Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage Study Guide

Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage by Alfred Lansing

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

In 1914 Sir Ernest Shackleton leads twenty-seven men on the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. The expedition intends to transverse the Antarctic continent by dog sledge. In December, 1914, the expedition, aboard the purpose-built polar exploration ship Endurance, enters the pack ice of the Weddell Sea off the coast of Antarctica some 1,100 nautical miles east of the Palmer Peninsula. By January, 1915, Endurance is a scant 60 nautical miles from its intended landfall—but it is also frozen immobile in pack ice that extends to all horizons. Endurance drifts with the pack ice for several months, eventually losing sight of land as the typical Weddell Sea current spins the vast pack ice floe in a slow clockwise direction.

As the pack ice transcribes its giant clockwise rotation, so ends the Antarctic summer. By late October, 1915, Endurance drifts some 500 nautical miles to the north-east, frozen fast in apparently limitless pack ice. In the intervening months the crew leads a generally optimistic life of boredom and intense cold even as the gradual realization sets that the trans-Antarctic nature of the expedition has failed. As the weather turns ever colder, the pack ice thickens and winter storms drive the floes together with increasing pressure and violence. At the end of October, 1915, the Endurance finally succumbs to the intense pressure and is slowly crushed. The crew, led by Shackleton, abandons ship and makes camp on a huge floe of pack ice. They salvage as much food and material as possible, and the expedition's dogs, sledges, and boats, are stockpiled on the floe. The crew establishes a makeshift home and names the drifting place Ocean Camp. Over the next few weeks the crew continues salvage operations as Endurance is slowly but entirely crushed. In late November, 1915, Endurance finally slips entirely beneath the sea; meanwhile the initial floe has crumbled under pressure and the crew has relocated to a larger, sturdier floe and established Patience Camp.

A few abortive attempts are made to sledge over the pack ice but slushy conditions and endless pressure ridges make it obvious that any sledging attempts are doomed to failure. After several days of work, only a few miles are covered in the sledges—less distance, in fact, than the floe has drifted with the Antarctic current during the same time period. The hapless crew remains essentially optimistic and spends the dark polar winter huddled in tents, subsisting off canned rations supplemented with meat from occasional penguins and seals. From time to time dogs are killed to conserve food and various interesting natural wonders are witnessed.

In March, 1916, the pack ice begins to break up as it finally drifts far enough north of the Palmer Peninsula that ocean currents and winds drive the mass on an erratic course. Warming temperatures bring additional game animals—but also cause the various floes to thin and begin to crumble away. The situation is indeed desperate and the ice floe upon which the men are encamped dwindles away by erosion and melting. Finally, in early April, 1918, Shackleton orders the men into the three small boats as navigable leads open in the pack ice. After several miserable days of freezing water and incredibly dangerous situations, the small craft are separated into two groups. Their planned destination is changed several times as storms or pack ice cut off various escapes; they

finally, incredibly, and happily reunite just off the shore of Elephant Island where a barely tenable beach is located and land. A tiny hut is constructed, penguins and seals are hunted, their meat stockpiled, and the men prepare for a long and isolated stay.

Shackleton selects the best boat and causes all the best equipment to be placed in it. Then, with five other men, he sets sail in late April, 1918, in what is perhaps the most dangerous sea on the planet in a twenty-two foot open boat rigged with extemporized sails. For many days the battered and weary crew fights gales and traverses several hundred nautical miles to finally make landfall on South Georgia island—the closest practical outpost of civilization. However, they land on the far-side of the island which is bisected by treacherous mountains. Fearing that the small boat is now too unseaworthy to round the island, Shackleton and the two strongest men set out to cross the island—a feat never before accomplished. In a few days of incredible mountaineering and blind luck they manage to gain the far shore, locate the tiny whaling outpost, and secure their own survival. The men on the other side of South Georgia Island are quickly rescued.

Shackleton then embarks on a series of abortive rescue attempts to reach Elephant Island and retrieve the remainder of his crew. Various attempts fail due to weather, ice, or deteriorated ship condition. At the end of August, 1916, however, Shackleton and his rescue party finally reach the much-depressed survivors and take them from the forbidding shores of their temporary home. Incredibly, the ill-fated voyage did not lose a single man.

Part I

Part I Summary and Analysis

Part I consists of eight enumerated chapters and is the longest Part of the book. It begins with Chapter 1 recounting the crushing of Endurance by the pack ice and subsequently Chapters 2 through 8 recount how the Endurance came to be trapped in the ice. In this non-chronological presentation of facts Part I deviates from the remainder of the text's journalistic chronology. The action-first presentation, however, sets the tone of the text as cool and professional—the outcome being known before the build-up allows the author and reader to concentrate on the salient facts rather than the expectation. In brief, Part I details the background history of the expedition, the organization and initial stages of the expedition, and the eventual loss of Endurance.

Shackleton's personality, personal history, and family background are presented—they bear little influence on the remainder of the text. Shackleton's experience as a polar explorer is concisely recounted; the expedition discussed in the book is Shackleton's third Antarctic voyage—his first is under the leadership of Robert F. Scott and his second is under his personal command. That voyage presses to within 97 miles of the pole before turning back and earns Shackleton a knighthood. Between 1911 and 1913 Shackleton solicits funds from a variety of sources to undertake his proposed trans-Antarctic expedition. The plan calls for two expeditions actually—one to reach the pole from Vahsel Bay and a second to drive toward the pole from the opposite end of the continent and establish a series of supply depot caches along the way. Neither expedition is successful in achieving stated goals. At the outset of the expedition Shackleton is forty years old, a powerful man of average height with an iron will and resolute determination.

While preparing for the expedition Shackleton purchases Polaris, a purpose-built polar exploration sailing vessel, and rechristens her Endurance. He raises funds from a variety of sources including generous personal contributions from James Caird, Dudley Docker, and Miss Stancomb-Wills. Shackleton also mortgages the expedition to raise funds—selling in advance the rights to whatever commercial exploitation the expedition might produce. When it comes time to crew the expedition there is no shortage of volunteers. The pay is miserly but the potential adventure and renown great. Many of the most-important positions are filled by men with whom Shackleton has previous polar experience; men he can intimately trust and who are unquestionably reliable. The men picked by Shackleton are almost without exception reliable and well suited for the tasks required of them. Most of the men are about Shackleton's own age and concise biographies consisting of but a sentence or two are offered for many of the men. Shackleton leaves England on the eve of war but with the nation's blessing and makes her shakedown cruise for Buenos Aires for final provisioning. Endurance is described in considerable detail and her construction and design are particularly emphasized. In brief, she is eminently suitable as a vessel for polar exploration and is purposefully

designed to sail with ice. After a brief stay in Buenos Aires, Endurance proceeds toward South Georgia Island.

