[Read free] Last Man Off: A True Story of Disaster and Survival on the Antarctic Seas by Par Matt Lewis (PDF All Chapters)

*Présentation de l'éditeurLast Man Off by Matt Lewis - a first-hand account of an ocean tragedy'Reads like a sinister version of The Perfect Storm . . . Thrilling, compelling, unsettling, rewarding' Sunday Times'A story that reminds us of the unforgiving nature of the sea and the courage that lies within the everyday heroes that have found themselves in hell'Bear Grylls*THE SUNDAY TIMES TOP TEN BESTSELLER*The waters of Antarctica, June 6th 1998. 23-year-old Matt Lewis has just started his dream job. An observer aboard a deep sea fishing boat, he is mesmerized by his new surroundings: glistening icebergs, killer whales and majestic albatross. As the crew haul in their lines for the day, the waves seem bigger than usual - they are casting shadows on the deck. A storm is brewing.What follows is an astonishing story of human courage, folly and tragedy. With the captain missing, and the crew forced to abandon ship, Lewis leads the escape onto three life rafts, where the battle for survival begins.This brilliantly written and thrilling hour-by-hour account will be enjoyed by readers of non-fiction classics such as A Perfect Storm and Touching the Void, as well as fans of Deadliest Catch, Captain Phillips and 127 Hours. As heard on BBC Radio 4.Matt Lewis was born in Bristol, England, in 1974. He trained as a marine biologist first at Bangor University and then at Aberdeen University, and has an MSc with distinction in Marine and Fisheries Science. In 1998 he got his first deployment as an observer aboard a deep sea fishing boat in the Southern Ocean. The trip was to end in tragedy. He now lives with his wife and two children in Aberdeen.ExtraitMATT LEWIS is a trained marine biologist with an MSc with distinction in Marine and Fisheries Science. He now lives with his wife and two children near Aberdeen, Scotland.AUTHOR'S NOTEThis book is my attempt to record an event that took place in June 1998 during the winter in the Southern Ocean. I was a Scientific Observer aboard the Sudur Havid, a South African deep-sea fishing boat, and it was my first job since graduating from university as a marine biologist.Outside South Africa, the fate of the Sudur Havid was never big news. It was just another foreign fishing boat in trouble. Really, I should be calling her the Sudurhavid, or even Suðurhavið, for I have come to learn that this was her proper name. But on board I only ever saw the word split on life-rings, and I've known her as the Sudur Havid for far too long to change. To continue with the confessional, I have used the more familiar term 'Antarctic Seas' for the subtitle of the book when we were technically only 54° South – but we were south of the Antarctic convergence, so the water masses and ecology are much the same.I waited a long time before I started writing Last Man Off. Partly this was due to a lack of self-belief, but it was also because I was trying to get on with my life and forget. I was trying to persuade myself that nothing of any significance had happened, so to write a book about the events was the last thing on my mind.I'm glad I waited to start writing. In the immediate aftermath of the accident I was so caught up in being a participant, and there was so much emotion, that it was impossible to be objective in description. When the police in the Falkland Islands asked me what had happened, I barely paused for breath for three hours, producing sixty-five pages of descriptions, times and details. I kept the transcript of the interview and, eight years later, this and other evidence helped me relive and reconstruct the events. By that time the need to blame had mellowed, I had listened to others as they discussed what had happened, and processed the events myself. Time passed has made the story clearer, and less painful to tell.There was coverage of the Sudur Havid in Cape Town. Some accounts were based on fact, some were more like fiction, but none were complete. I slipped quietly back into the UK, no cameras or journalists waiting for me at the airport, and I was grateful. My friends and family let me be; they didn't want to drag up traumatic memories, and assumed that I would talk about things in my own time. But I didn't want to tell those I cared about for fear of scaring them, and didn't tell others for fear of upsetting myself. It took years for me to realize that there was a story that deserved to be known. How could the struggle of a crew against the toughest seas in the world have slipped by? While I have been writing, a number of my fellow survivors have died, leaving the biggest story of their lives untold.I knew that I would need to describe events that I had not directly witnessed. After years*

