Our main story tonight concerns Mount Everest. It's no longer just a mountain, it's everyone's go-to metaphor for a significant challenge.

*“It's the Mount Everest of ice cream sundaes.*

*“The Everest of bar food. The homemade tater tot.”*

*“Adam is 20 minutes in, and he has two and a half dozen left. ‘This oyster tower is my Everest.’”*

Is it? 'Cause it really shouldn't be. When you host a show called "Man versus Food", living past 50 with your original heart should be your Everest.

Everest was first summited in 1953 by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. Before, it had seemed

an almost impossible feat. But as you may've seen, since then, climbing Everest has become dangerously popular.

*On top of the world, a deadly climbing season growing more dangerous. 11 killed,*

*including three Americans. New video of that line to reach the top of the world. Climbers stood in freezing conditions waiting to get to the peak and some were pushing and jostling for photographs on a space the size of two Ping-Pong tables thousands of meters up.*

Holy shit. The only thing more dangerous than jostling for photos on a mountaintop the size

of two Ping-Pong tables is jostling for photos on two actual Ping-Pong tables. 11 deaths at Delta Chi house. Nine of them sad.

Climbing Mount Everest has somehow gone from being a rare feat of extraordinary skill, to something that looks like the line at Trader Joe's.

The mountain gets littered with trash. A cleanup expedition this year brought down 24 000 pounds of garbage. There is also a lot of human shit up the mountain, which thanks in part to climate

change is now sliding downhill, in what's been called "a fecal time bomb". Which is a phrase that should be printed on every baby onesie. It's cute and it's accurate. Let's look at what is causing these issues, how Everest's climbing industry operates and how we can make things safer. There's actually nothing new about this overcrowding problem. Look at this eerily familiar story from 2012.

*These are images from high up on Everest. The path to the peak clogged with climbers, as many as 200*

*gambling with their very lives.*

Everest is just as ridiculously popular today as it was seven years ago. There's not many things you can say that about, it's basically Everest, Rickrolling and that's about it. There's a number of reasons

that explain the persistence of the crowds at Everest, as this Sherpa explains.

*Never gonna give you up,*

*Never gonna let you down,*

*Never gonna run around*

*And desert you*.

It's still fun. You didn't see it coming and it's still fun. One reason for overcrowding is that

you can't climb to the top whenever, there is one major summiting window, which lasts about 10 days in May.

And in some years, like this one, bad weather shrinks that time down to just a few days.

Which was fine when climbing Everest was relatively rare. For the first 35 years after Hillary and Norgay,

there were just 260 ascents. The 1990s saw the advent of commercial expeditions, clients paying for mountain guides and Sherpas to help them, causing that number to explode to over 1 900 by 2003.

And there's now been over 9 000 successful summits.

With that many people going up, you might think it's hard to stand out.

Some have bent over backwards to make their climb unique, from the oldest to get to the top, to the youngest, to all this nonsense.

*Ben and Shaunna will be the first Canadian couple to make it to the summit of Everest together.*

*In 2001, Stephan Gatt was the first to snowboard off the summit,*

*while husband and wife team Bertrand and Claire Roche became the first people*

*to fly off the top in a paraglider.*

*It's 5:40 A.M. and Rod's reached 29 028 feet, the highest point on earth. But he's got one more goal: to make the world's highest ever cell phone call*.

Nice work, Rod. The highest ever cellphone call. That's incredible. Or, it would've been, but Rod had

AT&T, so the call never went through. I got you, Business Daddy! I got you so good! If I could get serious for a moment, there is something I've been meaning to say: I know I give you a hard time, Business Daddy, but the truth is, you're the only Business Daddy I have. I know that you want what's best for me.

It's not easy having me as a Business Boy. I don't say this as often as I should, but I love you, Business Daddy. I hope that we never lose that special connection we have. I'm so glad our connection

isn't on your wireless network, 'cause it's absolutely terrible. I did it again ! I got you, Business Daddy.

Business Baby's out of control ! I'm acting up.

I'm sorry, where was I ? That's right: Mount Everest. Hundreds of people now go up every year.

Commercial expeditions haven't just increased access to the mountain, they've also increased comforts.

