

# **The Climb: Tragic Ambitions on Everest Study Guide**

**The Climb: Tragic Ambitions on Everest by Anatoli  
Boukreev**

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## Plot Summary

"The Climb" is a collaborative effort by high-altitude climbing guide Anatoli Boukreev and writer G. Weston DeWalt to tell the story of the tragic attempt to climb Mt Everest in May, 1996, in which several people died. Alternating between passages written by Boukreev and DeWalt, the book examines the increased commercialization of climbing where clients pay to be led to the summit by guides like Boukreev, and describes Boukreev's rescue efforts as a guide for one of these climbing companies, Mountain Madness.

The book describes the early efforts of Scott Fischer, an American climber from Seattle, to put his climbing expertise to financial advantage by creating a travel group called Mountain Madness. Plagued by organizational and logistical problems, Fischer was forced to make shortcuts and changes in plans from the very beginning. Tragedy strikes the group early on when one of the Sherpa guides develops a severe form of altitude sickness requiring his evacuation. Despite the varying levels of skill and preparedness of his clients, Fischer encourages all of them to try for the summit except for one individual who becomes so debilitated that Fischer takes him personally back to Base Camp.

The book defends Boukreev's controversial actions on the day the Mountain Madness climbers reach the Everest summit when several of them lose their way in a blinding storm. Rather than leading his clients at the time, Boukreev was resting in camp, not far from where the climbers became stranded in the storm. Because of his location, however, Boukreev was the only guide able to reach the stranded climbers, and led three of them safely back to camp.

"The Climb" addresses the portrayal of Boukreev by writer Jon Krakauer as an arrogant maverick who neglected his guide duties, attempting to discredit Krakauer's interpretation of events. Boukreev also implicates commercial guides Rob Hall and Scott Fischer and the increased practice of leading inexperienced climbers up high mountains as playing crucial roles in the tragedy that ensued. Both Hall and Fischer died during the climb, each exhausted and out of time after helping their clients reach the summit.

Boukreev completes the book by describing his own method for training and leading clients up Everest as a guide for a national Indonesian team of climbers. In contrast to Fischer and Hall, Boukreev prescribed a regimented course of training and acclimatization for his climbers, and only took the strongest on the summit bid. His method succeeded, with the entire team returning safely. The book closes with a brief memorial to Boukreev, who was killed in an avalanche while climbing Annapurna.



# Chapters 1-2

## Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

"The Climb" is a collaborative effort by high-altitude climbing guide Anatoli Boukreev and writer G. Weston DeWalt to tell the story of the tragic attempt to climb Mt Everest in May, 1996, in which several people died. Alternating between passages written by Boukreev and DeWalt, the book examines the increased commercialization of climbing where clients pay to be led to the summit by guides like Boukreev, and describes Boukreev's rescue efforts as a guide for one of these climbing companies, Mountain Madness.

In Chapter 1, called "Mountain Madness," DeWalt opens the book in the early spring of 1996, introducing the leaders of some of the climbing operations intending to climb Everest that year. Henry Todd, an Englishman, is the founder of Himalayan Guides, which is a commercial guide company that has had moderate success. Todd and his lead Sherpa, Kami Noru, are in Kathmandu, Nepal, making preparations to trek supplies to Base Camp at the foot of the mountain. Ed Viesturs and David Breashears are guiding an IMAX film crew that is making a documentary about climbing Everest. Each are experienced and well-respected climbers. A New Zealander, Rob Hall, is also preparing a commercial guided party for his company Adventure Consultants and fresh from the success of a guided expedition the previous season.

A newcomer to the commercial guided climbing business is Scott Fischer, the founder of a Seattle-based company called Mountain Madness. Fischer, DeWalt explains, is a highly respected climber who is eager to follow in the footsteps of Breashears, Todd and Hall in making a profit from his ability and experience. In his first attempt to organize a climb he eagerly courts potential clients who are expected to pay a fee of up to \$65,000 each. One of the spots is initially arranged for Jon Krakauer, a writer for Outside Magazine who Fischer is eager to take along for the potential publicity he would receive from Krakauer's article. Negotiations with the magazine founder, however, and Krakauer instead signs on with Rob Hall's expedition. Jon Krakauer's article and subsequent book about the tragic climb will eventually prompt Boukreev to write the current book, in partial disagreement over Krakauer's account of Boukreev's actions.

Fischer is disappointed to lose Krakauer, but manages to secure another high-profile client, Sandy Hill Pittman, a wealthy woman who is being sponsored by NBC to report on the climb via satellite phone and the internet. He has also hired three experienced climbers as guides, Nazir Sabir, Neal Beidleman, and Anatoli Boukreev.

Chapter 2, entitled "The Everest Invitation," describes how Boukreev comes to work for Mountain Madness as a guide. Boukreev had first met Scott Fischer in person in 1994, at a party given in Kathmandu by Rob Hall, although he knew about Fischer by reputation as a good climber. In fall of 1995, Boukreev is back in Kathmandu looking for work as a climbing guide with Henry Todd, who had made a verbal offer of a job. By



chance, he runs into Scott Fischer, who is in Kathmandu making arrangements for his planned Everest climb in the spring of 1996. Fischer is eager to hire Boukreev to guide for Mountain Madness, but Boukreev initially declines, telling him he has already agreed to guide for Todd. Fischer offers him nearly twice what Todd does, but Boukreev counter-offers a price that is \$5,000 higher than that. Fischer tells Boukreev it is too much, but asks him to consider his initial offer. The two meet again after a few days and Fischer agrees to Boukreev's request.

Boukreev's first task is to arrange for the procurement of oxygen and tents for the expedition. Fischer is eager to use oxygen canisters from a Russian company called Poisk, and Boukreev goes to Russia to negotiate for their purchase. Fischer gives him an advance on his fee and he is pleased to have found a good position as a climbing guide. For his part, Fischer is also pleased to have the services of Boukreev who is very well respected among serious climbers.



# Chapters 3-4

## Chapters 3-4 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 is entitled "Doing the Deals." Before the planned Everest climb, Boukreev had already committed to help guide a team to climb Manaslu, another high Himalayan peak. He returned from the climb and went to Russia to negotiate the oxygen deal, which proved to be difficult. Meanwhile, Fischer went to Denmark to solicit a climbing client, Lene Gammelgaard, then on to Africa to lead a climb of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

As the spring approached, the oxygen deal was still not reached and Boukreev began to worry. Henry Todd had already made an exclusive deal with Poisk to supply him with oxygen and Poisk would not agree to sell any to Boukreev. Karen Dickinson, the business manager for Mountain Madness, stepped in and made a deal with Todd to buy the oxygen through him at a price much higher than Poisk would have charged.

To Boukreev's surprise, Fischer contacted him from Africa with an offer to hire him to guide another climb after Everest and asked him to start looking for potential clients.

