

The White Spider: The Story of the North Face of the Eiger Study Guide

The White Spider: The Story of the North Face of the Eiger by Heinrich Harrer

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Plot Summary

In *The White Spider*, mountaineer Heinrich Harrer chronicles the history of mankind's battle against the North Face of the Eiger, a mountain in the Swiss Alps. The North Face is a sheer drop, treacherously icy and rocky, and constantly bombarded with avalanches. Harrer, one of the first party to succeed in climbing the North Face, focuses on the strength of character and courage of the climbers who have faced this challenge, many of whom lost their lives in the attempt.

The sheer North Face of the Eiger was thought impossible to climb when the mountain was first scaled by other routes in the 1800s. In 1935, a pair of mountaineers made the first attempt to climb the North Face and froze to death at 10,800 feet. Another failed attempt was made in 1936, and the climbers were killed going back down the mountain. In 1937, two climbers retreated successfully from their attempt. After two deaths on the North Face in 1938, the first successful attempt was made by Anderl Heckmair, Ludwig Vörg, Fritz Kasparek, and young Heinrich Harrer in 1938.

During the wartime years of the 1940s, few attempts were made to climb the North Face. Two successful ascents were made in 1946 and 1947, after a failed but non-fatal attempt in 1946. In the 1950s, fourteen successful climbs were made. In 1952, a party of nine reached the summit, made up of three separate parties, one French, one Austrian, and one German, who joined together during their climb. The climbers included noted German Hermann Buhl and French expert Gaston Rébuffat. Uly Wyss and Karlheinz Gonda's ascent in 1953 ended in tragedy, as the two fell from the ice field at the summit. Only later was their climb of the North Face classified as a success.

In 1957, a disastrous climb is clouded in mystery. Stefano Longhi and Claudio Corti, seemingly unprepared, were slow climbers. Günther Nothdurft and Franz Mayer soon caught up with them, and then slowed down to their pace for the journey. Longhi and Corti were injured, and the two other climbers finished the ascent but died on the way down the mountain. Corti was rescued with a steel cable, but his accounts of the events were inconsistent and unreliable.

The first winter ascent took place in 1961 and was filmed for a movie. Among many successful climbs in the early 1960s, three solo attempts in the 1960s led to tragedy and one expert descended without success, before Michel Darbellay climbed the peak solo in 1963. By the mid-1960s, the lower part of the climb was littered with ropes and pitons left behind, encouraging less accomplished climbers to the North Face. However, even as the number of successful climbs continues to grow, the mountain remains a challenge to test even the best mountaineers.



Come Back Safe, My Friends and The White Spider

Come Back Safe, My Friends and The White Spider Summary and Analysis

In *The White Spider*, Heinrich Harrer chronicles the history of mankind's battle against the North Face of the Eiger, a mountain in the Swiss Alps. The North Face is a sheer drop, treacherously icy and rocky, and constantly bombarded with avalanches. Harrer, one of the first party to succeed in climbing the North Face, focuses on the strength of character and courage of the climbers who have faced this challenge, many of whom lost their lives in the attempt.

As "Come Back Safe, My Friends" begins, the author narrates an anecdote about telling a climber he is writing a book about the Eiger. The climber attacks his book idea as either sensationalistic or unnecessary, and the author defends it as providing accurate information to the public, especially about the human side of climbing. Harrer has been researching the Eiger's history for years, focusing on the men who attempted to climb the North Face. His goal is to tell the unsensationalized truth about the ever-changing and dangerous mountain and the men who attempted the climb. The climber's criticism, however, bothers him.

Then, the author is visited by Kurt Maix, a journalist and mountaineer. When Harrer tells Maix he's writing a book about the Eiger's North Face, Maix is enthusiastic, bringing back Harrer's confidence. Maix says that Harrer will warn climbers about the ascent, not by issuing a warning but by telling the unvarnished truth about the mountain. Harrer will be trusted and believed by young climbers. Maix would have liked to write such a book, but feels it must be written by someone who has attempted the North Face. Maix's enthusiasm revitalizes Harrer, and Harrer asks Maix to help with the writing. They work together for many days, reviewing material and discussing the human aspects of climbing. The author thanks Maix for his help, along with a list of others, including men who have died but left writings behind that helped in creating Harrer's book.

The author says that a climb is planned on the North Face, and he says the climbers are always in his thoughts. The author does not condemn climbers who want to attempt the task, but he recognizes its danger. He describes being visited by two young climbers, hoping to climb the North Face. He gives them advice, not warnings, but as they leave, his wish is: "Come back safe, my friends."

In "The 'White Spider,'" Harrer describes the first ascent of a peak as a kind of birthday to be honored and remembered. In 1858, a hundred years before Harrer's book, the 13,041-foot high Eiger was first climbed. The North Face was first climbed only twenty years previously, in 1938, by a group of four climbers, including the author. The



hazardous climb endowed the author with strength and courage throughout the past twenty years.

The North Face is nicknamed "The White Spider" because of a white field of ice, surrounded by ice and snow-filled crevices that spread outward like a spider's limbs. The climb requires strength of character in addition to training. Patience, calm, sense and courage are essential qualities. The first description of the North Face, viewed from the top of the mountain in 1864, describes the steep wall as magnificent but impossible to climb. Those who have attempted it have widely been thought crazed. The author regrets not the attempts, but the sensationalism and media attention that surrounds the climbs, stating that true climbers want solitude, not attention.

In 1858, Charles Barrington first climbed the Eiger, with a party of two guides. The ascent was not written up until twenty-five years later, in a letter from Barrington to the Alpine Journal. Barrington describes choosing the unclimbed Eiger to ascend because it was closer and cheaper than trying the Matterhorn. With two guides, he went up and came down, facing two avalanches on the route. In following years, other routes were climbed, and in 1912, the Jungfrau Railway was built, including a tunnel through the Eiger with two windows onto the North Face. The second-to-last unclimbed route was ascended in 1932, when two Swiss climbers and two guides climbed the Northeast Face. Only the challenge of the "impossible" North Face remained.



The First Attempt on the North Face and The Tragedy of Toni Kurz

The First Attempt on the North Face and The Tragedy of Toni Kurz Summary and Analysis

In "The First Attempt on the North Face," the author defends climbers, stating that while people attempt to psychoanalyze climbers and trace the desire for adventure to psychological problems, climbing requires psychological health and balance. A longing for adventure and progress is natural, but the reaction to hazardous endeavors is either condemnation or praise, depending ficklely on failure or success. Climbing is a personal task, with no social benefit, admittedly. However, the author admires courage and the drive to adventure for their own sake.

The first two men to attempt the North Face were Max Sedlmayer and Karl Mehringer, who tried the climb in 1935. They took six days' provisions. The weather of the North Face is always bad, even when the weather around is fine, because of its position and shape. Sedlmayer and Mehringer could only evaluate the lower part of the climb, since the upper reaches of the North Face were unexplored and too far to examine. The climb includes three ice fields beneath the "spider."

At 2:00 a.m. August 21, 1935, the climbers began their ascent. The first day, they climbed 2,600 feet and camped high on the wall. The second day, progress slowed, up 300 feet of steep rock as rocks whizzed past, and across the First Ice Field. The progress was watched from below. The third day, the climbers progressed up the Second Ice Field and then were clouded by mist. A storm broke, lasting a full day. When the mist lifted, the climbers were alive and struggling upward. Still, experts knew the climb was now a hope against hope. Avalanches had trapped the climbers. Hidden in another cloud of mist, they disappeared. Rescue attempts were impossible, and a plane located one of the frozen climbers at the top of the Third Ice Field, a site thereafter named the "Death Bivouac."

