he was consigning his friend to certain death. Therein lies the tale. What happens next is sure to make one believe in miracles.

This is not primarily an adventure story about climbing. It is an account of one man, not just facing the abyss but being in the abyss and having his very being stripped to a raw struggle, not to survive but to want to survive. Simpson and a climbing partner in an excess of youthful bravado planned a new route up a monster Andean peak in Peru. The area was remote and civilization was somewhere else. After an arduous ascent, Simpson fell and broke his leg while descending. The reader gradually realizes what a chilling horror has befallen the pair. They have no possibility of rescue; the mountain was almost unclimbable for two superb athletes with two good legs. How can they possibly get down when one of them is unable to walk? Partner, Simon Yates, ropes Simpson to himself and tries to guide Simpson down who is forced to crawl, slide, and inch himself forward. Then Simpson goes over the edge of a cornice and is dangling with only the rope holding him over the void. Yates heroically digs in, but gradually he himself is being inexorably drawn to the chasm. He finally, with shuddering reluctance, cuts the rope, and Simpson falls many feet into a crevasse. The rest of the book is Simpson's six-day excruciating journey down the mountain: his thoughts, hallucinations and agony. Simpson is a powerful writer without a trace of self-pity. He doesn't try to impress us with his stoicism - far from it, at times he is almost mad with fright. There is nothing lurid here; the book is exhausting, but thought provoking. You won't forget it easily, and you

cannot help but wonder what it is like beyond the edge and into the maelstrom.

A good many books and short stories have been written about mountaineering accidents and tragedies. Every bookshop worth its salt will have at least one or two to choose from, but if this one is on the shelf - get it! This is a tale which will grow on you as you turn each page, compelling you to read on and on to its breathtaking conclusion. Simpson nearly died the first time, but there was worse to come. The author has made no attempt to glorify the story, nor alter the facts to shed a kinder light on his own thoughts and words, or the actions of his partner. This book is not just an account of a human tragedy on a mountain; it is a journey into the depths of a man's soul. It is as much about philosophy as it is about mountaineering, but don't let that put you off - it's a real heart thumper!

'Touching the Void' is the story of Joe Simpson and Simon Yates who climbed the West Face of Siula Grande, a mountain in the Peruvian Andes. After an accident Simpson has a broken leg and little chance of getting off the mountain alive. Yates lowers Simpson off the mountain quickly (as they do not have enough supplies to stay on the mountain) and unknowingly off a cliff face. Simpson cannot beck up the rope and Yates cannot pull him back up. Seconds before being pulled off the face of the cliff himself Yates cuts the rope and Simpson falls off the cliff and down the mountain. Yates, leaving the mountain the next morning, thinking Simpson dead, leaves Simpson to crawl off the mountain with his injuries. In the best portions of the book you get both Yates's and Simpson's thoughts about the accident, where they were and what was happening step by step in the days following the accident. You feel the pain, guilt, fear, and panic in both parties and get the idea that something fantastic occurred on Siula Grande. I say you get the feeling because in the poorer portions of the book you do not understand why one 'crevasse' is worse than another, why a 'pear shaped cornice' is a bad omen, why it is hard to place a 'friend' in a secure position on the mountain, and why a 'bollard' is dubious. In Simpson's words one portion of the mountain blends into the other and you have to be told this portion is scary, or that he is making progress, rather than seeing why he is scared or how he is making progress. Simpson admits as much in the Epilogue to the book when he says 'I simply could not find the words to express the utter desolation of the experience' and to be fair Simpson was not an experienced writer at the time of this book (he has written six since then). However, you are certainly left wanting for a description you can understand, and emotion that stands out from the rest, and a story you can grasp on to instead of feeling that 'you needed to be there'.

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