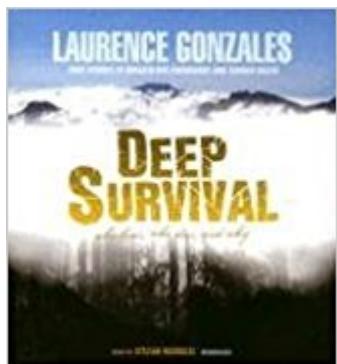


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Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, And Why -- True Stories Of Miraculous Endurance And Sudden Death



Synopsis

[Read by Stefan Rudnicki] After her plane crashes, a seventeen-year-old girl spends eleven days walking through the Peruvian jungle. Against all odds, with no food, shelter, or equipment, she gets out. A better equipped group of adult survivors of the same crash sits down and dies. What makes the difference? - - Examining such stories of miraculous endurance and tragic death, Deep Survival takes us from the tops of snowy mountains and the depths of oceans to the workings of the brain that control our behavior. Through analysis of case studies, the author describes the essence of a survivor and offers steps for staying out of trouble. In the end, he finds, it is what's in your heart, not what's in your pack, that separates the living from the dead. This book will change the way we understand ourselves and the great outdoors.

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Customer Reviews

When confronted with a life-threatening situation, 90% of people freeze or panic, says Gonzales in this exploration of what makes the remaining 10% stay cool, focused and alive. Gonzales (The Hero's Apprentice; The Still Point), who has covered survival stories for National Geographic Explorer, Outside and Men's Journal, uncovers the biological and psychological reasons people risk their lives and why some are better at it than others. In the first part of the book, the author talks to dozens of thrill-seekers-mountain climbers, sailors, jet pilots-and they all say the same thing: danger is a great rush. "Fear can be fun," Gonzales writes. "It can make you feel more alive, because it is an integral part of saving your own life." Pinpointing why and how those 10% survive is another story. "They are the ones who can perceive their situation clearly; they can plan and take correct

action," Gonzales explains. Survivors, whether they're jet pilots landing on the deck of an aircraft carrier or boatbuilders adrift on a raft in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, share certain traits: training, experience, stoicism and a capacity for their logical neocortex (the brain's thinking part) to override the primitive amygdala portion of their brains. Although there's no surefire way to become a survivor, Gonzales does share some rules for adventure gleaned from the survivors themselves: stay calm, be decisive and don't give up. Remembering these rules when crisis strikes may be tough, but Gonzales's vivid descriptions of life in the balance will stay with readers. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What impels people to risk their lives by climbing mountains or deep-sea diving? What confluence of forces leads to drastic accidents? Why do some people survive disasters while others perish? A renowned journalist intrigued with risk, Gonzales conducts an in-depth and engrossing inquiry into the dynamics of survival. Relating one hair-raising true story after another about wilderness adventures gone catastrophically wrong and other calamities, Gonzales draws on sources as diverse and compelling as the Stoic philosophers and neuroscience to elucidate the psychological, physiological, and spiritual strengths that enable certain individuals to avoid fatal panic and make that crucial "transition from victim to survivor." People who survive being lost or adrift at sea, for instance, pay close attention to their surroundings and respect the wild. Gonzales also notes that survivors think of others, either helping a fellow sufferer or rallying to outsmart death in order to spare loved ones anguish. The study of survival offers an illuminating portal into the human psyche, and Gonzales, knowledgeable and passionate, is a compelling and trustworthy guide. Donna SeamanCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read Laurence Gonzales' Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, And Why as a counterpoint to Amanda Ripley's The Unthinkable. Both are survivor books, very different in their approach, but with significant conclusions in common. Gonzales focuses more on accidents: unexpected twists that challenge people in stressful situations they chose to put themselves in, primarily wilderness and sporting recreational activities. Gonzales focuses little on true disasters, where our daily lives are suddenly interrupted by a wholly unexpected catastrophic and immediately life threatening event from which we must escape; Ripley focuses on true disasters. Gonzales focuses a lot on scientific, technical biological explanations; Ripley talks a lot about pseudo-scientific evolutionary biology. Gonzales is a more florid writer on a