Chapter 4, called "The Clients," introduces the 8 clients that had signed on to the Mountain Madness expedition by February, 2006. In addition to the wealthy socialite Sandy Hill Pittman and the Danish climber Lene Gammelgaard, Fischer had convinced Pete Schoening, a sixty-eight-year-old climber from Seattle to join the group, as well as his nephew, Klev. Pete Schoening was an experienced climber, but Klev had little climbing experience. Klev was, however, an excellent downhill skier and very athletic.

In Colorado, the guide Neal Beidleman had recruited three climbers, Martin Adams, Charlotte Fox and Tim Madsen. Dale Kruse, a dentist from Colorado and an early financial supporter of Fischer's climbing business, was the eighth member of the group.

The inclusion of Kruse was controversial. Although he had been on an earlier Everest climb with Fischer, he had failed to make the summit, succumbing to altitude sickness. There was some assumption among the other members of the group and among other expedition leaders that Kruse was invited by Fischer because of his financial support, not because of his fitness to climb. Henry Todd is quoted about the perhaps ethically marginal practice of taking a client's money when the guide knows he has little chance of completing the climb. In Todd's experience, one cannot be certain how any climber will perform. Good climbers sometimes failed, while marginal climbers succeeded through determination.



# Chapters 4-5

## Chapters 4-5 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 is called "The Trail to Everest." In March, 1996, Boukreev arrived in Kathmandu in advance of the expedition and met with Henry Todd to obtain the oxygen Mountain Madness had agreed to purchase from him. To Boukreev's dismay, he learned from Todd that the shipment of oxygen was being delayed at the Russian border because of customs problems with another shipment in the same container.

Boukreev met with Fischer in Kathmandu and learned that Fischer had hired Ngima Kale Sherpa as the "sirdar," or leader of the Sherpas at Base camp and that Lopsang Jangbu Sherpa would be the climbing sirdar. Sherpas, natives of the Himalayan region, are commonly hired to assist climbing expeditions by fixing rope lines, hauling equipment, and setting up advance camps. Boukreev was pleased that Fischer had hired Ngima, who was an experienced sirdar, but was somewhat apprehensive about the young Lopsang who was a good climber but not an experienced leader. Henry Todd had similar reservations about Lopsang's ability to lead.

With his business in Kathmandu complete, Boukreev flew by helicopter to Syangboche, a village from where he intended to trek to Everest Base Camp to oversee the setup of the Mountain Madness camp. He was delayed by rain but eventually reached Base Camp where he is happy to be busy helping the Sherpas set up tents for the expedition.



# Chapters 6-7

## Chapters 6-7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 is entitled "Doing the Details." As Boukreev worked on establishing the Mountain Madness camp at Base Camp, the rest of the team leaders assembled in Kathmandu. One of the guides, Nazir Sabir, had pulled out of the expedition for personal reasons leaving just three guides. Fischer was not alarmed, however, and expressed his high confidence in Beidleman and Boukreev. Dr. Ingrid Hunt had also joined the team as Base Camp manager and the team's physician.

A delay in the snow melt made it impossible for yaks to carry equipment to Base Camp, creating delays for the expedition. Fischer was also kept busy arranging for the delivery of the team's oxygen and tents.

The original plan was to have the clients fly to Kathmandu for a few days, then to Lukla, a village at a higher altitude, before trekking to Base Camp. This was designed to gradually acclimate them to higher altitudes as they prepared for the climb. Due to the delays however, Fischer changed the plan and had them fly directly to Syangboche, a village at a higher altitude than Kathmandu, thus skipping some acclimation time.

From Syangboche, the clients began trekking toward Base Camp and Boukreev headed back to meet the caravan. He met the clients for the first time and formed his initial opinions of them. All of them were in good physical shape, he judged, but were not as prepared for high altitude climbing as he would have wished. He realized at this point that his job as a commercial guide was the "prepare the mountain for the people, rather than the other way around" (pg. 66.)

Chapter 7 is called "Base Camp." The Mountain Madness climbers reached Base Camp on April 8, where the effects of altitude began to be felt in force. Of particular concern was a persistent cough developed by Beidleman, one of the guides. Part of Boukreev's duties as guide was to set down an acclimatization plan for the climbers to allow them to get used to the thin air they would encounter on the climb. This plan called for a series of climbs to higher camps, followed by descents to recover, gradually moving higher until a final push to the summit can be made. As part of his plan, Boukreev recommended to Fischer that after some climbs to higher altitudes, the climbers descend from Base Camp to a much lower altitude to spend several days recovering before the final climb. Fischer rejected this part of the plan. The reason, deWalt writes, is not known.

Much of "The Climb" is aimed at defending Boukreev against accusations made about his conduct on the climb, and in these two chapters, as Boukreev first meets the clients and begins his official interaction with the whole team, DeWalt and Boukreev are careful to point out Boukreev's reservations about some of the clients, and the fact that he called for a more conservative acclimatization plan that was overruled by Fischer.





# Chapters 8-9

## Chapters 8-9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 is entitled "Khumbu to Camp II." The first major obstacle to the climb of Everest is the Khumbu Ice Fall, De Walt explains, a treacherous section of ice with high walls and deep cracks, called crevasses. By custom, the expeditions at Base Camp all contributed to hire a Sherpa to prepare the route by fixing aluminum ladders on the steep sections and across the crevasses.

As Fischer's climbers made their way through the ice fall for the first time, Boukreev got his first glimpse of how they performed in difficult conditions. Some did well, while others seemed to need encouragement and handholding. He developed concerns in particular about Pete Schoening and Dale Kruse, and brought his concerns to Fischer. Fischer assured him that if he thought any climber was not fit to push for the summit, he would turn him back to Base Camp.

The climbers followed through Boukreev's plan of climbing up and down between Camp I and Base Camp with periods of rest in between. Sandy Pittman, despite troubles with her communications equipment, managed to post dispatches via satellite phone to NBC, which Fischer participated in. After several days, the team assembled at Camp I to sleep before setting out to Camp II the following day.

Boukreev climbed with the Sherpas ahead of the clients to Camp II. Upon arriving, he began to help the Sherpas set up the camp. As clients arrived, the Sherpas turned their attention to them. Boukreev explained that the Sherpas often received tips from the climbers after the climb, and so were eager to assist them whenever possible. Once the clients arrived, Boukreev assumed he would be infringing on the Sherpas' livelihood by also assisting the clients, so he sat on a rock and drank some tea. This action would be the source of some controversy.

Chapter 9 is called "Camp II." Fischer and Pete Schoening had returned to Base Camp, with the rest of the climbers remaining the night at Camp II. Beidleman and Boukreev made a plan that the next day the climbers would climb up to 6,800 meters, then return by midday to eat and rest, then descend to Base Camp. They contacted Fischer by radio at Base Camp, and he approved their plan.

Boukreev also suggested to Beidleman that they climb even higher than 6,800 meters, where a series of fixed ropes were to be placed to assist the climbers, thereby extending the marked route to Camp III. When the climbers reached 6,800 meters, it was decided that Boukreev would continue up alone and fix the route while Beidleman accompanied the climbers back to Base Camp.

