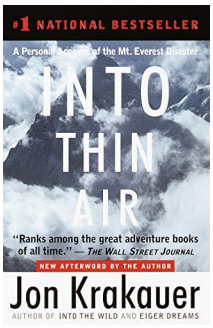

YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Into Thin Air

by Jon Krakauer

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38 Highlights

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 157

> There were many, many fine reasons not to go, but attempting to climb Everest is an intrinsically irrational act—a triumph of desire over sensibility. Any person who would seriously consider it is almost by definition beyond the sway of reasoned argument.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 4

> At 29,028 feet up in the troposphere, so little oxygen was reaching my brain that my mental capacity was that of a slow child.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 13

> In 1865, nine years after Sikhdar's computations had been confirmed, Waugh bestowed the name Mount Everest on Peak XV, in honor of Sir George Everest, his predecessor as surveyor general.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 14

> Those losses, as it turned out, would not be insignificant. Following Sikhdar's discovery in 1852, it would require the lives of twenty-four men, the efforts of fifteen expeditions, and the passage of 101 years before the summit of Everest would finally be attained.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 18

> And thus, shortly before noon on May 29, 1953, did Hillary and Tenzing become the first men to stand atop Mount Everest.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 23

> The incumbent hazards lent the activity a seriousness of purpose that was sorely missing from the rest of my life. I thrilled in the fresh perspective that came from tipping the ordinary plane of existence on end.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 26

> In 1991 the Ministry of Tourism charged $2,300 for a permit that allowed a team of any size to attempt Everest. In 1992 the fee was increased to $10,000 for a team of up to nine climbers, with another $1,200 to be paid for each additional climber. But climbers continued to swarm to Everest despite the higher fees. In the spring of 1993, on the fortieth anniversary of the first ascent, a record fifteen expeditions, comprising 294 climbers, attempted to scale the peak from the Nepalese side. That autumn the ministry raised the permit fee yet again—to a staggering $50,000 for as many as five climbers, plus $10,000 for each additional climber, up to a maximum of seven.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 31

> As an avid student of mountaineering history, I knew that Everest had killed more than 130 people since the British first visited the mountain in 1921—approximately one death for every four climbers who'd reached the summit—and

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Highlight (Yellow) | Page 34

> As I gazed across the sky at this contrail, it occurred to me that the top of Everest was precisely the same height as the pressurized jet bearing me through the heavens. That I proposed to climb to the cruising altitude of an Airbus 300 jetliner struck me, at that moment, as preposterous, or worse.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 35

> Ascending the stairs to my room I passed a large four-color poster titled "Himalayan Trilogy," depicting Everest, K2, and Lhotse—the planet's highest, second-highest, and fourth-highest mountains, respectively.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 86

> Sleep became elusive, a common symptom of minor altitude illness. Most nights I'd wake up three or four times gasping for breath, feeling like I was suffocating. Cuts and scrapes refused to heal. My appetite vanished and my digestive system, which required abundant oxygen to metabolize food, failed to make use of much of what I forced myself to eat; instead my body began consuming itself for sustenance. My arms and legs gradually began to wither to sticklike proportions.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 89

> (At Base Camp there was approximately half as much oxygen as at sea level; at the summit only a third as much.) When confronted with an increase in altitude, the human body adjusts in manifold ways, from increasing respiration, to changing the pH of the blood, to radically boosting the number of oxygen-carrying red blood cells —a conversion that takes weeks to complete.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 134

> Feeling slightly better on Saturday, I climbed a thousand feet above camp to get some exercise and accelerate my acclimatization, and there, at the head of the Cwm, fifty yards off the main track, I came upon another body in the snow, or more accurately the lower half of a body. The style of the clothing and the vintage leather boots suggested that the victim was European and that the corpse had lain on the mountain at least ten or fifteen years.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 176

