

# MOUNTAIN OF

# DOOM

VIDEO

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## VOCABULARY

**preserves:** keeps something in its original condition

**gruesome:** causing horror

**summit:** the top of a mountain

**crippled:** made unable to walk or move normally

**expedition:** a journey by a group of people for a specific purpose

## WAITING GAME

Mount Everest has become very crowded in recent years. Climbers wait in line to get to the top. While waiting, they struggle to breathe. Eleven people have died on Everest this year alone.

# Extreme cold. Cliffs of ice. Air so thin you can barely breathe. There are many ways to die on Mount Everest. So why do people want to climb it? BY TOD OLSON

**W**ould you dare to climb Mount Everest, the world's highest peak?

The winds howl, blinding snowstorms appear out of nowhere, and temperatures drop to -40 degrees Fahrenheit.

But nothing is as disturbing as the dead bodies.

You might spot some along the main route. At times, the wind reveals a pile of bones under the snow. Often, the cold **preserves** the bodies whole—exactly where they died. For 20 years, the body of a man from

India lay curled up near a cave. Climbers named him “Green Boots” for his colorful footwear.

Though the bodies are **gruesome**, they don't deter climbers from pursuing their goal of standing on top of the world—and living to tell the story. In fact, more climbers than ever before are conquering Mount Everest.

## Many Ways to Die

Everest is part of the Himalayan mountain range, rising above Central Asia on the border between China and Nepal. Everest's **summit** stands 29,029 feet above sea level—or nearly 6 miles high. The Sherpa people of Nepal refer to the mountain as the “Goddess of the Sky.”

People have been climbing Everest for almost 100 years, but in the beginning, very few people succeeded. This year, about 900 climbers reached the top. Eleven never made it home.

On Everest, there are numerous ways to die. People might be **crippled** by frostbite, or they might tumble down a 5,000-foot slope of ice. They might even be buried by an avalanche—a mass of snow, rocks, and ice that slides quickly down a slope without warning.

But on Everest, the greatest threat to survival is the air itself. As you ascend the mountain, the air gets thinner and you take in less and less oxygen. Most climbers rely on bottled oxygen near the top of the mountain.







**WHERE IS EVEREST?**  
 Mount Everest is part of the Himalayas, a mountain range in Asia. It lies on the border between Nepal and China.



Some crevasses can be up to 150 feet deep!

**WATCH YOUR STEP!**  
 Climbers must cross crevasses—deep, open cracks in the ice—using thin metal ladders.

Even so, they gasp for air after every step and have difficulty thinking clearly.

Above 26,000 feet, the danger is so extreme it's called the death zone. No one can survive there for long, given how little oxygen is in the air.

## Summit Fever

The danger often forces climbers to make difficult choices. Some have paid as much as \$130,000 to make the trip, and they've dreamed about reaching the top for years. Suppose they feel sick as they near the summit. Do they head back down or continue upward?

Every year, some climbers make the wrong decision. They're so focused on reaching the top that they ignore the dangers. Climbers call this "summit fever," and it can be deadly.

And what if a fellow climber needs help? In 2006, a British climber named David Sharp huddled in a cave inside the death zone. He had grown too weak to climb. At least 40 climbers passed him.

Some stopped, but no one attempted to help him down. They barely had the strength to make the descent themselves. Sharp died high on the mountain—alone.

## Why Climb?

Over the years, more than 300 climbers have perished on Everest. Now people often wonder: If the climb is so treacherous, why attempt it?

Climbers give a variety of answers. They say that Everest is a challenge that forces you to be tough and brave. It's a story that will impress your children and grandchildren. It's an accomplishment that will earn you respect from others.

To some climbers, the risk is the whole point. "If you live life trying to avoid death, then you are dead already," says American climber Alan Arnette.

Now that you're aware of the risks, it's time to make your choice. Would you prefer a comfortable walk at sea level—or a journey to the top of the world? •

# "I CLIMBED MOUNT EVEREST"

At 13, Malavath Poorna became the youngest girl to ever climb the world's highest mountain. We talked to her about what it was like to stand on top of the world.

## Did you always want to climb mountains?

Not at all! I grew up in a small village in India. I always loved sports, but I never tried mountain climbing. However, in ninth grade, I went to a rock climbing camp for poor children. The managers of the camp saw how tough we were, so they sent two of us to climb Mount Everest to inspire kids everywhere.

## How did you prepare to climb?

We worked out every day for eight months. It was the most difficult thing I've ever done. I needed to become strong enough to carry up to 55 pounds of gear. I had to learn how to walk in deep snow and climb walls of ice. And I had to

keep up with my schoolwork!

## What was the scariest moment on your journey?

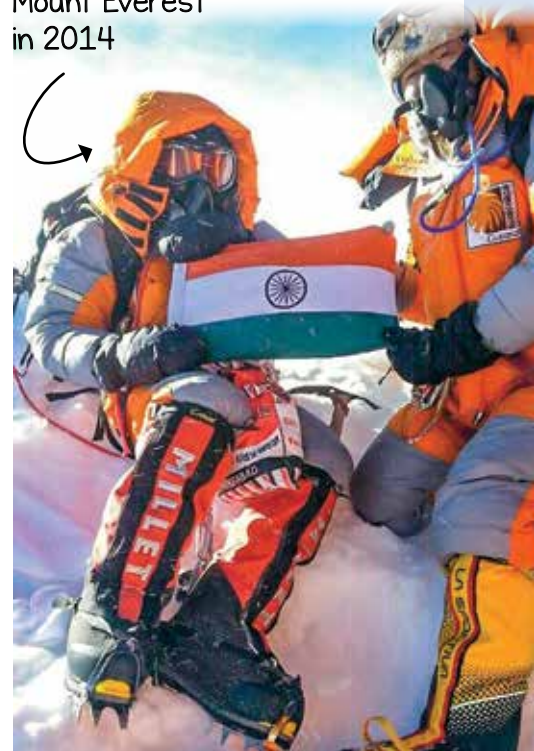
At the beginning, we received terrible news—16 people had been killed in an avalanche on the mountain. My coach gave us the option to go home. But I could see my goal above me and could not turn back.

## How long did it take?

The **expedition** took 52 days—to reach the summit and go back down. Near the top, I tried to remember my parents, teachers, and friends, who were waiting for me at home. I was determined to keep going. When I reached the top, I was so happy. I felt confident that I could achieve anything. •



Malavath at the top of Mount Everest in 2014



## ACTION ACTIVITY

## Put It Together

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ACTIVITIES

What makes climbing Everest dangerous, and why do people still do it?

**WHAT TO DO:** Complete the sentences below using examples from the texts.

1. Climbing Mount Everest is extremely dangerous because \_\_\_\_\_  
(Hint: Look in the first article. What are three ways that people can die while climbing Mount Everest?)

2. Still, people risk their lives to \_\_\_\_\_  
(Hint: Look in both articles. What does climbing Mount Everest prove? How does it make people feel?)