listening station on Nanda Devi. Then it dawned on me. These guys are running out the clock. At the historical moment when there is a spawn of expeditions coming from all corners of the earth, at the inflection point where there is a major leap forward in technical standards, just where there is a crying need for a comprehensive history of the Himalaya, they unaccountably give up the chase. Who knows, maybe the newer people and their projects weren't sufficiently interesting to them. On their telling, one could never imagine that since the mid-70s the Himalayan expeditions pages of this journal have tripled, nor that high-altitude technical rock or mixed climbing has been the scene of fantastic endeavors for the last 30 years. (Not a mention of firsts on Latok, Uli Biaho, Shivling, ....) Another failure in the historians' responsibility is their disregard of non-Anglophone achievements. The Japanese first all-women's ascent of Everest in 1975 is kissed off with a paragraph, compared to five pages for the American women on Annapurna three years later. A paragraph is all they can spare for the path-breaking Polish first winter ascent of Everest in 1973, but they have four for the ascent of Changabang by Brits in 1974. French, Italian, and German climbers of the edenic period (K2, Nanga Parbat, Annapurna) are well covered, but after 1960 they disappear. As to the Himalayan triumphs of Slavs, Czechs, Russians, etc., these vanish into thin air.

**John Thackray**


The 2006 season thrust Everest back into the public spotlight, in a way that was eerily reminiscent of a decade earlier. During spring 1996, so ably chronicled by Jon Krakauer, 12 climbers died; in 2006, 11 died, with the miraculous survival of Lincoln Hall preventing the equaling of a grisly record. In 2006 the drama took place on Everest's north side and swirled around the ethics of mountaineering. Journalists labeled Everest a "circus," populated by rich, spoiled pseudo-mountaineers obsessed with glory and unconcerned with its costs, financial or moral. Sir Edmund Hillary famously weighed in to castigate the state of climbing on the mountain.

Nick Heil, a freelance journalist, first covered the 2006 season in a piece for *Men's Journal*. He uses his article as a springboard to writing *Dark Summit: the True Story of Everest's Most Controversial Season*. Michael Kodas, also a journalist, explores the 2006 season in his book *High Crimes: the Fate of Everest in an Age of Greed*; yet for Kodas, 2006 was the postscript to an established pattern of poor behavior of climbers on the world's highest peaks.

While *Into Thin Air* remains the benchmark for literature on Everest, Heil's *Dark Summit* is an offering worthy of mention in the same sentence. Heil meticulously re-creates the events of 2006, piecing together his story from an extensive body of interviews with the climbers.
involved. Heil has a way with words, and his narrative moves smoothly and effortlessly. *Dark Summit* is split into two sections: Part One tells the story of David Sharp, a British climber attempting Everest for the third time. Sharp, climbing on an extremely low budget, ran into trouble on his descent from close to the summit. He hunkered down in “Green Boots Cave” above the Exit Cracks on the northeast ridge, where, close to death, he was passed by approximately 40 climbers the following morning. Heil weaves together Sharp’s story with that of Russell Brice’s Himalayan Experience guide service, whose two summit teams encountered Sharp at differing stages of his debilitation on 14-15 May. Part Two tells the stories of Lincoln Hall and Thomas Weber. Hall—given up for dead by his Sherpa companion—survived a night at 8,500 meters before miraculously walking down the following day [see the following review, Dead Lucky]. Weber—a semi-blind climber guided by Dutchman Harry Kikstra—died at the Second Step. The circumstances surrounding Weber’s death—and whether he should even have been climbing Everest in the first place—are somewhat unclear, and Heil tries to untangle differing recollections of the incident.

As Heil notes, “My intent … was not to try to render any final judgment…. If anything, I set out to try to illustrate, explain and clarify a series of incidents about which so much judgment has already been issued.” For the most part, he achieves his goal, yet, while it would be wrong to regard *Dark Summit* as a defense of the ever-controversial Brice, Heil does end up sympathizing with the position in which Brice finds himself as the “main man” on the north side. That said, while gathering information for the book, Heil spent six weeks at Brice’s base camp on Everest in 2007 as part of a North Col trekking expedition; he also visited Brice at his homes in Kathmandu and Chamonix, a position from which it would have been difficult to be objective. But due to Heil’s carefully reasoned prose, the average reader ends up generally convinced by his conclusion that little could have been done to help Sharp: “The more I learned about the particulars surrounding Sharp’s death, the less controversial it seemed to be.”

