

Banner in the Sky Study Guide

Banner in the Sky by James Ramsey Ullman

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Plot Summary

Rudi Matt is a sixteen-year-old boy who desperately wants to climb the Citadel - the mountain that his father died on fifteen years earlier. Living in a small Swiss mountain village, he is constantly reminded of his "legacy." Unfortunately, Rudi's mother and uncle want him to have nothing to do with his father's occupation and have forbidden Rudi from climbing. Ignoring this, Rudi is out on a glacier when he saves the life of a famous climber and gains an ally in his quest to climb the Citadel. Rudi goes up against his family and has to fight some inner demons up on the treacherous slopes. Will he succeed?

As the story begins, Rudi sneaks out of his job in the hotel kitchen to climb up to the base of the Citadel, a treacherous mountain that looms over his village of Kurtal. The mountain is believed to be cursed. Rudi's own father died on its slopes just fifteen years earlier while trying to climb it. No one has attempted this task since. Rudi passes his father's grave; he believes none of the myths about the Citadel. He knows he is risking his mother's wrath by exploring high up on the slopes. He is walking towards the mostly unused base camp for the Citadel when he hears a voice coming out of a fissure. He finds that a man is trapped on a ledge about twenty feet down. The man asks Rudi to go for help, but Rudi knows that they would not be back by nightfall. The man would probably freeze by then. He cleverly makes a "rope" out of his clothes and braces himself as the man climbs up and out.

Captain Winter introduces himself and is shocked to find that a sixteen-year-old boy has rescued him. A world-renowned climber, Winter takes an immediate liking to Rudi and finds that he is the son of Josef Matt - the man who died on the Citadel. Both Winter and Rudi find that they have wanted to climb the Citadel for years. They hike down towards Kurtal, and Rudi asks Winter not to mention his brave deed because his mother will be angry that he was on the mountain. Winter reluctantly agrees.

Back at the hotel, Rudi is caught lying. He was on the mountain instead of where he said he would be. His Uncle Franz and his mother are furious but relent somewhat when Captain Winter tells them that Rudi saved his life. At Winter's insistence, Franz agrees to let Rudi join them on a smaller climb, the Wunderhorn. Winter graciously buys Rudi new equipment, and the boy is overjoyed.

The men climb to a hut at base camp and sleep for the night. Rudi is still elated at the thought of a "real" climb. He holds his tongue at many times when he wants to give his opinion. They climb high on the mountain to get a look at Winter's real goal. From the altitude, they have a unique vantage point to examine the upper slopes of the Citadel. They discuss climbing issues. Rudi desperately wants to impress the men and tries to find a better way down. He ends up foolishly walking across a narrow lip of rock that crumbles and leaves him stranded. He has to be rescued by Winter and his furious uncle. Rudi is devastated and humiliated. He assumes he will never climb again.



Back at work, the head cook Teo tries to lift Rudi's spirits. He is the only surviving member of Josef's expedition. He is crippled but still mobile enough to show Rudi the ropes. Teo takes Rudi to climb a small peak on their day off. He shows Rudi valuable techniques on how to climb as a proper guide, not as a solo climber. Together, Rudi and Teo climb the mountain. With Teo's injury, Rudi is forced to climb while partially assisting the old man.

Captain Winter tries to enlist Franz as his guide for a climbing expedition to the Citadel, but Franz refuses. Winter travels to the nearby town of Broli to hire arrogant Emil Saxo as a guide. Rudi sees the smoke from the usually deserted cabin high on the slopes and realizes what has happened. He quietly takes his equipment and hikes up to join the two men. Upon arriving, Rudi lies and tells Winter that he has his uncle's permission to be there. The men allow Rudi to climb with them to reconnoiter the area under the Fortress. Up on the slopes, they are caught in an avalanche and buried. Rudi and Saxo slowly dig themselves out and find Winter trapped but unharmed, other than a cut on his head.

Franz receives word that men have been spotted climbing the Citadel and realizes that Rudi is missing. He gathers up a group of guides (including Teo) and hikes up toward the cabin. In the meantime, Winter, Saxo and Rudi reach the cabin, and Winter sends Rudi back to Kurtal for supplies while they return to Broli. Not admitting his lie, Rudi decides to climb for the Fortress alone. He makes his way to the massive wall and finds a route off to the left side where he climbs to the top. Unfortunately, he ignores the lateness of the day and is caught in a storm at the bottom of the Fortress. After almost falling off the mountain several times, Rudi retreats and finds shelter in a small cave. He realizes during the long, cold night that it is the same cave his father died in. After fighting panic, he becomes at peace and climbs down after dawn.

Back at the cabin, Winter and Saxo return to find the Kurtal guides, who accuse them of taking Rudi. Winter explains to Franz that he sent the boy to town, but then Rudi walks in exhausted and exclaims that he actually climbed above the Fortress. Rudi rests and then explains in detail how he conquered the Fortress. The men begin to argue about which town will overcome the mountain, Broli or Kurtal. Winter finally convinces Saxo and Franz that they can work better as a team. Rudi, Winter and Teo convince Franz that the boy deserves to be in the climbing party. The decision is made: Winter, Saxo, Franz and Rudi Matt will ascend the Citadel.

After quickly retracing the now familiar route to the base of the actual mountain, Rudi is humbled to be allowed to lead the group past the Fortress. His uncle is proud when they sit on top and take a break. The other men take turns leading from then on. Roped together, as they encounter especially difficult stretches, one man goes ahead while the other three brace on the rope for safety. Winter, Saxo and Franz all have moments to show their respective talents to lead the team upwards. They find a relatively sheltered location and pitch their tents for the night. The next day, the team encounters an obstacle called the Needle. All three men exhaust themselves trying to climb over it. Captain Winter becomes sick with exhaustion. Then Rudi climbs through a small cave to reach the top. As they sit on what looks like the last hurdle before the summit, it



becomes apparent that Winter cannot proceed. They rest for the night. The next morning, Rudi sees that Saxo has left to climb the summit for himself. He follows, worrying about what his uncle will think about him. Near the peak, Rudi catches up with Saxo on a narrow ridge. Saxo tries to push Rudi and falls, badly hurting his arm. Rudi climbs down to Saxo and realizes the man can't climb up. He takes Saxo down, giving up his hope of reaching the summit first.

Meanwhile, Winter and Franz set out after Rudi and Saxo. They see Rudi's pack on the narrow ridge. Fearing the worse, they press on. They soon reach the summit and are elated when they meet Rudi and Saxo back at their upper camp. With great difficulty, the group descends together back to the hut, mostly carrying Saxo. The town celebrates their return, and Rudi sees that Captain Winter placed his father's shirt on the peak as a banner. Winter tells the townsfolk that Rudi was there. Even Rudi's mother is proud.



Chapter 1, A Boy and a Mountain

Chapter 1, A Boy and a Mountain Summary

Rudi Matt is a sixteen-year-old boy who desperately wants to climb the Citadel - the mountain that his father died on fifteen years earlier. Living in a small Swiss mountain village, he is constantly reminded of his "legacy." Unfortunately, Rudi's mother and uncle want him to have nothing to do with his father's occupation and have forbidden Rudi from climbing. Ignoring this, Rudi is out on a glacier when he saves the life of a famous climber and gains an ally in his quest to climb the Citadel. Rudi goes up against his family and has to fight some inner demons up on the treacherous slopes. Will he succeed?

As the chapter begins, Rudi Matt sneaks out of work at the kitchen. Teo, the cook, notices almost immediately but doesn't mind. Rudi runs through the town of Kurtal, being careful to avoid his mother's house. Kurtal is situated in the center of the Swiss Alps, and Rudi is enamored with the mountains that surround the small tourist village. It is the year 1865. Rudi is a sixteen-year-old boy with blond hair who is being pushed into a business trade by his mother. He crosses a stream on the edge of town by hopping from stone to stone. Suddenly, he realizes that he is in the meadows and stops running. He sees tourists but doesn't care; he is finally at ease. Rudi looks up at the mountain peaks in front of him and is happy.

Soon Rudi comes to the tree line, and he stops at a small wooden box nailed to one of the trees. He opens it and sees the inscription "Josef Matt; 1821-1850." He prays, knowing it has been fifteen years since the death of his father. Rudi continues on, stopping only to pick up his climbing staff in the trees farther up the trail. The path continues on, and Rudi is jubilant. He yodels, not caring that his mother below would not approve of his climbing. Eating his small lunch, Rudi looks back at the blossoming resort town. Tourists from surrounding European countries have been inundating what was only a small farming village at the time of his father's death. The Alps are becoming popular now. To be an alpine guide is considered an honor in Kurtal. The surrounding peaks have all been climbed, except one. He looks up to see the Citadel looming above him, ominous and overpowering. The other nearby mountains pale in comparison to this foreboding peak. Rudi is familiar with every detail of its view. The people of Kurtal say that it cannot be climbed, but Rudi thinks differently.

Rudi moves on to a fork in the path. The right fork is well worn, leading to popular peaks like the Dornelberg and the Wunderhorn. He takes the faint left trail. The larger pine trees dwindle away to leave only small shrubs. Soon, even those are gone. Rudi is above the tree line now, and he skirts boulders carefully. He is alone with the rocks and the sky. Rudi has been this high many times before. He does not believe rumors of the mountain being cursed or haunted. He is on the glacier of the Citadel now. Ice sheets meet and distort into cold shapes. Two great ice shelves meet here, and Rudi has climbed both glaciers. There is still another glacier on the far side of the mountain. It is



near a town called Broli. Rudi has taken this long journey around the mountain several times. He has studied the Citadel in detail from all sides. His excursions are always emotional. His mother and Uncle Franz both disapprove of his climbing, but he does not care. Rudi cares more about climbing than anything.

Rudi angles left, up the so-called Blue Glacier. The ice is getting steeper and more dangerous now. There are hidden chasms called crevasses, although this day they are easy to navigate. He walks carefully on the ice. He sees an abandoned hut far ahead on the base of the mountain. Early explorers used it, but now Rudi is its only visitor. He gazes up at the imposing east face of the Citadel. There is snow far up ahead of him. Rudi navigates around a chasm and keeps going. Then he hears a faint sound. It is coming from a crevasse just ahead. He carefully approaches the edge and looks over.

Chapter 1, A Boy and a Mountain Analysis

As Rudi's character is introduced, the death of his father is briefly delved into. There is a premise about tradition and Rudi's legacy. Obviously, Rudi's father died on the mountain, but why? The area around Kurtal is in a time of profound change - especially for such an isolated region. The new tourist industry of mountain climbing has shaken the formerly sleepy village by adding uncertainty.



