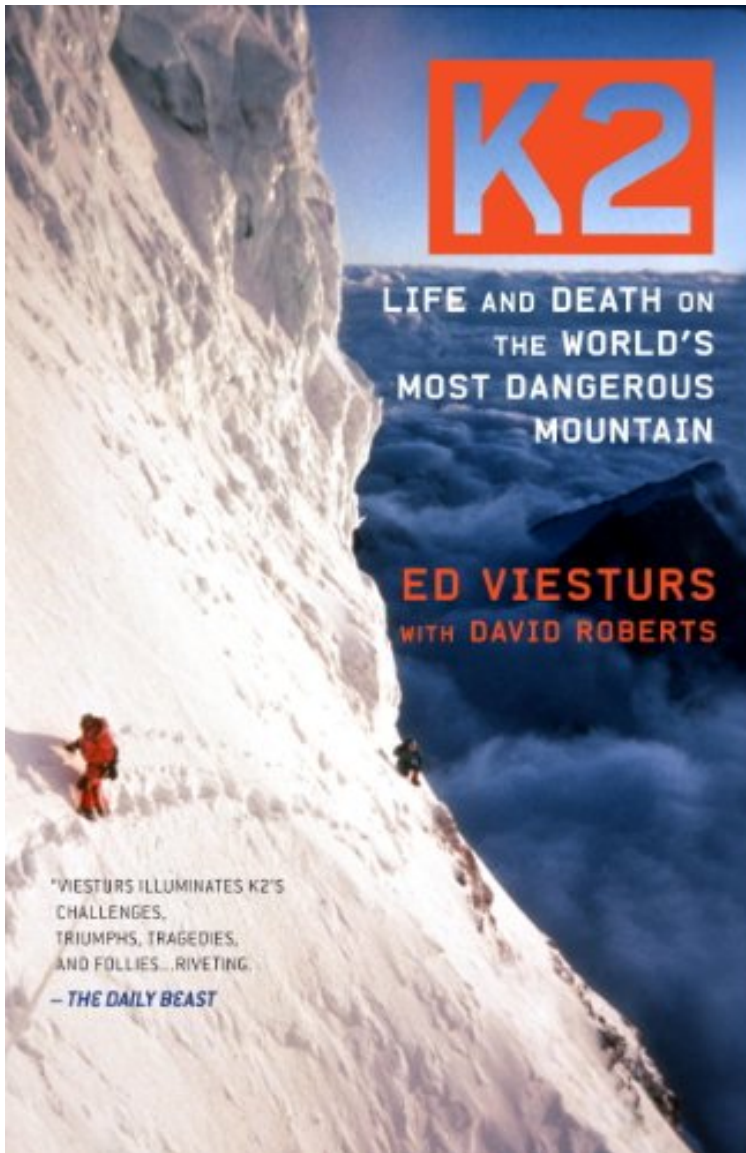


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K2: Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain



Par Ed Viesturs, David Roberts
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA thrilling chronicle of the tragedy-ridden history of climbing the world's most difficult and unpredictable mountain, by the bestselling authors of *The Mountain* and *No Shortcuts to the Top*Ed Viesturs, one of the world's premier high-altitude mountaineers, explores the remarkable history of K2 and of those who have attempted to conquer it. At the same time, he probes the mountain's most memorable sagas in order to illustrate lessons about the fundamental questions mountaineering raises questions of risk, ambition, loyalty to one's teammates, self-sacrifice, and the price of glory. Viesturs

knows the mountain firsthand. He and renowned alpinist Scott Fischer climbed it in 1992 and got caught in an avalanche that sent them sliding to almost certain death before Ed managed to get into a self-arrest position with his ice ax and stop both his fall and Scott's. Focusing on seven of the mountain's most dramatic campaigns, from his own troubled ascent to the 2008 tragedy, Viesturs crafts an edge-of-your-seat narrative that climbers and armchair travelers alike will find unforgettably compelling. With photographs from Viesturs's personal collection and from historical sources, this is the definitive account of the world's ultimate mountain, and of the lessons that can be gleaned from struggling toward its elusive summit.

