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The Cloud Garden



Synopsis

The Dari n Gap is a place of legend. The only break in the Pan-American highway, which runs from Alaska to the tip of South America, it is an almost impregnable strip of swamp, jungle and cloud forest between the vast landmasses of North and South America. Stories of abduction and murder there are rife and in recent years more people have successfully climbed Everest or trekked to the South Pole than have crossed the Dari n Gap. In 2000, Tom Hart Dyke, a young botanist, set off to Central America with one thing on his mind: orchids. He knew that in order to find the rare and beautiful species he so fervently admired, he would have to visit some of the most inhospitable places on earth. Unbeknown to Tom, another young explorer, Paul Winder, was backpacking through the area at the same time. Though he sometimes worked freelance in the City of London, Paul was a fearless and intrepid traveller, happier scaling volcanoes than lounging on beaches. In every bar and caf  along his route, rumours abounded of the Dari n Gap - and the more he heard, the greater became his desire to make the journey. Pure chance brought Paul and Tom together in northern Mexico; they formed an instant bond and their fate was sealed. Ignoring a final, succinct warning from the Lonely Planet guide - 'Don't even think about it!' - Tom and Paul set off into the Dari n: Tom in search of orchids, Paul in search of adventure. They would find plenty of each. For six days they made good progress. Then, just hours away from Colombia, the dream ended and the horror began. Paul and Tom were ambushed by FARC guerrillas who were to hold them hostage for the next nine months. From that day on, their survival was a matter of extraordinary endurance, incredible ingenuity and not a little good luck ...

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Customer Reviews

This is the true story of two world travelers â ” one an adventure junkie, the other obsessed with orchids, who came from different areas of England but by chance meet up in a restaurant in Central America. Falling into easy conversation, Paul mentions his desire to travel the Darien Gap, the only untraveled portion of the Pan-American Highway. Numerous travel guides urge travelers to avoid this area at all costs. It falls right smack in the middle of jungle terrain full of guerilla & paramilitary camps. There are endless stories of people entering the area but never being seen again. Paul & Tom decided to risk it anyway. Tom had visions of all the rare orchid varieties he was bound to discover in the lush, wild jungle while Tom was drawn to the thrill of successfully traveling an area that put off so many. So they set out in March of 2000 with a couple of hired guides, figuring the trek â ” starting in Panama, traveling through the Gap and ending up in Colombia â ” would only be a few days, and they figured the local guides could help them avoid the more dangerous portions of the the Gap. Paul & Tom were a couple of the lucky ones. Yeah, spoiler here â ” they made it out! :-p But not before they were held captive by a group of guerilla soldiers for 9 months in various camps throughout the jungle. When they came out, they were told by a member of the British Embassy that it was assumed they had been killed because no one survives in that area for that long. Tom & Paulâ™s kidnappers demand 3 million dollars for their release. Both men try to explain that no one has that kind of ransom money to pony up for them so they are kept hostage for months while the guerillas try to figure out a way to get their money.

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