



The Devil May Care: Fifty Intrepid Americans and Their Quest for the Unknown

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Stripped naked and pursued across cactus-studded plains by a band of armed Blackfoot Indians, John Colter escaped certain death to become the one of the most durable characters in western American history. But Colter's harrowing tale was not beyond the ordinary when compared to the adventures of other American explorers. In *The Devil May Care*, popular historian and travel writer Tony Horwitz has culled through the American National Biography and selected fifty stirring biographies of adventurers who had no one's footsteps to follow in--and yet contributed enormously to our understanding of the world.

Horwitz introduces us to fascinating individuals such as John Ledyard, the first American to see what would become the Pacific Northwest, and Elisha Kent Kane, America's first arctic hero, who stumbled upon an extremely strange remedy for scurvy while icebound off of Ellesmere Island. Having set off into the unknown many times himself as a foreign correspondent, Horwitz brings a subtle sense of humor and a reporter's eye for detail to a collection that offers a glimpse inside the lives of historic Americans who brazenly challenged danger as they pursued their wanderlust to extreme climates and forbidding environments.

Beginning with a short essay, Horwitz seeks his own definition of exploration, drawing on some of his research into the voyages of Captain James Cook and considering its larger implications throughout history. Archival photographs as well as a lively and personal introduction to each story by Horwitz further enhance the appeal of a volume that winds its way through several centuries of American exploration, affirming that the best adventure stories are the true ones.

The Devil May Care: Fifty Intrepid Americans and Their Quest for the Unknown Details

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Steve says

A lot of interesting lives. Reading any given individual life described, amazing as they often are, I felt as if my sense of the world and of history and of America was expanded and enhanced. But they never really added up to anything here. There will always be thousands and thousands more fascinating American lives than we can know about or comprehend. Here are fifty. Was it worth the investment of time and attention? I don't know. Maybe.

Jim says

I really like Horwitz's work, but this wasn't really what I expected. Sure, there are plenty of good mini-biographies of fascinating folk, but then you could have called the book Fifty Interesting Americans, except some of the people weren't even Americans. And often they really were not on quests. Surely there is no one in the book that doesn't deserve some attention, but I wonder really what was the purpose of this book. Now, if Horwitz had written the entries, and put his unusual spin on thing, I no doubt believe it would have been a wonderful read, but there are rather plebian biographies. I guess in most cases few would have searched them out, and therefore it is worthwhile that they were collected. But I smell a PR person who thought up a way to get a few bucks out of material already on hand.

Leslie says

What a book !! Tony Horwitz poured over 18,000 mini-biographies from the 27 volumes of "American National Biography" to find 50 American adventurers overlooked for decades by standard history books.

Early day historians established heroes, and every historian who came along promoted the same heroes. Granted, they were heroes. But writing about them to the exclusion of others just doesn't seem right. Take Simon Kenton. He did everything Dan'l Boone did, and he rescued Boone when he was attacked and hopeless outnumbered by Indian warriors.

And the women. Why aren't there more of them in the history books ? Take Mary Ann Patten. As a teenager she taught herself seafaring while traveling with her husband, captain of a clipper ship. And, when he husband fell ill with tuberculosis on a voyage from New York City to San Francisco, she assumed command of the ship, putting down a mutiny led by the First Mate with a stirring speech that brought all of the sailors to her defense. It took 50 days to round Cape Horn, but she did it and landed in SF without the loss of any lives.

The book is full of such stories, ordinary people who rose to the occasion and advanced the cause of the exploration of America.

Leah says

Really ended up skippin g over lots of this...not that interesting to be honest. Horwitz is the editor, not the writer, so it has none of his humor.

Lou Soskin says

I was disappointed. I found myself skipping through the book.
