Praise for Jon Krakauer’s
INTO THIN AIR

“A book that offers readers the emotional immediacy of a survivor’s testament as well as the precision, detail, and quest for accuracy of a great piece of journalism… It is impossible to read this book unmoved.”
—ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

“Brilliant, haunting… This is an angry book, made even more so by the fact that hardly anyone seems to have learned a thing from the tragedy.”
—SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

“Every bit as absorbing and unnerving as his bestseller, Into the Wild.”

“A searing book.”

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

—OUTSIDE

“Krakauer is an extremely gifted storyteller as well as a relentlessly honest and even-handed journalist, the story is riveting and wonderfully complex in its own right, and Krakauer makes one excellent decision after another about how to tell it… To call the book an adventure saga seems not to recognize that it is also a deeply thoughtful and finely wrought philosophical examination of the self.”
Krakauer introduces the many players until they feel familiar, then leads the reader with them up the mountain and into the so-called ‘Death Zone’ above 25,000 feet.

—San Francisco Chronicle

“Time collapses as, minute-by-minute, Krakauer rivetingly and movingly chronicles what ensued, much of which is near agony to read… A brilliantly told story.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“[Krakauer] proves as sure-footed in prose as he was on the mountain … quietly building the suspense as we follow the ill-fated expedition through its preparation and shakedown forays, and then delivering a lucid, blow-by-blow account of the cataclysmic storm and the death and agony following in its wake.”

—The New York Observer

“Into Thin Air reads like a fine novel—the main characters breathe their way through a plot so commanding, the book is hard to put down.”

—Amazon Reviews

“Make room on your shelf for mountaineering classics… Krakauer’s grip on your emotions will leave you gasping for breath.”

—Los Angeles Times

“[A] riveting account of events leading to the death of guides Rob Hall and Scott Fischer, assistant Andy Harris and two clients.”

—Boston Herald

“[A] gripping analysis of the tragedy.”

—The Tennesseean

“Into Thin Air is the … intense, taut, driving account of what happened. It is an engrossing book, difficult for the reader to put down … superbly reported.”

—Rocky Mountain News

“Astounding … honest … eloquent … Through objective and thorough research and in sparkling prose, Krakauer tells a story that awakens fury, disgust, admiration and tears.”

—The Times-Picayune (New Orleans)

“Meticulously researched and exceptionally well-written, Into Thin Air avoids the hype and easy condemnation that have infested other accounts. The book offers instead vivid details told matter-of-factly, almost quietly. The result is a deeply moving narrative that honors the courage of the people on the mountain while raising profound and possibly unanswerable questions about human behavior in a crisis.”

—Nashville Book Page

“Jon Krakauer offers fresh insights into the tragedy in his superb Into Thin Air, in which he adroitly sifts through the misunderstandings, miscalculations and misguided zeal that led his fellow climbers to their doom. His new book is, on every level, a worthy successor to his outstanding Into the Wild.”

—The Plain Dealer

“A taut, harrowing narrative of the most lethal season in Everest’s history … Krakauer offers a disturbing look at how technology, publicity, and commercialism have changed mountaineering.”

—Wisconsin State-Journal

“Just as he did in his previous book, the acclaimed Into the Wild, Krakauer employs exhaustive reporting, attention to detail, and a crisp, unpretentious writing style to shape the story.”

—Hartford Courant

“[Krakauer] has produced a narrative that is both meticulously researched and deftly constructed… His story rushes irresistible forward.”

—The New York Times Book Review

“Though it comes from the genre named for what it isn’t (nonfiction), this has the feel of literature: Krakauer is Ishmael, the narrator who lives to tell the story but is forever trapped within it… Krakauer’s reporting is steady but ferocious. The clink of ice in a glass, a poem of winter snow, will never sound the same.”

—Mirabella

“Every once in a while a work of nonfiction comes along that’s as good as anything a novelist could make up … Into Thin Air fits the bill.”

—Forbes

“Deeply upsetting, genuinely nightmarish… Krakauer writes indelibly… He’s brilliant… His story contains what must be one of the essences of hell: the unceasing potential for things to become worse than you fear.”