While in Buenos Aires a young man named Blackboro is hired to temporary duty. Desiring to join the expedition but refused, he stows away and thus becomes a crewmember after a severe tongue-lashing by Shackleton. Touching at South Georgia Island, Shackleton is advised by the whalers there that the Weddell Sea is packed with an uncharacteristic amount of ice. He decides to press ahead anyway. For several days the vessel makes good time and distance and is continually surrounded by the natural wonders of the Antarctic region. By mid-January Endurance is within 200 miles of Vahsel Bay, her destination, but further progress is frustrated by heavy pack ice. The next few days consist of gale weather and increasing pack ice; the gale compressing the pack ice against the distant shore and consolidating the ice into a continuous sheet. By the end of January Endurance is trapped in heavy pack ice and further independent movement is impossible. Gradually the crew comes to realize that the pack ice is more or less permanent—the expedition is not going to proceed as planned. By the end of February, even Shackleton concedes that the expedition is in grave danger. They have passed within a handful of miles of their target, but those miles are full of frozen pack ice, pressure ridges, and water leads which prevent landing. Over the next two months the men work at two primary tasks—fruitlessly trying to free the ship from the ice, and hunting seals for meat and blubber. By April they have accumulated two and a half tons of meat. In early May the sun appears for the final time for the Antarctic winter and the party loses sight of land due to their inexorable drift.

Throughout the long months the crew knit together into an intimate society. Practical jokes are plentiful and routine tasks and processes are established. Collectively, the crew does not succumb to depression but is worried about the situation. Some crew members, such as Vincent, do not fit in well, but most do. Although tempers flare occasionally, hijinks and planned entertainment pass the time. The ship's interior is reorganized to offer more space for living. Through June the temperatures are -17 degrees Fahrenheit. Even so, the dog crews continue to train and even hold racing derbies in the darkness. Toward the end of June the first unmistakable signs of pressure within the ice are manifested as grinding sounds and ominous vibrations. Mid-July sees gales and heavy snowfall. The high winds drive the pack ice into confusion and crush it ever closer together. Endurance begins to rock, shudder, and occasionally list. Pressure ridges built up everywhere and all of the men begin to worry about the pressure as Endurance first heaves up and down, then lists over, then is relentlessly battered. The end of August brings a particularly violent bout of pressure; Endurance's survival give birth to hope in the men—a false hope, as it turns out.

In mid-October Endurance is heeled thirty degrees to port within minutes by a giant shift in pressure. After several hours the pack ice again shifts and the ship rights. The crew spend many more days chopping ice from around the ship. Then, at the end of October, 1915, the pack ice shifts for the dreadful final time. First, pieces of Endurance are sheared off and carried away, then the planking is squeezed so much that she begins to take on water. McNeish builds a ten-foot high cofferdam in the aft hold but it is insufficient and the water continues to gain on the pumps. For three days the men

continue to fight for the ship but it becomes increasingly clear that she will not survive this third, final build up of pressure. Millions of tons of ice crush her relentlessly and on October 27 she finally succumbs with a series of shuddering cracks that sound like artillery. Her sides warp inwards and her beams begin to snap. Shackleton give the order and the men abandon the ship.

Part II

Part II Summary and Analysis

Part II consists of six enumerated chapters. In brief, Part II details how the crew abandon Endurance, salvage stores from her, train the dogs for sledging, repair the boats for a possible ocean voyage, and establish and abandon their first long-term camp upon the ice.

After abandoning ship, the men encamp on a large ice floe nearby. For several days they work at shifting supplies from the wrecked ship to the floe. The sledges, dog teams, and three boats are salvaged as is a considerable store of food. The initial camp is a miserable experience for most of the men and the cold is formidable. The initial plan is to proceed 350 miles northwest to Paulet Island where a known store of food and supplies has been cached previously. To this end, Shackleton insists that all nonessential supplies be abandoned; he establishes a two-pound rule for personal gear except for a banjo and journals. Puppies and sick dogs are shot, the ship is salvaged as far as possible, and the men set off on the sledges. Progress across the sludgy pack ice is tortuously slow and incredibly difficult. Pressure ridges are frequent and the surface of the ice is deceptive and uneven. After several days of heroic but pointless struggle, Shackleton admits what all the men now know—progress by sledge is all but impossible. Over the next few days salvage of the slightly more-distant ship is resumed—most men salvage personal items such as books or photographic equipment. Various contingency plans are established—all dependent upon the motion of the ice. The crew begin to reform social organizations based upon tent groups and once again some personalities begin to clash in minor ways even as preparations for a presumed boat journey begin. Seal hunting resumes as light returns and then lengthens into sixteen-hour days. A pack of playing cards is secured from some nook of stores and it becomes a sought after pastime; bridge mania sweeps the camp. Toward the end of November the wreck of Endurance finally slips beneath the water. The ice pack continues to move to the north.

Despite a paucity of materials and only a few tools, McNeish works on the ship's three boats, calking them, reinforcing them, and raising their freeboard. The men continue to hunt, train the dogs, and pass the time. The floe upon which they are established appears solid and firm and after a time they name the spot Ocean Camp. Occasional leads open but they are small and transient. The crew fights demoralization into mid-December; Shackleton decides to once again attempt sledging.

Beginning in late December the party takes to the sledges, carrying only two boats and abandoning the Stancomb Wills. Progress is very difficult and very slow. After only a few days the men are physically broken down and verge on collapse. At one point McNeish refuses to go on and refuses to obey orders. Shackleton intervenes and instructs McNeish, the moment passes, and the work continues—this episode proves to be the most serious backlash amongst the crew experienced on the entire expedition, a fact

which is quite remarkable given the situation. Finally, after making only a few miles of progress, everyone realizes that substantive movement by sledge is simply impossible. A solid floe is located and a new camp established. The floe proves unstable and the camp is moved, then moved again. The first day of 1916 arrives amidst foreboding conditions.

Part III

Part III Summary and Analysis

Part III consists of six enumerated chapters. In brief, Part III describes how the men survive for several weeks at a place called Patience Camp. They undergo various hardships and face starvation for a period; as the food situation improves so the ice situation becomes critical and Patience Camp is finally abandoned for the boats as the floe disintegrates in the warming, heaving ocean.

The second camp is named Mark Time Camp by Worsley. After five days of striving they have covered less distance on the sledges than they drifted on the ice—far less. The men grasp their own inadequacy to the task for the first time; their fate will be determined by external elements. Instead of covering 200 miles to land they cover nine miles in five days of brutal exhaustion. Food dwindles along with good humor. Orde-Lees is one day stalked and then pursued by a gigantic leopard seal—the first of several such dangerous encounters. It pursues him as far as the camp where Wild kills it with a rifle. Dressed out, the carcass provides about a half ton of meat and blubber. The next day three smaller seals are killed but Shackleton forbids their recovering, deeming the slushy ice conditions too dangerous to make the trek. His decision dumbfounds many of the men. After a few more days the camp is relocated due to melting ice. One of the dog teams is shot to conserve food; Wild shoots each of the animals with a revolver, a head shot at point-blank range. The bodies are buried in the snow. The men then make the arduous journey nearly back to Ocean Camp and establish a new camp dubbed Patience Camp. More hunting is accomplished and more dogs shot. During mid-January gale-force winds last for several days, winds occasionally reaching an estimated seventy miles per hour. The ice floe is driven north at about eleven miles every day. Ocean Camp being quite close, the remaining dog teams are used to sledge a large amount of supplies from Ocean Camp to the new camp; Stancomb Wills, the third boat, is also retrieved.

