

The Organ Ascent.

I have to ask myself, why am I here?

This is not an esoteric and philosophical investigation regarding the meaning of life. Oh no! It is far more mundane and pragmatic. It's Sunday, I am in the chapel at the evening service and I don't want to be here.

I look around me at the righteous members of the congregation and ask again, why am I here?

My Parents love to come to the evening service. It's the highlight of their week, but no one has ever thought to ask me how I feel about it.

I have been sitting on my own, near the front, for over an hour. My parents are up in the choir. My back is aching from the hard wooden bench and my mind has long since given up any pretence of being interested in the proceedings. My eyes drift vacantly around, scanning the scene. Occasionally I glance up at the pulpit, at the minister, droning on and on and on like an old car that's trying to start, but whose battery is failing fast.

I can see the heads of my parents over the top of the choir stalls behind him. Their faces are glowing with excited anticipation, hanging on his every word. My mother momentarily glances in my direction. She observes me looking around and fixing me with her steely gaze she mouths at me, "pay attention."

I'm used to this form of silent communication. It's become standard in this situation. I try to oblige. I sit up straight and the rigid back of the bench digs into my shoulder blades.

Again I fix my eyes on the minister and try to concentrate on his words, but of course, it's hopeless. Listening to the soporific, mono-tonal dirge that passes for the sermon, my mind swiftly escapes into another reality, out of naked self-preservation.

My eyes again start to drift around the chapel, coming to rest on the platform and, like an ecclesiastical Edmond Hillary; I begin to plan my latest assault on the north face of the organ.

In my mind, I've surveyed the route many times. I know every handhold and every foothold. After the walk through the valley of the aisle, I climb the narrow steps passed the pulpit, before starting the real climb in the foothills of the choir stalls.

I swiftly traverse the narrow ledge that is the base of the stained glass window, pausing only to look back over the yawning chasm of the body of the chapel, with its ridged benches full of silent, menacing faces reaching all the way to the to the entrance at the back of the chapel that is my escape route.

I then turn my attention to the challenge of the pipe chamber that is the north face. Using only the narrow hand and footholds of the sheer wooden wall, I reach the pinnacle of the organ sierra and triumphantly plant my flag firmly down the middle of the central 16-foot base pipe.

I have only moments to savour my achievement before I must consider my final escape.

Summoning all my courage, in my mind, I leap from the very top of the organ into the gaping void and grasping the first of the roof support bars, I use my momentum, to swing from bar to bar, over the heads of the enraged congregation, until with a final somersault dismount that would be the envy of any Olympic gymnast, I gently alight onto the top of the canopy that covers the entrance. From there it is only a matter of speedily swinging down to the ground and making my escape to freedom through the big wooden doors.

I feel exhilarated, but my delight is, unfortunately, cut short and I am catapulted back to harsh reality. The organ has burst into life, announcing that the sermon has finished and the final hymn is about to start. But I am not disheartened as it heralds the end of my ordeal for another week. Soon I will be back home, with my beloved books.

But, I still ask myself, why do I have to be here at all?

Unfortunately, the answer is only too obvious. You don't get a choice when you're seven years old.