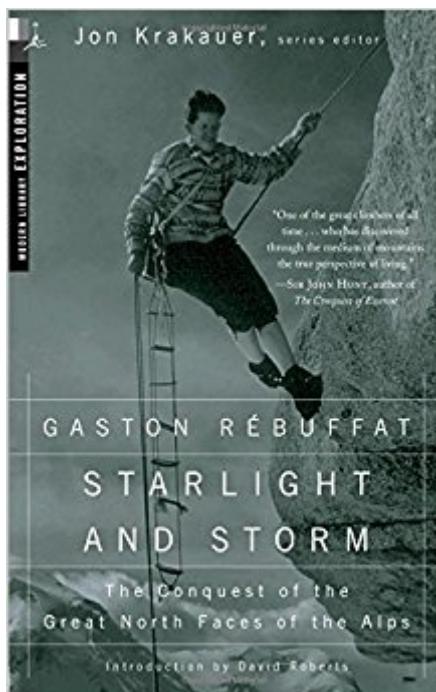


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Starlight And Storm: The Conquest Of The Great North Faces Of The Alps (Modern Library Exploration)



Synopsis

“One of the great climbers of all time . . . who has discovered through the medium of mountains the true perspective of living.” Sir John Hunt, author of *The Conquest of Everest* Known for his lyrical writing and his ability to convey not only the dangers of mountaineering but the pure exaltation of the climb, Gaston Raffauf is among the most well-known and revered Alpinists of all time. He rose to international prominence in 1950 as one of the four principal stalwarts in the first ascent of Annapurna, the highest mountain climbed at that time. Yet his finest feat as a mountaineer was to be the first man to climb all six of the legendary great north faces of the Alps—the Grandes Jorasses, the Piz Badile, the Dru, the Matterhorn, the Cima Grande di Lava-redo, and the Eiger. With this elegant book, first published in 1954, Gaston Raffauf transformed mountain writing. His insistence on seeing a climb as an act of harmonious communion with the mountain, not a battle waged against it, seemed radical at the time, though Raffauf’s aesthetic has since won the day. Through storms, avalanches, rock fall, unplanned bivouacs, and even the deaths of companions, we follow the Chamonix guide to the altar of his communion, on dark, icy walls that struck terror into the hearts of Europe’s finest mountaineers. Nor are these deft narratives mere recitations of dangers faced and obstacles overcome, for Raffauf pays as keen attention to the joys of comradeship won on these faces as he does to the climbs themselves. In our own day of corporate sponsorships, online expeditions, and eco-vacations, the purity of Raffauf’s vision of the Alps as (in the epithet of the title of another of his books) an “enchanted garden” shines forth in prose as fresh and stylish as any ever lavished on mountaineering.

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Customer Reviews

From the 1920s to the 1950s, the race was on in Europe to score first ascents of the most formidable routes in the Alps and Dolomites. Buoyed by the advent of artificial climbing techniques (primarily the use of pitons), teams from France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and Poland scaled the north faces of the Eiger, the Drus, the Matterhorn, the Grandes Jorasses, and other hallowed peaks, often pooling resources to obtain previously unimaginable success (and often tragedy), while the world below was ravaged by two brutal world wars. Noted French climbing guide Gaston Ruffat lived at the center of this crucial era in mountaineering history. *Starlight and Storm*, first published in French in 1954 as *Àfâ toiles et Tempâtes*, is his personal account of a rugged and glorious time before Gore-Tex, when men, soaked and chilled to the bone, sang to keep each other from falling asleep (forever) during exposed bivouacs in sub-zero degree snowstorms. Ruffat's love of the climber's life is evident with each turn of the page. Where contemporary authors like Jon Krakauer, who provides this reissue's foreword, describe climbing in terms of nightmares and inner struggles, Ruffat moves from one harrowing ascent to the next with uncommon gaiety and charm. "We have the instinct for it, the love of rocks and the necessary skill," he writes of time spent on the Drus, "so that we can climb without being worried by technical problems. Thus the whole climb was pure joy, for, while superficially watching over the actual ascent, the spirit had leisure to wander happily." The mysterious joy and lure of traversing earth's high places are expressed with a boyish innocence lost on much of today's climbing culture, making *Starlight and Storm* an enjoyable read, probably unlike any mountaineering journal you have ever encountered. --Kristopher Kaiyala

The Modern Library is going straight to the top to launch its new "Exploration" series with this volume by Ruffat, a legendary mountaineering guide. Published in the 1950s, this recounts his numerous adventures scaling nature's greatest heights of ice and rock. Though you could get a nosebleed just reading this book, Ruffat allows the reader to experience adventures they otherwise could only dream about. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Was a little water stained, but the vendor had already identified that, so I knew this before I ordered it. This book is worth the read.