Generally, boredom is ever present and demoralizing, and various quirky or silly methods are contrived to break up the endless hours. Even though temperatures are bearable, continual existence in slushy snow and ice is difficult. As food and blubber become scarce due to a shortage of game animals the refuse pits are exhumed and picked through several times. Occasional flocks of penguins are butchered and dressed. Occasional gales blow and eventually Paulet Island is less than ninety-four miles away and the crew survives on a tiny speck of ice in the 900,000 square miles of the frozen Weddell Sea. Worsley becomes highly focused on obtaining regular sighting to plot their position on his charts. As March passes on, the pack ice drifts north but away from Paulet Island and eventually that destination is abandoned as unfeasible. With that realization, much hope is lost. Bad weather confines the men to tents for days at a time. In early March a heavy sea swell is felt as the pack ice rolls in grinding and halting humps, but eventually the seas calm and no leads opened up. The men become

nearly frantic with desperation, fearing that their floe will simply evaporate in a crumble of pressure. James writes in his journal "'Man proposes [God disposes]'" (p. 120).

Food and cooking blubber reaches the critical point many times and Shackleton's distant refusal to harvest three seals is frequently rehashed in private groups of men. Rations are steadily decreased and increasingly consist of seal or penguin meat. Tea, bread, and other ship's rations are long-since exhausted. The shortage of food causes the men to have a difficult time maintaining a consistent body temperature in the cold conditions. Toward the end of March, land is finally sighted and identified as the tiny Danger Islets—but forty-two miles distant; beyond their reach. As March draws to a close, food becomes increasingly precious, tempers increasingly short, and desperation increasingly prevalent. Shackleton moves food stores near his tent to prevent petty theft and the refuse piles are again exhumed and sifted. Then the floe upon which Patience Camp sits splits and refreezes. Later another leopard seal is shot and provides an astounding 1000 pounds of meat alone. Its stomach contains fifty undigested fish, a welcome change of diet for the men. The last of the dogs—Macklin's team—is then shot. Instead of burying the animals, the corpses are dressed and eaten. Dog flesh is universally acclaimed as delicious. Another sea swell rolls through, bringing with it a variety of strange oceanic life forms and a few birds. The influx of food is welcome and materially lifts spirits. Stories and bragging again circulate in the camp, and McIlroy entertains everyone by explaining his secret recipe for a cocktail called 'The Bosom Caresser,' guaranteed to never fail.

In early April another leopard seal enters the camp, charging McLeod, and is added to the larder. The Patience Camp ice floe, however, which once measured a mile in diameter, has shrunk to less then 200 yards across. By this time it is usually surrounded by leads of open water. Clarence Island lies 68 miles due north. A heavy swell continues and the men realize they are being driven straight for the open sea—toward the dreaded Drake passage and almost certain death. Soon Clarence Island is sighted, even as the pack ice begins a bizarre wandering about. Then, on April 9, the Patience Camp ice flow cracks up and begins to disintegrate. The ship's boats are launched, loaded, and manned. The men row toward the open water even as the pack ice swirls around them.

Part IV

Part IV Summary and Analysis

Part IV consists of five enumerated chapters. In brief, it details how the men travel some 140 nautical miles in three tiny open boats through the most dangerous sea on earth to make an unlikely but successful landfall on tiny Elephant Island, a rocky and inhospitable chunk of rock in the South Sea. During this portion of the text the men suffer the most-extreme hardships of the entire expedition.

Shortly after abandoning Patience Camp the three tiny open craft—each about twenty-two feet in length and six feet in beam encounter a tide rip and are nearly overtaken by a tumbling, agitated mass of ice and water. They spend the first night tied off to a small floe but conditions are so dangerous that Shackleton decides to spend future nights in the boats if at all possible. A second desperate night spent on a crumbling floe convinces him that his decision should be enforced. Miserable nights are then spent in the boats. The boats go through a series of course changes as various destinations are attempted and then abandoned due to adverse conditions. Although not overloaded, the small boats are definitely not constructed for such open sea sailing and they constantly ship water and rock disconcertingly. Of the three, only the James Caird is really manageable. The inexperienced crew of the Dudley Docker results in the James Caird eventually taking her in tow. Orde-Lees, characteristically lazy, refuses to work and takes to his sleeping bag in the bottom of the boat. When another position is fixed they discover that despite sailing west they have actually moved east due to heavy tidal flow—a disheartening realization already discerned by many sailors. After a hurried conference their destination is again changed and they point north for Elephant or Clarence Island.

Wind increases and gigantic rollers mount from horizon to horizon. The men suffer from freezing temperatures, the inability to move about, and high winds. The boats are often inundated with freezing sea water. The men suffer agony and begin to lose hope but the voyage continues. During the final night beyond sight of land, Blackboro's feet freeze and many of the men weep without hope. Finally, a shortage of drinking water leaves most of the men dehydrated and in agony. Dawn finds the Stancomb Wills separated from the other two boats, but both parties are within sight of Elephant Island. A final, brutal row through fifteen miles of thundering seas is undertaken by all the boats over the course of two days. As they approach Elephant Island they have to deal with capricious freak winds, often reaching 100 miles per hour, which blow down from the islands heights and stir up enormous foaming breakers heading out to sea. Both parties finally close the shore and begin an arduous circumnavigation in search of a suitable landing place. One is finally located and, fortuitously, at roughly the same time the two parties again sight each other. The boats run ashore and Shackleton insists that Blackboro have the honor of being the first ashore—his frozen feet mandate that he be carried there, however. As the party lands Rickenson suffers a heart attack, but survives. Most of the men suffer some frostbite in addition to being exhausted and

dehydrated. The tiny beach measures barely 100 feet by fifty feet and is surrounded on all sides by vertical cliffs of rock. However, it is solid land—their first in 497 days.

Part V

Part V Summary and Analysis

Part V consists of six enumerated chapters. In brief, it describes how the men locate a suitable but inhospitable camp on Elephant Island—a camp dubbed Wild Camp. They then prepare a boat to make the nearly impossible trek to South Georgia Island, send the boat on its voyage, and settle down to a monotonous and dreadful life ashore Elephant Island waiting for some future rescue.

