



## **Diving into Darkness: A True Story of Death and Survival**

*Phillip Finch*

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## Diving into Darkness: A True Story of Death and Survival Phillip Finch

On New Year's Day, 2005, David Shaw traveled halfway around the world on a journey that took him to a steep crater in the Kalahari Desert of South Africa, a site known as Bushman's Hole. His destination was nearly 900 feet below the surface.

On January 8th he descended into the water. About fifteen feet below the surface was a fissure in the bottom of the basin, barely wide enough to admit him. He slipped through the opening and disappeared from sight, leaving behind the world of light and life.

Then, a second diver descended through the same crack in the stone. This was Don Shirley, Shaw's friend, and one of the few people in the world qualified to follow where Shaw was about to go. In the community of extreme diving, Don Shirley was a master among masters.

Twenty-five minutes later, one of the men was dead. The other was in mortal peril, and would spend the next 10 hours struggling to survive, existing literally from breath to breath.

What happened that day is the stuff of nightmarish drama, but it's also a compelling human story of friendship, heroism, ambition, and of coming to terms with loss and tragedy.

## Diving into Darkness: A True Story of Death and Survival Details

Date : Published September 30th 2008 by St. Martin's Press (first published March 3rd 2008)

ISBN : 9780312383947

Author : Phillip Finch

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Adventure, Survival



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## **From Reader Review Diving into Darkness: A True Story of Death and Survival for online ebook**

### **Julian Walker says**

A poignant story about the passions and perils of extreme diving.

Following the true story on one man from novice to master diver, and his journey from sport to cave diving, this book really draws you into its world and leaves you gasping for breath at the end.

The tragic, but at the same time heroic tale of an understated passion for a way of life about which many people have no clue, this book provides a powerful and engaging insight into lives less ordinary.

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### **Bart Löfgren says**

Beklijvend, maar ook zeer technisch boek over duiken op grote diepte. Na dit boek ben ik vastbesloten dat ik gewoon sportduiker blijf met een eigen max diepte van 60m.

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### **Katharine says**

Well-written and never sensational, this is an interested yet compassionate look at an epic diving accident. Loved it.

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### **Judy Cadena says**

First off, you're going to find that there's a lot of technical diving jargon about decompression, oxygen mixes, types of equipment, why every little thing is so vital, etc. I found myself losing focus and having to reread some of these areas. It felt like the kind of information only a diver could truly appreciate knowing.

But as the story progressed I realized that the 2nd half of the book probably wouldn't have been as compelling without knowing just how much thought and preparation goes into diving. You combine that with the events that took place and you have yourself one hell of an emotional roller coaster of survival and death. (That's not a spoiler by the way.)

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### **Naomi Stebler-stock says**

A true story of death and survival in the world's most dangerous sport, cave diving. Two friends plunge 900 ft deep into the water of the Komali Springs in South Africa, to raise the body of a diver who had perished there a decade before. Only one returns. Unquenchable heroism and complex human relationships amid the perils of extreme sport. On New Year's Day, 2005, David Shaw travelled halfway around the world on a

journey that took him to a steep crater in the Kalahari Desert of South Africa, a site known locally as Boesmansgat: Bushman's Hole. His destination was nearly 900 feet below the surface. On 8 January, he stepped into the water. He wore and carried on him some of the most advanced diving equipment ever developed. Mounted to a helmet on his head was a video camera. David Shaw was about to attempt what had never been done before, and he wanted the world to see. He descended. About fifteen feet below the surface was a fissure in the dolomite bottom of the basin, barely wide enough to admit him and his equipment and the aluminum tanks slung under his shoulders. He slipped through the opening, and disappeared from sight, leaving behind the world of light and life. Then, a second diver descended through the same crack in the stone. This was Don Shirley, Shaw's friend and frequent dive partner, one of the few people in the world qualified to follow where Shaw was about to go. In the community of extreme diving, Don Shirley was a master among masters. Twenty-five minutes later, one of the men was dead. The other was in mortal peril, and would spend the next 10 hours struggling to survive, existing literally from breath to breath. What happened that day at Bushman's Hole is the stuff of nightmarish drama, juxtaposing classic elements of suspense with an extreme environment beyond most people's comprehension. But it's also a compelling human story of friendship, heroism, unswerving ambition and of coming to terms with loss and tragedy.

#### Book details

Published

03/03/2008

Publisher

HarperSport

ISBN

9780007275533

#### My review:

Started off quite well. However I understand the book needs to have some technical background. I object to the book having about half of its total contents all about diving technical facts. The book goes off trail, for example if I wanted to know what happened in World War 2 and in 1984 in terms of diving I wouldn't buy a book about Dave and Don. The concept of the book is good, I got the impression the book would be a thriller/ autobiography. How wrong was I. If however you want to know about the chemical equations of substances, where to buy the best diving equipment then these pay the £16.99. If this is not something you want to read about, please save your money!

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#### Scot Parker says

This is an essential read for any technical diver. It's a case study of normalization of deviance and the dangers inherent in going "zero to hero" too quickly without gaining experience along the way. Although Finch praises Shaw's diving and his abilities, he died with less than 340 dives under his belt while attempting to do physical labor at a record depth on a rebreather. I can't adequately express just how little experience this represents for the kind of dive Shaw was doing. Most divers shouldn't even be doing 60m dives with less than 340 dives of experience, much less 800+m dives. Many divers have no business on a rebreather or doing technical diving at all with only 340 dives. Shaw wasn't an exception. He was clearly a good diver, but even the best divers need to gain experience progressively. To do otherwise is folly.

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## **Ray says**

The feats of these cave divers had me dizzy. For them, 50 meters (over 150ft) is a warm up dive and they routinely descend beyond 150m. Truly dizzying.

