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Ranulph Fiennes

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Presents the story of one of the greatest explorers who ever lived by 'the world's greatest living explorer'.

Captain Scott Details

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Author : Ranulph Fiennes

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From Reader Review Captain Scott for online ebook

Scott McKenzie says

Five word review: Unique insights from perfect biographer

Richard Steel says

Torn between 3 and 4 stars. The first half of the book is Scott's back-story before the ill fated Terra Nova expedition, and while it gives certain parts of the Terra Nova expedition some context, as a stand alone biography it was somewhat pedestrian - it was ok.

Second half is excellent; Fiennes experience with polar travel and conditions, together with his meticulous research of the expedition's letters and diaries, places him in an excellent position to be able to offer critical analysis of the decisions made by Scott and behaviour of the team.

As the journey begins to unravel, it's hard not to be moved by the courage shown by all the men involved, and having been given a glimpse of what these men went through i won't look at adversity in quite the same way again.

Three or four? such was my emotional involvement, i'll go for four :)

Jonathon Day says

Having first really studied Scott (briefly) at University I was mostly familiar with the famous 'debunking' of Scott evident in Roland Huntford's work: 'Scott and Amundsen'.

However, Scott's story has always stuck and when I was reminded of this book recently I was eager to read and alternative view from someone with real experience of the climate, conditions and dangers of the Arctic.

Fiennes does not disappoint: the book is a thorough and dedicated biography detailing Scott's early life and both the expeditions that made him famous. Fiennes states from the start he has no natural empathy with Scott directly but was keen to restore his reputation somewhat after what, he felt, were unjust smears against a man no longer able to defend himself. I found Fiennes arguments convincing, his own polar experience adds to the credibility of his conclusions and I feel he is generally respectful and mature in his arguments against those with whom he disagrees (this is no ranting polemic!).

Overall, an excellent read and insight into polar history, exploration and a look at a man many still admire as a hero (myself included).

Ange says

Although it's taken me quite some time to read "Captain Scott", this is more a reflection on me than the book. I found it a thorough and mostly well-written account of Captain Scott's Antarctic expeditions. Fiennes goes to great lengths to defend Scott's reputation against the claims made in Roland Huntford's book (which I have not read). However, I often felt that Fiennes tried too hard to justify or explain Scott's actions and the infrequent criticisms of Scott by his team (particularly by Titus Oates in his letters home to his mother). Even without Fiennes' explanations, it seemed obvious that many of Scott's Antarctic expedition companions had the greatest respect and admiration for him, and that numerous factors beyond Scott's control (in particular the unusually cold and harsh weather he experienced on the return journey from the Pole) contributed to the well known tragedy. Fiennes frequently described his own experiences in the Antarctic, and while this experience almost certainly gives him a unique understanding of Scott's circumstances, I found these anecdotes rather intrusive. On the whole, this is definitely a worthy read, although not one that evokes the atmosphere of the age to any great degree (unlike Elspeth Huxley's "Scott of the Antarctic" which I have read several times).

Enrique Gustavo Baglioni says

Una libro que pretende refutar otro por un escritor que no sabe argumentar. Una pena

Como bien lo explica su autor en el último capítulo con su libro pretende hacer una crítica y réplica principalmente al libro de Roland Huntford sobre el mismo tema. Si bien es cierto que el libro de Huntford lo muestra a Scott como a un bobo en cada aspecto de su vida lo que es inverosímil, Fiennes cae en el mismo error haciendo a Scott un genio, de cada error una virtud o un acierto y buscando cualquier justificación para sostener lo insostenible. También es absurda e infantil su forma de hablar despectivamente de Amundsen en cada referencia que hace.

Omar Waheed says

The description of Captain Scott and his four companions marching back from the South Pole haunted me days after finishing the book. I couldn't help repeatedly imagining what they went through in that freezing cold tent with frostbitten limbs and faces, no food or water, no strength to continue and no reinforcements coming to help. My heart just couldn't encompass the pain and desolation.

The author Ranulph Fiennes has written a book that evoked my emotions while being thorough to the subject matter, briefly covering Scott's biography, the details and context of both Antarctic voyages and wading through the controversy of his legacy in the final chapter. Fiennes is a polar explorer himself and travelled the same route as Scott to the south pole and references to his own experiences provided valuable context.

