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Black Hawk Down

Mark Bowden

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Journalist Mark Bowden delivers a strikingly detailed account of the 1993 nightmare operation in Mogadishu that left 18 American soldiers dead and many more wounded. This early foreign-policy disaster for the Clinton administration led to the resignation of Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and a total troop withdrawal from Somalia. Bowden does not spend much time considering the context; instead he provides a moment-by-moment chronicle of what happened in the air and on the ground. His gritty narrative tells of how Rangers and elite Delta Force troops embarked on a mission to capture a pair of high-ranking deputies to warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid only to find themselves surrounded in a hostile African city. Their high-tech MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters had been shot down and a number of other miscues left them trapped through the night. Bowden describes Mogadishu as a place of Mad Max-like anarchy--implying strongly that there was never any peace for the supposed peacekeepers to keep. He makes full use of the defense bureaucracy's extensive paper trail--which includes official reports, investigations, and even radio transcripts--to describe the combat with great accuracy, right down to the actual dialogue. He supplements this with hundreds of his own interviews, turning Black Hawk Down into a completely authentic nonfiction novel, a lively page-turner that will make readers feel like they're standing beside the embattled troops. This will quickly be realized as a modern military classic. --John J. Miller -

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