Extrait Introduction In the wee hours of the morning of August 1, 2008, some thirty climbers from ten different expeditions set out from their high camps on the Abruzzi Ridge of K2. At 28,251 feet the world's second-tallest mountain, K2, thrusts skyward out of the Karakoram Range of northern Pakistan. After weeks of sitting out bad weather, the mountaineers were poised to go for the summit on a clear and windless day. During the endless storms, morale at base camp had reached rock bottom, and some climbers had thrown in the towel and gone home. But now everybody still on the mountain was jazzed. As they emerged from their cramped tents to clip on crampons and hoist packs, the climbers were riding a manic high. Sometime that day, they thought, they would claim one of the most elusive and glorious prizes in mountaineering. For most of these men and women, K2 was the goal of a lifetime.

Chapter 1: THE MOUNTAIN

VATOR Although the various teams were operating independently, they had tried to cobble together a common logistical plan that would help everyone get to the top. The crucial feature of that plan was the fixing of thin nylon ropes to be used on the way up, in effect, as handrails, and on the way down as lines that could be easily rappelled. Those fixed ropes were intended to ensure the climbers' passage through the Bottleneck, a steep and dangerous couloir of snow and ice that rises from an altitude of 26,400 feet. The Bottleneck and the sketchy leftward traverse at the top of it form the "crux" of the Abruzzi Ridge. Although climbing the Bottleneck is only moderately difficult, what makes that high gauntlet so nerve-racking is a gigantic serac a cliff of solid ice that looms above it. Weighing many tons, poised at a vertical and, in places, an overhanging angle, the serac looks as though it is barely attached to the mountain. Yet in the sixty-nine years since mountaineers first came to grips with this formidable obstacle, the serac had proved remarkably stable. It seemed, indeed, to be a permanent feature of K2's summit pyramid. Thirty climbers crawling up the same route on the same day would have been business as usual on Mount Everest. On K2 a far more serious mountain, and one that has seen far fewer attempts such a crowd was unprecedented. Still, as they approached the Bottleneck, thanks to the perfect weather for which they had waited so long, the climbers were awash in optimism. The summit was within their grasp. And then things started to go subtly wrong. Small mistakes were made. Miscommunications, fueled by the many different languages the climbers spoke, flared into angry words. The slower climbers began to block the way for those who were capable of moving faster. Yet the single event that turned an awkward day into a catastrophe was nobody's fault. Within the next thirty-six hours, eleven of those mountaineers would die high on the Abruzzi Ridge. The disaster that unfolded on August 1 would end up as the worst single-event tragedy in the mountain's history, and the second worst in the long chronicle of mountaineering in the Himalaya and the Karakoram. And nobody saw it coming.

-----Almost sixteen years earlier, on August 16, 1992, with my partners Scott Fischer and Charley Mace, I had left our high camp in the predawn darkness and started trudging up toward the Bottleneck. On that day, I, too, had been full of bursting hope, tempered by the wary alertness that is the obligatory state of mind for any alpinist who wants to stay alive in the great ranges. I had previously climbed Everest and Kangchenjunga, the first- and third-highest peaks in the world, but I knew that K2 was in another league of difficulty and danger. Like 2008's climbers, Scott, Charley, and I had had to bide our time for interminable weeks before we finally got a crack at the summit. Not only storms but all kinds of logistical snafus and interpersonal conflicts had delayed our final assault again and again. It was not until fifty-seven days after arriving at base camp that we finally set out for the top. On the other hand, on that August day in 1992, the three of us had had the Bottleneck to ourselves. And fixing ropes up the couloir was not part of our plan.

In *No Shortcuts to the Top*, the memoir I wrote about climbing the world's fourteen highest peaks, I devoted a full chapter to my K2 expedition. Even after K2, it took me several years before I began to consider that it might be possible for me to reach the summit of all fourteen 8,000-meter peaks. For one thing, I didn't think there was any way that I could ever afford to go on so many expeditions. For another, climbing all fourteen 8,000ers seemed far too ambitious a goal. The first person to accomplish that feat had been the great Tyrolean mountaineer Reinhold Messner, who knocked off his fourteenth in 1986. And Messner was like a god to me. Yet with K2, I became the first American to climb the world's three