out of touch, I managed to make contact with Phil Marshall of the Isla Camila and Magnus Johnson from the Northern Pride, and met to interview them. For Phil, in particular, the memories were upsetting. It wasn't pleasant to ask him to recall as much detail as I needed, but he helped me to describe the search and the moment of rescue.As the book took shape, and I became more committed, I travelled to South Africa to interview some of the crew. In a series of one-on-one interviews, I checked my recollections with Morné Van Geems, Sven Lizamore and Stephan Truter from the Sudur Havid, and they described events I couldn't have witnessed in the other raft. There were small conflicts between their memories and mine, but I expected this. They also helped me to build up a better picture of the techniques that we used in fishing, which was something I wanted to describe as vividly as I could. We sat and chatted in the shade, outside their comfortable Cape Town homes, and their stories took me back to the Southern Ocean. Their enthusiasm and drive to fish still humble and mystify me; they are fishermen to the core. By the end of the book I had also been helped by Big Danie from the Sudur Havid, and finally Captain Ernesto Sandoval from the Isla Camila.Writing has not been the healing process I had hoped for; I have been reduced to tears on many occasions. It has been less of a catharsis and more of a self-imposed torture as I have forced myself to picture and relive painful events, again and again. I am fearful of misportraying men who were operating under great stress, and know that for some I am describing the deaths of loved ones.I wish I had more photos, which would make the boat and the people more vivid for you and for me. But my camera is still on the Sudur Havid. Port side, aft cabin, on the main deck, in the right-hand drawer under my bunk. If anyone wants to get it for me, it's at 53º56´S, 041º30´W.The surprise for me, in writing, was realizing how much I miss the sea, the boat and the adventure. For a short time in the Southern Ocean, I was at my most alive, at my best.CREW LIST: MFV SUDUR HAVIDGLOSSARYbosun foreman of the crew on deck.bow the front end of the ship.deck-suit a waterproof but unsealed suit that can be worn for everyday work on deck. A layer of foam insulation adds buoyancy in the event of a fall overboard.derrick a crane with a moving, pivoted arm for hoisting objects on deck or out of the hold.dogs the metal levers that close and lock a waterproof storm door, clamping it shut.engine casing the metal structure that houses the upper parts of the engine room and the exhaust pipes.EPIRB Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon. Self-contained, individually identifiable devices that send out a distress signal when manually activated or triggered by water immersion/sinking. A signal is picked up by satellites and relayed to maritime rescue authorities.factory deck the level below the main deck, just above waterline; almost enclosed, except for hatches and scuppers. On the Sudur Havid the factory deck held freezers, factory, crew cabins, galley and the crew mess.freezer suit an insulated, non-waterproof and quilted suit worn under waterproofs. Made from fibre insulation with a polyester shell fabric.galley the kitchen of a boat.gantry a metal arch structure used to lift objects and support pulleys for fishing operations.GRT gross register tonnage, a measure of the volume of permanently enclosed spaces in a ship. Not weight or displacement, but useful for comparing ships. Now generally referred to as gross tonnage.hold the storage area for cargo. On the Sudur Havid this held bait and catch, and was refrigerated to –18°C.hull the entire hollow body of a ship, floating partly submerged in water. From the deck down the sides to the keel of the boat, but excludes superstructure.immersion suit/survival suit neoprene or fabric suit, donned in an emergency, which seals out water and keeps the wearer dry.Inmarsat the operators of a satellite system for maritime communications and safety.keel a beam that acts as the structural spine of the boat, along its bottom, from bow to stern.knot a speed of one nautical mile per hour (1.151 mph or 1.852 kmh).leeward the direction facing away from the wind (downwind).life-raft an inflatable rubber raft with canvas canopy, stored uninflated in a canister on deck. Provides an emergency refuge.lightship weight the weight of the ship with no cargo, fuel, crew or supplies aboard.lower deck the lowest level of the boat, below sea level. On the Sudur Havid this held the engine room, hold, crew cabins and tanks for oil, fuel and water.main deck the uppermost complete deck from bow to stern. On the Sudur Havid this held: the mast and derrick, winches, superstructure, rope crates and stern gantry.Mess the canteen or dining area.nautical mile a distance of 1.151 miles or 1.852 kilometres.painter a rope, usually attached to the bow, used for tying up or towing.pitching when the bow of the boat moves up and downport to the left of the ship, when facing forward.Rigid Raider small, fast fibreglass boats used by the armed forces for inshore operations.SART Search and Rescue Transponder. A self-contained, waterproof device that emits a signal when detecting radar in use nearby, allowing a location to be determined.scuppers slots cut through the hull of a boat, to allow water to drain from a deck.snood the short length of line that attaches each hook to the rope fishing line.Southern Ocean the name given by mariners to the waters surrounding Antarctica, formed by the southernmost portions of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans.splicing the joining of pieces of rope by weaving their strands together, rather than by tying a knot.stern the back end of the ship.starboard to the right side of the ship, when facing forward.storm door waterproof metal doors that

