

Daredevils

In:

Grethe Kirkeby Poulsen &
Bodil Hohwü Nielsen,

Travellers,

Systime, 2007.

Captain Robert Falcon Scott (1868-1912) was a British explorer who made an attempt to be the first to reach the South Pole in 1911. The American explorer Robert Peary had beaten the British to the North Pole in 1909, so now the race was on for the South Pole. Scott's opponent was the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen. Amundsen was far better equipped than Scott. He and his team were able skiers and they used dog sledges. Scott, on the other hand, had brought experimental motor sledges that broke down and ponies that were unable to survive the harsh weather conditions. So it was no surprise that Amundsen reached the pole first – in December 1911. Scott and his pole team reached 90° S in January 1912 where a Norwegian flag greeted them. They knew they had been beaten. They now had to start the saddest return journey to their ship – a return journey that turned fatal. Although Scott was in Antarctica in the summer, the weather turned very bad. Blizzards were relentless and temperatures dropped to below -40° and never rose above -18°. These terrible conditions combined with Scott's growing depression and disappointment at having lost the race slowed the expedition down and finally killed him and his party. In the excerpt you can read about Scott's final days. Their tent and their frozen bodies were not discovered until nearly 8 months later on November 12th 1912. A great cairn of ice was raised over their bodies. A search was made for Captain Oates' body, but it was never found, only his discarded sleeping bag, cut open for much of the length to enable him to enter it with badly frostbitten feet. Fortunately, the search party managed to salvage Scott's journals together with a number of letters to friends, family and the public.

R. F. Scott

The Last Entries (1912)

Saturday, March 10.—This morning it was calm when we breakfasted, but the wind came from the W.N.W. as we broke camp. It rapidly grew in strength. After travelling for half an hour I saw that none of us could go on facing such conditions. We were forced to camp and are spending the rest of the day in a comfortless blizzard camp, wind quite foul.

W.N.W. West North
West
blizzard sb snestorm
foul adj modbydelig

urge *vb* ansøre
 ransack *vb* gennemsøge
 tabloid *sb* (med.) tablet
 sway *vb* ude af kurs
 forenoon *sb* formiddag
 en'durance *sb* udhold-
 enhed
 season *sb* årstid (her:
 vinter)
 liable *adj* tilbojelig
 head wind *sb* stik mod-
 vind
 cairn *sb* varde
 W. by S. = West by South
 W.S.W. = West South
 West
 mit mitten *sb* luffe
 shudder *vb* skælve

Sunday, March 11.—Titus Oates is very near the end, one feels. What we or he will do, God only knows. We discussed the matter after breakfast; he is a brave fine fellow and understands the situation, but he practically asked for advice. Nothing could be said but to urge him to march as long as he could. One satisfactory result to the discussion; I practically ordered Wilson to hand over the means of ending our troubles to us, so that any one of us may know how to do so. Wilson had no choice between doing so and our ransacking the medicine case. We have 30 opium tabloids apiece and he is left with a tube of morphine. So far the

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The sky completely overcast when we started this morning. We could see nothing, lost the tracks, and doubtless have been swaying a good deal since—3.1 miles for the forenoon—terribly heavy dragging—expected it. Know that 6 miles is about the limit of our endurance now, if we get no help from wind or surfaces. We have 7 days' food and should be about 55 miles from One Ton Camp to-night, 6 x 7 = 42, leaving us 13 miles short of our distance, even if things get no worse. Meanwhile the season rapidly advances.

Monday, March 12.—We did 6.9 miles yesterday, under our necessary average. Things are left much the same, Oates not pulling much, and now with hands as well as feet pretty well useless. We did 4 miles this morning in 4 hours 20 min.—we may hope for 3 this afternoon, 7 x 6 = 42. We shall be 47 miles from the depôt. I doubt if we can possibly do it. The surface remains awful, the cold intense, and our physical condition running down. God help us! Not a breath of favourable wind for more than a week, and apparently liable to head winds at any moment.

Wednesday, March 14.—No doubt about the going downhill, but everything going wrong for us. Yesterday we woke to a strong northerly wind with temp. -37°. Couldn't face it, so remained in camp till 2, then did 5 1/4 miles. Wanted to march later, but party feeling the cold badly as the breeze (N.) never took off entirely, and as the sun sank the temp. fell. Long time getting supper in dark.

This morning started with southerly breeze, set sail and passed another cairn at good speed; half-way, however, the wind shifted to W. by S or W.S.W., blew through our wind clothes and into our mits. Poor Wilson horribly cold, could not get off ski for some time. Bowers and I practically made camp, and when we got into the tent at last we were all deadly cold. Then temp. now midday down -43° and the wind strong. We must go on, but now the making of every camp must be more difficult and dangerous. It must be near the end, but a pretty merciful end. Poor Oates got it again in the foot. I shudder to think what it will be like to-

morrow. It is only with greatest pains rest of us keep off frostbites. No idea there could be temperatures like this at this time of year with such winds. Truly awful outside the tent. Must fight it out to the last biscuit, but can't reduce rations.

Friday, March 16 or Saturday, 17.—Lost track of dates, but think the last correct. Tragedy all along the line. At lunch, the day before yesterday, poor Titus Oates said he couldn't go on; he proposed we should leave him in his sleeping-bag. That we could not do, and we induced him to come on, on the afternoon march. In spite of its awful nature for him he struggled on and we made a few miles. At night he was worse and we knew the end had come.

Should this be found I want these facts recorded. Oates' last thoughts were of his Mother, but immediately before he took pride in thinking that his regiment would be pleased with the bold way in which he met his death. We can testify to his bravery. He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint, and to the very last was able and willing to discuss outside subjects. He did not — would not — give up hope till the very end. He was a brave soul. This was the end. He slept through the night before last, hoping not to wake; but he woke in the morning—yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, "I am just going outside and may be some time." He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since.

I take this opportunity of saying that we have stuck to our sick companions to the last. In case of Edgar Evans, when absolutely out of food and he lay insensible, the safety of the remainder seemed to demand his abandonment, but Providence mercifully removed him at this critical moment. He died a natural death, and we did not leave him till two hours after his death. We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman. We all hope to meet the end with a similar spirit, and assuredly the end is not far.

I can only write at lunch and then only occasionally. The cold is intense, -40° at midday. My companions are unendingly cheerful, but we are all on the verge of serious frostbites, and though we constantly talk of fetching through I don't think any one of us believes it in his heart.

We are cold on the march now, and at all times except meals. Yesterday we had to lay up for a blizzard and to-day we move dreadfully slowly. We are at No 14 pony camp, only two pony marches from One Ton Depôt. We leave here our theodolite, a camera, and Oates' sleeping-bags, Diaries, &c., and geological specimens carried at Wilson's special request, will be found with us or on our sledge.

frostbite *sb* forfrysning
 induce *vb* overtale
 bravery *sb* tappered
 insensible *adj* bevidstløs
 the remainder *sb* de
 øvrige
 his abandonment "at vi
 lod ham i stikken"
 Providence *sb* forsynet
 mercifully *adv* barm-
 hjertigt
 re'move *vb* fjerne, her: lod
 ham do
 dissuade him *vb* tale ham
 fra det
 assuredly *adv* helt sikkert
 verge *sb* kant
 theodolite *sb* teodolit
 (landmålerinstrument)
 specimen *sb* prøve

fortune *sb* skæbne
 possessor *sb* ejer
 pemmican *sb* pemmikan
 (torret kød)
 indigestion *sb* darlig
 mave
 contemplate *vb* tænke på;
 betragte
 primus *sb* primus (koge-
 apparat)
 spirit *sb* sprit
 pannikin *sb* lille metal-
 drikkekrus
 forlorn hope *sb* selv-
 mordspatrolje

Sunday, March 18.—To-day, lunch, we are 21 miles from the depôt. Ill fortune presses, but better may come. We have had more wind and drift from ahead yesterday; had to stop marching; wind N.W., force 4, temp. -35°. No human being could face it, and we are worn out *nearly*.

My right foot has gone, nearly all the toes—two days ago I was proud 5
 possessor of best feet. These are the steps of my downfall. Like an ass I
 mixed a small spoonful of curry powder with my melted pemmican—it
 gave me violent indigestion. I lay awake and in pain all night; woke and
 felt done on the march; foot went and I didn't know it. A very small
 measure of neglect and have a foot which is not pleasant to contemplate. 10
 Bowers takes first place in condition, but there is not much to choose
 after all. The others are still confident of getting through—or pretend to
 be—I don't know! We have the last *half* fill of oil in our primus and a
 very small quantity of spirit—this alone between us and thirst. The wind 15
 is fair for the moment, and that is perhaps a fact to help. The mileage
 would have seemed ridiculously small on our outward journey.

Monday, March 19.—Lunch. We camped with difficulty last night, and
 were dreadfully cold till after our supper of cold pemmican and biscuit
 and a half a pannikin of cocoa cooked over the spirit. Then, contrary to
 expectation, we got warm and all slept well. To-day we started in the 20
 usual dragging manner. Sledge dreadfully heavy. We are 15½ miles
 from the depôt and ought to get there in three days. What progress!
 We have two days' food but barely a day's fuel. All our feet are getting
 bad—Wilson's best, my right foot worst, left all right. There is no chance 25
 to nurse one's feet till we can get hot food into us. Amputation is the
 least I can hope for now, but will the trouble spread? That is the serious
 question. The weather doesn't give us a chance—the wind from N. to
 N.W. and -40° temp. to-day.

Wednesday, March 21.—Got within 11 miles of depôt Monday night;
 had to lay up all yesterday in severe blizzard. To-day forlorn hope, Wilson 30
 and Bowers going to depôt for fuel.

Thursday, March 22 and 23.—Blizzard bad as ever—Wilson and Bow-
 ers unable to start—to-morrow last chance—no fuel and only one or two of
 food left—must be near the end. Have decided it shall be natural—we shall 35
 march for the depôt with or without our effects and die in our tracks.

Thursday, March 29.—Since the 21st we have had a continuous gale
 from W.S.W. and S.W. We had fuel to make two cups of tea apiece and
 bare food for two days on the 20th. Every day we have been ready to start
 for our depôt 11 miles away, but outside the door of the tent it remains a 40
 scene of whirling drift. I do not think we can hope for any better things

now. We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker, of course,
 and the end cannot be far.

It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more.

R. Scott.

5 Last entry.

For God's sake look after our people

Message to the Public (1912)

The causes of the disaster are not due to faulty organisation, but to mis-
 5 fortune in all risks which had to be undertaken.

1. The loss of pony transport in March 1911 obliged me to start later
 than I had intended, and obliged the limits of stuff transported to be
 narrowed.

2. The weather throughout the outward journey, and especially the
 10 long gale in 83° S., stopped us.

3. The soft snow in lower reaches of glacier again reduced pace.

We fought these untoward events with a will and conquered, but it
 cut into our provision reserve.

