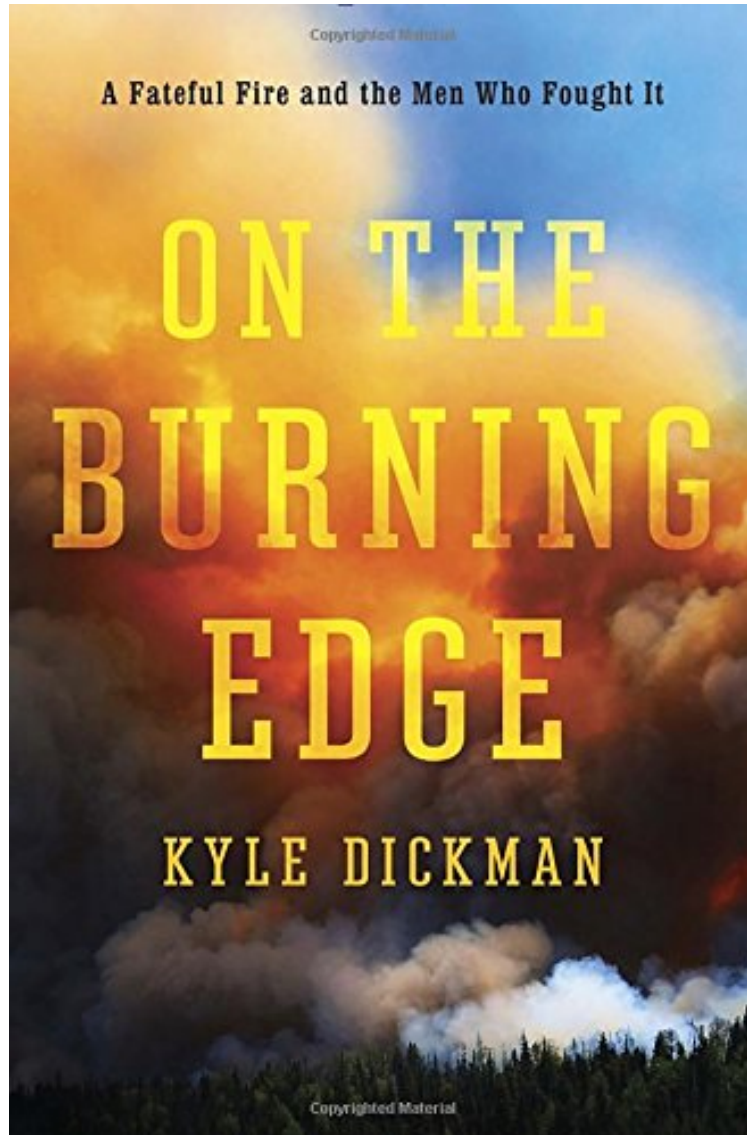


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Kyle Dickman

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Kyle Dickman : On the Burning Edge: A Fateful Fire and the Men Who Fought It before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On the Burning Edge: A Fateful Fire and the Men Who Fought It:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. This is a great book about a very sad tragedy By Meredith D Lund This is a great book about a very sad tragedy. If you love wildfire and its historic events, you will love this book. It is a very easy read and the author has done in depth research. When you finish this, I highly recommend "from

Tragedy to Recovery". This tells the story of the Yarnell Fire from the perspective of the residents. After fighting fires for twenty years, this book helped me see what is left when we go home. Really helped me put things into perspective! 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A gripping tragic account of the fatal Yarnell Hill Wildfire By Theexbrit A fascinating look at the life of wildfire "Hotshots" the tragedy that Granite Mountain. The Yarnell Hill Fire took the lives of 19 of the Granite Mountain Hotshots, the worst loss of wildfire firefighters. This book weaves a fascinating yet ultimately tragic story of the men, their families the job they loved so much. Told by a former wildfire firefighter the book covers the history of Granite Mountain the personalities of the men that made up the team. Also woven into the story are several other wildfires details about the equipment tactics used by the firefighters that tackle our forest brush fires. This book keeps you gripped from the very first page, well written hard to put down. An excellent if ultimately heartbreaking story of 19 very brave young men. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating and heartbreaking By Nancy Ambrosiano Author and former wildland-fire hotshot Kyle Dickman does a superb job of illuminating the personalities and incredibly challenging role of the hotshots, and of exploring the catastrophic events of the Yarnell fire. The writing is clear and compelling, the story is wrenching. Anyone who lives in a fire-prone area should read this, as well as anyone fascinated by the unfolding story of a modern disaster and the policies that influence such events. With climate change crisping the desert southwest, devastating tales like this one could, sadly, become more prevalent. Read it and weep.

