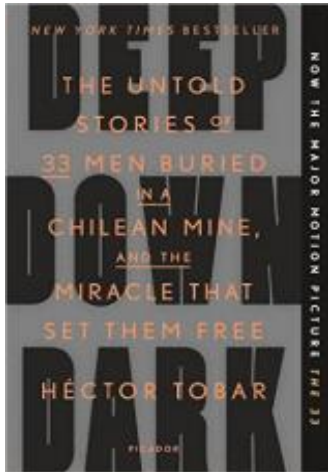


Deep Down Dark: The Untold Stories of 33 Men Buried in a Chilean Mine, and the Miracle That Set Them Free

by Héctor Tobar



About the Book

When the San José mine collapsed outside of Copiapó, Chile, in August 2010, it trapped 33 miners beneath thousands of feet of rock for a record-breaking 69 days. The entire world watched what transpired above-ground during the grueling and protracted rescue, but the saga of the miners' experiences below the Earth's surface --- and the lives that led them there --- has never been heard until now.

For DEEP DOWN DARK, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Héctor Tobar received exclusive access to the miners and their tales. These 33 men came to think of the mine, a cavern inflicting constant and thundering aural torment, as a kind of coffin, and as a church where they sought redemption through prayer. Even while still buried, they all agreed that if by some miracle any of them escaped alive, they would share their story only collectively. Héctor Tobar was the person they chose to hear, and now to tell, that story.

The result is a masterwork of narrative journalism --- a riveting, at times shocking, emotionally textured account of a singular human event. DEEP DOWN DARK brings to haunting, tactile life the experience of being imprisoned inside a mountain of stone, the horror of being slowly consumed by hunger, and the spiritual and mystical elements that surrounded working in such a dangerous place. In its stirring final chapters, it captures the profound way in which the lives of everyone involved in the disaster were forever changed.

Discussion Guide

1. The prologue to DEEP DOWN DARK describes the incredibly long commutes made by employees to reach the remote San José Mine. No local jobs paid as well, so the pay was an incentive for miners such as Franklin Lobos,

signing on at age 52 to help pay his daughter's college tuition. Jessica Chilla refused to kiss Darío Segovia goodbye on the morning of August 5th because he chose the high pay despite the dangers, and because the job would cause them to postpone their daughter's birthday party. What risks and personal sacrifices would you be willing to endure for a high wage?

2. Carlos Pinilla, the general manager of the San Esteban Mining Company, had a mandate from the owners to cut costs but keep the mine running, despite government threats of shutdown in 2007 in the wake of a deadly accident. Yet the mine continued to operate without key safety features, such as ladders in the vertical escape tunnels. Manuel Gonzáles, the first rescuer to reach the miners, was shocked by the primitive gear San Esteban had issued its workers. How would you have handled Pinilla's dilemma?

3. What new information did you gain about those 69 days of survival? What details did DEEP DARK DOWN provide that were absent from the 2010 media blitz?

4. Discuss the many types of hunger described in the book, starting of course with hunger for food. Would you have been a food-box looter, or would you have complied with Mario Sepúlveda's calculations? What did you learn about the physiology of starvation, and the dangerous process of refueling an emaciated body? What other cravings did the miners face, deprived of power, their families and a way out? What would your coping strategies have been?

5. As their bodies became diminished, what happened to the miners' approach to spirituality and mortality (the focus of Chapter 15, "Saints, Statues, Satan")? How did tangible objects --- culminating in the arrival of a carved Virgin Mary --- enhance their prayers?

6. The closing line of Chapter 9, "Cavern of Dreams," is a quote from José Henríquez, the informal pastor, after the pipe and drill bit broke through: "*Dios existe*," he says. God exists. Do you attribute the rescue to human ingenuity, divine intervention, or a combination of the two? What is your definition of a miracle?

7. Discuss the women's perspectives, especially focusing on Chapter 3, "The Dinner Hour," and the tent city of Camp Esperanza, where María Segovia (sister of Darío) became the unofficial mayor? As Ariel Ticona watches a video of his daughter's birth, what new point of view does he gain regarding his wife?

8. Throughout the central chapters, we watch the process of "mining" for men, as the world's leading drillers (Jeff Hart in particular) are called in to break through the earth. DEEP DARK DOWN also describes the process of extracting gold and copper at the San José Mine. How did the book affect your view of humankind versus nature? How did the drilling images compare to the image of Edison Peña running through the tunnels of the mine?

9. Discuss the political power struggles over who would to become the face of the rescue (especially President Sebastián Piñera versus the minister of mining, Laurence Golborne). How did the psychologist Alberto Iturra handle the limitations of his power? How did the miners manage the question of leadership throughout their ordeal, eventually delegating duties (including nursing and communications)?

10. The rescue is a triumph of many elements, especially engineering and global cooperation. The book introduces us to experts from NASA, the military, the mining industry, and other sectors, hailing from Kansas, South Africa, Austria, Italy, and other corners of the globe, culminating in the safe dispatch of the Fénix. The miners themselves demonstrated

tremendous skill and ingenuity. What would it take to harness that level of visionary cooperation for other global crises?

11. From the millionaire Leonardo Farkas's fund to the miners' decision to form Propiedad Intelectual Minera, S.A. (Miner Intellectual Property, Inc.), how has the miners' financial well-being been dealt with? Did it surprise you that not all of the miners accepted pensions?

12. In the aftermath of the rescue, some of the men return to mining, despite terrifying flashbacks. Víctor Zamora, who was difficult for the author to track down, was once homeless and returns to a broken and destitute life. Edison Peña battles alcoholism. Others celebrate fatherhood, while still others focus on capitalizing on their experience. What determines whether survivors can find meaning in their lives, sustained by hope?

13. How did the miners retain their individuality while they were trapped? Which of their personal stories resonated with you the most?

14. How does DEEP DARK DOWN enhance the images of humanity that Héctor Tobar has presented in his previous books (TRANSLATION NATION and the novels THE BARBARIAN NURSERIES and THE TATTOOED SOLDIER)? How did his training as a journalist and a novelist --- combined with his roots in Central America --- prepare him to capture the miners' stories?

Author Bio

Héctor Tobar is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and novelist. He is the author of the critically acclaimed *New York Times* bestseller DEEP DOWN DARK, as well as THE BARBARIAN NURSERIES, TRANSLATION NATION and THE TATTOOED SOLDIER. Héctor is also a contributing writer for the *New York Times* opinion pages and an associate professor at the University of California, Irvine. He's written for *The New Yorker*, *The Los Angeles Times* and other publications. His short fiction has appeared in *Best American Short Stories*, *L.A. Noir*, *Zyzzzyva* and *Slate*. The son of Guatemalan immigrants, he is a native of Los Angeles, where he lives with his family.

Critical Praise

?A riveting account of a remarkable disaster.?

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Publication Date: September 1, 2015

Genres: Biography, Nonfiction

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Picador

ISBN-10: 1250074851

ISBN-13: 9781250074850