Chapter 2, A Boy and A Man

Chapter 2, A Boy and A Man Summary

The crevasse is narrow but deep. Rudi cannot see the bottom. He calls out and is answered by a voice. The voice is German, not Swiss - so Rudi knows it is not a man from Kurtal. He finds out that the man is trapped on a ledge about twenty feet down. He cannot see the man due to the angle of the chasm. He quickly finds out that the climber is not injured but has been trapped for about three hours. The man asks if Rudi has a rope, and he replies that he does not. Once the man finds out that Rudi is alone, he calmly tells Rudi to go back to the village for help. Rudi is hesitant to follow the man's request, figuring he would be frozen by the time Rudi could return with a search party.

The man is trapped without his ice axe and can't get any footholds to climb out. Rudi feels admiration for the brave man, who doesn't exhibit any fear at his predicament. He lies flat and lowers his staff over the edge. The man doesn't see it. Then he ties his jacket to the staff and repeats the process. This time, the man cries out that he can see the jacket, some ten feet up. Rudi takes off his shirt, ties it on to the jacket to increase the length of his homemade "rope" and lies down on the cold ice. Now the man explains that it is just out of reach. Rudi extends the "rope" again with his trousers and pulls the knots tight. He digs two holes for leverage and lowers his lifeline. The man grabs it but protests that he will pull Rudi in. Rudi tells the man that he is strong enough to hold him and digs in.

The man puts his full weight on the rope, and Rudi braces with all of his might. He desperately holds onto his staff. Rudi is so tired that he can't speak. Minutes go by before the man finally pulls himself up over the edge. Rudi is exhausted. The man is shocked to see that Rudi is just a boy. He helps the freezing Rudi dress himself, and they both warm themselves in the sun. The climber thanks Rudi for saving his life. Rudi examines the man, who is perhaps thirty years old, and asks if he is Captain Winter. The man is surprised and confirms that Rudi is correct. He is an infamous English climber who has climbed more peaks than any man alive. Rudi heard he was in the area. He introduces himself and is amazed and elated at what has happened. Captain Winter asks if Rudi is related to Josef Matt and says that he should have known after what Rudi did. Rudi's father was killed trying to ascend the Citadel. Rudi and Captain Winter look up at the mountain.

Captain Winter splits a bar of chocolate with Rudi, and they discuss mountain tactics. They agree that the Citadel can be climbed. Winter admits he is trying to climb the Citadel, but he can't find a guide to take him in Kurtal. Even Rudi's Uncle Franz refused him. Winter speaks of hiring a man named Emil Saxo in nearby Brolu to guide him. Rudi confesses that he also wants to climb the peak. Rudi explains his thoughts on the mountain. He tells Captain Winter about the problems with the east face, northwest ridge, north face, west ridge and southwest ridge. He is astonished to find himself, a sixteen-year-old dishwasher, explaining his views on the Citadel to an accomplished



mountain climber. Captain Winter listens intently. Rudi suggests the southeast ridge as the best route up the mountain, and Winter agrees. It is the slope that Rudi's father was killed on.

The men walk down towards town. Winter is surprised to find out that Rudi is not working as a climber's apprentice. Rudi explains that his mother does not want him to follow in his father's footsteps by climbing. They reach the main trail, and Rudi asks Captain Winter to walk down separately and not tell anyone of their meeting. He doesn't want to get in trouble for being on the mountain. Winter reluctantly agrees.

Chapter 2, A Boy and A Man Analysis

The character development of Captain Winter shows that he is a multi-faceted individual who does not easily fall into stereotypes. People in Rudi's village have always seen him as a small boy. Therefore, he has fairly low self-esteem. The captain sees his potential, especially as a climber. He perceives Rudi as a talented and brave young man, not a boy. Once the captain finds out that Rudi is the son of Josef, he is even more impressed. The captain is a great climber, but he doesn't have the arrogance or ego to match. He is a great role model for fatherless Rudi.



Chapter 3, Two Hundred Dirty Dishes

Chapter 3, Two Hundred Dirty Dishes Summary

The dishes have stacked up in Rudi's absence, and the waitress complains to Teo, the cook, about Rudi. Teo Zurbruggen is an old, crippled man who works with Rudi in the kitchen of the Beau Site Hotel. He defends the boy and makes up a cover story that Rudi is with his sick mother. The waitress doesn't believe him. Teo was injured leading the attempt on the Citadel with Rudi's father. Josef and another climber were killed, while Teo luckily escaped with a bad limp and a paralyzed arm. He still yearns for climbing and encourages Rudi often. Teo is often sad at the view of the mountains from his work.

Franz Learner, Rudi's uncle, arrives, looking for Rudi. Teo attempts to cover for the boy, but the waitress ruins his story. Franz is furious, and he is upset at the stack of dirty dishes. Teo protests that, "You cannot bottle the wind." Franz angrily threatens to move Rudi to another part of the hotel. Rudi's mother wishes him to learn the hotel business. Franz agrees, since Rudi is too small and wiry to be a guide. Teo tries to appeal his case, but Franz is angry about his sister losing her husband to the Citadel. Franz leaves to tell Frau Matt about her son.

Frau Matt is disappointed with Rudi and finds her views echoed by Franz. She laments Rudi's desire to climb. Then Rudi shows up, unaware of Franz's visit to the hotel. He attempts to lie and is caught. Both Franz and his mother admonish the boy. Rudi tries to explain why he disobeys, but he can't. Franz tries to explain the tough, dangerous life of a guide. Rudi has the chance to be a businessman, and he should appreciate it.

Suddenly, Captain Winter arrives at the house. Franz introduces him to Frau Matt and Rudi. He keeps up his part of the bargain by pretending not to know the boy. The two men make plans to climb the Wunderhorn. Captain Winter suggests using Rudi as a helper, but Franz protests. Rudi begs his uncle and tells him what happened on the glacier. Captain Winter retells the story to incredulous Franz and Frau Matt. They are both amazed that Rudi saved Winter's life. Franz asks Rudi how he knew how to get Captain Winter out of the chasm. Rudi explains that he just did what came naturally to him. Captain Winter puts in a good word on Rudi's behalf and asks again that the boy accompany them the following day on the Wunderhorn. He promises to take care of Rudi. Frau Herr is indecisive, but she reluctantly agrees. Rudi is elated and finishes up his work in the hotel kitchen.

Chapter 3, Two Hundred Dirty Dishes Analysis

Rudi sees his chance to escape from the drudgery of working at the hotel and fights for the chance to climb "officially" for the first time. His first great triumph is achieved when his uncle and mother relent in letting him climb with Captain Winter. Rudi at last has a

chance to show what he is made of. He can finally show his uncle that his destiny is to be a climber. Unfortunately, he still has lessons to learn about climbing with others, and he must learn the hard way.



Chapter 4, Trial -

Chapter 4, Trial - Summary

Rudi dreams of climbing the Citadel and then takes his father's red flannel shirt out of a drawer. He studies it for some time before going to the hotel. After finishing his dishes early, he receives a note to visit the mountaineering shop in town. Teo is delighted and sends him out early. Rudi is very excited that Captain Winter has bought climbing supplies for him. He proudly picks up a pair of boots, a knapsack and an ice-ax. Rudi has never owned real equipment before. He breaks in the boots on the way home and shows the gifts to his mother. She expresses excitement, but she is sad because he will only be using them once.

Franz and Rudi meet up with Captain Winter at the hotel, and the men check their gear. Some men call out as they walk down the street that it is nice to see another Matt climbing at last. A cruel boy that Rudi knows sees him, and Rudi sees the jealous look on his face. The group leaves town and walks up the path, soon reaching the wooden monument to Rudi's father. They leave the tree line, and Rudi is amazed at how comfortable his boots are. After stopping for a snack, they reach the fork and turn right. There are rocks and a small glacier. Rudi has trouble with his heavy pack because he usually travels light, but soon they reach the Alpine cabin.

Built to accommodate thirty, the cabin has been built to house climbers from Kurtal. There are many benches and a fireplace. Franz and Rudi talk to the other guides. Rudi is prouder than he has ever been. He sits by the fire and eats with the other men. They talk into the night, and Rudi feels at home.

Chapter 4, Trial - Analysis

Teo is vicariously living through Rudi. The old man is genuinely excited for the boy, since he knows what it is like to have the "fever" for climbing. He also knows that Rudi will lead a miserable life if he stifles his true gift. His vision helps get Rudi through some tough times in his life. Where Rudi is young and impatient, Teo realizes that it will work out in the end. The older man's foresight and wisdom is very helpful when the two interact throughout the story.



Chapter 5, - And Error

Chapter 5, - And Error Summary

The early morning is still pitch black outside as the men leave the cabin. The goal is to be up on the mountain by mid-morning so that they can be back before the early afternoon. Usually the afternoon sun causes dangerous landslides that need to be avoided. It is bitter cold, but Rudi realizes that the darkness is not complete. Gradually, his eyes adjust to the faint starlight. It is a gentle climb at first, and Rudi brings up the rear, as a porter. They continue in this fashion for an hour.

Just before dawn, the climbers leave the mild ridge and climb to a second one. They soon reach the mountain wall and rope up for "real" climbing. There are large granite blocks, like stairs, and the route is nearly vertical. Several times, Rudi feels Captain Winter and Franz pull the rope taut to support him, but he is proud not to need the help. The sun comes up, and they remove some of their heavy clothes. Looking up, Rudi notices the different climbing techniques his uncle uses compared to the captain as they alternate the lead. Uncle Franz works methodically, while the captain exhibits a particular lightness on the rocks. Rudi suddenly realizes that he is having no difficulties keeping up with the men and is even more delighted. He notices better routes at times but has the sense to keep this to himself.

Rudi, Franz and Captain Winter look down at the town far below them. They reach the high upper shoulder of the Wunderhorn and follow it around to where they have a clear view of the Citadel. They sit and have lunch while they stare at the opposing peak that soars above them. This view offers them a detailed look at the forbidding upper slope. Rudi follows the southeast ridge with his eyes until he sees a dark outcropping of rock. It is known as the Fortress and is considered impassible. It is the highest point his father's group reached. Captain Winter is looking at the same thing and asks Franz how high Josef reached. Franz explains that he never made it past the Fortress, but Josef believed that there was a route around it. The captain tries to get Franz's interest up about climbing the Citadel, but he is having none of it. He tells the captain that the mountain is evil and needs to be left alone.

The men sit and contemplate the Citadel for some time. Captain Winter makes notes on the southeast ridge. Rudi wants to comment on what he sees, but he feels it is not his place. There is no plan to continue on to the summit of the Wunderhorn because the goal is to see the Citadel from high. Rudi wanders out and examines the way down. He spies an alternate, possibly better route. Investigating further, he climbs down to a small ledge leading to a larger platform. Past the platform is a descending slope that looks like a simple route. He slowly inches out onto the ledge, not fearful of the shear drop below. Suddenly, he feels a tremor beneath him as the ledge crumbles away. He quickly leaps to the platform and feels a panic come over him. Beyond the platform is only smooth wall. What had been his ledge is now just a rough patch on the smooth granite surface.



He carefully tries a handhold and slips. He tries and slips again, now feeling panic again. His attempt to find a "shortcut" has trapped him.

