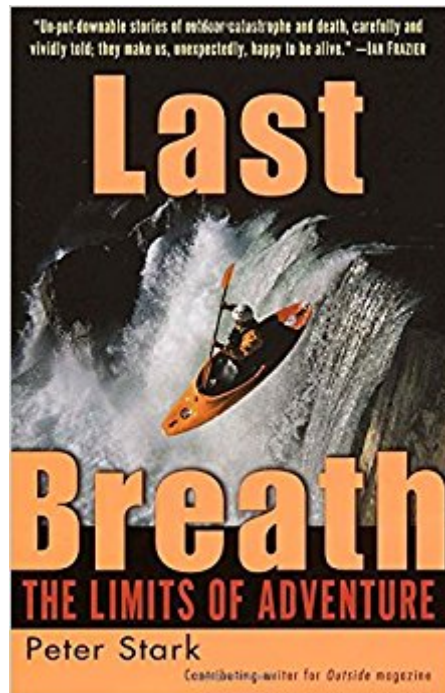




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# Last Breath: The Limits Of Adventure



## Synopsis

“Forget the edge of your seat. Last Breath takes you to the edge of your life, for a pulse-pounding glimpse into the Great Beyond. There are many ways to risk your life in the out-of-doors, and Stark has captured them in exquisite and harrowing detail.” —JIM ROBBINS Author of *A Symphony in the Brain*

An enthralling blend of adventure and science, *Last Breath* re-creates in heart-stopping detail what happens to our bodies and our minds in the perilous last moments of life when an extreme adventure goes awry. Combining the adrenaline high of extreme sports with the startling facts of physiological reality, veteran travel and outdoor sports writer Peter Stark narrates a series of adventure stories in which thrill can cross the line to mortal peril. Each death or brush with death is at once a suspense story, a cautionary tale, and a medical thriller. Will they survive, or will they succumb? Readers will shiver with a man lost in the snowy woods, suffering from hypothermia and tearing off his clothes as he burns up from the cold; they will hallucinate with a young woman stranded at the top of Annapurna as she experiences a cerebral edema; and while a kayaker tumbles helplessly underwater for two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, readers, too, will gasp for their last breath.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Un-put-downable stories of outdoor catastrophe and death, carefully and vividly told; they make us, unexpectedly, happy to be alive."--Ian Frazier

"STARK'S MASTERFUL PACING AND USE OF DETAILS KEEP THE READER'S STOMACH TURNED IN SUSPENSE."

—Booklist

"A FASCINATING BLEND OF STORYTELLING

"Forget the edge of your seat. "Last Breath takes you to the edge of your life, for a pulse-pounding glimpse into the Great Beyond. There are many ways to risk your life in the out-of-doors, and Stark has captured them in exquisite and harrowing detail." -JIM ROBBINS Author of "A Symphony in the Brain An enthralling blend of adventure and science, "Last Breath re-creates in heart-stopping detail what happens to our bodies and our minds in the perilous last moments of life when an extreme adventure goes awry. Combining the adrenaline high of extreme sports with the startling facts of physiological reality, veteran travel and outdoor sports writer Peter Stark narrates a series of adventure stories in which thrill can cross the line to mortal peril. Each death or brush with death is at once a suspense story, a cautionary tale, and a medical thriller. Will they survive, or will they succumb? Readers will shiver with a man lost in the snowy woods, suffering from hypothermia and tearing off his clothes as he's burning up from the cold; they will hallucinate with a young woman stranded at the top of Annapurna as she experiences a cerebral edema; and while a kayaker tumbles helplessly underwater for two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, readers, too, will gasp for their last breath.