There are now "luxury expeditions" that can cost up to $130 000, offering things like heated tents

with dining tables. We should talk about how all those amenities and, indeed, most climbers,

get up the mountain, and that's with Sherpas.

The majority of expeditions rely on Sherpas to do everything from carrying supplies to putting up

tents to setting the ropes and ladders. They are integral to commercial expeditions, as this Sherpa will tell.

*How many of the clients that you see coming to Everest could do it without you ?*

*- I would say zero.*

*- Zero ?*

*- None of them ?*

*- None.*

For many climbers, Everest is not unlike Simon and Garfunkel. There is someone along for the ride to the top and there's someone pulling all the weight. I'm not saying who's who and neither is Art Garfunkel, unless Paul Simon writes it for him.

Just a quick note regarding Sherpas: Sherpas, with an uppercase "S" are an ethnic group. Sherpas, lowercase "s" are the mountain workers, some of whom, but not all, are Sherpas uppercase "S". Extra fun fact: a word that changes meaning when it's capitalized is known as a "capitonym".

Now you have the perfect tidbit handy next time you want to self-destruct on a first date,

that's yours to have fun with.

Sherpas take on a lot of responsibility and risk. One of the most dangerous parts of Everest involves the Khumbu Icefall, a notoriously deadly area littered with gigantic blocks of ice that can fall at any moment, as well as huge crevasses. Some Sherpas known as "Icefall Doctors" prepare the crossing for climbers each season. For a sense of just how dangerous this job is, take your anxiety medicine of choice and watch this.

*After four hours, they're back at the crevasse. It's so wide, three ladders need to be latched together. The first crossing is always the most dangerous. The risk is the unsecured end will collapse.*

*Temba knows that the icefall doctor he replaced died the previous year on this mountain down a crevasse. Keep going forward. Nice and easy. Take it easy. Don't get scared !*

Wait: "Don't get scared ?" The fuck are you talking about ? That is very scary ! Fear is the body's natural response. That doesn't help. It's like telling someone: "don't get thirsty" or "don't be cold" or "don't sneeze at this photo of Justin Long." Why are none of you sneezing ? You're being weird. Take that down! I do know that I cut that clip off there, and you're worried about whether he made it

to the other side, so let me just show you the end, it's absolutely amazing.

*Never gonna give you up,*

*Never gonna let you down,*

*Never gonna run around*

*And desert you*.

I got you again ! It's still fun ! Rick's still got it.

That guy did make it across, don't worry. Even after the ropes and ladders are fixed, the Icefall is still dangerous for those who cross it. While clients may only have to pass through it a few times, Sherpas have to pass through it far more often. Time spent in the Icefall is borrowed time because the more time you spend in it, the more likely you are to be buried alive.

On each expedition as their clients sleep in heated tents, the Sherpas have to carry the tourist gear through the Icefall not once or twice, but about 40 times, 40 times as baggage porters

through this valley of death. 40 times. That seems like between 39 and 40 too many times.

It puts their customers' achievements in a different context. If your friend ran a marathon, but only because someone else ran a thousand miles back and forth, bringing them Gatorade and carrying a dining table, you might not cheer quite so hard at the finish line.

Everest Sherpa ranks among the most dangerous occupations on earth. Many are willing to do this,

because there aren't many jobs that pay as well. The fact they are risking their lives for the ambitions of well-off climbers is uncomfortable to square, no matter how hard some might try. Watch one TV presenter ask his Sherpa to help him grapple with the morality of what he's asking him to do.

*If I wasn't here, you wouldn't be here. And you wouldn't have to go through the Icefall and I know of the tragedies that have happened, so I'm fascinated to know and I'd love to hear your thought whether you think it's wrong that we should be here ?*

***During our expedition, we are like same family.***

*I love that. Yeah, come here. Thank you.*

*I like those sentiments. When we're away from family. I agree. It's nice. I love that description*

*that we're family. It's not client and Sherpa. We're in this together.*

But it is client and Sherpa. You jumped on his answer real quick, there. That Sherpa barely had time to get it out before you were hugging him. That is not the warm embrace of family, that's one man physically squeezing the white guilt out of another. Huge risks are being taken by Sherpas to give their clients the bragging rights of conquering the mountain.