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## **Kevin Frost says**

Solid piece of writing. Didn't soar. Was a bit too nice and respectful. But a good read if a bit longish when it came to some of the biography and family type material. Nice and orderly in it's recreation of the dives and it's painless explanation of the science of deep diving.

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## **Kaz Curtis says**

Fascinating read

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## **Mike says**

A great read on a fascinating subject and something I've long been interested in (cave diving), but would never try... A well written investigation of a tragedy that probably could have been avoided. The only nitpicking is a handful of glaring typos in the latter parts of the book.  
Recommend reading for sure.

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## **Jaime Contreras says**

Before anything, I only read this book because I picked it up at a secondhand bookstore. This book will interest three kinds of people: spelunkers, divers or lovers of extreme sports. I read it because I like thrillers in which people place themselves into dire and dangerous situations with severe consequences.

Phillip Finch's Diving Into Darkness, gives us the tale of two friends (Dave Shaw and Don Shirley) who are deep cave divers. These men approach deep sea diving into underwater caves. Their 'the devil may care' attitude coupled with a high level of arrogance spells disaster for the duo. These men will not elicit anything but an incredulous shaking of the head by the reader. While their intent was to retrieve the body of another diver (Deon Dreyer) but it becomes a white knuckle trip into the extreme world which tests the two men beyond their wildest nightmares. The book is well-written and kept my attention. But, I had to look up quite a few terms because I am not familiar with the sport/past time.

I recommend this to anyone who likes real thrills.

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### **Daniel Vieira says**

Li em português. Livro clássico do universo do mergulho.

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### **Barbara says**

In 2004, Dave Shaw, a professional commercial pilot and sometime deep cave diver, found the body of Deon Dreyer - a young man who had been dead for nearly 10 years; the discovery was made at a depth of roughly 300 meters, at the bottom of a huge cavern known as "Bushman's Hole" in South Africa. The parameters of Shaw's dive plan didn't allow enough time for him to bring the body to the surface, but he was determined to assemble, and return with, a recovery team, a commitment that would ultimately yield tragic consequences.

There is a lot of technical information in the book, especially relative to advancements in diving apparatus and gas mixtures. Finch explains, in detail, the options available to divers at various depths - and the possible ramifications of their choices. He painstakingly describes the effects of depth and pressure on the body, how different mixtures of helium and oxygen affect breathing and carbon dioxide levels, the hazards of nitrogen narcosis, and the value of a good decompression plan. He also provides a view of Shaw's personal life, his marriage and family, and that of the other members of the recovery team, most notably his friend Don Shirley.

Precise planning of the "big dive" was crucial and meticulous; each team member had a specific submersion time, calculated to the minute so he could provide support along the drop line, and each had his own depth limit and dive time, based upon personal experience and training. Many earlier dives were made to position emergency gas/air cylinders along the decompression route. A few minutes on the bottom at such an extreme depth requires a laboriously slow return to the surface, over a period of 10 or 11 hours. Medical staff and police divers were on hand; a pulley system was designed to transport an injured or "bent" diver from the surface to an on-site decompression chamber. It's like a carefully choreographed ballet.

Finch fully explains the hazards - and that nothing is certain - at such depths. And in such a critical sequence of actions, it only takes one flaw, one brief error in judgement, one deviation from routine, to create a disastrous ripple that leaves one friend dead, the other struggling to survive during a 10-hour crawl back to the surface. The action is churning, suspenseful - and the loss, and sorrow, palpable.

But Finch also describes the allure - the awe, the amazement, the euphoria that comes from seeing something rare and beautiful, and going to places that most cannot even imagine. For the deep cave diver, those things overshadow the dangers. Very interesting, fascinating reading.

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### **Paul Brown says**

Underwater in complete darkness and confined spaces is my idea of hell on earth so I was weary about reading this and yet morbidly curious at the same time. While the big dive itself is both riveting and terrifying I think overall the author has let his source material down.

Unlike other readers I have no problem with the bios (these are real people after all) or the technical jargon

(the most interesting bit seen as cave diving is also about maths and timing not just derring-do) I just didn't care for the structure or tone of the book.

We don't get to the main feature until the last third of the book and its pretty much done and dusted in fifty pages leaving one with the impression that the story needed a lot of padding out and less patient readers would have lost interest before the core of the story.

David Shaw's family seem to have had a big say in the writing of the book because a lot of it reads like hero worship to the lost diver and if like me you're an atheist the religious elements awkwardly shoehorned into the end are cringe worthy. I personally would have liked a bit more impartiality from the author but that's just me.

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### **Candice Landau says**

It's hard to find a book that can hold you captive when the outcome is not just known from the start, but depressing. Diving into Darkness does just this. Through masterful investigative journalism and storytelling, Phillip Finch takes readers on an epic journey through time and into another world; a deadly world of caves, great depths, and complex diving procedures.

If you want a very real feel of the relatively young sport of extreme cave diving and the people who do it, this book is for you. I particularly enjoyed the thorough explanations of diving and its effects on the body and even as a certified scuba diver, felt I learned a lot.

Diving into the Deep kept me riveted the whole way through, not because of the outcome, but because of the techniques involved in fighting to survive. One man lives, one man dies, and this book's details the struggle for life in gripping detail.

As both a scuba diver and an avid reader it was nice to find something that actually took place in my home country. I think the one thing that could have made the book even better was if the author had given us a stronger sense of South Africa's diving culture and indeed more of a reason behind Shaw's attraction to the country. As an expat I know full well how bright, colorful and different South Africa is and I wish I'd seen that reflected more in the book.

Otherwise a fantastic read!

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