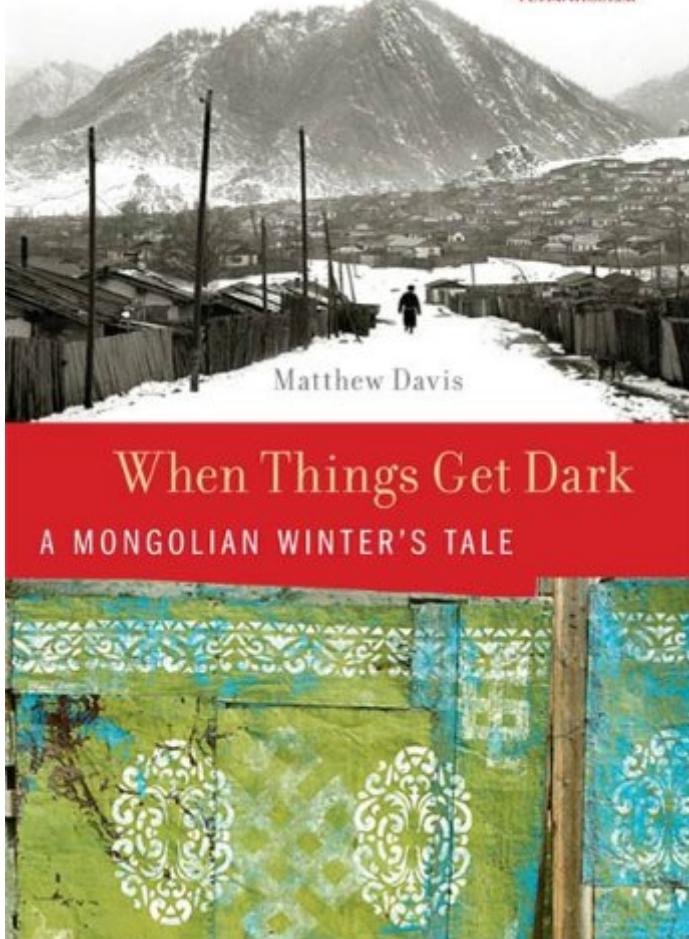


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When Things Get Dark: A Mongolian Winter's Tale

"Matthew Davis's portrait of Mongolia is riveting, insightful, and deeply honest."

—PETER HESSLER



Synopsis

At 23, Matt Davis moved to a remote Mongolian town to teach English. What he found when he arrived was a town "and a country" undergoing wholesale change from a traditional, countryside existence to a more urban, modern identity. When Things Get Dark documents these changes through the Mongolians Matt meets, but also focuses on the author's downward spiral into alcohol abuse and violence--a scenario he saw played out by many of the Mongolian men around him. Matt's self-destruction culminates in a drunken fight with three men that forces him to a hospital to have his kidneys X-rayed. He hits bottom in that cold hospital room, his body naked and shivering, a bloodied Mongolian man staring at him from an open door, the irrational thought in his head that maybe he is going to die there. His personal struggles are balanced with insightful descriptions of customs and interactions, and interlaced with essays on Mongolian history and culture that make for a fascinating glimpse of a mysterious place and people.

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Customer Reviews

Having lived in Mongolia for nearly 11 years including during the time this book covers, I have to say

that Davis is very accurate in his portrayal of countryside life and of the state of the country. He's brutally honest about his experiences, not all of which paint a good picture of him, yet still comes out looking good at the end, mainly because he just truly seems to love Mongolia and the friends he made here. I kept thinking how he must have cringed to have his mom and dad read it after describing their visit to the country and admitting all he hid from them. I've heard the history portions of the book described as boring and filler, but I actually felt it was the most accessible book on Mongolian history that I've read, because he connects everything with real life. That said, his experience will most probably not mirror that of other ex-pats living in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, or even tourists visiting the countryside. Tourism is becoming sophisticated here. I would not, however, recommend visiting in the winter. Come in the summer when it's gorgeous! If you can brave the cold, come in the fall. A definite read for any Peace Corps volunteer coming to Mongolia. No, actually, you should read it even if you're just interested in Mongolia. It's well written, a good book.

I think this book will really resonate with foreigners living in Mongolia and English teachers working in foreign countries. As someone who has done both, I enjoyed this book a lot. It touched on many of the issues foreigners find difficult to deal with in Mongolia, including drinking, fighting, and hate crimes. It also didn't sugar coat English teaching as a Peace Corps assignment. If you had any naive views about English teaching in developing countries, this book generally dispels them. I enjoyed the author's writing style, however I wasn't a big fan of the history sections throughout the book because they were a little overly long. In the Kindle edition there were some weird typos. Words would have spaces in them so the word "organization" would be "org aniza tion". There were a lot of these typos and it was a little distracting. Overall a very enjoyable read about how life in Mongolia really is.

I have to say that I was quite surprised by this one. After reading many reviews on the book I finally got it not really having high expectations for it. It was a great book though. Very well written. I even enjoyed the historical sections and wished for more. This is much more than just a story about a drunk guy getting into fights in Mongolia, as many reviews would lead you to think. It's a story that involves the author, and what he was going through during his stay in Mongolia. I almost thought that I would be reading some badly written book by some stupid kid, but was pleasantly surprised at the writing style and content. Highly recommended for those interested in Mongolia or looking for a "real" peace corp story or travelogue. A great read and a great story from someone who has an

opinion and something to say, and isn't scared to say it.

As a RPCV from mongolia, myself, it was a very interesting read. The book arrived in great condition and i'm glad to have a clean hardcover of it.

This honest tale is a good introduction to Mongolia for somebody who has never been there. It also tell an inspiring tale of trying to adapt into a foreign culture while holding on to something of yourself. Highly readable!

This book caught my eye recently. Here's my take on it. First though, some background. As a kid I saw a movie about Genghis Khan and got interested in Mongolia. At the time - many years ago - it was communist and VERY isolated. Of course, it had always been isolated I guess - the word Mongolia used to be a virtual synonym for isolation at one time. (I must confess that I use it that way to make a point in a seminar that I give, but that is another story.) Needless to say, there was not much real information on it that I ever saw until quite recently and even now it seems minimal. So, we now have this book. The author spent time in Mongolia recently as an English teacher and seems to have gotten immersed into the local situation in a time of great change. He lived in a ger - the circular tent looking house of Mongolia and took up some local habits. It seems winter there is pretty hard to say the least. Many bizarre anecdotes. One of the local habits he took up was drinking a LOT and getting into at least one very violent fight - the scene with him in the hospital with kidney damage after that tells you how bad it was. A bit shocking, but maybe it tells us more about what things are really like there than we might get in say National Geographic. Not you standard travelogue although there is some of that too. Give the author some credit for honesty, and he did seem to learn something important from the experience and not everyone might. Some interesting perspective. Give it a try, but be warned that it is not for the faint of heart.

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