> High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE) is less common than High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE), but it tends to be even more deadly. A baffling ailment, HACE occurs when fluid leaks from oxygen-starved cerebral blood vessels, causing severe swelling of the brain, and it can strike with little or no warning. As pressure builds inside the skull, motor and mental skills deteriorate with alarming speed—typically within a few hours or less—and often without the victim even noticing the change. The next step is coma, and then, unless the afflicted party is quickly evacuated to lower altitude, death.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 185

> “With enough determination, any bloody idiot can get up this hill,” Hall observed. “The trick is to get back down alive.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 193

> Experiments conducted in decompression chambers had by then demonstrated that a human plucked from sea level and dropped on the summit of Everest, where the air holds only a third as much oxygen, would lose consciousness within minutes and die soon thereafter.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 210

> All told, thirty-four climbers departed for the summit in the middle of that night. Although we left the Col as members of three distinct expeditions, our fates were already starting to intertwine—and they would become more and more tightly bound with every meter we ascended.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 226

> Unfortunately, the sort of individual who is programmed to ignore personal distress and keep pushing for the top is frequently programmed to disregard signs of grave and imminent danger as well. This forms the nub of a dilemma that every Everest climber eventually comes up against: in order to succeed you must be exceedingly driven, but if you’re too driven you’re likely to die. Above 26,000 feet, moreover, the line between appropriate zeal and reckless summit fever becomes grievously thin. Thus the slopes of Everest are littered with corpses.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 229

> Bottled oxygen does not make the top of Everest feel like sea level. Climbing above the South Summit with my regulator delivering just under two liters of oxygen per minute, I had to stop and draw three or four lungfuls of

> air after each ponderous step. Then I'd take one more step and have to pause for another four heaving breaths—and this was the fastest pace I could manage.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 234

> A quick check revealed a fist-sized chunk of frozen drool blocking the rubber valve that admitted ambient air into the mask from the atmosphere. I chipped it off with the pick of my ice ax, then asked Andy to return the favor by turning off my regulator in order to conserve my gas until the Step cleared. He mistakenly opened the valve instead of closing it, however, and ten minutes later all my oxygen was gone.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 241

> "Come down with me," I implored. "It will be at least another two or three hours before Rob shows up. I'll be your eyes. I'll get you down, no problem." Beck was nearly persuaded to descend with me when I made the mistake of mentioning that Mike Groom was on his way down with Yasuko, a few minutes behind me. In a day of many mistakes, this would turn out to be one of the larger ones.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 243

> The literature of Everest is rife with accounts of hallucinatory experiences attributable to hypoxia and fatigue.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 247

> It would be many hours before I learned that everything had not in fact turned out great—that nineteen men and women were stranded up on the mountain by the storm, caught in a desperate struggle for their lives.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 259

> At that moment I was just arriving at the tents—probably no more than fifteen minutes in front of the first members of Beidleman's group. But in that brief span the storm abruptly metastasized into a full-blown hurricane, and the visibility dropped to less than twenty feet.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 272

> "So I'm trying to shove her hands back into her mittens when all of a sudden Beck mumbles, 'Hey, I've got this all figured out.' Then he kind of rolls a little distance away, crouches on a big rock, and stands up facing the wind with his arms stretched out to either side. A second later a gust comes up and just blows him over backward into the night, beyond the beam of my headlamp. And that was the last I saw of him.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 287

> At 5:30, as Lopsang left the South Summit to resume his descent, he turned to see Harris—who must have been severely debilitated, if his condition when I'd seen him on the South Summit two hours earlier was any indication—plodding slowly up the summit ridge to assist Hall and Hansen. It was an act of heroism that would cost Harris his life.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 294

> Nevertheless, it was remarkable that Hall was even alive after spending a night without shelter or oxygen at 28,700 feet in hurricane-force winds and windchill of one hundred degrees below zero.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 299