highest mountains. The outdoor magazines ran a few short profiles about me. One of them was titled "Ed Who?" Even after those pieces appeared, I was still relatively unknown to the general public, but with the boost in confidence they gave me, I finally got up the nerve to start approaching potential sponsors. K2 was a huge turning point in my life. Yes, it brought me my first modest taste of what you might call "mountaineering celebrity." But far more important than any faint whiff of fame were the lessons K2 taught me. In the aftermath of 2008's disaster, all kinds of armchair "experts" delivered their scathing critiques. Nonclimbers clogging the online chat rooms, in response to sensational newspaper articles, took a macabre delight in the tragedy. This was Everest 1996 all over again, they seemed to think the melodrama of clueless dilettantes who had no business on the mountain buying their way into a catastrophe at the cost of their own lives, as well as the lives of professional guides entrusted with caring for them. (Hundreds of readers of Jon Krakauer's bestseller *Into Thin Air* reduced his complicated narrative to that simplistic morality play.) After the August 2008 tragedy, Messner himself sounded off in this vein, decrying the "K2 package deals" that he assumed had lured novices to the mountain and concluding, "Something like this is just pure stupidity." Messner was not the only famous mountaineer to criticize the victims of the 2008 disaster. The temptation to second-guess those luckless climbers' decisions was all but irresistible. Newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV shows called me for my commentary. I was already beginning to think that what had happened on K2 on August 1 was far more complicated than the first tabloid and Internet versions of the story. It would take several weeks for more detailed accounts to trickle down from the slopes of the mountain and find their way to responsible media outlets. And I was not about to cast facile aspersions on climbers who had died on the mountain, or had barely survived it. In 1992, K2 had not only proved to be a turning point in my life it had been the scene of what I still regard as the greatest mistake I ever made as a mountaineer. The most important lesson I learned from that beautiful and dangerous peak was a blunt one: Don't ever do that again if you want to stay alive. Listen to your instincts, and follow them. Recently, I reread my diary from the K2 trip. I was struck by how different it seemed from the account I had written in *No Shortcuts*. Events and relationships that seemed really important when they were happening barely made it into the chapter I wrote thirteen years after the expedition. Conversely, some of the most dramatic turning points of my weeks on K2 got covered in my diary in only a few deadpan sentences. I wasn't writing the diary, of course, for anybody else to read. At the time, I thought I was simply making a day-by-day record of the most ambitious mountaineering attempt of my life up to that point. Now I wonder. Any "story" can be told in dozens of different ways. For that very reason, I believe, every time you go back and reexamine an important chapter in your life, you learn something new about it. And the reactions of audiences when I give slide shows, as well as the e-mails I received from folks who read *No Shortcuts to the Top*, gave me many new insights into my own experience. I have always believed that climbing mountains teaches you lessons. And more than that, I firmly believe that those lessons can be applied to the rest of your life. It's not an easy process, however. Mountaineering literature is full of trite clichés about "conquering an enemy" or "transcending your limits." For at least two centuries, philosophers of the outdoors have insisted that nature is "a school of character." Would that it were all so simple! The most important lesson I learned from K2 was that by simply putting off making a decision, I made the worst decision of my life: to climb on into a gathering storm. I was lucky to survive our summit push on K2. Scott and Charley didn't agree with me about this. That day, they never seemed to suffer from the nagging doubts the knot in my gut, as I've always thought of it I carried with me hour after hour. Yet my partners' comparatively blithe attitude about our climbing on that August 16 doesn't even begin to tempt me to revise my judgment. It's ultimately a personal thing. K2 is often called the hardest mountain in the world. It's also often called the deadliest. This may not be strictly true: in terms of the ratio of climbers who get to the top compared to those who die on the mountain, Annapurna is more deadly than K2. (I succeeded on Annapurna, in fact, only on my third try, in 2005, and only after I'd begun to wonder whether it was too dangerous a peak to justify another attempt. It became my n... *Revue de presse* *Gripping*... reveals a good deal about the rarefied noble-gonzo world of high-altitude mountaineering. *New York Times* *Viesturs* illuminates K2's challenges, triumphs, tragedies, and follies... *Riveting*. *The Daily Beast* *Viesturs*'s you-are-there narration communicates effortlessly the enormous effort, and high adventure, of scaling K2. *Publishers Weekly*