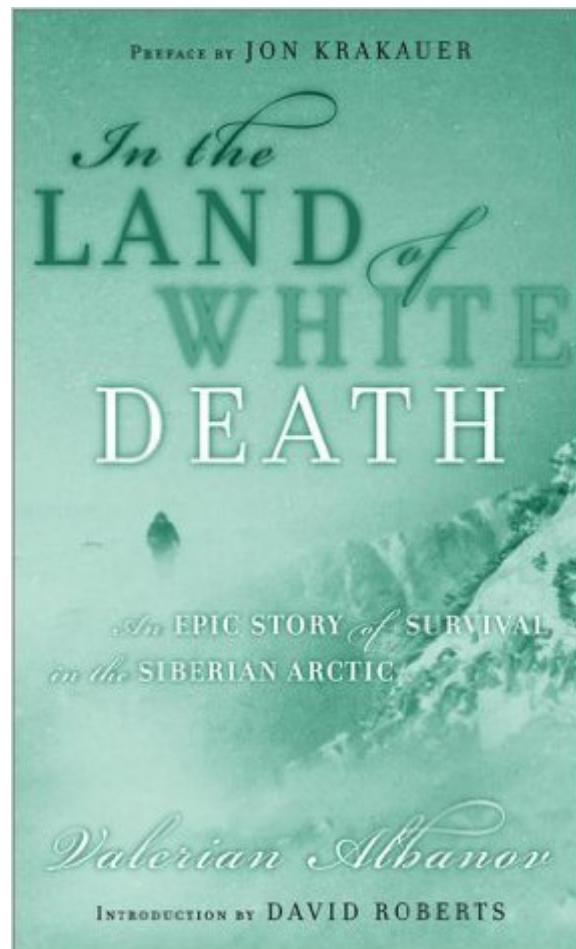


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# In The Land Of White Death : An Epic Story Of Survival In The Siberian Arctic



## Synopsis

In 1912, six months after Robert Falcon Scott and four of his men came to grief in Antarctica, a thirty-two-year-old Russian navigator named Valerian Albanov embarked on an expedition that would prove even more disastrous. In search of new Arctic hunting grounds, Albanov's ship, the Saint Anna, was frozen fast in the pack ice of the treacherous Kara Sea—a misfortune grievously compounded by an incompetent commander, the absence of crucial nautical charts, insufficient fuel, and inadequate provisions that left the crew weak and debilitated by scurvy. For nearly a year and a half, the twenty-five men and one woman aboard the Saint Anna endured terrible hardships and danger as the icebound ship drifted helplessly north. Convinced that the Saint Anna would never free herself from the ice, Albanov and thirteen crewmen left the ship in January 1914, hauling makeshift sledges and kayaks behind them across the frozen sea, hoping to reach the distant coast of Franz Josef Land. With only a shockingly inaccurate map to guide him, Albanov led his men on a 235-mile journey of continuous peril, enduring blizzards, disintegrating ice floes, attacks by polar bears and walrus, starvation, sickness, snowblindness, and mutiny. That any of the team survived is a wonder. That Albanov kept a diary of his ninety-day ordeal—a story that Jon Krakauer calls an "astounding, utterly compelling book," and David Roberts calls "as lean and taut as a good thriller"—is nearly miraculous. First published in Russia in 1917, Albanov's narrative is here translated into English for the first time. Haunting, suspenseful, and told with gripping detail, *In the Land of White Death* can now rightfully take its place among the classic writings of Nansen, Scott, Cherry-Garrard, and Shackleton.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a worthwhile read if you enjoy harrowing stories of near-death polar adventures. It's amazing that Albanov survived. His book is a combination of excerpts from his detailed diary and elaborations he added after the fact, supplemented by an informational preface from the publisher who recently discovered his almost-forgotten manuscript. If you have already read "Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage" by Alfred Lansing, this book isn't quite as good, but it is an interesting contrast. (If you haven't, put Endurance on your must-read list!) The challenges faced were similar, though not quite as extended in Albanov's case. This story starts in much the same way as the Endurance - a ship trapped in pack ice (though in this case in the Arctic). But this is where the story diverges. The biggest difference that you learn up-front is that only two people survived (compared to the whole crew on the Endurance!) Albanov is the navigator but does not get along with the captain. As a result, after two winters (!) enduring their relationship and the worsening conditions, he asks for permission to build a kayak and sledge from scrap and set out on his own in search of land. Much to his disappointment, however, half the crew (even many of the weaker ones) ask to accompany him. Their destination is "Cape Flora" about 120 miles away across pack ice. According to a polar explorer's diary from decades ago, Cape Flora once had a shelter and supplies. But they really don't even know if it still exists and exactly how to get there. And if it is still there - what then? But Albanov is able to focus on the immediate goal and not worry about the what if's.

