



High Crimes: the Fate of Everest in an Age of Greed

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High Crimes is journalist Michael Kudas's gripping account of life on top of the world--where man is every bit as deadly as Mother Nature. In the years following the publication of *Into Thin Air*, much has changed on Mount Everest. Among all the books documenting the glorious adventures in mountains around the world, none details how the recent infusion of wealthy climbers is drawing crime to the highest place on the planet. The change is caused both by a tremendous boom in traffic, and a new class of parasitic and predatory adventurer. It's likely that Jon Krakauer would not recognize the camps that he visited on Mount Everest almost a decade ago. This book takes readers on a harrowing tour of the criminal underworld on the slopes of the world's most majestic mountain. *High Crimes* describes two major expeditions: the tragic story of Nils Antezana, a climber who died on Everest after he was abandoned by his guide; as well as the author's own story of his participation in the Connecticut Everest Expedition, guided by George Dijmarescu and his wife and climbing partner, Lhakpa Sherpa. Dijmarescu, who at first seemed well-intentioned and charming, turned increasingly hostile to his own wife, as well as to the author and the other women on the team. By the end of the expedition, the three women could not travel unaccompanied in base camp due to the threat of violence. Those that tried to stand against the violence and theft found that the worst of the intimidation had followed them home to Connecticut. Beatings, thefts, drugs, prostitution, coercion, threats, and abandonment on the highest slopes of Everest and other mountains have become the rule rather than the exception. Kudas describes many such experiences, and explores the larger issues these stories raise with thriller-like intensity.

High Crimes: the Fate of Everest in an Age of Greed Details

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From Reader Review High Crimes: the Fate of Everest in an Age of Greed for online ebook

Chris says

An in depth look at the various issues surrounding Everest. Professional reviewers have likened it to a sequel to *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster*. In many ways it is. Koda is a little more damning than Nick Heil, but he does a very good job of fairness. It should be read with Heil's *Dark Summit: The True Story of Everest's Most Controversial Season*.

Andy Miller says

This nonfiction book tells of the other side of the world of climbing Mt Everest. While most stories about Everest focus on the heroism, the mountaineering ethic, the camaraderie of those who climb Everest. "High Crimes" written by a reporter who is also a mountaineer, shows a different side. Too many climbers do not have the skills or conditioning for a successful climb or have the money for a fully supported guide service. But they persist anyway, often hiring sketchy guides for minimal amounts of money. The sketchy guides themselves cause problems by their greed and incompetence. The book also touches on thefts on the mountain of tents, sleeping bags and especially the expensive and coveted oxygen bottles.

My only fault with the book is its structure and narrative which tells of two stories; one is the author's own experience at his attempt of climbing Everest and the other is about a 69 year old doctor who died after descending from an Everest summit and the consensus of the climbing community that it was due to incompetence by one of the "bargain" guides. Both climbs happened at the same time but on different routes and different parties, any cohesion between the two was lost by the author's going on tangents during the narratives discussing other climbers, other climbs, other ethical issues of mountaineering.

But the substance was great, it included nuanced analysis of the issues on the mountain; what is the responsibility of the prepared climbers and guides who invest tens of thousands of dollars to pursue a dream when confronted by the results of an ill prepared attempt that seems planned on leaching off the more prepared climbers, the thefts by some Sherpas balanced by the poverty of their people contrasted to the vast amounts of money that come to the mountain.

Beverly says

Similar to *Into Thin Air*, but not as deeply felt. Koda is much less spiritual than Jon Krakauer. It describes Koda's 2004 trip to Everest and the continued spiral down into crime, drug use and violence of those who are using the mountain for their own purposes, where lots of money is to be made, criminals will follow,

Mazola1 says

High Crimes reads a bit like a failed attempt to climb Mount Everest. And indeed, that is what much of the book is about, various failed attempts to conquer the mountain, some merely discouraging and disappointing,

others misbegotten and tragic. At times the book is compelling and absorbing, but at other times it gets tedious and boring. It covers a lot of the same ground over and over, seeming to go up and down, and then back up and down again. Some parts make quick and compelling reading while others are pretty tough slogging. All this back and forth gives the book a choppy pace, and leaves the reader a bit exhausted by the end.