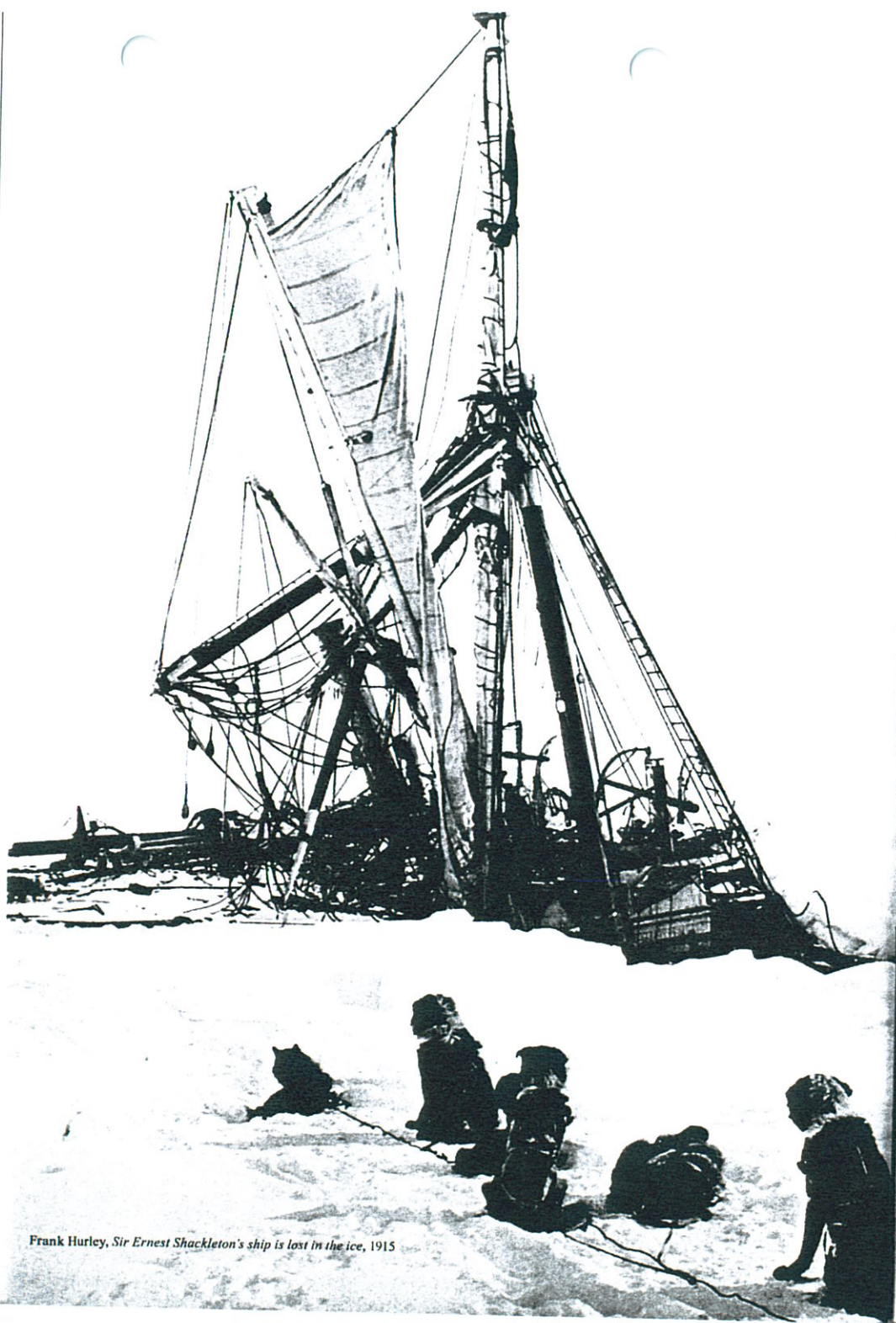
Every detail of our food supplies, clothing and depôts made on the
 15 interior ice-sheet and over that long stretch of 700 miles to the Pole and
 back, worked out to perfection. The advance party would have returned
 to the glacier in fine form and with surplus of food, but for the astonish-
 ing failure of the man whom we had least expected to fail. Edgar Evans
 was thought the strongest man of the party.

20 The Beardmore Glacier is not difficult in fine weather, but on our
 return we did not get a single completely fine day; this with a sick com-
 panion enormously increased our anxieties.

As I have said elsewhere, we got into frightfully rough ice and Edgar
 Evans received a concussion of the brain—he died a natural death, but
 25 left us a shaken party with the season unduly advanced.

But all the facts above enumerated were as nothing to the surprise
 which awaited us on the Barrier. I maintain that our arrangements for
 returning were quite adequate, and that no one in the world would have
 expected the temperatures and surfaces which we encountered at this
 30 time of the year. On the summit in lat. 85°/86° we had -20°, -30°. On the
 Barrier in lat. 82°, 10,000 feet lower, we had -30° in the day, -47° at night
 pretty regularly, with continuous head wind during our day marches. It

faulty *adj* mangelfuld
 mis'fortune *sb* ulykke,
 uheld
 oblige *vb* tvinge
 glacier *sb* gletsjer
 untoward *adj* uansket
 conquer *vb* sejre
 pro'visions *sb* forsyninger
 in'terior *adj* indre
 ad'vance party *sb* fortrop
 surplus *sb* overskud
 con'cussion of the brain
sb hjernerystelse
 e'numerate *vb* opregne
 adequate *adj* tilstrækkelig
 summit *sb* top
 lat. = latitude *sb* bred-
 degrad



Frank Hurley, *Sir Ernest Shackleton's ship is lost in the ice, 1915*

is clear that those circumstances come on very suddenly, and our wreck is certainly due to this sudden advent of severe weather, which does not seem to have any satisfactory cause. I do not think human beings ever came through such a month as we have come through, and we should
 5 have got through in spite of the weather but for the sickening of a second companion, Captain Oates, and a shortage of fuel in our depôts for which I cannot account, and finally, but for the storm which has fallen on us within 11 miles of the depôt at which we hoped to secure our final supplies. Surely misfortune could scarcely have exceeded this last blow.
 10 We arrived within 11 miles of our old One Ton Camp with fuel for one last meal and food for two days. For four days we have been unable to leave the tent—the gale howling about us. We are weak, writing is difficult, but for my own sake I do not regret this journey, which has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death
 15 with as great a fortitude as ever in the past. We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last. But if we have been willing to give our lives to this enterprise, which is for the honour of our country, I appeal to our
 20 countrymen to see that those who depend on us are properly cared for.

Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale, but surely, surely, a great rich country like ours will see that
 25 those who are dependent on us are properly provided for.

R. Scott.

The text on the cross that was erected in memory of the expedition:

30 in
 Memoriam
 Capt. R. F. Scott, R.N.
 Dr. E. A. Wilson, Capt. L. E. G. Oates, Ins. Drgs., Lt. H. R. Bowers,
 R.I.M.
 35 Petty Officer E. Evans, R.N.
 who died on their
 return from pole. March
 1912
 40 to strive, to seek,
 to find,
 and not to
 yield

wreck *sb* ruin
 advent *sb* komme
 shortage *sb* knaphed
 a'ccount *vb* gore rede for
 su'pply *sb* forsyning
 ex'ceed *vb* overga
 hardship *sb* modgang
 fortitude *sb* sjælsstyrke
 enterprise *sb* projekt
 hardihood *sb* hardforhed
 to strive, to seek ... citat
 fra Lord Alfred Tennyson,
Ulysses (1842)

4. Written assignment: Use words and phrases from Scott's text to describe the ordeal of fighting your way to school on a winter's day.

Jon Krakauer (1954-) is an accomplished mountain climber, acclaimed journalist and writer. He has written a number of books about mountain climbing and wildlife experiences and worked for Outside magazine. As a reporter, Krakauer was invited to join Robert Hall's summit expedition to Mount Everest in the spring and summer of 1996. The season of 1996 was seen by many, including Krakauer, as disastrous with its heavy death toll, not least among many very well-trained, professional climbers. His controversial account of the disaster was published in Outside magazine and later turned into a best-selling book, *Into Thin Air* (1997/1999), from which the following excerpt is taken.

Jon Krakauer

Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster (1999)

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.

5 *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*

10 *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

15 *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*

cordon *sb* afspærring
altitude *sb* højde
pressure *sb* tryk
mountai'neering *sb* bjerg-
bestigning
lap *sb* etape
yield *vb* give efter
ice-claw *sb* isklo
rubber slipper *sb* gum-
misal

grant *vb* tildele
 re'tain *vb* bibeholde
 Eric Shipton (1907-1977)
 legendarisk engelsk bjerg-
 bestiger
 straddle *vb* skræve over
 vastness *sb* vidstrakthed
 dim *adj* sløret
 de'tached *adj* fraværende
 sweep *sb* udstrakthed
 re'lease *sb* udløsning
 summit *sb* top
 summon *vb* opbyde
 pre'ceding *adj* forudgå-
 ende
 ramen soup *sb* nudelsuppe
 ex'cruciating *adj* uud-
 holdelig
 trial *sb* prøvelse
 troposphere *sb* troposfære
 ac'quainted *adj* bekendt
 pose *sb* positur
 a'scend *vb* bestige
 lo'cate *vb* lokalisere
 surgeon *sb* kirurg
 gangrenous *adj* som har
 koldbrand
 de'teriorate *vb* blive
 dårligere
 heed *vb* ænse
 usher *vb* føre
 gaggle *sb* flok

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 Pumi, 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.

