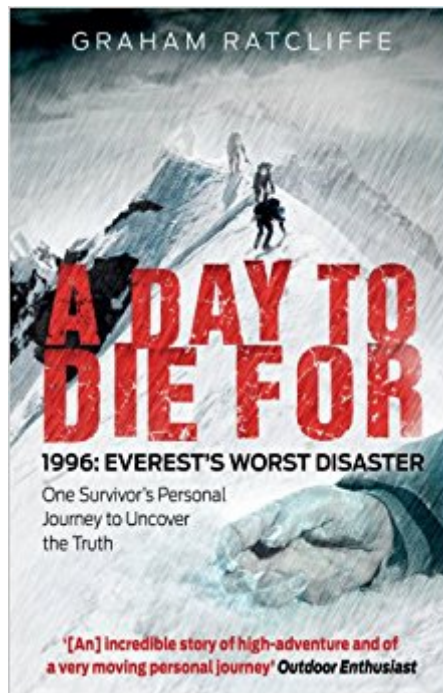




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# A Day To Die For: 1996: Everest's Worst Disaster



## Synopsis

The truth about the 1996 Everest disaster by one of its survivors, uncovering crucial new information— On May 10 and 11, 1996, eight climbers perished in what remains the worst disaster in Everest's history. Following the tragedy, numerous accounts were published, with Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* becoming an international bestseller—but the whole story has not been told. This book reveals for the first time the full, startling facts that led to the tragedy. Graham Ratcliffe, the first British climber to reach the summit of Mount Everest twice, was a firsthand witness, having spent the night on Everest's South Col at 26,000 feet, sheltering from the deadly storm. For years, he has shouldered a burden of guilt, feeling that he and his teammates could have saved lives that fateful night. His quest for answers has led to discoveries so important to an understanding of the disaster that he now questions why these facts were not made public sooner. History is dotted with high-profile disasters that both horrify and capture the attention of the public, but very rarely is the prevailing view of them revised to such devastating effect.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[An] incredible story of high-adventure and of a very moving personal journey" Outdoor Enthusiast  
"Graham Ratcliffe has experienced triumph but also tragedy ... and for the very first time tells of his remarkable journey" Daily Express  
"A welcome addition to the history of mountaineering ... an absorbing read" -- Boardman Tasker Prize  
"I was completely engrossed ... this is pretty serious stuff ... the writing is forthright and precise and the book gallops along at a riveting pace . . it's a must

read" The Climber, New Zealand Alpine Club "Reads like a detective thriller ... a book that pulls no punches and tells it how it was" SA Mountain Sport

Graham Ratcliffe is a member of Henry Todd's team who was also on Mount Everest's South Col on May 10, 1996.

Have you ever seen a movie that you waited throughout the film for something to happen, but nothing ever did? When I open a book, I am one who feels I really ought to keep slogging through it, even though it never seems to quite "happen." That's the way this book is. Ratcliffe begins by telling the story of how he got to be on Everest in the tragic year of 1996, and that story takes up the first half of the book. But then, he begins to wonder whether any of the teams on the mountain that May were receiving weather forecasts. This is especially important to him, in that Rob Hall's and Scott Fisher's teams asked the team Ratcliffe was on, not to attempt the summit on May 10th. They asked Ratcliffe's team to hold off until the following day, so they could go ahead with their planned summit attempt on the 10th. The leader of Ratcliffe's team agreed, and the tragic storm that blew in the evening of the 10th left him to wonder whether Hall and Fisher - when they negotiated this deal - knew that the weather would turn as sour as it did, thus leaving Ratcliffe's team - trying to summit on the 11th - in grave danger. Ratcliffe is a Brit and a public school boy, and it is probably from that perspective only that one could understand how he could essentially build the next several years of his life around attempting to answer this question. He badgered folks from all over the globe who might have any knowledge of the receipt of weather forecasts on Everest. He turned the living room of his and his wife's apartment into an office, over-stuffed with correspondence and other weather and detritus. It was a tough slog. Some of the people he contacted undoubtedly just did not want to re-visit what had been a horrible experience, either as a direct participant or an observer. Others, I'm sure, truly didn't know or remember and got tired of being harassed by Ratcliffe. Others, I'm just as sure were concerned about the possibility of the families of the fatalities lawyering up against the possibility that Hall and Fisher did indeed know the weather was slated to turn treacherous and led their clients into it anyway. But at the end of the day, the fundamental question for Ratcliffe seems most likely to be, "What difference does it make, anyway." Yeah, he did finally establish that Hall and Fisher, as well as the Imax team received weather forecasts of one kind or another, which leaves open for argument whether they should have left for the summit on the day in question. But was hushing up the weather report any more important than the fact that they so graphically and tragically ignored their own deadline for being off the summit and on the way back down the world's