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY MENS JOURNAL In the tradition of Sebastian Junger's *The Perfect Storm* and Robert Kurson's *Shadow Divers* comes a true and heartbreaking tale of courage, difficult decisions, and ultimate sacrifice. *On the Burning Edge*, by award-winning journalist and former wildland firefighter Kyle Dickman, is the definitive account of the Yarnell Hill Fire. On June 28, 2013, a single bolt of lightning sparked an inferno that devoured more than eight thousand acres in northern Arizona. Twenty elite firefighters the Granite Mountain Hotshots walked together into the blaze, tools in their hands and emergency fire shelters on their hips. Only one of them walked out. Dickman brings to the story a professional firefighters understanding of how wildfires ignite, how they spread, and how they are fought. He understands hotshots and their culture: the pain and glory of a rough and vital job, the brotherly bonds born of dangerous work. Drawing on dozens of interviews with officials, families of the fallen, and the lone survivor, he describes in vivid detail what it's like to stand inside a raging fire and shows how the increased population and decreased water supply of the American West guarantee that many more young men will step into harm's way in the coming years. Praise for *On the Burning Edge* What makes this book a tear-jerking classic is the seamless manner in which Dickman weaves a century of fire-management history into the fully realized stories of the men's lives: the sweat, the adrenaline, the orange glow of fire within their aluminum shelters, and the chewing gum that hotshot Scott Norris left in the shower before telling his girlfriend, Heather, "I'll take care of it later. I promise." Outside Dickman offers a riveting account of a dangerous occupation and acts of nature most violent and those who face both down. Library Journal

What makes this book a tear-jerking classic is the seamless manner in which [Kyle] Dickman weaves a century of fire-management history into the fully realized stories of the men's lives: the sweat, the adrenaline, the orange glow of fire within their aluminum shelters, and the chewing gum that hotshot Scott Norris left in the shower before telling his girlfriend, Heather, "I'll take care of it later. I promise." Outside Dickman offers a riveting account of a dangerous occupation and acts of nature most violent and those who face both down. Library Journal About the Author Kyle Dickman is a former editor at Outside magazine and a former member of the firefighting crew known as the Tahoe Hotshots. He spent five seasons fighting wildfires in California. Dickman's reporting has been nominated for a National Magazine Award. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with his wife, Turin. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 The Perfect Profession Grant McKee parked his aging Dodge Neon by a row of pickups out front of an aluminum-sided shop in Prescott, Arizona. The air shook with the punch of nail guns and the rattle of diesel engines, and a dry breeze wicked the last of winter's humidity from the desert Southwest. It was early April, and the new leaves on the only two trees inside the fenced-in compound rustled quietly. From the driver's seat, Grant watched seven or eight men huddle together inside the shop's raised garage door. Like him, nearly all were in their early twenties and fit: prime draftees, had Uncle Sam come calling. They wore oil-stained Carhartt pants, faded flannel shirts, and down jackets with duct-tape patches covering holes. Most had quit jobs washing dishes or parking cars as golf course valets to be frontline grunts in America's long war on wildfires. None of them could have known it that April morning, but the Granite Mountain Hotshots would come to define their lives. Grant made the long walk toward the men. His unused leather workboots, heavy and foreign, clicked on the blacktop as he entered the garage. He had an angular face, pronounced eyebrows, and dark hair recently cut to give him the put-together look he liked. But what caught the other firefighters' attention was his build: five feet seven inches, with the same muscled frame that had carried him to the varsity wrestling team as a high school freshman. Inside, most of the guys silently sized the others up. Some knew one another. Others looked terrified. One fidgeted nervously, as if just being in Granite Mountain's hallowed garage fulfilled a dream. Grant didn't feel that way. He might have looked like a hotshot, but 2013 was his