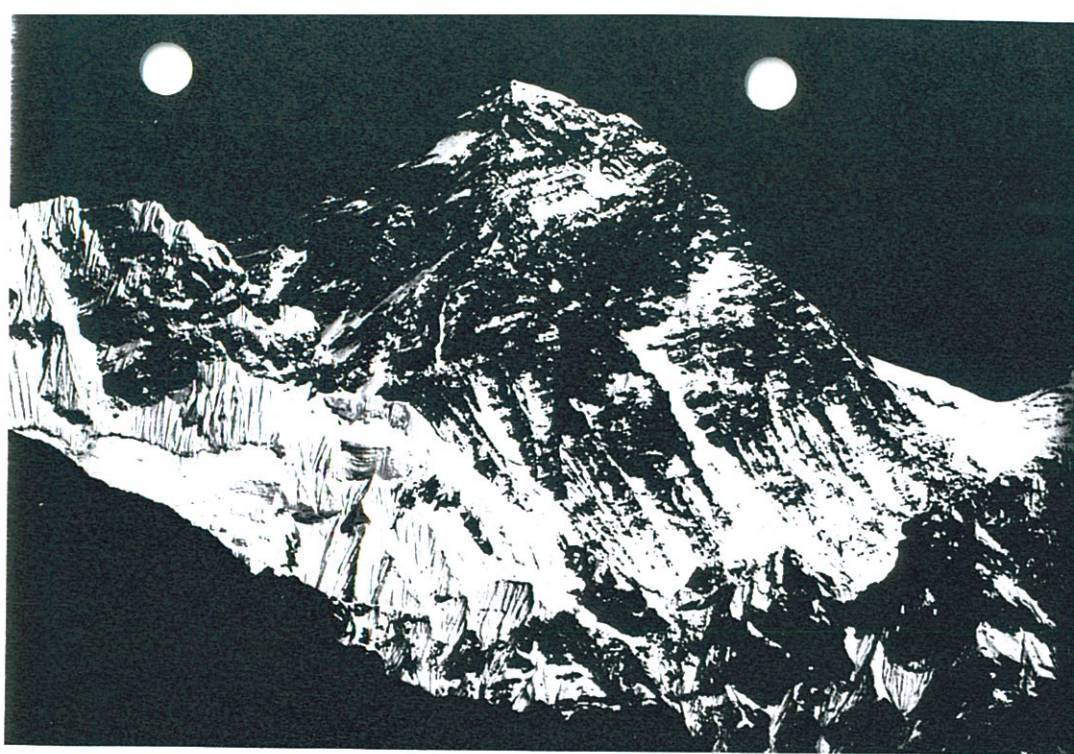
The uppermost shank of Everest's Southeast Ridge is a slender, heavily corniced fin of rock and wind-scoured snow that snakes for a quarter mile between the summit and a subordinate pinnacle known as the South Summit. Negotiating the serrated ridge presents no great technical hurdles, but the route is 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.

a'pparent *adj* åbenlys
 oxygen-de'pleted *adj* som
 har for lidt ilt
 cwm *sb* walisisk ord for
 dal (udtales: *kuom*)
 i'nnocuous *adj* harmløs
 wispy *adj* tottet
 insub'stantial *adj* luftig
 gleam *vb* funkle
 con'vection *sb* varme-
 strømning
 de'scent *sb* nedstigning
 gauge *sb* måler
 shank *sb* stykke
 corniced *adj* med sne-
 kamme
 sub'ordinate *adj* sekun-
 dær
 pinnacle *sb* tinde
 ne'gotiate *vb* klare
 se'rrated *adj* savtakket
 ridge *sb* højderyg
 hurdle *sb* forhindring
 ex'posed *adj* udsat
 cautious *adj* forsigtig
 shuffle *vb* slæbe med
 fødderne
 a'byss *sb* afgrund
 no'torious *adj* berygtet
 pro'nounced *adj* tydelig
 notch *sb* indhak
 haul *vb* hive
 de'scend *vb* bevæge sig
 nedad
 option *sb* mulighed
 co'mmunal *adj* fælles
 com'prise *vb* bestå af
 throng *sb* flok
 bide one's time *idiom* for-
 holde sig afventende
 valve *sb* ventil
 a'bruptly *adv* pludseligt
 suffocate *vb* kvæles
 dim *vb* blive uklar
 on the brink of *idiom* på
 grænsen til at



Christian Als, Mount Everest

hy'poxically *adv* pga iltmangel
 im'paired *adj* svækket
 crank *vb* dreje
 drain *vb* tomme
 squander *vb* spillede
 benefit *sb* støtte
 supple'mental *adj* supplerende
 mob *sb* hob
 dis'perse *vb* sprede sig
 hide *sb* hud
 hunker *vb* sidde på hug
 file *vb* gå i gåsegang
 frantic *adj* ude af sig selv
 plead *vb* bønfalde
 de'mure *adj* ærbar
 sparrowlike *adj* spurveagtig
 dis'guise *vb* skjule
 for'midable *adj* formidabel

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 formi-

dable 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.

It was after three o'clock when I made it down to the South Summit. By now tendrils of mist were streaming over the 27,923-foot top of Lhotse and lapping at Everest's summit pyramid. No longer did the weather look so benign. I grabbed a fresh oxygen cylinder, jammed it onto my regulator, and hurried down into the gathering cloud. Moments after I dropped below the South Summit, it began to snow lightly and visibility went to hell.

Four hundred vertical feet above, where the summit was still washed in bright sunlight under an immaculate cobalt sky, my compadres dallied to memorialize their arrival at the apex of the planet, unfurling flags and snapping photos, using up precious ticks of the clock. None of them imagined that a horrible ordeal was drawing nigh. Nobody suspected that by the end of that long day, every minute would matter.

— o —

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

re'solve *sb* viljestyrke
 a'stounding *adj* forbløffende
 pro'pel up *vb* drive op
 un'wavering *adj* urokkelig
 de'sire *sb* begær
 it's in the bag *idm* den er hjemme
 upbeat *adj* optimistisk
 ex'hausted *adj* udmattet
 plod *vb* traskede
 casually *adv* flygtigt
 drive *sb* handlekraft
 hammered *adj* smadret
 cheer *sb* munterhed
 em'ploy *vb* anvende
 trademark *sb* her: karakteristisk
 frat = fra'ternity *sb* US broderskab
 drag ass *idm* sl tung i roven
 slump *vb* falde sammen
 tendril *sb* fjersky
 lap *vb* skvulpe
 be'nign *adj* venligsindet
 visi'bility *sb* sigtbarhed
 i'mmaculate *adj* ulastelig
 cobalt *adj* koboltblå
 com'padre *sb* (spansk) venner
 dally *vb* smøle
 apex *sb* top
 or'deal *sb* provelse
 nigh = near
 pur'suit *sb* beskæftigelse
 trifling *adj* ubetydelig
 di'version *sb* tidsfordriv
 titillating *adj* pirrende
 e'nigma *sb* mysterium
 mor'tality *sb* dødelighed

inherent *adj* iboende
peril *sb* fare
at close range *idm* på nært hold
conveniently *adv* behageligt
ponder *vb* gruble over
divestiture *sb* afklædning
magnify *vb* forstørre
sheer *adj* ren og skær
superfluity *sb* overflod
carnage *sb* massakre
death toll *sb* antal døds-
 ofre
col *sb* sadel, sænkning i
 højderyg
huddle *vb* krybe sammen
oblivious *adj* usidende
grief *sb* sorg
guilt-ridden *adj* skyld-
 betyngt
self-reproach *sb* selv-
 bebrejdelse
lingering *adj* langvarig
disquietude *sb* uro
cornea *sb* hornhinde
hypothermic *adj* nedkølet
delirious *adj* uklar
concur *vb* være enig
enviable *adj* misundelses-
 værdig
elude *vb* undvige
marginally *adv* som ligger
 lige på grænsen til at være
magnitude *sb* størrelses-
 orden
overdue *adj* skulle være
 sket for længe
bar none *idm* uden sam-
 menligning
compulsively *adv* eks-
 tremt
elaborate *adj* omfattende
prevent *vb* forhindre

activity, I firmly believed, not in spite of the inherent perils, but precisely because of them.

Until I visited the Himalaya, however, I'd never actually seen death at close range. Hell, before I went to Everest, I'd never even been to a funeral. Mortality had remained a conveniently hypothetical concept, an idea to ponder in the abstract. Sooner or later the divestiture of such a privileged innocence was inevitable, but when it finally happened the shock was magnified by the sheer superfluity of the carnage: 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.

Eventually I spoke of my lingering disquietude to Klev Schoening, whose home was not far from mine. Klev said that he, too, felt awful about the loss of so many lives, but unlike me, he had no "survivor's guilt." He explained, "Out on the Col that night, I used up everything I had trying to save myself and the people with me. By the time we made it back to the tents I had absolutely nothing left. I'd frostbitten one cornea and was practically blind. I was hypothermic, delirious, and shivering uncontrollably. It was terrible losing Yasuko, but I've made peace with myself over it, because I know in my heart that there was nothing more I could have done to save her. You shouldn't be so hard on yourself. It was a bad storm. In the condition you were in at the time, what could you have possibly done for her?"

Perhaps nothing, I concurred. But in contrast to Schoening, I'll never be sure. And the enviable peace of which he speaks eludes me.

With so many marginally qualified climbers flocking to Everest these days, a lot of people believe that a tragedy of this magnitude was overdue. But nobody imagined that an expedition led by Rob Hall would be at the center of it. Hall ran the tightest, safest operation on the mountain, bar none. A compulsively methodical man, he had elaborate systems in place that were supposed to prevent such a catastrophe. So what hap-

pened? How can it be explained, not only to the loved ones left behind, but to a censorious public?

Hubris probably had something to do with it. Hall had become so adept at running climbers of all abilities up and down Everest that he got a little cocky, perhaps. He'd bragged on more than one occasion that he could get almost any reasonably fit person to the summit, and his record seemed to support this. He'd also demonstrated a remarkable ability to prevail over adversity.

In 1995, for instance, Hall and his guides not only had to cope with Hansen's problems high on the peak, but they also had to deal with the complete collapse of another client named Chantal Mauduit, a celebrated French alpinist, who was making her seventh stab at Everest without oxygen. Mauduit passed out stone cold at 28,700 feet and had to be dragged and carried all the way down from the South Summit to the South Col "like a sack of spuds," as Guy Cotter put it. After everybody came out of that summit attempt alive, Hall may well have thought there was little he couldn't handle.

Before this year, however, Hall had had uncommonly good luck with the weather, and it might have skewed his judgment. "Season after season," confirmed David Breashears, who has been on more than a dozen Himalayan expeditions and has himself climbed Everest three times, "Rob had brilliant weather on summit day. He'd never been caught by a storm high on the mountain." In fact, the gale of May 10, though violent, was nothing extraordinary; it was a fairly typical Everest squall. If it had hit two hours later, it's likely that nobody would have died. Conversely, if it had arrived even one hour earlier, the storm could easily have killed eighteen or twenty climbers – me among them.

Certainly time had as much to do with the tragedy as the weather, and ignoring the clock can't be passed off as an act of God. Delays at the fixed lines were foreseeable and eminently preventable. Predetermined turn-around times were egregiously ignored.

Extending the turn-around times may have been influenced to some degree by the rivalry between Fischer and Hall. Fischer had never guided Everest before 1996. From a business standpoint, there was tremendous pressure on him to be successful. He was exceedingly motivated to get clients to the summit, especially a celebrity client like Sandy Hill Pittman.

