

Powder Burn: Arson, Money, and Mystery on Vail Mountain

Daniel Glick

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Twin Peaks meets Philistines in the Hedgerows: An arson investigation in the ultra-rich ski town reveals a strange, complicated community where everyone is a logical suspect. . In October, 1998 seven fires simultaneously erupted atop Vail ski area. By the time they had been extinguished, several lifts were massively damaged, the elegant and beloved Two Elk Lodge was totally destroyed, lift shacks were just embers, and the ski patrol headquarters was beyond repair. Before the flames had even died down, rumors about likely culprits were spreading through the exclusive Colorado community. Everyone, it seems, was a likely suspect in the \$12 million arson. Vail Associates (VA), the international recreation company that runs the ski basin, had gone public two years earlier, bringing a profit-at-all-costs mentality to a town that still prided itself on being run by grown-up ski bums. VA had a lucrative insurance policy that paid out well in case of fire. Environmentalists were angry about plans to expand the ski valley. Locals had employment grievances with VA, which preferred to import cheaper Central American workers to replace increasingly bummed out ski bums. Vail's ski patrol was furious at being told they would, as a cost-cutting measure, have to clean the patrol shack's toilets. Mom and Pop business owners in town had been scarred by the behemoth company's competitive claws. Other Colorado ski area owners were still apoplectic about a Justice Department anti-trust ruling that allowed Vail to gobble up two neighboring resorts. Backcountry skiiers feared Vail's relentless expansion would shut them out of their favorite terrain. Hunters were angry that the region's elk herd would be decimated to make way for more development. Neighboring towns had been fighting VA over water rights. Packed with odd characters and paranoia, with beautiful mountains and despicable actions, this is a book about crime, the environment, a small town, and a crime that remains unsolved. Powder Burn reads as quick as an expert skiier zooming down a black diamond slope.

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