money involved, his book reads like a check list or a concatenation of all the things that went wrong on Everest. Ultimately, all this recounting makes Simpson violate Krakauer's most fundamental caveat, a caveat that applies not just to Everest, but all of climbing and beyond:

> But to believe that dissecting the tragic events of 1996 in minute detail will actually reduce the future death rate in any meaningful way is wishful thinking. The urge to catalog the myriad blunders in order to 'learn from the mistakes' is for the most part an exercise in denial and self deception. [To] convince yourself that Rob Hall died because he made a string of stupid errors that you are too clever to repeat... is injudicious. *(Into Thin Air*, p. 274)

But this is how *Dark Shadows Falling* sometimes reads: as a categorization of mostly stylistic mistakes that Simpson hopes might lead us to some higher moral ground. Logically, this just isn't a sustainable or convincing argument (nor is it "judicious").

On another level, however, I can deeply admire what Simpson is trying to do. For what we do learn from the 1996 Everest disaster and other climbing disasters of lore, including Simpson's own, is that the human spirit can be a truly remarkable thing. While some will always choose to "cut and run," and others will choose to simply step over the dying on their way to the summit, still others will choose to stay behind and fight it out to save another despite all odds.

It is this kind of sacrifice and selflessness to which Simpson himself alludes when pushing a bold new route on Pumori. Within striking distance of the summit, and with most of the technical difficulties behind, Simpson chooses to turn back when he detects signs of illness in his partner. As for putting his partner at risk by trying to coerce him on farther, or perhaps bolting for the summit with lame promises to return, Simpson simply states that as far as his friend's life was concerned, "there was no way I was going to take the risk." Granted, Simpson is hardly the most sentimental writer, but his disappointment is palpable. Selflessness and sacrifice have always been fundamental to heroism.

Simpson has made explicit what often is implicit: that moral dilemmas have always been intertwined with the great dramas of alpinism. And this is the claim that they all make upon us: after the "string of stupid errors" have been made, then what do we do? Cut the rope as Simpson's own partner did on Siula Grande? Give up your own life trying to save your client's life, as Rob Hall did on Everest? Try and stop Maurice Herzog from going insane, or follow him up to the top of Annapurna, the first 8000-meter peak ever to be climbed, only to be horribly frostbitten? It may be 'injudicious' to think that we are too clever to repeat those "stupid mistakes," but when misfortune occurs, what happens next? Do we declare morality to be an unaffordable luxury at some predetermined altitude?

While I may disagree with some of *Dark Shadows Falling*, and I am definitely not a fan of Simpson's digression upon digression whatever-comes-to-mind writing style ("solipsistic exegesis," John Thackray called it in last year's *AAJ*), I nevertheless am always thankful when someone tries to make a thoughtful examination of this sometimes sublime and sometimes stupid sport that we pursue.

DAVID HALE

A Deathful Ridge: A Novel of Everest. J.A. Wainwright. Mosaic Press: Ontario, Canada and Buffalo, New York, 1997. Hardback. 138 pages. $24.95

If you are the least bit intrigued by the 1924 disappearance of George Leigh Mallory and Andrew "Sandy" Irvine on the upper reaches of Everest's Northeast Ridge, you will savor every word and be utterly astonished by this superbly researched, brilliant first novel by Canadian poet and author J.A. Wainwright. This book (a novel of fiction, lest you forget) is impressively detailed in its outrageous yet believable story line that is intimately and passionately told. You may never again think of mountaineering's most famous unsolved mystery quite the same. Did Odell really see Mallory and Irvine going "strong for the top" above the Second Step on June 8, 1924? And how did the famous ice axe (identified as Irvine's by its three short parallel nicks carved into the wooden shaft; I've seen it) come to rest near the First Step? And most entrancing of all: did Mallory actually reach the summit? The novel's only-at-first incredulous premise demands that I don't tell you more. Secrecy is absolute, "till death do we part," and a gentlemen's honourable pact. In this year of Everest and the Titanic, even the great ship gets a couple of pages! (Quite logically, I might add.) Read this book and delight in reconsidering the myriad riddles of the intertwined mythology of George Mallory and Mt. Everest. This profound investigation of the mountaineering psyche, of the climber's life, blinding ambition, and high-altitude death—succinctly rationalized by Mallory's infamous quote "because it's there"—will leave you reeling.

ED WEBSTER

In the Zone: Epic Survival Stories From the Mountaineering World. Peter Potterfield. The Mountaineers: Seattle, 1996. Photographs. 270 pages. $22.95.

Two of the three tales from *In the Zone* are of a most compelling kind—the sagas of those victims of catastrophic events in the mountains who, against great odds, live to tell their stories. What makes this kind of story especially rare is the balance of circumstances that allow it even to exist and yet not be common. These are solitary ordeals where if the protagonist were more hurt or in a more remote setting there would be no one to tell the tale. Conversely, if they were less hurt in a less exotic situation, their story may not be so interesting.

Author Peter Potterfield relates these two tales along with a third story that falls into a different and more familiar category of mountaineering story: epic endurance, survival, and heroism in a hostile environment, but ultimately under more voluntary circumstances. The fact that one of the three stories is Potterfield's own helps to overcome the loss of visceral punch that might be expected when someone tells someone else's story. There is a certain credibility that comes through in Potterfield's words at times—particularly when he's describing pain—that would be very difficult to conjure straight out of imagination.

The first story takes place in June of 1992, when Colby Coombs, Ritt Kellogg, and Tom Walter begin climbing up a hard route on Mt. Foraker. Nine days later, Colby Coombs returns alone. His is a moving story with haunting images that are hard to shake. I finished this story with a great respect for Coombs. His survival is a testament to a combination of fine mountain skills and a self-knowledge that allowed him to escape a situation that might well have killed the rest of us.

The second epic, Potterfield's own, takes place on remote Chimney Rock in the North Cascades. What should have been a short roped fall becomes a 150-foot body-shattering tumble leaving Potterfield marooned on a small ledge with terrible injuries. His partner (luckily a marathon runner) goes for help as Potterfield does what he can to keep the life force from