RISK

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Location: **Annapurna, Nepal**

You're constantly focused on the next move. It's a special feeling, as you become totally absorbed into what you're doing. And it's not just for one brief second; this feeling lasts all the way to the top, and back down again. You're way up on Annapurna and you're in your own world; utterly exposed. You have to keep concentrating on the next instant, the next move, or you won't survive.

Everything disappears; the future does not exist. The world seems unreal. But whatever's running through your head, you have to maintain the speed – this game is a combination of solo climbing and accepting serious risk. You are constantly rolling the dice; all or nothing. But I'm not scared. For me, on the face of things, this all seems completely normal. But then – when I think about it after – I begin to wonder that perhaps it wasn't correct to make that much of a wager. I really like the exhilaration in the moment, but on the other hand, I know that I can't keep gambling with my life. I'm heading down a one way street and eventually I won't come back. I know that for sure, if I keep playing.

Being on Annapurna is like being on another planet, so unprotected, so far on the edge. It's impossible to explain why you expose yourself to these situations, or how to communicate just what exactly is going on in your head to those who have never experienced that world before. To present yourself to this kind of danger you have to be strong and have a lot of experience. I always try to climb as efficiently as possible. Others say I climb 'super fast'. I don't know if I do. I don't really care. All I know is that I want to achieve my goal to climb the mountain and it's easier if I go quickly. You can easily have good weather for a day or two, but for a whole week is almost impossible. My way gives me more opportunities, extra rolls of the dice. It is the most important thing, to be efficient.

I'm never scared. If I am scared, I will turn back, because you're only afraid when you're in a situation you're not prepared for. Then it's dangerous, and then you have to turn round. This is very important. After a big climb, your body's reaction will be really strong. You'll be totally done-in for the whole winter. All you'll be able to do is go out on easy climbs and not think too much about what you did before.

But you'll get better. Then the risk begins all over again.

In October 2013, Steck soloed a new route on the South Face of Annapurna without supplementary oxygen. The 37-year-old summited the peak in the middle of the night and descended to base camp just 28 hours later. This 'speed' ascent is already being called a milestone in the history of modern alpinism.

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