seal the compartments of a boat, usually fastened by dogs.superstructure the parts of the boat above the hull, projecting above the main deck. On the Sudur Havid the engine casing, Officers' Mess and cabins, and bridge.tender a small boat used to ferry people or small goods between ships or to shore.trawler a fishing boat that tows its net through the water.treadplate a metal sheet with raised pattern for grip.wheelhouse the structure housing the ship's wheel and other controls. Also called the bridge.windward the direction facing into the wind (upwind).BOAT PLANS AND MAPSVisit (http://bit.ly/1b7xkOO) for a larger version of this image. Visit (http://bit.ly/1GBgF4s) for a larger version of this image. Visit (http://bit.ly/1GyYfhU) for a larger version of this image.PROLOGUE18:30, SATURDAY, 6 JUNE 1998I'm waist-deep in seawater one degree below zero. My legs are numb, my fingers are frigid, and I cling to the inflatable arch which supports the roof of the flooded life-raft.In the dim amber light I can just make out a few shapes around me. Bubbles, our Captain, lies slumped in the water, his head supported by his lifejacket. This is the same man who sang 'Flower of Scotland' over the radio to the Harbour Master each week as we reported our catches. He has a wife and kids back in Cape Town. Now he is barely alive, his chunky-knit jumper and tracksuit bottoms no match for the water, the hypothermia and the heart attack he suffered as we abandoned the boat.Above us, the thin canvas canopy is our only shelter from the shrieking wind and the leviathan swells of the Southern Ocean. Every few minutes, the canopy is crushed against us by the crest of a breaking wave, flexing the inflatable life-raft as if folding it in two, jolting us from our contemplations.Slowly, I sing to myself, 'Will your anchor hold in the storms of life . . .' They are lines from my favourite song from Sunday school. I don't have a single drop of maritime blood in my body, so Heaven knows why I liked the song when I was a child, but it seems fitting now.God, if I survive this . . .What? What am I willing to promise to be out of this situation? I change my prayer.God, help me to survive this. • • • There is little human noise. Any talk of rescue has long died away, and those who were wailing have stopped. Each person has sunk into his own struggle to survive. In the darkness, Big Danie pulls Morné and Eugene close, trying to keep them warm. Morné can feel Danie's giant hands shaking.Suddenly Bubbles' voice cuts across the raft, roll-calling each of the crew he can remember. Seventeen of us boarded the raft.'Morné?''Yes, Skipper.''Brian?''Yes, Skipper.''Matt?''Yeah, I'm OK, I'm here.'The roll-call goes on. It serves as a call to attention, making each of us respond, and a brief reminder that we are not alone. But it also brings events into stark definition. Although my mind is clouded by the cold, I am sure there were more people on the raft than Bubbles is calling out now, and some no longer answer.Beneath me, weak orbs of silver light glow up from the water. The fading bulbs are attached to lifejackets, which are attached to bodies. I can feel limbs and objects under my feet and knees and sense that they are not alive. I cannot bring myself to care as long as they offer some support to keep me above the chill of the water.Boetie has been acting strangely since his head was battered by the steel hull of the boat when we abandoned ship. Tonnes of pressure versus one human skull? No contest, even if the skull is South African. Bubbles ends his latest roll-call by shouting out for his best friend.'Boetie?'No reply.'Boetie? . . . Boetie?''He is dead, man,' said Hannes. 'Stop.'ONEESCAPE1DEPARTUREWednesday, 1 April 1998The woman on the phone, Louise, was cordial but brief. The fishing boat, now waiting in Cape Town, would sail 3,000 miles down to sub-Antarctic South Georgia. If I took the position, I would be working as a Scientific Observer on the Southern Ocean for the next three months. I knew little of the reality I was to face: icebergs, killer whales and ocean swells as high as houses, not to mention some of the wildest weather in the world. • • • I had been looking for a job in marine biology after completing a Master's degree at Aberdeen. Opportunities had sprung up and snapped away my course-mates, taking them off to new and exciting positions around the world. For me, a few months' work at the university was followed by a disappointing few weeks on the dole; I was working as an office porter just to keep my pride up. Four years of study, so many dreams of aquatic adventure, and now I was stuck trolleying paper around the photocopiers in an Aberdeen office block.All I needed was some 'experience', that all-important kick-start to get my professional life moving. During a chance conversation, a friend from the Zoology department reminded me that he had worked for a short while aboard fishing boats around the Falkland Islands. The job sounded tough but rewarding and he scribbled down the address of a consultancy group in London who recruited such scientists. Several weeks and phone conversations passed until late on a Wednesday afternoon, on 1 April, a message came through on my pager to 'Call Louise'. The deployment she was offering me started in just two days. Surely this was the break I needed; the adventure I craved.Friday, 3 April 1998Corinne gave me a lift to Aberdeen Airport in her old blue Fiat for the red-eye flight to London. She was happily chatting about the trip and what we would do on my return, and we seemed to fit a month's conversation into the short journey.We had met through the university SCUBA diving club and had been seeing each other for just over a year, living together for the past few months. She had seen my frustrations grow and she was excited and supportive that I had a chance to prove