Likewise, since he had failed to get anybody to the top in 1995, it would have been bad for Hall's business if he failed again in 1996 – especially if Fischer succeeded. Scott had a charismatic personality, and that charisma had been aggressively marketed by Jane Bromet. Fischer

cen'sorious *adj* kritisk
hubris *sb* overmod
a'dept *adj* dybtig
cocky *adj* skråsikker
record *sb* optegnelse
pre'vail *vb* sejre
ad'versity *sb* modgang
stab *sb* her: forsøg
spud *sb* kartoffel
un'commonly *adv* usæd-
 vanligt
skew *vb* forvrænge
judgment *sb*
(U.S. BE: -ge-) dommekraft
gale *sb* kuling
squall *sb* pludselig storm
con'versely *adv* omvendt
pass off *vb* slå hen med
eminently *adv* yderst
pre'ventable *adj* som kan
 forhindres
pre'determined *adj*
 forudbestemt
e'gregiously *adv* på
 rystende vis
ex'tend *vb* udsætte
ex'ceedingly *adv* over-
 ordentlig
market *vb* markedsføre

the prospect of *idm* ud-
 sigten til at
 sufficiently *adv* tilstræk-
 kelig
 to cloud sb's judgment
idm pavirke ens dom-
 mekraft
 hypoxia *sb* iltmangel
 ponder *vb* overveje
 imperative *adj* bydende
 nødvendigt
 lucid *adj* klar
 toll *sb* pris
 ensure *vb* sikre
 ratio *sb* forhold
 ban *vb* forbyde
 reckless *adj* dumdristig
 perish *vb* omkomme
 bulk *sb* hovedpart
 corollary benefit *sb*
 positiv folgevirkning
 trash *sb* affald
 byzantine *adj* (US, BE:
 by'zantine) indviklet
 spectacularly *adv* iøjne-
 faldende
 ill-equipped *adj* dårligt
 udstyret
 assess *vb* bedømme
 access *sb* adgang
 staggeringly *adv* rystende
 vested interest *sb* kraftig
 interesse
 issue *vb* udstede
 permit *sb* tilladelse
 enact *vb* vedtage
 significantly *adv* i væ-
 sentligt omfang
 revenue *sb* indtægt
 enterprise *sb* forehavende
 conceivably *adv* muligvis
 dissect *vb* analysere
 minute *adj* allermindste
 urge *sb* trang
 catalog *vb* (US, BE:
 -logue) registrere
 blunder *sb* dumhed
 denial *sb* fornægtelse
 self-deception *sb* selv-
 bedrag

was trying very hard to eat Hall's lunch, and Rob knew it. Under the circumstances, the prospect of turning his clients around while his rival's clients were pushing toward the summit may have been sufficiently distasteful to cloud Hall's judgment.

It can't be stressed strongly enough, moreover, that Hall, Fischer, and the rest of us were forced to make such critical decisions while severely impaired with hypoxia. In pondering how this disaster could have occurred, it is imperative to remember that lucid thought is all but impossible at 29,000 feet.

Wisdom comes easily after the fact. Shocked by the toll in human life, critics have been quick to suggest policies and procedures to ensure that the catastrophes of this season won't be repeated. It has been proposed, for example, that a guide-to-client ratio of one to one be established as the standard on Everest – i.e., each client would climb with his or her own personal guide and remain roped to that guide at all times.

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.

But guiding Everest is a very loosely regulated business, administered by byzantine Third World bureaucracies spectacularly ill-equipped to assess qualifications of guides or clients. 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.

Analyzing what went wrong on Everest is a useful enough enterprise; it might conceivably prevent some deaths down the road. But to believe that dissecting the tragic events of 1996 in minute detail will actually reduce the future death rate in any meaningful way is wishful thinking. The urge to catalog the myriad blunders in order to "learn from the mistakes" is for the most part an exercise in denial and self-deception. If you can convince yourself that Rob Hall died because he made a string of stupid errors and that you are too clever to repeat those same errors,

it makes it easier for you to attempt Everest in the face of some rather compelling evidence that doing so is injudicious.

In fact, the murderous outcome of 1996 was in many ways simply business as usual. Although a record number of people died in the spring climbing season on Everest, the 12 fatalities amounted to only 3 percent of the 398 climbers who ascended higher than Base Camp – which is actually slightly below the historical fatality rate of 3.3 percent. 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.

Truth be told, climbing Everest has always been an extraordinarily dangerous undertaking and doubtless always will be, whether the people involved are Himalayan neophytes being guided up the peak or world-class mountaineers climbing with their peers. It is worth noting that before the mountain claimed the lives of Hall and Fischer, it had already wiped out a whole corps of elite climbers, including Peter Boardman, Joe Tasker, Marty Hoey, Jake Breitenbach, Mick Burke, Michel Parmentier, Roger Marshall, Ray Genet, and George Leigh Mallory.

In the case of the guided ilk, it rapidly became clear to me in 1996 that few of the clients on the peak (myself included) truly appreciated the gravity of the risks we faced – the thinness of the margin by which human life is sustained above 25,000 feet. Walter Mittys with Everest dreams need to bear in mind that when things go wrong up in the Death Zone – and sooner or later they always do – the strongest guides in the world may be powerless to save a client's life; indeed, as the events of 1996 demonstrated, the strongest guides in the world are sometimes powerless to save even their own lives. Four of my teammates died not so much because Rob Hall's systems were faulty – indeed, nobody's were better – but because on Everest it is the nature of systems to break down with a vengeance.

in the face of *idm* over-
 com'pelling *adj* over-
 bevisende
 injudicious *adj* ufor-
 svarlig
 outcome *sb* resultat
 fatality *sb* dødsfald
 amount to *vb* svare til
 fatality rate *sb* dødsra-
 under'taking *sb* fore-
 havende
 neophyte *sb* nybegynder
 peer *sb* ligemand
 corps *sb* korps
 ilk *sb* slags
 rapidly *adv* hurtigt
 appreciate *vb* være kla-
 over
 gravity *sb* alvor
 sustain *vb* opretholde
 Walter Mitty dagdrom-
 mer
 bear in mind *idm* husk
 faulty *adj* mangelfuld
 with a vengeance *idm* i
 dobbelt styrke

Aron Lee Ralston (1975-) is an American rockclimber. In 2004 he published *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* about his experiences. He is now a public speaker, predominantly non-profit, and still climbs mountains extensively.

Aron Ralston

Trapped (2004)

"It's 3:05 on Sunday. This marks my 24-hour mark of being stuck in Blue John Canyon. My name is Aron Ralston. My parents are Donna and Larry Ralston, of Englewood, Colorado. Whoever finds this, please make an attempt to get this to them. Be sure of it. I would appreciate it."

It's April 27, 2003, and for the first time since my arm was pinned against the wall of this Utah canyon, I am using my digital camcorder to videotape myself. I take long blinks and rarely look at the camera's screen. What makes me avert my glance is the haggard expression in my eyes. They are wide-open, huge bowls; loose rolls of flesh sag and tug at my lower eyelids.

Picking up the camera, I point it first at my forearm and wrist, where it disappears in the horrifyingly skinny gap between a large boulder and the canyon wall. Then I pan the camcorder up over the pinch point to my grayish-blue hand.

"What you're looking at there is my arm, going into the rock ... and there it is – stuck. It's been without circulation for 24 hours. It's pretty well gone."

Shaking my head in defeat, I yawn, battling fatigue.

I outline my failed attempts at self-rescue, and continue. "The other thing that could happen is someone comes. This being a continuation of a canyon that's not all that popular, and the continuation being less so, I think that's very unlikely before I retire from dehydration and hypothermia. Judging by my degradation in the last 24 hours, I'll be surprised if I make it to Tuesday."

I know with a sense of finality that I'm saying goodbye to my family – my parents and my 22-year-old sister, Sonja – and that regardless of how much I suffer in this spot, they will feel more agony than me.

"I'm sorry."

With tears brimming, I stop filming and rub the backs of my knuckles across my eyes. I start up once more.

"You guys make me proud. I go out looking for adventure and risk, so I can feel alive. But I go out by myself, and I don't tell someone where I'm going – that's just dumb. If someone knew, if I'd been with someone else, there would probably already be help on the way. Dumb, dumb, dumb."

10 DAY ONE: SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 9 A.M.

This is hoodoo country, Abbey country, the red wasteland.

Under a bluebird sky, I leave my truck at the dirt trailhead for Horseshoe Canyon, the isolated window of Canyonlands National Park that sits 15 air miles northwest of the legendary Maze District. My plan is to make a 30-mile circuit of biking and canyoneering through Blue John and Horseshoe canyons.

This vacation, a five-day road trip, was last-minute. Some friends and I had called off a mountaineering trip, and the cancellation freed me for a hajj to the desert from Aspen, Colorado, where I had a few days off from my sales job at the Ute Mountaineer, an outdoor-gear shop. Usually I would leave a detailed schedule with my roommates, but since I left without knowing what I was going to do, the only word I gave was "Utah."

Though the Blue John circuit will be only a day trip, I'm carrying a 25-pound pack, most of the weight taken up with climbing gear for navigating the steep canyon system, food, and a gallon of water divided between a three-liter CamelBak hydration bladder and a one-liter Nalgene bottle. I'm wearing a pair of beat-up running shoes and wool socks, with just a T-shirt and shorts over my bike shorts.

Pumping against a 30-mile-per-hour headwind on a scraped dirt road, I finally make it to the entrance of Blue John Canyon and lock up my bike. By 2:30, I'm about seven miles into the canyon, at the midpoint of my descent, the narrow slot above the 65-foot-high rappel marked as Big Drop in my guidebook. Now the canyon deepens dramatically over a series of lips and benches.

I reach the first drop-off in the floor of the canyon, a ten-foot dryfall, and use a few good in-cut handholds on the canyon's left wall to lower myself. It's not a difficult maneuver, but I wouldn't be able to climb back up the drop-off from below. I'm committed to my course; there's no going back. The pale sky is still visible above this ten-foot-wide gash in the earth's surface as I continue scrambling down, over lips and ledges

canyon *sb* kloft
pin *vb* fastklemme
camcorder *sb* videokamera
a'vert *sb* vende bort
haggard *adj* hærget
sag *vb* hænge
tug *vb* trække i
boulder *sb* rullesten
pan *vb* panorere
circu'lation *sb* blodomløb
de'feat *sb* nederlag
fa'tigue *sb* udmattelse
re'tire *vb* her: do
dehy'dration *sb* væskemangel
hypo'thermia *sb* nedkøling
degra'dation *sb* forringet tilstand
agony *sb* smerte

hoodoo *sb* sojleformet klippeformation
wasteland *sb* udørk
bluebird *sb* blå nordamerikansk sangfugl
dirt *sb* jord
trailhead *sb* sted hvor sp. starter
window *sb* indgang
legendary *adj* legendarisk
circuit *sb* rundtur
cance'llation *sb* aflysning
hajj *sb* pilgrimstur (Islam)
pack = backpack
navigate *vb* komme rundt
steep *adj* stejl
hy'dration bladder *sb* vandbeholder
beat-up *adj* slidt
headwind *sb* modvind
de'scent *sb* nedstigning
slot *sb* sprække
lip *sb* kant
bench *sb* (geol) terrasse
drop-off *sb* stejl klippe-side
dryfall *sb* udtørret vandfald
co'mmitted to *adj* fast besluttet på
visible *adj* synlig
gash *sb* flænge
scramble *vb* klatre
ledge *sb* klippeafsats

sus'pend *vb* henge
 undulate *vb* bølge
 re'frigerator *sb* køleskab
 wedged *vb* kilet fast
 downstream *adv* egl. nede
 ad floden, her: længere
 nede
 channel *sb* kanal
 dangle off *vb* dingle ned
 fra
 tra'verse *vb* krydse
 pre'cautionary *adj* sikker-
 heds-
 jab *sb* stød
 chimneying *adj* skorstens-
 agtig
 teeter *vb* vippe
 squat on one's haunches
idm sidde på hug
 rear *sb* bagside
 lodged *adj* fastklemmt
 a'djust *vb* justere
 quake *sb* rystelse
 backlit *adj* lyst op bagfra
 con'sume *vb* her: fylde
 yank *vb* rykke
 ricochet *vb* rikolettere
 con'fined *adj* snæver
 in tow *idm* på sleb
 lateral *adj* overside
 ig'nite *vb* antænde
 pine for *vb* længes efter
 pur'sue *vb* videreføre
 ex'plore *vb* udforske
 volun'teer *vb* melde sig
 fris illigt
 em'bark on *vb* kaste sig
 ud i
 a'ccount *sb* beretning

and under chockstones – boulders suspended between the canyon walls. The canyon narrows to just four feet wide here, undulating and twisting and deepening. It's 2:41 p.m.

