



K2: Triumph and Tragedy

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K2 is the second highest mountain in the world, at 8611 metres only a couple of hundred metres lower than Everest and is one of the most unrelenting and testing of the world's 8000-metre peaks.

Jim Curran came to K2 as a climbing cameraman with an unsuccessful British expedition, but stayed on through the climbing season. This is his account of the dramatic events of that summer, a story of ambitions both achieved and thwarted on a mountain which all high-altitude climbers take the most pride in overcoming. In 1986 K2 took its toll of those ambitions.

Curran vividly describes the moments that contribute to the exhilaration of climbing on the world's most demanding mountain, and he assesses the tragedy of that summer with compassion and impartiality.

K2, "the savage mountain", is the second-highest peak in the world - and the most difficult to climb. In 1986, it was the site of both dazzling triumph and great loss as twenty-seven men and women reached the top but thirteen died trying. Curran was there to record it all in words and photographs: courage and obsession, luminous success and thwarted ambition.

K2: Triumph and Tragedy Details

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Crystal says

Sensitively written account of the 1986 K2 attempt which the author witnessed. It is truly moving how very respectful Curran reacted as one tragedy after another struck. He was along to film but refused to profit on the pain and sad outcome. He suffered huge personal losses which undoubtedly clearly defined his priorities and showed him to be a man of great character.

Excellent read! Terrifying, heartbreaking consequences of so many ambitious and determined climbers that dared this deadly beast of a mountain.

Mathias Seiwert says

Interesting book for sure. SO sad to see so many elite climbers die on K2 in 1986. Many of those who survived that year died on different mountains later in life...Such is the nature of elite mountaineering in the Himalaya/Karakoram--and yet there is much a Christian can learn from these climbers about perseverance and overcoming extreme challenges/trials.

Alison Sumper says

Interesting and very sad that so many climbers died in 1986 on the mountain. I knew climbing was dangerous, and I knew many people have died trying to reach the summit, but this was just so depressing.

Rebekkila says

I feel a bit bad about loving this book so much. Thirteen people died while climbing K2 during the summer of 1986 and the author was there at base camp for all thirteen deaths. I probably could have read this story in half a day but I kept looking at the pictures of the people that were with him that summer and at the drawings of the mountain and the surrounding region. I think I spent as much time looking at the pictures and drawings as I did reading. But it is so hard for me to wrap my head around the enormity of this mountain and all of its cols, peaks, and glaciers.

I read another book to similar to this about a disasterous expedition on Mt. Everest. The tone of the the two books was very different. The author of this story never went higher than camp 1 or 2, which meant he never got into extremely high altitude. Where as the author of Into Thin Air summited Everest nad was physically and mentally in a very different state from Jim Curran. Jim C. never really blamed anyone personally for what happened during the climb. He realized the altitude and the storms had a lot to do with the deaths of his friends. And at the end he walked off the mountain alone.

Andrea says

Having just finished K2: Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain, I am drawn to reread Jim Curran's book and see the events he writes about in a fresh light.

I first read *K2: Triumph and Tragedy* about a dozen years ago; I am not a climber, but I love mountaineering books wholeheartedly. Curran's book details the horrific 1986 climbing season, in which 13 people died (seven of whom actually made it to the top). Jim Curran was not attempting the summit himself, but he was there to chronicle the British expedition and as such, found himself in the middle of the events that unfolded over the summer.

Again, I was fascinated by the stories of the individual climbers and the risks they took to succeed (or die trying). I look forward to reading this again.

Carolyn (in SC) C234D says

I liked this very much. I find the books I've read about mountaineering fascinating, such as *INTO THIN AIR* and *THE CLIMB*. This book was written by Jim Curran, an experienced climber and photographer, who was on this expedition to take photographs and videos, not to climb to the summit. He has an engaging way of writing, and seemed to express his emotions and opinions in an honest, pretty non-judgmental way. Many photographs by Jim and some of the other climbers are included, and it is very helpful to put a face to a name that you are reading about. I also wore a path to the maps to see where he was talking about. This was a very interesting tale of success for some (making the summit) and tragedy (for some of those same people). A gripping book. 4.5 stars.

Mazola1 says

Jim Curran's book tells the story of the deadly summer of 1986 on K2. Triumph refers to the twenty seven climbers who successfully climbed K2 that year, including the first woman to do so. The tragedy is that thirteen climbers were also killed on the mountain. Jim Curran was a member of one of the expeditions on the mountain that year, but did not climb much above base camp. Nonetheless, from his station low on the mountain, he learned of each of the deaths, including that of his good friend Al Rouse, and two other women who successfully summited, only to be killed on the descent.