Captain Scott's ill-fated South Pole adventure occurred around the same time as the Titanic disaster. Both tragedies seemed symptomatic of a mood within the British Empire looking to re-capture past glory and prove continuing prowess. Both projects were grand in scale and shared tragic ends which seemed a combination of human error and bad fortune. Fiennes does justice to the place of Scott's journey in the history of the Empire and describes how attitudes towards Scott changed as attitudes towards the Empire did within British society.

Fiennes has attempted to balance the narrative on Captain Scott which had begun with him as British hero shortly after his death and seemed to end with him as fool and villain in the present day. At times, he defends Scott and debunks wrongful criticism and myths around Scott's life and polar expeditions. At other times he simply adds detail and context to the situations Scott faced in Antarctica so the reader could have a wider understanding of the decisions he made. I finished the book with the impression that I had read something balanced and complete and have no desire to read other books on the subject.

Kristina Brown says

I cannot recommend this highly enough. Not a hagiography yet sympathetic to the ordeal of Scott and his men. Who better to write of the trials of Antarctic travel than someone who has not only been there but has experience both manhauling and using dogs?

This is a factual account of Scott's travels using quotes from original sources rather than past biographies. Sir Ranulph not only describes what happened but also explains from his own experience the whys and wherefores. He also carefully highlights errors that have become almost accepted truths, giving evidence to support his reasoning.

If you were only going to read one book about the Terra Nova expedition this should be it.

Ethan says

With this biography of Captain Scott, Ranulph Fiennes is attempting to right the wrong done to Scott's reputation. A wrong mostly done by the author Roland Huntford, at least in Fiennes view. The author charts Scott's life but primarily focuses on his two expeditions to the south pole, the second one ending in tragedy. Fiennes is an experienced polar explorer and has lead expeditions in the same areas as Scott, using some of the same methods, including extensive man-hauling as were used on both Scott's expedition. This gives the book a weight you can feel. He writes about the stress and strain and deprivation that wears on you, leading to being harsher on your companions during your expedition journaling than you otherwise would be. He goes into great detail on why and how the decisions were made to man-haul to the South Pole by his team, instead of using dog sleds and skis as Amundsen did. Fiennes doesn't shy away from Scott's character flaws, flaws that Scott himself was aware of and fought against his whole life. He was prone to bouts of depression and malaise, to being sharp-tongued and dismissive of those who weren't pulling their weight. Through the surviving journals of the men who were on the expedition, he shows that most of the crew knew these faults and respected and admired Scott for the tremendous leader he was anyway.

This was an interesting read, especially after finishing "The Last Viking" Stephen Brown's biography of Roald Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer who secretly launched an expedition to the South Pole at the same time as Scott. I came out of that book with a great admiration for Amundsen, but Fiennes clearly has a great disrespect for him. He considers the way Amundsen kept his plans to be the first to the pole secret until it was too late for Scott to make any adjustments, sneaky and underhanded. Amundsen was an adventurer pure and simple, his expedition was solely to be the first to the pole, nothing else. Scott on the other hand was leading a scientific expedition. He and his men mapped great areas of the Antarctic, taking scientific measurements the entire time, collecting samples and specimens and adding to the collective knowledge of the mostly unknown polar region.

This is at its heart a great adventure book. The things they went through both on the first and second expedition are hard to fathom in this day and age. The end is harrowing but it's highly readable.

Jairo says

Years ago, I read two books about polar exploration by Roland Huntford and enjoyed them very much. The summary was: Amundsen was a genius, Shackleton was a tough natural-born leader, and Scott was stupid and lazy, and essentially murdered the men he led.

Recently I came across this book by the accomplished modern explorer Fiennes and thought "Why did this guy write an entire book about the fool Scott?". After I read the first few pages of Fiennes book, I wasn't able to stop.

Besides telling a fascinating story, Fiennes discusses in detail the many accusations against Scott, and shows that these were mostly unfounded. To summarize, many decades after his death, Scott was the victim of a assassination of reputation, and Roland Huntford was the main perpetrator.

Fraser says

I bought this book in a moment of inspiration after a wonderful visit to Discovery Point in Dundee.

I have also followed Fiennes career closely, reading most of his books depicting his various travels and adventures.