I come to another drop-off. This one is maybe 11 or 12 feet high. A refrigerator-size chockstone is wedged between the walls ten feet downstream from the ledge, giving the space ahead the claustrophobic feel of a short tunnel.

Right in front of me, just below the ledge, is a second chockstone the size of a large bus tire, stuck fast in the three-foot channel between the walls. If I can step onto it, I can dangle off the chockstone, then take a short fall to the canyon floor. Stemming across the canyon with one foot and one hand on each wall, I traverse out above the chockstone. With a few precautionary jabs, I kick down at the boulder. It's jammed tightly enough that it will hold my weight. I lower myself from the chimneying position and step onto the chockstone. It supports me but teeters slightly. Facing up canyon, I squat on my haunches and grip the rear of the lodged boulder. Sliding my belly over the front edge, I hang from my fully extended arms.

I feel the stone respond to my adjusting grip with a scraping quake. Instantly, I know this is trouble, and instinctively I let go of the rotating boulder to land on the round rocks on the canyon floor. I look up, and the backlit chockstone consumes the sky. Fear shoots my hands over my head. I can't move backwards or I'll fall over a small ledge.

The next three seconds play out in slow motion. The falling rock smashes my left hand against the south wall; I yank my left arm back as the rock ricochets in the confined space; the boulder then crushes my right hand, thumb up, fingers extended; the rock slides another foot down the wall with my arm in tow, tearing the skin off the lateral side of my forearm. Then, silence.

My passion for the wilderness was ignited when I was 12, when my family moved from Indiana to Colorado, in 1987. Back east for college at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh, I pined for the West, and after I graduated I took a job at Intel Corporation as a mechanical engineer, in 1997, working in Phoenix, Tacoma, and then Albuquerque. Even before I quit and moved to Aspen, in 2002, to pursue my adventures full-time, I spent every scrap of vacation exploring the remote West; volunteered for three years with the Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council; and, as my competence grew, embarked on more and more solo expeditions.

I'd recently read two best-selling accounts of extremes in the wilderness, both by Jon Krakauer. *Into the Wild*, the story of Chris McCandless's

dropping out of mainstream society, entranced me. Despite his death in Alaska at age 24, I was inspired with dreams of "rubber tramping" across the country, living out of the back of a truck. As I read Krakauer's next book, *Into Thin Air*, his chronicle of the 1996 Everest disaster, I wondered what I would have done in those climbers' places. I wanted to reveal to myself who I was: the kind of person who dies or the kind of person who overcomes circumstances to help himself and others.

In 1998, I decided on three climbing projects that would come to occupy my entire recreational focus. I would climb all of Colorado's fourteeners, 59 of them by anyone's highest count; I'd then solo them in winter (something that hadn't been done); and I'd reach the highest point in every state. By the end of 2002, I had climbed the fourteeners, and soloed 36 of them in winter. The further I got with my project, the more I learned about my character. Climbing in winter by myself wasn't just something I did – it became who I was.

I pushed myself on increasingly difficult routes, but I also developed strategies to mitigate the added risks of winter travel. Still, there were a few near misses that prompted me to reevaluate my practices. In February 2003, on a backcountry hut trip with some of my Albuquerque Mountain Rescue buddies on Colorado's 11,905-foot Resolution Peak, two of my more experienced friends and I skied a 40-degree bowl, despite dangerous conditions. When we gathered midslope at a cluster of trees, the entire half-mile-wide hillside released with a quiet whoomph. The slide swept us hundreds of feet down the mountain, swamping two of us and burying the third for long minutes, until our avalanche transceivers pinpointed his location. We survived, but our friendships did not. I lost two friends because of the choices we made.

Rather than regret those choices, I swore to myself I would learn from their consequences. Most simply, I came to understand that my attitudes were not intrinsically safe.

3 P.M.

Good Christ, my hand. The flaring agony throws me into a panic. I grimace and growl a sharp "Fuck!" I yank my arm three times in a naive attempt to pull it out from under the rock. But I'm stuck.

"Oh, shit, oh, shit, oh, shit!" I shove against the boulder, heaving against it, pushing with my left hand, lifting with my knees pressed under the rock. I brace my thighs under the boulder and thrust upward, grunting, "Come on ... move!"

Nothing.

en'trance *vb* tryllebinde
 chronicle *sb* beretning
 en'tire *adj* hele
 recre'ational *adj* fritids-
 four'teeners 14,000 feet
 mountain
 solo *vb* her: bestige (et
 bjerg) alene
 mitigate *vb* formindske
 added *adj* oget
 prompt *vb* tilskynde
 midslope *adv* midt på
 skråningen
 cluster *sb* klynge
 re'lease *vb* komme i skred
 slide *sb* (sne)skred
 avalanche *sb* lavine
 tran'sceiver *sb* radioanlæg
 der kan modtage og sende
 pinpoint *vb* angive nøj-
 agtigt
 in'trinsically *adv* af natur
 flaring *adj* brændende
 shove *vb* skubbe
 brace *vb* presse op
 thrust *vb* skubbe

hose *sb* vandslange
 strap *sb* rem
 loop *sb* lokke
 ex'tract *vb* tage frem
 gulp *vb* tylle i sig
 guzzle *vb* slugge
 cock *vb* dreje
 e'vert oneself *vb* anstrenge sig
 inventory *sb* status
 mesh pouch *sb* netlomme
 knockoff *sb* efterligning
 harness *sb* (klatre-)sele
 wad *sb* bundt
 shin *sb* skinneben
 pad *vb* polstre
 e'liminate *vb* afvise
 acid *sb* syre
 option *sb* valgmulighed
 order of preference *idm*
 prioriteret rækkefølge
 excavate *vb* udgrave
 rig *vb* rigge
 anchor *sb* anker
 chip *vb* hakke

I'm sweating hard. With my left hand, I lift my right shirtsleeve and wipe my forehead. My chest heaves. I need a drink, but, sucking on my CamelBak hose, I find my water reservoir is empty. I still have my full Nalgene bottle, but it takes me a few seconds to realize I won't be able to sling my pack off my right arm. Once I shrug my left arm free of the pack strap, I expand the right-side strap, tuck my head inside the loop, and pull the whole thing down my left side, to my feet. Extracting the water bottle, I unscrew the top and, before I realize what I'm doing, gulp three large mouthfuls, then halt to pant for breath. Then it hits me: In five seconds, I've just guzzled a third of my water supply.

"OK," I say out loud, "time to relax. The adrenaline's not going to get you out of here. Let's look this over, see what we got." I need to start thinking; to do that, I need to be calm.

Poking my left hand into the small gap above the catch point, I touch my right thumb, which is already a sickly gray. It's cocked sideways and looks terribly unnatural. There is no feeling in my right hand at all.

An inner voice explodes at the prognosis: *Shit! How did this happen? What the fuck? How the fuck did you get your hand trapped by a fucking boulder? Look at this! Your hand is crushed; it's dying, man, and there's nothing you can do about it. If you don't get blood flow back within a couple hours, it's gone.*

"No!" I tell myself out loud. "Shut up, that's not helpful." It's not my hand I need to worry about. There is a bigger issue. The average survival time in the desert without water is between two and three days, sometimes as little as a day if you're exerting yourself in 100-degree heat. I figure I've got until Monday night.

I take an inventory of my pack. In the outside mesh pouch, I have my CD player, CDs, extra AA batteries, my mini-digital-video camcorder, a digital camera, a three-LED headlamp, and a knockoff of a Leatherman multitool. I've also got a climbing rope and harness and the small wad of rappelling equipment I'd brought to use at the Big Drop rappel. I pull the rope bag out and drop it on the ledge in front of my shins, padding the rock shelf so I can lean into it. My legs are quickly tiring of standing.

My next thought is escape. Eliminating ideas that are just too dumb (like cracking open my AA batteries on the boulder and hoping the acid eats into the chockstone but not my arm), I organize my options in order of preference: excavate the rock around my hand with my multitool knife; rig ropes and an anchor above myself to lift the boulder off my hand; or amputate my arm.

I decide to work on the first option – chipping the rock away. Drawing out my multitool, I unfold the longer of the two blades.

My first attempt to saw into the boulder barely scuffs the rock. I try again, pressing harder, but the back of the knife handle indents my forefinger much more readily than the cutting edge scores the rock. Changing my grip on the tool, I hold it like Norman Bates and stab at the rock.

Nothing. It seems like every time I go climbing on a sandstone formation, I break off a handhold, yet I can't put a dent in this boulder. The canyon walls seem to be of a much softer rock. I settle on a quick experiment and, holding my knife like a pen, I etch a g on the canyon's north wall. Slowly, I make a few more letters: *e-o-l-o-g-i-c*. Within five minutes, I scratch out three more words until I can read the phrase, an elegantly worded warning about falling rocks from *Colorado's Thirteeners* author Gerry Roach: **GEOLOGIC TIME INCLUDES NOW.**

8 P.M.

Stress turns into pessimism. Without enough water to wait for rescue, without a pick to crack the boulder, without a rigging system to lift it, I have one course of action. I speak slowly out loud:

"You're gonna have to cut your arm off."

Hearing the words makes my instincts and emotions revolt. My vocal cords tense and my voice changes octaves:

"But I don't wanna cut my arm off!"

"Aron, you're gonna have to cut your arm off!"

I realize I'm arguing with myself, and yield to a halfhearted chuckle. This is crazy. But I know that I could never saw through my arm bones with either of the blades of my multitool, so I decide to keep picking away at the boulder. *Tick, tick, tick ... tick ... tick, tick.* The sound of my knife tapping is pathetically minute.

A breeze is blowing downcanyon, flicking sand over the ledge above me and into my face. I bow my head, and the brim of my baseball cap keeps most of the dust out of my eyes, but I can feel the grit on my contacts.

Darkness seeps from my penumbral hole and spills into the desert. I establish a rhythm, pecking at the rock at two jabs per second, pausing to blow dust away once every five minutes. Time slips past.