myself.We were prepared for a swift separation, but this was much quicker than either of us anticipated. I would be away at least three months, possibly longer, maybe out of contact for the entire time. I began to feel anxious. The Southern Ocean is a hostile place and I was unsure of the welcome I would receive aboard the boat, as a university upstart recording the conduct of hardened fishermen.The night before, in our room, I had bundled the few possessions from the kit-list into a rucksack: thick thermals, thick jumpers and thick books. This may have been my first time as an Observer, and my first trip to the Southern Ocean, but I had spent a few weeks on yachts and research vessels. This was long enough to know that warm clothes and a few good tomes were part of an essential high-seas survival kit.At the gate through to security we kissed goodbye. I could see tears in her eyes, and her lips trembled as she told me I'd be fine.'I'll see you in a few months,' I promised. 'The time will fly by.'Watching her blonde curls and brown padded jacket disappear into the crowd, I headed through to my flight. • • • By lunchtime I was climbing the steps to an impressive Georgian building in Kensington, just in time for my departure briefing. Louise greeted me in the hall, and led me through to the far less impressive and drab company offices. She was young and bubbly, and I relaxed a little. In the stuffy reception area she introduced me to another new Observer, Magnus Johnson. Lanky and friendly, with short dark hair and a heavy brow, Magnus was a few years older than me. His name and soft Shetland timbre gave away his roots, but for the last few years he had been studying in Leicester for a doctorate.Together we were run through our roles and responsibilities. We were to be stationed on two long-lining vessels shortly to set sail from Cape Town for the Southern Ocean. Once aboard, we would observe the boats' fishing operations, reporting our findings to the company on our return to the UK. Our main tasks would include counting and measuring catch, recording compliance with international fishing regulations and, perhaps most importantly, watching for endangered albatrosses that had accidentally been caught.Eager to prove ourselves, Magnus and I listened intently and made notes. Despite the overflowing lever-arch files of instructions and protocol that sat on the desks in front of us, we scribbled as though we were competing with each other.At the end of the briefing, after we had filled in the paperwork, the last task was vessel allocation. Louise thrust a printed spreadsheet across the table towards us.'So, which boat do you want to go on?' she asked, glancing at us. 'We need to decide now, for contact details.'The two boats were the Northern Pride and the Sudur Havid, its foreign name an awkward and unfamiliar blend of syllables. Our tongues tripped over the pronunciation. Soo-dur Have-id. Magnus and I looked at each other and shrugged. The names of the boats meant nothing to us at this point.We were given some more basic information. Both vessels were Cape Town registered, and owned by the same company, but the Northern Pride had Spanish officers, which probably meant Spanish speakers, while the Sudur Havid's were South Africans, who would be more likely to speak English. I kept quiet, not wanting to say that I couldn't be bothered to learn a language. The voyage would be difficult enough.We could have flipped a coin, or drawn straws. I waited for Magnus to express an opinion.After just a few seconds, he declared, 'Oh well, I quite fancy learning Spanish.''I don't,' I responded, adding quickly, 'I'll take the Sudur Havid.'It seemed so easy and unimportant a choice at the time, sitting in a comfortable London office. Then again, some of life's most pivotal decisions seem that way when they are made. Magnus would be aboard the Northern Pride; I would live and work on the Sudur Havid, call sign ZU1047: Zulu Uniform One Zero Four Seven. The name may have been foreign to me, but in the language of her first home, the Faroe Islands, it means Southern Ocean. • • • We were to fly to Cape Town the same day, at 19:00. The vessel owners were keen to get moving. The fishery had already opened for the season two days earlier, on 1 April, but the boats were not allowed to fish without an Observer. The owners had been slow to organize their fishing licences, which cost £60,000 for each boat, and the departure had been further delayed because the Sudur Havid was awaiting the issue of a safety certificate. Although the fishing season ran until the end of August, it would be cut short if the quota for the whole fishery was reached. The first week of the season was famous for particularly good catches, and rival crews were already on-site, hauling in the prize: Patagonian toothfish. Once out of port, it would still take us two weeks to join them. Expensive time was ticking.Briefing finished, we rooted around the office basement frantically scavenging and packing oilskins, rubber gloves, knives and measuring boards. A one-piece blue and red deck-suit, waterproof with buoyant insulation, looked practical and warm. Being someone on the small side of average – 5´8?, eleven stone, and size eight shoes – my clothing was relatively easy to source, except for a deck lifejacket. For some reason, there were none of these available. For 6´4? Magnus, there seemed to be nothing left in the right size. We were the last Observers to be deployed on the fishery for the season, and most of the kit had already been issued. Given that we were expected to work on deck in all conditions, the omissions were troubling. We both at least expected to have the right equipment.Revue de presseA story that reminds us of the unforgiving nature of the sea and the courage that lies within the everyday heroes that have found themselves in hell (Bear Grylls)A