After making landfall the men eat and then hunt several seal which are in relative abundance on the remote beach. After eating they sleep "'as we had never slept before, absolute dead dreamless sleep, oblivious of wet sleeping bags'" (p. 179). The morning, however, holds a shocking realization—marks around the beach indicate that the high-water mark is well above the level of the flat area. They will have to move. Wild takes the Stancomb Wills and scouts around the island. In nine hours of searching they locate only one seemingly secure camp—a fairly sheltered spit of beach about 150 yards long and thirty yards wide. It features a glacier for water and holds several seal and even some sea elephants—incidentally, animals for which the island is named. At high tide the three boats are again embarked and make the dangerous journey to the new beach. High land winds descend to the ocean and require the boats to sail close to the rocky shore. Many of the men are so chilled by the voyage and exertion that they warm their frozen hands in the guts of freshly-killed seals.

A more inhospitable place can scarcely be imagined. However, it is secure. Shackleton quickly decides that it is foolishness to simply wait and hope for improbable rescue—he announces that he will take five men and the James Caird and make for civilization. After consulting with Worsley, the destination chosen is South Georgia Island, some 800 miles to the northeast. The chances for success are deemed miniscule. Shackleton decides to crew James Caird with Worsley, Crean, McNeish, Vincent, and McCarthy. McNeish and Vincent are selected to remove their penchant for troublemaking from the remainder of the crew. Crean and McCarthy are selected for their seamanship, strength, and skill. Worlsey's navigation and small-boat abilities are an absolute requirement.

The other boats are partially dismantled to strengthen and improve James Caird, and all the best equipment—scanty at best—and supplies are loaded into this last best chance for survival. At the end of April, Shackleton departs in the tiny boat, leaving Wild in command of the remaining crew. The marooned men watch the tiny boat move off into the vast, trackless space of the most-dangerous stretch of water on the planet.

Ashore, the men settle in for a prolonged wait. They gather all available rocks and pebbles and construct the base of a crude hut. The remaining two boats are then inverted and placed atop the base, forming a crude roof. Canvas is wound about the entire structure to offer some waterproofing, and mud, animal feces, and seaweed are used to chink the many gaps through which icy winds constantly blow. The melting

glacier frequently inundates the hut, turning it into a stinking, sopping mess which has to be bailed out every morning. There is nothing to do but wait. Plentiful seals and penguins ensure that food is not a cause for immediate concern, and huge stores of meat are laid in for hard times. By mid-June, Blackboro's left foot is gangrenous but stabilized. Macklin administers the only dose of anesthetic and McIlroy surgically removes most of Blackboro's foot. When Blackboro regains consciousness he is not in pain—thus ends the most-serious injury sustained by any member of the expedition.

By early July most of the men have abandoned hope that Shackleton will return. To keep up hope, Wild assigns mid-July as the improbable target date, but that too comes and goes. As the tobacco runs out the men begin to smoke various combustible items, settling on the sennegrass insulation salvaged from their boots. Storms, pounding surf, and calving glaciers are all dangerous but are survived with little danger, though great discomfort. Hudson develops a large abscess on his buttock and McIlroy finally opens it to drain. Macklin comments to his journal about the stench of living in a tiny hut with a score of other unwashed men subsisting on nothing but meat cooked with blubber and sleeping between a man with a gangrenous foot and another with a discharging abscess—"'a horrible existence, but yet we are pretty happy...'" (p. 212). By late August the men have mostly given up hope.

Part VI

Part VI Summary and Analysis

Part VI consists of six enumerated chapters. Briefly, it recounts how Shackleton and a picked crew of five other men pilot the James Caird through the Drake passage and hundreds of miles of the South Sea from Elephant Island to South Georgia Island. Their successful voyage and accurate landfall are, to this day, regarded as one of the most singular and remarkable feats of seamanship in all of recorded maritime history.

On April 24th Shackleton and his five picked men depart Elephant Island in the James Caird. They stand out northerly until encountering a long drift of pack ice which they eventually cross through one open lead by rowing. The first night Shackleton and Worsley sit at the helm quietly discussing their situation while the other men sleep. Shackleton is dismayed to have to trust so entirely in Worsley's navigational skill—he is used to relying on his own strength and determination, Shackleton finds the limitless sea unsettling. The second day dawns and after breakfast Shackleton organizes the crew into two watches: Shackleton, Crean, and McNeish will form the first watch while Worsley will lead Vincent and McCarthy in the second watch. Other than in exceptional circumstances, the watches will rotate every four hours.

The men are constantly drenched by the always shipping green water and spray. Every tack requires the ballast of rocks be shifted about, and someone has to constantly operate the boat pump. Worsley calculates their speed at about two knots while passing through the Drake passage, the most dreaded bit of ocean on the planet. Wind gusts often exceed one hundred miles per hour and the famous Cape Horn Rollers rise to heights of eighty or ninety feet and travel at a speed of around thirty knots. The James Caird sail through a heavy following sea and work tortuously through every becalmed trough and every screaming, howling crest. The men exist hour by hour, moment by moment. In late April a gale requires them to heave to and weather for several hours. Most of the men suffer from rheumatism, trench foot, and frostbite. After six brutal days, the boat has covered 238 miles—one-third of the way.

Sixty knot gales again force the boat to heave to and weather. When the winds grow even harsher a sea-anchor is rigged and the hapless boat is driven through the spray. The men pass the anxious hours chipping accumulating ice from the boat, lightening her so that she will not swamp. After three days the gale begins to subside, a heavy breaking wave stripping away the sea anchor. A jib is bended on as a storm trysail and the boat begins to make headway. Worsley is disgusted to realize, upon turning in, that his reindeer sleeping bag is rotting into little more than a sack of slime. When the storm moderates, Worsley obtains a fix—they are halfway to South Georgia Island. The weather then remains agreeable for several days and the boat sails to less than 250 miles from South Georgia Island. Then a rogue wave nearly swamps the boat, breaking the compass and shifting the ballast. With less than one hundred miles to go, however, the weather turns again to gale. The final cask of water is opened and the crew

depressingly discovers it to be tainted with salt and foul. They drink it anyway. They finally close to within sixty miles of land but their position is uncertain and they spend the night standing off and on. By early morning the next day the fog lifts and land is sighted. They point in and reach the surf zone, the pounding breakers exceeding forty feet in height, then claw off in search of a possible landing. They run through rough, heaving seas between dangerous reefs for several hours then are forced to stand off again for a final heartbreaking night. The next day they again stand in, closing a different section of coast and again clawing off through difficult shoals. After a series of hair-raising approaches, made all the more difficult by eccentric winds, they finally make a final desperate run and land on a tiny beach, the James Caird immediately flailing against surrounding boulders. It is May 10, 1916, and they stand on South Georgia Island from whence they had sailed 522 days previously. They shake hands, locate a brook, and drink.