Boukreev worked quickly and extended fixed ropes up to 7,100 meters, then quickly descended to Base Camp. After a long sleep, he was taken aside by Fischer, who

gently chastised him for not being more attentive to the clients, mentioning that Boukreev had rested while the climbers were setting up their tents at Camp II. Boukreev was confused about what his role was as a guide, feeling that encouraging self-sufficiency among the clients was important. He spoke with Beidleman about this, and Beidleman explained that they were really expected to hold their clients hands as much as possible. Beidleman told Boukreev that he thought half of the climbers would drop out before the summit push anyway, and that Boukreev would have a chance to really prove his worth at high altitude.



# Chapters 10-11

## Chapters 10-11 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 is entitled "The First Delays." By April 21, the Mountain Madness climbers had fallen behind in their acclimatization schedule. Resting at Base Camp, Boukreev had a chance to evaluate the recovery of the climbers he was guiding, and his reservations remained over the fitness of some of them.

Bad weather delayed the establishment of Camp III, and a sudden onset of high altitude pulmonary edema or HAPE struck one of the Mountain Madness Sherpas, Ngawang Topche. Brought down from the mountain through the Khumbu Ice Fall at night by Beidleman, Ngawang was taken quickly to a lower altitude where he could be rescued by helicopter, and transported to a hospital. This added to Fischer's stress, not only out of concern for Ngawang but also the potential expense for his rescue and care.

The Mountain Madness climbers made their way back up the mountain toward Camp III, which Boukreev was instructed to help establish along with the Sherpas ahead of the climbers. Bad weather forced them back on the first attempt however and they return to Camp II. This was another unwelcome delay. The Sherpas were needed to help in a cooperative effort between the expeditions to fix the ropes between Camp III and Camp IV on April 26. If the Mountain Madness Sherpas had to make another attempt to establish Camp III, they would need to rest afterward and would not be available to help. Fischer decided that the Sherpas should establish Camp III and that Boukreev would instead help the other teams fix the ropes to Camp IV.

While Boukreev maintained his doubts about the ability of the climbers, some of them in turn began to express their dissatisfaction with their guides. It appeared to some of them that Fischer, Boukreev and Beidleman were not well organized and not very attentive to their clients.

Chapter 11 is called "Toward the Push." On April 25, the plan was for Boukreev to rest at Camp II for the work ahead establishing the route between Camp III and Camp IV. With Fischer and Beidleman still lower on the mountain, the Mountain Madness climbers at Camp II planned to climb toward Camp III to 7,000 meters, then descend back to Camp II.

On April 26, Boukreev set out with some Sherpas to fix ropes between Camp III and Camp IV. The climbing was difficult, but the team made good progress, extending the fixed ropes to about 7,550 meters. Stopping for the day, Boukreev descended to Camp III while the Sherpas continued down to Camp II

Boukreev spent that night at Camp III and was surprised to find that none of the climbers had advanced to the camp yet. Bad weather had in fact kept them at Camp II most of the day. The following day, Boukreev and the Sherpas continue their work on



the route, extending the fixed ropes to the site chosen for Camp IV. Returning to Camp III at the end of the day, Boukreev is pleased to find five of the climbers have reached the camp.

The following day Boukreev was alarmed by the condition of Dale Kruse, who seemed withdrawn and slow-moving. He convinced Kruse that he should descend as soon as possible and began to help him down the mountain along with Lene Gammelgaard. Fischer was at Camp II on his way up with Pete Shoening to Camp III to help him acclimate, and neared Camp III as Kruse and Boukreev were starting to descend. Fischer, concerned about Kruse's condition, turned around to help Boukreev get him down the mountain.

As Boukreev and Fischer assisted Kruse down to Camp II, they spoke about the delays and concerns of Fischer over Ngawang, the Sherpa ill with HAPE, and the amount of oxygen that had been used to that point. Kruse's condition improves somewhat as they near Camp II, where they stay that night. The next morning Boukreev continues his descent with Kruse while Fischer goes to Camp III with Schoening.

By May 1, all of the Mountain Madness team was in Base Camp except for Charlotte Fox and Tim Madsen, who had descended to the village of Pheriche to recover from altitude sickness. Boukreev and Martin Adams decided to descend to a lower altitude to rest for the summit push. Fischer told the climbers that on May 6 they would all ascend to Camp III and from there make their push to the summit.



# Chapters 12-13

## Chapters 12-13 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 12 is called "The Countdown." On May 6 all of the Mountain Madness climbers and guides were in Base Camp, preparing to climb to Camp II in their push to the summit. Boukreev, feeling well rested after his descent, was concerned about Kruse's condition and also about Fox and Madsen, who had not yet climbed as high as Camp III. Fischer assured him that at Camp III he would assess everyone's condition for making the summit and turn around anyone he thought should go.

Climber Martin Adams reached Camp I and was surprised to find Dale Kruse in one of the tents, having a difficult time. He asked two other climbers to check on him, and they agreed that Kruse was in bad shape and should probably go down. When they reached Camp II, where Fischer and Beidleman are, they informed them of Kruse's condition. Frustrated, Fischer began to descend to get Kruse and take him back to Base Camp. At this point, Boukreev was below Camp I and might have been in better position to help Kruse down, saving Fischer's time and strength, but the expedition had only a few radios for communication, and Boukreev was not carrying one of them.

Fischer, who felt a personal obligation to Kruse, took him all the way to Base Camp before heading back up the mountain. He met with the guide Henry Todd on his return ascent, and Todd was struck at how slowly Fischer seemed to be moving compared to his usual quick pace.

Chapter 13 is entitled "The Death Zone," referring to the highest reaches of the mountain where it is the most dangerous. Having all reached Camp III, with the exception of Kruse, the Mountain Madness team set out on May 9 toward Camp IV. Fischer decided that Boukreev should lead the route while Fischer climbed behind to make sure all their climbers made it safely. Also climbing were the members of Rob Hall's team.

The plan called for Boukreev and the Sherpas to set up three tents at Camp IV where the climbers would rest for the summit attempt at around midnight. When they arrived at the site, however, the wind was so strong they could barely erect the tents. Instead of three tents, they put up two. A general consensus arose that there was little chance of making an attempt, but the decision was ultimately Fischer's.

By 10 o'clock that night, the wind had stopped. The climbers began to prepare their equipment and oxygen for the summit push. Boukreev, still climbing without oxygen, put a canister and mask in his pack just in case he should decide to use it. Each of the other climbers took two canisters, with the plan to take another canister from a cache left by Sherpas on their descent. There was just enough oxygen for each of them to reach the summit and return, provided they did not take too much time.

The first to depart were Lopsang, leading Sandy Hill Pittman. Boukreev set out with Martin Adams. Fischer brought up the rear.