—Salon

“Into Thin Air is a remarkable work of reportage and self-examination…. And no book on the 1996 disaster is likely to consider so honestly the mistakes that killed his colleagues.”

—Newsday

“Jon Krakauer combines the tenacity and courage of the finest tradition of investigative journalism with the stylish subtlety and profound insight of the born writer. His account of an ascent of Mount Everest has led to a general reevaluation of climbing and of the commercialization of what was once a romantic, solitary sport, while his account of the life and death of Christopher McCandless, who died of starvation after challenging the Alaskan wilderness, delves even more deeply and disturbingly into the fascination of nature and the devastating effects of its lure on a young and curious mind.”

—Academy Award in Literature Citation from the American Academy of Arts and Letters

Also by Jon Krakauer

Iceland
Eiger Dreams
Into the Wild
Under the Banner of Heaven
Jon Krakauer
Into Thin Air

Jon Krakauer is the author of Eiger Dreams, Into the Wild, Into Thin Air, Under the Banner of Heaven, and Where Men Win Glory, and is the editor of the Modern Library Exploration series.
INTO THIN AIR

A Personal Account
of the Mount Everest Disaster

JON KRAKAUER

ANCHOR BOOKS
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NEW YORK

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Postscript

For Linda:
and in memory of Andy Harris, Doug Hansen,
Rob Hall, Yasuko Namba, Scott Fischer, Ngawang
Topche Sherpa, Chen Yu-Nan, Bruce Herrod,
Lopsang Jangbu Sherpa, and Anatoli Boukreev
INTRODUCTION

In March 1996, Outside magazine sent me to Nepal to participate in, and write about, a guided ascent of Mount Everest. I went as one of eight clients on an
expedition led by a well-known guide from New Zealand named Rob Hall. On May 10 I arrived on top of the mountain, but the summit came at a terrible cost.

Among my five teammates who reached the top, four, including Hall, perished in a rogue storm that blew in without warning while we were still high on the peak. By the time I’d descended to Base Camp nine climbers from four expeditions were dead, and three more lives would be lost before the month was out.

The expedition left me badly shaken, and the article was difficult to write. Nevertheless, five weeks after I returned from Nepal I delivered a manuscript to Outside, and it was published in the September issue of the magazine. Upon its completion I attempted to put Everest out of my mind and get on with my life, but that turned out to be impossible. Through a fog of messy emotions, I continued trying to make sense of what had happened up there, and I obsessively mulled the circumstances of my companions’ deaths.

The Outside piece was as accurate as I could make it under the circumstances, but my deadline had been unforgiving, the sequence of events had been frustratingly complex, and the memories of the survivors had been badly distorted by exhaustion, oxygen depletion, and shock. At one point during my research I asked three other people to recount an incident all four of us had witnessed high on the mountain, and none of us could agree on such crucial facts as the time, what had been said, or even who had been present. Within days after the Outside article went to press, I discovered that a few of the details I’d reported were in error. Most were minor inaccuracies of the sort that inevitably creep into works of deadline journalism, but one of my blunders was in no sense minor, and it had a devastating impact on the friends and family of one of the victims.

Only slightly less disconcerting than the article’s factual errors was the material that necessarily had to be omitted for lack of space. Mark Bryant, the editor of Outside, and Larry Burke, the publisher, had given me an extraordinary amount of room to tell the story: they ran the piece at 17,000 words—four or five times as long as a typical magazine feature. Even so, I felt that it was much too abbreviated to do justice to the tragedy. The Everest climb had rocked my life to its core, and it became desperately important for me to record the events in complete detail, unconstrained by a limited number of column inches. This book is the fruit of that compulsion.

The staggering unreliability of the human mind at high altitude made the research problematic. To avoid relying excessively on my own perceptions, I interviewed most of the protagonists at great length and on multiple occasions. When possible I also corroborated details with radio logs maintained by people at Base Camp, where clear thought wasn’t in such short supply. Readers familiar with the Outside article may notice discrepancies between certain details (primarily matters of time) reported in the magazine and those reported in the book; the revisions reflect new information that has come to light since publication of the magazine piece.

