

**THE WILDEST DREAM: MALLORY, HIS LIFE AND
CONFLICTING PASSIONS**

by Peter and Leni Gillman

(Headline, £18.99)

Review for *The Great Outdoors*, December 2000,

by Gordon Stainforth

This is the best mountaineering biography I have ever read. It does everything a biography should do: it evades nothing, and builds up a very rich portrait in which the whole of Mallory's world is vividly re-created. The interplay of characters in Edwardian Cambridge, with its many strange relationships, is beautifully brought to life, and the question of Mallory's sexuality is confronted fairly and sensitively.

One of the things that makes the book so compelling is the dramatic irony. Apart from the prologue, there's not a mention of Everest until page 170. Yet all the time, in a superbly crafted buildup to the final Everest expedition, we know that Mallory is fated - it's a bit like watching the Titanic movie. And it has many profundities along the way - a fine analysis of Mallory's famous four-word quote, the post-war resonances of climbing Everest, the enormous personal pressures Mallory was under before the 1924 Expedition, and a comparison of Mallory and Irvine's relationship with his own marriage. Yet the pace of the story never slackens, so that it manages to be both a very rounded and deeply interesting historical work and a very entertaining read at the same time.

I've never read any book before that brings the early Everest expeditions so vividly to life - showing just how well organised the final 1924 expedition was, and just how determined they were in the face of very bad luck with the weather. Irvine particularly is given his full due for the first time. I'll have to confess the final chapter reduced me to tears.

So it's a very strong story, but above all I think the book's strength lies in the quality of the writing. It is immensely clear, in my opinion far better than anything that's been written on the subject before. If it doesn't win the Boardman Tasker Award, I for one shall be very disappointed.

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