Rudi sees Captain Winter and his uncle. They have followed him and tell him not to move. Rudi tries to catch a rope that they throw, but the angle of the mountain makes it impossible. His uncle ropes up to the captain and begins to cross what had been the ledge, inch by inch. He gropes the bare surface for handholds, finally taking a jump into space to reach Rudi's platform. He holds the rope while Rudi climbs it back, and then he ties it off and climbs back himself. Rudi is devastated by the look his uncle gives him. The captain tries to relieve the tension by saying it is okay, but Rudi figures that this will be his last climb. He is devastated. He has forced other climbers to risk their lives for him, a terrible offense in mountaineering.

Chapter 5, - And Error Analysis

Rudi learns an important lesson on the mountain with his uncle and Captain Winter. Unfortunately, his uncle is looking for an excuse to say that his nephew shouldn't be a climber. Rudi wants to please the others and is very impatient. He also has no experience climbing in a group. This responsibility is new to him, and he makes a bad mistake requiring him to be rescued. This embarrassment takes a hard toll on Rudi.



Chapter 6, Master and Pupil

Chapter 6, Master and Pupil Summary

The weather turns bad, and the mountains become enshrouded in fog. Captain Winter leaves for several days and asks Franz to reconsider being his guide for a Citadel expedition. Rudi doesn't understand, but Franz has told no one what happened on the mountain. For that, Rudi is glad, but it is small consolation. He is back at work, and the dirty dishes seem to never stop coming. Franz considers him "back where he belongs." Rudi's mother has him take his climbing equipment, which has only been used once, to Uncle Franz to sell, since they won't be used again.

Rudi feels miserable after the third day of rain and tells Teo about what he did on the mountain. The cook agrees that it was a bad thing to do and speaks of youthful impatience. Rudi goes back to work, and the only thing keeping him going is the thought of seeing Captain Winter again. Teo sees that the weather is turning better and tells Rudi to meet him the next morning for "training."

Teo and Rudi walk two hours through the forest to the base of a smaller peak called the Felsburg. Rudi is amazed at how fast the old man walks, even with his bad limp. Teo asks Rudi to scale a cliff so he can watch. Rudi starts climbing, taking his time, using good techniques like testing handholds well, leaning out to see his options and always having three points of contact. He reaches the top and carefully climbs back down. Teo says he did a good job for an easy climb and sends Rudi up another face. It is slightly more difficult, but Rudi completes the task. Next, Teo has Rudi climb with a pack load. Rudi has great difficulty with the heavy, free-swinging pack, but he again succeeds. Teo explains that guides always carry heavy packs with provisions, so Rudi needs to get used to it. He has Rudi repeat the climb. Next, he has Rudi practice knot tying, belaying and then rappelling.

The two eat lunch at the base of the Felsburg and talk. Rudi asks Teo to teach him more. Teo explains that Rudi is a good solo climber, but a guide always climbs with others. The guide leads, helps and is responsible for his climber. Teo explains that Rudi was not thinking like a guide when he wandered off and got into trouble on the Wunderhorn. He was thinking only of himself. Then, he tells Rudi about his father.

Josef Matt was a renowned climber who was afraid of nothing. He had a passion and that passion was directed at climbing the Citadel. Josef had a red shirt that he planned to put on a pole and plant on the summit for all to see. He set off with Teo as his porter and an English climber named Sir Edward Stephenson. They took the southeast ridge and were working on the far left side of the Fortress when there was a rockslide. Sir Edward's leg was broken, and Josef and Teo could not get him down alone. It started getting dark and very cold. Josef told Teo to go for help. Teo fell on the way down, badly hurting his left side. Still, he made it back to town, but then a bad storm came in. By the



time a rescue party reached the two climbers, they had frozen to death in a small cave. Josef had put his red shirt on Sir Edward to try and keep him warm.

Teo stops talking and looks at Rudi. He explains that Rudi's father died trying to help another in the noblest manner of a guide. The mountain didn't kill him; he chose to stay with his climber. Teo then looks up the mountain and ropes up. He explains that Rudi will be his guide. Rudi climbs ahead, and the old man follows slowly but expertly. When they reach high on the cliff face, Teo cannot pull himself up with his withered arm, and Rudi has to support him. It is excruciating, but Rudi does it. They reach the summit and descend, again with difficulty. Rudi is elated as the men walk back towards town. He goes into the kitchen to work and is told that a man stopped to say goodbye. He said he was leaving "for good." Rudi realizes that he missed his chance to see Captain Winter, and his heart drops.

Chapter 6, Master and Pupil Analysis

The skills that Teo teaches Rudi on the Felsburg are priceless later on in the story, when Rudi is forced to use most of these same skills in life or death situations. For one, Rudi has to think how to support an injured climber when he assists Teo in climbing and descending the Felsburg. This same technique is used when Rudi assists Saxo high up on the Citadel. Teo also instills many ethical practices of the guides that contribute to Rudi's decision to help Saxo (as a true guide would) instead of leaving the man and pressing on towards the summit. Teo also explains to Rudi what really happened to his father on the Citadel. This helps Rudi when he is trapped alone in the small cave under the Fortress and realizes that it is the same cave his father died in.



Chapter 7, A Prisoner Escapes

Chapter 7, A Prisoner Escapes Summary

Franz Lerner is talking to his sister, Frau Matt, in her parlor. He explains how Captain Winter returned and offered him twice his normal fee to guide him on a Citadel climb. Franz was flattered but refused. He offered to climb any other peak for half his usual fee. He shakes his head. Franz explains that he thinks the captain is possessed by the mountain. The Citadel is evil and should not be climbed. Rudi listens in disappointment. He works without feeling and wishes the fog would again cover up the view of the Citadel from his window. He is in a constant daze and starts breaking more and more dishes at work. Teo tries to cheer him up, but nothing gets through to him.

Boys on the street are cruel and taunt Rudi as the "guide with the apron." One of the bigger bullies, Klaus Wesselhoft, catches him sewing his father's red shirt and ridicules him. Rudi hits Klaus with all of his might, but the older, larger boy hits him in the face and gives him a nosebleed.

Franz has been busy with the great weather. Teo begged him to take Rudi along as guide, but he would hear no part of it. To add insult to injury, Franz even used Klaus on two occasions because he was so busy. Then Rudi overhears Franz telling his mother that he has seen smoke rising from the unused hut on top of Blue Glacier. With a start, Rudi realizes that it has to be Captain Winter. He has not given up his quest to climb the Citadel but merely hired a guide from Broli. Rudi's mind races, and he makes a fateful decision. That night, he packs heavy clothes, including his father's shirt. He then leaves a note for his mother and sneaks over to Franz' house. There, he gathers up "his" climbing equipment and sets off for the hut. The light from the stars is enough to find his way on the familiar trail. He gathers his climbing stick on the way up.

Chapter 7, A Prisoner Escapes Analysis

Even though Rudi is a talented climber, he is still a sixteen-year-old kid and very insecure about himself. He is easily goaded by other cruel children who mock him because they climb while Rudi washes dishes. Rudi tries to be faithful to his mother's wishes, but he still has to seek his own path - literally. When Rudi hears that Winter has gone up with another guide to climb the Citadel, he makes the fateful decision to try and hook up with Winter's group up on the glacier.



Chapter 8, White Fury

Chapter 8, White Fury Summary

Rudi emerges above the tree line in the darkness. As the dawn slowly breaks, he sees a plume of smoke ahead. He carefully traverses the crevasses on the Blue Glacier. Above, the sunlight strikes the top of the Citadel. He approaches the cabin and walks in, seeing an unfamiliar man who he realizes must be Emil Saxo. The huge man confirms this as Captain Winter walks in the door. He is very surprised to see Rudi and makes him breakfast. Rudi announces that he wants to join the expedition. Saxo laughs, but Winter just smiles. He explains to Saxo how Rudi saved his life on the glacier. Rudi lies, though, when Captain Winter asks if he has permission to join them. He says that his mother gave him permission to climb, provided he climbed with Winter. Winter is hesitant but agrees to let Rudi accompany them on some preliminary climbing at the base.

Winter, Saxo and Rudi make slow progress on the glacier. Winter and Saxo alternate the lead and have to stop constantly to cut steps on the steep ice. The incline increases from forty to fifty degrees as they climb the massive white slab. The group reaches a final huge crevasse before the main body of the upper glacier. The only way across is a snow bridge that they precariously cross one by one. The upper glacier is a series of snow towers that wind around, usually ending in an impassible dead end. It is slow going, but they make progress. At noon, Rudi looks back to see the crevasse receding in the distance. It is only visible as a small line below. They reach the top of the glacier and look up to see the southeast ridge of the Citadel looming above. Rudi is elated to be ready to set foot on the mountain itself.

Now the footing is soft snow as opposed to ice. The brightness from above changes, and Rudi is momentarily confused. They struggle to get to the rocks as the powdery snow starts sliding beneath them. It is an avalanche. Before Rudi can reach safety, a white wave hits him. He spins and goes under.

Chapter 8, White Fury Analysis

There are many parallels between the experiences of Rudi and his father during the story. Both are caught in an avalanche near the base of the Citadel. Both nearly outrun it before being taken under. Of course, Rudi's incident ends well, with the exception of Captain Winter's head injury, which plagues him later on. The earlier avalanche injures Sir Edward Stephenson to the point where they are forced to stay in a cave that they later die in. This ironic twist creates a bond between father and son that is palpable even though Rudi never knew his father.



Chapter 9, The Challenge

Chapter 9, The Challenge Summary

Earlier that day, Franz returns from a climb on the Felsburg. He enters the Edelweiss Tavern and quickly hears rumors that Captain Winter is attempting to climb the Citadel. A man who has returned from Broli reports the news, as well as the fact that Saxo is acting as Captain Winter's guide. Franz is hurt, and the men take turns savaging Winter and Saxo's names and the mountain itself. Then Frau Matt enters, looking for Rudi. Franz suddenly realizes what has happened and reassures his sister that Rudi only went to the hut on the glacier.

Teo reports that he has seen three climbers above the Blue Glacier through his telescope. The men debate the identity of the third man, but Franz knows who it is. The local guides are shocked when they discover it is Rudi. Teo raises a toast to the only "true mountaineer in Kurtal," and the crowd of guides descends on him. He ignores them and calls them cowards. He explains that they have no passion; they only climb peaks they have climbed a hundred times before. There is no challenge for them anymore. He speaks of the Citadel soon being climbed by a guide from Broli and shames the men.

Franz speaks up and explains the difference between a coward and a foolish risk taker. He announces that he is leaving for the hut in the morning, and a large group of guides agrees to follow. He plans to take Rudi down with him and talk Captain Winter out of his foolish plan. Even Teo plans to be ready at five the next morning.