Before I know it, it's nearly midnight. Perhaps because of my growing fatigue, a song is playing over and over in my head. Sadly, the melody is from the first Austin Powers movie, which I watched a few nights ago, just a single line of the ending credits' chorus repeating on an infinite loop: *BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, BBC Five, BBC Six, BBC Seven, BBC heaven! Yeah, that's not annoying at all, Aron.*

scuff *vb* ridse
 in'dent *vb* lave fordybning
 forefinger *sb* pegefinger
 score *vb* ridse
 Norman Bates hovedperson i filmen *Psycho*, A. Hitchcock 1960
 stab *vb* dolke
 handhold *sb* fæste
 dent *sb* hak
 pick *sb* hakke
 crack *vb* slå i stykker
 rigging system *sb* hejse-system
 vocal cords *sb* stemmeband
 tense *vb* blive stram
 chuckle *sb* kluklatter
 mi'ute *adj* her: svag
 contacts = contact lenses
 seep *vb* sive
 pe'numbral *adj* halv-skygge-
 peck *vb* hakke
 credits *sb* rulletekst
 chorus *sb* omkvæd

penetrating *adj* gennem-
trængende
generate *vb* producere
fade *vb* aftage
buckle *vb* give efter
agonizing *adj* smertefuld
equation *sb* regnestykke
fall short *vb* mislykkes
carabiner *sb* karabinhage
crack *sb* sprække
tug *sb* ryk
adjustment *sb* justering
restrict *vb* hæmme
alternately *adv* skiftevis
flap *sb* vingeslag
screech *vb* skrige
kidney failure *sb* nyre-
svigt
flash flood *sb* pludselig
kraftig oversvømmelse
triangular *adj* trekantet
webbing *sb* remtojt
founder *vb* slå fejl
fissure *sb* spalte
crest *vb* nå toppen af
twitch *vb* give et ryk
slot *sb* åbning

Even if I wanted to sleep, I couldn't. The penetrating chill of the night air urges me to keep attacking the rock to generate warmth, and when my consciousness does fade, my knees buckle and my weight tugs on my wrist in an agonizing call to attention.

I realize that the best way to conserve my energy is to construct a seat. 5
Getting into my harness is the easy half of the equation. Now comes the hard part: getting some piece of climbing gear hung up on a rock overhead, something that can hold my weight. My first dozen tries fall short, but then, with a brilliantly lucky throw, the carabiner bundle I've rigged hits the wide mouth of the crack, drops into the pinch point, and, 10
with a tug at just the right moment, wedges tight.

A wave of happiness washes over me. With two adjustments of the knots, I can finally lean back and take some weight off my legs. Ahhhhh. Fifteen minutes later, however, my harness begins restricting the blood flow to my legs. I alternately stand and sit, establishing a pattern that I 15
repeat in 20-minute intervals.

In the coldest hours before dawn, I take up my knife again and hack at the chockstone. Just after eight o'clock, I hear a rushing noise filtering down from above. I look up as a large black raven flies over my head. At the third flap, he screeches a loud ca-caw and then disappears from my 20
window on the world. I can see bright daylight on the north wall, 70 feet above. I turn off my headlamp. I've made it through the night.

DAY TWO: SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 9:30 A.M.

*I wonder what kidney failure will feel like. Not good, probably. Maybe 25
like when you eat so much you get cramps in your back. Only worse, I bet. It's gonna be a rough way to die. Hypothermia would be better. But the temperature didn't dip that low last night, only about 50 degrees on my watch thermometer. Maybe death by flash flood?*

But I'm ready for action, not for dying. It's time to get a better anchor 30
established, one that I can use to build a rigging system to try to move the boulder.

It appears to me that a small triangular horn sticks out from a shelf six feet over my head. But my attempts to toss the webbing over the horn founder. Time after time, the webbing pulls free. A fissure on the right 35
side of the horn catches my eye. The next time I throw, just as the knot is about to crest the horn, I put the rope leader in my teeth and gently twitch the webbing – it slips back into the slot. Aha! I slip a metal rap-
pel ring over the yellow strap of webbing, forming a loop with the ring 40
at the bottom.

I've spent two hours just getting the anchor set up, but the endeavor has been an unqualified success so far.

Good work, Aron. Now all you've got to do is move the boulder. Don't stop now.

5 Cutting 30 feet of climbing rope, I loop one end of the short piece around my chockstone and tie it to itself. Next I thread the other end up through the rappel ring – I can just reach it without tugging against my right wrist. I yank on the rope. Nothing.

Well, at least the anchor is holding.

10 I need a bigger mechanical advantage. Engrossed, I call upon my search-and-rescue experience, and the two hauling systems we used to evacuate people from vertical faces. I decide on a modified Z-pulley system with a haul line so I can pull down to lift the boulder off my hand. I add Prusik loops, wrapping webbing around the rope in a friction 15
knot that, when loose, slides along the rope but tightens when weighted. Then I clip the loops to carabiners, connecting the rope back to itself. With two such changes in direction, I've theoretically tripled the force applied at the haul point. But the boulder ignores my efforts. Flailing through hours of taxing work, I never once budge the rock. I finally 20
stop for a break and glance at my watch. It's after one o'clock, and I'm sweating and panting.

Suddenly, I hear distant voices echoing in the canyon. My mind swears in exhilarated surprise, and my breath abruptly catches in my suddenly dry throat. Holding my breath, I listen.

25 "HELP!"

The caterwauling echoes of my shout fade in the canyon. Forcing myself not to breathe, I listen for a reply. Nothing.

"HELLLP!"

30 The desperation of my quivering shout disturbs me. Again, I hold my breath. After the dying fall of my shout, there is no returning sound besides the thumping of my heart. A critical moment passes, and I know there is no one in this canyon. My hopes evaporate.

My morale slumps in a pang, like the first time a girl broke my heart. Then I hear the noises again. But I know better, and I wait. Slowly they 35
resolve themselves into the scratchy sounds of a kangaroo rat in his nest.

2 P.M.

40 For the first time, I seriously contemplate amputating my arm. Laying everything out on the surfaces around me, I think through each item's possible use in a surgery. My two biggest concerns are a cutting tool that

en'deavor *sb* (US, BE: endeavour) anstrengelse
un'qualified *adj* ubetinget
yank *vb* hive
en'grossed *adj* opslugt
call upon *vb* her: trække på
hauling system *sb* træk-system
vertical *adj* lodret
face *sb* (bjerg-)side
modified *adj* modificeret
pulley *sb* bloktrisse
haul line *sb* trækline
knot *sb* (reb-)knude
triple *vb* tredoble
haul point *sb* trækpunkt
effort *sb* kraftanstrengelse
flail *vb* fægte
taxing *adj* anstrengende
budge *vb* få til at røkke sig
ex'hilarated *adj* oploftet
caterwaul *vb* klynke
fade *vb* do hen
quiver *vb* skælve
e'vaporate *vb* svinde ind
morale *sb* kampånd
slump *vb* falde sammen
re'solve *vb* opløses
scratchy *adj* skrattende
contemplate *vb* overveje
item *sb* genstand
surgery *sb* operation
con'cern *sb* bekymring



Dan and Janine Patitucci, Climbing between walls outside of Moab, Utah, USA

can do the job and a tourniquet that will keep me from bleeding out. Of the multitool's blades, the inch-and-a-half one is sharper than the three-inch one. It will be important to use only the longer blade for hacking at the chockstone and preserve the shorter one for potential surgery.

5 Even with the sharper blade, I instinctually understand that I won't be able to hack through my bones – I don't have anything that could approximate even a rudimentary saw.

The likeliest method available for cutting off my arm, cutting through the softer cartilage of my elbow joint, simply never occurs to me.

10 I turn my attention to the tourniquet. Experimenting with the hose from my empty CamelBak, I cut the tubing free from the reservoir and manage to tie it in a simple knot around my upper forearm just below my elbow. But I can't cinch it down; the plastic is too stiff.

So much for that idea.

15 I have a piece of purple webbing knotted in a loop that I untie and wrap around my forearm. A five-minute effort yields a double knot, but the loops are too loose to stop my circulation. I need a stick, or a carabiner, to twist the loops tighter. Clipping the gate of my last unused carabiner through the loops, I rotate it twice. The webbing presses deeply into my
20 forearm and the skin nearer my wrist grows pale. Seeing my makeshift medical setup working brings me a subtle sense of satisfaction.

Nice work, Aron.

Despite my optimism, I realize there's a darker undercurrent to my brainstorming. Until I figure out how to cut through the bones, ampu-
25 tation isn't a practical choice. But I wonder about my courage levels if cutting off my arm becomes a real plan of action. As a test, I hold the shorter blade of the multitool to my skin. The tip pokes between the tendons and veins a few inches up from my trapped wrist, indenting my flesh. The sight repulses me.

30 *What are you doing, Aron? Get that knife away from your wrist! What are you trying to do – kill yourself? That's suicide! You'll bleed out. You slice your wrist and it's as good as stabbing yourself in the gut.*

I can't do it.

I picture my blood spilled on the canyon walls, the torn flesh and
35 ripped muscles of my arm dangling in gory strands from two white bones pockmarked with divots, the result of my last efforts to chisel through my arm's structural frame. And then I see my head drooped to my sagging torso, my lifeless body hanging from the knife-nicked bones. I set down my knife and retch.

40 *I hate this boulder. I hate it! I hate this canyon. I hate the morgue-cold slab pressing against my right forearm. I hate the faint musty smell of*

tourniquet *sb* arepresse
a'pproximate *vb* gore det
 ud for
rudimentary *adj* primitiv
cartilage *sb* bruske
elbow joint *sb* albueled
tubing *sb* slange
cinch *vb* stramme
yield *vb* frembringe
makeshift *adj* improviseret
setup *sb* indretning
subtle *adj* raffineret
undercurrent *sb* understrom
poke *vb* pirke
tendon *sb* sene
vein *sb* blodare
re'pulse *vb* vække afsky
dangle *vb* dingle
gory *adj* bloddryppende
strand *sb* tjavs (oftest om har)
pockmarked *adj* arret
divots *sb* her: smahuller
chisel *vb* mejsle
droop *vb* hænge slapt
sagging *adj* sammenfalden
retch *vb* have opkastningsfølelser
morgue *sb* lighus
slab *sb* stenplade
musty *adj* muggen

glaze *vb* glasere
 punctuate *vb* understrege
 tormenting *adj* pinetfuld
 anxiety *sb* angst
 swell *vb* svulme op
 wormhole *sb* (fys) orme-
 hul
 endure *sb* udholde
 excruciating *adj* uud-
 holdelig
 maltreatment *sb* mis-
 handling
 immeasurable *adj*
 umådelig
 eon *sb* (US, BE: aeon)
 evighed
 hazy *adj* sloret
 whitecap *sb* (bølge med)
 skumtop
 swell *sb* donning
 confident *adj* tryk
 neoprene *sb* neopren (syn-
 tetisk gummiprodukt)
 insulation *sb* isolering
 supple *adj* smidig
 elated *adj* opstemt
 retrieve *vb* hente frem
 discarded *adj* kasseret
 overhand knot *sb* over-
 håndsknob
 clamp down *vb* stramme
 grebet om
 vigorously *adv* energisk

the greenish slime thinly glazing the bottom of the canyon wall behind my legs.

