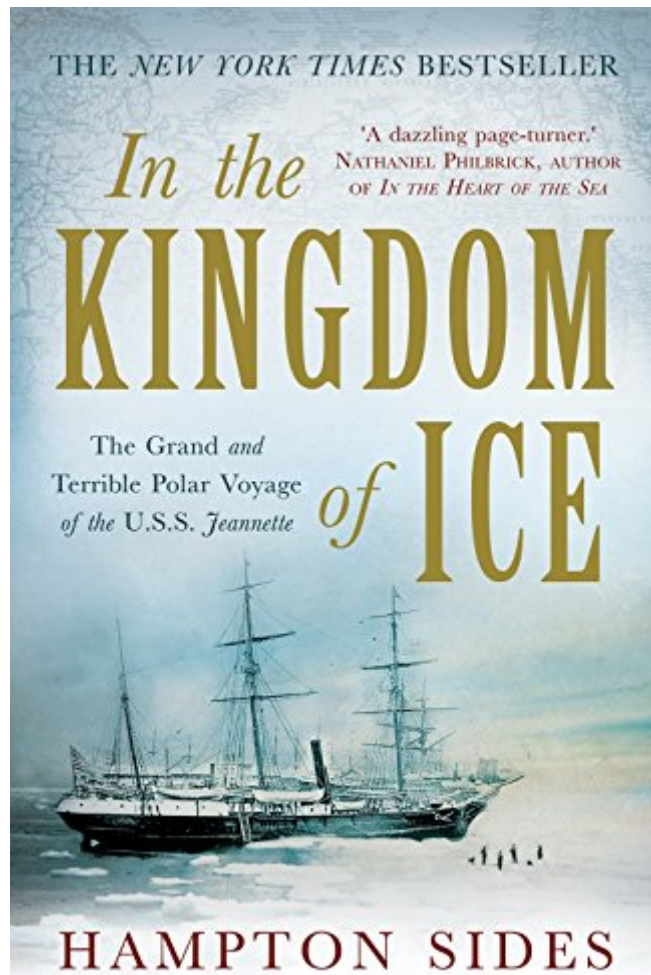




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In The Kingdom Of Ice



Synopsis

In 1879 the USS Jeanette set sail from San Francisco to cheering crowds and a frenzy of publicity. The ship and its crew, captained by the heroic George De Long, were heading for glory and the last unmapped area of the globe: the North Pole. But it was not long before the Jeanette was trapped in crushing pack ice. Amid the rush of water and the shrieks of breaking wooden boards, the crew found themselves marooned a thousand miles north of Siberia with only the barest supplies, facing a seemingly impossible trek across the endless ice. Battling everything from snow blindness and polar bears to ferocious storms and frosty labyrinths, the expedition battled madness and starvation as they desperately strove for survival. With twists and turns worthy of a thriller, *In the Kingdom of Ice* is a spellbinding tale of heroism and determination in the most unforgiving territory on Earth.

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Customer Reviews

You can read the synopsis up top, so I won't bore you with that. I will, however, recommend that you read this. If you are here, I will assume you have an interest in either the author's work or, more likely, the history of polar exploration. I have not previously read any of Side's other books, but with

a fairly strong interest in the history of the exploration of the poles, I can heartily recommend this. This is first-rate narrative history, well-written and paced to create a gripping account. "Novelistic" can be used as an insult to history writing, but I use it here as a compliment. This is a page-turner. Unfortunately, having read this in galleys, there is no index, nor are photos provided, but the end notes are thorough and this seems to be very well researched. The letters written by Lt. DeLong's wife during the time he and the ship and crew were out of contact are hear-warming and -rending and provide an excellent counter-point and commentary on the main narrative, and the author's access to the surviving journals and letters of the other crew members allow him to paint full-bodied portraits of the men on the ice. You come very quickly to care about these men and their fates. The story of the Jeannette is, like many explorations before and after it, one of extreme heroism, a good deal of heartbreak, and high adventure for those of us in armchairs. This is a fine addition to the literature.