semi-autobiographical quest following a life of adventure; Ripley is a straightforward young writer trying to analyze what others do. But this review is about Gonzales' book, which aspires to tell people [not] what to do but rather to be a search for a deeper understanding that will allow them to know what to do when the time comes. His book tries to provide an overarching philosophy, really, for life survival, not just survival when you're lost in the woods or hanging off a mountain. In fact, if there is a unifying theme of "Deep Survival," other than survival itself, it is Stoicism. Quotations from Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius litter the book, and their ideas permeate every page. For example, from Epictetus: "On the occasion of every accident that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and inquire what power you have for turning it to use." This is because Gonzales believes, with demonstrated reason, that a Stoic approach to unexpected twists in life will maximize your chances for survival, in whatever situation you find yourself. Gonzales ties all his stories and thoughts back to himself "back to his own growing appreciation for these principles he discovers during his life, and most of all back to his father's experiences in World War Two and the rest of his life (he was a bomber pilot alive at the time this book was written, 2004). If you don't like the personal angle, it may seem a bit navel-gazing. But he does a good job making himself and his family relevant, and after all, it's his book, not merely a textbook for the wanna-be survivor. Gonzales spends the first half of the book evaluating "How Accidents Happen." In other words, most of what he focuses on is preventable survival problems. For him, if you stay home, there will be no survival problem. And, for the most part, if you go out into the wilderness and make the right choices, there will also be no survival problem. What Gonzales wants to know in this section is why people act in ways that create situations in which they must survive. His conclusion, shot through the book, is that it's down to uncontrollable emotions, mostly for bad, but also for good. Quoting Remarque's description in "All Quiet On The Western Front" of men who, having been at the front for a while, thrown themselves to the ground on sheer reflex, even before they can hear or sense a shell, Gonzales concludes "Emotion is an instinctive response aimed at self-preservation." But that same instinctive response can also betray. There is much talk of dopamine, brain structures, stress hormones, memory, and, in the end, "that quality which is perhaps the only one which may be said with certainty to make for success, self-control." Our brains conspire to impel us by inciting emotions to do things that are not rational and not a good idea, but seem like a good idea to our brains. We need this type of decision making, since it is fast and effective, but it can kill us, if the emotion leads us to do something objectively stupid. Panic is only one of those emotions;

pleasurable emotions are also extremely powerful. Controlling those emotions without losing their benefit is everything. And not just the control of manipulation—also the control of knowing what you don't know. A survivor expects the world to keep changing and keeps his senses always tuned to: What's up? The survivor is continuously adapting.

The survivor does not impose pre-existing patterns on new information, but rather allows new information to reshape [his mental models]. Of course, even choosing activities carefully while engaging in rigid self-control is often not enough. Accidents always happen; it is the nature of systems, even simple systems. Small failures are self-correcting or at least not catastrophic, until the day they combine with other happenings to create total failure. As with a sand pile, which slides and collapses in unpredictable ways, you can tell that an accident will happen despite your best efforts, but not how or when. (It helps, of course, not to be stupid or have undesirable characteristics. Gonzales, like Ripley, casually slags fat people as unlikely to survive.)

This is a commonality of systems: Gonzales notes that Clausewitz pointed out that military systems seemed simple, and therefore easy to manage, but terrible friction . . . is everywhere in contact with chance, with consequences that are impossible to calculate. Again, Clausewitz says a general must not expect a level of precision in his operation that simply cannot be achieved owing to this very friction. And trying to impose our own reality on actual reality when that friction starts to bite is disastrous. Even if you choose carefully and have self-control, and avoid a system failure, you may still end up in a survival situation by simple failure of knowledge. If you don't bother to inquire how the local waves differ from the waves you are familiar with, you may end up in trouble that you could have easily avoided. Gonzales does not promise that everything will be OK; he merely offers analysis and advice for maximizing the chance of avoiding problems.

