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Simmons, Dan. The Terror

Simmons? lengthy novel tells the hypothetical story of the lost Franklin Expedition to the Arctic in search of the Northwest Passage in the late 1840s. The story is told on a rotating basis through the eyes of several of the expedition members, including the leader, Sir John Franklin; Franklin?s second in command, Captain Francis Crozier; naïve young surgeon Dr. Harry D.S. Goodsir; Lieutenant Irving; and several others. Little is known about the actual fate of the Franklin Expedition, but Simmons? account is, for the most part, true to what little has been discovered. In Simmons? version of events, Sir John Franklin is an aging buffoon whose pride does not allow him to make decisions in the best interest of the survival of the crews of H.M.S. Terror and H.M.S. Erebus, but instead lead to the ships being trapped in the sea ice for years, waiting in vain for a thaw as their supplies slowly run out. The men?s slow death by starvation, scurvy, lead poisoning and botulism from ill-soldered tinned foods, near-mutiny, outright murder, and injury from frostbite and hypothermia are bad enough (and described in lavish detail), but Simmons has injected an extra horror?a huge white beast is stalking the ice-ridden ships, killing and eating men. Is it a white polar bear? Or is it something much, much worse?

?The Terror? is a book which demands patience. At times as glacial in pace as the ice in which the ships are trapped, it nevertheless builds inevitably toward the horror of the expedition?s nightmarish fate. Worth the ride for the historical detail alone, the fantasy/horror addition of the strange white beast on the ice and a final few chapters delving deeply into Inuit legend and mysticism will not be for everyone. Enjoyable.

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