The next chapter, "The Tragedy of Toni Kurz," takes place in 1936. Albert von Allmen was a sector guard on the rail tracks running through the Eiger. That summer, Edi Rainer, Willy Angerer, Anderl Hinterstoisser, and Toni Kurz attempted to climb the face. One of the climbers had been hit by a stone, and they had turned back. Von Allmen called to them from the tunnel, and they shouted that they'd be there soon. Von Allmen began to make tea for them. As he waited, the tea began to grow cold.

At the beginning of the summer, two climbers arrived to try the Eiger's North Face. As they waited, they climbed the Schneehorn, but one died in an avalanche on the descent. The pair never made their attempt on the Eiger. Angerer and Rainer arrived a few days later, to try a new route to the First Ice Field. They explored the route, but bad weather made them retreat, still eager to try again. In the press, "Nordwand" (North



Face) became known as "Mordwand" (Death Face). Angerer and Rainer made lighthearted, youthful comments to the journalists who crowded around.

In July, Angerer, Rainer, Hinterstoisser, and Kurz began their climb, which included a traverse on a rope over an unclimbable area. In taking away the rope after the traverse, the climbers blocked their path back down. During the climb, one of the men was injured. Almost certainly, the accident was Angerer being hit by a rock. The four continued their ascent, however. On the third day, Angerer must have been too injured to go on. The four turned back. After another night on the mountain, they tried to cross the traverse, but were blocked without their rope in place. They had to try a different route, through avalanche and rocks. That's when they heard Allmen calling up, and shouted that they would be down soon.

When Allmen checked on the boys' late arrival, he heard a call for help from Toni Kurz, the only survivor, trapped on the mountain. Rescuers went up from the window, but could not reach Toni, who had to spend another perilous night on the mountain. The next day, rescuers still couldn't get to him. Kurz had to cut away his own rope, pull it apart, and make a longer rope to climb down, but still he couldn't reach them. He died on the mountain, feet away from rescuers.



1937: On the Eiger

1937: On the Eiger Summary and Analysis

In 1937, several parties of climber gathered, all planning to attempt climbing the North Face. Newspapers had a role in both public outcry against the climb, considered by many to be suicidal, as well as the sensationalism of the effort. The Swiss government issued a warning that rescue or recovery attempts on the mountain were not guaranteed. Keying on the term "North Face Fever," the author compares the mountain to an infection, and the mountaineers to the immune system that fights for the health of the human race by subduing, not the mountain, but the new ground for human development.

The weather was bad, and one party left without making an attempt. There were rivalries, including national rivalries, between the climbing parties. Two Italians, Giuseppe Piravano and Bruno Detassis, started up the northeast face, on the difficult Lauper Route, to get a better look at the North Face. Their ultimate goal was guiding tourists up the North Face. When the weather turned worse, many thought the Italians were dead. They reappeared, climbing upward, but they were caught in an avalanche. Detassis's leg was injured. Piravano climbed up a steep ice slope and lowered Detassis down onto a ridge, the location of the Mittellegi Hut. Swiss climbers assisted them down the mountain.

Two climbers came to the area and asserted false intentions of climbing the Eiger to gain notoriety. They were forced out of Switzerland. Newspapermen gathered, but the real climbers were quiet and serious. Franz Primas and Bertl Gollackner started a climb up the Lauper Route, just for reconnaissance. Gollackner left his food behind, but didn't go back for it, not anticipating a lengthy climb. Bad weather traps them on the mountain, though. They made the Mittellegi Ridge, but instead of climbing down to the hut, they climbed inexplicably upward toward the summit. Out of strength, they collapsed.

Matthias Rebitsch and Ludwig Vörg, concerned about the two missing climbers, headed to the mountain with two other climbers to assist in the search. They, too, found themselves trapped on the mountain by avalanches, waterfalls, and rocks. They had to cut seats in the mountain ice for a place to spend the night, finally making it to the Mittellegi Hut the next day. When guides came back with the rescued Primas, saying Gollackner was dead, Rebitsch and Vörg, still recovering from their own ordeal, volunteered to help the boy's body down.

Later in the month, Rebitsch and Vörg returned to the base of the North Face. They decided to create a well-stocked camp for the first night, and Liebl and Rieger, two other climbers, helped them with gear. However, the climbers found Anderl Hinterstoisser's body and instead of making their climb, brought down the body. Then, they brought up more supplies and explored the area, adding a rope to the traverse, which they dubbed the Hinterstoisser Traverse. The weather, though, turned bad, and Rebitsch and Vörg



waited until the weather cleared in the second week of August. They brought as much gear to their first camp as possible, including sleeping bags.

The next day, Rebitsch and Vörg climbed up from their camp to the Third Ice Field. Then, storms caught them. The next day, they climbed down in the bad weather to their Swallow's Nest camp. An avalanche of rocks narrowly missed Vörg in the final feet. After a night of rest, they brought their gear down the mountain.



The First Ascent of the Face

The First Ascent of the Face Summary and Analysis

In 1938, two Italian climbers, Bartolo Sandri and Mario Menti, died on the North Face early in the summer. Other climbers were waiting patiently. Harrer finished his final exams at the University of Graz and joined Fritz Kasperek at the base, telling only his future mother-in-law his plans. Fraissl and Brankowski were also at the mountain. The climbers studied the mountain, climbing the northeast side to the Mittellegi Ridge. Harrer and Kasperek placed a pack of equipment on the Face and watched the weather and the condition of the snow and ice. On July 21, they began their climb, followed by Fraissl and Brankowski. They discovered Heckmair and Vörg already on the mountain.

Heckmair and Vörg had evaded notice by staying at a hotel instead of in a tent, and had modern equipment because they had found a sponsor for the climb. Heckmair and Vörg, however, turned back, citing concern about the weather. Harrer believes they turned back because there were too many people on the Face. Harrer and Kasperek climbed up, struggling with their backpacks, but sliding rocks hit Fraissl. Fraissl and Brankowski turned back. Harrer and Kasperek made the now icy traverse and breakfasted at the Swallow's Nest. They left ropes and equipment, in case a retreat was necessary.

On the First Ice Field, Harrer realized it was a mistake to come without heavy crampons. The ice and rock offered few footholds or places to secure pitons, and the climb to the Second Ice Field was arduous. Deciding not to risk a treacherous route under falling rock in adverse conditions, they camped for the cold, long night. The next day, because of Harrer's lack of crampons, Kasperek hacked steps into the Second Ice Field with an axe. Heckmair and Vörg, starting out again that morning with modern crampons, speedily caught up with them, and the teams joined.

The party went across the Third Ice Field and up the Ramp, an incline leading to the Spider. Fritz Kasperek slipped and fell, stopped by Harrer's rope, but soon was up again and at the top of the Ramp. They were only able to sit on a rope sling, with barely room for a cooker to brew tea and cocoa. As he fell asleep, Harrer remembered climbing a peak as a child. Returning, he saw two eagles feasting on a carcass. Then, he was given food and shelter by an old herdsman living on the mountain, an example of man's kindness to counterpoint nature's cruelty. After falling off balance in his sleep and righting himself, Harrer learned that Heckmair's stomach was upset and brewed tea to quiet it.

The next morning, the party climbed up a crack to a 30-foot cliff, which they climbed with the help of pitons and a thick ice formation. As they traversed toward the Spider, a plane flew by, taking historic photos. A thunderstorm approached as the group made the Traverse of the Gods, a relatively easy and spectacular final step to the Spider. The Spider turned into an aptly-named trap, as falling snow caused a flood of snow and ice.



Harrer was overpowered by an avalanche, held only by his piton. After the barrage, Harrer learned Fritz survived by quick-wittedly thrusting a piton into the ice. Heckmair held himself with an axe and grabbed onto Vörg.

