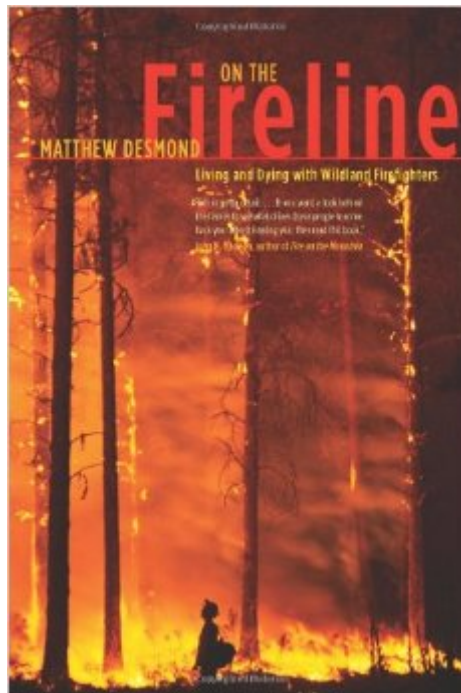


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# On The Fireline: Living And Dying With Wildland Firefighters (Fieldwork Encounters And Discoveries)



## Synopsis

In this rugged account of a rugged profession, Matthew Desmond explores the heart and soul of the wildland firefighter. Having joined a firecrew in Northern Arizona as a young man, Desmond relates his experiences with intimate knowledge and native ease, adroitly balancing emotion with analysis and action with insight. *On the Fireline* shows that these firefighters aren't the adrenaline junkies or romantic heroes as they're so often portrayed. An immersion into a dangerous world, *On the Fireline* is also a sophisticated analysis of a high-risk profession and a captivating read. "Gripping . . . a masterful account of how young men are able to face down wildfire, and why they volunteer for such an enterprise in the first place." —David Grazian, *Sociological Forum* "Along with the risks and sorrow, Desmond also presents the humor and camaraderie of ordinary men performing extraordinary tasks. . . . A good complement to Norman Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*. Recommended." —*Library Journal*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Desmond's work crackles with rich detail, careful analysis, and helpful insights that not only teach us a great deal about the life of a firecrew but also the social meaning of risk, discipline, and place. Beautifully written, *On the Fireline* helps us understand the challenges and opportunities wildland firefighters face and what draws them to lead lives of the brink of danger. Many ethnographies generate more heat than light, but Desmond strikes the right balance, for this is a story that both

captivates and educates.

This book outlines the true stereotypical, "what it takes to be a firefighter" attitude, and trust me it addresses the stereotype well. But Desmond, having only worked for one fire crew, seems to know what it took for that crew to be cohesive. However, having worked for a couple different crews I can confidently say they are all different. I got about 40 pages in and stopped reading. Firefighters come from all different walks of life and serve many purposes on and off the line. Desmond does a great job at judging his inferior crew mates. The nation needs more Firefighters, that comes with encouragement of fellow crew mates, not judgement based on their backgrounds. We are all here to make the same difference.

On the Fireline is Matthew Desmond's sociological study of his time serving on wildland firefighting crews over several summers. Desmond was a college student and seasonal firefighter who recorded his observations of life on a fire crew. That is the one problem with his writing, there is a detached and a tiny feeling of poor less educated coworkers throughout the book. His details of what wildland firefighting entails is raw and gritty and some of the best writing about the actual work I have read. What throws this book off course are his observations and suppositions of the psychological and sociological forces driving his coworkers. He does a good job of exposing the deeply entrenched macho attitude within the firefighting community, but throws some of his coworkers under the bus to illustrate his point. Mixed in the observations are some thoughtful comments about the way the firefighting culture helps extend the rural culture that is disappearing in the US today. Desmond also throws in some observations on the necessity of conservation and land management and the constant struggle between the two. This book has some really wonderful writing but there are some portions that read more like a dissertation which muddle the message.

This book is an enjoyable read since I am a 31 year firefighter. Some of my best memories are fighting wildfire as a hand crew member, an engine company firefighter, and a helitack crew member. This book describes the best and worst of firefighting in ways that puts you into the action and you know what the author is talking about. Mars and Venus readers should be required to read this.

I read the first 30 pages and then made a very rare decision (a rare decision for me at least) and decided to stop. I didn't like how it was written and how large assumptions were made based off a

small pool of individuals. This book didn't tell the story of the firefighters...it used and exploited them.

This was a great book especially because it is a true ethnography, which is why I was reading it for school. Since one of my sons worked in Oregon as a firejumper this was very interesting to me on a personal level.

While there is some action, this book spends most of its time exploring the culture and attitudes of Wildland Firefighters. It is a little dry when talking about sociology and psychology, but it does a fine job of showing what makes these guys tick.

This book is only for those who enjoy reading a poorly written Master's Thesis verbatim. He's also managed to take an interesting subject and turn it into a yawner. Don't bother.

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