"I... hate... this!" I punctuate each word with slaps of my left palm against the chockstone, as tears well in my eyes.

No expectation has prepared me for this tormenting anxiety of a slow death, thinking about whether it will come tonight in the cold, tomorrow in the cramps of dehydration, or the next day in heart failure. This hour, the next, the hour after that.

But then another voice speaks coolly. *That boulder did what it was there to do. Boulders fall. That's their nature. You did this, Aron. You chose to come here today; you chose to do this slot canyon by yourself. You chose not to tell anyone where you were going.*

9 P.M.

Night fills the sky. Time swells, my agony expanding with it. I've fallen into a wormhole where I endure excruciating maltreatment for immeasurable eons, only to return to consciousness. In the hazy freedom of my imagination, I fly out of the canyon, dipping and weaving in the whispering clouds over the sea, whitecaps changing to swells as I head still farther west, glancing back to watch the land turn into a green frame around the cobalt ocean.

DAY THREE: MONDAY, APRIL 28, 7 A.M.

I still haven't given amputation a full chance.

I realize that I'm not confident in my tourniquet. I need something more flexible than the tubing and more elastic than the ... *That's it! Elastic!* The neoprene tubing insulation from my CamelBak is supple but strong. It's perfect.

I'm elated at the idea and retrieve the discarded tubing insulation from my pack. Why didn't I think of this before? Using my left hand to wrap the thin black neoprene twice around my right forearm two inches below my elbow, I tie a simple overhand knot and tighten with one end in my teeth, then double and triple the knot. I take a carabiner and clip the neoprene, twisting it six times. Clamping down on my forearm, the material pinches my skin. For some reason, the pain pleases me.

I take my multitool and, without thinking, open the long blade. Instead of pointing the tip into the tendon gap at my wrist, I hold it with the blade against the upper part of my forearm. Surprising myself, I press on the blade and slowly draw the knife across my forearm. Nothing happens. Huh. I press harder. Still nothing. No cut, no blood, nothing. Back and forth, I vigorously saw at my arm, growing more frustrated with each

attempt. Exasperated, I give up. *This is shit! The damn blade won't even break the skin. How the hell am I going to carve through two bones with a knife that won't even cut my skin? God damn it to hell.*

That's pathetic, Aron, just pathetic.

Back to waiting.

3:35 P.M.

I have to urinate.

Save it, Aron. Pee into your CamelBak. You're going to need it.

I transfer the contents of my bladder into my empty water reservoir, saving the orangish-brown discharge for the unappetizing but inevitable time when it will be the only liquid I have.

6:30 P.M.

A subtle stirring tells me it's time to pray. I haven't tried that yet. I close my left hand in a loose fist, shut my eyes, and lower my forehead onto my hand.

"God, I am praying to you for guidance. I'm trapped here in Blue John Canyon – you probably know that – and I don't know what I am supposed to do. Please show me a sign."

I slowly tilt my forehead back until I'm looking up through the pale twilight. Nothing. What was I expecting? A swirl in the clouds? A petroglyph showing a man with a knife? I start again.

"OK, God, since you're apparently busy ... Devil, if you're listening, I need some help here. I'll trade you my arm, my soul, whatever you want. Just get me out of here."

DAY FOUR TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 5 A.M.

More cycles.

Dark.

Cold.

Stars.

Space.

Shivering.

I've got a little less than three ounces of water left. I place the bottle in my crotch and unscrew the lid. But as I raise the bottle to my mouth, the lid snags on my harness and the bottle slips. My sluggish brain responds too slowly for my hand to catch it before it tilts almost horizontal and a splash of the sacrament darkens my tan shorts, turning the red dust to a patina of shining mud.

Fuck a nut, Aron. Pay attention! Look what you did!

exasperated *adj* forbitret
 carve *vb* skære
 transfer *vb* overføre
 bladder *sb* blære
 discharge *sb* udtømning
 inevitable *adj* uundgæelig
 subtle *adj* umærkelig
 stirring *sb* spirende
 fornemmelse
 tilt *vb* lene, vippe
 swirl *sb* hvirvel
 petroglyph *sb* hellerist-
 ning
 cycle *sb* cyklus
 crotch *sb* skridt
 lid *sb* låg
 snag *vb* hænge fast
 sluggish *adj* slov
 sacrament *sb* nadver (her:
 altervin)
 tan *adj* gyldenbrun
 patina *sb* skær

debit-purchase *sb* med betalingskort
 conjure *vb* fremmane
 tidal *adj* tidevands-
 rejuvenated *adj* forynget
 supportive *adj* støttende
 astutely *adv* klogtigt
 reassure *vb* trøste
 aspiration *sb* stræben
 muster *vb* opbyde
 dis'mantle *vb* afmontere
 biceps *sb* overarmsmuskel
 recock *vb* loftte igen
 fist *sb* knyttæve
 hilt *sb* skaft
 vision *sb* syn
 warp *vb* blive skæv
 a'stonishment *sb* overraskelse
 sepia-toned *adj* sepiafarvet, brunlig
 hallucinogenic *adj* hallucinogen (om narkotika)
 trail *sb* spor

Water is time. By that spill, how many hours did I just lose? Maybe six, maybe ten, maybe half a day? The mistake hits my morale like a train.

6:45 A.M.

I wonder if the police are involved in any theoretical search yet. Perhaps they've obtained my credit-card and debit-purchase histories, which would lead them to Glenwood Springs, Moab, and then Green River. No, wait: I paid cash for those Gatorades in Green River. Damn.

Credit, debit, cash, it doesn't matter; a couple energy drinks aren't going to guide rescuers all the way out here. Shifting away from the dim hopes of my rescue, I conjure up a series of bright memories that bring me a tidal change of emotion. I am surprisingly happy. Rejuvenated, I start videotaping.

"It's 6:45 in the morning on Tuesday morning," I repeat myself. "Mom, Dad, I really love you guys. Thank you both for being understanding and supportive. I really have lived this last year. I wish I had learned some lessons more astutely, more rapidly, than what it took to learn. I'll always be with you."

My thoughts turn to my sister and her wedding to her fiancé, Zack Elder, in August. "I wanted to say to Sonja and Zack that I really wish you the best in your upcoming life together. Do great things with your life – that will honor me the best. Thanks."

Thinking about my sister makes me happy. She's planning to be a volunteer teacher; it reassures me to know she's got such great aspirations. A smile cracks my dry lips.

7:58 A.M.

Slowly, I become aware of the cold stare of my knife. There's a reason for everything, including why I brought that knife, and suddenly I know what I am about to do. Mustering my courage, I dismantle a purple Prusik loop from the rigging and tie it around my right biceps, preparing the rest of my tourniquet as I refined it yesterday.

Unfolding the shorter blade, I close the handle and grasp it in my fist. Raising the tool above my right arm, I pick a spot on the top of my forearm. I hesitate, jerking my left hand to a halt a foot above my target. Then I recock my tool and, before I can stop myself, my fist violently thrusts the blade down, burying it to the hilt in the meat of my forearm.

"Holy crap, Aron," I say out loud. "What did you just do?"

My vision warps with astonishment. I bend my head to my arm, and my surroundings leave sepia-toned hallucinogenic trails behind them. Yesterday, it didn't seem possible that my knife could ever get through

my skin, but I did it. When I grasp the tool more firmly and wiggle it slightly, the blade connects with something hard, my upper forearm bone. I tap the knife down and feel it knocking on my radius.

Whoa. That's so bizarre.

I am suddenly curious. There is barely any discernable sensation of the blade below skin level. My nerves seem to be concentrated in the outer layers of my arm, then. I confirm this by drawing the knife out, slicing up at my skin from underneath. *Oh, yeah, there they are.* The flesh stretches with the blade, broadcasting signals through my arm as I open an inch-wide hole. Letting the pain dissipate, I note that there is remarkably little blood; the capillaries must have closed down for the time being. Fascinated, I poke at the gash with the tool. *Ouch.*

As I root around, burgundy-colored blood seeps into my wound. I tap at the bone again, feeling the vibration of each strike through my left thumb and forefinger. Even damped by surrounding tissues, the hollow thumping of the blade against my upper forearm bone resonates up into my elbow. The soft *thock-thock-thock* tells me I have reached the end of this experiment. I cannot cut into or through my forearm bones.

Sweating from the adrenaline, I pick up my water bottle. As the first drops splash against my lip, I open my eyes and stare into its blue bottom with detached observation as I continue to tilt the bottle up and up. I'm going to do it, and the fact I shouldn't makes me enjoy it even more.

Just do it – get it over with. It doesn't matter.

Each tablespoon of water satisfies me like a whole mouthful, and instantly I'm gulping at the dribbling flow. I close my eyes ... *Oh, God.* I swallow the last drops and it's gone.

DAY FIVE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 3 A.M.

In the piercing brutality of night, I repeatedly escape into trances. If heaven turns out to be as comfortable as the trances, then what I return to in the canyon is nothing short of hell. There is only one emotion in hell: unmitigated despair wrapped in abject loneliness, and I am enveloped in it.

9 A.M.

I update my hour tallies in my head: 96 hours of sleep deprivation, 90 hours that I've been trapped, 29 hours that I've been sipping my urine, and 25 hours with no fresh water. The exercise evokes no emotion, only matter-of-fact acknowledgment.

radius *sb* spoleben
 discernable *adj* mærkbar
 broadcast *vb* udsende
 dissipate *vb* opløses
 capillary *sb* meget lille blodår
 gash *sb* gabende sår
 burgundy *adj* vinrød
 damped *adj* dæmpet
 tissue *sb* væv
 detached *adj* uengageret
 piercing *adj* skærende
 unmitigated *adj* absolut
 abject *adj* total
 tally *sb* regnskab
 deprivation *sb* berøvelse
 acknowledgment *sb* (U.S., BE: -ledge-) erkendelse

wrecking ball *sb* kugle til nedbrydning
 re'mains *sb* jordiske rester
 scatter *vb* sprede
 a'dieu (*franskt*) farvel
 be'stow *vb* skænke
 bliss *sb* lykksalighed
 rapture *sb* ekstase
 frigid *adj* rakold
 anno'tation *sb* kommentar
 comple'mentary *adj* tilsvarende
 prance about *vb* spankulere rundt
 dapple *sb* plet

Suddenly, I have a new idea – what about using a rock as a wrecking ball to smash into the chockstone? Or maybe this is an old idea. Have I thought of this already? I can't remember.