# Chapters 14-15

## Chapters 14-15 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 14 is called "To the South Summit." The Mountain Madness climbers left Camp IV about 30 minutes after the members of Rob Hall's team departed for the summit. Here DeWalt writes about the different approaches taken by Hall and Fischer toward climbing. Hall was more of a "legalist," DeWalt claims, believing that the safest way to climb in a group is to set down rigid guidelines and expect the climbers to follow them, giving up some of their personal freedom in the process. Fischer, on the other hand, DeWalt calls a "situationalist." He believed that it was impossible to foresee every possible eventuality and that climbers should be allowed some flexibility.

There was some controversy about who was supposed to fix the ropes from Camp IV to the summit. According to several climbers, they thought Hall's Sherpas were to fix the ropes, but found that the route had not been completely fixed. According to the Sherpas interviewed afterward, they met climbers coming down the mountain who told them the route was already fixed and so did not continue.

As the members of Hall's and Fischer's groups moved slowly toward the summit, they mingled together. Boukreev and some of the climbers became worried about the time owing to the slow pace. Boukreev was not certain whether he should be breaking out ahead of the group to lead the climbers or fall back to help them along. One of Hall's clients, Lou Kaschiske, decided he was unable to continue and turned around. On his way down, he encountered Fischer at the very end of the string of climbers. Fischer seemed fit at the time.

Chapter 15 is entitled "The Last Hundred," and refers to the last 100 meters of the climb, from a feature called the South Summit to the summit of Everest. Hall's and Fischer's climbers were moving slowly toward the summit with their oxygen supplies dwindling. Neal Beidleman and Martin Adams stop for a time and wait for Sherpas to bring them their third bottle before continuing toward the summit.

At a steep section of the climb called the Hillary Step, Boukreev was surprised to find that no ropes had been fixed. This area required excellent climbing skills to ascend without ropes, so he took the lead and set up a rope course. Above the step, Boukreev stopped fixing ropes, expecting another guide would take care of it while he broke a trail to the summit.

Nobody did fix a rope in this section, however, leaving the climbers exposed to a treacherous section along a steep ridge. Boukreev reached the summit just after 1:00 p.m. and waited for his other clients to summit, planning to lead them back down to Camp IV while they still had oxygen. Beidleman, Adams and Klev Schoening arrived at the summit, but then for several minutes nobody else appeared. Boukreev began to



worry as it was getting late in the day. At 2:00 p.m. he began to descend, suspecting there was a holdup at the Hillary Step.

In this chapter DeWalt addresses the issue of a "turnaround" time, which is a pre-set hour at which anyone who has not reached the summit must turn around and descend. Hall's team had a turnaround time, he writes, but Fischer had set no such time, preferring to make the judgment as conditions dictated. Since Fischer's team carried so few radios, however, there was no way for Fischer to be aware of Boukreev's concerns at the summit.





# Chapters 16-17

## Chapters 16-17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 16 is called "Decision and Descent." Boukreev and Adams descended to the Hillary Step where they found Andy Harris and Jon Krakauer from Rob Hall's team waiting at the top of the step. Several climbers were still ascending toward the summit, despite the late hour, including Fischer who stops at the top of the step to converse with Boukreev. Boukreev is concerned that the climbers have been climbing for 14 hours at this point with 18 hours of oxygen if they have been using the recommended rate. According to Boukreev, he proposed to Fischer that Boukreev should descend to Camp IV and be prepared to come back up the mountain to help any clients who need it. Fischer agreed to the plan, Boukreev writes.

This is a crucial moment in the book, as it is this decision of Boukreev's that becomes controversial in Jon Krakauer's later account of the tragedy. Boukreev is establishing that he was acting under the direction of his employer, Fischer, not out of self interest.

Neal Beidleman led the remaining Mountain Madness climbers to the summit, where they spent 40 precious minutes taking photographs, then hurried them back toward Camp IV. It was now after 3:00 p.m. and concern was mounting that the oxygen was getting low. As of this point, there was no sign of imminent bad weather.

As Boukreev left the South Summit toward Camp IV, snow began to blow. He still considered the conditions "normal, and since he could still see the climbing route and Camp IV in the distance, he was not alarmed about the weather.

Chapter 17 is entitled "Snowblind." After reaching Camp IV, Boukreev rested for about 45 minutes, then became concerned that none of the Mountain Madness climbers who had summited earlier had returned. He realized he would have to go back up with oxygen and help them down. Meanwhile at Base Camp, Dr. Hunt was becoming increasingly worried about the safety of the climbers. She was surprised to hear from Fischer at the summit at nearly 4:00 p.m., noting that he sounded extremely tired.

On his way down, Fischer stopped to rest, exhausted, telling Lopsang Sherpa "I am very sick...Lopsang, I am dead" (pg. 191.) Rob Hall had also continued up the summit with one of his climbers and had not yet made it back to Camp IV.

Boukreev, unaware of the exact situation but knowing the hour was late, started back up the mountain from Camp IV, using oxygen for the first time in order to save his strength. As he climbed, the weather began to change and he lost visibility entirely. Realizing that he cannot continue, he returned to Camp IV hoping that perhaps some of the Mountain Madness climbers had made it back. When he reached the camp, nobody had returned.



# Chapters 18-19

## Chapters 18-19 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 18 is called "Walk or Crawl." With oxygen and visibility dwindling, the Mountain Madness climbers feel their way down the mountain while Boukreev nervously walked the perimeter of the camp looking for arrivals. Martin Adams arrived after struggling down from the summit and collapsed in his tent. Boukreev found him there and helped him get into his sleeping bag. He asked Adams for news of the other climbers, but Adams was too exhausted to reply.

Meanwhile, Neal Beidleman tried to lead Klev Schoening, Lene Gammelgaard, Tim Madsen, Charlotte Fox and Sandy Pittman back to Camp IV. They had reached the South Col, the wide sloping snow field where the camp was situated, but in the worsening weather could not see the camp. Also with the group were Yasuko Namba, a Japanese climber from Rob Hall's group that was having severe difficulty moving, and Beck Weathers, another climber from Hall's group who was being led by Mike Groom, one of Hall's guides.

The group struggled through the extreme wind, uncertain of which way to go. Klev Schoening suddenly became certain he knew the way, and set out quickly with Lene Gammelgaard. The others tried to follow but Namba and Pittman were barely able to walk. Schoening, Beidleman and Gammelgaard did eventually make it to camp, but the remaining climbers stopped and huddled together, their backs to the wind. Mike Groom left the group to try to reach the camp and send help back for them. Beck Weathers wandered away.

Chapter 19 is called "The Rescue Transcript," and is the transcript of an interview of Anatoli Boukreev conducted by his coauthor, Weston DeWalt. The transcript is not edited, DeWalt explains, and Boukreev's answers are in broken English.

Boukreev was in Camp IV, unable to climb higher up the mountain because of the weather, waiting for any sign of climbers returning from the summit. When Lene Gammelgaard, Klev Schoening and Neal Beidleman stumbled into the camp, he learned from them that five other climbers remained out on the South Col, approximately 15 minutes from the camp, needing help to get back.

