

issues in complex interactions. He also notes that humans entertain competing views of the Arctic environment, tending to see it in pure mental images as either pristine or polluted, robust or fragile. The author suggests that Arctic realities lie somewhere between these simplified, half-truth pictures of nature.

The second major section of the book describes the evolving state of international policy for protecting the Arctic environment. Samson discusses the Rovaniemi Initiative and the 1991 Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). He also summarizes four major programs developed to implement its policy goals, which include the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program. Samson describes other international cooperative efforts related to the northern environment, including the Convention on the Law of the Sea, the International Arctic Social Sciences Association, and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. He criticizes the AEPS as an ineffective vehicle for protecting the Arctic environment, yet his points are poorly developed. For example, on page 70 he asserts that the AEPS does not deal squarely with global-change issues, but instead limits itself to a regional perspective. In fact, the AEPS states the need to work with existing international bodies to control pollutants in the region that come from outside sources. This is not a duplication of existing mechanisms, as Samson claims, but a necessary approach for building a workable set of policy arrangements integrated at the local, regional, and global levels.

The third major part of *Thin ice* surveys strategies for managing environmental change in the region. Samson offers the interesting idea that conceptual blindness is a major obstacle to solving global-change problems in the Arctic, as it hinders designing the right forms of political institutions. He argues that humans are confronted with new planetary realities that cannot be grasped by current ways of thinking about nature. The author notes on page 126 that new policy forms should be characterized by 'adaptability, plurality, and interdisciplinarity.' Samson also argues that problems associated with military security remain distinct from those of environmental security, although their differences are also blurred. He brings up the idea of sustainable development, attempting to relate it to differing perceptions of the place of humans in nature, but his cursory treatment does not help bring clarity to a confusing debate. This section of the book concludes with the observation that Scott's expedition to the South Pole ended in tragedy because he failed to learn from indigenous knowledge gained by Arctic explorers who observed Inuit techniques. The author suggests that more use should be made of traditional ecological knowledge in coping with global-change issues in the region.

The book is thin on analysis; it introduces several promising ideas, but fails to exploit them in any sustained manner. For example, Samson refers to four cultural views of humans toward nature — individualist, egalitarian, hierarchist, and fatalist — but makes scarce use of them to illuminate his subject. In other places there is an obvious need for a more demanding attention to details. On page

86, Samson refers the reader to chapter 4.3 of *Thin ice* for a description of the role of science in politics, yet no such chapter exists in the book. In numerous places, the author cites references in the text, then neglects to include them in the bibliography. One of many examples is found on page 111, where Samson cites a work published by Caldwell in 1984 but fails to provide the facts of publication in the bibliography. This oversight is frustrating for readers who wish to look up sources used by the author in writing his book. Also, on pages 119–120 Samson states that Scott died in 1905 while on his South Pole expedition, when in fact his life ended in 1912. These and other problems, such as an occasional jumbling of sentence structure, should have been corrected before the manuscript went to press. (James N. Gladden, Department of Political Science/Justice, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK 99775-6420, USA.)

ANTARCTIC HOUSEWIFE. Nan Brown. 1996. Richmond, Victoria: Hutchison of Australia. 190 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-09-108510-1.

This is a memorial reprint (first published in 1971) of Nan Brown's experiences as a member of the Falkland Islands government settlement at King Edward Point on the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia during the mid-1950s. Nan, an Australian, had just married George Brown, a Scot who had been appointed to run the radio station at King Edward Point for two and a half years. While most autobiographical books written by people working in or briefly visiting Antarctic regions tend to be highly emotive, inaccurate, exaggerated, and boringly similar, Brown's personal account is refreshingly accurate and well written. She relates a series of delightfully vivid descriptive cameos of incidents experienced and of personalities befriended at the government settlement and at Grytviken whaling station and the three other stations on the island. This was only a decade before the end of the whaling industry at South Georgia, yet there was no indication then that the end of an historical era was not far off.

Nan Brown presents an intriguing insight into the joy and hardships of life on this remote South Atlantic island, as one of only five women in a population of more than 2000 men. Her brief, yet highly descriptive, verbal snapshots of the wildlife and scenery reveal her addiction to the island's wild environment. She succeeds in capturing the excitement of a whale hunt in one of the tiny catchers and provides a vivid picture of the hectic life at the whaling station. In addition to the routine duties of being a housewife, she describes the active social life of their isolated community and meeting many notable visitors to the settlement. These included members of George Sutton's South Georgia Survey Expedition and of Vivien Fuchs' and Edmund Hillary's Trans-Antarctic Expedition; HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on his return on RY *Britannia* from the Melbourne Olympics; and the governor of the Falkland Islands.

Brown also established, on behalf of the whalers and sealers at the four stations, a lucrative 'business' as the

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.