Chapter 9, The Challenge Analysis

This chapter foreshadows the fact that Franz really does have a desire to climb the Citadel, but is keeping it inside. This comes out when he takes a group of Kurtal guides up to find his nephew. Franz is torn between his fear of seeing his sister, Matt's mother, hurt and his natural competitive spirit in wanting to find a way up the Citadel. Franz has learned to be content. He has to be pushed hard to realize that he wants to be on the mountain. Teo angers the group of climbers by making it all too obvious that a boy is braver than they are.



Chapter 10, Three to Make Ready -

Chapter 10, Three to Make Ready - Summary

Back on the mountain, in the midst of the avalanche, Rudi attempts to "swim" on top of the churning snow. He soon finds himself careening end over end before the roar ends abruptly. He is trapped with a small pocket of air in front of his face. From the brightness of the snow around him, Rudi knows he is not very deep in the snow. He calms himself before starting to wriggle and turn. It is very slow going, and several times snow covers his face. As he carefully works his way upward, it is difficult not to sink deeper in the shifting snow. Then, he finally breaks out into bright sunlight and looks around, bewildered.

Rudi sees that both ends of the rope end under the snow and starts pulling one end. Saxo abruptly breaks out on his end, and they both run to dig out Captain Winter. He is about four feet down and has a gash on his head, but he is awake. They sit on the slope, exhausted, and discuss how stupid it was to try the powdery snow in the warm afternoon. They work their way down the slope and make for the hut, reaching it just after dark. They start a fire and eat dinner. Rudi is exhausted and soon falls asleep.

In the morning, Rudi wakes to a discussion between Captain Winter and Saxo. Winter wants to take Josef's original route, but Saxo thinks there might be a better way to go. Winter agrees they will decide on the way up, as the route presents itself. First, they will descend to Broli for more supplies. They need provisions for a longer ascent. Captain Winter asks Rudi to return to Kurtal for more supplies and to ask his uncle to accompany them one last time. Panicked at the thought of his lie being discovered, Rudi asks to come to Broli with them, but Winter is set on Franz having a last chance.

Overhearing the conversation, Saxo realizes that Winter is asking for another guide to accompany them. He is insulted. He is especially angry that a guide from Kurtal might accompany them. Winter is perplexed by the rivalry between the two towns and tries to talk sense to Saxo. Saxo argues that all men from Kurtal are cowards and that he will not climb with one, even if he is the "best" from Kurtal. Again, Winter tries to reason with the stubborn guide from Broli. He asks Saxo to be open-minded and look at the big picture and says that they all want to conquer the mountain. The best way is to have the most talent. The men leave for Broli, and Winter says they will talk more on the decent.

Rudi tries one last time to change Winter's mind about sending him back to Kurtal, but Winter is adamant. They are to meet back at the hut at noon the next day. Rudi sadly watches the men recede in the distance. He sits alone in the hut, not sure what to do. He knows if he follows Captain Winter's command, he will not be returning to the mountain. His uncle will put a stop to that. Rudi dejectedly climbs down the glacier, his mind racing. He comes to a juncture where a right turn would take him down the Blue Glacier towards Kurtal. A left turn would take him back up the upper glacier to the Citadel, where they were the day before. Rudi turns left.



Chapter 10, Three to Make Ready - Analysis

The pivotal conflict of the story is whether Rudi will follow his dream to be a mountain guide like his father or give in to his family's wishes and go into business. His choice is before him at several points in the story, and he makes small steps toward being a guide, like sneaking out to climb whenever he has an opportunity. However, the big decision occurs when he walks back towards Kurtal, knowing that to follow Winter's wishes and ask his uncle will expose his lie. He decides to take his fate in his own hands and confront his father's legacy himself. This point in the story is a major choice for Rudi that will affect him for the rest of his life.



Chapter 11, Alone

Chapter 11, Alone Summary

Rudi calmly climbs the upper glacier. He is alone on the enormous slant of ice that makes him an insignificant dark dot on the surface. He makes good time, following the steps cut by Winter and Saxo the day before. He tentatively crosses the snow bridge and then threads the serac maze easily - again retracing the earlier steps. He climbs up the powdery snow and veers left of the avalanche site. He keeps going and realizes with a start that he is on solid rock - the true southeast ridge of the Citadel. He rests and notices that he can see both Kurtal and Broli from his high vantage point. He sees the Fortress but nothing above that.

The rock wall becomes steeper as Rudi cleverly gains fifty feet and then another fifty feet. He reaches a smooth face and has to backtrack. Rudi then finds a small route up as the cliff drops away below for a full thousand feet straight down. The ridge narrows to a point, and he is forced to straddle it, with staggering drop-offs on both sides of him. He reaches an impassible tower of rock that blocks the ridge, and he has to climb around the side, again clinging to the cliff. Several times, he becomes disheartened and has to psyche himself back up to continue. He gets back on the ridge above the tower and finds the going easier, but much more surreal. There is no sound, and he feels very alone. For the first time, he wonders if there really are demons on the mountain.

Then, Rudi reaches a fifty-foot tall smooth rock surface, the Fortress. This is the highest anyone has ever reached. He makes for the left side, his father's route. Rudi follows the ledge several steps until it stops abruptly. He sees a rock cleft five yards past, but he sees no way to reach it. He stares until he notices the wall between him and the "chimney" is not completely smooth, although there are no traditional handholds. Rudi moves out into space, hugging the cliff face with every inch of his body. He knows that if he stops, he will fall.

Then Rudi is in the cleft, looking up past the Fortress. Rudi knows his father was right. There was a way past! Rudi is bleeding, and his clothes are ripped. He doesn't notice. He looks at the waning sun but doesn't care. Rudi scurries up the cleft and becomes the first person to stand above the Fortress. He sees the top of the southeast ridge for the first time and realizes that it can be climbed. His heart swells. Then a cloud blots out the sun and brings him back to reality. The sky darkens, and he feels the cold for the first time

Chapter 11, Alone Analysis

One of a high altitude climber's most important rules (which is also one of the most difficult to resist) is to keep track of the time. Being stranded high on a slope at night usually spells death, even with modern clothing. The lure of the peak has pushed many



climbers well past a reasonable time of return. Scores of mountaineers have lost their lives because of it. As an Everest climber, the author of the story was familiar with the dangers of not watching the time, as well as the dangers of even the faintest sign of a storm. Any signal of impending bad weather is a warning to immediately turn back and seek shelter. In this story, Rudi knows better, but his impatience and inexperience overrules his common sense as he climbs in and past the footsteps of his father.



Chapter 12, A Boy and a Ghost

Chapter 12, A Boy and a Ghost Summary

As the first gusts of wind hit him, Rudi climbs back into the narrow cleft and finds shelter as he descends. As he crosses the sheer rock wall, the wind blows him towards the mountain - making his return quicker. Unfortunately, that is the end of his luck. The winds strike him full force as he walks the ledge below the Fortress. Snow makes the visibility almost nothing. He staggers forward and crawls, but he cannot find the narrow ridge that leads downwards. The wind rises to a wail, and then a rumble hits his ears. Rudi frantically looks for any shelter as the gusts are nearly horizontal now. There is thunder and lightening. He finds a very shallow cave and crawls inside. The storm howls, and he waits.

After an unknown time, the storm dies down, and Rudi waits for it to end completely. He crawls out and is terrified to see the last rays of the sun. He starts climbing down the snow-covered ridge and slips. Rudi slips again and almost tumbles out over the edge of the cliff. He figures he will probably freeze if he stays on the mountain for the night, but he knows he will die if he continues down. Teo fell in the same location, and the ridge wasn't slippery then like it is now. Rudi climbs back up into the cave and tries to keep warm. He puts on his sweater and eats the last of his food. It is pitch black, and he falls asleep.

Rudi wakes with a start and notices that the black has been replaced by a dull gray. There is mist outside that covers everything. The cold is almost unbearable, and Rudi takes out his father's red shirt and puts it on. There is a moment of horror as he realizes that he is in the cave where his father and Sir Edward died. He fights a blind panic that rushes inside of him and also fights the urge to run out into the night. He expects to scream and feels the ghosts all around. Then, Rudi simply says "father," and the fear vanishes - replaced with calm. He knows his father is watching him and that the shirt will keep him safe. Rudi prays and falls asleep.

Rudi awakens before dawn and starts down the ridge, which is still slippery from the night before. At least now he can see the route down. Rudi slips and becomes afraid, but he doesn't fall. He tells himself that he is Rudi Matt, the son of Josef! He will succeed.

Chapter 12, A Boy and a Ghost Analysis

In the cave at the base of the Fortress, Rudi makes peace with the death of his father at last. For years, he has been uncertain of his future. Even when climbing happily on the mountain, Rudi feels guilt over having to keep his actions secret. He feels torn because he is a good kid at heart and wants to obey the wishes of his mother. Unfortunately, she is asking him to deny his legacy, and it eats away at him until he is forced into stealth.

Rudi finally comes face to face with his father in the cave and knows he is a true climber.



Chapter 13, - Four to Go

Chapter 13, - Four to Go Summary

John Winter and Emil Saxo arrive back at the hut to find it restocked. They realize that men from Kurtal have been there, but they don't know why. Saxo sees six packs and bellows about trickery. He becomes enraged, thinking the Kurtal guides are trying to take the mountain from him. Captain Winter tries to calm him down. Both men try and figure out why the Kurtal guides went out without their packs. Saxo again suspects a trick of some sort. Then Franz walks in, with Teo and the rest of the guides.

Franz asks where Rudi is, and the captain replies that he should be with them. There is confusion as they swap stories. Franz is angry with the captain, but the captain explains that he sent Rudi down the day before to find Franz. Captain Winter is upset to hear that Rudi never arrived in Kurtal and also that the boy lied about having permission to be on the mountain. The men can't see how they could have missed Rudi on the way up. They worry that he might have fallen in a crevasse on his way down. Franz and Saxo start arguing and yelling at each other. Captain Winter has to jump between them to stop them from fighting. He chastises them and then realizes that Rudi is standing in the doorway. He is bruised and bloody, but he smiles and says, "I have found the way!" Franz embarrasses Rudi, and Rudi explains that he found a way past the Fortress.

The others stare incredulously as Rudi tells them how he made it to the cleft and over, only to have the storm come up on him suddenly. Teo says how proud he is. Captain Winter makes him eat. The group of guides is horrified to hear how Rudi spent the night on the mountain. He says there are no demons and explains the route in detail to Captain Winter. Franz tells Rudi that he is not angry with him but still wants to take the boy back down to his mother. Captain Winter and Teo take Rudi's side and argue with Franz. Teo pleads Rudi's case, saying that he is a born climber and that Franz must not take him back down. Captain Winter chimes in about Rudi's heart and the fact that he climbed higher than any man alive. He deserves to press on with the group. Then the men begin to argue about whether the mountain belongs to Kurtal or Broli. Saxo comes close to blows with the Kurtal guides. He calls the Kurtal men cowards, and a fight appears imminent. Then Franz speaks up and says he is there to climb the mountain.

