

*Peak*  
by Roland Smith

I should have waited until June to make the ascent, but no, moron has to go up in March. Why? Because everything was ready and I have a problem with waiting. I had studied the wall, built all my custom protection, and picked the date. I was ready. And if the date passed I might not try it at all. It doesn't take much to talk yourself out of a stunt like this. That's why there are over six billion people sitting safely inside homes and one. . .

"Moron!" I shouted.

Option #1: Finish the climb. Two hundred and sixty-four feet up, or about a hundred precarious fingerholds (providing my fingers didn't break off like icicles).

Option #2: Climb down. A little over five hundred feet, two hundred and fifty fingerholds.

Option #3: Wait for rescue. Scratch that option. No one knew I was on the wall. By morning, I would be an icy gargoyle. And if I lived my mom would drop me off the wall herself.

Up it is, then.

I timed my moves between vicious blasts of wind, which were becoming more frequent the higher I climbed. The sleet turned to hail, pelting me like a swarm of frozen hornets. But the worst happened about thirty feet from the top, fifteen measly fingerholds away.

I had stopped to give the lactic acid searing in my shoulders a chance to simmer down. While I waited, a thick mist drifted in around me. The top of the wall disappeared, which was just as well. When you're tired and scared, thirty feet looks about the length of two football fields, and that can be pretty demoralizing. Scaling a wall happens one foothold and one handhold at a time. Thinking beyond that can weaken your resolve, and it's your will that gets you to the top as much as your muscles and climbing skills.

This is it, I told myself. Fifteen more handholds and I've topped it.

I reached up for the next seam and encountered a little snag. Well, a big snag really. . .

My right ear and cheek were frozen to the wall.

To reach the top you must have resolve, muscles, skill, and. . .

A FACE!