Michael Kodas attempted Everest in 2004 (and again in 2006), and covered his 2004 expedition as a journalist for the *Hartford Courant*, a Connecticut newspaper. In *High Crimes*, he weaves together two stories: that of his own expedition in 2004, led by George Dijmarescu, and that of Nils Antezana, an American doctor of Bolivian origin whose death Kodas lays at the feet of his—according to Kodas—dishonest guide, Gustavo Lisi. Kodas’ argument for this charge is convincing. Describing scenes of corruption, theft, violence, and possible murder, Kodas lambastes the Everest “scene” and the way the mountain is climbed and guided today. Though his focus is Everest, he also seems to extend his attack to the wider community of high-altitude mountaineers; they appear as little more than a cadre of thieves and criminals, as Kodas provides a laundry list of every piece of dirt he could dredge up on the subject. Kodas’ qualifications to make these assertions, however—with his two abject failures on Everest, in 2004 and 2006, the only Himalayan peak he has attempted—is certainly open to debate.

Kodas has something of a “bee in his bonnet” about Everest, and indeed high-altitude mountaineering. He makes no attempt to produce a balanced work, preferring to repeatedly hammer home his single point, aiming for maximum shock value: “Prostitutes and pimps propositioned climbers walking through base camp” and “There is a growing tendency to use drugs to reach the summit of Everest.” These are examples of Kodas’ favored “method” of analysis: taking individual instances and conveying the impression that they are endemic. The problem with Kodas’ approach, as every good historian or lawyer knows, is that providing a thoroughly one-sided story, and failing to suggest that actuality could be even slightly different, leads to a weak
argument. One is left with the impression that Kodas was poorly equipped to be on Everest in the first place, had difficulty fitting in with his teammates, and has taken this opportunity to fire off his vitriol in print, where they can offer no defense. Describing the problems he faced on his own expedition, he is often petty and childish; this undercuts the gravitas of certain incidents which clearly were extremely serious.

Kodas' writing style is somewhat graceless, and his prose lacks fluidity. At certain points, his sentences are downright cringe-inducing ("David [Sharp] knew that there was one disease that he could not provide medication for: summit fever"). High Crimes also feels disjointed; Kodas jumps from South America to the Himalaya to the United States and back, in different years. This is in striking contrast to Dark Summit, in which Heil moves seamlessly through his tale, elegantly interweaving his stories. Dark Summit is a carefully written, reasoned, skillfully told tale; I found myself savoring each chapter. Kodas' High Crimes is an awkward, angry polemic; I rushed to get through it.

Myles Osborne


Dead Lucky enters into the already very crowded field of Everest disaster stories. In many ways the book follows the typical narrative arc so familiar to readers of these works: the invitation to climb, the training, the preparations, the walk in, the questioning, and then the climb itself with the ensuing success or disaster. Hall, however, is an experienced writer—this is his eighth book—and Dead Lucky exerts a narrative pull on the reader that makes it a valuable contribution to the genre.

Hall’s troubles on his 2006 Everest climb began when he suffered a cerebral edema about an hour after leaving the summit. Hall noticed his own erratic behavior: He wanted “to climb up the mountain, not down it.” He wanted to jump off the Kangshung Face. He “continually rejected” his oxygen mask. Eventually, after losing consciousness and having been pronounced dead, he was left by his Sherpas at Mushrom Rock, 8,600 meters up the northeast ridge.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of Dead Lucky is the way in which Hall describes his hallucinations of that night. At one point he believed that “three women were camped in a little space amongst the rocks.” He could hear them “chattering and laughing” but “couldn’t be bothered visiting them.” Later, a climber appeared to Hall from the direction of the Second Step, and Hall “gestured for him to follow me down the narrow path, which now ran alongside a wall built from rough-cut but well-fitted stones.” The women, the climber, the path, and the wall are all the products of Hall’s oxygen-starved imagination. Hall incorporates these moments into the narrative without introduction or explanation, which is disorientating for the reader until we realize that we are in his hypoxia. It is a deft and disturbing way to convey his mental state.

Miraculously, Hall survived the night. The following morning, as the news of his supposed death filtered to the media and his family in Sydney, he was found by climbers and a Sherpa. His first words to them—“I imagine you are surprised to see me here”—are strikingly