Gonzales then turns to Survival—what to do when, for whatever reason, you've ended up in a survival situation. Many people bend the map—they try to, when lost in an unfamiliar area, rationalize how they are really in a familiar area. Don't do that. Be as Stoic as possible. Accept your fate yet work to change it. Never follow rules given by others just because they are rules or because they are the group. Never give up. Fatigue is mostly psychological and difficult to recover from; rest proactively rather than pushing yourself. Balance risk and reward, then act decisively—be a man of action. Pray—even if it doesn't work, it helps you focus and take action. (Although neither Gonzales nor Ripley emphasize it, both note that religious people are far more likely to survive.) Plan the flight and fly the plan. But don't fall in love with the plan. Give yourself small goals and achieve small successes; follow a routine; create order.

Focus on yourself, not on blaming others, or relying on them. And, ultimately, you may still die.
 “But what can be earned is a certain nobility” not in the sense of aristocratic status but in the sense of striving for quality and dignity of behavior and living. The last is said by a wilderness firefighter of his daily job, but it can just as well be applied to a survivor in a single desperate situation. None of what Gonzales says is all that startling. I imagine many of us would list some variations on these if asked the question, “what should one do to survive?” But Gonzales weaves these principles into a coherent whole, and links them to a range of interesting stories about real people. As with Ripley’s book, whose more cut-and-dried lessons Gonzales echoes, the reader can benefit quite a bit from this book, if you read carefully and absorb the lessons.

This is augmenting the way I experience the wilderness. Though focused on how we interact with our environment, this thoughtful book is extending beyond adventures to modify how I interact with the world at large - we are constantly adjusting to survive in our environments, and oftentimes those adjustments are in response to primitive instincts not as relevant to today’s world. This book presents a good reminder that it’s worthwhile to consider the source of the things we feel, and to create the distance between feeling and action to try and calibrate that action appropriately. For those who like to experience the unbounded world outside of our modern comforts, this will humble you and make you appreciate how every time you venture into the unknown you are navigating an incredibly complex world with energy and power beyond our comprehension. It is worth keeping this in mind as we go out to knock on Mother Nature’s door.

I should have read the one and two star reviews here on b4 buying this book. I agree that it starts off great, but after a while.....zzzzzzzzzzzz. Laurence Gonzales’s writing style jumps around so much, I found myself re-reading many sentences to figure out what he was trying to say. Where was the editor on this one? I expected the book to be “who lives, who dies, and why”, & reading how people survived plane crashes, boating mishaps, etc. WAS riveting, but about half way through the book it became a struggle for ME to survive. The author’s focus veers off to obsessing about his father’s life, (perhaps another book?)...but I found it overwhelmed the initial subject.

I had heard about this book quite some time ago, and kept meaning to read it. I finally started it, and really wanted to like it (I’m a huge fan of wilderness survival stories, airplane disaster diagnosis shows, etc.). Unfortunately, it was one of the most annoying books I can remember reading. It was

like my own personal death march - slogging onward, in hopes that the next chapter would be better, and not willing to write off the time I had put into reading as far as I had, to simply walk away and leave it unfinished. It never got better. The author has no system to organize his thoughts on any topic. The chapter names kept changing, but it was really the same material, referenced over and over again (and not in new or particularly insightful ways - just "again"). He gets bogged down in structures of the brain and their functions, chaos theory and closely coupled systems - there is, proportionally, very little discussion of actual survival situations. There are a couple that he keeps going back to (over and over again, as if approaching them from a different perspective - only not). Then there are a few others that are so fleetingly referenced they are never even developed in relation to his own thesis. It was a very confused presentation of what could have (and should have) been a very engaging topic. It was just too "stream of consciousness" for a book of this type, for my tastes - which is a bit ironic for a book that ultimately became a thesis on how the brain is organized. The one good thing about it is he cites so many other books in his rambling references that you may latch onto some other books that treat the same topic in a more organized and engaging way. This book wasn't it.

Having some experience in brushes with death and combat, I have often contemplated the vagaries of who survived and why. This book took my confused tangle thoughts and placed them in order. Loved it so much the first time I read it I immediately read it through again. It is now filled with highlights.

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