The book paints Everest as the world's highest crime scene, a place full of thieves, rogues, self absorbed shits and worse. While much of this is undoubtedly true, the book does seem to have an axe to grind and might be just a tad bit unbalanced. But you certainly know which characters wear the black hats in this dark tale, and the author obviously has personal animosity for some of them, stemming from his encounters with them during his own unsuccessful attempt to summit Everest.

By telling the story of two climbers allegedly abandoned high on the mountain and left to die by selfish guides whose behavior is described as callously indifferent if not downright criminal, High Crimes highlights some of the most pressing problems confronting Everest today. These include the increasing number of inexperienced, infirm, and unwise amateurs clogging the slopes and the ill trained guides who exploit them.

I guess Everest could be seen as a microcosm of the modern world, putting the spotlight on a lot of what's wrong with it, from selfishness, lack of concern for our fellow human beings, the ease with which we pollute formerly pristine environments and the frequently pernicious effects of technology and wealth. But I have a feeling that the people who climb Everest may well not be like most of the rest of us at all.

It could be that the extreme environment of Everest brings out the worst in people by putting them under extreme psychological and physical stress. Or it could be that there is a quantum leap between most people and those that feel like they can only be most alive by taking what most of us would regard as foolish risks to accomplish a feat that at bottom may not be worth a person's life.

Are the people that populate High Crimes representative of those who climb Everest? If so, do they reflect society going to hell in a handbasket? Or are they and Everest sui generis? Is Everest a cautionary tale? Or is it a dark and twisted freak show? Read this book and decide for yourself.

Amar Pai says

This guy tries a little too hard to expose the "seedy underbelly" of the Everest scene. In this book he recounts the drama behind both his own disastrous failed attempt to summit, and the drama of some others who ended up dead due to bad sherpa'ing, stolen equipment, etc. etc. Problem is he's an unreliable narrator; you never know if the people he's badmouthing are actually that bad, or if he's just a whiny useless sad sack. Little bit of A, little bit of B.

Nevertheless I did get sucked into the main scandal covered by the book. Gustavo Lisi is so villainous! (He's this mountain guide whose client dies while they're climbing together... I won't spoil by telling more, but basically he's a sociopathic con man.) It was interesting to read about all the gossip, drama, fraud, petty larceny, brawling and bickering that goes on at Base Camp, as opposed to man's heroic triumph over nature etc.

Oh one thing that really annoyed me about this book-- Kostas just takes it as a given that every climber on Everest has a moral obligation to help any other climber who's in trouble. I don't see that as obvious at all. If you think mountaineers who step over a dying man on their way to the summit are guilty of "murder," why is it ok for you to keep most of your paycheck rather than donate it to Oxfam International? I think most people

just haven't thought through the consequences of the moral positions they hold. See: *Living High and Letting Die* .

Not only does he moralize about people not rescuing other people, he acts like every death on the mountain is a massive avoidable tragedy. It's not a tragedy. It's some rich blokes willingly exposing themselves to mortal risk for the sake of their ego or inner satisfaction. Climb your mountain if you want, we all do crazy ish. Just don't expect my pity if it doesn't work out. (I always think of that guy in the Everest IMAX movie who got caught in the infamous 96 storm and froze to death on the mountain top, while his wife was 8 months pregnant. Really dude? You couldn't wait?)

Donald says

Having read most any book I can find on mountaineering and Everest in particular, this one stands out. Like many, I read Krakauer's "Into Thin Air", which is a must read and starting place for anyone interested in Everest. Most other books on Everest are either not as well written or not as interesting. Kotas and Krakauer are both journalists first and mountaineers second, which in the end (I believe) produces an superior book.

Aside from being very well written, Kotas tells a climbing story that I had never heard. Kotas tells the dark stories of climbing, the ones other authors are certainly aware of but have chosen not to reveal.

Kotas tells of his own experience on the mountain, of how some on his team turned homicidal in their quest for the summit. He tells of theft high on the mountain, where the consequences can be deadly. He tells the story of a doctor who died while being led by a deadbeat liar who claimed to be an experienced guide, but was only interested in using his client's money to satisfy his own ambition.

In the end, I left the book with a greater appreciation of the lengths some are willing to go to in order to satisfy their own ambitions (not completely dissimilar to business in the US). Other authors will teach you to respect the mountain. Kotas will teach you to watch your back whenever you are not alone on the mountain.