Part VII and Epilogue

Part VII and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Part VII consists of three enumerated chapters; the epilogue is distinct and consists of five pages of text followed by two pages of acknowledgements. Briefly, Part VII describes the traverse of South George Island by Shackleton, Worsley, and Caird. The roughly thirty-mile traverse crosses 10,000 foot peaks and is accomplished virtually without equipment in a stunning thirty-eight hour hike which is to this day considered one of the most spectacular, if unlikely, feats of mountaineering in recorded history.

The first order of business is to secure the James Caird but the men lack the strength to drag her safely ashore. She is instead tied off while the men eat and sleep. In the morning the boat is lightened by unloading and partial dismantling and finally dragged ashore. Shackleton decides that circumnavigating the island is impossible and determines—shockingly—to attempt a thirty-mile traverse across the 10,000 foot mountainous spine of the island. Over the next few days they recuperate strength, stockpile food, and sleep. Then they reload the boat and sail six miles to King Haakon Bay where they find safe harbor and excellent conditions. McNeish, Vincent, and McCarthy are to remain at King Haakon Bay in what they dub Peggotty Camp. Shackleton, Hurley, and Crean are to make the overland trek. They have a pot, two compasses, a pair of binoculars, about 50 feet of knotted rope, and a carpenter's adze.

In the very early morning of May 18, 1916, the three men set out for Husvik. They ascend to 2,500 feet and then follow a level ingress in heavy fog. They eventually discover have been moving in the wrong direction and retrace their steps, turning upland again. The ascent becomes increasingly steep. They reach the summit at about eleven in the morning, after nine hours of hiking. The descent is impossible so they backtrack down, traverse eight miles, and ascend again. At three in the afternoon they again reach the summit and again discover the descent to be impossible. Again they backtrack down, traverse, and ascend, reaching the top at four in the afternoon after fourteen hours of hiking. The descent is precipitous and treacherous—but barely possible. By five in the afternoon the temperatures are dropping to freezing and weather is rolling in. The experienced Shackleton knows that spending the night would be fatal and that rapid descent is imperative—yet the exhausted men can barely straggle along. So he does the unthinkable and suggests they slide. Faced with two untenable choices, the men take the only path that is not surely fatal and lock their legs together and slide down the snow face into the darkness. Two minutes later they have descended 2,000 feet in safety—against all odds.

They continue on with only intermittent and brief breaks and at about two in the morning reach the coast—but in the wrong location. Again they retrace their steps uphill, traverse, and begin the descent. It is five in the morning and they have been hiking for twenty-seven continuous hours. They are exhausted and sit down to rest, huddling together for warmth. Worsley and Crean immediately fall asleep and after twenty

minutes Shackleton feels himself nodding off into what his vast polar experience assures him is slow freezing sleep of death. He fights to stay awake for a few more minutes and then rouses the others. At six-thirty in the morning they hear the distant work whistle of the whale factory at their destination. It is the first sound of the outside world they have heard for seventeen months. They continue the traverse until at one-thirty in the afternoon they reach the final ridge. They descend to the town and reach a waterfall at three in the afternoon. Too tired to retrace their steps again they fasten their length of rope and climb down through the choking, freezing water. About four in the afternoon they stagger into the town having endured thirty-eight continuous hours of hiking. They are greeted by the shocked and unbelieving workers who take them to the house of Thoralf Sørlle, an acquaintance of Shackleton. Notwithstanding their relationship, Sørlle fails to recognize the bearded and bedraggled explorer.

The brief epilogue recounts the outcome of the expedition. The traverse of South Georgia Island has been accomplished only twice—once by Shackleton and once, forty years later, by a professional surveying team encumbered by the latest and best equipment. The surveying team report that their experience leads them to believe that Shackleton's performance was, in a word, inconceivable.

Shackleton is treated to every comfort by the whaling station. His men are treated to whatever amenities are available and they are greeted as heroes. That night a ship is dispatched to Peggotty Camp to rescue the three men there. A crude evening reception is held for the men and there they receive the highest reward possible—the bestowal of heartfelt admiration for the accomplishment of survival, delivered by grizzled sea captains used to the conditions prevailing in the Weddell Sea.

Shackleton then prosecutes a rescue attempt toward Elephant Island. Three abortive attempts are made in three separate vessels, each one failing due to weather or ice. A fourth attempt, made in the Chilean sea-going tug Yelcho, finally sails for Elephant Island, reaching the destination five days later. The twenty-two castaways on Elephant Island, largely devoid of hope, meet their rescue with enthusiasm and intense relief. Wild urges Shackleton to come ashore and survey their encampment and hut, but the offer is declined. As quickly as possible, the men are rowed to the ship. Macklin, for one, remains on deck until Elephant Island sinks over the horizon. The epilogue is followed by two pages of acknowledgments.

Characters

Sir Ernest Shackleton, leader

Ernest Shackleton is an Irish explorer knighted for the successful command of the 1907-09 British Antarctic Expedition. Subsequent to that expedition he becomes interested in traversing the Antarctic continent by dog sledge, a feat not actually accomplished until 1958. By the time period considered in the text, Shackleton is an experienced polar explorer, having travelled to the Antarctic in 1901-1902 under Robert Scott and having led a 1907-1909 expedition. As Shackleton envisioned, the expedition sets out from England in August, 1914, and reaches the Weddell Sea in January, 1915. Whalers at South Georgia Island warn Shackleton that ice conditions are worse than normal—their prescient advice is disregarded, however, and Endurance is trapped in ice and lost by late October, 1915. Under Shackleton's undaunted leadership, the men survive several months on the drifting pack ice before reaching Elephant Island.

Shackleton then determines to proactively seek help rather than waiting for improbable rescue. Selecting Worsley and Crean for their skill and McNeish, Vincent, and McCarthy for more complex reasons (he fears leaving them behind for morale purposes as well as valuing their skills), Shackleton sets out on a hundreds-mile journey in the open boat James Caird, bound for South Georgia Island. Shackleton and his men successfully make landfall after what is often considered the most remarkable and epic open-boat journey in maritime history. While McNeish, Vincent, and McCarthy recuperate from the voyage, Shackleton, Worsley, and Crean cross the mountainous spine of South Georgia Island in a remarkable thirty-six hour traverse, today considered an astonishing feat of mountaineering. After summiting the small team is faced with the certainty of freezing to death during the oncoming night and the unflappable Shackleton cause the men to lock legs and slide down the precipitous slope into the unknown terrain below—fortunately without incident.

Shackleton's expedition of survival and triumph is unparalleled in the exotic history of polar exploration and he is today rightly regarded as a preeminent explorer and polar adventurer. Incidentally, after successfully rescuing his crew from Elephant Island he discovers that the supply and provisioning party, a separate expedition upon which his trans-Antarctic voyage had been utterly and blindly dependent, has failed—whereupon he affects their rescue as well.

