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The Winter Over



Synopsis

Each winter the crew at the Shackleton South Pole Research Facility faces nine months of isolation, round-the-clock darkness, and one of the most extreme climates on the planet. For thirty-something mechanical engineer Cass Jennings, Antarctica offers an opportunity to finally escape the guilt of her troubled past and to rebuild her life. But the death of a colleague triggers a series of mysterious incidents that push Cass and the rest of the forty-four-person crew to the limits of their sanity and endurance. Confined and cut off from the outside world, will they work together or turn against one another? As the tension escalates, Cass must find the strength to survive not only a punishing landscape but also an unrelenting menace determined to destroy the station - and everyone in it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Author Matthew Iden started out well, framing a thriller with a compelling story and backdrop that kept me enthusiastically reading until about 80% into the story. At that point, the foundation began to crack and, if not for the power of the author's prose, might have caused the story to tumble to the ground. Here's why, without spoilers: THE WRITING -- "The Winter Over" is carried by exceptional descriptions and dialogue. Mr. Iden demonstrates his skills from the first page to the last, weaving images that paint complete pictures of the action. The reader is introduced to all the major and minor characters, presenting enough information that one never becomes confused. This aspect of the book is five-star quality. THE PLOT -- "Without being pushed, the reader is slowly pulled into the story until immersed in the mystifying details and unable to stop turning the pages. With less

than a quarter of the book left, the plot took on a different life, and it felt at times that events were twisted to make sense of the story. The first time I kept my disbelief in check, but then something else happened followed by other incredulous incidents. After a while, I felt like the Dutch boy trying to plug leaks in the dike. Eventually, I ran out of fingers. Some of the problems (without exposing major parts of the story): causing weapons to suddenly appear, enabling the heroine to miraculously have just the tool she needs close at hand, and a scene where the moon is full but it is pitch black outside and nothing can be seen (including a nearby fire). Add to that the calculating Observer (the villain) being revealed at the end through a careless slip and story immersion continues to fracture.

THE CHARACTERS – One cannot help but like the heroine Cass. While she does carry some baggage with her, it doesn't overwhelm her personality. Readers will find it hard not to step into her shoes and experience the action through her eyes. Other characters are fleshed out enough to give the story credibility.

IN CASE YOU WANTED TO KNOW – I don't charge stars for language, but do let potential readers know there are vulgarities and f-bombs in this book. The author makes judicious use of these rather than littering them unnecessarily throughout the book. While there are some instances of sexual innuendos, they are on the level of what one would see and hear on a weeknight sitcom. Sex scenes are not described in the story.

THE INTANGIBLES – Thrillers similar to "The Winter Over" have been written many times. Take a bunch of people, add some danger, plant them where there is no easy way out, and let the mayhem happen. However, Mr. Iden's descriptions and character interactions make this a page-turner. Yes, there are some plot devices in the final chapters which caused concern. However, while these led to a lower rating, the book is so well crafted that I still recommend it.

BOTTOM LINE – A good read, one that will hold your attention. Rating it three-and-a half stars.

It's difficult to explain why I picked this Kindle First book. I've never been sufficiently interested in the Antarctic to read anything about it and I'm not normally much of a thriller fan. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find myself engrossed in the details of how survival (of a sort) is made possible for the scientists and support staff who live there to perform research that cannot be accomplished anywhere else on earth. Some of the information astonished me. I had no idea that the research station there is 10,000 feet above sea level. As if the cold isn't bad enough, there's also the danger of high-altitude sickness. So which one killed scientist Sheryl Larkin? Or was she murdered? The forty+ people who are left at the station for the long winter season have several things in common. All are intelligent and competitive. Serving in the Antarctic is a resume

power-booster and there are far more applicants than positions. Even those in low-level support positions are well-educated or multi-talented or both. Most are geeks and many of the others have military backgrounds. It's not a laid-back atmosphere. Cass is a young engineer whose career was derailed by an industrial accident. She came to the research station to try to get herself back on track. Keeping the station's machinery working is a vital job. The workers joke uneasily that the Antarctic wants them dead, but the extreme cold is death on equipment, too. And that equipment is all that makes survival possible. I don't want to give away the plot so I'll say only that a corporation has taken over the management of the station and installed their own people to run it. Of course, they promise that the scientists will be given every assistance in their work, but they didn't promise not to conduct their own experiments and one of those experiments is a carefully-guarded secret. This book is very well-written and I was fascinated by the look into a strange way of life. There are some stories in which the location is the most important "character" and I think this is one of them. The harsh, constant danger of the Antarctic dominates every moment, as it does in real life. It's more difficult for me to assess it as a thriller. I was surprised to find so much foreshadowing, a literary technique that I think of as out-dated (a la Mary Roberts Rinehart.) It seems to me that the reader is capable of putting the pieces together more easily than the author gives us credit for. Cass is an appealing character, as is her boisterous friend Biddie and the station doctor. One of the characters seems absurd and over-drawn to me, but I was impressed with the author's handling of several others. In particular, station manager Jack Hanratty starts out as a shadowy, antagonistic man and it's not until near the end of the story that we learn where he fits into the plot. The station "morale officer" (i.e. resident shrink) is also a likable sort who seems to change sides several times. But the plot revolves around the Joker in the deck - the unknown Mr. X whom Hanratty dubs "The Observer." As disasters pile up, the demoralized staff and crew must try to figure out if they can trust anyone at all. I loved this book until about the 75% mark. After that, it became too intense and violent to suit me. However, I'm glad I read it. Even if the author took some liberties (as he admits he did) I think it captures the flavor of this unique undertaking and the rare people who challenge themselves there.

This was my kindle first pick for January, it was a no-brainer for me- I love the Marty Singer series by this author. This book was a big disappointment, I struggled to finish it. It started out great, I liked the main character, Cass, and her interactions with the rest of the crew. No spoilers here, as the story progressed, the main premise seemed very improbable. By the time I finished the book, I really didn't care who had caused all the mayhem, I just wanted it to end.

To stay the entire winter at the Shackleton Polar Research Center you must undergo a panoply of psychological tests. In this book, instead of weeding out the people prone to hysteria and fear, those are the preferred candidates. To study how people react in critically stressful environments. And this study is being run by a corporation. I thought that was a little over the top. The book was fairly well written, though a few characters could have been left out. And the identity of the person pulling the strings was kind of obvious, I thought. Results: good read, but nothing spectacular.

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