Boukreev had three canisters of oxygen, one of which he had already given to Martin Adams. He gave a canister each to Gammelgaard and Schoening and frantically began to circulate among the tents, asking for help from the other guides and Sherpas and looking for more oxygen for a rescue attempt. Nobody was willing or able to help, and no oxygen was found. Finally, he took a canister from Lopsang Sherpa and headed out to find the huddled climbers.



Boukreev had been told by Gammegaard that he did not need to ascend the South Col to find the climbers, but to head out laterally from the camp for about 15 minutes. He was confused by this because it would place the climbers well off the descent route. He did not find them on his first attempt and returned to the camp to ask again where they might be. On his second attempt, he found Tim Madsen, Charlotte Fox, and Sandy Pittman huddled together. Yasuko Namba was lying unresponsive nearby. Leaving some hot tea and a canister of oxygen with Pittman and Madsen, Boukreev led Fox back to the camp and helped her get into her tent.

Boukreev was exhausted and tried once more to get someone to help guide the climbers back to the camp. Finding nobody, he went back out. Madsen was able to move under his own power, but Pittman required Boukreev's constant assistance. Namba was lying unresponsive in the snow and was left behind. Weathers' location was unknown.

Boukreev could now account for all the Mountain Madness climbers except Fischer. He had learned earlier from Lopsang that Fischer was still higher up on the mountain, and, Boukreev assumed, in trouble. As morning dawned and the weather began to clear, Boukreev told Lopsang that as soon as possible he was to get some other Sherpas and go up the mountain to help Fischer down. Meanwhile, Boukreev, exhausted from rescuing the lost climbers, returned to his tent.



# Chapters 20-21

## Chapters 20-21 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 20 is entitled "The Last Attempt." As the morning of May 11 arrived, the Mountain Madness team had run out of oxygen. Boukreev awoke from a few hours sleep anxious about Fischer and eager to try to find out if he was still alive somewhere up the mountain. Boukreev spoke with Neal Beidleman and they agreed that Beidleman would lead the climbers down the mountain while Boukreev stayed behind to find out what he could about Fischer. The climbers were given oxygen by David Breshears, a climber leading a documentary film crew.

Rob Hall and one of his climbers had also not returned to Camp IV, and some of the Sherpas from Halls group started climbing up to help him. They encountered Fischer on the way, unconscious, but still breathing. They placed an oxygen mask over his face and left a canister running and continued on. Another approaching storm turned them back before reaching Hall, however, and they returned to Camp IV.

Boukreev learned from the returning Sherpas that Fischer was still alive but the Sherpas tell him he has no chance of surviving. He was unresponsive, unable to drink any tea and just barely breathing. Boukreev held out hope that the oxygen may have revived Fischer and made preparations to climb up to Fischer with more oxygen to help him if possible.

Boukreev found Fischer lying in the snow, his snow suit partly open and one hand frozen with no mitten. He is beyond any help. Boukreev quickly covered his body as best he could. Physically and emotionally exhausted, Boukreev descended to Camp IV in a storm that was just as severe as the previous night's, collapsing in his tent.

Chapter 21 is called "Mountain Media Madness." Beidleman led the Mountain Madness climbers to Base Camp, where they rested before trekking back down. Meanwhile, Boukreev made a solo ascent of Lhotse, a nearby peak, before joining Beidleman in Kathmandu to settle the affairs of the expedition before departing. Boukreev was surprised to find journalists at the airport in Kathmandu wanting to interview him about the events on the mountain.

Boukreev flew to Bangkok, then to Los Angeles, then to New Mexico to stay with a friend. While in New Mexico he was contacted by a journalist from the magazine Men's Journal named Peter Wilkinson. Boukreev was willing to cooperate with Wilkinson but his poor English frustrated him and he asked for the services of a translator. The translator proved to be ineffective, however, and Boukreev arranged to provide written answers to Wilkinson's questions.



Boukreev participated in several other interviews, including one with Jon Krakauer, who was preparing his article for Outside Magazine. Again frustrated by his poor English, Boukreev gave Krakauer a copy of the written answers he had given to Wilkinson.

When Krakauer's article was published, Boukreev was puzzled. Krakauer openly questioned Boukreev's actions on the day of the summit attempts, specifically his descent to Camp IV while his clients were still high on the mountain. Krakauer suggested that Boukreev was negligent for climbing without oxygen and without a full climbing suit and pack, endangering his clients' safety by endangering his own.

Boukreev wondered if Krakauer had misunderstood his statements about the events of the climb, since in the written description he had provided him he clearly stated that it was under Fischer's direction he descended to Camp IV. Furthermore, photographs from the day of the climb showed Boukreev fully dressed in the same kind of climbing suit as the others. As to the question of oxygen, Boukreev had climbed several peaks over 8,000 meters without it and was climbing without oxygen with the full knowledge and support of Fischer, the expedition leader.

With the help of friends, Boukreev crafted a long letter to Outside Magazine countering Krakauer's assertions. The editors offered to publish the letter if it could be shortened to fit their format but Boukreev refused. The letter was not published. Nine months after the article appeared, Krakauer's book about the climb, "Into Thin Air," was published. His characterization of Boukreev had not changed.



# Afterword, Epilogue and Postscript

## Afterword, Epilogue and Postscript Summary and Analysis

In the Afterword, DeWalt speculates about what might actually have happened to Fischer and the missing climbers from Rob Hall's team. Based on the description of his condition from Lopsang Sherpa, Fischer may have died from HACE or High Altitude Cerebral Edema, a type of altitude sickness that affects the brain.

Andy Harris, one of Hall's guides, was never found but his ice axe was discovered by a later climbing expedition between the Hilary Step and the South Summit on an unroped section of the climb. Rob Hall had last been heard of by radio the night of the terrible storm, and died on the mountain. Doug Hansen, one of Hall's climbers, was being helped by Hall toward the summit earlier in the day, but was not with Hall when Hall radioed Base Camp. His fate is unknown.

Finally, DeWalt calls for the ongoing debate about commercial climbing expeditions to continue, but hopes that the debate will not be tarnished by rumor and innuendo.

In an Epilogue entitled "The Return to Everest," Boukreev describes his consulting for a state-sponsored expedition from Indonesia to climb Everest. Based on his years of experience and what he learned from the tragic events in 1996, Boukreev outlined a rigorous training and acclimatization plan for the Indonesian team. He assembled a group of Russian guides to lead them and took part in the climb himself, although considering himself a "consultant" rather than a guide. Despite the Indonesians having very little climbing experience, Boukreev succeeds in leading three of them to the summit.

In a postscript, DeWalt provides a brief account of an encounter between Boukreev and the husband of Yasuko Namba, who he met in Base Camp during his expedition with the Indonesian team. Boukreev had taken some personal items from Namba's body and wanted to find a Japanese climber at Base Camp to possibly return them to Namba's family. He was surprised to find Namba's husband himself there, trying to possibly find Namba's body. Boukreev apologizes to him, telling him there was nothing that could be done. Namba's husband thanks Boukreev for his efforts.