2 P.M.

"It's Wednesday afternoon," I say into the camera. "Some logistics still to talk about." I've covered what to do with my possessions, so now I begin talking about where I'd like my remains to be scattered – Big Sur, Havasupai Creek in Arizona, New Mexico's Sandia Peak, a little spot on the Rio Grande...

Looking straight into the lens, I bid one last adieu: "I'm holding on, but it's really slowing down, the time is going really slow. So again, love to everyone. Bring love and peace and happiness and beautiful lives into the world in my honor. It would bestow the greatest meaning for me. Thank you. I love you."

Somewhere inside my mind, I know I won't survive tonight in Blue John Canyon. The day has been cool; this night will be the worst yet. It's not something I debate or internally discuss, but when I consider that I am going to die in a matter of hours, it rings true. If my time is up, then it is up, and yet I have a disconnected feeling of lightheartedness that vaguely approximates bliss. I wonder if this is what rapture feels like. Give it whatever name I want – all I know for sure is that I don't have to sweat it out anymore, because I'm not in charge.

11 P.M.

The canyon is an icebox. These are the killing winds.

I only get through two of the frigid nine hours of darkness before I decide it is time to make a final annotation. My watch confirms that it is April 30, for another hour at least. Above the four letters of my name, ARON, I scratch into the red rock, OCT 75. Below my name, I make the complementary scratching: APR 03.

I lean back in my harness and slip into another trance. Color bursts in my mind, and then I walk through the canyon wall, stepping into a living room. A blond-haired three-year-old boy in a red polo shirt comes running across a sunlit hardwood floor in what I somehow know is my future home. By the same intuition, I know the boy is my own. I bend to scoop him into my left arm, using my handless right arm to balance him, and we laugh together as I swing him up to my shoulder. The boy happily perches on my left shoulder while I steady him with my left hand and right stump. Smiling, I prance about the room, tiptoeing in and out of the sun dapples on the oak floor, and he giggles gleefully. Then,

with a shock, the vision blinks out. I'm back in the canyon, echoes of his joyful sounds resonating in my mind. Despite having already come to accept that I will die where I stand before help arrives, now I believe I will live.

That belief, that boy, changes everything for me.

DAY SIX: THURSDAY, MAY 1, 9:30 A.M.

With five days of gritty buildup pasted to my contact lenses, my eyes hurt at every blink, and wavering fringes of cloud frame my dingy vision.

Sip after sip of acidic urine has eroded my gums and left my palate raw. I can't hold my head upright; it lolls off to lean against the canyon wall. I am a zombie. I am the undead.

Miserable, I watch another empty hour pass by. The boost I felt from my vision of the boy has dissipated entirely. I have nothing whatsoever to do. I have no life. There is nothing that gives even a slight hint that this awful stillness will break. But I can make it break. I can resume smashing the chockstone with the rock.

Bonk! Again, I strike the boulder, the pain in my hand flaring. *Thwock!* And again. *Screeaatch!* My rage blooms purple amid a small mushroom cloud of pulverized grit. I bring the rock down again. *Carrunch!* Now my voice stokes hatred for the chockstone as I growl with animalistic fury – "*Unnngaarrrrgh!*" – in response to the throbs pulsing in my left hand.

Whoa, Aron. You might have taken that too far.

With my knife, I begin clearing particles from my trapped hand, using the dulled blade like a brush. Sweeping the grit off my thumb, I accidentally gouge myself and rip away a thin piece of decayed flesh. It peels back like the skin of boiled milk before I catch what is going on. I already knew my hand had to be decomposing without circulation, but I wasn't sure how fast the putrefaction had advanced. Now I suddenly understand the indigenous insect population's increased interest in my hand.

Out of curiosity, I poke my thumb with my knife blade twice. On the second prodding, the blade punctures the epidermis, like it is dipping into a stick of room-temperature butter, and releases a telltale hissing. Escaping decomposition gases are not good; the rot has advanced more quickly than I guessed. Though the smell is faint to my desensitized nose, it is abjectly unpleasant, the stench of a far-off carcass.

I lash out in fury, trying to yank my arm straight out from under the sandstone handcuff, never wanting more than I do right now to simply rid myself of any connection to this rotting appendage.

palate *sb* gane
 boost *sb* saltvandsind-sprøjtning
 stoke *vb* give næring til
 gouge *vb* snitte
 decayed *adj* radden
 decom'pose *vb* gå i opløsning
 putre'faction *sb* forradnelse
 in'digenous *adj* naturligt hjemmehørende
 epi'dermis *sb* overhud
 carcass *sb* atsel
 a'ppendage *sb* vedhæng

com'posure *sb* fatning
 un'budging *adj* urokkelig
 e'piphany *sb* ahenbaring
 inter'vention *sb* indgriben
 seizure *sb* anfald
 torque *vb* vride
 vise *sb* skruestik
 re'verberate *vb* give
 genlyd
 cap-gun *sb* knaldhaette-
 pistol
 fe'rocity *sb* vildskab
 ulna *sb* albueben
 antici'pation *sb* forvent-
 ning
 de'ploy *vb* bringe i stilling

I don't want it.
 It's not a part of me.
 It's garbage.

Throw it away, Aron. Be rid of it.

I thrash myself forward and back, side to side, up and down, down 5
 and up. I scream out in pure hate, shrieking as I batter my body against
 the canyon walls, losing every bit of composure that I've struggled so
 intensely to maintain. And then I feel my arm bend unnaturally in the
 unbudging grip of the chockstone. An epiphany strikes me with the
 magnificent glory of a holy intervention and instantly brings my seizure 10
 to a halt:

If I torque my arm far enough, I can break my forearm bones.

Like bending a two-by-four held in a table vise, I can just bow my
 entire goddamn arm until it snaps in two!

Holy Christ, Aron, that's it, that's it. THAT'S FUCKING IT! 15

There is no hesitation. I barely realize what I'm about to do. I unclip
 from the anchor webbing, crouching until my buttocks are almost touch-
 ing the stones on the canyon floor. I put my left hand under the boulder
 and push hard, harder, HARDER! to put a maximum downward force
 on my radius bone. As I slowly bend my arm down to the left, a POW! 20
 reverberates like a muted cap-gun shot.

I scramble to clear the chockstone, trying to keep my head on straight.
 Without further pause and again in silence, I hump my body up over
 the rock. Smearing my shoes against the canyon walls, I push with my
 legs and grab the back of the chockstone with my left hand, pulling with 25
 every bit of ferocity I can muster, until a second cap-gun shot ends my
 ulna's anticipation. Sweating and euphoric, I touch my right arm again.
 Both bones have splintered in the same place, just above my wrist.

I am overcome with excitement. Hustling to deploy the shorter and
 sharper multitool blade, I completely skip the tourniquet procedure I 30
 have rehearsed and place the cutting tip to my wrist, between two blue
 veins. I push the knife into my wrist, watching my skin stretch inward,
 until the point finally pierces and sinks to its hilt.

In a blaze of pain, I know the job is just starting.

Pre-reading

1. You are going on a weekend hike in a wild landscape – how do you prepare, what do you pack?

Analysis and Interpretation

1. Divide the text into sections.
2. Compare the background paragraphs to the diary-based paragraphs and analyse them based on:
 - the length and complexity of the sentences
 - the verbal tenses
 - the tone
3. Draw a time-line of the days that Aron spent trapped in the canyon.
4. What are his main emotions and actions at different points in time? Look for instance at the way he feels at day and how he feels at night.
5. Identify the turning point of Aron's ordeal – what brings it about?
6. How does he escape?
7. Make a characterization of Aron in which you take into account his actions, reactions, emotions and earlier experience and discuss whether Aron is outstanding.
8. What influence does the fact that this is an autobiographical non-fictional text have on your reading and appreciation of it?
9. Who is the text written for?

Post-reading

1. Find Aron's website on the Internet. Make an analysis of the site in which you include the following:
 - how does Aron present himself?
 - what are the contents of the site?
 - how does he use pictures?
 - in what way is the site interactive – and why?
2. The news of Aron's narrow escape from death was so spectacular that it even made it to Danish papers. What is the role of the media in Aron's story and what does it take to become famous today?
3. Compare Aron's project of rock climbing with Scott's project of reaching the South Pole. What do the two men have in common and where do they differ? Are the two projects equally acceptable on a moral level?

Pat Hopkins is fascinated by eccentricity and a major collector of Boerkitsch – South Africa's own form of kitsch. He is a history and political science graduate from the University of Natal, an award-winning writer and author of a number of books, including *The Boy on Baden-Powell and the Siege of Mafeking*; *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show, on the 1976 Soweto Uprising*; and *Eccentric South Africa (2001)*, from which this text is taken.

Pat Hopkins

The Warrior Princess (2001)

Trust yourself, both in your suffering as well as in your triumph.

– Machiavelli, *Tactics for Warrior Princesses*

“Welcome to Egypt, welcome to the land of confusion, allow me to unlock its secrets,” screamed Said Beshir Arabi, a twenty-one-year-old hustler, at visitors arriving at Cairo's airport. Tall, imposing forty-five-year-old Johannesburg artist Sybille Nagel – visiting North Africa with luggage stuffed full of crushed cans she intended rusting in the desert for use in a series of paintings – took up his offer. They married three days later.

“She's just your average mixed-up teenager,” comments one of her sons from a previous failed marriage.

“Bonkers!” adds her mother.

Oddball, bizarre, outlandish, weird and peculiar are typical remarks.

“Insane,” cry others. But she is none of these. She defies description.

15 A child prodigy, she is the daughter of an autocratic, Teutonic entrepreneur who was interned at Baviaanspoort as a German alien during World War II. Even though she endured a troubled relationship with her father, he did instil in her a great passion for German philosophy, literature and art by introducing her to the teachings of Goethe, Rudolf Steiner and the
20 outrageous sculptor Joseph Beuys. These were formative influences on her, together with her Down's syndrome-afflicted sister who acquainted her with the angels who used to visit her. Then there were the family holidays she turned into adventures – once nearly drowning when a voice within instructed her to swim across a lake in Germany.

warrior *sb* kriger
Machiavelli (1469-1527)
italiensk statsmand og
politisk tænk
hustler *sb* bondefanger
im'posing *adj* statelig
bonkers *adj* bindegal
oddball *adj* sær
out'landish *adj* frem-
medartet
de'fy *vb* unddrage sig
prodigy *sb* vidunderbarn
auto'cratic *adj* diktatorisk
teu'tonic *adj* germansk
alien *sb* fremmed
en'dure *vb* udholde
in'stil *vb* bibringe
J. W. v. Goethe (1749-
1832) tysk digter
Rudolf Steiner (1861-
1925) østrigsk filosof, Stei-
ner-skolernes pædagogik
er baseret på hans tanker
out'rageous *adj* skandalos
Joseph Beuys (1921-1986)
tysk konceptkunstner
formative *adj* formativ,
som præger den personlige
udvikling
ac'quaint *vb* gøre bekendt
med