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Cold Feet: Stories of a Middling Climber on Classic Peaks and Among Legendary Mountaineers

By David Pagel

Cold Feet: Stories of a Middling Climber on Classic Peaks and Among Legendary Mountaineer. By David Pagel. Self-published, 2014. 384 pages. Paperback, \$19.95.

There are only a few climbing writers whose work I genuinely look forward to diving into an armchair with. Jim Perrin tops the list, and Chris Bonington's early work is up there. Then there's Pagel—Dave Pagel. An American. And now, thankfully, he's collected his published stories into a book, along with a lot of other wonderfully creative and thoughtful material.

I first met Pagel through the pages of *Climbing* magazine in 1983. "Mind Games," his essay about a climbing trip to Colorado and Wyoming, blew my mind. (I was 17.) It was as if he had stripped away everything he knew about climbing and was just observing. And he was. Much of the story centers on a psychological battle between Pagel and his partner to see who can get the other to lead a pitch of Tulgey Wood: "When God built Devils Tower, He smiled graciously upon rock climbers. When He chiseled out the third pitch of Tulgey Wood, He was either in a hurry, a particularly unpleasant mood, or making a very bad joke." The pair makes it up the climb, and it's both a touching story of friendship and a hilarious discussion of things we all try to avoid, namely death.

"Mind Games" is the smallest tip of the iceberg in *Cold Feet*, Pagel's new collection. Throughout he recounts both his extremely vast climbing experience (from Lotus Flower Tower to Mt. Kenya) and offers observations on just about everything related to climbing— from scary gear that "frays" his mind to the strangeness of topographic diagrams. Plus, he knows the H word—humility—although I'd argue that not all of the climbs and expeditions he describes are as "middling" as the title suggests. You have to be fairly experienced just to get up some of these things, and you have to have incredible patience. Your average climber would never get up the Eiger, nor be able to handle the intricacies of a trip to Kenya—the taxi system alone is like playing bumper cars.

The book is divided into seven sections, ranging from stories of Pagel's exploits to "Perspective," thoughts on the whole climbing world. For example, there's a chapter in here called "The Truth is Out There," in which Pagel coughs up his thoughts on everything from Mallory and Irvine to the YDS grading system.

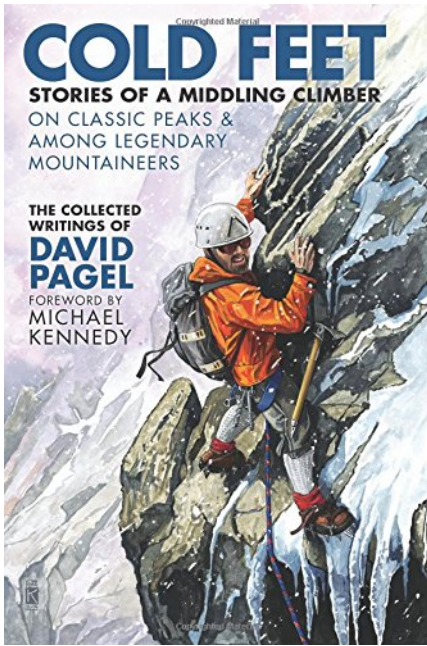
And this is the coolest part, I think: "Verse." In this day and age, putting poetry out there is the biggest risk a writer can take, especially a writer delving into the tough-person world of climbing. Pagel does it with panache, class, and eloquence.

Pagel is what I like to describe to my daughters as a "big brain." He gets it. He gets the whole worldwide, intellectual, and cultural climbing scene. Not many climbing writers do. In fact, very few of us do. His experiences and thoughts are so fresh and raw and unmolested with BS that *Cold Feet* is one of the best reads on the climbing horizon.

We should all strive to do so well.

– Cameron M. Burns

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