First, I would like to thank Jon Krakauer and David Roberts for their efforts in bringing this lost treasure to English-speaking readers. Much of what is read about polar exploration is about American, or English, or Scandinavian exploits. The Russian Classic, *In the Land of White Death* (the title is the English translation of the title of the French version published in 1928), will make a great addition to any library on Arctic and Antarctic exploration. Valerian Albanov is the Navigator on the Saint Anna which leaves Alexandrivsk (now Murmansk) in 1912 to traverse the Northeast Passage (something only accomplished once before at the time) on a hunting trip that was supposed to end in Valdivostok. But, a late start finds the Saint Anna frozen in the ice pack early that winter in the Kara Sea. After wintering 1913 stuck in the ice that is dragging them every northward, Albanov believes that the best chance of survival is for the crew to split in two - half to remain on the Saint Anna with her captain Greogiy Brusilov and wait the eventual (hopeful) passage

of the ship into the Western Hemisphere to be freed near Greenland, while the other half - thirteen - follows Albanov on a trek across the ice pack southward towards Franz Josef Land, the archipelago that was Fridtjof Nansen's Farthest North. Albanov's account begins with his team's departure from the Saint Anna. The early part of the book is told in a narrative that Albanov wrote after the trek then quickly switches to his journal entries which are written with great clarity.

Navigating the Barents Sea north of Russia and Siberia can be a dodgy proposition. Nevertheless, in August 1912 the Russian ship "Saint Anna", with 25 men and one female nurse aboard, set sail from Murmansk for Vladivostok (7,000 miles distant via the Northeast Passage), with the expressed purpose of discovering new Arctic hunting grounds. By mid-October, the vessel was trapped in the ice, and, for the next 18 months, drifted helplessly northwards. In April of 1914, ten of the crew and the ship's navigator, Valerian Albanov, despairing of the vessel's eventual release, voluntarily left their shipmates in an attempt, with kayaks and sledges, to reach the Franz Josef island group somewhere to their south. *IN THE LAND OF WHITE DEATH*, subsequently written by Albanov, is based on his diary of the 3-month, 235-mile odyssey over the ice pack, frigid water and deserted island shores to reach Cape Flora on Northbrook Island, from which point he anticipated rescue. There are many points of similarity between this book and *ENDURANCE: SHACKLETON'S INCREDIBLE VOYAGE*, by Alfred Lansing, which describes the same sort of gritty survival journey achieved by Sir Ernest Shackleton and his 27 men after their ship, "Endurance" was trapped and crushed by Antarctic ice in 1915 during an abortive attempt to reach the South Pole.

Notwithstanding the facts that Shackleton was a more charismatic leader, that Shackleton's men were of better mettle, and that their journey to safety was over a longer distance, the Albanov narrative remains a gripping, tautly told account of men against the elements. One of its chief attractions, for those with short attention spans or too many books to read, is its brevity --190 pages in small-format hardcover. Sadly, there is no photo section (as is included in *ENDURANCE*).

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