I could not put this book down. This is a detailed historical account of a tragic polar expedition that reads like a psychological thriller novel. Adding to the novelistic flavor are poignant quotes from the journals and letters of the expedition's men and stories about their loved ones waiting for their return. When George Washington De Long, a young naval officer, left the San Francisco harbor on July 8, 1879, commanding the ship "Jeanette," he was already a national hero. Earnest and methodical, he was leading a handpicked, competent, disciplined crew, bound for the North Pole. De Long and many other explorers and scientists in that era believed that the Arctic ice pack formed only an outer ring, and beyond it was an "Open Polar Sea." This "Open Polar Sea" was thought to be a large, warm water basin, that a ship might sail through right to the North Pole, possibly finding land and inhabitants at the North Pole. De Long's expedition was in search of a pathway through this ice to the "Open Polar Sea." De Long did not know, as he set sail, that data from a U.S. Bering Sea survey disproving the "Open Polar Sea" theory would reach Washington, DC after he sailed. Even after he began to suspect that the theory might be wrong, he continued pursuing his goal of reaching the North Pole and making additional discoveries in the Arctic. This was not a totally unreasonable idea -- the ship was heavily reinforced to resist the ice packs, and carried huge amounts of coal to keep the crew warm, plentiful food, dogs for hauling and an excellent navigator, an innovative engineer and a brilliant doctor. But as the book shows, the Arctic is treacherous, and just a few pieces of bad luck and some missing or erroneous information can destroy the bravest, strongest and best-trained men. The book also provides an overview of Gilded Age American and European society in this era, and how Victorian concepts of exploration, manhood, and science

affected the expedition's planning and outcome. Especially striking are the portraits -- almost mini-novellas -- of the two primary intellectual sponsors of the voyage and their impact on its goals and design -- the expedition's financially generous, but dangerously eccentric and unrealistic financial sponsor, James Gordon Bennett, Jr., the autocratic owner of the New York Herald Tribune, and Professor Augustus Petermann, a brilliant German cartographer, suffering from severe bipolar disorder (untreatable in his day) and an unwillingness to consider alternative polar geography theories. A third sponsor -- the U.S. Navy -- truly did its best for the expedition, fitting out the ship in the California Mare Island naval shipyard with the expert advice of naval engineers. The book is a classic illustration of the fact that even careful planning by experts cannot foresee all possible outcomes and cannot save projects based on erroneous theories.

Hampton Sides is an American historian and journalist. He recounts the astonishing trials of a group of 33 dedicated seamen determined to be the first men to reach the North Pole. The story is fraught with the perils of nature and how it diminished even the heartiest explorer's determination to survive. The time was circa 1880; when the genius of Thomas Edison and Alexander Bell was still evolving, and when James Gordon Bennett Jr. was the owner, publisher and editor of the "New York Herald"; he was also the benefactor of the voyage of the USS Jeannette even though the vessel was inducted into the US Navy. The story is distilled from the private writings and journal of the Commander, George De Long, various crew members including Melville the engineer and Ambler the ship's medical officer. It is a captivating historical account that reveals the sorrow of separation of loved ones, the severe conditions under which the crew's survival pivoted and the tragic end to the Jeannette and its commander, De Long, as well as a number of other crew members. Although the expedition was a failure in its quest, reaching the North Pole, it did provide scientific data that was preserved and returned with the survivors of the mission. If nothing less, the data dispelled the theory of the open polar sea as supported by Heinrich Petermann widely regarded as the world's leading theoretical cartographer of the time and whose maps commander De Long depended on. While steeped in historical detail, Hampton Sides makes the recitation of the facts incredibly readable and the resulting story a "cannot put down" read. I highly recommend that you add this book to your reading list; you shouldn't be disappointed.

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