In a final memorial word entitled "In Memory," De Walt describes the death of Anatoli Boukreev in a climbing accident on the mountain Annapurna, his body lost forever in an avalanche.



# Characters

## Anatoli Boukreev

Anatoli Boukreev was a Russian climber who took on Kazakhstani citizenship following the collapse of the Soviet Union. A highly trained and experienced high-altitude mountain guide, Boukreev's services were in demand by the commercial expeditions preparing to climb Mt. Everest in 1996. He signed on with Mountain Madness, led by Scott Fischer, after Fischer offered him over twice the pay offered by another company.

Considered aloof and arrogant by some of the other climbers, Boukreev was independent and sometimes impatient. He believed strongly in a regimented training and acclimatization process to prepare climbers for high altitude and was concerned when his employer, Fischer, did not adopt Boukreev's complete recommendations.

Boukreev climbed several peaks above 8,000 meters in height in his career, many of them solo and without supplementary oxygen. His capabilities at high altitude allowed him to rescue three Mountain Madness climbers who had become lost while descending from the summit of Everest in 1996. Despite his heroic act, Boukreev found himself in the center of a controversy after another climber, Jon Krakauer, published an account of the climb that portrayed him as negligent.

The year after the 1996 climb, Boukreev led an Indonesian national team to the summit of Everest under his consultation and guidance, with three climbers reaching the summit and all climbers returning safely. Boukreev died in late 1997 while climbing the Himalayan peak Annapurna when an avalanche swept down from above, burying him in snow.

## Scott Fischer

Scott Fischer was a tall, attractive, and charismatic climbing guide from Seattle and the founder of the commercial adventure company Mountain Madness. He was enthusiastic about growing his young company and aggressive in seeking out climbing clients to participate in his 1996 expedition to climb Mt. Everest.

Fischer is portrayed as perhaps not being as objective as he should have been in assessing the capabilities of his climbing clients. Wishing to avoid confrontation or disappoint his paying clients, Fischer continued to encourage his clients even as their condition deteriorated.

Fischer's own condition deteriorated while climbing and he was moving notably slower than usual on the day of the Mountain Madness summit attempt, climbing at the end of the string of climbers to assist his clients. As a result, Fischer became stranded high on the mountain above his clients as they descended from the summit, possibly debilitated by high-altitude cerebral edema or HAPE a condition that causes swelling of the brain at



high altitude. His body was found by Boukreev above Camp IV on the day after the summit.

## **Jon Krakauer**

Krakauer was a writer for Outside Magazine who originally intended to sign on with Scott Fischer's climbing company but switched to join Rob Hall's group. Upon returning from the expedition, Krakauer wrote an article and then a book about his experience. In his account, Krakauer portrayed Boukreev in a mostly negative light. "The Climb" addresses and attempts to counter Krakauer's version of events.

## **Rob Hall**

This individual is the leader of Adventure Consultants, another commercial guide service that is leading a group of climbers at the same time as Mountain Madness. Hall died during the climb when he became stranded by weather high on the mountain.

## **Martin Adams**

This individual is one of the Mountain Madness climbers who reached the summit with Boukreev. Adams was a strong climber who was often impatient with the slow pace and lack of organization of the Mountain Madness expedition.

## **Neal Beidleman**

This individual, along with Boukreev, is one of the Mountain Madness guides. Beidleman succeeded in leading one climber back to Camp IV from the group that became lost on the descent, but was too exhausted to go back out to help those who had fallen behind.

## **Charlotte Fox**

This individual is one of the Mountain Madness climbers who had been signed on by Beidleman and who was rescued by Boukreev.

## **Sandy Hill Pittman**

Sandy Hill Pittman was a wealthy amateur climber with some previous experience climbing at high altitude. She has difficulty reaching the summit and then descending and was in the group that became lost near Camp IV. She was rescued by Boukreev.





## **Lopsang Sherpa**

The climbing "sirdar" or lead Sherpa guide for Mountain Madness. Lopsang tried to help Fischer on his descent, but left him to try to get help. He was unable to return for several hours, finding Fischer barely alive.

## **Klev Schoening**

This individual is one of the stronger Mountain Madness climbers despite his relative lack of high altitude experience. This person is the nephew of Pete Schoening.

## **Pete Schoening**

An experienced but older climber, Pete Schoening was one of two Mountain Madness climbers who turned back and did not attempt the summit.

## **Dale Kruse**

A dentist and amateur climber, Dale Kruse was an early financial supporter of Fisher's business and a good friend. Despite his deteriorating condition, Kruse was encouraged by Fischer to make the summit attempt. He became too ill to continue, however, at Camp I, and was helped back to Base Camp by Fischer.

## **Yasuko Namba**

This individual is a Japanese climber with Rob Hall's expedition. Namba is helped down the mountain by the group that becomes lost and is among the small group that Boukreev locates in the storm. Barely conscious and unable to move under her own power, she is left behind and later dies.

## **Tim Madsen**

This individual is one of the Mountain Madness climbers who becomes lost and is found by Boukreev. Madsen decides to stay with Pittman, Fox, and Namba when they become lost near Camp IV. Boukreev later leads him back to camp.

## **Beck Weathers**

Weathers was a climber with Rob Hall's group that was initially with the small group that became lost. He wandered away from the group and spent the night of the storm alone in the storm. He manages to survive and make his way back to camp the following morning, despite frozen hands and feet.

## **Henry Todd**

This individual is an experienced English climbing guide who is also leading climbers on Everest in 1996. Todd supplies Fischer's company with oxygen.

## **Karen Dickinson**

This individual is Scot Fischer's business manager who helps handle the logistics of preparing the expedition.



# Objects/Places

## Mt. Everest

This is the highest peak on Earth, located in the Himalayas between Nepal and Tibet. It is the main setting for "The Climb."

## Mountain Madness

This is the commercial climbing guide service started by Scott Fischer for which co-author Anatoli Boukreev works.

## Everest Base Camp

This is the main base of support for climbing expeditions. Everest Base Camp is like a small tent city where each expedition maintains operations.

## South Col

This is a relatively flat section on Mt. Everest where the climbers establish the highest camp, Camp IV. It is on the South Col that the group of climbers becomes lost in the storm while trying to find the camp.

## Camp IV

This is the highest camp on Everest from which the attempt for the summit is made and the returning point for climbers descending from the summit. It is near Camp IV that the group of climbers rescued by Boukreev becomes lost.

## Hilary Step

This is a steep section of rock that rises in the path to the summit. On the day of the summit, climbers became backed up at the Hilary Step, creating crucial time delays.

## South Summit

This is a peak along the route to the true summit of Everest. Rob Hall dies near the South Summit, where he becomes stranded during the descent.