The Kurtal men cheer, and again there is almost a fight as Saxo and Franz argue over who will reach the top first. Winter announces that they will climb together, and both Saxo and Franz scoff at him. Captain Winter asks the men to put away their prejudices and put their talents to combined use. He begs them to see past their pride and see the greater good. They reluctantly shake hands, and the guides enthusiastically speak of the three who will ascend the next day. "Four," Captain Winter corrects, as he looks at Rudi. Franz agrees that his nephew can come with them.

Chapter 13, - Four to Go Analysis

The grown men arguing over "rights" to the mountain like children playing over a toy is almost comical. The traditional old rivalry of Kurtal versus Broli runs deep in the villagers' blood. Winter has to work hard to make the stubborn old climbers finally see common sense. The point is that a strong group often has differing opinions which help keep them thinking at all times. Competitiveness can be a very strong incentive to do one's best.



Chapter 14, First of All Men

Chapter 14, First of All Men Summary

The men pack enough provisions for two nights on the mountain if necessary. They stay up late into the evening discussing strategy. Well before dawn the next morning, four depart for the summit, while five remain at the hut. The plan is for three of the remaining men to follow the main climbers the next day in case assistance is needed getting down. Teo is to stay at the hut to prepare food, and the last man leaves for town to explain what is going on. Franz tells the man to explain to Frau Matt that Rudi is safe in the cabin so she won't worry. While packing, Saxo makes a point to ridicule Rudi's old climbing pole. He attempts to take it, but Rudi holds his ground. Uncle Franz warns that it will get him stuck in a chimney, but Rudi refuses to leave it. He also has his father's red flannel shirt packed deep in his pack.

All of the men depart the cabin. It is still night, but the weather is calm and clear - a perfect day for climbing. Soon, the group splits up as planned. Teo asks Rudi to think of his father. Saxo, Winter, Franz and Rudi tie off and work their way uphill. They make superb time, crossing the snow bridge and icefall almost by memory. They have a quick snack consisting of bread and tea, and then they continue. Captain Winter asks Rudi to lead, since he knows the way. Rudi is honored and climbs carefully. The order on the rope is reversed, with Winter and Saxo bringing up the rear. On the narrow ridge, Rudi remembers many of his handholds from before. He feels a confidence for himself and his team. As the sun rises higher, the men remove some of their heavy clothing. Rudi adeptly leads the team past the towers of rock, and soon they are at the base of the Fortress itself.

There is a short argument when Saxo insists on trying another route, but Winter dissuades him. With his uncle assisting, Rudi has no problems inching across the rough cliff and reaching the small cleft. The others follow. On the way up the cleft, though, Rudi's pole becomes stuck, and Franz pushes for him to discard it. With some difficulty, Rudi frees himself and continues on - ignoring his uncle. In minutes, they are on top of the Fortress. Even Uncle Franz is impressed with Rudi's performance.

Saxo and Winter retake the lead and continue upward. They see a vulture up on the rock and stop to watch it until it flies away. Rudi is elated and yodels in delight. The men climb further upward, following the ridge when possible and sometimes having to skirt around the adjacent faces. The air is noticeably thinner, and some of the smaller peaks are well below them now. They reach an obstacle, a smooth wall. There is an argument over which way to continue, and this time, Saxo wins out. He leads the way, and they quickly are back on the ridge again. They see the shoulder of the mountain looming above them and start wondering how to tackle it.



The light fades, and the group finds a small, level site for the two tents. After a dinner consisting of meat, cheese, bread and tea, the men talk for some time. They look at distant villages twinkling in the distance below. They think of the coming day.

Chapter 14, First of All Men Analysis

The mountain itself can be considered the true antagonist in the story. It symbolizes both a physical and mental wall that many want to climb over. This inanimate object inspires, kills, impresses and frustrates all of the main characters. This being said, Rudi's first goal is reached when he achieves his father's goal of getting over the Fortress. He literally and figuratively follows in his father's footsteps to conquer the imposing wall on his own.



Chapter 15, The Needle's Eye

Chapter 15, The Needle's Eye Summary

Rudi and Franz share a tent. It is very cold but still much more comfortable than when Rudi had the cave to himself only a few days before. After an uncertain sleep, the men break camp in the dark and have a quick meal. Rudi notices that Captain Winter keeps touching his head where he was injured in the avalanche. The men pack all their equipment in case it is necessary to spend another night on the mountain. The group proceeds single file up the ridge. Soon it is dawn, and the route becomes more defined. Rudi notices again that Captain Winter seems to be straining and doesn't look himself. He thinks that they all have to make it to the summit - especially the captain. He deserves it more than anyone.

The ridge ends abruptly at the shoulder of the mountain, and the men gaze up the two-hundred-foot cliff, looking for the best way up. Although not as steep as it originally appeared, the rough face breaks into multiple gullies and chimneys. They start climbing, reach a dead end, back down and begin again. With only one climber investigating each possible route so the others can hold the rope, the going is much slower. It takes them multiple tries with Winter, Saxo and Franz trying their own routes before a path takes them up to the first ledge. They keep climbing, again with the trial and error method. They slowly edge higher and higher.

The holds become more difficult as the strain begins to wear on the men. Captain Winter has a coughing fit and has to rest after coming back from a dead end. The route forces the climbers to the exposed east face, where the sheer drop makes even Rudi try not to look down. Rudi sees a chimney that would take them off the cliff, but Winter shakes his head. Soon, a rock fall cascades down the chimney that Rudi was looking at earlier.

The climbers work their way up the unrelenting surface. Saxo makes an impressive climb up an otherwise smooth wall by stuffing his knee in a crack for leverage. The other men follow, although the hold is too big for Rudi, and he has to be pulled up by rope. He is humiliated but soon has other issues to worry about. They are nearing the top of the shoulder now. It appears to be the last major obstacle to the summit.

Winter, Saxo, Franz and Rudi reach a spire of rock that blocks their path, and they examine the situation. Saxo tries a small cleft, which leads up and into the "needle" itself. He soon comes back, reporting that it turns into a tunnel that is too small to fit through. Franz makes an attempt but also reports that it is too narrow. Captain Winter moves to climb the outside of the needle. He uses almost impossible grips to position himself against the abyss below. He almost imperceptibly makes progress against the near smooth spire of rock - getting within five feet of the top before running out of handholds. He tries in vain for several nerve-wracking minutes before Franz calls for him to come down. On his return, he slips and has to be pulled back by rope. Winter is



exhausted. He coughs and gasps. Franz and Saxo follow in Winter's footsteps, using slightly different techniques, but they meet the same fate. The men sit at the base of the needle, defeated. It has taken three hours, and they are resigned.

Rudi asks if he can try ascending the narrow cleft because he is the smallest. He ropes up and starts climbing. It is easy for some time, but then the rocks begin to close in. He climbs through gaps where he literally has to squeeze. The light dims, and the way ahead becomes dark. There is water in the passage, and the slippery surface causes Rudi to fall back several times. He becomes stuck in complete darkness and tries not to panic. He composes himself before wriggling upwards until he frees his arms. Then the shaft starts to widen, and he sees light ahead. He exits the shaft on top of the needle, and the whole world seems to be below him. Kurtal is finally visible again. Rudi pulls up the rope, ties it off and lowers it down to the men on the outside of the needle. Within minutes, they are all standing beside him on top of the shoulder.

Chapter 15, The Needle's Eye Analysis

The character development is strong in this chapter. Each of the climbers has a moment to shine. Each of their individual talents comes to play, and it becomes obvious (in hindsight) how right Captain Winter was to fight to get two opposing guides to accompany him. Rudi proves himself to be indispensable because of his small stature, while before it was a detriment. He is the only one capable of climbing through the small cave in the needle.



Chapter 16, Darkness and Dawn

Chapter 16, Darkness and Dawn Summary

The men rest for several minutes there on top of the needle, in view of the summit at last. It is tantalizingly close, perhaps only two hours away. It is late in the afternoon now, and Rudi realizes that there is no way the men will be able to reach even back to where they are now by nightfall. It is a very good thing they brought their tents. As they start upwards, it is obvious that the Captain is not doing very well. He stumbles constantly and has difficulty breathing. He has another coughing fit that causes him to lose balance and almost fall. Franz tells him that the group will pitch their tents just ahead and rest for the night. Both Winter and Saxo protest. The weather might not hold another day for them to reach the summit. They say that the chance is now. However, Franz points out that besides Winter's obvious difficulties, they will probably not even be able to reach the top by dark. Winter asks the men to go on without him. Saxo jumps on the opportunity, and Franz chastises him for abandoning his duties as guide to always assist his "Herr."

Saxo reluctantly helps Franz pitch the tents in a small hollow where they will be protected from the wind. Franz cooks up some food and announces that there is enough for one more meal only. By the end of the next day, they have to be back at the hut. Saxo paces and pouts, looking up at the summit. Rudi is also upset and confused. He was euphoric after he conquered the needle and thought the feeling would last to the summit. Franz, Rudi and Saxo sit and watch the stars while Winter sleeps. Then they all go into the tents to sleep. Franz asks Saxo to tell him if Winter gets worse.

Saxo awakens the other climbers during the night, saying that it is very likely that Winter will not be able to go on in the morning. He suggests leaving Winter with Rudi and continuing on to the summit. Franz adamantly refuses to leave his Herr, and Saxo berates him as a coward. Franz tells Saxo that he is not a guide, since the first rule of a real guide is to "never leave his Herr." Laying there in the dark, Rudi knows that Franz will stay with Winter. He is devastated. In fitful bits of sleep, he dreams of the mountain.

Rudi wakes up in the night thinking that he heard something. He quietly leaves the tent and discovers Saxo missing. Captain Winter is sleeping by himself in the other tent. He fights an urge to wake the others but knows what the outcome would be. Rudi gathers his equipment, pole and red shirt. He starts climbing with a tumult of emotions inside his head. Only once, he looks back to see the tents, wondering what his uncle will think of him. He feels a certainty in his head that is above all others. He must beat Saxo to the top.



Chapter 16, Darkness and Dawn Analysis

The character theme of a "good guide" is detailed in chapter sixteen when Saxo's pride and greed prove to be too much for him. He consciously makes an effort to ignore the guide code and goes on towards the summit to seize personal glory. Even Rudi, the "kid," understands this and feels that Saxo shouldn't be allowed to reach the top first. He has the same quandary, assuming Winter won't be able to proceed and knowing Franz will attend to him. This makes Rudi the only one capable of pursuing the renegade climber Saxo. There is some foreboding that Saxo will get what's coming to him, and of course, it happens all too soon thereafter.



Chapter 17, The Day

Chapter 17, The Day Summary

As the dawn breaks in Kurtal, crowds gather around the only telescope. Since word of the climb reached the village, the people have gathered at the prospect of the Citadel being conquered at last. This morning, the third day, the mood is more tense. There is worry for the climbers. Everyone knows the food situation. The telescope is trained on the shoulder of the mountain. If the climbers are to be seen, it has to be this morning. There are rumors and arguments, most centering around Saxo slowing the group. Frau Matt is present when the announcement is made that two figures are visible above the shoulder.