Gaston tells a great mountain tale in an inspirational and poetic way! I found this book to be very inspirational!

This is a great book, one of the classics. However, I do agree with the reviewer who complains that there isn't enough stuff about the actual climbing. Not only did Rebuffat do many famous ascents, but he also climbed with the greatest French climbers of his generation, most notably fellow Annapurna expedition members Louis Lachenal and Lionel Terray -- and he basically never mentions them. It is as if Gaston was too humble, and thought no one would be interested -- but we are, we are! Anyone who enjoys this book needs to run not walk to find Lionel Terray's "Conquistadors of the Useless" which is very sadly out of print in English (although still a mainstay of French climbing literature). Not only do you get great stories of Gaston himself from Terray (including their ill-starred and hysterically funny attempt to run a farm together), but you also get all the blow by blow descriptions you could ever want of the big climbs -- the Walker, the Eiger, etc, -- as done by the legendary Lachenal-Terray rope. Also, look out for "True Summit" by David Roberts, a new history of the Annapurna expedition which is due to be released later this Spring. And if you read French, try the two hot books in French climbing circles these days: Rebuffat's recently published biography and Louis Lachenal's memoirs ("Carnets du Vertige")... not to mention Rebuffat's several other books and, yes, even movies!

Lyrical written, the author, Gaston Rebuffat, one of the world's climbing greats, expresses such joy for mountaineering that it is infectious. No climbing enthusiast's library should be without this book. The photograph of Rebuffat which graces the cover of this book is alone worth the price of the book. Rebuffat is positively poetic in his description of various climbs. The reader almost feels as if one were as one with the mountain. A purist, the author climbed not for the glory of it, but for the sheer joy of the brotherhood of the rope. In these days, where climbing is often just a reason for a media event, the author's approach is refreshing, indeed.

This book changed and energized my life. I picked up Gaston's Starlight and Storm from a used book bin while wandering downtown in DC one night when I was 18 years old. I read it a dozen times that year. And I have been climbing mountains with passion ever since. The book and the man changed my life. A year after reading this, I began to climb, initially at Seneca Rock in West Virginia. Then I moved abroad ultimately climbing in Chamonix over a dozen seasons, all over the

UK and Western Europe from the Eiger to the Marmolata, and all over the US for some 50 years now. I've bought and reread all of Gaston's books. I've got pictures of Chamonix with Gaston as the main figure photographed by Pierre Tairraz, the photographer for all his books, in collages on most of the walls in my home. They have been up or years and I'm thought of as a curator of mountain photos. 30 years ago, I met Gaston with his pipe in his mouth looking out over the rising clouds from the Auguille du Midi Hut above Chamonix (just like a photo in this book) and had an opportunity to tell him that Starlight and Storm and the vision he shared of climbing in it had gripped me to the core and changed me while a wandering boy to a life-long world-wide climber and mountaineer...and I thanked him. He was gracious and happy that I had found my love of climbing...just like you would expect. My visit on that occasion was to climb his own route on the Midi. Well, it is later now in time, I've slowly become 66 years old, now living in the mountains of Colorado, but I still have this book on my shelf, so worn, so moving, so brilliant an stirring...the comradeship of the rope ..my friend, my companion, my inspiration. The story of my life, actually. Bon voyage, Gaston. Thanks again for your inspiration.

"Starlight and Storm" is one of these rare examples of an outstanding climber who can also write engagingly and with poetic verve! Rebuffat is unquestionably one of the outstanding climbers of the early post WW II mountaineering in Europe and perhaps the most outstanding French climber of the period. His achievements (first French climb of the Walker Spur of the Grand Jorasses; first French Climb of the north face of Eiger, member of the Anapurna expedition) speak for themselves. What also sets apart Rebuffat from many others (many climbers write books to underwrite financially their future expeditions or to underscore their achievements) is his joyful, honest and inspired writing. Rebuffat has a real talent to convey beautifully his emotions and leads us masterfully along his fascinating climbs. This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in mountaineering, and I commend John Krakauer for including it in the new "Exploration" series!

Gaston Rebuffat is clearly a very nice guy, and much of the glory of this book is how clearly that shows through. But what doesn't shine nearly so much is his discussion of the climbs themselves. There is little interest in how the various climbs are achieved, in the technical nature of the accomplishments, or even the excitement of the climbs themselves. Instead, we get a lot of stuff about the brotherhood of the hills, and the sort of touchy-feely love of the mountains which in the 1950s was probably much less annoying than it is now. Despite this, Rebuffat's book is still a classic, if only because he was the first climber in so many cases to put us right on the mountain

with him. I would recommend his former climbing partner Maurice Herzog's Annapurna before this one, but still feel that Rebuffat's Starlight and Storm is a more than amiable companion.

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