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The Mantis: A mountaineering novel

Philip Temple



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It is not the courage to go back up that we need. It's the courage to go down. Just to go on ... ' In 1977 a British expedition led by Himalayan veteran Geoff Strickland, summiteer of K2 and Everest among others, set off to attempt the first ascent of unclimbed Puthemojar - the 'Mantis' - in the Karakoram. 25,311 feet high, renowned for its difficulty, and with a fearsome reputation, the Mantis had claimed the life of at least one climber on each of the previous expeditions that had attempted to scale its complex series of ridges and icefalls. In order to claim the coveted first ascent, Strickland put together a small team comprising the cream of British mountaineering talent: his long-time Himalayan climbing partner and photographer Michael Blackmore; the redoubtable northerner Joe Dodge, as tough as they come; Dodge's regular partner and another veteran of numerous Himalayan expeditions Doug Lowrie; and two young guns - Brit Alan Wyllie, and Kiwi Peter Chase, a pair who had been tearing up the Alpine rule book with daring ascents on the steepest and most difficult faces. Although Michael Blackmore's 1980 record of the climb - The Last Challenge - has become a classic of mountaineering literature, Blackmore himself was never satisfied it told the full story of the events on Puthemojar in 1977. Before his death in 2000, Blackmore had prepared a draft manuscript - a 'creative narrative' - of the expedition which, with thanks to Blackmore's widow, has now been completed by award-winning author and mountaineer Philip Temple. While perhaps best regarded as a work of fiction, The Mantis tells for the first time the gripping story of that 1977 British expedition to Puthemojar. It is a portrait of these men, their drive, this mountain and a credible testimony of just what went on, high on the Mantis.

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