Frank Wild, second-in-command

Frank Wild is second-in-command of the expedition, second only to Shackleton in authority and oversight. Prior to the expedition he has an enormous amount of polar experience including having served previously with Shackleton. Wild serves with quiet distinction during the expedition and proves utterly reliable and capable. He is well-liked by the men and always displays a calm-headed approach to any situation. Shackleton

relies heavily on Wild's intuition and judgment and consults him frequently with virtually all aspects of managing the expedition—from the planning through the execution to, eventually, the survival on the pack ice.

When the expedition is split at Elephant Island, Wild remains behind in charge of the twenty-one remaining men while Shackleton and his crew of five journey to South Georgia Island. For four months Wild and his men subsist on seal and penguin meat supplemented with odds and ends of remaining rations and occasional seaweed. The primary frustration Wild faces during this period is boredom and he is energetic in finding ways to occupy or simply amuse the men. Wild is today commemorated by Point Wild on Elephant Island; additionally, the Elephant Island encampment is named Camp Wild in his honor.

Frank Worsley, captain

Frank Worsley, a New Zealand sailor, is captain of Endurance. His service during the initial stages of the expedition appears to have been rather pedestrian. After Endurance is crushed his skills became critical and obvious as he takes observations and calculates the crew's drifting position. He retains the only functional chronometer throughout the expedition which he wears about his neck at all times—without the instrument his observations are useless. When the expedition takes to the boats and attempts landfall, Worsley's daily sightings allow Shackleton to plot the expedition's location—the quirky currents of the Weddell Sea cause their immediate destination to be changed several times in rapid succession until, finally, Elephant Island is reached. Worsley's gruff manner does not ingratiate him to the men but his remarkable navigational and small-boat skills change their attitudes during the latter parts of the voyage.

Worsley accompanies Shackleton in the James Caird on the voyage from Elephant Island to South Georgia Island. Worsley's ability to take accurate sextant readings from the pitching James Caird, riding in fifty-foot seas and weather, is truly remarkable and his ability as a small-boat captain and navigator is perhaps unequal in maritime history. On the voyage, Worsley leads the second watch composed of himself, Vincent, and McCarthy. After making landfall, Worsley then accompanies Shackleton across the mountainous spine of South Georgia Island on the trek to the northern shore. Worsley is today commemorated by Mount Worsley of South Georgia Island.

Thomas Crean, second officer

Thomas Crean is the second officer of the expedition. He joins the Royal Navy at a young age and by the time of the expedition has undertaken two previous polar expeditions under the direction of Robert Scott, where Crean serves with distinction. Crean likewise serves with distinction during the expedition and is trusted and particularly valued by Shackleton. Crean's even-handed leadership and unflagging optimism earn him the respect of the men and he is generally well-liked. He is physically

powerful, intelligent, and dedicated to the men. Crean accompanies Shackleton in the James Caird on the voyage from Elephant Island to South Georgia Island. On this voyage, Crean serves on Shackleton's watch with McNeish and for several days maintains an almost superhuman strength and watchfulness. After making landfall, Crean then accompanies Shackleton across the mountainous spine of South Georgia Island on the trek to the northern shore. Crean is today commemorated by the Crean Glacier of South Georgia Island.

Dr. Alexander H. Macklin and Dr. James A. McIlroy, surgeons

Alexander Macklin and James McIlroy are the two surgeons of the expedition. Macklin is an English doctor, born in India, and is highly educated. Aside from his surgeon's duties he is placed in charge of a team of sledge dogs. Macklin therefore spends considerable time on salvage and hunting expeditions subsequent to Endurance's destruction. Macklin is fond of his dogs and regrets their eventual execution and consumption, but knows the necessity of such an action. Macklin demonstrates a quick temper on a few occasions but is generally reliable and well-liked by his crewmates.

McIlroy is an English surgeon and is highly educated. He has considerable experience practicing medicine. Like Macklin, McIlroy is placed in charge of a team of sledge dogs. McIlroy therefore spends considerable time on salvage and hunting expeditions subsequent to Endurance's destruction. Unlike Macklin, McIlroy is not overly-fond of his dogs. When Blackboro's foot has to be amputated, Macklin administers a chloroform anesthetic while the more-experienced surgeon McIlroy performs the operation. McIlroy's post-expedition life is noteworthy.

James Francis Hurley

James "Frank" Hurley is the expedition's official photographer; his work appears in the photographic plates included in the text. Hurley is a valued member of the crew and often goes beyond his official duties to assist others and perform menial duties. He appears to have retained a lively imagination and sense of humor throughout the expedition and is well-liked by most of his crewmates whom he endeavors, usually successfully, to keep in high spirits. Although Hurley has little practical polar experience, Shackleton frequently seeks his advice regarding camp movements and so forth.

During the destruction of Endurance, Hurley is mostly occupied in performing various duties and apparently does not salvage photographic equipment from the ship. After the initial camp is established, various salvage expeditions return to the ship and it is during these trips that most of the photographic plates and equipment subsequently used by Hurley are recovered. Because of Hurley's work, the expedition is well-documented, photographically.

Thomas H. Orde-Lees, motor expert (later storekeeper)

Orde-Lees is the motor expert of the expedition and serves admirably during the early parts of the expedition. He is highly educated and has military experience but is unpopular with most of the other men of the expedition who consider him lazy and condescending. After the destruction of Endurance he is appointed as store keeper and serves with martial zeal in that capacity. He apparently suffers from a dread of starvation and often keeps his personal rations for extended periods. Even so, he is scrupulously honest and is never suspected of sneaking extra portions of the stores over which he has been entrusted. During the voyage from the pack ice to Elephant Island, Orde-Lees refuses to assist in any way, and spends most of the voyage in his sleeping bag, wedged into the bottom of the boat. Orde-Lees' journal makes infrequent reference to his own laziness—a trait which he apparently finds acceptable. Orde-Lees is notorious for his voluminous flatulence and incessant snoring.

Harry McNeish, carpenter

McNeish is the carpenter of the expedition and, as such, is instrumental in performing much of the specialized work necessary for the crew's survival after Endurance is crushed. For example, he fashions new sledges and fixes existing sledges and, most importantly, he modifies the ship's boats which are used to reach Elephant Island. At Elephant Island, he further modifies James Caird by adding a sort of decking and strengthening the hull and spars. It is probable that McNeish's work saves the lives of all the men of the expedition. Even so, at forty years old he is one of the oldest members of the expedition and seems to suffer physically during the initial portions of the expedition's movements on the pack ice. At one point he is so physically and mentally spent that he briefly refuses to follow orders, rationalizing that the destruction of Endurance had freed him from his obligations. How he hopes to survive without the other men is unknown, but he apparently realizes his pitiable condition and shortly rejoins the expedition. After reaching Elephant Island, McNeish continues on with the small crew led by Shackleton and reaches South Georgia Island. He does not make the island traverse with Shackleton.