Curran's book is a sad one, and the reader feels his anguish as he learns of death after death. Each death seems terrible in its own unique way. There is young Italian climber Renate Cassaratta, who falls into a crevasse just minutes from base camp where his wife is waiting for him. Fatally injured, he is able to call his wife by radio, but dies as rescuers lift him from the crevasse. Curran learns from another climber that his friend Al Rouse, exhausted by his summit climb, was left to die in a tent high on the mountain, hallucinating and too weak to climb down.

Curran concludes that most of those who died were victims of summit fever, and were willing to take unreasonable risks to achieve their dream of standing on top of K2. He writes that climbers develop habits and attitudes that are deeply ingrained by the time they attempt as formidable a mountain as K2, especially when it comes to what they regard as an acceptable level of risk. He feels that climbers who had retreated

before in the face of danger would probably not have pressed on towards the summit of K2 in 1986, a year marked by bad weather and numerous accidents. Curran's book provides a revealing look at the types of people that climb mountains, including the differences between those that climb and perish and those that climb and return home safely.

Lucas says

There is a lot of the tragedy, and the triumph is only noted in the appendices. I'm not familiar with mountaineering terms like 'abseiling' and this book doesn't pause to explain, otherwise it is a very straightforward and readable account. It is frequently too diary-like and there is not enough attention to what comes before or after any event. I also had a poor conception of the space: the different camp positions and the distance and difficulty of travel between them.

The author is a film maker and makes constant self-conscious remarks about the decision to haul around film equipment or not, or whether to record emotional events like when the death of a climber is reported at a camp. I found this interesting, but is there a finished film with his work in it?

The main killer the author repeatedly makes clear is not the mountain but the high altitude environment: time spent above 8000 meters has to be limited to 3 days at most. The effects of altitude sickness lead to mental and physical degradation that greatly magnify the chance of making a fatal mistake, or will kill outright.

Annie says

This book suffers from a few things, among them being the fact that the author was a little too close to the situation, and doesn't really have a background in journalism. I'll explain: a few times he mentioned that he could have taken more pictures of events that were happening, but chose not to, as it "felt wrong." There were probably a few situations where that was the respectful thing to do, but I found the photos in the book a little lackluster for someone who was hired to document the event. Another reviewer mentioned that the author seemed to get lost in name dropping, or discussing the who's who of the climbing world at the time. I definitely found that to be true as well. Overall I think it was a decent and honest account of what happened on K2 that fateful summer, but I wouldn't go out of my way to recommend this book to those who want a good book on mountaineering.

(Also...this is just something I have a problem with in general: treatment of Sherpas. The author paints them as ruthless opportunists, but honestly, you're using these people as human pack animals, probably not paying them hardly anything, and asking them to risk their lives- and sometimes lose their lives, as one of the 13 deaths was a Sherpa- for your dumb egos. It's pretty disgusting, honestly. That's just my two cents though.)

Susan Moore says

Worst climbing tragedy on K2.

Well written account of the 1986 achievements and deaths on K2. Twenty-seven climbed the mountain that year. Thirteen died. Eight died above 8,000m. The other five died from a falling rock, avalanches, and falls.

I found a very crucial piece of information that apparently had not been read or heeded by most climbers on K2 in 2008 when eleven climbers died in similar circumstances. That is that a Korean summiteer in 1986, tried to fix the cut line across the traverse under the serac and put up a new line for others to traverse. Unfortunately, he left about a three foot hank of rope hanging down between the old and new rope line that others in the dark, and in fatigued conditions clipped onto and fell from in the dark. In 2008, many people who did summit couldn't find their way back to the fixed rope. Those with skills, used their crampons and ice axes to go down a near vertical wall of ice. Others, sat down to wait for morning. I think the lesson is, you have to plan to save yourself if possible. Cecile went on later to be the first woman to win the Explorers Grand Slam, climbing the highest mountain on each of the seven continents and going to both the north and south poles.

In 2008, only Cecile Skog's team knowingly carried a 300' length of climbing rope for emergencies such as this, and fixed a crucial line just cut from an avalanche under this terrible serac, which also took her new husband down to his death.

Jim was a minimal climber. He was along for videography, photos, and ultimately a documentary. He was the last member of his team left there by the time he trekked out to go home. I highly recommend this book to people like me who are interested in climbing, and especially for climbers.

Evan Scott says

I thought that the book K2 was very interesting but very hard to follow along with. Jim Curran was sort of jumpy from topics and did not provide vocabulary that made the book better. I enjoyed following along his adventure up the mountain and the struggles he faced. I gave the book a three because it lost my attention most of the time. The plot was good but the structure of the book was not.

