CONTENTS

Preface ix

Introduction: A Brief History of Polar Exploration 1

I. Heading North 5
   Explorers and Survivors 6
   The Far South 9
   In Search of the Northwest Passage 12
   Catastrophe in Canada 14
   Stuck in the Ice 15
   Imperial Ambitions 16
   “Scandinavian Ascendancy” 18
   Race to the Poles 19
   Shackleton’s Expedition 21

II. Writing on Ice 24

Part One: Making a Home 29

I. Medieval Norse Sagas and the Pagan Prophetess 31
II. Full of Fruit: Hans Egede’s Greenland 42
III. Secret Runes: Searching for the Colonists, 1800–2000 52

Part Two: The Long Dark Night 57

IV. Sir William Edward Parry: “The Utmost Regularity and Good Order” 60
   Our New Acquaintance 67
   V. Comforts and Good Cheer: Nansen Goes North 70
      A Happy Ship 73
      Nothing to Write About 78
   VI. “I Dread Getting Up”: Richard Byrd Alone in the Antarctic 85
      “Great Waves of Fear” 90

Part Three: The Dieter Eust 93

VII. “They Are an Epic”: Robert Falcon Scott and the South Pole 97
     A Wearsome Return 106
     “The Poor Soldier Has Become a Terrible Hindrance” 109
     “We Will Not at This Moment Raise the Question” 114

VIII. Ballooning to the North Pole: The Andrée Expedition 117
      Raw Brain and Algae Soup 122

IX. Eating Each Other: Adolphus Greely’s Three Years of Arctic Service 125
    “A Stern and Frightful Reality” 126
It was two miles beyond the entrance of this canal that a ship made its appearance about noon. The sun shone brightly at this time and a gentle breeze blew from the north. At first, some intervening icebergs prevented Captain Warrens from distinctly seeing anything except her masts, but he was struck with the strange manner in which her sails were disposed, and with the dismantled aspect of her yards and rigging. She continued to go before the wind for a few furigons, and then, grounding upon the low icebergs, remained motionless.

On approaching he observed that her hull was miserably weather-beaten, and that not a soul appeared upon the deck, which was covered with snow to a considerable depth. He hailed her crew several times, but no answer was returned. Previous to stepping on board, an open port-hole near the main chains caught his eye, and on looking into it, he perceived a man reclining back in a chair, with writing materials on a small table before him, but the fogginess of the light made everything very indistinct. The party, therefore, went up on deck, and having removed the hatchway, which they found closed, they descended to the cabin. They first came to the apartment which Captain Warrens had viewed through the port-hole. A terror seized him as he entered it. Its inmate retained his former position and seemed to be insensible to the presence of strangers. He was found to be a corpse, and a green damp mould had covered his cheeks and forehead and veiled his open eye-balls. He held a pen in his hand, and a log-book lay before him, and the last sentence in its unfinished page ran thus: 11th Nov. 1762. We have now been enclosed in the ice seventy days. The fire went out yesterday, and our Master has been trying ever since to kindle it again, but without success. His wife died this morning. There is no relief...