The men begin to speculate which two men are climbing and what happened to the other two. Someone speaks about "the boy" not being able to make it and then stops suddenly. Frau Matt realizes that she has been lied to and that her brother and son are on the mountain. She calms herself and thanks the men for trying to lessen her worries. Frau Matt realizes then and there that her son was born to be a guide and that she must accept it.

Earlier that same day, Franz rises to find both Rudi and Saxo gone. Winter asks what is happening, and Franz reluctantly tells him. He is amazed to see that Winter has made a fantastic recovery during the night, and the men set out in pursuit of Rudi and Saxo. Franz sees that although exhausted, Captain Winter seems to be revitalized. Both men now struggle with coughing fits at this altitude. They gasp and wheeze at every step. They strain their eyes towards the summit ahead, but they see no signs of movement.

There is some difficult climbing, and then a very small ridge becomes visible before them. Franz sees that it is not a complicated climb, but the one-foot ridge drops off impossibly into space on both sides. They have a clear view of the much closer summit, but there are no signs of life ahead. From their vantage, they can see many peaks, even to distant France. They climb silently and move out onto the narrow ridge. Franz stops in horror; Rudi's backpack lies in front of them on the ridge. They look down into the nothingness on both sides. They call for the boy, but there is no answer. Winter tries to calm Franz that Rudi couldn't have fallen. Why would he have taken off his backpack? Winter takes out the red flannel shirt and staff. They continue on towards the summit.

Chapter 17, The Day Analysis

The technique of flashback is used very well in this section of the story to add suspense. Chapter seventeen and eighteen are out of order. The point of view switches from following Rudi, the main character, to the town and Rudi's mother, giving a limited amount of information and maximizing the reader's anticipation. Then, the point of view switches to Winter and Franz, and the reader learns that they have found Rudi's

backpack. Still, the reader does not know what has happened to Rudi, and tension is high. The reader will not know what has happened until starting chapter eighteen, where the story again changes to Rudi's point of view.



Chapter 18, The Heights

Chapter 18, The Heights Summary

Several hours earlier, Rudi watches the sun rise as he presses on towards the summit. He feels the sun on his face and does not cough in the thin air. He knows to keep a slow pace so he does not exhaust himself. He sees footprints in front of him but no sign of Saxo himself. Rudi despairs about leaving his uncle and the captain, but he pictures himself planting his father's shirt on the peak. He presses on until he finally sees Emil Saxo on the narrow ridge directly in front of him. Rudi calls for Saxo to stop and catches up to him on the knife ridge itself.

Saxo tells Rudi to go back and that he is going to climb the summit himself. He does not want his great feat to be associated with a "kitchen boy" from Kurtal. Rudi argues and pleads. Saxo moves suddenly to turn on Rudi and falls off the edge. Rudi sees that Saxo has luckily landed about twenty feet below, on a small ledge. He appears hurt but alive. Saxo awakes and attempts to climb back up to Rudi, but his left arm is limp. He has to turn back. Rudi considers the problem for a moment and then moves to climb down to Saxo. His earlier anger at the man has vanished. He knows the climber's creed: always help another climber in distress. His pack pulls at him unnecessarily, so he leaves it on the ridge.

Rudi manages to half climb, half slide down to Saxo's ledge. He looks carefully at Saxo's arm. It seems to be broken. Rudi tries to help Saxo climb back up to the ridge. After almost falling off the edge, they give up. Rudi again looks back up towards the ridge, reckoning that he can be back up and climbing again towards the summit in less than a minute. Saxo despondently urges him to leave him and go on. He shouts at Rudi to go on and climb to the summit - he has "won." Rudi looks out towards the end of the ledge and sees that it goes down an alternate route towards the tents. He is certain that with his help, Saxo can make it. Alone, though, Saxo doesn't have a chance. By the time they reach the tents, it will be too late in the day to climb back to the summit. Rudi's mind seems as if it will explode in the minute it takes him to make a decision.

Rudi grips Saxo's belt as they struggle down the ridge. It is very slow going. Almost every act of steadying Saxo's bulk pushes Rudi to the limit of his strength. At one point, Saxo loses his balance, and Rudi also falls trying to grab him. Luckily, they both slide down to a level spot below. Neither can move for several minutes. Trying to catch his breath, Rudi looks up to see two figures nearing the crest far above them. He almost cries out for aid. He knows they could be at his side in half an hour. They were also less than a half hour from the summit, though. Rudi forces himself to look away and manages to get Saxo, who wants to quit, upright. He no longer has any strength or coordination whatsoever. Many times, the decent turns into a somewhat controlled fall where they slip and bang the rocks below. Soon, both men are bruised and bleeding. Rudi drags Saxo towards the needle step by step. He is on the shoulder when he finally



collapses. He remembers being picked up and carried. There are voices. Captain Winter says that they made it to the summit. Rudi says it is good.

Chapter 18, The Heights Analysis

Rudi is forced to make the decision of his life when he finds Saxo injured and realizes that he can easily climb to the summit by himself. Depressed, Saxo actually goads Rudi to abandon him to claim his prize. Rudi takes only a moment to make his decision, but it seems like an eternity to him. He gives up his dream to be the first on the Citadel so that he can save another. Rudi shows his true character when he chooses the path of a guide over the greed that Saxo displays. He comes of age, impressing Captain Winter more than anyone.



Chapter 19, The Conqueror

Chapter 19, The Conqueror Summary

Rudi gets to rest for an hour in the tent and gets some food and tea. They have to be off the mountain by nightfall, so they depart soon. The group abandons the tents and starts downhill: Rudi, Winter, Saxo and then Franz. Most of the time, Franz has to bear Saxo's full weight as he lowers the semi-conscious man. The needle itself is actually the easiest part; they just lower down the ropes. Rudi is exhausted, and he remembers half climbing until he feels the rope bite into him and knows he has slipped. He doesn't look or think. Voices tell him what to do, and he obeys. Rudi remembers the Fortress: the slabs, the cleft and then finally the narrow ledge. He falls, and a hand takes hold of him. He recognizes Teo's voice. It gets dark, and he is back at the hut.

Rudi eats and starts to feel better. Some of his friends congratulate him. Saxo is being readied by two men to be taken back to Broli. He pauses in the doorway and looks for a moment at Winter and Franz. Then his gaze steadies on Rudi. He puts out his hand, and after a moment Rudi shakes it. Saxo thanks Rudi for saving his life. He tells Winter and Franz to thank Rudi as well.

The men return to Kurtal for a hero's welcome. The church bells ring, and the shops close. Rudi holds his mother, and they look at each other for a moment. The crowd pushes and raises Captain Winter and Franz up on their shoulders to carry them to the terrace. People are coming from all across Switzerland. The cheers are deafening. The mayor calls for Winter and Franz and declares the Citadel to be their mountain. Winter shakes his head and corrects him, "It is Rudi's mountain." Rudi stammers and tries to explain, but Winter silences him and has him look through the telescope. The red shirt is flying from the pole at the summit like a banner. Rudi tells Franz and Winter that they put it there. Winter responds: "No Rudi, you put it there. You and your father."

The crowd explodes. Even the governor is en route to the celebration. Winter tells Rudi that he will climb the Citadel many more times during his life. Uncle Franz agrees. Rudi sees Teo and excuses himself. He has dishes to wash.

Chapter 19, The Conqueror Analysis

Captain Winter shows the ultimate generosity when he gives Rudi the victory he deserves by placing his "banner in the sky." He realizes that Rudi could have easily climbed to the summit but chose to care for another instead. Winter's lack of greed makes a huge impression on the young man. Rudi displays his true humble nature when he leaves the celebration early to "get back to work." He is happy, but he is not too important to do his job.



Characters

Rudi Matt

Rudi is a sixteen-year-old boy whose father, Josef, died on the slopes of the Citadel when he was just an infant. Rudi's life is shadowed by the infamous mountain that looms over his hometown. Rudi is smart, polite and friendly. He is also fighting his "nice" image to grow into the man he is meant to be. Rudi feels intense loyalty and kinship with his dead father and feels it is his duty to conquer the peak that defeated his father. Rudi has more adult friends than friends his own age because climbing is the heart of his hometown. Most of his peers are training to be guides. For Rudi to be the son of a great climber and not be training is a social stigma. For Rudi to be a dishwasher is even worse.

Rudi starts out making small, rebellious moves to try and climb when he can sneak out of the restaurant. Later, he defies his family by running away to climb with a famous mountaineer, Captain Warner. He gains confidence in himself and learns to climb as a true guide - part of a team. The cook and ex-climber, Teo, teaches Rudi many lessons. Rudi eventually learns that most of the adult role models in his life (even his uncle) have much to teach him, and he is excited to learn.

Rudi takes some chances by climbing along on the Citadel, but he manages to surpass his father's climbing point and leads the group further up the mountain. He works as an important member of the team and makes the decision far up on the slope to help out another at the cost of giving up the summit for himself. This selfless act shows the strong character evident in the son of Josef Matt.

Franz Lerner (Uncle Franz)

Franz Learner is Rudi's uncle and an accomplished guide in Kurtal. Franz is a very skilled climber in his own right, but he has great reservations about the Citadel. Franz's personal attachment to the mountain is due to seeing his sister raise a son without a father. He perceives the Citadel as the cause of his sister's pain and puts it out of his mind. As a competitive climber, he reconciles himself to the idea that the Citadel is not meant to be climbed. As a "Kurtaler," Franz has a dislike for the rival town of Broli. He is a very intelligent and skilled man, but he is also set in his ways.

Franz grows angry and frustrated at Rudi's defiance, but he eventually learns to accept that Rudi is a skilled climber and has the right to do as he pleases with his own life. Franz also admits to himself that he has always wanted to climb the Citadel. He joins in as a guide to assist Captain Winter. Franz is impressed by all members of his party up on the mountain - even Emil Saxo. The two men are at odds for most of the time because of the rivalry between their hometowns. Franz does learn to see the big picture, that they climb better as a team.



In the end, Franz is joyous at his conquest of the Citadel with Rudi. He is even happier for his nephew. Franz is proud of Rudi and knows everything will work out for the best.

Captain John Winter

Winter is a famous climber who has climbed many peaks throughout world and has wanted to climb the Citadel since a child. Winter has a great reputation as a skilled mountaineer. He doesn't have an ego to match. Captain Winter is perceptive enough to see Rudi's heart (when he is saved by Rudi early in the novel) and Rudi's natural talent. Winter begins a campaign to convince Rudi's family to let him climb because it is in his blood.