Purely in terms of the skills needed to make it to the top, Everest isn't actually the most difficult mountain to climb. Don't take that from me, I don't know anything.

Mountaineers will tell you the same.

Everest is a very difficult endeavor. It's not a very technical mountain. It doesn't require a lot

of technical climbing skill. If you can get fit enough to keep putting one foot in front of the other, you can get up. If you're going with a commercial tour, you don't need much technical ability to climb Everest. Theoretically, I could do it, if I just trained a little. I know what you're thinking:

with that body, is there any way you could be training harder ? I'm a beast. Not a day goes by that

I don't sacrifice sweat to the gods of swole at the Temple of Iron. I got a mortgage from Swell's Fargo

and I've been passing plate ever since. I call this one "Papier" and this one "Maché" because my shit is shredded.

While Everest doesn't require much technical skill, inexperience can still be deadly, especially as you near the peak. Climbers can experience something called "summit fever". They want to get to the top,

not considering whether they'll have energy to get down. It can be hard to make good decisions up there, the area above 26 000 feet has only 30 percent of the oxygen that there is at sea level. It is called the "Death Zone", what it can do to your body is brutal.

*It's impossible to stay at these heights for more than a few days. The stomach stops digesting food, the heart stops pumping blood to the fingers and toes and the brain goes into meltdown. Your brain is now swelling because of the hypoxia. It has nowhere to go because it's constrained by your skull. The only exit out of your skull is where your spinal cord comes down. Your brain is being squeezed out of your skull.*

Delightful. I'm surprised descriptions didn't continue getting worse.

Your brain is squeezed out, your nipples retract into your chest and start stabbing your heart,

your kneecaps explode, re-form, and then explode again, and the bones in your arms and legs

switch places. Ideally, inexperienced climbers would not be allowed to try something so dangerous.

But the limits on Everest are very lax. The limits on half of Everest are very lax.

There are two major routes that commercial expeditions follow. One from the Tibetan side and one from the Nepalese side. The Tibet side is more technically difficult and the government has limits

on how many people can summit.

But the Nepal side is a little easier and there are no limits on how many climbing permits the government issues.

You need to pay an $11 000 fee and have a doctors' note that deems you physically fit.

And that's a pretty big loophole, even the least-physically-fit person on earth can get a glowing

doctor's note. I know this for a fact because he recently did.

A massive two-thirds of climbers go up the Nepal side and a shocking number of them

are unqualified to do that, as a Nepalese official admits.

*How many of the climbers that you permit to climb, do you think are well qualified ?*

*- Maybe around 50, 55 percent ? - 50 percent ?*

Half ? Only half are qualified ! Then why are you letting the other half climb ? If Cirque du Soleil had

half its trapeze artists be trained acrobats and the other half enthusiasts with $11 000 and their own tiger bodysuit, you would shut that shit down before someone got badly hurt.

Nepal relies heavily on tourism revenue, so they've been slow to make changes. They are not the only ones to blame. Guiding companies could also turn down unqualified climbers.

Many good ones do. Unfortunately, many bad ones do not. Take Shriya Shah-Klorfine,

a Canadian woman who decided to climb Everest, despite having no serious climbing experience.

 *Shriya got an introduction to an expedition company:*

*"Utmost Adventure Trekking" it's called. They told Shriya as long as she was*

*determined, they'd teach her. She had to be taught almost everything,*

*from putting crampons on her boots to how to use them to cross the ice ladders.*

Agreeing to take such an obviously unqualified climber up Mount Everest could well be the Mount Everest of irresponsible decisions. While that woman did make it to the summit, she died

trying to make it back down. Slow, inexperienced climbers aren't just a danger to themselves,

they can be a danger to everybody else. The top of Everest is just two Ping-Pong tables and the route down is sometimes single file. If people aren't moving, you can get stuck. Listen as some experienced guides worry about a client who's summited, but who can't get down, because people who probably shouldn't be there.