LAST BREATH REVIEWAs I sit reading "Last Breath," Peter Stark's engrossing study of life's last moments during venturesome activities, a sudden thought occurs. I've done several of the activities he writes about, and experienced some of the physiological hardships he discusses. Not to the extremes he portrays, of course, but I've been cold, thirsty, overheated, and even nearly drowned. I can appreciate that had any of my hardships progressed to the levels of his discussions, I wouldn't be here right now. That's sobering. For this book Stark has conducted immense research and interviewed a vast array of medical specialists. He has plumbed the depths of normally recalcitrant research labs, reticent scientists, wilderness conference attendees, and adventurers from many disciplines. With the information he has gathered he dissects hypothermia, drowning, mountain sickness, burial by avalanche, scurvy, heatstroke, falls, predators, the bends, malaria, and dehydration. To top it off, he includes an essay on his own fear of death. It's a thought-provoking book that conjures up intense personal feelings about one's mortality and willingness to take chances. It illuminates moments of foolishness and bravery, although the bravery most always leads to poor decisions. Stark knows how to make each experience resonate within the reader like a fire bell. In my case,

introspection leads to disturbing thoughts of the way things could have been had my comfort zone been larger. The author uses a highly effective technique of creating a story leading to each mishap. He weaves wonderful tales of seemingly innocuous circumstances leading to decisions that illustrate how judgment can bring death to careless adventurers. A Jeep stuck in the snow prompts the driver to attempt to walk to his destination, a warm and cheery mountain cabin filled with friends. A kayaker bites off more river than he can swallow. A hot dogging snow boarder creates an avalanche that traps him in its cold embrace. A rock climber falls, is seemingly saved by a ledge, but then succumbs in a lonely place from injuries caused by his sudden stop. A cyclist attempts to blow away her competition by a sprint that ends up with a fatal heatstroke. Every end result benefits from Stark's careful explanation of the physical possibilities that exist, the actual damage incurred in each scenario, and what the stricken person's mind envisions as trauma overtakes him or her. The chattering thought process will carry over to the reader, bringing dismay and a bit of self-study. I sucked on an orange the entire time I was reading the chapter on scurvy.

Schuyler T Wallace  
Author of TIN LIZARD TALES

Great read. I read this book years ago from a hotel library on vacation and could never find it since. It came up in an article about something else I was reading and I jumped on it - shame it does not come in an electronic format

Exciting, interesting, entertaining, memorable.

Peter Stark does an amazing job of telling many mini tails of adventure gone wrong and chronicling the physiology that underlies the adventurer's demise. Great read for the nerd and laymen alike!

Conventional wisdom has it that dying out in the snow of hypothermia is a gentle, nearly painless way to go. Dreamy. This intriguing book presents more details and more reality on this, and several other ways of dying. I'm rereading it and sharing it with others. Good for conversations. I'm assuming that the author researched and that it is mostly medically correct.

Mildly interesting.

Very descriptive but sometimes a bit too descriptive. Very in depth and informative. This is not a book for anyone who cannot handle blood or suffering

This might look like a morbid subject, but it isn't really. Every single one of us is going to die, and although we become very good at not thinking about it - developing a kind of mental blind spot that hides the awareness - it might be a good idea to give it some thought. Besides, we could pick up some tips that put off the evil hour. Such as not deciding to ski the rest of the way when our car breaks down in subzero conditions a few miles from the friend's house where we are going. Such as taking the right anti-malarial drugs before going to a part of the world where that disease is endemic. Or not free-soloing a rock face of difficulty 5.9 with no one else in sight or hearing distance. As Peter Stark explains, risking your life helps you to experience life more fully. But sometimes risks turn out badly, and then it may be too late to be sorry. "Last Breath" tells you exactly what it is like to drown in a "hole" while kayaking a turbulent river, to die of dehydration in the Sahara, or to be buried by an avalanche. So you don't need to try these experiences yourself - which is a good thing, if you want to go on living. This book is packed with fascinating information about our bodies, how they work, and their relationship with the surrounding environment. Without the support of technology - clothes, houses, heating, and so on - human beings can live only in a narrow band close to the Equator, below 3.5 miles above sea level, and where there is plenty of fresh water. Stark drives home to the reader just how easy it is to misjudge things when stepping outside the ideal environment. Sometimes just one wrong movement - or even one necessary thing left undone... At the end of "Last Breath", I found there was a wonderful unanticipated bonus. \*I\* was still alive!

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