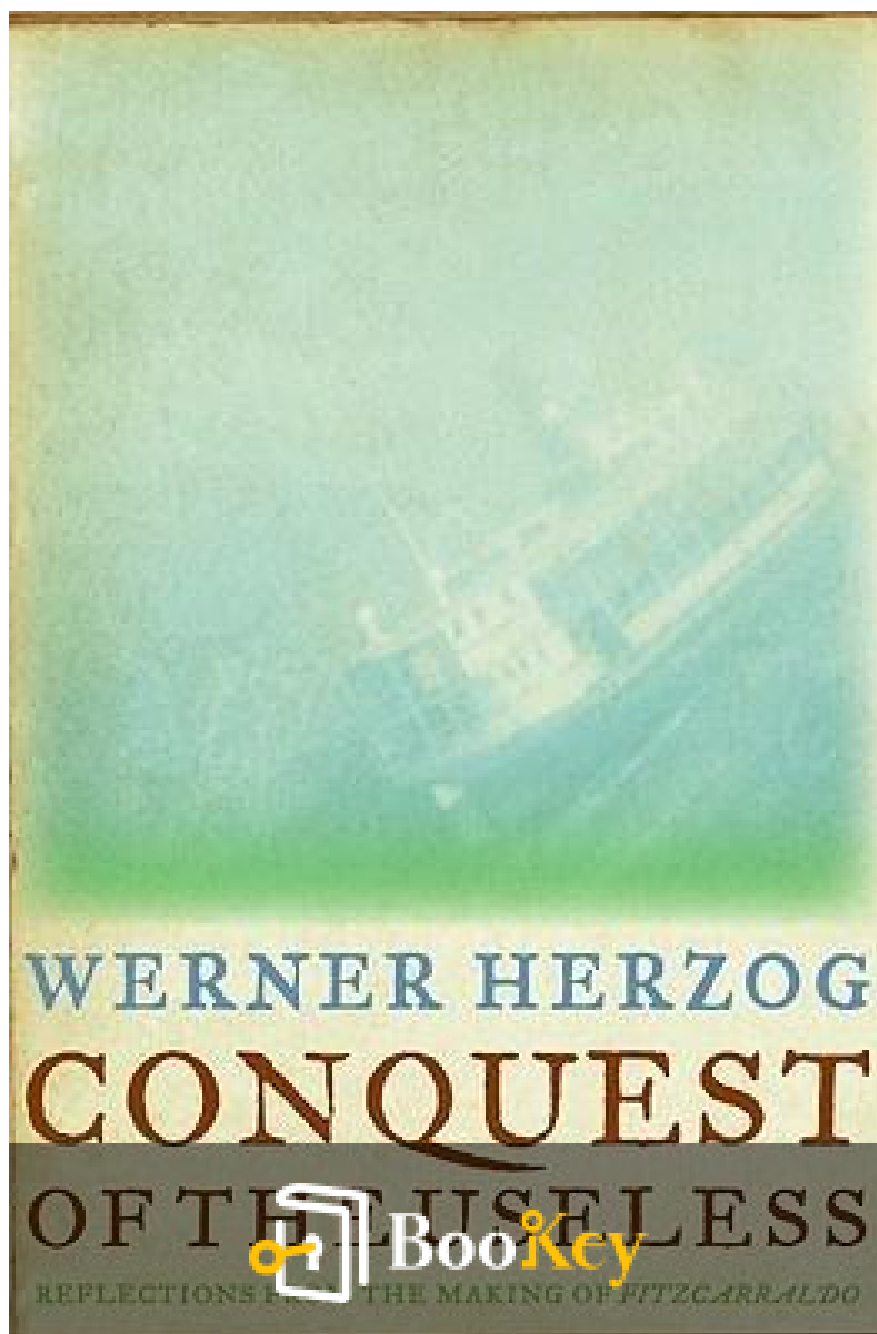


Conquest Of The Useless PDF (Limited Copy)

Werner Herzog



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Conquest Of The Useless Summary

The Pursuit of Art Through Unyielding Chaos.

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About the book

In "Conquest of the Useless," Werner Herzog invites readers into the chaotic heart of his filmmaking process during the challenging production of "Fitzcarraldo," set against the backdrop of the unforgiving Amazon rainforest. This mesmerizing account transcends mere behind-the-scenes narration, exploring existential themes of ambition, obsession, and the relentless pursuit of artistic vision in the face of insurmountable odds. Herzog's raw and poetic reflections serve not just as a critique of the film industry and its absurdities but also as an intimate glimpse into the mind of a visionary filmmaker grappling with the delicate balance between creation and destruction. Through his evocative prose and vivid imagery, readers will be captivated by the profound questions about the nature of reality, the absurdity of human endeavors, and the endless quest for meaning in life, making this a compelling read for anyone intrigued by the art of storytelling and the struggle of the creative spirit.