The four, amazed to find each other alive, tied together and ascended on a single rope. From the ground, an audience watched through telescopes as the climbers made their way upwards. The men stopped for the night on a narrow ledge with no room to sit, drinking bowl after bowl of coffee. Fritz suffered from lack of cigarettes. Unable to offer a cigarette, Harrer remembered the first time he met Fritz. Harrer was a starving youth, with no money, backpacking in the mountains, and Fritz shared his supply of fruit, leaving himself without food for his journey.

The men slept standing up, and in the morning, they threw their unnecessary provisions over the precipice in preparation for the final ascent. Heckmair led the party up, and Kasperek, whose hand was injured in the avalanche, went last. They climbed between avalanches, in increasingly difficult conditions as the ice thinned so no pitons could be driven in. Then, snow red with blood fell past Harrer and Fritz. Vörg had injured his hand saving Heckmair from a fall. As they made their way through the treacherous final ascent, they heard voices of searchers on the summit but decided not to answer. They didn't want to accidentally spur a dangerous rescue attempt. Finally, they emerged at the Summit Ice Field, and concentrating on the last difficult climb, almost fell over the opposite side of the mountain.

Harrer led the painstaking climb down for the exhausted party, and it was filled with problems. Harrer kept losing the route, and Heckmair's trouser-band was broken. As they came down, they saw people and suddenly longed for civilization. They were greeted with cigarettes, cognac, and offers of food and shelter.



Further Successful Ascents

Further Successful Ascents Summary and Analysis

Harrer details escaping from a British internment camp in India in 1944 and making his way to Tibet. A doctor treating him in Lhasa criticized extreme climbers, mentioning the North Face. Harrer stated that he was among the first successful ascent, but no one believed him until the doctor saw his name in a newspaper account. Harrer learned of the second successful climb, by French climbers Lionel Terray and Lois Lachenal.

In 1946, guides Hans Schlugnegger and Edwin Krähenbühl attempted the climb and got above the ramp before having to climb back down. The next year, Terray and Lachenal found the ice melted but faced waterfalls and falling rocks. They passed through the First Ice Field skillfully before having to bivouac. The next day, they traversed to the Spider but were caught in a thunderstorm. They kept going and reached the summit, cured of the desire to ever climb the Face again.

In the third successful attempt, Swiss guides Hans Schlugnegger and his brother Karl determined to guide Gottfried Jermann, a top-notch climber. They started their climb on August 4, 1947, ten years after Hans had been among the party trying to rescue Toni Kurz. They quickly ascended, and on the traverse to the Spider were met with a thunderstorm and bivouacked through the storm, making the way up to the summit the next morning in record speed.

Jean Fuchs and Raymond Monney were driven to climb the Eiger's North Face. In 1949, they made an attempt and had to retreat. They thought to climb it in the winter's snow, but saw that was folly. In the summer of 1950, Marcel Hamel and Robert Seiler made two attempts that were foiled by weather, escaping into the train tunnel after a blizzard. Karl Reiss and Karl Blach made an attempt, but Blach broke his arm in an accident.

Medical student Erich Waschak and forestry hand Leo Forstenlechner camped at the North Wall's base. Meanwhile, Fuchs, Monney, Hamel, and Seiler joined forces. When the four Swiss saw Waschak and Forstenlechner bringing provisions up to a camp on the face, they hurried to begin their ascent. Waschak and Forstenlechner delayed their start due to weather concerns, while the Swiss started up, but the Austrians quickly climbed the now rocky (instead of icy) wall, catching up with the Swiss at the Ramp.

The Austrians passed the Swiss, but ran out of supplies and waited in a thunderstorm at the Spider. The Swiss returned the pitons the Austrians had left for them, and the Austrians went on, reaching the summit as night fell and descending the next morning. The Swiss were caught in a blizzard that day, but made their way to the summit, descending the following day.



1952: The Great Year on the Eiger

1952: The Great Year on the Eiger Summary and Analysis

Pierre Julien and Maurice Coutin climbed the North Wall in July 1952, with one bivouac. Later in the month, a large group of climbers arrived at the Eiger. Austrians Sepp Larch and Karl Winter climbed the summit July 26 and climbed down the next day, discovering that a party of nine, including Hermann Buhl, had followed them.

Brothers Otto and Sepp Maag started up unnoticed on the 26th to lay in supplies at their bivouac, and ran across Buhl and his partner Jöchler, who were doing the same. Buhl and Jöchler found an ideal bivouac spot below the Rote Fluh, but it was blocked from descending by falling stones. The next day the Maag brothers started their ascent, as did Buhl and Jöchler. French climber Gaston Rébuffat and a party of French climbers followed. The undersupplied Maag brothers and Buhl's party joined up at the Third Ice Field.

At the Ramp, ice blocked Buhl's progress, and after an unsuccessful attempt up, they were joined by the French. The ice had melted, and the parties roped up through a waterfall and bivouacked separately. The next day, the parties joined ropes and painstakingly traveled up the Spider's slope, until they were pummeled by an avalanche. The parties survived but were exhausted, and bivouacked for the night, the unequipped Germans remaining with the well-equipped French. Buhl and Jöchler, who had endured the lead during the avalanche, were ill. Still, the next morning Buhl climbed a 70-foot icy gully, trying and failing several times, before collapsing and giving the lead to Jöchler. The other parties followed, and they made their way up. Only near the summit did the French separate from the Germans and Austrians.



The Wall of Life and Death

The Wall of Life and Death Summary and Analysis

On August 5, 1952, Austrian climbers Erich Vanis, Hans Ratay, and Karl Lugmayer arrived at the North Face. The next day, they climbed to the Ramp and bivouacked in the rain, which turned to snow in the night. They proceeded in the snow, but on the Ice Bulge, they met an avalanche. Then, they made a bad choice and had to retrace their steps and bivouac. Despite Lugmayer being hit with a stone, they made the summit the next day, bivouacking on their way down.

Karl Blach returned to the North Face and offered to guide Jürgen Wallenkamp and Bernd Huber as far as the Difficult Crack. However, when they started, Huber was feeling unwell. Blach took his place, and by 1 p.m., Blach and Wallenkamp were at the Ramp. They stopped and had tea before going up the waterfall. Battling falling stones, they got to the top of the Spider and bivouacked before heading to the summit.

Meanwhile, Karl Reiss and Siegfried Jungmeier were climbing the North Face. Reiss attempted to climb the cliff straight up to the Spider from the Third Ice Field, but did not have enough equipment. They made it to the top, Reiss later describing the thunderstorm that met them as "good conditions." Five parties of eighteen men had climbed the North Face in 1952. The successful climbs did not last. In 1953, two Germans fell from the Second Ice Field in bad weather. Uly Wyss and Karl Heinz Gonda scaled the North Face only to be swept off the mountain in a snowslide near the summit. Erhard Riedl and Albert Hirschbichler made the climb that year, but no one attempted it in 1954 or 1955.

In 1956, climbers again gathered at the Eiger's North Face. Dieter Söhnel and Walter Moosmüller started to climb in August but were repulsed by bad weather twice. Young Klaus Buschmann and Lothar Brandler began an ascent and the next morning were joined by Söhnel and Moosmüller, and the inexperienced climbers were glad to see the more experienced men. They had hardly begun their climb, though, when Söhnel and Moosmüller were suddenly knocked off the mountain. Buschmann and Brandler descended to report the accident and give up their climb for the year.



The Tragedy of 1957

The Tragedy of 1957 Summary and Analysis

In 1957, Italian climbers Stefano Longhi and Claudio Corti started to climb the North Face on August 3. They found themselves on the wrong route, bivouacked, and got on track the next day. German climbers Günther Nothdurft and Franz Mayer were just starting out but had lost their equipment according to Corti's later account, which Harrer finds hard to believe. Observers' accounts from telescopes are at odds with Corti's. Corti's descriptions of the face are also imprecise, and Corti's knowledge of the face was limited at best.

