

The second factor which sets Somers' work off from the bulk of climbing literature is the role of climbing. In fact, three of these stories have nothing to do with climbing at all, and in several of the others climbing is only something that happens in the background. When climbing plays a larger role, the stories remain primarily about the characters—their perceptions, feelings, failings, and interactions with others. Somers' climbers climb the way Smith runs in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* or the way Eddie Felson plays pool in *The Hustler*. Even so, Somers can vividly portray both the way climbing feels and the way climbers feel. Standard climbing literature, on the other hand, even the fiction that has sprouted up in recent years, is more grounded in action and drama with comparatively little suggestion of the complexity of life outside of climbing.

Somers has a considerable range. "Kumari's House" is a story as dark as an Alpine hut. "John Paul II" is hilarious. "Stone Boat" constructs a myth. "The Singer" is a song the singer could have sung. Given this range and Somers' approach to writing, it is not surprising, or even disappointing, that some of the stories are quite a bit better than others. It's like climbing. If a particular route does not offer all one had hoped, the next one probably will. And like climbing, although I do not know exactly what to expect, I look forward to more encounters with Somers' work.

JOE FITSCHEN

*This Game of Ghosts*. Joe Simpson. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1994. 320 pages, black-and-white photographs. \$24.95.

Joe Simpson's second volume of autobiography is just as exciting and impressively written as its predecessor, *Touching the Void*, his amazing account of survival on the Peruvian peak Siulá Grande. Simpson's life has been composed of risk, achievement and calamity—his own, and those of many mountaineering friends. At least five of those pictured in the book's many photographs subsequently died in the mountains, not to mention the two killed in a plane crash near Kathmandu.

"Another accident, another life;" Simpson's tone is weary, laden with doom. His own life has been immersed in violent action, and not only in the mountains. In Wales he crashed a car into a slate wall. He once gashed his head tricycling down a flight of steps. That was a week after he had leapt over a pile of brushwood and tumbled fifteen feet onto sharp stone. He was five years old. Even his social engagements are hazardous: a cocktail party in Sheffield ends in a razor attack and robbery.

It is tempting to regard Simpson as the maker of his own misfortunes. But that's only sometimes true. Many of his mountain disasters could have happened to anyone who ventures repeatedly into the Himalaya and other high ranges. The last one, on the steep Nepalese peak Pachermo, was caused by his partner's fall, in turn due to a badly manufactured crampon. The partner,

however, was barely hurt; Joe resumed his role of smashed-up survivor. Once more, in an eerie repeat of Siulá Grande, he was lowered down a snow slope with a serious injury.

Simpson is less reticent than most climbers about his life outside the mountains. There is a welcome chapter on his Greenpeace activities, and half a dozen mentions of his girlfriend. She even shows up in a photograph, poking her tongue in Simpson's ear at a post-Pachermo celebration. Joe is grinning, beer glass and lighted cigarette in hand. The book has the nervy humor of the survivor. I recommend particularly the vivid account of a ghastly van ride up the Karakoram Highway with a strung-out Pakistani driver. Throughout the book Simpson reproduces human speech with the authority of a good dramatist.

Like *Touching the Void*, this book is written with introspective conviction. Be prepared for the occasional outburst of doom-hung philosophy, with allusions to Sartre, and poetry of Siegfried Sassoon and Christina Rossetti. And be ready to laugh, for Simpson has a saving sense of humor. The dominant mood, however is in the title of the first chapter, "Fear is the Key." I know of no mountaineering writer better than Simpson at conveying this emotion. Look at the photographs of him and his partner after a night hanging from the precarious rope handrail on the Bonatti Pillar, after their bivouac ledge had broken loose, shredding their climbing ropes as it went. "Fear shows in their eyes," the photo caption needlessly reads. *This Game of Ghosts* is testimony to what those eyes have seen.

STEVEN JERVIS

*Camp 4: Recollections of a Yosemite Rock Climber.* Steve Roper. The Mountaineers, Seattle, Washington, 1994. 255 pages, black-and-white photos. \$24.95.

Read this book. It's funny. Touching. Revealing. Named after the famous Yosemite Valley campground, *Camp 4* is a chronicle of rock climbing in Yosemite Valley during the "Golden Era," from 1933 to 1971. The author, Steve Roper, transports us to the era with detailed renderings of climbs, characters and conversations, as well as with perceptive and understated black-and-white photographs. He pulls out the best and worst of the time and place, the noble and farcical, the juvenile and tragic. Then he surprises us by going beyond the chronicle. Roper shakes out essence and grit for any climber with half a heart who was or is young, crazy, limber and passionate, and for whom walls devoid of routes beckon like a goddess.

Using personal recollection, letters, articles and interviews, Roper portrays climbers as a vivid blend of foibles, talent and drive:

- Royal Robbins was aloof with a "measured speech pattern" and "perfect bearing." He surrounded himself with "yes men." And he appeared all the more removed next to the Camp 4 crowd given to "laughing outlandishly,