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About the author

Werner Herzog is a renowned German filmmaker, author, and provocateur, known for his influential contributions to cinema that blur the lines between documentary and fiction. Born on September 5, 1942, in Munich, Herzog emerged as a prominent figure in the New German Cinema movement of the 1970s, celebrated for his unique vision that often explores themes of human struggle against nature and the limits of ambition. His distinctive storytelling style, characterized by deep existential themes and a profound sense of adventure, has garnered critical acclaim and a devoted following. Apart from his filmography, which includes classics like "Aguirre, the Wrath of God" and "Fitzcarraldo," Herzog's written works, such as "Conquest of the Useless," provide intimate insights into his artistic process and the philosophical underpinnings of his work in the face of adversity.

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Chapter 1 Summary: Conquest of the Useless

“Conquest of the Useless” by Werner Herzog is a reflective account of his experiences while filming “Fitzcarraldo,” a film that tells the story of a man who dreams of transporting a massive steamship over a mountain in the Amazon rainforest to reach a rich rubber territory. This ambitious project embodies Herzog's fascination with human obsession, the struggle against nature, and the folly of grand aspirations.

The narrative unfolds with Herzog's exploration of the arduous and often chaotic filmmaking process. He details the logistical challenges faced in navigating the treacherous Amazon and the psychological toll exacted on his crew. This setting is not merely a backdrop; the rainforest plays a crucial role in illustrating the themes of struggle and conquest, as characters and filmmakers alike grapple with the untameable power of nature.

Throughout the chapters, Herzog introduces key themes of artistic obsession and existential reflection. He highlights the passion and madness that fuel both the characters within his film and the real-life endeavors of the filmmakers. He muses on the nature of storytelling itself—how it intertwines reality and fiction, and the sacrifices made in the pursuit of artistic vision.

Key characters such as Fitzcarraldo, who embodies Herzog's own relentless drive for creation, are juxtaposed with the real individuals involved in the

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film's production, eliciting questions of authenticity and the boundaries of dedication. Herzog's contemplative prose reveals the fine line between madness and genius, illustrating how the ambition to achieve the seemingly impossible often leads to profound encounters with both beauty and despair.

As the narrative progresses, Herzog delves into personal reflections on failure and the meaning of success in art. He shares his philosophical musings on life's uncertainties, the unpredictability of navigating the vast wilderness, and the relentless pursuit of dreams, even in the face of insurmountable odds. Through vivid and poetic language, he captures the spirit of filmmaking as a desperate yet noble endeavor.

In summary, "Conquest of the Useless" is not just a behind-the-scenes look at the making of "Fitzcarraldo"; it is a profound meditation on the nature of ambition, creativity, and the human experience, making it a compelling read for both film enthusiasts and those interested in the depths of human aspiration.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Prologue

Prologue Summary

In the gripping prologue, the narrator experiences a vivid and consuming vision that evokes a sense of desperation and surrealism. This vision features a massive steamship inexplicably ascending a steep hill in a dense jungle, a striking image that symbolizes both human ambition and the forces of nature. Amidst this chaotic landscape, the powerful voice of tenor Caruso pierces through the cacophony, momentarily overshadowing the suffering of a land abandoned by divine care. Rather than singing, the birds in this harsh environment emit cries of anguish, reflecting the turmoil that permeates the scene. The trees, personified as Titans locked in combat, further embody the struggle of life in a world tempered by both beauty and brutality. The narrator feels profoundly unsettled, as if caught in a foreign poem, underscoring the stark and jarring contrasts that define this primordial setting. Through this vision, the prologue sets the stage for a journey—a clash between human aspirations and the untamed wilderness that underscores the narrative's central themes.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The struggle between human ambition and the forces of nature

Critical Interpretation: Imagine standing at the base of a towering mountain, looking up at what seems insurmountable. In this moment, you are reminded of the core lesson from Herzog's narrative—that your greatest ambitions may feel like a massive steamship trying to ascend a steep hill in a dense jungle. Yet, it is this very struggle against overwhelming odds that shapes your character. As you confront challenges, you embrace not only the chaos but also the beauty in the struggle, understanding that every setback and every moment of desperation is part of a deeper journey. This realization can inspire you to chase your goals with relentless tenacity, to harmonize with the raw forces of life, and find meaning amidst the tumult.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Conquest of the Useless

Summary of Chapters

June 16-26, 1979 - San Francisco to Caracas:

In his San Francisco home, the protagonist grapples with the chaos around him, immersing himself in work and revisiting past friendships. The winds howl outside, enhancing his sense of isolation and urgency as he strives to complete his script with only a week left. Family and friends become temporary comforts; he visits Coppola's family, who play music tapes. He receives a telegram about the precarious state of his projects, and encounters struggles with Coppola's health and preparations for filming. Traveling to Los Angeles, he faces bureaucratic obstacles related to contracts and production locations while contemplating the nature of realism versus stylization in film. Following a frustrating series of delays, he arrives in Caracas, where he is met with passport issues and initially feels disoriented in the new environment.