Eric_W says

Mt. Everest has become a vast garbage dump. Persons of all persuasions, limitations (be the first without oxygen), handicaps (be the first asthmatic), ages (be the first over 70), and genders (the first transsexual – just kidding, at least so far) – if they have the funds – can pay an outfitter to get them to the summit. Some outfitters are better – and more reliable and honest – than others. Some steal supplies, others try to make it on the cheap. Base camps are now filled with prostitutes and hustlers, trash is everywhere (including bodies on the way up.) Aside from the fact that only an idiot would want to face the hazards and hardship of preparing for, and then climbing the mountain, which I do not need to remind anyone, has already been surmounted numerous times, it kills people. The base camps are virtually lawless and Kathmandu resembles nothing more than a shanty town.

Kordas follows the climbs of two parties. One, led by an unscrupulous guide, is fraught with difficulty and leaves a member, a Bolivian doctor, to die. His own party bickers and becomes downright nasty. Sure is fun to read about though. Best on a summer day when the temperature is over 90.

By the way, the TV series on climbing the mountain, Everest: Beyond the Limit, is outstanding. You can get it cheaply through iTunes. My hat is off to the cameramen, who not only had to climb the mountain, but lug

the frigging camera along with them.

Other titles to read with this one:

Into Thin Air A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster

Dark Summit The True Story of Everest's Most Controversial Season

Kim says

I really did not like this book at all. The book explores the crime and unethical behavior surrounding Mt. Everest today. The author questions why there are so many deaths on Everest. A 69 year old man dying while trying to summit. Climbers who refuse to use supplemental oxygen. Climbers without limbs...I have to wonder what are these people doing there in the first place and why did they feel invincible?? For all the time spent bashing the inexperienced climbers I have no idea why the author felt he was qualified to climb, let alone his wife. I felt like the author wrote this book to justify to the world why he personally never made it to the top.

Lori says

A real page turner! Crime, selfishness, natural disasters, death, frostbite, summit fever...

I have two criticisms of this book that prevent me from giving it five stars. The first is its structure--Kodas chronicles two Everest summit attempts that take place in the same season but on different routes: his own Connecticut Everest expedition and the summit bid of Dr. Nils Antezana, an older climber. Chapters go back and forth between the two accounts--and not chronologically--with sidetracks into numerous other stories, background info, and previous seasons' climbs. All the info is highly compelling, but the sheer number of characters (I think there were 5-7 Davids alone) is confusing and the back and forth is jarring--just as I was totally engrossed by one story, the chapter ends and I had to re-gear for the continuation of a previously interrupted story.

My second problem with the book is Kodas' grievance with his climbing expedition partners seems to have compromised his objectivity. He recounts every injustice done to him, every hurled insult, every piece of equipment lost or unpaid for or unfairly acquired. I got a little bogged down in the telling of Kodas' summit bid because of this.

For me, the excellent part of the book is the tragic telling of the events leading to the death of Dr. Antezana. Kodas does a great job of portraying Dr. Antezana and his family, who come across as such humane, kind, loving people. Yet Kodas also is honest about how Dr. Antezana's lack of judgement and intense desire to summit Everest contribute to his downfall.

Kodas also does a good job of laying out all sides of the dilemmas inherent in guided high altitude climbing. Is a climber's first responsibility his own summit bid (to say nothing of his own life) or to helping other climbers in bad to desperate situations? should the big expensive climbing outfits share their gear and expertise with those who show up unprepared and under-funded? No easy answers.

Susan Liston says

Oh dear, this book is all over the place. Partly the story of the author's failed trip to Everest and all the dreadful people around him, partly the story of a Bolivian-American doctor who died on his attempt, and the doctor's daughter's quest to find out exactly what happened to him (and to expose his "guide" as a evil lying fraud.) And partly a bunch more stories in which we are treated to lots of other reasons not to try to climb Mount Everest. Mother Nature isn't your only adversary, you must also deal with criminally faulty equipment, shirkers, thieves, con artists, cheapskates, liars, abusers, druggies, etc. One does wonder if the author exaggerates a tad...and/or was possibly a pill himself that didn't "get along"...probably a bit of all of it. At any rate, it does make whatever you are doing at the moment seem a lot wiser and saner than climbing a 28,000 ft mountain in Nepal. (or Peru, or Alaska, even Connecticut, where the author lives, apparently all the rock climbers there are real nasty too!)