In a separate account of Corti's, he describes joining up with the Germans later at the Second Ice Field, saying only the Germans' provisions had been lost. Still, this account is also full of discrepancies. According to observers, the parties only joined up near the Spider, days later. They record six nights of bivouacs and surprisingly slow progress, and report that the parties acted antagonistically, with the leaders taking out the pitons instead of leaving them for the followers and cutting separate sets of steps in the ice. Corti's accounts also contain impossible descriptions of the weather and contradictory accounts of Nothdurft, who is described as both deathly ill and making harrowing climbs.

At some point, Longhi fell, and Corti caught him on the rope. Corti tried to haul him up, but to no avail. Longhi could have climbed up but apparently did not know the proper technique. Corti left Longhi on the ledge, promising to send rescue. Then, at the Spider, Corti was hit on the head by a stone, and the Germans went on, again promising to send rescue, according to Corti's report. Again, Harrer finds it difficult to believe. Journalist and mountaineer Guido Tonella differed with Corti over his report.

Tonella interviewed Corti in the hospital after the climb, but only published part of the interview. At first, Corti praised Tonella for printing the truth, then later sued for slander. Tonella believed Corti was both unprepared and untruthful. Among the contradictory evidence is an admittedly unclear photograph showing two or three people, after Corti said the Germans had left him. An additional piece of evidence may be Longhi shouting to rescuers that he knew nothing of what happened to Corti. Reports also tell of Corti eager to climb again next year and even believing his venture might be categorized as a successful ascent.



The International Rescue Team and Epilogue

The International Rescue Team and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

"The International Rescue Team" describes the scene of the tragedy on the ground. Gawkers filled the local town. Longhi was seen to fall, but rescue attempts were declared impossible. However, experienced climbers knew that new steel cables afforded an opportunity. Still, the technology was new, and there were clashes of personality on top of technical difficulties.

A team brought a winch and steel cables to the Eiger, and sought to find a location to establish it. After two attempts, Alfred Hellepart was finally lowered to the site of the bivouac tent. Hellepart lowered down the sheer precipice on a thin steel cable, awed with the sight. Finally, he spotted Corti, calling for rescue. Hellepart had no cigarettes but was able to throw Corti some chocolate, which Corti gobbled down. Hellepart repositioned himself to get to Corti, and then carried Corti up with the help of the winch.

The rescue effort was only able to save Corti, and they brought him down the mountain after a bivouac on the peak. Meanwhile, Nothdurft's father arrived in Grindelwald, the nearby town, but he experienced only disappointment. His son never returned. The missing climbers' parents prompted investigations into what happened on the mountain. No explanation was found of what may have happened to the two missing climbers.

Only more contradictions arose, including a story from an innkeeper that Nothdurft and Mayer only left for the climb on Sunday, the day after Corti said he met them on the mountain. A friend of Nothdurft and Mayer, Max Eiselin, confirmed that the two visited his home on the Sunday. Eiselin was unable to explain Nothdurft's behavior on the mountain, which seemed opposed to everything Eiselin knew about him. Harrer suggests that the quicker Nothdurft party was trapped behind the slower Italian party, who would not let them pass. Search parties in 1957 failed to find the bodies or any indication of what happened to the men. Harrer believes the two climbers may still be found, and perhaps even Nothdurft's notes can be recovered.

Harrer adds an "Epilogue" to the first section of the book, chronicling events after the first writing. In 1958, a party of three climbers made it to the Flatiron before one was injured by a stone, and the next day climbed down to the Gallery Window. Two Austrian students, Kurt Diemberger and Wolfgang Stefan, started the climb on August 5 and became the fifteenth party to manage the ascent.

Harrer counts as an essential element of success in the climb knowledge of the route, which is why he's included a route guide at the end of the book. He also recommends plastic crash helmets to protect from rocks, reiterating the Eiger's dangers: avalanches,

rockslides, and sudden storms. Harrer warns only the most prepared and qualified to attempt its challenge.



Fate Made the Amendments, Four Shirts and an Overcoat, and Ascendancy of the Armchair

Fate Made the Amendments, Four Shirts and an Overcoat, and Ascendancy of the Armchair Summary and Analysis

After the appendix is a second section, "Additional Chapters by Heinrich Harrer in Collaboration with Kurt Maix, July 1964." In "Fate Made the Amendments," the author discusses the classification of successes on the Eiger's North Face. Harrer long felt that Gonda and Wyss's climb up the face should be classified as a success, though they were swept off the ice field approaching the summit. Since the initial publication, the climb was reclassified as a success.

Günther Nothdurft and Franz Mayer's bodies were finally found on the top of the mountain near the west face, making them the fourteenth successful ascent. There was no indication that they fell or were swept away by avalanche, and their deaths are still a mystery. Harrer states that Corti's account is still inconsistent and confused and defends his presentation of it. Nothdurft's diary contained no entries, which a friend confirmed he habitually made after his climbs, not during them. The friend still feels the actions during the climb are unexplained.

Harrer states that he believes the North Face isn't suited to Italian climbers' temperaments and mentions the first successful Italian ascent in 1962 by a team of six Italians who bivouacked six times, taking the climb in seven days. An Italian solo attempt was made in 1963 by Walter Bonatti, who got as far as the Second Ice Field before descending, stating that the climb wasn't worth risking his life. Harrer's account seems to suggest that Italians are too cautious for the North Face, which is rife with uncontrollable dangers like avalanches and falling rock.

In "Four Shirts and an Overcoat," Harrer continues the mountain face's history. Kurt Diemberger and Wolfgang Stephan were criticized for not joining a search for Austrian Engelbert Titl in 1958 before their successful climb, but Titl was not found missing until Diemberger and Stephan were already on the mountain. Bricklayers Adolf Derungs and Lukas Albrecht, two poor youths with an overcoat in place of a bivouac bag, made the sixteenth ascent in 1959. When they threw their overcoat over the side after their last bivouac, observers thought it was a falling man. Derungs and Albrecht were filmed on their ascent by two filmmakers and climbers, Edmund Geer and Wolfgang Görter. Also in 1959, two Swiss climbers claimed to make the ascent in one day, but photos were found to not support the claim. The seventeenth ascent, Harrer attributes to Ernst Forrer and Peter Diener in September 1959.



"Ascendancy of the Armchair" begins with Harrer describing Geer and Görter filming again. This time the subjects were Lothar Brandler, Jörg Lehne, and Sigfried Löw. That winter, the three climbers attempted an on-camera winter climb of the Eiger Face but found the conditions too severe. The filmmakers attempted filming a climb again, and Toni Hiebeler, Toni Kinschofer, Anderl Mannhardt, and Walter Almberger made the winter ascent with six bivouacs in March 1961. Reports of the ascent were clouded by questions of how the climbers used the window from the train tracks.



The Silver Trench, Climbers Have a Language of Their Own, and I Am Sorry, Brian...

The Silver Trench, Climbers Have a Language of Their Own, and I Am Sorry, Brian... Summary and Analysis

"The Silver Trench" is a feature of the North Face that can be seen by observers below when the light hits an area on the Ramp, making the ice gleam. Adolph Mayr fell to his death from the Silver Trench in 1961. After a summer of bad weather, Mayr arrived to make the climb. Mayr was young but experienced and knowledgeable, with a lovable personality. Fritz von Almen, a hotel owner, warned Mayr that crossing the Third Ice Field in the afternoon incurred increased danger due to falling stones loosened by the sun. Mayr set off on a solo attempt, hoping to surpass the Third Ice Field before afternoon.