tallest mountain? Jon Krakauer made it up and back, although totally exhausted and unable even to help search for lost climbers by the time he got back to the advance camp. Motor sports might be a good example here of how participants in death sports ought to approach them emotionally. Motor racing is vastly safer than a half-century ago, when few careers lasted until retirement, but the attitude among these competitors is that the very worst thing that can happen always could happen. And if it does, well, everybody knows and accepts the risk. Why should it be different on Everest?

The author spends the third half of the book telling a very brief version of his experience on Everest on 10 May 1996. He then proposes a theory of how Fischer and Hall plotted to get his group to delay its summit try to 11 May. Then he tries to prove that Hall and Fischer KNEW that the storm was going to hit that day. He fails miserably in trying to prove his hypothesis. This is nothing but sour grapes from a guy who didn't get a chance to summit in 1996. Granted, there were a lot of poor decisions made that May. However, this book borders on libelous in its failed attempt to prove that Rob and Scott deliberately spoiled a team's attempt to summit, merely to increase the probability of their own paying clients' chances of summiting on the 10th.

I've read many, many mountaineering books over the last several years (I'm an armchair climber!) but this is by far the least enjoyable book on the subject I've read. I found it quite boring in many parts, and was skipping through pages and pages almost from the beginning. I think there's an interesting story buried in there, but so many unimportant details are strung out throughout the book. It seems that the author tried and tried to make the case that somehow weather forecasts were withheld, misinterpreted, sinisterly manipulated, given but not shared--by the end I wasn't sure what the point was. The sections of the book dealing with actual climbing were interesting, hence my two stars, but the rest...I found boring and tedious.

Not an enjoyable read. In a narrative sense the book is quite disjointed, meandering from place to place and location to location with little rhyme or reason, serving more like an autobiography than a researched review of the 96 disaster. The writing style however, is nowhere near this book's biggest problem...This book is littered with cherry-picked quotes, hearsay, unsubstantiated "evidence" and wild assumptions designed to support the author's apparent conspiracy theory that everybody on Everest in May 1996 had somehow conspired to force the author and his team into a life-threatening situation by hiding the weather reports from him and his team. Yet he is unable to produce with any certainty these reports. After reading quote after quote from people who were there who told the

author, many of which are reproduced in this book, that the weather reports were non-existent or sketchy and vague at best, the author gleefully reads between the lines of their comments to make assumptions about people's motives and decisions - many of the people he blames are dead and are in no position to defend themselves. And the final straw at the end of the book when he makes the insinuation that somehow these elusive weather reports and the alleged actions of Rob Hall, Scott Fisher, David Brashers, Ed Viesturs and many of the other climbers and team leaders present in 1996 in "hiding" the truth of the situation somehow led to the death of Anatoli Boukreev a year later on Annapurna is sickening. This book reads like someone with survivor's guilt, on a witch-hunt to find someone to hold responsible for the tragedy on May 10, 1996 - the author was there and due to his own unawareness of what was happening to the people on the mountain, was unable to render assistance. Latching on to 2 lines in a magazine that the author was completely unable to reproduce, locate or substantiate, this book borders on slander. While no-one can argue mistakes were made by a number of people, in extreme conditions in possibly the most hostile environment on earth, this book adds nothing to the existing narrative or events, and appears to serve only to salve the author's conscience as circumstances left him unable to render assistance on that fateful night. Please don't waste your money or your time.

This book was a very laborious account of the author's life from 1995 to 2009, including numerous events that weren't particularly relevant to the main story line. The author tried to find a "smoking gun", but the evidence wasn't very convincing.

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