first season, and he wasn't sure he wanted to be one. If all went as planned, he'd make \$30,000 by November and, with a resume padded with first responder experience, move on to the paramedic job he actually wanted. At first glance, wildland firefighting seemed an odd step for Grant, even if the City of Prescott's fire department hosted the wildland fire crew. He preferred movies and comfortable beds to the outdoors, and over the next eight months, the job would afford him very little time inside. Granite Mountain's modest and nondescript headquarters took up a corner of the closest thing the forty-thousand-person city of Prescott had to an industrial district. It didn't look much like a real fire station. No hoses, no turnouts, red trucks, or spotted dogs. The inside smelled of two-stroke gasoline and stale woodsmoke, and the walls were decorated with some of the more interesting things the guys had found in the woods. A deer's jawbone sat on the tool rack with the screwdrivers, and a dozen rusted-out pull-tab Coors cans with sun-cured pine needles sticking out of the tops filled one shelf. A jumble of wooden tool handles, some splintered from crushing swings, filled an entire corner, and chainsaws and their parts, carburetors, air filters cluttered a rolling island in the middle of the room. The hotshots called the place the saw shop, and Grant and a dozen other firefighters milled about, waiting for the shift to start. A few minutes later, a diesel Ford F-250 that was lifted eighteen inches off its oversized tires rumbled into the parking lot. Donut emerged and walked straight up to Grant and the other rookies. You guys ready to learn? he asked. Then he took his place nearby and struck up a loud conversation with other veterans. Get your asses in here! boomed Eric Marsh, the crew's superintendent, from inside the station's ready room. He always looked forward to the return of the seasonal firefighters. Having fourteen more guys around there were no women on this year's crew ensured a livelier atmosphere around the station. Grant joined the throng of men funneling through the shop door and took a right into a conference room. A dozen Formica tables and folding chairs sat before blank whiteboards. Hanging on the walls were fire safety reminders: your life is more important than any structure! and posters memorializing the two deadliest wildfires in recent history: Montana's 1949 Mann Gulch Fire (thirteen deaths) and Colorado's 1994 South Canyon Fire (fourteen deaths). Up front, Marsh sat alone. Morning, gentlemen, Marsh said. A seasoned firefighter, he was in his early forties, a handsome man with a lantern jaw, a handlebar mustache, and a red-and-black Granite Mountain Hotshots ball cap pulled over a head of salt-and-pepper hair. One arm was in a sling from a mountain-biking accident weeks earlier, a fact he chose not to elaborate on. As the shuffling of chairs quieted, Marsh looked out at the faces. Five crewmen had left Granite Mountain over the winter, and Marsh had to hire replacements, which was always a bit of a gamble. Hotshot work is rarely glamorous, and the months away from home, brutal physical labor, heat, poison oak, chainsaws, falling trees, and flames aren't for everybody. Usually, a few new hires washed out in the first month or two, a few made it through a season but swore to never return, and a few fell in love with the job. It was good to see some of the veterans back. Some of the hotshots had worked as seasonal employees under Marsh since he took over as Granite Mountain's superintendent in 2006. There was Brandon Bunch, the laconic former bull rider who was starting his fourth season with Granite Mountain, and Andrew Ashcraft, an active member of the Mormon church, who was still sporting his well-groomed mustache. At twenty-nine, he had the looks of a Top Gun pilot and four kids. Marsh was in the process of converting Ashcraft to a permanent employee, but for the time being, the paperwork was caught in bureaucratic limbo. For the third year, Ashcraft was officially returning as a seasonal employee. Marsh introduced himself and asked the crew's full-time firefighters to do the same. Known collectively as the overhead, these seven hotshots commanded Granite Mountain. Jesse Steed, thirty-six, was the captain, the number two in command. People called Jesse the picture-perfect hotshot, and the ex-Marine, who was six-foot-four and more than 220 pounds, never disputed the point. Beside Jesse sat the crew's three squad bosses: Travis Carter, thirty-one, who was a walk-on football player at the University of Arizona and still looked the part; Clayton Whitted, twenty-seven, a former youth pastor who brought church to the fire line; and Robert Caldwell, twenty-three, a Prescott local with an IQ high enough to merit his acceptance in Mensa. The final two overhead were lead firefighters Chris MacKenzie, thirty, a California-born longtime hotshot with such a laid-back demeanor that his crewmates often compared him to the Dude in *The Big Lebowski*, and Travis Turbyfill, twenty-seven, a moose-size man who had seen combat in Afghanistan as a Marine and was a gifted mechanic. Tell us about yourselves, Marsh said to the crew. Most of them didn't know one another and didn't want to speak. Marsh's way of dealing with their shyness was to force his men to get over it. Give us your name, how many years you've fought fire, and something ... your favorite color, whatever you'd like, he said. At twenty, Grant was the youngest guy on the crew. He played it cocky, standing, saying his name, and coolly explained that his cousin was Bob Caldwell, one of the squad bosses. It didn't go so easily for all the new guys. Dustin DeFord, said a redheaded rookie who sat near Grant. My favorite color is DeFord paused for a second. black. It reminds me of fire. That's nice, Dustin, Marsh said. Thank you. Now please sit the fuck down. There are 114 twenty-person hotshot crews nationwide, but the vast majority are stationed in the West. In New Mexico and Arizona, there are a total of twenty. With a forty-one-year-old U.S. Forest Service crew stationed on the town's north end, Prescott has two. Hotshots make up less than 5 percent of the estimated fifty-six thousand federal and state wildland firefighters who battle blazes every summer. The remainder work on engines, less-qualified crews, water tenders, and aircraft, and as support staff. While the media often likens hotshots to the special forces of wildland firefighting, it's an imperfect comparison. Unlike joining the Navy SEALs or the Army Rangers, which demand years of training, hotshot crews can accept new hires within a matter of days. On paper, becoming a hotshot requires only