Several authors and editors I respect counseled me not to write the book as quickly as I did; they urged me to wait two or three years and put some distance
between me and the expedition in order to gain some crucial perspective. Their advice was sound, but in the end I ignored it—mostly because what happened on the mountain was gnawing my guts out. I thought that writing the book might purge Everest from my life.

It hasn’t, of course. Moreover, I agree that readers are often poorly served when an author writes as an act of catharsis, as I have done here. But I hoped something would be gained by spilling my soul in the calamity’s immediate aftermath, in the roil and torment of the moment. I wanted my account to have a raw, ruthless sort of honesty that seemed in danger of leaching away with the passage of time and the dissipation of anguish.

Some of the same people who warned me against writing hastily had also cautioned me against going to Everest in the first place. 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.

The plain truth is that I knew better but went to Everest anyway. And in doing so I was a party to the death of good people, which is something that is apt to remain on my conscience for a very long time.

Jon Krakauer
Seattle
November 1996

DRAMATIS PERSONAE
Mount Everest Spring 1996:

Adventure Consultants Guided Expedition

Rob Hall, New Zealand, leader and head guide
Mike Groom, Australia, guide
Andy “Harold” Harris, New Zealand, guide
Helen Wilton, New Zealand, Base Camp manager
Dr. Caroline Mackenzie, New Zealand, Base Camp doctor
Ang Tshering Sherpa, Nepal, Base Camp sirdar
Ang Dorje Sherpa, Nepal, climbing sirdar
Lhakpa Chhiri Sherpa, Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Kami Sherpa, Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Tenzing Sherpa, Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Arita Sherpa, Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Ngawang Norbu Sherpa, Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Chul dum Sherpa, Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Chhongba Sherpa, Nepal, Base Camp cook
Pemba Sherpa, Nepal, Base Camp Sherpa
Tendi Sherpa, Nepal, cook boy
Doug Hansen, USA, client
Dr. Seaborn Beck Weathers  USA, client
Yasuko Namba  Japan, client
Dr. Stuart Hutchison  Canada, client
Frank Fischbeck  Hong Kong, client
Lou Kasischke  USA, client
Dr. John Taske  Australia, client
Jon Krakauer  USA, client and journalist
Susan Allen  Australia, trekker
Nancy Hutchison  Canada, trekker

Mountain Madness Guided Expedition
Scott Fischer  USA, leader and head guide
Anatoli Boukreev  Russia, guide
Neal Beidleman  USA, guide
Dr. Ingrid Hunt  USA, Base Camp manager, team doctor
Lopsang Jangbu Sherpa  Nepal, climbing sirdar
Ngima Kale Sherpa  Nepal, Base Camp sirdar
Ngawang Topche Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Tashi Tshering Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Ngawang Dorje Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Ngawang Sya Kya Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Ngawang Tendi Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Tendi Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
“Big” Pemba Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Jeta Sherpa  Nepal, Base Camp Sherpa
Pemba Sherpa  Nepal, Base Camp cook boy
Sandy Hill Pittman  USA, client and journalist
Charlotte Fox  USA, client
Tim Madsen  USA, client
Pete Schoening  USA, client
Klev Schoening  USA, client
Lene Gammelgaard  Denmark, client
Martin Adams  USA, client
Dr. Dale Kruse  USA, client
Jane Bromet  USA, journalist

MacGillivray Freeman IMAX/IWERKS Expedition
David Breashears  USA, leader and film director
Jamling Norgay Sherpa  India, deputy leader and film talent
Ed Viesturs  USA, climber and film talent
Araceli Segarra  Spain, climber and film talent
Sumiyo Tsuzuki  Japan, climber and film talent
Robert Schauer  Austria, climber and cinematographer
Paula Barton Viesturs  USA, Base Camp manager
Audrey Salkeld  U.K., journalist
Liz Cohen  USA, film production manager
Liesl Clark  USA, film producer and writer
Wongchu Sherpa  Nepal, sirdar
Jangbu Sherpa  Nepal, lead camera Sherpa