Von Almen watched through a telescope as Mayr began his ascent. He mastered the Difficult Crack and the Hinterstoisser Traverse, now hung with the ropes of previous climbers. He climbed straight up the difficult rock from the First Ice Field to the Second Ice Field, and on the vast, impressive field he slowed. He reached the Third Ice Field during the period of heavy stone fall, and bivouacked. The next day he seemed slower and less certain. At the Silver Trench, he was unable to find a foothold, and on the third attempt, he slipped and fell off the mountain.

In "Climbers Have a Language of Their Own," Czech climbers Radovan Kuchař and Zdeno Zibrin start up the face. One of them lost his axe on the Second Ice Field, and they bivouacked at the upper rim. The next day, due to ice on the Ramp, they bivouacked early, making it to the Spider the day after. Without their ice axe, they bypassed the Spider by going straight up the rocks, bivouacking high up in the Exit Cracks and reaching the summit the next morning after a climb marked by cautiousness.

A Polish team following reached the summit ten hours later, in a quicker but more dangerous climb. A Swiss party was behind them, and a third party, Swiss Alois Strickler, whose first partner had to withdraw with an illness, and Austrian Leo Schlömmer followed. The three groups met at the Waterfall Chimney and formed a single, international rope. The party bivouacked and made slow but unified progress the next day, before breaking into three ropes at the Exit Cracks and rejoining at the summit. A party of Bavarians and Austrians made the twenty-first ascent. Later in September, Hilti von Almen and Ueli Hürlimann made a rapid ascent in fourteen hours. Near the end of September, just as bad weather was beginning to set in for the season, Austrians Erich Streng and Robert Troier made the last successful ascent of the year.



"I Am Sorry, Brian..." covers 1962, with forty-four men climbing the face successfully and five men dying on it. A film crew was at the mountain, and the notoriety attracted crowds. Two English climbers, outgoing adventure-seeker Brian Nally and thin, shy Barry Brewster, arrived to try for the first British ascent, and they started well until a sudden stone avalanche swept Brewster off the Second Ice Field, injured at the end of his rope. Nally carved a bivouac to protect Brewster, and Brewster apologized to his friend. After Nally thought Brewster was dead and while a rescue party approached, an avalanche hurled Brewster's body to the ground. Some have suggested Brewster was alive and stood up, but he may have merely been swept off the wall, with ropes and pitons.



July 31: Start and Finish, The Mass Assault, and The Year of Chivalry

July 31: Start and Finish, The Mass Assault, and The Year of Chivalry Summary and Analysis

"July 31: Start and Finish" chronicles the same summer. Loulou Boulaz and Yvette Attinger, the first women to attempt the North Face, started the climb with Michel Vaucher and Michel Darbellay. They bivouacked low down and started off late the next day in uncertain weather, but by afternoon, they were at the Ramp, where they bivouacked. The next day, the weather was worse, and they headed back down, bivouacking through the night and arriving safely in the morning.

Austrians Helmuth Drachler and Walter Gstrein started up as the previous party arrived on the ground, climbing slowly on icy rock and going straight up the rock cliff from the first to second ice field. The next day, they tried to climb straight up to the Spider, but failed and came back to bivouac. The next day, they made a slow, icy climb, bypassed the Spider by climbing up the wall to the left, and made one more bivouac. The next day, the weather confined them. For two days, they fought the weather to climb the last 1,000 feet to the summit. Meanwhile, a solo climber, Adolf Derungs, had slipped and fell even before reaching the Hinterstoisser Traverse.

"The Mass Assault" chronicles the first Italian success, a party of six Italians. Walter Almburger and three friends passed them on the face, climbing in part for the film still being shot. The face was crowded, but not its most crowded. Between August 19th and 23rd, sixteen climbers from five nations were on the slope. Two more parties went up in the following days, two Austrian climbers and Paul Etter and Martin Epp, who climbed the North Face in a day and a half. Among all these successes, the third solo aspirant, Diether Marchart, an experienced soloist who had climbed the Matterhorn's north face, fell to his death between the first and second ice fields. More successes followed that year, and two less experienced climbers fell to their deaths.

"The Year of Chivalry" covers 1963. Erich Friedli, Jr. and Arnold Heinen started up the face July 30, reaching the Third Ice Field when avalanches of rocks streamed down. They bypassed the field, rock climbing over it, to the Ramp and on past two other parties, to bivouac at the Exit Cracks. All three parties reached the summit the next day. On August 1, Michel Darbellay made the first successful solo climb, swiftly mastering the mountain so he was at the ramp by 10:30. He made it to the Exit Cracks before bivouacking, while it was still light, and achieving the summit the next morning.

A German team, Helmut Salger and Horst Wels, made the final ascent of the year early in August. A week later, a Spanish team, Albert Rabada and Ernesto Navarra, started up, along with a Japanese party that later turned back. The Spaniards went on despite bad weather. After four bivouacs, they made the Spider and were seen moving

painstakingly up, but they collapsed after yet another night, and rescue efforts were in vain. In late December of 1963, Paul Etter, Ueli Gantbein, and Sepp Henkel were at the summit of the mountain. When weather reports were promising the next day, they descended the North Face with 300-foot ropes to recover the dead Spaniards' bodies.



Man, the Deciding Factor, Route Guide to the North Face, and Attempts and Successes on the North Face

Man, the Deciding Factor, Route Guide to the North Face, and Attempts and Successes on the North Face Summary and Analysis

In "Man, the Deciding Factor," a new year has dawned in 1964. The newest call is to find a direct route up the North Face of the Eiger, a "Direttissima." Harrer believes a more direct route would require too much in the way of technology, as well as being difficult and dangerous. With imagination, a possible route can be seen up the mountain, but Harrer sees no exit at the top, without artificial help in place. Still, Harrer sees the accomplishment as inevitable, with the enthusiasm of youth. He calls a warning against using technology to advance beyond one's skill, however. A party led by Peter Siegert in January tried a direct route and had to escape into the railway tunnel. By the time of Harrer's writing in the summer of 1964, no one had yet achieved the direct route.

Harrer bemoans the ropes and aids hanging in the lower part of the face, inviting unprepared climbers to try the North Face, but both climbers and rescuers don't want them removed. Guides are afraid that removing them would lead to more accidents among the inexperienced who would still flock to the mountain. Few novelties remain for the mountain peak. On September 1, 1964, Daisy Voog became the first woman to climb the North Face, with her partner Werner Bittner. Even as the "firsts" narrow, the North Face remains a testing ground for the individual man's character.

Harrer appends a "Route Guide to the North Face," which details a route up the 5,900-foot face. The route goes up by the First Pillar and the Shattered Pillar, traverses across to the Difficult Crack and to the Hinterstoisser Traverse. It goes from the Swallow's Nest to the First and Second Ice Fields, to the Flatiron, the Death Bivouac, and the Third Ice Field. It continues to the Ramp, up the chimney to the Ice Bulge, the Brittle Ledge, and the Traverse of the Gods to the Spider, and on through the Exit Cracks to the summit.

The "Attempts and Successes on the North Face" lists attempt dates and names of party members, with brief descriptions, from Sedlmayer and Mehringer's deaths in 1935 to 1981. After the last ascent described in the book, Daisy Voog's climb in 1964, there were fifty more successful ascents. Twenty-eight notable climbs during that period are listed with comments.



Characters

Heinrich Harrer

Heinrich Harrer was a college student when he made plans to join Fritz Kasperek in an attempt to ascend the as-yet unclimbed North Face of the Eiger. Harrer did not tell anyone of his plans except his future mother-in-law. He kept his intentions from his tutors and friends at the University of Graz, rushing through his final exams to join Kasperek at the Eiger in July 1938. Harrer and Kasperek started up the mountain, and found themselves on the climb with a more experienced team, Anderl Heckmair and Ludwig Vörg. Harrer was at a disadvantage because he had decided not to bring heavy crampons, not realizing how important they would be to this icy climb.

