



AAC Publications

---

## **Too Close to God: Selected Mountain Tales**

By Jeff Long

**Too Close to God: Selected Mountain Tales. Jeff Long. Imaginary Mountain Surveyors (Canada), 2015. 290 pages. Paperback, \$19.95.**

For four decades Jeff Long has been on lead, moving climbing fiction from stock genres to serious and deep explorations into the human condition. This collection is a lens through which readers can view the growing maturity of climbing literature; the stories and excerpts arc from Long's seminal "The Soloist's Diary" (1974) to an excerpt, "When God Throws Angels Down," from his novel *The Wall* (2006).

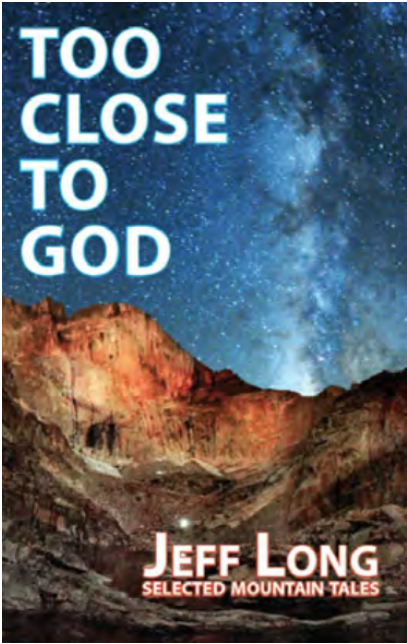
Beyond the scope of history that this collection encompasses is the impressive diversity of the stories. "The Virgins of Imst" is a realist's vision of the closed world of a remote valley in the Alps and of the intrusion of outsiders, while the excerpt from Long's novel *The Descent* hearkens to the madness found in *Heart of Darkness*. My favorite here is "In Gentle Combat with the Cold Wind," an honest recount of a climber picking up an old man hitchhiking on a wintry Halloween night. I love how this story hints at hauntings within the soul of alpine climbing.

These stories are firmly forged by Long's hands—hands that know cracks and cold. Descriptions of moves in high, remote places resonate exceptionally true. In this collection death also figures large. Without question death factors in climbing, in adventure, in life. It must. However, I must add a suggestion: Don't plow through Long's work in a mad dash. Jam these stories together and you will muddy their singular luminosities and finish feeling dark, missing the light the stories shine. The final excerpt, taken from *Angels of Light*, is particularly satisfying in the hope of its final lines.

Jeff Long writes in his introduction that he hopes his stories will serve as ink for future writers of mountain fiction. This echoes of Walt Whitman in "Poets to Come": "But you, a new brood, native, athletic...greater than before known, Arouse! Arouse, for you must justify me, you must answer." As Whitman shaped modern American poetry, so does Long shape modern climbing fiction. He calls to be read. And he calls for new young writers to explore, to go to the regions his stories and novels have mapped.

– Mark Rodell

Images



## Article Details

Author	Mark Rodell
Publication	AAJ
Volume	58
Issue	90
Page	375
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Book reviews