Taiwanese National Expedition

“Makalu” Gau Ming-Ho  Taiwan, leader
Chen Yu-Nan  Taiwan, climber
Kao Tien Tzu  Taiwan, climber
Chang Jung Chang  Taiwan, climber
Hsieh Tzu Sheng  Taiwan, climber
Chhiring Sherpa  Nepal, sirdar
Kami Dorje Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Ngima Gombu Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Mingma Tshering Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Tenzing Nuri Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Dorje Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Pasang Tamang  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Ki Kami Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa

Johannesburg Sunday Times Expedition

Ian Woodall  U.K., leader
Bruce Herrod  U.K., deputy leader and photographer
Cathy O’Dowd  South Africa, climber
Deshun Deysel  South Africa, climber
Edmund February  South Africa, climber
Andy de Klerk  South Africa, climber
Andy Hackland  South Africa, climber
Ken Woodall  South Africa, climber
Tierry Renard  France, climber
Ken Owen  South Africa, journalist and trekker
Philip Woodall  U.K., Base Camp manager
Alexandrine Gaudin  France, administrative assistant
Dr. Charlotte Noble  South Africa, team doctor
Ken Vernon  Australia, journalist
Richard Shorey  South Africa, photographer
Patrick Conroy  South Africa, radio journalist
Ang Dorje Sherpa  Nepal, climbing sirdar
Pemba Tendi Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Jangbu Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Ang Babu Sherpa  Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Dawa Sherpa  
Nepal, climbing Sherpa

**Alpine Ascents International Guided Expedition**

Todd Burleson  
USA, leader and guide

Pete Athans  
USA, guide

Jim Williams  
USA, guide

Dr. Ken Kamler  
USA, client and team doctor

Charles Corfield  
USA, client

Becky Johnston  
USA, trekker and screenwriter

**International Commercial Expedition**

Mal Duff  
U.K., leader

Mike Trueman  
Hong Kong, deputy leader

Michael Burns  
U.K., Base Camp manager

Dr. Henrik Jessen Hansen  
Denmark, expedition doctor

Veikka Gustafsson  
Finland, climber

Kim Sejberg  
Denmark, climber

Ginge Fullen  
U.K., climber

Jaakko Kurvinen  
Finland, climber

Euan Duncan  
U.K., climber

**Himalayan Guides Commercial Expedition**

Henry Todd  
U.K., leader

Mark Pfetzer  
USA, climber

Ray Door  
USA, climber

Michael Jorgensen  
Denmark, climber

Brigitte Muir  
Australia, climber

Paul Deegan  
U.K., climber

Neil Laughton  
U.K., climber

Graham Ratcliffe  
U.K., climber

Thomas Sjögren  
Sweden, climber

Tina Sjögren  
Sweden, climber

Kami Nuru Sherpa  
Nepal, sirdar

**Swedish Solo Expedition**

Göran Kropp  
Sweden, climber

Frederic Bloomquist  
Sweden, filmmaker

Ang Rita Sherpa  
Nepal, climbing Sherpa and film crew member

**Norwegian Solo Expedition**

Petter Neby  
Norway, climber

**New Zealand-Malaysian Guided Pumori Expedition**

Guy Cotter  
New Zealand, leader and guide

Dave Hiddleston  
New Zealand, guide

Chris Jillet  
New Zealand, guide

**American Commercial Pumori/Lhotse Expedition**
Dan Mazur          USA, leader
Scott Darsney      USA, climber and photographer
Chantal Mauduit    France, climber
Stephen Koch       USA, climber and snowboarder
Brent Bishop       USA, climber
Jonathan Pratt     U.K., climber
Diane Taliaferro   USA, climber
Dave Sharman       U.K., climber
Tim Horvath        USA, climber
Dana Lynge         USA, climber
Martha Johnson     USA, climber

*Nepali Everest Cleaning Expedition*
Sonam Gyalchhen Sherpa Nepal, leader

*Himalayan Rescue Association Clinic*
(in Pheriche Village)
Dr. Jim Litch       USA, staff doctor
Dr. Larry Silver    USA, staff doctor
Dr. Cecile Bouvray France, staff doctor
Laura Ziemer        USA, assistant

