

southernmost Interflora agent. Her writing is lucid and has a flare for expressing detail succinctly yet accurately. The book is illustrated with her personal black-and-white photographs. For those familiar with South Georgia, *Antarctic housewife* is a nostalgic read, while for those who don't even know where it is, this story should enthrall. The book has been reprinted to commemorate Nan Brown's recent, tragic death; she has been interred at Grytviken. (Ron Lewis Smith, British Antarctic Survey, High Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ET.)

BRIEF REVIEWS

SVALBARD: PORTRAIT OF AN ARCTIC SUMMER. James and Sue Fenton. 1997. Abernethy, Scotland: Footprints of Abernethy and Inverasdale. 56 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-9530069-0-5. £12.00.

This neat little paperback gives the impressions one visitor had of Svalbard one summer. It tells the story of how he and some friends travelled around the archipelago, partly by ship and partly on skis. It is divided into two parts: text for the first 24 pages, and fabulous colour photographs for the rest.

The text is an odd combination of information, personal experiences, and some very poetic descriptions. The whole point of the book is, according to the authors, not to write a guide book, but to provide information about the Arctic on three levels: visual impressions via the photographs, factual information in the captions, and personal experiences in the text. This does not work as well as it might, giving the reader the feeling that the photographs have less to do with the text than they might, and that the two parts of the book are completely separate from each other.

The authors note in the introduction that there are no place names mentioned in the book, and that readers will have to discover for themselves precisely where a photograph was taken or to which part of Svalbard the text refers. This is a little irritating, and means that the captions — which the authors state are one of their prime ways of providing information — are not as complete as they should be. However, many of the photographs are stunning, and range from spectacular scenic shots to close-ups of wildlife, and the book is nicely produced on good-quality paper.

ANTARCTICA. Kim Stanley Robinson. 1997. London: Harper Collins Publishers. 414 p, hard cover. ISBN 0-00-225359-3. £16.99.

Kim Stanley Robinson is best known for his science fiction (the best-selling Mars Trilogy), and this is his first foray into a fiction genre that is proving increasingly popular:

ecothrillers. The plot, basically, is that a small band of 'ecosaboteurs' invades the Antarctic and makes strategic strikes at various scientific and industrial installations there. The book is set sometime in the twenty-first century, mineral exploitation is well underway, and the Antarctic Treaty has virtually collapsed. The main characters are a senator's aide, a 6 ft 4 in female mountaineer, and a general field assistant-cum-sociologist called X.

What promises to be an entertaining novel, however, ends up a rather rambling account of various scraps of information about the Antarctic that the author seems to have come across during his research. These are strung together haphazardly, making the plot difficult to follow, and leaving the reader wondering where the book is going. For example, nothing of much import happens before page 225, at which point the ecosaboteurs make their first attack. Before this are lengthy accounts of various historical expeditions, mainly those of Robert Falcon Scott, Ernest Shackleton, and, on Scott's last expedition, the winter trip immortalized by Apsley Cherry-Garrard as the 'worst journey in the world.' It is apparent from the start that much of this information comes from Roland Huntford's *Scott and Amundsen* (1980), and Scott is portrayed throughout as a power-hungry incompetent who should never have been allowed to set foot in the Antarctic. While Robinson is entitled to his point of view, his constant harping about Scott becomes a little wearing.

Robinson has clearly done extensive research — and it is apparent from his descriptions (as well as the bio on the fly-cover) that he visited the Antarctic personally. His accounts of life at McMurdo are convincing, and he has been to some trouble to try to understand the main environmental issues involving the Antarctic. However, it is a shame he felt obliged to include the whole lot in the book, to the point where there is so much information that it seriously interferes with the plot. And there are minor mistakes — such as Halley being designated a US base in the map at the beginning, a reference to 'Roger' Swann (page 18), and the Scientific Committee 'for' Antarctic Research.

In short, *Antarctica* is probably a perfectly good read for those who know little about Antarctic exploration in the early twentieth century and would like to learn more, but it is rather too heavy going to be classed as a thriller. However, the Antarctic needs all the positive publicity it can get these days, and if Kim Stanley Robinson's novel alerts the public to the perilous state of the Earth's last unexploited wilderness, then it cannot be a bad thing.

Reference

Huntford, R. 1980. *Scott and Amundsen*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.