The two teams joined together and climbed the Eiger's most difficult face in three days. Harrer led the team down, but even though he'd climbed the more usual route to the mountain's summit before, he lost his way and the party had to backtrack on his way down. Harrer writes his memoir not only about his own experiences on the North Face but also about the history of attempts of the North Face beginning in the 1930s. Harrer has great admiration for climbers, believing that there is inherent value in courage and breaking new ground for its own sake.

Harrer admits that mountain climbing is done for personal fulfillment, not for the betterment of mankind. However, he believes that testing one's own limits and improving one's physical and mental condition to peak performance has its own value, even though it may be done at a heavy risk. Harrer both warns climbers against the danger of the North Face and admires all those who have attempted it. Harrer seems to most admire youth and those who prove themselves through successes, even if ultimately their successes end in tragedy.

Fritz Kasperek

Fritz Kasperek was a climber and a friend of Heinrich Harrer. Kasperek and Harrer started their ascent of the North Face together as a team. Harrer recalls his first meeting with Kasperek. Harrer was a starving youth, backpacking through the mountains with no money. He met Kasperek on the road, and Kasperek saw how hungry the boy was. Kasperek opened his backpack and shared with Harrer all his fruit, with Harrer eating twice as much as Kasperek. Later, Harrer learned that Kasperek's last money had been spent on the food, and Kasperek had to complete a 300-mile journey with nothing to eat.

When Kasperek and Harrer were on the North Face, Kasperek wanted nothing more than a cigarette, and Harrer was sad that he has none to offer to his friend. During the avalanche that assailed the party on the White Spider, Kasperek had presence of mind to dig a piton into the ice to hold himself in place. However, Kasperek's hand was



injured, and so he completed the journey to the summit as the last man on the rope. If someone behind him were to fall, he would not have strength in his injured hand to hold the rope.

A protégé of Kasperek's, Erich Waschak, climbed the North Face in 1950. Kasperek gave the ice axe that he used on the North Face in the 1938 climb to Waschak, who climbed the difficult route in a single day, along with a partner. Kasperek was killed while climbing Salcantay in Peru in June of 1954.

Anderl Heckmair

Andrel Heckmair was an experienced climber and led the team that first ascended the North Face of the Eiger in 1938. He originally started out with his partner Ludwig Vörg, but was joined by other climbers on the way. Heckmair was the most masterful climber among the four and led the party. During the avalanche the party endured at the Spider, Heckmair held himself in place with his axe and grabbed on to Vörg to keep him on the mountain.

Ludwig Vörg

In 1937, Vörg was trapped with Matthias Rebitsch on the North Face overnight during an attempt to rescue Primas and Gollackner. On an attempt to climb the face with Rebitsch, the two found Hinterstoisser's body and interrupted their plans to bring the body down. Rebitsch and Vörg created the "Swallow's Nest" camp, and though they did not make the summit, they were the first team to descend from an attempt in safety.

The next year, Vörg partnered with Heckmair to climb the North Face. The two were later joined by Harrer and Kasperek, and the four made the first successful ascent of the North Face, led by Anderl Heckmair.

Kurt Maix

Maix helped Harrer write his book about the Eiger, providing enthusiastic support for the idea of writing a history of man's relationship with the great mountain. Maix is credited with co-writing the later chapters.

Charles Barrington

Barrington was the first climber to reach the summit of the Eiger. He climbed the mountain in 1858, accompanied by two guides.



Max Sedlmayer and Karl Mehringer

Sedlmayer and Mehringer were the first climbers to attempt the Eiger's North Face in 1935. They froze to death at the top of the Third Ice Field, in a location thereafter named the Death Bivouac.

Toni Kurz

Toni Kurz died tragically in 1936, after his party of four climbers turned back because of an injured party member. The rest of the party died on the descent, and rescuers attempted to save Kurz. Kurz, however, died on the mountain before rescuers could reach him.

Anderl Hinterstoisser

Hinterstoisser died on an attempt to climb the North Face in 1936, but he pioneered the traverse to the First Ice Field, afterwards known as Hinterstoisser's Traverse.

Albert von Allmen

Albert von Allmen was a sector guard on the railway running through the Eiger mountain in 1937 and the first to call for rescuers when he discovered Toni Kurz trapped, with the rest of his party dead.

Giuseppe Piravano and Bruno Detassis

In 1937, Piravano and Detassis attempted the North Face. Detassis injured his leg, and the climbers had to descend to the Mittellegi Hut.

Franz Primas and Bertl Gollackner

In 1937, Primas and Gollackner were trapped on the North Face by bad weather and collapsed during an attempt to make it to the summit. Primas was rescued.

Matthias Rebitsch

In 1937, Rebitsch was trapped with Ludwig Vörg on the North Face overnight during an attempt to rescue Primas and Gollackner. On an attempt to climb the face with Vörg, the two found Hinterstoisser's body and interrupted their plans to bring the body down. Rebitsch and Vörg created the "Swallow's Nest" camp, and though they did not make the summit, they were the first team to descend from an attempt in safety.



Bartolo Sandri and Mario Menti

Sandri and Menti were the third team to die on the North Face, attempting a climb in 1938. They fell near the Difficult Crack.

Lionel Terray and Lois Lachenal

Terray and Lachenal were the second team to successfully climb the North Face, making their ascent in 1946.

Hans Schlunegger, Karl Schlunegger, and Gottfried Jermann

In August, 1946, guides Hans and Karl Schlunegger formed a party with Gottfried Jermann to climb the North Face of the Eiger and became the third successful ascent, ten years after Hans had been in the rescue party attempting to rescue Toni Kurz.

Erich Waschak and Leo Forstenlechner

Waschak and Forstenlechner were the first mountaineers to climb the North Face of the Eiger in a single day. The climbers made the journey in 18 hours in July of 1950, bivouacking on the summit after their climb and descending the next day.

Hermann Buhl

Renowned German climber Hermann Buhl led a successful international climb of the North Face in 1952, after he and his partner joined with undersupplied brothers Otto and Sepp Maag and a party of French climbers led by Gaston Rébuffat. Buhl was at the lead of the party during an avalanche on the Spider, and was ill. Still, the next day, he led the way out, climbing a 70-foot icy gully to establish a rope to help the others climb out.

Gaston Rébuffat

Rébuffat was a renowned French climber and the leader of a party of five Frenchmen who joined Hermann Buhl and three others in an international party that climbed the North Face in 1952.



Otto and Sepp Maag

Brothers Otto and Sepp Maag were underequipped for their attempt to climb the North Face in 1952, and they were lucky to join up with the other two more prepared parties starting up at the same time. They were part of a party of nine from three different countries to make the summit at that time.

Uly Wyss and Karlheinz Gonda

Wyss and Gonda climbed the North Face successfully but were swept away while crossing the Summit Ice Field. In 1953 when the attempt was made, it was not classified as a success because the team did not reach the summit and return in safety. However, later the climb was classified as a success, and Wyss and Gonda are listed as the twelfth successful ascent of the North Face.

Günther Nothdurft and Franz Mayer

Nothdurft and Mayer made an attempt to climb the North Face in 1957 but apparently experienced trouble that was never fully explained. The two quick, young climbers made slow pace, alongside two Italian climbers, Longhi and Corti. After Longhi and Corti met with accidents, Nothdurft and Mayer attempted to finish the climb and disappeared. Years later, it was discovered that the two climbers made it to the summit but died on the way down the mountain. Their attempt is now considered the fourteenth successful ascent of the mountain.

Claudio Corti

Corti was an Italian climber who, along with Stefano Longhi, attempted to climb the North Face in 1957. Corti's story of the events is unreliable and contains apparent contradictions. Corti and Longhi headed up the wrong route, and once they were on the correct route, they found Nothdurft and Mayer also climbing. During the ascent, Longhi fell and became stranded. Corti, the only survivor, was hit during a rockslide on the Spider and left with a bivouac tent while Nothdurft and Mayer went for help.