*Indo-Tibetan Border Police Everest Expedition*
(climbing from the Tibetan side of the mountain)
Mohindor Singh     India, leader
Harbhajan Singh    India, deputy leader and climber
Tsewang Smanla     India, climber
Tsewang Paljor     India, climber
Dorje Morup        India, climber
Hira Ram           India, climber
Tashi Ram          India, climber
Sange Sherpa       India, climbing Sherpa
Nadra Sherpa       India, climbing Sherpa
Koshing Sherpa     India, climbing Sherpa

*Japanese-Fukuoka Everest Expedition*
(climbing from the Tibetan side of the mountain)
Koji Yada          Japan, leader
Hiroshi Hanada     Japan, climber
Eisuke Shigekawa   Japan, climber
Pasang Tshering Sherpa Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Pasang Kami Sherpa Nepal, climbing Sherpa
Any Gyalzen        Nepal, climbing Sherpa

2 Not everyone present on Mt. Everest in the spring of 1996 is listed.
ONE

EVEREST SUMMIT

MAY 10, 1996 • 29,028 FEET

It would seem almost as though there were a cordon drawn round the upper part of these great peaks beyond which no man may go. The truth of course lies in the fact that, at altitudes of 25,000 feet and beyond, the effects of low atmospheric pressure upon the human body are so severe that really difficult mountaineering is impossible and the consequences even of a mild storm may be deadly, that nothing but the most perfect conditions of weather and snow offers the slightest chance of success, and that on the last lap of the climb no party is in a position to choose its day....

No, it is not remarkable that Everest did not yield to the first few attempts; indeed, it would have been very surprising and not a little sad if it had, for that is not the way of great mountains. Perhaps we had become a little arrogant with our fine new technique of ice-claw and rubber slipper, our age of easy mechanical conquest. We had forgotten that the mountain still holds the master card, that it will grant success only in its own good time. Why else does mountaineering retain its deep fascination?

Eric Shipton, in 1938

Upon That Mountain

Straddling the top of the world, one foot in China and the other in Nepal, I cleared the ice from my oxygen mask, hunched a shoulder against the wind, and stared absently down at the vastness of Tibet. I understood on some dim, detached level that the sweep of earth beneath my feet was a spectacular sight. I’d been fantasizing about this moment, and the release of emotion that would accompany it, for many months. But now that I was finally here, actually standing on the summit of Mount Everest, I just couldn’t summon the energy to care.

It was early in the afternoon of May 10, 1996. I hadn’t slept in fifty-seven hours. The only food I’d been able to force down over the preceding three days was a bowl of ramen soup and a handful of peanut M&Ms. Weeks of violent coughing had left me with two separated ribs that made ordinary breathing an excruciating trial. 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. Under the circumstances, I was incapable of feeling much of anything except cold and tired.

I’d arrived on the summit a few minutes after Anatoli Boukreev, a Russian climbing guide working for an American commercial expedition, and just ahead of Andy Harris, a guide on the New Zealand–based team to which I belonged. Although I was only slightly acquainted with Boukreev, I’d come to know and like Harris well during the preceding six weeks. I snapped four quick photos of Harris and Boukreev striking summit poses, then turned and headed down. My watch read 1:17 P.M. All told, I’d spent less than five minutes on the roof of the world.

A moment later, I paused to take another photo, this one looking down the Southeast Ridge, the route we had ascended. Training my lens on a pair of
climbers approaching the summit, I noticed something that until that moment had escaped my attention. To the south, where the sky had been perfectly clear just an hour earlier, a blanket of clouds now hid Pumori, Ama Dablam, and the other lesser peaks surrounding Everest.

Later—after six bodies had been located, after a search for two others had been abandoned, after surgeons had amputated the gangrenous right hand of my teammate Beck Weathers—people would ask why, if the weather had begun to deteriorate, had climbers on the upper mountain not heeded the signs? Why did veteran Himalayan guides keep moving upward, ushering a gaggle of relatively inexperienced amateurs—each of whom had paid as much as $65,000 to be taken safely up Everest—into an apparent death trap?

Nobody can speak for the leaders of the two guided groups involved, because both men are dead. But I can attest that nothing I saw early on the afternoon of May 10 suggested that a murderous storm was bearing down. To my oxygen-depleted mind, the clouds drifting up the grand valley of ice known as the Western Cwm looked innocuous, wispy, insubstantial. Gleaming in the brilliant midday sun, they appeared no different from the harmless puffs of convection condensation that rose from the valley almost every afternoon.