dramatic tale of survival in one of the most brutal situations on earth. Feels like reading the diary of a doomed man . . . so personal and chillingly real; totally takes you there in a way that is not always comfortable (Steve Backshall)Reads like a sinister version of The Perfect Storm...Thrilling, compelling, unsettling, rewarding . . . This breakneck race of a book isn't just required reading for fans of waterborne peril; Harvard MBAs could also scour the pages as a case study in dysfunctional workplaces and woeful man management. It's like the Perfect Storm, but with gruesomely, even murderously, imperfect people (Sunday Times)A heart-thumping tale of tragedy and survival - minus the Hollywood ending (Daily Telegraph)A thrilling, horrifying and compelling portrait of human survival. Colossal terror unfolds on every page (The Bookseller, Books of the Year)For his compelling account of the hardships of fishing in remote Antarctic waters, and of what it means to abandon ship in a severe storm with inadequate equipment and a crew unprepared for survival. The book is objective but non-judgmental in its descriptiveness, so heightening the true sense of disaster. The style makes the book accessible to a wide public, but it is also essential reading for seafarers, fishermen and yachtsmen, as it concerns attitudes to safety and survival. A truly life-affirming and influential work. (The Mountbatten Maritime Award for best literary contribution - Certificate of Merit)

Par Matt Lewis

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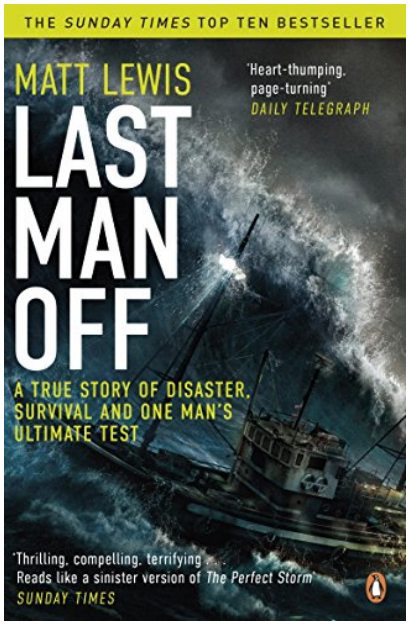

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Commentaires clientsCommentaires clients les plus utiles0 internautes sur 0 ont trouvé ce commentaire utile. Excellent and thrilling readPar CHOISYA remarkable read which you sometimes have to remind yourself is true. Gives incredible insight into the hazards of deep water fishing and the risks involved.

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