Alfred Hellepart

Hellepart was part of the rescue effort that saved Claudio Corti in 1957. He was lowered down the face of the Eiger on a steel cable and carried Corti up the mountain on his back.



Stefano Longhi

Longhi was an Italian climber who, along with Claudio Corti, attempted to climb the North Face in 1957. Corti and Longhi headed up the wrong route, and once they were on the correct route, they found Nothdurft and Mayer also climbing. During the ascent, Longhi fell and became stranded. He died on the mountain before rescue could get to him.

Adolf Mayr

Mayr made the first attempt at a solo climb of the North Face in 1961 and fell to his death.

Michel Vaucher, Yvette Attinger, Michel Darbellay, and Loulo

In 1962, Vaucher, Attinger, Darbellay, and Boulaz were the first party to include a woman that made a serious attempt to climb the North Face. Weather forced them to retreat from the Ramp, and they descended safely after three bivouacs.

Michel Darbellay

Swiss guide Darbellay made the first successful solo climb of the North Face in August 1963.

Paul Etter, Ueli Gantbein, and Sepp Henkel

Etter, Gantbein, and Henkel made the first successful descent down the North Face in December 1963, retrieving the bodies of two Spanish climbers who had perished on the mountain in August.

Daisy Voog and Werner Bittner

Voog and Bittner were the party including a woman to successfully climb the North Face. They made the ascent in 1964, the fiftieth ascent up the face.



Objects/Places

The Eiger

The Eiger is a 13,042-foot tall mountain in the Swiss Alps with a sheer face on its northern side.

The North Face

The North Face of the Eiger is a steep, 5,900-foot high wall and was originally considered impossible to climb.

The White Spider

The White Spider is a field of ice in the upper reaches of the North Face of the Eiger, with icy crevices leading away from it, reminiscent of a spider's limbs. The White Spider turns into a funnel of avalanches and rock slides from above it, posing a serious danger to climbers.

Ice Fields

The North Face of the Eiger has three ice fields separated by cliffs below the White Spider.

The Death Bivouac

The Death Bivouac is a spot above the Second Ice Field on the face of the Eiger where the first climbers froze to death during the night.

Exit Cracks

Exit Cracks lead upwards from the White Spider to the Summit Ice Field at the top of the Eiger, providing a route from the North Face to the summit.

Traverse of the Gods

The Traverse of the Gods is a traverse with a spectacular view that leads to the White Spider.



The Ramp

The Ramp leads up from the Third Ice Field to the Traverse of the Gods. Climbers must pass through a chimney which is filled with ice in cold times and pouring with water in warmer weather.

The Flatiron

The Flatiron is a ledge above the Second Ice Field.

The Ice Hose

The Ice Hose is a route leading from the First Ice Field to the Second Ice Field.

Gallery Window

Originally built to dump rubble from drilling down the face of the mountain, the Gallery Window looks out from the railway tracks running through the Eiger onto the North Face.

The Swallow's Nest

Rebitsch and Vörg on their first attempt at the North Face established a well-supplied camp below the Second Ice Field that came to be known as the Swallow's Nest.

The Hinterstoisser Traverse

Named after the climber in the second attempt at the mountain who forged the route and later died on a descent down the face, the Hinterstoisser Traverse is a route to the First Ice Field.

The Mittellegi Hut

The Mittellegi Hut is a hut on a ridge on the northeast side of the Eiger, where climbers can find relief and rescue.

Grindelwald

Grindelwald is the nearest village to the North Face of the Eiger.

Kleine Scheidegg

The Kleine Scheidegg is a mountain pass near the Eiger.

Themes

Courage

Harrer admires courage as a fundamental virtue. In his book, he argues strongly against those who criticized attempts to climb the North Face as suicidal or purposelessly dangerous. Harrer sees the North Face as a challenge where one can fully explore courage and put it to the test. He admires all who find it within themselves to brave the climb. Harrer sees the initial unsuccessful climbers as courageous pathfinders who led the way to later success. Those who died on the face, he admires for enduring the trials of the mountain, even though that endurance is self-afflicted.

Harrer encourages critical awareness of the difficulty and danger of any undertaking like the climb of the North Face, and he believes only a small percent of people are suited for extreme challenges like the Eiger's harshest climb. Still, Harrer admires even the unprepared for the endurance and courage they show in existing in circumstances that are so dire.

To Harrer, the greatest courage lies in mastering one's own fear and loneliness, and being able to make the best choices in the moment of need. He admires Fritz Kasperek for his instinctive action in driving a piton into the ground when the avalanche hit them as they crossed the Spider, and in protecting that piton and during a brief lull driving it further in to serve as an anchor. Kasperek was not immobilized by the danger he faced. His courage showed in being able to react to the danger and therefore overcome it. While Harrer admires all those who face danger, he most admires those whose actions remain calm and reasoned and assured under dire circumstances.

The Search for Adventure

Harrer sees the search for adventure as a natural instinct of youth, a drive to push the boundaries of what is known to be possible. Harrer sees the "impossible" North Face of the Eiger as a feat that could not be ignored by the human instinct to drive on in search of new challenges. Once the idea of climbing the North Face had taken hold among climbers, it was inevitable that it would be climbed.

In 1964, when Harrer publishes the later chapters detailing climbs of the North Face in the early 1960s, the idea of a direct route climbing the sheer rock cliffs up the Eiger has taken hold among climbers. Like the idea of climbing the North Face at all in the 1930s, the idea of a direct route is considered by many impossible. Even Harrer seems to doubt the possibility of finding a climbable route. Still, he considers it inevitable that the direct route will be climbed. It is a new challenge that has taken hold of youth, and therefore it will be conquered, no matter how many victims fail and die before the successes arrive.



Harrer admires the search for adventure and the desire for new challenges. Once the Eiger's North Face has been climbed and roped with the equipment of previous climbers, it seems somewhat sullied to him. He does not see the North Face as less of a challenge but wishes for it to return more to its previous untouched state, to retain the purity of the challenge and discourage those who are not fit. Harrer believes that each individual should examine himself and determine mental and physical fitness for the adventure one is drawn to.

The Bond Between the Physical and the Mental

Climbing a mountain is assuredly a physical activity. However, Harrer emphasizes the character-building aspects of climbing when he praises it. Harrer believes that not only physical prowess but mental acuity, calm, and balance are necessary ingredients for overcoming the harshest challenges nature has to offer. The North Face of the Eiger embodies these harshest challenges, with its deadly iciness, constant avalanches of rock and snow, and easily underestimated features, so changeable in the turbulent weather.

Harrer sees the physical challenges he described as necessarily mental challenges as well. A healthy body comes from a healthy mind; *mens sana in corpore sano* is the fundamental qualification for the North Face. Harrer notes many critics who call the attempt suicide or the product of a deranged mind. Harrer counters that an unbalanced mind would be completely paralyzed by the challenge of the North Face. He sees being able to make good choices on the deadly face, in the cold and isolation, as the ultimate proof of a sound, healthy mind.

The bond between body and mind that Harrer sees in mountain climbing is an ideal that he associates with youth and vigor. The best of man's mind and man's body is revealed in the direst of situations. Even with the help of artificial aids, Harrer sees ultimate success or failure as resting with the health of man's mind and body. The achievement of mental and physical acuity is the ultimate goal, and one cannot be perfected without the other.

Style

Perspective

The *White Spider* is an historical account, and the author strives for accuracy. However, he also filters his accounts of the North Face of the Eiger through his personal perspective on climbing. Harrer admires climbing as a virtuous activity that elicits all the best and healthiest aspects of the human spirit, and so he admires climbers as the best of men. Harrer seeks to show climbers in this light, praising the courage and aptitude that they show and focusing on mountaineers as a community of brothers. Throughout his account, he defends climbing and seeks to ease any disputes within the climbing community, spreading praise on the factions of guides and climbers alike.