As I began my descent I was extremely anxious, but my concern had little to do with the weather: a check of the gauge on my oxygen tank had revealed that it was almost empty. I needed to get down, fast.

The uppermost shank of Everest’s Southeast Ridge is a slender, heavily corniced fin of rock and wind-scoured snow that snakes for a quarter mile between the summit and a subordinate pinnacle known as the South Summit. Negotiating the serrated ridge presents no great technical hurdles, but the route is dreadfully exposed. After leaving the summit, fifteen minutes of cautious shuffling over a 7,000-foot abyss brought me to the notorious Hillary Step, a pronounced notch in the ridge that demands some technical maneuvering. As I clipped into a fixed rope and prepared to rappel over the lip, I was greeted with an alarming sight.

Thirty feet below, more than a dozen people were queued up at the base of the Step. Three climbers were already in the process of hauling themselves up the rope that I was preparing to descend. Exercising my only option, I unclipped from the communal safety line and stepped aside.

The traffic jam was comprised of climbers from three expeditions: the team I belonged to, a group of paying clients under the leadership of the celebrated New Zealand guide Rob Hall; another guided party headed by the American Scott Fischer; and a noncommercial Taiwanese team. Moving at the snail’s pace that is the norm above 26,000 feet, the throng labored up the Hillary Step one by one, while I nervously bided my time.

Harris, who’d left the summit shortly after I did, soon pulled up behind me. Wanting to conserve whatever oxygen remained in my tank, I asked him to reach inside my backpack and turn off the valve on my regulator, which he did. For the next ten minutes I felt surprisingly good. My head cleared. I actually seemed less tired than I had with the gas turned on. Then, abruptly, I sensed that I was
suffocating. My vision dimmed and my head began to spin. I was on the brink of losing consciousness.

Instead of turning my oxygen off, Harris, in his hypoxically impaired state, had mistakenly cranked the valve open to full flow, draining the tank. I’d just squandered the last of my gas going nowhere. There was another tank waiting for me at the South Summit, 250 feet below, but to get there I would have to descend the most exposed terrain on the entire route without the benefit of supplemental oxygen.

And first I had to wait for the mob to disperse. I removed my now useless mask, planted my ice ax into the mountain’s frozen hide, and hunkered on the ridge. As I exchanged banal congratulations with the climbers filing past, inwardly I was frantic: “Hurry it up, hurry it up!” I silently pleaded. “While you guys are fucking around here, I’m losing brain cells by the millions!”

Most of the passing crowd belonged to Fischer’s group, but near the back of the parade two of my teammates eventually appeared, Rob Hall and Yasuko Namba. Demure and reserved, the forty-seven-year-old Namba was forty minutes away from becoming the oldest woman to climb Everest and the second Japanese woman to reach the highest point on each continent, the so-called Seven Summits. Although she weighed just ninety-one pounds, her sparrowlike proportions disguised a formidable resolve; to an astounding degree, Yasuko had been propelled up the mountain by the unwavering intensity of her desire.

Later still, Doug Hansen arrived atop the Step. Another member of our expedition, Doug was a postal worker from a Seattle suburb who’d become my closest friend on the mountain. “It’s in the bag!” I yelled over the wind, trying to sound more upbeat than I felt. Exhausted, Doug mumbled something from behind his oxygen mask that I didn’t catch, shook my hand weakly, then continued plodding upward.

At the very end of the line was Scott Fischer, whom I knew casually from Seattle, where we both lived. Fischer’s strength and drive were legendary—in 1994 he’d climbed Everest without using bottled oxygen—so I was surprised at how slowly he was moving and how hammered he looked when he pulled his mask aside to say hello. “Bruuuuuuce!” he wheezed with forced cheer, employing his trademark frat-boyish greeting. When I asked how he was doing, Fischer insisted that he was feeling fine: “Just dragging ass a little today for some reason. No big deal.” With the Hillary Step finally clear, I clipped into the strand of orange rope, swung quickly around Fischer as he slumped over his ice ax, and rappelled over the edge.