## **Khumbu Ice Fall**

This is a large, treacherous field of ice above Base Camp that is negotiated with the use of aluminum ladders lashed to form bridges. This is one of the most dangerous sections of the climb.

## **Namche**

This is the Tibetan market village below Base Camp where some of the climbers spend time preparing for the climb.

## **Kathmandu, Nepal**

This is the large city in Nepal that is the location for the early preparations to climb Everest and the point of arrival in Tibet for the climbing clients.

# Themes

## The Defense of Boukreev's Actions

"The Climb" is largely a response to the controversy surrounding the tragic climb of Everest in the spring of 1996 in which several climbers died, including two commercial climbing guides. Anatoli Boukreev was a guide for one of the companies leading expeditions and he played a central role by rescuing three of the climbers in his group when they became lost high on the mountain.

One of the other climbers on the mountain at the same time as Boukreev was Jon Krakauer, a writer who was hired by Outside Magazine to join a commercial expedition and write about it for publication. When Krakauer's piece was published, it was highly critical of Boukreev, describing him as arrogant and even negligent in his role as a guide. As outlined in "The Climb," Boukreev wrote an extended response to Krakauer's article and asked Outside Magazine to publish it. The magazine offered to edit the piece to make it shorter to fit their format, but Boukreev refused. It is implied that "The Climb" is Boukreev's attempt to set the record straight regarding Krakauer's depiction of the events.

Aside from disputing some of the factual elements of Krakauer's article, such as what Boukreev was wearing on the day of the summit attempt, DeWalt and Boukreev attempt to add information that Krakauer leaves out, including the claim that it was Scott Fischer's plan to send Boukreev down to Camp IV after summiting to rest and bring help up to climbers that might need it. Krakauer had suggested that Boukreev descended out of regard for himself and should have stayed with the climbers. This claim of Boukreev's at once disputes Krakauer's claim and also lays the blame, if there is any, on Fischer. In Boukreev's assessment, he was doing his job, which was to follow the instructions of his employer.

As the tragic events unfolded, DeWalt and Boukreev are careful to point out that because he had descended quickly and had some rest, Boukreev was the only guide able to assist the climbers who became lost while trying to find Camp IV. Running from tent to tent, Boukreev found all the other climbers, Sherpas and guides were physically unable to help him.

The authors would seem to place the blame for the tragedy not on any one person, but on the practice of providing commercial climbing services that promise to lead any climber to the top of Everest. This is not realistic, Boukreev believes. In a final defense of Boukreev's ability and what he believes to be a superior method of leading climbs, the authors include an account of Boukreev's consulting for an Indonesian team of climbers which put three men, led by Boukreev, at the summit and brought all the team members back safely.



## The Commercialization of Climbing

"The Climb" is critical of the development of commercial climbing expeditions that would seem to promise to take anyone to the summit of Everest for a fee. After witnessing the success of other climbers like Henry Todd and Rob Hall, Scott Fischer decided to enter the business of commercial guiding, starting a company called "Mountain Madness," largely with the backing of Dale Kruse, a dentist and amateur climber.

The implication made by DeWalt and Boukreev is that in selecting clients for these expeditions, the ability to pay was more important than the ability to climb. The clients were of a wide range of abilities, and Boukreev had doubts about some of them from the very beginning.

Another criticism Boukreev would seem to have of commercial climbing is that the clients expected to have their every need taken care of by the guides. This does not promote the self-reliance required to be a successful climber, Boukreev believed. He also had a more regimented approach to acclimatizing to high altitudes, one that was not adopted by Fischer. When his clients reacted differently to the altitude, Fischer allowed them to move up and down the mountain at an individual pace. By the time of the final ascent, two of the climbers had spent much of the acclimatization period below Base Camp and very little time high on the mountain. One of the climbers had even trekked down from Base Camp just before the final ascent to meet some friends and go out for the evening rather than saving her strength for the climb. As a result, the wide difference in abilities is enhanced by the varying preparedness of the climbers.

Underlying the open criticism of commercial climbing is the suggestion that putting unprepared clients on the mountain can be fatal. Fischer is depicted as being so worn down from the stress of trying to make a business of the expedition and from leading his less experienced climbers up and down the mountain that he is in poor shape by the final day. Rob Hall, it is speculated, may have doomed himself by trying to help one of his weaker clients to the summit when it was too late in the day to make it back to Camp IV in time. The prospect of telling a paying customer they must turn around for their own safety was perhaps too difficult.

It is this commercial element that changes the relationship between the guide and climber, the authors suggest. The following year, Boukreev organized another climb of Everest, but as a consultant, not as a guide. He offered his leadership and expertise, but made no promises of success. He prescribed rigorous training and a selection process to determine which climbers were best suited for making the summit. Boukreev's method, he would seem to suggest, is a better and ultimately safer way to lead climbers to the top of Everest.

## The Uncertain Dangers of Climbing

In Chapter 4, DeWalt quotes the experienced mountain guide Henry Todd as saying, "You don't know who's going to come good and who's going to go bad. You can get the



best climbers not perform, and you can get other people who are very marginal who are just utterly determined and will be successful" (pg. 47.) The suggestion is not only that determination can partly make up for marginal ability when climbing Everest, but also that even the most experienced and able climbers may be defeated by the mountain. This assertion would seem to have been supported by the events of May, 1996 covered in "The Climb."

Of the five climbers who died in the blinding storm, three of them were experienced mountain guides. Andy Harris worked for Rob Hall. Rob Hall was an expedition leader, as was Scott Fischer. All were in excellent physical shape at the start of the climb and all were very experienced climbers. While the exact details of their deaths are unknown, all were the victims of the exacting environment at high altitude. Sudden lethal afflictions such as high-altitude cerebral edema or HACE can strike anyone, DeWalt writes, and it may be that this is what killed Scott Fischer.

Aside from the physiological dangers, there are the uncertainties of the mountain itself that can kill. Sudden storms such as the one that covered the climbers during their descent from the summit can reduce visibility to nothing in surroundings where one false step can lead to a plunge of hundreds of feet. Giant crevasses can open suddenly, and huge ice towers come crashing down. No amount of preparation can avoid these dangers and climbers must rely on a good deal of luck.

This theme is reinforced by the closing chapters of the book. The year following the tragic climb of 1996, Boukreev organizes another climb on stricter lines, taking only the strongest climbers and planning for as many situations as possible. His climb is a success, with no injuries or deaths. Shortly afterward, though, Boukreev himself is killed while climbing the mountain Annapurna when a sudden avalanche sweeps down from above, burying him and another climber.

# Style

## Perspective

"The Climb" is a cooperative effort of two authors, Weston DeWalt and Anatoli Boukreev. The authors decided to maintain separate voices throughout the book, with the sections contributed by each appearing in different typefaces to distinguish who is writing.