Winter tries to get Franz to guide him up the Citadel. When Franz refuses, Winter hires Emil Saxo from rival town Broli to do the job. This angers Franz, who later joins the climbing group. Winter is very successful at breaking through the old rivalries to get the two most talented guides to work together. Winter is injured on the slope and almost can't continue. He later reaches the summit and carries Rudi's "banner" to the top. Captain Winter very graciously tells the townsfolk that Rudi was there on the mountain, knowing full well that Rudi could have easily scaled the peak if he had abandoned Saxo on the slope to die. Winter gives credit where it is due.

Frau Matt (Mrs. Matt)

Frau Matt is Rudi's mother and the widow of Josef Matt. She is terrified that Rudi will die like her husband and thus tries to protect him as best she can. In doing this, she pushes Rudi to repress his natural climbing talent. She wants her son to learn the business trade by working at a hotel kitchen. Frau Matt constantly asks her brother, Franz, if she is doing the right thing by Rudi, and Franz generally agrees.

Later, Frau Matt comes to accept that Rudi is destined to follow in his father's footsteps - not by dying - but by becoming a famous climber. Frau Matt learns to be proud of her son and appreciate his abilities, instead of wanting to stifle them. This comes to her slowly; first, the men of Kurtal lie to her. They do not want to upset Frau Matt about her son climbing on the Citadel. Later, she learns the truth and lets go of her fears for Rudi. When he returns triumphantly, she is happy for him.

Teo Zurbriggen

Teo is the veteran climber of Kurtal and the soul survivor of the disastrous Josef Matt expedition of 1850. Teo is also an optimist and a proponent of Rudi from the beginning. As the hotel cook, Teo is seen as a "has been" since crippling his leg on the slopes of the Citadel. Teo shows Rudi that he has talent and can still climb, though. Teo also teaches Rudi the finer points of group climbing.



Teo allies with Captain Winter in pushing Franz and Frau Matt to let Rudi pursue his natural talents. He also shows he has some ability left when he hikes to the base camp and even up to the base of the Fortress - the outcropping where Rudi's father lost his life. Teo explains to Rudi that the mountain didn't kill his father. As a guide, Josef chose to stay with his injured climber. He could have abandoned Sir Edward and survived, but he stayed anyway. This important lesson serves to strengthen Rudi in his times of need.

Josef Matt

Josef Matt is Rudi's father and husband to Frau Matt. He died in 1850, fifteen years before the time period of the story. Josef guided the first expedition (the only expedition until Captain Winter) to the Citadel. He was in the company of Sir Edward Stephenson and Teo Zurbruggen. When an avalanche caught the group below the Fortress, Sir Edward was injured. Josef was true to his guide heritage and stayed with the hurt man. This fateful decision cost both men their lives when a storm trapped them. They froze before they could be rescued. Josef's red flannel shirt was found wrapped around Sir Edward in a futile attempt to keep him warm. The shirt was passed on to Rudi, who never gets a chance to know his father.

Josef Matt is a man of true character who is respected by many important characters, including Captain Winter and Rudi. His selflessness seems to be passed on to his son, and many in town are waiting for Rudi to come into his own. Following in his father's footsteps is seen as noble by most, except for Franz and Frau Matt.

Emil Saxo

Emil is an arrogant guide from Broli who agrees to be Captain Winter's guide on the Citadel when Franz refuses. Saxo is talented in the climbing arts, but his ability is clouded by his pride and his ego. He is prideful, easy to anger and very narrow-minded. His attitude severely undermines his great natural climbing talents.

Saxo despises "Kurtalers" with a passion and has great problems climbing with Franz later in the novel. Saxo is suspicious of anyone from Kurtal and is suspicious of a trick when the men come looking for Rudi. Several times, Saxo comes very close to picking a fight with any or all of them.

Ever the egotist, Saxo breaks his guide principles when he abandons Winter and Franz to press for the top alone. When pursued by Rudi, he threatens the boy to make him stay away and give Saxo the victory. This anger is his downfall, as he slips and injures his arm arguing with Rudi and has to be rescued. Although initially wanting to die, Saxo does show appreciation and humbleness at being rescued by a mere "boy."



Klaus Wessel

Klaus is Rudi's peer in Kurtal. He is a bully who likes to ridicule Rudi because instead of working to become a guide like the other boys, he works as a dishwasher at the local hotel. Klaus guides for Franz at several points in the story when Rudi is forbidden from climbing - further humiliating the boy. Klaus congratulates Rudi when he returns as the hero of the climbing expedition.

Sir Edward Stephenson

Sir Edward Stephenson is an original climber of the ill-fated 1850 Citadel expedition. Sir Edward is injured in an avalanche while trying to find a route past the Fortress outcropping. Rudi's father, Josef, pulls him into a small cave and tries to comfort the man. A storm moves in, and both Sir Edward and Joseph Matt freeze before they can be rescued.

Herr Hempel

Herr Hempel is the owner of the Beau Site Hotel and a fairly prestigious man in Kurtal. Herr Hempel works with Frau Matt to try and keep Rudi interested in working the hotel business. He is also the town official who leads the celebrations after the Citadel is conquered.



Objects/Places

The Citadel

The Citadel is the largest and most formidable peak that towers over the village of Kurtal. Having claimed the life of Josef Matt in his ill-fated 1850 expedition, it is considered "evil" by the villagers. Men of Kurtal are resigned that it is "off limits," but this notion is soon tested by both Rudi and Captain Winter.

Kurtal

A small village in the middle of the Swiss Alps, Kurtal is a popular site for the newly emerging sport of mountain climbing.

Broli

Broli is a rival village to Kurtal. It is located on the other side of the Citadel from Kurtal. It is home to Emil Saxo, the notorious guide.

The Wunderhorn

The Wunderhorn is a small peak by Swiss standards. It is where Rudi is first allowed to climb with his uncle and Captain Winter to get a good high view of the Citadel. Rudi gets overzealous on the Wunderhorn and has to be rescued by Franz and Winter.

The Felsberg

A lesser peak near Kurtal, the Felsberg is often overlooked in favor of higher mountains. It is used as a training site for Rudi when Teo takes him for a climbing session.

Auslander

Auslander is the native Swiss word for tourist.

Serac

A precarious tower of ice that usually forms near the tops of glaciers is known as a serac. This feature can create a mazelike terrain that can be difficult to cross. Also, in warm afternoons, seracs are prone to collapsing - which endangers anyone near.



Gruss Gott

Locals in Switzerland use the term "Gruss Gott" to say hello. It means literally, "God's greetings."

Chimney

A "V" shaped cleft in a cliff face is commonly referred to as a chimney in mountaineering slang. Often sought after, chimneys usually provide a sheltered and easier climb.

Col

A col is a term for the so-called saddle that exists at the top of a glacier.

Glacier

A glacier is a large, flowing ice mass that forms at the base of mountains. Glaciers offer their own hazards, as opposed to the mountain itself.

Crevasse

An ice gorge, usually associated with a glacier, is referred to as a crevasse.

Blausee Hut

The Blausee Hut is a local way station built as a "base camp" for mountain expeditions. This cabin is as Rudi's introduction into the real life of climbers when he is allowed to accompany his uncle and Captain Winter on a minor climb early in the novel.

Tree Line

At high altitude, trees cannot survive. The "tree line" is the level where all plant growth other than lichens and mosses ceases.

Blue Glacier

The main ice mass at the base of the Citadel is referred to as the Blue Glacier and is the main point of departure for the mountain itself.

Guide

A guide is the person responsible for helping climbers on the local mountains. This occupation is a main means of employment in Swiss alpine villages such as Kurtal. A world famous climber may have more overall climbing experience than a local guide, but the guide has specific experience with local peaks.

Herr

A local guide refers to his tourist climber as a "Herr," which literally mean man or mister. This term has much meaning in the tradition of the guide. A guide is responsible for his climber and ultimately has to keep him safe - even at the cost of his own safety.



Themes

Experience and Patience

Rudi begins the novel with much un-harnessed talent but not much experience. He does not fear heights and genuinely wants to learn more. His lessons are taught to him in many ways. Rudi learns an early lesson when he strands himself while climbing with his uncle and the captain. His lack of patience causes the rest of the group to be put at risk. He is embarrassed that he needs to be rescued, and unfortunately it is all the ammunition his uncle needs to keep him from climbing. Teo rescues Rudi's ego, though, and shows him how to climb in a group - as a true guide. Rudi is forced to learn to listen and be patient. He knows that the more experienced climbers do things for a reason, and he often has to wait for the answer. Many times he has to hold back from blurting out his ideas so he does not show disrespect.

Climbing in a hurry is often deadly. Climbing without knowing what one is doing is generally almost as bad. Rudi learns to take his time and think before acting. He also learns to deal with the group dynamic, where they must work together to confront the task ahead of them. Rudi also masters the finest point of being a guide, protecting his climber above all else. He shows himself to be a better man than Saxo in this regard. Saxo admits that he would have left Rudi, had the roles been reversed. Only through experience and learning does Rudi become confident without being prideful. Rudi knows a lot about climbing from years of informal "training" by himself, but he is smart enough to know there is much he doesn't know and much to learn from the experts: Franz, Winter, Teo and even Saxo. He eventually learns to climb with other's needs in mind, not just his own. He learns and lives the guide code.

Ego Climbing

Mountain climbing requires a great amount of skill and patience. While some of this is truly acquired at birth, other important aspects must be learned and practiced. A large part of being out on a cliff face requires the correct attitude. A climber must have confidence in himself but not be over-confident and take unnecessary risks.

The sheer force of will required to hang from a vertical rock wall, exposed for thousands of feet, cannot be properly described in print. It takes a concerted effort to focus and take time to rest and think before making the next move. All grips must be evaluated, first visually and then by touch. Dead ends must be retraced and some routes abandoned. This can be very frustrating and tiring to a climber. One of the most difficult parts of climbing is knowing when to turn around for the day, or forever. The summit area in particular is typically very exposed to the elements. Climbers have only a small window of daylight to make the summit and still be able to get back to camp before nightfall. When the goal is in sight, it is difficult to stop just because it is the afternoon. The desire to press on can be deadly. Rudi nearly dies when he continues on past the



Fortress until a storm catches him high on the mountain, followed by nightfall. His father died because he was trapped on the mountain by a storm, and the night temperatures killed him.

Saxo is probably the best example of a climber with no moral base who truly climbs for his own ego. When Saxo leaves the group high on the mountain so he can "win" by being the first on the Citadel, it shows his shallowness. A true guide doesn't think only of himself, but of the group as a whole. A guide is committed to his climber, who he takes care of at all costs.

Tradition

Kurtal is a small town where traditions take along time to change. The Josef Matt expedition of 1850 caused enough pain for the town that a common belief of resignation took over. People believed that the mountain was insurmountable. Some even thought it was evil. Climbers had to keep a blind spot to the peak that was always in their view. Over time, it just became accepted that the Citadel was to be avoided. Only outsiders saw this as odd. Rudi is another exception, of course. He doesn't fear the mountain that "killed" his father, but he eventually becomes somewhat obsessed with climbing it. Captain Winter's search for a guide to climb the Citadel also causes many villagers to think he is crazy. Even Franz turns him down, so Winter has to travel to a rival village to finally find his first guide in the person of Emil Saxo.

