

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

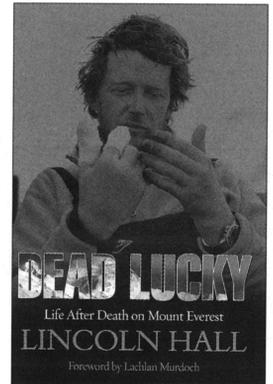
DEAD LUCKY: MY JOURNEY HOME FROM EVEREST. *Lincoln Hall.* New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2008. 309 pages. \$24.95.

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 Mushroom 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



straightforward and indicative of the understated tone of the whole book. Hall then recounts his rescue, including shocking verbal and physical abuse from two Sherpas who were unwilling participants.

Hall places his story within the wider controversies of Everest in 2006, especially the death of David Sharp, the British climber who was also thought to be dead, then seen alive, but was not rescued and did not survive. Instead, as Hall writes, “forty people had walked past David Sharp ... as he lay alive but unmoving on the trail,” and the circumstances of his death prompted a media outcry. Sharp’s story becomes an affecting background to Hall’s, and Hall explores the two very different outcomes, the “simplistic” attitude of the media to these events, and the bigger question of why some live, but others die. Another touchstone here is the death of Sue Fear, another well-known Australian alpinist and a good friend of Hall’s, who died on Manaslu while Hall was on his way down to base camp. The first thing Hall does after arriving home in Australia is to attend her memorial service.

Dead Lucky is in many ways as much a story of tragedy as it is of survival. Indeed, “It is the tragedies more than the triumphs that maintain Everest’s aura,” writes Hall. This is certainly true of Everest publishing, but it is a credit to Hall’s talents as a writer that *Dead Lucky* contributes to that aura of Everest in such a singular and arresting way.

CLARE CHESHER

THIN WHITE LINE. ANDY CAVE. London: Hutchinson, 2008. 230 pages. Hardcover. \$48.50.

In 1997, during his descent from the north face of Changabang, in the Garwhal Himalaya, Andy Cave heard a quiet sound. High above, a series of snow slides merged into a single flood, surging toward him and his climbing partners. Initially “the whiteness,” he wrote in his first, award-winning memoir, *Learning to Breathe*, seemed to take “an eternity.” Then time began again, and with it, “so quietly and softly [the avalanche] took Brendan away.”

That same sense of a muted blast, stilled time, and erased presence suffuses Cave’s second book, *Thin White Line*. Near the opening Cave arrives at the Piolet d’Or award ceremony in Chamonix; their Changabang ascent has just been nominated for the prize. Still in shock, months after the avalanche and Brendan Murphy’s death, Cave depicts the town with words that fall like eerie, muffled echoes: “All day snow fell like feathers, until the only colour left... was white, milk white, over pavements, cars, trees, hats and hair. In the evening it continued, a slow descent, graceful and noiseless, so that with closed eyes the only sensation was a gentle trickle and burn as the flakes slid from your cheeks. It was as if the snow normally reserved for high summits had become lost and decided to rest here on the street.”

Throughout the book, his descriptive passages possess a ghostly, poignant beauty—alluding to loss, separation, disconnection—as if the invisible and the unspoken are what matter most, as if the author is searching to express an idea that lies just beyond the edges of his vision. Indeed, like many introspective climbing writers, Cave attempts to resolve that familiar existential question in its risk-heightened form: How do we accept a world that includes suffering and violent death?