Amerynth says

Jim Curran's "K2: Triumph and Tragedy" is a solid account of the disastrous 1986 climbing season on K2, the world's second highest mountain. That year, 13 climbers from a variety of expeditions died on the mountain's infamous slopes.

Curran, who was on a British expedition as a filmmaker and did not climb much higher than 7,000 meters, watched from base camp as several people marched off to their deaths, including one of his closest friends. His pain is palpable during some of the later parts of the book and he concludes that successful high altitude mountaineers are the kind of people who push themselves to the brink precisely because it has always worked out before -- until it doesn't.

Curran is a middling writer... his early chapters get bogged down in a sort of name dropping scenario where he starts tossing around the names and accomplishments of climber after climber. Even though many of the names were familiar, it was just too much to take in at one time. The later chapters of the book are better, but more tragic as Curran waits at base camp for friends that will never return.

I've read a lot of mountaineering books over the years and found this one to be good over all, but not one of my favorites. I'd recommend it only to readers who are already fairly familiar with climbing and technical

terms as Curran does not take a lot of time for explanations.

Dale says

The World's Second-Highest Mountain...

All 14 of the world's 8,000-meter peaks are located in the Himalaya or the Karakoram ranges in Asia. Of the group, Everest reigns as the supreme highest mountain in the world. And yet it is a neighbor with the strange name of "K2" that many consider the harder to climb. Everest is deadly, but the ridges running up to the summit are said to be less challenging than K2. K2 is the true monster among mountains.

During 1986, twenty-seven persons made the summit of K2, a triumph for the climbers. But thirteen persons lost their lives that year in the attempt to master what many have named "The Savage Mountain."

Author Jim Curran was on the mountain during the summer of 1986. His work as a climbing cameraman for the British Fullers Expedition gave him plenty of insight into the climbers and the mountain.

Some of those who reached the summit of K2 that summer died on their way down. In fact, seven of the thirteen had reached the summit before disaster overtook them. Two Americans were killed in an avalanche, one man fell to his death in a crevasse just out of base camp, and seven were trapped at 26,000 feet for days. Only two would survive and they were almost dead when they finally were helped to base camp.

But all was not a tragedy. A young man named Benoit Chamoux made a historic 23-hour climb. Wanda Rutkiewicz became the first woman to summit K2. There were moments of heroism, including the author's rescue of one of the two survivors of the summit disaster.

Curran tells his story much like he lived it, one day at a time. We witness his rejoicing at the accomplishments of the climbers. We feel his anxiety when his friends are trapped for days. He shares his sorrow for the ones who were left behind, dead on the savage mountain that claimed their lives.

This is a fascinating account of triumph and tragedy. I give the book four stars.

Quoth the Raven...

Jerry Smith says

I don't know why I like mountaineering books since I have never really wanted to undertake a mountain climb myself. I guess I look to these books to help me understand why people would risk everything on such a quest.

This book certainly goes some way in that regard in that it is written entirely from the point of view of an expedition member, photographing an attempt on K2. This really does seem to be an extremely unforgiving mountain indeed.

I came away with a good feel for what life was like from the point of view of a team member left at base camp/camp 1, trying to support his team going for the top. It gives a great feel for how futile such a position can feel when things go wrong.

The book is well written but I was a little confused by all the different groups that were introduced and the names of mountaineers also on the mountain were introduced informally therefore we didn't really get a feel for them as people before learning of their demise which reduced the impact.

Carla says

As you would expect from the name, this book is about climbing K2, one of the highest mountains, and technically way more difficult than Mt Everest. It is therefore generally frequented by more serious and experienced climbers than Everest, but still has a higher percentage death toll.

The author, Jim Curran, went on a expedition in 1986, and writes about his experiences. He went primarily to take film and provide back up, and not to summit, and therefore spent much of his time there close to Basecamp. This put him in prime position to record the different comings and goings of the many expeditions, as well as meet and make friends with the other climbers. Many climbers summited that year, but many died as well.

It's evident that Curran is a very experienced mountaineer, and a member of the elite climbing community. I don't know whether he wrote this book for fellow climbers, but you do need to know the basics of climbing to get something out of this book. He doesn't really explain the basics of climbing techniques and equipment, the effect of high altitude on the body and mind of climbers, or any slightly technical terms, and takes all of this as given that the reader will understand (unlike in Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*). His writing style is fairly impartial, and he also does not dramatise or sensationalise the deaths that occur. One gets the feeling that he is trying to be as respectful as possible of his friends and the climbing community in general. I think he does a good job of describing the events that occurred without getting overly emotional, or really placing blame for the disasters on anyone specific.