Perce Blackboro, stowaway (later steward)

Blackboro, a friend of expedition-member William Bakewell, joins Endurance in Buenos Aires as a temporary-duty hand. Desiring to accompany the expedition but refused permanent employment, he contrives to stowaway with Bakewell's help—he is nineteen years old at the time. When Blackboro is discovered, Shackleton, only half-jokingly, promises that Blackboro is to be the first man eaten should the expedition have to resort to the necessity of cannibalism to survive. Subsequent to this inauspicious start, however, Blackboro becomes a valuable crewmember and serves well on the expedition. Just prior to landing on Elephant Island, however, Blackboro suffers

extensive frostbite to his feet. Although his right foot recovers, gangrene sets in on his left foot. After several weeks of recuperation on Elephant Island, the expedition's surgeons amputate most of Blackboro's right foot—his wound thus becoming the most serious of the entire expedition.

Lionel Greenstreet, Hubert T. Hudson, Alfred Cheetham, Louis

The indicated men are the remainder of the crew of the expedition. Greenstreet is the first officer; Hudson is the navigator; Cheethan is the third officer; Rickinson is the first engineer; Kerr is the second engineer; Wordie is the geologist; Hussey is the meteorologist; James is the physicist; Clark is the biologist; Marston is the official artist—a few of his images are included in the text; Green is the ever-optimistic and capable cook; How, Bakewell, McCarhy, McLeod, and Vincent are able seamen; and Holness and Stevenson are the fireman. All of the men are, to some extent, described in the book though not nearly to the same degree as the individuals separately enumerated.

Objects/Places

Enduranceappears in non-fiction

The ship Endurance is a purpose-built vessel intended for polar exploration. She is designed by Aanderud Larsen and built in Sanderfjord, Norway under the direction of Christian Jacobsen. Her design and construction are scrupulously executed to ensure maximum strength and durability; she is launched in 1912. Shackleton purchases the ship as the primary conveyance for his planned trans-Antarctic voyage. She sails from England in August, 1914, touches at Buenos Aires for final provisioning, and departs from South Georgia Island in December, 1914. By January, 1915, Endurance is within a few hundred miles of her destination—but has been caught in heavy pack ice. By the end of January the pack ice has completely surrounded the ship and frozen it fast. The crew remains aboard her until late October, 1915, when Endurance is finally crushed by the unremitting pressure of the pack ice. She is thereafter slowly ground to pieces and sinks, settling finally into the water in late November, 1915. Endurance is a three-master vessel, barkentine rigged, and bearing a coal-steam engine. Her best speed is about ten knots, her length 144', her beam 25', her displacement about 350 tons, and her normal complement in the neighborhood of twenty-eight men.

James Cairdappears in non-fiction

The James Caird is a twenty-two foot whaleboat in which Shackleton, with five companions, makes an epic open-boat voyage of over 800 miles from Elephant Island to South Georgia Island during the winter of 1916. She is a double-ended whaleboat with a six-foot beam, made of pine planking over an American elm and English oak framework—with two feet of freeboard. She is later modified by McNeish to prepare for the journey by having a hide deck laced over her open bows. She carries the best equipment and supplies remaining to the expedition. The crew's survival in the treacherous southern seas is nothing short of miraculous, and Worsley's navigational skill proves remarkable. She is named for Sir James Caird, a financial backer of the expedition. The boat is today preserved in a college museum.

Dudley Docker and Stancomb Willsappears in non-fiction

The Dudley Docker and the Stancomb Wills are both ship's boats of Endurance. Each is about twenty-two feet in length and about six feet in beam. The Stancomb Wills is a capable sailor but the Dudley Docker proves difficult to handle, is swamped several times, and is almost lost on a few occasions. Neither boat proves more seaworthy than the James Caird, though both craft reach Elephant Island intact. Unlike the whaleboat, the two craft are heavy square-sterned boats constructed of solid oak, colloquially termed 'bottlenose killerboats'. They are thereafter converted into a makeshift hut on the

island. Both boats are named for financial backers of the expedition; Dudley Docker and Miss Janet Stancomb-Wills.

Ice Sledgesappears in non-fiction

An ice sledge is, basically, a cart or buggy with runners for sliding across frozen surfaces instead of wheels for rolling. Shackleton's sledges are narrow, medium-sized sleds and are capable of transporting a large amount of stores and one or more men. They are hauled by dogs. The expedition initially intended to use the ice sledges to traverse the Antarctic continent. After the expedition's goals are frustrated by pack ice, the sledges are salvaged and used in several abortive attempts to traverse the pack ice toward landfall on the Palmer Peninsula. Eventually the sledges are broken up and used as raw materials or abandoned. The dogs are shot or, at a later point, shot and eaten.

Pack Iceappears in non-fiction

Pack ice consists of compacted sea ice which floats on the surface of polar, or cold, seas, freed from attachment to land. It is carried about by wind and sea currents and often accumulates in huge masses of jumbled fields of ice. Pack ice also consists of large ice floes, large pieces of drift ice that are perhaps as much as ten or twenty yards thick and up to a mile in diameter. When two large floes are driven together by wind or currents, their edges heave upwards forming pressure ridges—walls of ice many feet high and up to a mile or more in length. The vast pack ice of the Weddell Sea, upon which Shackleton encamps, is driven in a generally clockwise direction by prevailing currents and tends to break up once thrust beyond the lee of the Palmer Peninsula.

Ocean Campappears in non-fiction

Ocean Camp is the name given to the first encampment of lengthy duration used by the men of the expedition. The camp is established upon a large pack ice floe that is fairly stable for several weeks. The camp, initially, is nearby the wreck of Endurance but gradually grows distant as the pack ice moves erratically about. The camp is abandoned during an abortive attempt to sledge across the pack ice toward a hoped-for landfall along the Palmer Peninsula.

Patience Campappears in non-fiction

Patience Camp is the name given to the second encampment of lengthy duration used by the men of the expedition. The camp is established upon a large pack ice floe that is fairly stable throughout several months. The name refers to the realization of the men that they will be forced to remain in the camp for a long time, after they admit the futility of sledging across the pack ice toward land. The camp is abandoned because the ice floe begins to melt and erode away.

Weddell Seaappears in non-fiction

The Weddell Sea, part of the Southern Ocean, lies astride the Antarctic continent and is bounded on the west by the Palmer Peninsula. Most of the sea is encumbered by permanent ice. It is known as inhospitable, dangerous, and full of capricious winds and currents. Virtually the entire text takes place in the Weddell Sea.

Elephant Island and Wild Campappears in non-fiction

A tiny and very remote island in the southern seas at 61 08' South and 55 7' West, Elephant Island is an icy and mountainous crag jutting from the seas with only tiny beaches accessible by sea. Virtually the island's only claim to fame is that it provides landfall and refuge to the men of Shackleton's expedition; they select a tiny beach for a lengthy stay and christened the area Wild Camp in honor of the expedition's second-in-command Frank Wild. It is devoid of plant life and nearly devoid of animal life.

