

hundreds of thousands in funding for the expedition by her looks—"a pantyhose company has kicked in \$80,000 for rights to her legs." The fury that Everest unleashes seems only too well deserved.

For all its strengths, the book has a crucial weakness: its characters lack strong definition. They are less interesting than their actions imply. I found it easier to remember some of the minor players, like the unsympathetic AAC president or the devious Chinese liaison officer, than I did its central ones. Thus the Abe-Daniel nexus, which should dominate the narrative, feels merely peripheral. Unlike Long's first novel, *Angels of Light*, this one is without really strong figures to match—or enhance—the power of its action or the clarity of its physical description. This major defect undercuts many of the book's intentions.

Although *The Ascent* may disappoint admirers of the very promising *Angels of Light*, its achievement remains considerable. Long is a bold writer, ready to address major subjects and expert at describing the harsh environment of the big mountains. As in the earlier novel, he has perhaps more material than the narrative can bear, but in the end, he draws the threads of his story together: Wangdu, Diana, the bond between Daniel and Abe. He fashions a fitting conclusion to his violent and sobering tale.

STEVEN JERVIS

*Flammes de Pierre*. Anne Sauvy. Diadem Books. London/USA, 1992, distribution by Trafalgar Square, North Pomfret, VT, 05053. \$22.95.

The name of this book of sixteen short stories—which literally means Flames of Rock—refers to the ridge of pinnacles which radiate from Les Drus, in Chamonix. The author has climbed around Chamonix for many years and has absorbed the spirit and the quirks of the climbing scene there—at least the French side of it.

The tales in *Flammes de Pierre* revolve around those who frequent the mountains of Chamonix: the climbers, both aces and hacks, guides and their clients, and some phantasmagoric characters too. Twists of fate, ego and ambition, the fantastic and the supernatural, all are her subject matter.

The style of Sauvy's writing is markedly different to the fast-paced, action-oriented journalism about world-class climbing epics we have grown used to in today's climbing magazines. Her tales build slowly, patiently. Just when you think the story isn't really heading anywhere, she delivers a strange or dramatic element that hooks the reader till the end. Sauvy's is a formal and precise style of writing.

Among the most evocative stories in this collection are *The Collector*, in which a solo climber devises an elaborate scheme to achieve greatness, posthumously, and *The Abseil*, a nightmarish tale literally about the eternal rappel. Others stand out as being well-crafted too: In *The Bishorn Ghost* a malevolent spirit who haunts the Alps and delights in causing mayhem to

unsuspecting climbers finds love; and, as in *La Fourche*, what climber has not wondered whether he or she would sign that Faustian pact if Satan offered a career of stunning success on the heights?

Not every tale works well though. Savvy plumbs the realm of silliness with satires like *The Star*, which tells the story of a climbing star manufactured by Hollywood-like image makers, and, in *Intrusion*, we meet a blob from outer space that consumes climbers to absorb their knowledge—predictably the blob doesn't think much of climbing.

But other of her satires are cunning parables that made me read closely, as in *Liberation*, in which the mountains of the Alps are given personalities and a yen for political organization, which ultimately ends up being about as organized as today's Yugoslavia.

The book first appeared in 1982 in France and won climbing-writing awards there and in Germany. Her most recent collection, *La ténèbre et l'azur*, from 1991, also won an award in French climbing-literary circles.

GREG CHILD

*The Grand Controversy*. Orrin and Lorraine Bonney. The AAC Press, New York, 1992. 457 pages. \$28.50.

This book is a pleasant surprise. One might expect 457 pages of elaborately documented research into a minor historical issue to be dull, to say the least; but Lorraine Bonney, finishing (after nearly twenty years) the work begun by her late husband Orrin, manages to pull the story together in eminently readable form.

Admittedly, there are those for whom the question "Who first climbed the Grand Teton?" is not a "minor historical issue"; were it not for such people we might be lacking in entertainment. One such individual was William Owen himself, the main protagonist of this book, whose efforts to establish his own claim to the first ascent are at the heart of *The Grand Controversy*.

I, for one, am impressed and convinced. Endowed with the historical sense of a two-by-four (I have to be reminded by others of routes I had forgotten I had climbed), I have always assumed that many of my ascents on the Grand were on the Owen-Spalding route; now I may have to begin calling it the Langford-Stevenson. Of course, when the Owen-Spalding partisans come out of the woodwork (or the grave, as the case may be) I may have to change my mind again; so it goes with historical debates. Once we have passed beyond the possibility of hard physical evidence, the dialectic of inference, presumption, and *ad hominem* arguments takes over. Only our stubborn insistence that there is such a thing as objective truth keeps these arguments alive.

For the Teton enthusiast, there is more to recommend this book: accounts of much of the rest of the early history of the range and Jackson Hole itself. Sections of historical black-and-white photographs are interspersed with tales of the pioneer climbers, often first-person accounts. Some inaccuracies in the photo captions can be discerned by the discriminating reader, and indeed lead to