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## Mountain books

## Try this one

**Mountains of the Mind: How Desolate and Forbidding Heights Were Transformed into Experiences of Indomitable Spirit.** By Robert Macfarlane. *Pantheon Books*; 320 pages; \$24. *Granta*; £20

OF ALL the books published to mark the 50th anniversary of climbing Mount Everest, Robert Macfarlane's "Mountains of the Mind" stands out as by far one of the most intelligent and interesting.

As a climber, he well understands how "the mountains one gazes at, reads about, dreams of and desires are not the mountains one climbs." As a scholar, he teases out how perceptions of mountains have changed over the past three centuries, and he seasons his text with personal memories of peaks scaled and chilblains earned.

Mr Macfarlane argues that we owe these changes in cultural attitude to the protagonists of the Sublime—Burke, Addison and Rousseau—to the leading Romantic poets and to such artists as Turner, Friedrich and Ruskin. In the 19th century, mountain exploration came to be regarded as something greater than simply the preserve of a Victorian bourgeoisie who could catch the new trains to the Alps, or gritty public-school boys being groomed for empire. Mr Macfarlane delves skilfully into the cultural implications of palaeontology, geology, Darwinian evolutionary theory and the discovery of the earth's tectonic plates in a style that shows he can be as poetic as he is plucky.

ation, and climbed swiftly to the top of the bestseller lists on both sides of the Atlantic. There are over 3.6m copies in print.

Mountains provide an antidote to modern life and its dreary preoccupation with maximising comfort and minimising risk. They offer particular qualities—remoteness, wildness, separation from the humdrum—which are denied by the increasingly cosseted and climate-controlled nature of western urban living. A growing number of people long for environments that do not respond to the flick of a switch or the twist of a dial. More than this, mountains seem increasingly to provide a much-needed spiritual resource. Even when flattened into book-form, they offer a viewpoint from which people can not only look across extraordinary and mysterious landscapes, but also down into themselves. ■

## Islamic terrorism

## Who killed Daniel Pearl?

A French bestseller puts forward an intriguing new theory

DANIEL PEARL was a *Wall Street Journal* reporter who was kidnapped in the Pakistani city of Karachi in January last year. Pearl's captors filmed themselves cutting his throat and then severing his head from his body. "I am American," he said on camera. "I am Jewish. My family on my father's side is Zionist."

In the distorted vision of Islamic terrorism, Pearl was a spy for the CIA or for Israel's Mossad, a man to be held hostage in exchange for the release of a senior Taliban official and Pakistani militants captured in America's war in Afghanistan. After a three-month trial that ended last July, a Pakistani court found four Muslim extremists guilty of the kidnapping and murder. Their ring-leader, the British-born Omar Sheikh, was sentenced to be hung; the other three to 25 years' imprisonment.

European interest in this gruesome episode might have been expected to dwindle had it not been for Bernard-Henri Lévy, a French writer and philosopher and President Chirac's former special envoy to Afghanistan. As France's most recognisable tele-intellectual, Mr Lévy has a wide following. The very week it was published, "Qui a Tué Daniel Pearl?" jumped to the top of the French bestseller list; it has remained there ever since.

Mr Lévy, composing what he freely admits is a mix of a novelist's imagination and an investigator's evidence, offers an intriguing explanation for why Pearl might really have been killed. The journalist had been trying to make contact with Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, the "guru" of Richard Reid, the hapless Muslim convert who tried to use explosives in his shoe to blow up an aircraft on its way from Paris to Miami. Mr Lévy believes that Pearl was close to uncovering collusion between extremist Islamic groups and officials of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, known commonly as ISI. Omar Sheikh was not a zealot acting outside the law but an ISI agent, Mr Lévy believes: the agency was helping supply Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda with weapons of mass destruction and providing Pakistani nuclear secrets to both Iran and North Korea.

If true, this has terrifying implications. Pakistan, supposedly President Bush's brave ally in fighting terrorism, Mr Lévy says, is playing "a double, even triple game" and could even have helped plot the September 11th attacks. What a mistake to be obsessed with Iraq, he argues,

**Qui a Tué Daniel Pearl?** By Bernard-Henri Lévy. *Grasset*; 536 pages; €20

when the real rogue is a fanatical and nuclear-armed Pakistan.

Mr Lévy can prove very little of this, but it would be foolish to dismiss his theories as mere fantasy. It is beyond doubt that the ISI under its former head, Hamid Gul, aided the Taliban and had dubious links with extremist Islam. And it is beyond doubt too that Mr Lévy has been thorough. He has probed the background of Omar Sheikh, the "perfect Englishman" who abruptly dropped out of the London School of Economics. Mr Lévy's travels, sometimes on a French diplomatic passport, took him to Dubai, Afghanistan, Britain, Bosnia and even—to meet Pearl's parents—to Los Angeles. In Pakistan, he retraced Pearl's steps, stayed in the same hotels and sought out the same contacts, which took some courage since Mr Lévy, despite being a declared atheist, was, like Pearl, born Jewish.

His writing has a keen sense of detail and atmosphere, which makes his book a gripping read. But it is also a sobering challenge to the Islam of tolerance and moderation: Muslims must defeat the "madmen of God, or rather the Devil" who "call for jihad and, explosives strapped to their bellies, aspire to die as martyrs." As Mr Lévy points out, that battle will be *la grande affaire* of the 21st century. ■



A taste for risk