

## Marni Jackson Chair of Boardman Tasker Judges 2022

Hello, my name is Marni Jackson and I'm talking to you from Toronto, Canada. There are no mountains here, which is one reason why I loved escaping into the books submitted to the Boardman Tasker Award this year – all **forty** of them, piling up like a small mountain of words in one corner of my office.

And now there are six.

I would like to thank every author for the experiences they've shared on the page – for their generosity. I also want to thank my fellow jury members, Matt Fry and Natalie Berry, for being such good companions on this reading expedition. Together, sometimes wearing only pyjamas, we managed to climb K2 in winter, traverse the Black Cuillin (hope I'm pronouncing that right) do a few gritty routes on Stanage, and dangle upside down in a blue crevasse – all without leaving the house.

But NOT climbing turns out to have its risks as well. Kieran Cunningham has written a highly engaging account of how he spent the pandemic in the Italian alps, in lockdown, forbidden to climb his favourite peaks—and what that did to his mental health. **Climbing the Walls** is a reminder of the healing power of mountains and why they matter.

And I didn't know that risk could be measured until I read **Through Dangerous Doors** by Robert Charles Lee, a retired risk scientist who went from adventuring with psychedelics to climbing on rock and ice, often with his equally adventurous partner Linda. Compulsively candid, Lee has written an unfiltered, unpredictable memoir that's a pleasure to read.

**Time on Rock** by Anna Fleming captures the intimate relationship between climber and rock, whether it's the gritstone of the Peak District or the granite of the Cairngorms. Her elegant, muscular writing puts us right there on the route with her, creating a peripatetic meditation on how "we shape the rock and the rock shapes us".

Having won the Boardman Tasker prize previously for *Deep Play*, with his new book Paul Pritchard has gone even deeper into the spiritual rewards of a life in the mountains. After Paul was almost killed by a falling rock while climbing in Tasmania, he had to push through new physical limitations to arrive at insights that have changed his life. **The Mountain Path** is a devastatingly honest and inspirational account of choosing to live. It's also great fun to read.

I think Natalie and Matt would agree that every book on our short list expands the boundaries of mountain literature. This is especially true of **A Line Above The Sky**, in which the poet Helen Mort draws a line between the risks and terrors of new motherhood and a more untethered life in the mountains. Freedom vs. family – that is the crux where many turn back. Shadowing the story of Alison Hargreaves, who refused to give up alpinism when she became a mother, Helen brilliantly captures the soul-forging power of two extreme experiences—climbing mountains and giving birth.

While Helen writes about women in the mountains, Brian Hall tells the story of eleven remarkable mountain-addicted men. Brian grew up with the radical climbers who would come to define a wild and glorious chapter of mountaineering in the nineteen seventies and eighties. He partied with them, climbed with them and grieved them. Full of humour, affection and

respect, **High Risk: Climbing to Extinction** takes the reader to the heart and soul of the golden age of UK climbing.

And now we come to the announcement you've been waiting for. ..

This year, in an unanimous decision, the jury also took a risk and drew a line. The 2022 Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature goes to **both** Brian Hall, for *High Risk: Climbing to Extinction* and to Helen Mort for *A Line Above The Sky*.

Congratulations to the winners, greetings from Canada and I hope you all enjoy the celebrations tonight.

Thank you.