In the sections written by Boukreev, the perspective is that of a first-person witness to the events being described. Boukreev is a seasoned and respected high-altitude climber, and brings an expert perspective to his accounting of the technical aspects of the climb. Boukreev maintains his own opinions about the fitness of some of the climbers, the motivation of some of the other guides, and the subject of commercially-guided climbing, which he openly expresses. It is a personal perspective that Boukreev provides the book and one that is not always objective.

DeWalt provides the larger portion of the text, piecing together the events for which Boukreev was not present from interviews with other climbers who were on the mountain at the same time. DeWalt employs a more objective perspective but one that is largely sympathetic to Boukreev. DeWalt frequently includes quotes and descriptions from different sources covering the same events, providing a more rounded perspective, but also underlining the fact that memories are not always reliable.

## Tone

"The Climb" is a non-fiction adventure story with an ending that includes both tragedy and heroism. Largely a response to the controversy over the actions of the professional climbing guides Rob Hall, Scott Fischer and Anatoli Boukreev, the book has an overall goal of supporting Boukreev's actions and describing his own acts of heroic rescue. At times, the tone is indignant, as Boukreev takes issue with Jon Krakauer and others who have openly criticized him. Likewise, Boukreev often expresses his impatience with the expectations placed on him as a guide to attend to every need of his clients, some of whom are unfit to attempt to climb Everest in his opinion. The sections of the book written by Boukreev are often in the personal, subjective tone of a man frustrated by his situation who feels he has been misunderstood.

DeWalt brings a more straightforward, journalistic tone to the book, but his sympathy for Boukreev is apparent. While he includes material that is critical of Boukreev, he tried to maintain a balanced tone by including Boukreev's responses. The end of the book raises the tone almost to one of reverence for Boukreev, as DeWalt describes Boukreev's successful climb of Everest the year after the tragedy, and his eventual tragic death in an avalanche while climbing Annapurna. The epilogue describing Boukreev's subsequent climb of Everest seems to vindicate his skill as a guide, while





memorial section describing his death provides a balancing reminder that even the most skilled climbers are always at risk of death.

## Structure

"The Climb" is presented in several short chapters in roughly chronological order. The opening four chapters outline the background of Scott Fischer and his climbing guide service called Mountain Madness, and Fischer's efforts to sign clients on to an expedition to reach the summit of Mt. Everest. Co-author Anatoli Boukreev is introduced as Fischer convinces him to sign on to the expedition as a guide.

The main portion of the book, Chapters 5 through 20, is a chronological account of the climb, from the clients' arrival in Nepal to the summit and then back to Base Camp. Chapters 18 and 19 detail the ordeal of the climbers who were lost in the blinding storm while returning to Camp IV from the summit, and Anatoli Boukreev's attempts to rescue them. Chapter 21, the final chapter, discusses the controversy over the actions of the climbers and guides, fueled by an article critical of Boukreev written by Jon Krakauer, another climber. In an afterword, DeWalt discusses the controversy and speculates on what might have happened to Fischer and the other climbers who died or disappeared. In an epilogue, Boukreev describes training a team of Indonesian climbers who are successful in summiting Everest the following year. In a final short section called "In Memory," De Walt describes how Anatoli Boukreev lost his life in an avalanche while climbing another Himalayan peak called Annapurna.



## Quotes

"Scott Fischer from West Seattle, Washington, was coming to the mountain. Six foot four with a chiseled, symmetrical face and long, flowing blond hair, he ran his West Seattle, Washington-based adventure company, Mountain Madness, as an extension of his personal ambition: to climb mountains around the world and to have a hell of a time doing it" (Chapter 1, pg. 7-8.)

"For Boukreev it was a welcome invitation, and the offer of prospects beyond was promising. Boukreev had a great deal of confidence in Fischer's ability to handle the complexities of fielding an expedition and appreciated him as a climber" (Chapter 2, pg. 25.)

"Some expedition leaders, according to Henry Todd of Himalayan Guides, are not above suspicion for taking on marginal clients, pocketing their money and dreams while all the time strongly suspecting that they didn't have a prayer of making the top" (Chapter 4, pg. 46.)

"Boukreev took the acclimatization excursions very seriously, and he felt that the routines that had been established should be strictly followed" (Chapter 7, pg. 72.)

"Boukreev, while generally satisfied with client performance, had some concerns about Dale Kruse and Pete Schoening and their capacities for the climb ahead, but Fischer, Boukreev remembered, reassured him" (Chapter 8, pg. 79.)

"Boukreev was concerned with Fischer's decision, and Martin Adams, though not in a position to directly intervene, was also concerned. 'Scott's got everybody going; He's got Dale going; he's got [Pete] Schoening going. It's obvious that these people are sick; they can't do it, but for whatever reason they want to go, and Scott says fine'" (Chapter 11, pg. 123.)

"I was not happy with the conditions on the mountain. After more than two decades of climbing, I had developed certain intuitions, and my feeling was that things were not right" (Chapter 13, pg. 140.)

"At 1:07 p.m., Boukreev reached the summit of Mount Everest, more with a sense of relief than of celebration. The goal had been to summit as early as possible so as to get the clients back to Camp IV under oxygen, and while 1:07 was considerably later than he would liked ot have arrived, he understood that if the clients followed quickly, they would be able to make it." (Chapter 15, pg. 170-71.)

"Boukreev continued his descent, constantly monitoring the weather. It was, he said, 'Normal for Everest; not at the moment possible to say it was a serious problem, because I had a clear view of the climbing route'" (Chapter 16, pg. 183.)



"We wandered as a group for a while. We were moving slowly. Different people would come to the front and fall behind, but we kept yelling, all of us, to stay together as a group." (Chapter 18, pg. 201.)

"Boukreev found Madsen, Pittman, and Fox huddled in a close circle; Yasuko Namba lying on the ground, appearing unconscious; Beck Weathers nowhere in sight" (Chapter 19, pg. 221.)

"On the morning of May 11, the oxygen supply of Mountain Madness depleted, Neal Beidleman and the clients made the decision to retreat down the mountain" (Chapter 20, pg. 228.)

"And just around seven o'clock, five minutes past probably, I found Scott... It is like not life in the face. I saw no breathing, just a clenched jaw. I lose my last hope. I can do nothing. I can do nothing. I cannot stay with him" (Chapter 20, pg. 233.)

"Fischer's deteriorating health, complicated apparently by a lack of oxygen, the hour at which he was stricken, his position on the mountain, poor communications, the weather that arose and the conditions and abilities of his team members who could have offered help were, in combination, the factors that led to his death" (Afterword, pg. 259-60.)

# Topics for Discussion

What is Boukreev's motivation for writing "The Climb?"

Is Boukreev convincing in his refutation of Jon Krakauer?

How does Boukreev's assessment of his own personality compare with the ones offered by his clients?

Does Boukreev share in the blame for what happened on the mountain?

How does the commercialization of high altitude climbing affect the safety of climbers, according to the authors?

Discuss the authors' decision to present the book in separate passages written by each one. Is it an effective technique? Why or why not?

What lessons does Boukreev learn from his experience with Mountain Madness?