This book is so passionate, one clearly feels the admiration that Fiennes holds for Scott, and the contempt he holds for authors who have never set foot on the snow and ice of the Antarctic.

Suffice to say, I found myself re-assessing the commonly held views of the noble failure of his expedition, and Scott although always a 'tragic' hero in popular lore is no longer to me. He is a real hero in every sense of the word, right down to the incredible dignity he demonstrated when he knew it was all over.

'Aussie Rick' says

This biography on Captain Scott by Ranulph Fiennes will rank in my top ten books for 2003. I have to confess that I have no in-depth knowledge on arctic travel and exploration other than having read a few good books on the subject.

Having said that, out of the books that I have read on the subject this has to be the best so far. In any book I read I always have a look at the background (or pedigree) of the author. In this case Ranulph Fiennes has the personal experience of many years of arctic travel & exploration to back up his claims and theories in his account of Captain Scott.

By referring to his own experiences in the same areas and similar circumstances you get a much better idea of what was possible and why and what wasn't possible and why. He is also able to put to rest many of the myths and fairy tales surrounding Scott's South Pole expedition and the fate of himself and his companions.

After finishing this book I really felt I had a much better understanding of what these brave men attempted and why they failed or didn't fail depending on your point of view. As other reviews have indicated, maybe the author tends to lean to Captain Scott's defence too much but then again maybe Captain's Scott's reputation needs to be picked up from the dust of history and given a good polish again, its well deserved.

I would have no hesitation in recommending this book to anyone who wants to know what really happened to Captain Scott. Anyone who enjoys accounts of adventure, of man overcoming adversity or just a decent history book to read, this will suit them down-to-the-ground. I am indebted to the author for passing on his passion for this man, I have learnt a few things and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to read such a well-researched and well-written book, well done to Mr Fiennes!

From the back cover: *"The real story of one of the greatest explorers who ever lived by the man described by the Guinness Book of Records as the world's greatest living explorer."*

Ann-Marie says

This is a fascinating and very sad story. This year it's 100 years since Scott and two of his fellow explorers died on the ice in Antarctica. There is much written about him but Sir Ranulph Fiennes writing gave the story another dimension because Fiennes has been there and has endured much of what Scott did.

I liked the book very much. It is well written and easy to read. Fiennes tells Scott's story, and is quite critical of much that has been told about him. I still don't feel that I've learnt what kind of person he was which make me curious. I think he may have been a very private man.

Matthew says

A really excellent and passionate re-telling of Captain Scott's fateful voyages to the South Pole by Ranulph Fiennes. Scott's character and journeys have taken a bit of a bashing in recent times, if you asked most people what they knew it would be something along the lines of...'The Norwegian got there first'...'I may be some time'...'Didn't take dogs'...This I must admit was pretty much my level of knowledge as well. Fiennes completely re-assesses Scott and the decisions he made to paint the true picture of a real adventurer, a real Gentleman and a British hero, a great read. My only question why print the maps with due south at the top of the page? Perhaps this was how it was done 100 years ago, but it seemed odd. Anyway, a tough read as it's very in-depth, but a really fantastic book.

Shane says

Had never read anything on Scott or on Antarctica before so was unaware of any tarnished image of Scott. Fiennes spends a lot of time in the book disputing other authors conclusions or myths that have sprung up in recent years which I found a bit annoying (maybe cause I was unaware of them to begin with)
It's a very detailed account of Scott's two expeditions and his ultimate demise. It was fascinating to hear the

many challenges and deprivations the team faced and the struggles and how they overcame them. What I most took away from this book were the feats of human endurance and the human spirit to endure and still maintain their humanity and good nature in such miserable conditions.

Stephen Rodwell says

Interesting to hear about Fienne's experiences alongside Scott's and a decent overview of the historiography surrounding Scott.

It's pretty readable too though sometimes the paragraphs don't seem to link and it meanders through different topics vaguely related.

The biggest issue with the book is that, even though he claims not to care that deeply about Scott, and even though he claims to weigh up both sides of an argument, sometimes his prose comes across as so one-sided, pro-Scott that it loses some credibility. For example, he claims that a man cannot be judged by his diary entries as they would have been edited had he not died. That's true to a degree, but I don't think you can disregard every negative comment about another expedition member as having no truth or right to be discussed.

Overall - interesting but could have done with some editing!
