

The Eiger, April 9th, 2015

With one parachute under my arm, another on my back, and crampons affixed to my ski boots, I step onto the vibrating skid of the hovering helicopter. I lock eyes with Martin Schurmann, a hardened Swiss mountain guide and fellow BASE jumper who is waiting for me on the steep, icy summit of the Eiger. Martin has performed countless rescues and body recoveries on this mountain. Due to its beauty, access and high visibility, the lure of the Eiger is simply irresistible to climbers and airborne sportsmen, despite its decades long track record of killing them. I trust Martin with my life, and his eyes will signal my next move. His stocky build and strength keeping him as stable as a mountain goat, he nods and grabs my left foot, helping me down, and steadying my feet as I step from the helicopter onto this terrifying mountain.

The ride of my life has yet to begin, and the intensity level is already peaking. My mouth is dry from nerves — I've spent years preparing for this day, but *dammit*, this is scary. The infamous Eiger North Face is off to my right, and the West face is below me. It claimed the life of a skier just last week when his binding malfunctioned and sent him pinballing to the bottom.

The familiar grip of my ski edges gives me confidence. I am now in my element. For 33 years skis have been an extension of my feet, and the feeling of terror is now dulled by familiarity. I am entirely committed. The mountain is at its prime, and the cameras are rolling. 60 Minutes' Anderson Cooper has freed his schedule, once again, in anticipation of this moment. There is no turning back. This thing is going down.

“Ready, set, go!” I point my skis and take control of my parachute. The first do-or-die move has gone my way, which is good because it would be awfully embarrassing

to immediately seal my fate with a botched speedwing launch, and slide to my death on national TV without performing a single impressive act. *It's on. Time to shred 6000 feet of prime conditions by way of my three favorite sports.*

Under my speed wing parachute, I slice through the smooth, thin atmosphere down the Eiger West face at 50 MPH, appreciative of the gorgeous vista that I know has only been enjoyed by a few speedriders, half of whom are no longer with us. My heart races as I whizz past my landmarks, an outcropping on one side, then a tight ice-filled draw down slope from one of my turns, and my focus sharpens as I zero in on my landing; a steep and exposed icy slope, interspersed with rocks.

I land with perfect accuracy in the “you fall, you die zone.” With my skis now solidly gripping the Western Flank of the Eiger, and my intuition steering my line between the peppery rocks, I grab the cutaway handle at my belly, yank it and set myself free from the speed wing parachute. With another critical transition complete, I am now skipping along a scarily steep slope with only one reasonable exit: the edge of the world. I am nearly halfway through my run, and the gnarliest part is yet to come. This dream run is relentless with risk.

My mind takes a backseat to emotion as my skis accelerate, free of the drag of the chute. I've skied my whole life, but this time it is different: Faster, scarier, wearing a BASE jumping parachute and without poles. Technique is irrelevant. I am hauling ass, dodging frozen chunks of snow and exposed rock, charging towards the take off ramp. I am amped. The ramp is approaching fast, and my point of no return has come and gone — I am too fast to stop before the edge. *Here we go: double backflip.*

I hit the ramp with aggression, lean back, and grab my shins. The golden wall is a

blur, but my awareness is keen. One flip, then two, orbiting into space... I grab the ski release handles, straighten my legs and yank them. Click, click, BOOM! I am free of the skis and plunging down the North Face of the Eiger, accelerating into a darker and scarier world where everything moves even faster and where I must not remain.

I press my body against the ever-increasing wind, harnessing more and more speed and sliding down the intangible to gain horizontal flight. I must escape the mountain's grasp, and my skis are now falling like airborne daggers that could kill me or shred my parachute if I don't out-fly them. At 120+ MPH, the ledges pass beneath my feet one by one. I can taste victory near, but I crave only speed. I scoot my way past the last piece of rock and into a new and more welcoming world: the pristine snowfield at the Eiger's base.

I savor one last moment of flight... and NOW! I toss the pilot chute and the canopy crisply smashes open. "WOOOOOOHOOO! YEAAHHHH BUDDY!" I scream as I fly past my cameraman. His hands are shaking as he waves at me, and his hollering voice is filled with joy and surprise, as if he had no idea what to expect from the ride.

I fly slowly under my parachute and land. "WHHOOAAAA Dude. OH MY GOD... That was pretty intense man!" I scream into my GoPro camera. I am completely blown away. My body is now stationary more than a vertical mile beneath the mountain summit, but my emotions are still soaring. I later told Anderson Cooper in an interview: "Nailed it. I don't have words to describe how it felt to go and pull that off after so much time, and you know, it was kind of a twisted style of having fun, but it was *really* fun."

The helicopter ferries me back to the summit. Time for a second run. As I step into my skis and nod confidently at Martin, I have no idea that the fatal malfunction that

took my best friend's life is going to strike again in the next three minutes.