LibraryCin says

4.5 stars

Journalist Michael Kudas takes a look at how busy Everest is and the issues that have happened due to its popularity. Primarily, he is looking at the fraud and theft that happens there (plus more). The consequences of fraud and theft at Everest, though, versus anywhere else, can turn deadly.

Kudas climbed Everest in 2004 with a neighbour, George, their wives, and a few other people. Things turned sour very quickly. So, he describes his own experiences with that group, as well as recounting 69-year old Nils Antezana's death on Everest, at the same time as Kudas and his group were there, but Antezana, his guide and two Sherpas were climbing the other side of Everest.

Wow! This was very good. Kudas, being a journalist, is a good writer, and I just wanted to keep reading. I didn't want to put the book down. Nothing's going to live up to *Into Thin Air* for me, but this comes close. It does jump around in place and time; however, I was still able to follow. There are lots of people involved and lots of stories, but I think that actually helped me figure out time/place, as Kudas focused on the two main stories and added in a few others here and there, but always came back to the main stories. For anyone with an interest in Everest, this is definitely worth the read!

Ian says

Michael Kudas, who makes his living as a reporter and photojournalist with *The Hartford Courant*, focuses this book on his experience attempting to climb Mount Everest in 2004 as part of the Connecticut Everest Expedition, which included his wife and fellow journalist Carolyn Moreau, and Bolivian-born physician Nils Antezana, who successfully reached the summit of Everest but was later abandoned by his "guide," Argentinean Gustavo Lisi, and Sherpa's and perished on the mountain and occurred at the same time as the Connecticut team's attempt. The title of the book reflects how the glory of being able to reach the summit of the world highest mountains, the Himalayas, changes and reveals climbers (of varying experience and ability as shown in the book) to be either heroes or villains by uncovering cases of theft, threats, beatings, and abandonment that have become common in mountain climbing. "The change is caused both by a tremendous boom in traffic to the world's mountains and a new class of parasitic and predatory adventurer." (Publisher description)

There were two main issues that I had with this book. While I did enjoy reading it and would highly recommend it to anyone who enjoys nonfiction, there are so many people involved in both Kodal's experience climbing Everest and Nils Antezana's journey that I could not remember what importance they had even though Kodal does a great job of explaining each of the two expeditions involved in the book (including the turmoil and dissolution of his team) and the book seems to include every detail of the expeditions (Kodal's account of threats, insults and equipment issues) to the back-stories related Dr. Antezana's life, family and his eventual death on Everest. The important features of the book include understanding who can be trusted in tense and often life-threatening situations, the issue of experience and ability climbing in high altitude, and whether glory of reaching the summit of Everest is more important than getting help for someone whose life is at risk. The part of the book that I enjoyed the most was the determination of the Antezana family (Nils's wife Gladys, daughter Fabiola, son David and Fabiola's husband Davide Percipalle) to discover the truth of Nils Antezana's death and the mysterious past of Gustavo Lisi, the man that led Nils on Everest, along with Michael Kodal and several climbers who participated in each of the expeditions. This book may not be suitable for some readers because it contains sometimes graphic descriptions of the turmoil of the various expeditions, descriptions of the many hardships faced by the climbers, and strong language.

Janette Fleming says

In 2004, journalist Michael Kodal joined local mountain climbers from home on an expedition to Mount Everest. He anticipated an exhilarating and arduous adventure among a group of like-minded idealists that he could report to his readers back in Connecticut. But on the Himalayan mountain, he discovered thieves, prostitutes, con men, and blackmailers. There were people who would do anything for a quick buck, or a guarantee of reaching the top. And some of them were on his own team.

Thieves stole equipment on which the team's lives depended, Kodal's life was threatened by one of his teammates, and a climbing partner was beaten unconscious by another in Base Camp. He returned from the Himalaya disillusioned. But a plea for help from the daughter of a mountaineer who vanished on Everest on the very day that Kodal had retreated from his own disintegrating team prompted him to return to Everest and uncover an underworld that preys on unsuspecting climbers on major peaks around the world.