> Before signing off, Hall told his wife, “I love you. Sleep well, my sweetheart. Please don’t worry too much.” These would be the last words anyone would hear him speak. Attempts to make radio contact with Hall later that night and the next day went unanswered. Twelve days later, when Breashears and Viesturs climbed over the South Summit on their way to the top, they found Hall lying on his right side in a shallow ice hollow, his upper body buried beneath a drift of snow.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 309

> The first body he came to turned out to be Namba, but Hutchison couldn’t discern who it was until he knelt in the gale and chipped a three-inch-thick carapace of ice from her face. Stunned, he discovered that she was still breathing. Both her gloves were gone, and her bare hands appeared to be frozen solid. Her eyes were dilated. The skin on her face was the color of white porcelain. “It was terrible,” Hutchison recalls. “I was overwhelmed. She was very near death. I didn’t know what to do.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 309

> Beck’s head was also caked with a thick armor of frost. Balls of ice the size of grapes were matted to his hair and eyelids. After clearing the frozen detritus from Beck’s face, Hutchison discovered that the Texan was still alive, too:

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 312

> As they resumed their descent, a volley of grapefruit-sized stones came whizzing down from the upper mountain and one of them struck a Sherpa in the back of the head. “The rock just creamed him,” says Beidleman, who observed the incident from a short distance above. “It was sickening,” Klev Schoening recalls. “It sounded like he’d been hit with a baseball bat.” The force of the blow chipped a divot as large as a silver dollar from the Sherpa’s skull, knocked him unconscious, and sent him into cardiopulmonary arrest.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 323

> Devout Buddhists believe in sonam—an accounting of righteous deeds that, when large enough, enables one to escape the cycle of birth and rebirth and transcend forever this world of pain and suffering.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 337

> I’d always known that climbing mountains was a high-risk pursuit. I accepted that danger was an essential component of the game—without it, climbing would be little different from a hundred other trifling diversions.

> It was titillating to brush up against the enigma of mortality, to steal a glimpse across its forbidden frontier. Climbing was a magnificent activity, I firmly believed, not in spite of the inherent perils, but precisely because of them.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 338

> all told, Everest killed twelve men and women in the spring of 1996, the worst single-season death toll since climbers first set foot on the peak seventy-five years ago. Of the six climbers on Hall's expedition who reached the summit, only Mike Groom and I made it back down: four teammates with whom I'd laughed and vomited and held long, intimate conversations lost their lives. My actions—or failure to act—played a direct role in the death of Andy Harris. And while Yasuko Namba lay dying on the South Col, I was a mere 350 yards away, huddled inside a tent, oblivious to her struggle, concerned only with my own safety. The stain this has left on my psyche is not the sort of thing that washes off after a few months of grief and guilt-ridden self-reproach.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 341

> Perhaps the simplest way to reduce future carnage would be to ban bottled oxygen except for emergency medical use. A few reckless souls might perish trying to reach the summit without gas, but the great bulk of marginally competent climbers would be forced to turn back by their own physical limitations before they ascended high enough to get into serious trouble. And a no-gas regulation would have the corollary benefit of automatically reducing trash and crowding because considerably fewer people would attempt Everest if they knew supplemental oxygen was not an option.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 342

> Moreover, the two nations that control access to the peak—Nepal and China—are staggeringly poor. Desperate for hard currency, the governments of both countries have a vested interest in issuing as many expensive climbing permits as the market will support, and both are unlikely to enact any policies that significantly limit their revenues.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 343

> Or here's another way to look at it: between 1921 and May 1996, 144 people died and the peak was climbed some 630 times—a ratio of one in four. Last spring, 12 climbers died and 84 reached the summit—a ratio of one in seven. Compared to these historical standards, 1996 was actually a safer-than-average year.

Highlight (Yellow) | Page 352

> Lou had just returned from spending a weekend with Beck Weathers in Dallas. Following his helicopter evacuation from the Western Cwm, Beck had his right arm amputated halfway below the elbow. All four fingers and the thumb on his left hand were removed. His nose was amputated and reconstructed with tissue from his ear and forehead.
