

The collection holds together well with common themes making the bond. The human side and the individual take more importance than the technical side and the expedition approach. There are the big questions: "Why do we do it? Is it worth it? Are the risks justified? Where do you draw the line?" There is the question of death and how climbing fits into everyday life.

Dave Roberts considers the why in "Consolation for a Tragedy." His four-man team is on the top of Huntington after weeks of extreme effort. He says of the surroundings and the moment,

"Nothing could last thus suspended, we were bound to die, Ed in only twenty hours; but if time for us had ever stopped to let the savage splendor of the earth declare its timelessness, it was then."

Tilman describes a similar feeling of timelessness, standing on the summit of Nanda Devi in "Gentlemen's Relish."

The issue of "drawing the line" comes up in John Long's "The Only Blasphemy." He finds himself high up on a rock climb, unroped, struggling with a 5.11 move. He survives the incident to write one of the best articles in the book.

Reinhard Karl covers a lot of issues in "Boredom in Big Numbers." To the why question, he says that he is not really sure but something keeps making him keep on doing it. He talks about the misunderstandings between the "illiterate and the mountain hero" in his travels through foreign lands, seeking mountain glory.

Perrin's collection covers a lot of ground. It is great writing and well put together.

ANDREW TUTHILL

Savage Arena. Joe Tasker. St. Martin's Press, New York, 1982. 270 pages, 52 black and white photographs, 8 sketch maps, 6 diagrams. \$18.95.

Climbing, more than most sports, seems to foster the autobiographical urge. At its most difficult, its violent changes of mood offer considerable opportunity for introspection. Possibly, it may be too personal and subjective an experience to really write about effectively. However, when an attempt is made, there is no doubt that it must include a certain amount of soul searching if the tale is not to bog down irksomely in technical jargon.

Joe Tasker died on Mount Everest in 1982, a fact that makes it difficult to think about *Savage Arena* objectively. I was brought up to believe that an autobiography written in the prime of life would, of necessity, be incomplete. But this is not necessarily the case in writing about climbing, where memories of a

septuagenarian may not reliably recall the intensity of the mountaineering experience. Nor can a climber of Tasker's caliber, with his high ambition, count on a long span of "sunset" years in which to reflect. We are lucky to have one book by him, let alone three. (He also wrote *Everest: The Cruel Way* and, with Peter Boardman, *The Shining Mountain*.)

Savage Arena certainly adds something to our view of the cutting edge of modern Himalayan climbing. In it, Tasker describes both the debilitating effects of these climbs and the subsequent epic descents with candor.

The contradictory facets of his personality apparently worked together to produce the successful ascents of which he writes: a strong romanticism coupled with hard-nosed practicality and a love of life alongside a willingness to accept death. Yet, there are anecdotes in this book that make one wonder whether to praise the author for his honesty or to criticize him for his insensitivity. He speaks as candidly of his intolerance of Asian bureaucracies and his tentmates' habits as he does of a hit-and-run incident with a herd of goats. He writes almost as if he knew that by the time this book appeared in print, he would be beyond reproach. Indeed, throughout much of the book, Tasker dwells on what he sees as auguries of his own fate, only to reject them each time, as anyone who continues to climb at that level must, with the argument that the risks are, however, closely calculated. It is astounding to read of the rapidity with which he recovered from near-fatal efforts only to go right back for another attempt. Therein lies much of the fascination of the book and of the man.

Having been to some of the places of which he writes and having met some of the people, I find his descriptions accurate. Yet, at times, their brevity is annoying, particularly in the nonclimbing segments. For instance, there is only one sentence about Skardu, a brief mention of the "rigorous atmosphere of Islam" and almost nothing about Kathmandu. I find it hard to believe that most climbers are as uninterested in these adjuncts of the mountain experience as Tasker seems to be. This same taciturnity leads him to give tantalizingly incomplete glimpses of his own past and psychological makeup. He mentions his seven years in a seminary almost in passing, yet I got the feeling that his reasons for being there, and for leaving, are closely bound to his climbing.

To fault the book for these omissions is not really to fault it at all. This is a fine collection of gripping adventures, good inspirational reading before one's next climb. It flows quickly and easily and the photographs complement the text well.

Yet the more books I read about climbing, the more I wonder why no book on the subject has quite the same relevance to our lives as Hemingway's writing about fishing or Saint-Exupery's about flying. Until such a genius comes along, Joe Tasker's book will suffice. All the essential ingredients are in *Savage Arena*: serious situations, profound emotions, exotic locations and aesthetic sensibility.

RON MATOUS