June 21-30, 1979 - Caracas to Iquitos:

As he settles in Caracas, he observes the frenzy of development and encounters cultural idiosyncrasies, including local creative endeavors and

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surreal characters, like the poet Titan, who embodies the spirit of madness intertwined with art. He and others face frustrations upon traveling through chaotic airports and recently canceled flights, grappling with uncertainty about transport and next steps. In Iquitos, he begins to adjust but faces infrastructural challenges and the division within indigenous communities over their ties to outsiders, including himself.

July 1-5, 1979 - Iquitos:

The protagonist's experiences deepen as he navigates through the jungles and rivers, confronting the stark realities of life in the wilderness. He observes the stark beauty of nature while also bearing witness to the human struggle and despair. He encounters hardships at markets and sweltering heat, while the ongoing absence of basic necessities weighs heavily. The stark contrast between the playful innocence of children and the harsh conditions serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities of existence in such a volatile environment. His observations culminate in reflections on the life cycle and suffering of all creatures.

July 6–14, 1979 - Pucallpa to Iquitos:

After an arduous journey through physical and emotional landscapes, he finds himself increasingly isolated and questioning his purpose. Encounters with local people—a blend of indigenous and Spanish influence—highlight

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the rich tapestry of cultures that interact, often uneasily, within the wilderness. Complications arise with logistical concerns regarding camouflaging his endeavors for film production amidst a backdrop of local tensions and external pressures from bureaucratic forces—a constant reminder of how intertwined these worlds are. He finally decides to shoot in Camisea, aiming to maneuver through the political ramifications and relationships while attempting to assert control over an increasingly chaotic situation.

July 15-21, 1979 - Iquitos:

As the aesthetic translations of his life and art collide, connections with both people and nature drive the narrative. In Iquitos, he grapples with bureaucracy and impending relationships with industry leaders while processing personal health concerns that mirror the state of his projects. A struggle between dreams and reality unfolds as familiar surroundings grow more confusing and alienating. Health issues intensify, symbolizing the risks associated with both the physical journey he undertakes and the artistic path he navigates.

July 22 – October 2, 1979 - Final Reflections:

The narrative circles back to ongoing turbulence in both the environment and the protagonist's psyche. His encounters with others in the field reflect a

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broader theme of concern for exploitation, creativity, and survival. As he faces logistical setbacks, these intertwine with family concerns back in America, manifesting an underlying thread of personal responsibility amidst outward chaos. By the journey's conclusion, the protagonist is caught between the aspirations of filmmaking and the inherent unpredictability of life—the continuous blend of beauty and brutality prevalent throughout the Amazon, mirrored back by his internal conflicts.

Overall, this rich tapestry of moments and characters demonstrates his grappling with art, politics, personal journey, and the universal search for meaning amidst chaos.

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Chapter 4: Epilogue

In the epilogue, the narrator reflects on a chaotic filming experience in Iquitos that was fraught with challenges. Just as filming was set to commence, one of the boats, Huallaga, arrived after numerous delays caused by grounding. The narrator's enthusiasm led him to dive into the murky waters, but he narrowly avoided disaster when he grazed a submerged beam.

Amidst these logistical troubles, team dynamics worsened due to the unraveling mental state of a crew member. Initially appearing frazzled and possibly under the influence, the team member's condition deteriorated to a point of temporary insanity. In an effort to help, the narrator took him into his hut, only for it to be set ablaze by the distraught man, who then fled town while brandishing a machete and painting his face in a manner reminiscent of indigenous warriors. After a tumultuous episode involving hostages, the narrator managed to arrange for the troubled crew member's safe return home, an experience that ultimately solidified their friendship.

Two decades later, the narrator revisits the site of his filming in Camisea, tracing memories of his collaboration with actor Klaus Kinski. He encounters two Machiguenga villagers who had once offered to confront Kinski, finding the village largely unchanged except for a well-stocked medical station established by an oil company. The famed region, rich in natural gas, has been legally protected for the indigenous people, yet the

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jungle shows no signs of the narrator's past presence—what was once cleared has reverted to a dense wilderness.

While wandering through the jungles he now recognizes intimately, he senses an underlying tension among the native families, a stark contrast to the camaraderie previously witnessed in the children's play. Now, the families seem to harbor a deep-rooted animosity, indicating a fractured community rife with unresolved grievances. The narrator perceives this hostility mirrored in the jungle itself, a living testament to the wrath and indifference of nature, while the river continues to flow unperturbed by human turmoil. This epilogue serves as a poignant reflection on the passage of time, the complexities of human relationships, and the enduring, untamed spirit of the jungle that envelops them both.