Another tradition that is broken with great difficulty (by Rudi and Captain Winter) is the bitter rivalry between Kurtal and Broli. The rivalry of "us versus them" is a great incentive for Uncle Franz to lead a group of guides up to the hut at base camp. This same hatred makes it very difficult even for mild-mannered Franz to see that the group is better off with two talented guides - both with particular climbing styles. Winter's savvy method of finally getting the two men from rival towns to climb with him is a major factor in the eventual success. The rivalry causes a competitive spirit between Franz and Saxo that makes them work harder than they would have separately. Together, the group works better than each man could have separately - the true test of a good team.



Style

Point of View

Banner in the Sky is told in the third person. Generally, it follows Rudi's experiences, but it also shows the lives of Rudi's family and friends. The third person point of view is especially effective toward the end of the story because it allows the reader to first experience the townspeople's perspective, and Rudi's mother's perspective, as they anxiously await the climbers' appearance at the summit of the mountain. The reader's information is as limited as the town's. Then, the point of view switches to Winter and Franz on the summit, who find Rudi's backpack. The anticipation and tension rises, since the reader's knowledge is still limited. The third person point of view keeps the reader in suspense as the story unfolds.

The story is loosely based on the actual ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865. The Citadel is considered impossible to climb by the local villagers, and even seasoned climbers see the mountain as cursed or evil. Many locals believe that anyone trying to scale the Citadel must be foolish. Uncle Franz shares this view to a point, but his real rationale is based on his loyalty to his sister. He was young when his brother-in-law died on the mountain and doesn't want his sister to see any more pain. For this reason, he is very close-minded to any suggestion of his nephew climbing the Citadel.

The main character Rudi simply loves climbing. It is in his blood. His point of view is literally always up. He knows that his father's greatest goal was to plant his banner on top of the Citadel, and he wants more than anything to complete that goal. While Rudi has natural talent, he has no formalized training. Through Teo and Captain Winter, he eventually learns patience and the art of unselfish climbing. Rudi also believes that he should be able to live his own life the way he sees fit. He is growing to be a man and wants to make his own choices. His mother has decreed that he will learn the hotel trade, but Rudi cannot ignore the mountains around him. Rudi's mother sees her husband's death as a pointless waste and wants more than anything to keep Rudi from following his example.

Captain Winter is a very competitive man and is seeking a challenge. He saw the Citadel at a young age and was transfixed. As an experienced adventurer, he chooses to finally take on this longtime goal. His spirited persistence goes against the traditional views of the local villagers and generates some conflict and soul searching among many - especially Uncle Franz. He proves to be a catalyst to provoking change in the village.

Setting

The setting of this story is in the Swiss Alps of the 1860s. This mountainous region is rugged, and the tourist trade is just beginning to flourish. Locals learn the skill of



mountain climbing to escort these tourists to nearby peaks. What was an isolated village only a generation past is now evolving to become a thriving economy based around these visitors. The village of Kurtal is the focus of the main characters, while the rival climbing town of Broli produces the antagonist, Emil Saxo. Although slowly gaining in popularity, the villages are still relatively isolated, and the villagers live mostly quiet lives without really ever leaving town.

Many local mountain peaks are described as they are climbed. The goal of the story, the treacherous peak known as the Citadel, has many features that are detailed. There is the main ice mass at the base, called the Blue Glacier. A small hut that becomes base camp is also a central focus. The first large obstacle, the Fortress, is a shear wall that is eventually overcome. This is a dangerous location that is a major challenge because it claimed the life of Rudi's father. There is also a second feature that almost causes the climbing group to give up, the Needle.

Other lesser mountains are also discussed in the story. These include the Wunderhorn, the Felsburg and the Dornelberg. The view from the upper shoulder of the Citadel gives the climbers views of surrounding countries like France and Germany. The village is fairly isolated, but the view from the upper mountain shows that the world is in fact out there and getting closer all the time.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of the story are masked heavily in tradition and custom. Some believe the mountain is evil, and the town eventually takes up this notion. Anyone wanting to climb is dismissed as crazy. The town changes, although slowly. Tradition is also apparent in the code of the guides. This dictates that a guide is responsible for his climber. This code leads to the death of Josef Matt, and it leads Rudi to save Saxo's life up on the high mountain. There is a strong moral drive to take care of one's climber high on the mountain when things go bad. Rudi and Josef pass this extreme test, while Saxo fails when he abandons the group. There is great meaning in doing the right thing.

Another strong meaning is that groups can often be served by diversity. The men from Kurtal and Broli, who originally despise each other, eventually learn to work together. Their differing climbing styles make the climbing of the Citadel possible. In fact, the ascent of the mountain is made possible because each man takes the lead at different times. Winter is adept at certain situations, Franz at others and Broli at still others. Of course, Matt is the only climber physically able to squeeze through the small opening in the needle - allowing the group to press on. At other times, sheer exertion makes it necessary to work in shifts to allow resting time. This group dynamic works to keep the men going and keep them motivated. This is a phenomenon that Rudi has never experienced when climbing alone.

The language of the people of Kurtal and the surrounding areas is simple and to the point. They live relatively simple lives. Even the growth of the mountain trades does little to change the basic, plain personalities of the townspeople. They strive to do their jobs



to the best of their ability, without a lot of complexity or examination. When they talk, it is quick and to the point. One of the few opportunities to see a villager actually open up is in the local tavern, when there is drinking.

Structure

Banner in the Sky is divided into nineteen chapters. Chapter one introduces young Rudi Matt and his forbidden fascination with climbing. Chapter two details the episode where Rudi comes across Captain Winter and saves his life. Rudi's uncle and mother become aware of Rudi's courageous deed in chapter three, as Captain Winter persuades Rudi's family to let him climb. Rudi readies for his climb of the Wunderhorn in chapter four, but he makes a costly error in chapter five and has to be rescued. Teo teaches Rudi some of the finer points of climbing in chapter six - especially patience. He forces Rudi to think of climbing as a group activity, with added responsibilities. Rudi runs away to join Captain Winter's expedition in chapter seven. The group climbs to the base of the Citadel and is hit by an avalanche in chapter eight. Uncle Franz learns of Rudi's lie in chapter nine. He leads a group of Kurtal guides up to get his nephew. In chapter ten, Rudi, Winter and Saxo escape the avalanche, and Rudi is sent back to Kurtal. He makes the fateful decision to climb the Fortress by himself while Saxo and the Broli men quarrel at the hut.

Rudi successfully scales the Fortress in chapter eleven but is caught by a storm high on the mountain. He is forced to spend the night in a cave and is haunted by the memory of his father in chapter twelve. Rudi rejoins the group in chapter thirteen. The men work out some of their differences and agree to collaborate in a Citadel expedition. Captain Winter, Franz, Saxo and Rudi set out and make it past the Fortress in chapter fourteen. They press onward and scale the formidable Needle with Rudi's assistance in chapter fifteen. Captain Winter delays the group, and Saxo selfishly goes ahead to conquer the Citadel by himself in chapter sixteen. Rudi follows Saxo up the mountain. In chapter seventeen, Captain Winter and Franz pursue Rudi and find only his pack. Chapter eighteen flashes back to Saxo falling and injuring himself. Rudi has to choose between helping Saxo and reaching the summit. The group returns to Kurtal as heroes in chapter nineteen. Captain Winter tells the crowd that it is Rudi's mountain.



Quotes

"It cannot be climbed." Chapter 1, pg. 19

"Anything but that, he said. Any other peak, any route, any venture. But not that, he said. Not the Citadel." Chapter 2, pg. 34

"He must work in the hotel. It is his mother's wish. He is to be trained for the business." Chapter 3, pg. 42

"Today, on the Blue Glacier, this boy saved my life." Chapter 3, pg. 49

"...if you do not climb like you father's son you need not bother to come back!" Chapter 4, pg. 54

"It is an evil mountain, that. A killer mountain. It has been left alone now for fifteen years, and it is best that it be left alone forever." Chapter 5, pg. 65

"A guide carries a pack. When he is a real guide he does not think of it as a load or a burden. It is as much a part of him as his rope of his boots of his clothing. It is like part of his body." Chapter 6, pg. 78

"If by climbing you mean putting one foot in front of the other and going up and down a mountain, you have learned already. Or perhaps you did not need to learn, but were born knowing." Chapter 6, pg. 79

"But no, he does not want that. All he wants is one peak. That accursed peak...." Chapter 7, pg. 90

"The boy is his father's son. Josef Matt's son. Remember that. Let him come with us, and we'll see what he can do." Chapter 8, pg. 107

"They will be destroyed before they even set foot on the mountain." Chapter 9, pg. 117

"I will tell you who the third is. It is my nephew." Chapter 9, pg. 121

"I drink to Rudi Matt - the only true mountaineer in Kurtal." Chapter 9, pg. 122

"Perhaps there'll be a few tricky stretches, but they shouldn't bother us. We know it can be done because it's been done before." Chapter 10, pg. 131

"I am a man of Broli. A man of Broli does no climb with a Kurtaler." Chapter 10, pg. 133

"...if there is one thing you must do in your life it is to climb this wonderful, terrible mountain that no man has ever conquered...All right, I want to climb it.." Chapter 10, pgs. 134-135



"Come on, you Kurtal sheep, I'll take on the lot of you!" Chapter 13, pg. 170

"For you, my Captain, I am doing strange things, God grant I shall not live to regret it."
Chapter 13, pg. 183

"There is a route up the wall. It will go." Chapter 14, pg. 191

"A guide of Kurtal does not leave his Herr on a mountain. What a guide of Broli does, I
of course do not know." Chapter 16, pg. 225

"Go on. You have won; I have lost. Climb to the top. Claim your victory." Chapter 18, pg.
267

"You saved my life. You could have climbed to the top, but instead you saved my life. I
thank you. I salute you." Chapter 19, pg. 280



Topics for Discussion

Why does Captain Winter take an instant liking to Rudi Matt?

Rudi has natural abilities, but what new traits does he pick up over the course of the story?

What killed Rudi's father? Could it be said that the mountain killed him? Explain.

What is the job of a guide? What responsibilities go along with being a guide?

What important lessons does Teo teach to Rudi?

Explain why the residents of Kurtal think the Citadel is an evil mountain, not meant to be climbed.

Is Broli a good guide? Is he true to the guide's code?

Why doesn't Rudi's mother want him to follow in his father's footsteps?

Explain the rivalry between Kurtal and Broli.

Why do climbers worry about time when they are high on a mountain, far above the tree line?

Contrast Winter and Franz's climbing methods.

Banner in the Sky is loosely based on true events. What real mountain does the Citadel represent that was also climbed in 1865?