



## The Ice Master: The Doomed 1913 Voyage of the Karluk

*By Jennifer Niven*

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The Karluk set out in 1913 in search of an undiscovered continent, with the largest scientific staff ever sent into the Arctic. Soon after, winter had begun, they were blown off course by polar storms, the ship became imprisoned in ice, and the expedition was abandoned by its leader. Hundreds of miles from civilization, the castaways had no choice but to find solid ground as they struggled against starvation, snow blindness, disease, exposure--and each other. After almost twelve months battling the elements, twelve survivors were rescued, thanks to the heroic efforts of their captain, Bartlett, the Ice Master, who traveled by foot across the ice and through Siberia to find help.

Drawing on the diaries of those who were rescued and those who perished, Jennifer Niven re-creates with astonishing accuracy the ill-fated journey and the crews desperate attempts to find a way home.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Eighty-five years after a famous but ill-equipped Canadian Arctic expedition of 1913 had sacrificed 16 lives, some artifacts appeared on an Internet auction site. They had originated at a "ghost camp," discovered in 1924, where four of the expedition's 28 men, one woman, and two children had perished. Jennifer Niven has completed the unfulfilled mission of survivor William McKinlay to produce a "more honest and revealing account" of the wreck of the *Karluk* and its aftermath.

The explorers became split into several dispersed groups living "in the shadow of death." Their simultaneously grim and gruesome experiences are interwoven in this minutely detailed and atmospheric retelling, created by combining and comparing firsthand accounts and other sources. The characters are vividly re-created, from the expedition's self-interested leader, whom McKinlay called "a consummate liar and cheat," to the heroic ship's master, who struggled over 700 miles to organize a rescue. Supplemented by haunting and fascinating photographs, *The Ice Master* makes for harrowing and compulsive reading. This is a momentous story of the Arctic; of adventure, misadventure, and the heights of human endurance. But it is also a story of human failings and the waste of young lives, as poignant now as it was when it was big news in 1914. --Karen Tiley, *Amazon.co.uk*

#### From Publishers Weekly

The 1913 Canadian Arctic Expedition was perhaps the worst-planned arctic exploration in history. The captain declared the ship unfit for the voyage upon seeing it, and the crew consisted of young sailors who had no arctic experience, and scientists who would be better off teaching in a classroom than searching for an undiscovered arctic continent. Niven's first book, unlike the voyage, is well-researched and it's thorough. Screenwriter Niven captivates with her reconstruction of the doomed crew's efforts to survive the harshness of the polar winter, disease, hunger and their own clashing personalities. She expertly captures the feelings of the crew about their situation and about each other, and meticulously recounts the daily activities of the 25 crew members (11 survived), during their long stay as castaways on a small arctic island. The story does read slowly at points, especially near the beginning of the book. The pace picks up as the book progresses, with the most exciting part being the heroic account of the captain's 700-mile trek from the crew's camp to Siberia in search of a ship that he could use to rescue his men.

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#### From [Booklist](#)

*/\*Starred Review\*/*In 1913, famed scientist Vilhjalmur Stefansson organized a mission to the Arctic to discover uncharted land. In an attempt to save money, he purchased a less than adequate ship, the *Karluk*, and skimmed on supplies. After only a month, the ship becomes trapped in a giant ice floe, and Stefansson abandons most of the crew and scientists, leaving them to fend for themselves. Led astray by the ice flow and brutal winds, the 25 remaining people are eventually forced to abandon the ship after it is crushed by ice and begins sinking. From this point, their real troubles begin. They camp on the ice but, with spring approaching, are forced to hike along the shifting ice floes to the barely habitable Wrangel Island. Once there, the captain and one Inuit man begin a trek to Siberia in hopes of finding a ship to rescue the stranded men. Meanwhile, the survivors on Wrangel Island face harsh weather, illness, and dissent among their ranks. Drawn from the diaries and firsthand accounts of the scientists and crew, Niven has skillfully written her narrative with a genuine sense of immediacy. Her straightforward prose, along with the excerpts from the men's diaries, reveals the men's characters, both good and bad. The survivors cover the entire spectrum of human nature,

from noble self-sacrifice to bitter selfishness. While some men resorted to stealing and lying, others went so far as to risk their lives for the survival of the group. Niven's narration transcends the adventure genre and can ultimately be looked at as a study of how the human character is revealed under extreme duress. An amazingly powerful book. *Kristine Huntley*

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