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Chapter 5 Summary: Persons and places

In the chapters discussing the making of a film, we are introduced to a diverse cast of characters and locations that play pivotal roles in the production. The narrative begins with **Mario Adorf**, a seasoned German-Italian actor, who originally portrayed the captain but left the project after the first shooting phase. Another important figure is **Gustavo Cerff Arbulù**, a Peruvian production assistant with prior experience on Werner Herzog's film **Aguirre**.

Key settings are highlighted, such as **Belém**, a Brazilian provincial capital situated at the Amazon's mouth, and **Belén**, a unique floating quarter in Iquitos, demonstrating the varied landscapes producers navigated during filming.

As the production team falls into place, we meet notable collaborators. **Uli Bergfelder**, an expert in Provençal poetry, contributes as a set decorator alongside **Les Blank**, an American director known for his documentaries and for creating **Burden of Dreams**, which chronicles the challenges faced during the creation of **Fitzcarraldo**. Fashion and costume designer **Franz Blumauer** also joins, lending his expertise to the film's rich aesthetic.

The film's narrative is further enriched by the involvement of actors like **Cla**

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udia Cardinale, who plays a key role, and **Miguel Ángel Fuentes**, who portrays Cholo. The story alludes to the deep historical context of the Amazon, focusing on the indigenous community from the **Camisea** village, located at the confluence of the Río Camisea and Río Urubamba.

Klaus Kinski, perhaps the most controversial figure, takes on the lead role of Fitzcarraldo, despite his tumultuous reputation. This character's ambition and passion mirror the film's overarching themes of dreams and obsession. Contrasting him, we have **Jason Robards**, an acclaimed American actor who initially embraced the role of Fitzcarraldo before stepping down due to health issues.

Supporting characters such as **José Lewgoy**, a Brazilian actor who plays the rubber baron Don Aquilino, and **Rui Guerra**, who directed previously noted films in Brazilian cinema, engage with the cultural backdrop of the film. Collaborators like **Tom Luddy**, a political activist and film festival founder, and **Lotte Eisner**, a film historian, provide insights and mentorship significant to the New German Cinema movement.

An intricate network of talents continues with individuals like **Dr. Claude Chiarini**, whose medical expertise is crucial on set, and sound technician **Zézé D'Alice**. The challenges of filming in hostile environments, such as the treacherous **Pongo de Mainique** and **Pongo de Manseriche** rapids, underscore the film's ambitious scope.

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As production unfolds amidst logistical challenges and environmental obstacles, filmmaker **Werner Herzog** is portrayed both as an inspiring visionary and a stubborn artist, seeking truth and beauty in the chaotic elements surrounding him. The people who come together for this project, from set designers like **Henning von Gierke** to the various actors and crew members like **Dagoberto Juarez**, share in this grand endeavor, each bringing their own skills and background to shape the film's iconic narrative.

In sum, these chapters not only outline the various participants in the production of **Fitzcarraldo** but also emphasize the rich cultural and geographic tapestry of the film's environment, ultimately showcasing the ambition and complexity behind Herzog's cinematic vision.

Character/Person	Description/Role
Mario Adorf	Seasoned German-Italian actor; originally played the captain but left after the first shooting phase.
Gustavo Cerff Arbulù	Peruvian production assistant; previously worked on Herzog's <i>*Aguirre*</i> .
Uli Bergfelder	Set decorator; expertise in Provençal poetry.
Les Blank	American director; created <i>*Burden of Dreams*</i> about <i>*Fitzcarraldo*</i> 's making.

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Character/Person	Description/Role
Franz Blumauer	Fashion and costume designer, contributed to the film's aesthetic.
Claudia Cardinale	Portrays a key role in the film.
Miguel Ángel Fuentes	Plays Cholo.
Klaus Kinski	Controversial lead role of Fitzcarraldo, embodying themes of ambition and obsession.
Jason Robards	Initially embraced the role of Fitzcarraldo, stepped down due to health issues.
José Lewgoy	Plays the rubber baron Don Aquilino.
Rui Guerra	Directed notable Brazilian films, adds cultural context.
Tom Luddy	Political activist and film festival founder, provides insights to the New German Cinema movement.
Lotte Eisner	Film historian, offers mentorship.
Dr. Claude Chiarini	Medical expertise on set.
Zézé D'Alice	Sound technician.
Henning von Gierke	Set designer.
Dagoberto Juarez	Crew member contributing to the project.
Locations	Belém and Belén highlight the varied landscapes and logistical challenges faced during filming.
Pongo de Mainique and Pongo de Manseriche	Treacherous rapids that represent environmental obstacles in production.

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Character/Person	Description/Role
Werner Herzog	Filmmaker depicted as visionary and stubborn artist, seeking truth in chaos.

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