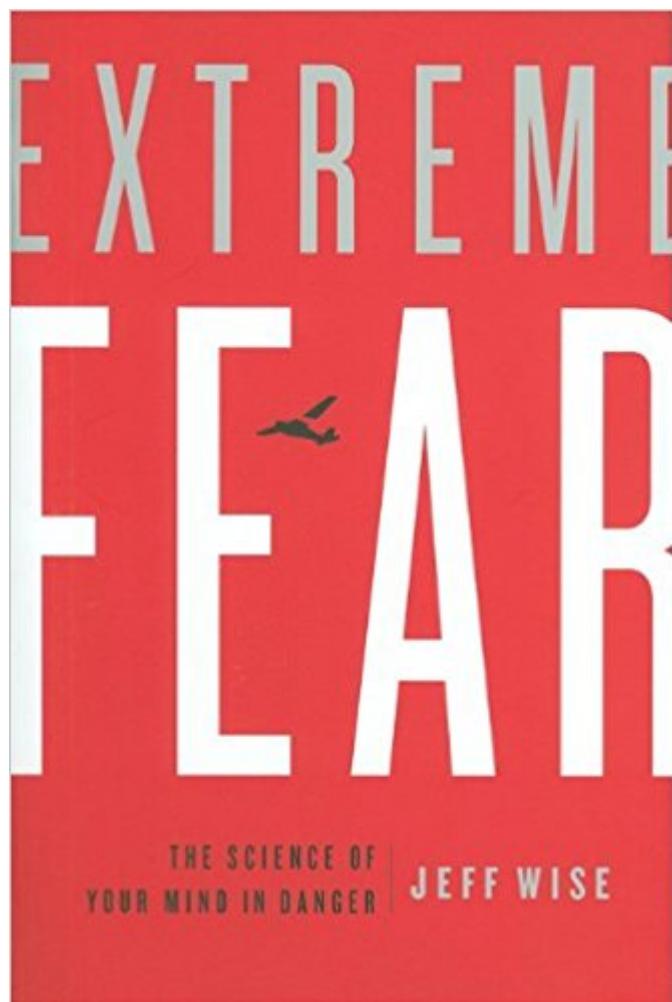


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Extreme Fear: The Science Of Your Mind In Danger (MacSci)



Synopsis

Fear is a mysterious force. It sabotages our ability to think clearly and can drive us to blind panic, yet it can also give us superhuman speed, strength, and powers of perception. Having baffled mankind for ages, fear is now yielding its secrets to scientific inquiry. The simple model of "fight or flight"--that people respond to danger either by fleeing in terror or staying to fight through it--has been replaced by a more complex understanding of the fear response. Veteran science journalist Jeff Wise delves into the latest research to produce an astonishing portrait of the brain's hidden fear pathways. Wise, who writes the "I'll Try Anything" column for Popular Mechanics, favors a hands-on approach, volunteering to jump out of an airplane while wearing sensors and to endure a four-hour simulated missile attack on a Navy destroyer. He returns with a tale that combines lucid explanations of brain dynamics with gripping, true-life stories of mortal danger: we watch a woman defend herself against a mountain lion attack in a remote canyon; we witness a couple desperately fighting to beat back an encircling wildfire; we see a pilot struggle to maintain control of his plane as its wing begins to detach. By understanding how and why these people responded the way they did, Wise argues, we can better arm ourselves against our own everyday fears. Full of amazing characters and cutting-edge science, *Extreme Fear* is an original and absorbing narrative that will force you to reconsider the limits of human potential.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book does an excellent job of describing the brain mechanisms involved in extreme fear,

provides numerous anecdotes about occasions on which someone experienced it, and provides a good deal of military lore and experimental evidence about how fear works and what it does and how it can be limited. But I find myself wondering whether it will offer insight or assistance to anyone who may be suddenly confronted with a fear-inducing situation. There are more variations in human reaction to extreme fear than the author acknowledges. Although I'm not an expert on the topic, I have experienced extreme fear on a few occasions, and have watched others experience it on many more occasions. My personal belief is that aside from the most basic brain-body mechanisms, well described in this book, a person's reaction to an obviously life-threatening situation (or one that seems life-threatening) is largely determined by the whole accumulation of experiences and situations to which the person has been exposed from childhood on. If this is so, it's more than a little difficult to reshape an individual's reactions to such situations, although quite possible to reshape reactions to such specific fears as fear of combat. I have known people who seemed almost immune to fear (although of course they really weren't) and I have known others who yield to fear so readily that one cannot count on them to perform in any dangerous situation. For example, when somebody quite unexpectedly receives a serious electrical shock (1000 to a few thousand volts at high amperage), which I have seen happen perhaps a dozen times, their reactions vary dramatically, from near-complete psychological collapse at one extreme to a few minutes of shaking and cursing, followed by acceptance of treatment and/or return to work.

Everyone feels fear. It is inherent to the human condition. For some, fear is a stimulant driving them to extraordinary feats. For others, fear is paralyzing. Humankind has struggled with fear since the dawn of time, trying to overcome or at least control it. Fear has been the subject of philosophers, priests, aristocrats, generals and psychologists, all trying to understand it. And now scientists have entered the picture and fear is giving up its secrets. In this fascinating and engrossing book, fear gets the pop-science treatment from Jeff Wise, who brings a varied background as "science writer, outdoor adventurer and pilot of airplanes and gliders" to the task. Actually, his accomplishments seem pretty thin for the task, but he is no less qualified than other pop-science writers like Malcolm Gladwell. In fact, Wise does, in my opinion, a better job than Gladwell. He successfully merges contemporary scientific investigations into the nature of fear with medial analysis and real life stories of people both trapped and motivated by fear. Wise writes well and he has structured his book to be fast-moving, even though it is packed with information including more than a few scientific terms the reader is likely to be unfamiliar with. His examples are particularly well chosen to illustrate his points. For example, he describes scuba diving in underwater caves and how divers are faced with

situations where fear and panic appear to be = and in fact are - the only "rational" responses, such as being lost and alone in an underwater cave.

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