The account of the successful 1938 ascent of the North Face is told in first person, from Harrer's personal perspective. He includes his own thoughts and experiences during the ascent. One notable moment is when Fritz Kasperek, the member of the group who is most addicted to cigarettes, is left with only soggy, unlightable sticks. Harrer includes a flashback memory of first meeting Kasperek, when Fritz shared his last food with the starving student. Harrer includes another such flashback as he is drifting to sleep, when he recalls the kindness of a mountain farmer in taking him in and feeding him during one of the adolescent's first climbs in the local mountains.

After Harrer's personal account of the 1938 ascent, the book reverts to an historical recounting of the successes and failures on the Eiger. Harrer continues to filter the accounts through his personal perspective. He attempts to remain impartial when discussing the 1957 tragedy on the Eiger, but he is highly critical of Corti (much more so than of Brian Nally, whose partner also died and who also gave confused accounts after rescue) and in a later chapter, admits to feeling the Eiger's North Face is not suited to Italian climbers' temperaments. Despite his biases, Harrer desires a brotherhood among climbers and focuses on the idea of European, international teamwork.

Tone

In *The White Spider*, Heinrich Harrer exhibits somewhat of a nostalgic tone. Harrer's experience in climbing the North Face of the Eiger was life-changing, even if he didn't realize it at the time. The experience was one of his youth, and he associates mountain climbing with youthfulness, health, and freshness of mind and body. Harrer strongly feels the sublime nature of the mountain and admires the desire to become a part of it in exacting physical challenge. Describing the attempts, and particularly the most admirable ones, to climb the North Face seems to be, for Harrer, describing an ideal.

Harrer focuses on youth, strength, and wholesome character, on many levels idealizing the young climbers he describes. He was once one of the young climbers with limitless possibilities ahead of him, and now he is a more experienced man, looking back upon



the glory of youth. As a grown man, he cannot find himself fully in the upsurge of youthful enthusiasm. He is more cautious now, believing intellectually that new challenges will be conquered but unable to wholeheartedly back them. He does not truly see the possibility of a direct route up the North Face. He only sees the youthful drive to conquer this idea.

Harrer seems somewhat disillusioned with the present, preferring the past. He dislikes the crowds constantly drawn to the North Face or the myriad of ropes and pitons left behind in the mountain. He seems to long for the Eiger of his youth, still unexplored and pristine.

Structure

The *White Spider* is a biography, not so much of Heinrich Harrer's historic ascent of the Eiger's North Face in 1938, but of mankind's relationship with that sublime work of nature, following a linear structure by recounting man's encounters with the North Face. Harrer begins his story of the North Face with man's first ascent of the Eiger, and with descriptions of the North Face during man's first encounter with it, when it was considered unclimbable. Then, Harrer describes the first unsuccessful attempts to climb the North Face in the mid-1930s, attempts that led to deaths and criticisms of the attempt to make the ascent.

The longest chapter in the book is Harrer's autobiographical account of his own ascent of the North Face, the first successful climb. Harrer describes in detail each phase of the trip and the conditions encountered on the journey to the peak. Afterwards, he chronicles the next twenty years of climbs on the North Face, including the successes and failures as more and more climbers were drawn to the challenge. The initial edition of the book ended with the Epilogue and was written in 1958.

In 1964, Harrer revised the edition to update it with climbs through the early 1960s, including the first ascent by a woman. The chapters after the Epilogue are brief, with year-by-year accounts of important events on the North Face. Many of the climbs are described only briefly, as more and more people came over the years to the North Face. Harrer ends with the knowledge that more changes are coming, as climbers are still working toward a new first, a direct route up the sheer cliffs of the face.



Quotes

"The very way in which Sedlmayer and Mehringer went about the reconnaissance of the Face spoke volumes for their character. They approached their mountain calmly and without fuss. There was no challenging smile on their faces, no show of conceit." *The First Attempt on the North Face*, p. 22

"Nobody could have held it against the guides at Eigerletscher Station if they had refused to take a single step onto the Face when they heard of the accident. But there was one man still alive. They were all determined to rescue him, to snatch him, if possible, from the clutches of that fatal wall." *The Tragedy of Toni Kurz*," p. 44

"Nobody knows what Rebitsch and his companions thought during those recovery operations. They didn't advertise their feelings. The fact remains that they put off their supreme effort, which might quite possibly have ended in success, because they found Hinterstoisser's body on the way up. They brought it down in spite of the stones whistling about their ears. They carried out what to them was an essential, final act of piety." *1937: On the Eiger*, p. 72

"Yes, we were quite happy. This huge mountain face had brought our lived down to the lowest common denominator." *The First Ascent of the Face*, p. 99

"As soon as the decision had been taken, I lightened our rucksacks by throwing down the precipice that part of the equipment and provisions which had become superfluous. Among it was a whole loaf of bread, which disappeared at a great pace in the mists below us. I had grown up in hard circumstances and had never before thrown away a piece of bread; but now the act seemed symbolic to me—we were moving on." *The First Ascent of the Face*, p. 123

"The news of Terray's and Lachenal's successful repetition of the climb certainly burst like a bomb among the ambitious body of Oberland guides; but men born and bred in the Hills like Schlunegger do not allow themselves to be spurred on by personal or national dreams of glory." *Further Successful Ascents*, p. 147

"The 'European Rope,' as a spiritual brotherhood, had not yet emerged." *1952: The Great Year on the Eiger*, p. 175

"Wellencamp was the first to say it. Everything had been said about the North Face, how big, how savage, how grim, how high, how magnificent it was; but no one before him had said that to rest on it was lovely, that one could enjoy the beauty of the scene from it at one's leisure." *The Wall of Life and Death*, p. 197

"I am sorry that the verdicts of my trustworthy informants must necessarily throw a shadow on the great joy over the rescue of Claudio Corti. It is the hardest assignment I have had to carry out in this book. I can only lay the reports on either side of the scales



—on the one side sober criticism and judgment, on the other self-justification or an attempt at it." *The Tragedy of 1957*, pp. 232-233

"But now let us stop talking about death; let us think of and believe in the life and the beauty of mountaineering. Let us not now worry about the lack of organisation at the last rescue on the Eiger; let us only see what was uplifting, grand, communal, the will to help." *The International Rescue Team*, p. 254

"In spite of Adi Mayr's tragic death it was a good year—a year of success founded on individual ability and dependable teammates. But 1962 was to show the Face in a new and sadly different light. Admittedly, there were successful ascents, and encounters with men who earned our unreserved respect and sympathy. There were, however, others who, weighed in the balance of fate, were found wanting, and yet returned safe from the wall. And then there were fatalities, shattering, unintelligible fatalities, leaving behind them many an unanswered question." *Climbers Have a Language of Their Own*, p. 293

"The intention of this book has never been merely to relate the sensational history of this great Face, but to reveal its true beauty—a beauty which, one cannot reiterate it too often, is not for the average man." *Man, the Deciding Factor*, p. 333



Topics for Discussion

When Harrer climbed the North Face of the Eiger, was it a reasonable and worthwhile decision?

Is it true that when mankind embraces an idea, such as finding a direct route up the North Face, that it will inevitably be accomplished?

What is the relationship between skill and technology in climbing?

To what extent does mountain climbing require mental and psychological prowess?

What are Harrer's biases in the novel and how do they affect the way he retells history?

How do you interpret the events of the tragedy of 1957 and the conflicting reports, including Corti's statements?

Why does Harrer admire climbers, and how convincing are his arguments against critics of extreme mountain climbing?

What qualities does Harrer admire most in others and why?