two basic courses, which can be completed online in hours, and the physical ability to hike three miles in forty-five minutes while carrying a forty-five-pound pack. What separates hotshots from the other wildland firefighters is that they specialize in fighting Americas largest and most dangerous blazes. No job in the firefighting profession requires its men and women to spend so much time on the edge of an active burn. Over the course of a thirty-year career, a hotshot might fight eight hundred to one thousand fires. By contrast, a structural firefighter may battle only eighty over that same period. At its best, the job is the greatest adventure of many hotshots lives. At its worst, it varies little from the hard labor of a chain gang. For weeks, crews work sixteen-hour days in soaring temperatures, using chainsaws and hand tools like Pulaskis and shovels to build control lines, or linear barriers clear of flammable materials, around wildfires. There are female hotshots, but usually no more than one or two on a given crew, and the overwhelming majority are young men in their twenties and thirties. Some are college-educated, having quit high-paying finance jobs in search of a simpler lifestyle in the woods, while others have left behind farms, reservations, or the inner city to make a years salary in eight months of work. Crew cultures tend to be militaristic. Among the standard twenty-head crew, at least seven are highly trained permanent firefightersthe overhead. Among them are emergency medical technicians, men and women with decades of fire-line experience, and chainsaw operators capable of cutting down trees as thick as some bridge pilings. During the first few weeks of fire season, the overhead lead the new hotshots through a series of runs, hikes, and workouts that get the men into the best shape of their lives. Fitness is a matter of safety on the fire line: Its required for moving efficiently through the mountains, but its also mandatory should a firefighter have to outrun a blaze. Granite Mountain called this intensive training period the two-week critical, and it culminated in a drill at the end of April meant to test the hotshots new skills and fitness. A week into the 2013 season, Marsh gathered the men and told them about his shoulder. He couldnt return to the fire line until it healed, which might take months. The news meant that for the first time in the decade that Marsh had been a part of the crews overhead, he wouldnt take part in the drill. His injury had been too severe. He made no effort to hide his disappointment. Marsh loved being superintendent and fighting fires. Until he returned, Tom Cooley, a City of Prescott structural firefighter with many years of hotshot experience, would take over as captain, and Jesse Steed, officially the captain, would become the interim superintendent. The news thrilled Steed. He talked openly and often about his plan to someday take over as Granite Mountains superintendent, and even the temporary position gave him a chance to shape the crew. Among the first things Steed did was make the physical training punishingly intense. The veterans expected him to do as much. During slow shifts on the line, Steed would often pound out a few dozen squats with a chainsaw on each shoulder or do lat pulls with forty-gallon buckets of foamthe soapy substance, mixed with water, thats used to slow a fires spread. He designed the hardest workouts himself. One day he led the men to a three-hundred-foot hill and made them run up in their fire boots. Then theyd sprint back down, grab a chainsaw, and repeat the Circle six times. The hike up Thumb Butte, an aptly named chunk of black basalt that rises above Prescott, was even harder. Steed paired the hotshots up and made the teams race the two miles and six hundred vertical feet to the top, one man carrying the other on his back. Most days, the intensity of Steeds workouts made two or three guys puke from overexertion. Grant pushed himself so hard he vomited every day. In many ways, the work didnt suit Grant. He was stylish, clean, and fastidious. Every night before bed, hed fold and stack his firefighting clothes and place them at the foot of his bed in the order hed put them on the next morning. Into his shoes went his sockstone designated for the right foot, one for the leftand those went next to the toilet for quick entry in the morning.