*It should only take about 10 minutes a person at the maximum. I feel really sorry for Bill and the guys up there. Russ, we haven't moved Yeah, I know. 23 people queued up on the second step. The most pathetic sight I can see is the people who can't even down climb a ladder one step at a timel. I'm sorry for the pathetic standard of mountaineering in front of you and I hope they can hear.*

His frustration is understandable. Think about the violent rage you felt the last time you couldn't walk down an escalator, because assholes were standing still. Now imagine doing that for hours, in freezing temperatures, as your brain leaks down your spinal cord.

You'd be angry, too. We're never going to get the number of deaths on Everest down to zero.

There is inherent risk there. Or at least, there will be until one of the luxury expeditions offers a bespoke catapult experience in which clients are lobbed in a private pressurized bubble.

But there are steps that Nepal could take to manage the risks, like reduce permits to prevent overcrowding, space out expeditions and place limits on the number of companies that can operate...

Until Nepal does that, there will continue to be deaths that could have been prevented. You question the motives behind some of these climbs. Even Sir Edmund Hillary was depressed at what he had seen Everest become.

In these commercial expeditions the guides work pretty hard getting their customers up. But all the customers want to try and get to the top of the mountain and then come down and boast about it to their friends at home. Very few of them, and I've talked to many of them, have a deep feeling

of love for the mountains.

Some aren't doing it out of a passion for mountaineering, but just because they want to say they climbed Everest. You think a selfie from the summit of Makalu is gonna get Everest-levels of Instagram love ? Of course not ! Who gives a shit about Makalu ? It's only the ninth-tallest mountain on earth.

Or rather, it would be, if it existed, which it doesn't, 'cause I just made it up and none of you noticed and that's the point. Or, it would be, if I had made it up. Makalu is neither imaginary nor the ninth-tallest mountain: it's the fifth-tallest and that's the point. Or, rather, it would be, if that were even Makalu.

That's the view from Everest and you didn't notice 'cause the only thing most of us know about mountain climbing is that a selfie from the Everest is fire because goals and thus deserves some serious Insta-love and that is the point here.

This points to a possible solution. In researching this story, we stumbled upon this tantalizing attempt to secure bragging rights.

*An Indian couple's accused of faking a Everest climb. A photo posted to the tour company's website claimed to show the woman at the peak of Everest. Another climber said this is a Photoshopped picture of him.*

They just Photoshopped themselves up there. That is the boldest use of Photoshop to trick people

that I've seen, since I stumbled across this sealpony hybrid. It's amazing ! if you are going to put

yourself on top of Everest, put yourself on a seal-pony, it's just better ! The more you think about it,

the more brilliant this idea becomes. If it is just a summit photo what you want, faking it is probably the most ethically defensible way to get it.

If even faking it seems like too much work to you, we've created the company "Adventures Indoors Luxepeditions", the world leader in getting people to the summit of Everest without ever going there.

We believe that climbing Everest should be for qualified climbers. But that doesn't mean that you

can't visit the top of Everest. Simply visit TheTopOfMountEverest-dot-com, a website that was surprisingly available.

Once you are there, you'll be asked: "Would you like to climb Mount Everest ?"

Simply click "Yes" and you can then insert a picture of yourself, either alone, with friends, or a pet,

onto the top of Everest, all without posing any risk. Our fatality rate is close to zero, not too bad for the oldest Photoshop expedition out there, operational since Earlier This Week 2019.

We know everyone wants an arbitrary world record attached, so you can also customize your

photo with your personal first, like this one, of the first twin babies to summit Everest. Look at those fecal time bombs ! What an achievement. What are you waiting for ?

Climbing Mount Everest has become an industry with blood on its hands. But it's one of the most striking photos you can have of yourself. Join me in embarking upon the Everest of Instagrammable moments.

Visit TheTopOfMountEverest-dot-com. Why do it ? Because it's there.

I'm going up. Shoo, Sherpa ! I'm doing it on my own.

I did this myself ! I did it on my own ! That's our show. Thanks for watching.

See you next week. Good night !

I did it ! Get out of here. You're in frame. Go get me a dining table. I did it ! I'm on top of the world !

I'm the first British man with glasses in a navy blue suit to get to the top of Everest.

I did it !