High Crimes is a shocking expose of the dark underside of Everest: people stepping over dying climbers on their way up; unscrupulous con men who sell faulty oxygen tanks that leave climbers without air when their lives depend on it; drugs and prostitution in Base Camp; and people all but murdered in the cutthroat race to get to the top. Illustrated with incredible photographs and written with thriller-like pacing, High Crimes is a gripping and fascinating story.

If summiting Everest is on your list of "100 Things to do Before I Die" you should read this compelling if somewhat disheartening look at the dark side of climbing the world's tallest mountain.

High Crimes explores the corruption of one of the purest places on earth, Mount Everest, and the author doesn't pull any punches pointing the finger and naming names of those who indulge in dishonest and outright criminal behaviour putting others' lives at risk....and worse.

The author compares Everest Base Camp to a Wild West boomtown... with no sheriff.

He is especially critical of the Everest peak baggers who pay thousands of dollars to unscrupulous commercial operators to be dragged to the top and back down again (if they are lucky), "climbers" who have as much business being on the mountain as I do.

The structure of the novel is a little distracting, as the author tells his own summit attempted with the wife beating climbing team from Hell and the heart-breaking story of Dr. Nils Antezana, both threads running through the book pulling it all together.

Fascinating stuff

James says

When I started climbing I also started reading books about climbs and quickly noticed that the authors ALWAYS found villain's to castigate.

The author's behavior was always noble, generous, and beyond reproach.
But those other people!!!

This book is no different, the author thinks highly of himself,
but by his own admission he wouldn't let his team mates send even a single email through his internet connection.
Is that stingy, petty, or mean?

The structure of the book is horrible, the author tells a dozen different stories and is cutting back and forth from one to another so that the reader doesn't have the satisfaction of completing one story before heading off on something else.

I did find it interesting that he's the only Everest writer that questions whether walking up 10,000' of ladders and fixed ropes that others have placed is really climbing.

I wonder if he would have mentioned that if he had been successful on either of his two Everest attempts.

The way 99% of Everest climber's do the mountain isn't really climbing.

One has to question the point of walking up ladders just to get to some point higher than where others have been.

But to answer another reviewers question,
Everest climbers are not a cross section of society,
so while their behavior is interesting to behold,
it doesn't reflect on the rest of us, or portend the future.

The photos were nice, would have been better to have more.

The revelation that the \$450 a bottle oxygen is usually unusable crap from India rather than the real deal, will open the eyes of anyone planning to go there in the future.

Only one mountain, but so many types of crimes.

At the end he muses about a nut case in Connecticut who chops off bolts others use for safety on the rock faces.

He says: "the bolt war seems less about bolts than about being at war."

The same could be said of people who write books about other climbers.

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I just looked through this book again,
pardon me if I'm cynical,
but I wonder if all the thieving on Everest is directed
to some extent by the premium guides.

Why pay \$60,000 instead of \$10,000?

"We can protect you from thieves."

I'd have to guess the premium guides benefit
from the crime up there.

And they do resent the budget people going up and
using their fixed lines, aluminum ladders etc for free.
The extent of their resentment is generally quite intense.

Other legit businessmen in other areas of the economy have
used criminals to direct business/profits their way.

Amerynth says

It was really hard to decide whether I liked Michael Kudas' "High Crimes: The Fate of Everest in an Age of Greed" or not. Ultimately, I found the book's problems detracted from my enjoyment of it.

On the good side, I found Kudas' expedition stories to be interesting and chock-full of good tidbits. The death of Nils Antezana seems particularly tragic and a good illustration of what summit fever can bring.

That said, I found the transitions between stories to be really jarring... I really disliked Kudas' style of introducing a new character, then giving that person's history from A to Z, then return to his story. The book jumped too much and Kudas' premise got lost someplace along the way. The final chapters seemed rushed and tacked on.

The book also left me wondering how prevalent theft on Everest really is. Kudas makes it sound as that tents need to be padlocked or something to prevent people from stealing your gear, oxygen and food. I've read lots of Everest expedition stories... and have never seen theft mentioned as a constant problem previously (though I have read about camps being stripped by Sherpas who thought hikers had died or because of friction between expedition leaders.)

Overall, I found the book interesting, I guess, but it doesn't stand up to all of the great expedition memoirs out there.