South Georgia Islandappears in non-fiction

A small and remote island in the southern seas at 54º 15' South and 36º 45' West, South Georgia Island is part of the South Sandwich Islands. During the time of the text, the island is the most-isolated and a final outpost of civilization in the southern hemisphere. The island features, historically, a series of tiny whaling outposts along the northern shore. Shackleton's open boat reaches the southern shore and his unequipped trip without provisions over the mountainous spine of the island still ranks as one of the great feats of mountaineering.

Leopard Sealsappears in non-fiction

Leopard seals are large-bodied keystone predators of the Antarctic; killer whales are their only natural predator. The expedition encounters several leopard seals during the period of living on the pack ice and the encounters are usually violent as men are pursued—as prey—by the leopard seals until they either escape or, preferably, are rescued by someone with a rifle. The leopard seals encountered by Shackleton's expedition routinely top 1,000 pounds, remarkably large for the species. Several leopard seals are killed and then eaten by the expedition.

Themes

Polar Adventure

Shackleton could offer very few tangible reasons for undertaking the ill-fated expedition. Certainly a trans-Antarctic expedition had never been accomplished, but the reward for executing such an expedition was to be found only in the doing of it and not in any real economic or political gain, though certainly national honor and fervor accounted for much of the expedition's funding. Shackleton himself was fairly uninterested in the science—either biological or geological—of the undertaking and seems to have included scientists only in order to secure funding from various sources. Indeed, the entire expedition seems fairly devoid of purpose beyond doing it because it had not been done before. It is evident, therefore, that the entire voyage was nothing more, nor less, than a grand adventure.

In this respect, at least, the fact that the ship is caught and crushed by ice, causing an abandonment of the intended purpose, is not greatly significant. After abandoning the ship and their stated purpose, the expedition embarks on a remarkable and nearly impossible struggle to survive. After many months of living on pack ice floes the party takes to open boats and manages to navigate through the most dangerous sea on earth to a tiny speck of an island where a tenuous camp is established. Later, Shackleton and a few hardy men set sail over hundreds of miles of trackless sea in a tiny craft to make landfall on another speck of an island. Then they cross nearly impossible terrain with no equipment to arrive at a whaling station which was then, perhaps, the most-remote vestige of civilization on the planet. By any standard, their incredible voyage surmounted a trans-Antarctic expedition in scope, daring, and adventure.

Survival

The dominant and obvious secondary theme of the text deals with the daily survival of men trapped by the reality of brutal nature. When Endurance sailed she was well-provisioned and while aboard the ship the members of the expedition lived a relatively easy life, free from undue worries of actual day-to-day survival. That changes, and drastically so, when Endurance is crushed by pack ice. Once the men abandon the crushed ship they are faced with the immediacy of simple day-to-day survival and all of their thoughts and actions are devoted to surviving until the next day.

For many months the expedition members live on a camp pitched on a frozen ice floe, hundreds of miles from land. During this time freezing is a constant danger. Occasionally seals are killed to supplement their stockpile of rations, salvaged from the ship, and thus starvation is not, at first, an imminent reality. However, as the weeks and months pass, food stores are exhausted and the expedition relies more and more on what meat is obtained by hunting. During some periods, rations are reduced to the point of starvation and the reality of death by starvation appears possible.

Finally, as the pack ice begins to thaw and crumble, the expedition members face death by drowning or by being crushed between jostling hunks of pack ice. They take to the open boats to make an attempt upon land—ultimately successful—and are threatened by exposure and exhaustion. Once land is obtained, a smaller party setsout across hundreds of miles of dangerous seas, then across an unmapped mountain range to arrive, finally, at a distant outpost of civilization. Throughout the entire ordeal, daily survival proves a struggle. Thankfully, it is a struggle to which the determined men proved equal.

Triumph Amidst Difficulty

Had the expedition vanished into the polar waste, as so many others did both before and after, there would likely have been no book. Instead, the fate of the men would be considered briefly in a footnote or a paragraph in a text devoted to the history of polar exploration and they would, today, be all but forgotten victims of the strange but unshakable human compulsion to explore. That they were marooned on floating ice, made a treacherous sea voyage in open boats through the most dangerous seas on the planet, and survived and indeed triumphed throughout disaster, is what is truly incredible about Shackleton's voyage.

Throughout the ordeal, the most-dangerous aspect of survival faced by the men was that of mental resoluteness. Had they simply given up, as McNeish nearly did on one occasion, they would certainly have perished. The dominant leadership of Shackleton was omnipresent and his nearly uncanny certainty of triumph instilled most, if not all, of the men with the vision of a successful return to civilization. Their survival was not merely a mute stumbling forth from the Antarctica, but a triumphal rebirth because of, rather than in spite of, the incredibly difficulties through which they passed.

Style

Perspective

The historical text is written from the perspective of some decades after the events described. It is presented in a typical journalistic third-person, limited, point of view. The infrequently presented interior thoughts or motivations of individuals are not created from whole cloth but instead derived from analysis of journal entries and personal interviews with survivors. Indeed, the source materials available to the author are incredibly complete and a list of acknowledgements and primary sources are offered at the end of the text.

The text explores the incredible journey of Shackleton and the men of his expedition from the early stages of preparation through the sailing and eventual destruction of Endurance, to their adventure on the pack ice until their ultimate rescue. There is little direct information provided about the expedition's larger historical significance or impact on polar exploration. Similarly, the text does not consider the sociological phenomenon of polar exploration. The text is highly focused on presenting the expedition itself, stripped of all external considerations, and in this the text is highly successful and entirely accessible to any reader.

Tone

The book is crafted with a particularly even and cool tone, reminiscent of a professional journalistic presentation of historical events. Sensationalist language or constructions are entirely absent and the simple, tuned sentences and paragraphs present the exciting and dangerously thrilling expedition in an accessible format, materially contributing to the text's enduring success. The book's opening statements make it clear that the scientific expedition ends in unsuccessful disaster, that the subsequent fight for survival is perilous, thrilling, and ultimately successful, and that no expedition member is lost throughout the entire ordeal.

This results-first construction sets the serious but casual tone which is masterfully carried throughout the remainder of the text. From the first pages the reader knows the outcome and thus the material is presented as an exciting and thrilling sequence of dangerous events which are all overcome by the determination of the capable crew and the devoted Shackleton. Freed from any artificial 'whodunit' suspense, the text is therefore able to establish a consistent and successful tone and texture.

Structure

The 282-page text is divided into seven enumerated parts and a five-page epilogue. Each part averages about thirty-five pages in length, from the longest Part I at sixty-one pages to the shortest Part VII at sixteen pages. Each Part is further divided into three to

eight enumerated chapters with six chapters being about average; chapters average a little less than seven pages in length each, from the longest Part I, Chapter 2, at thirteen pages to the shortest Part V, Chapter 3 at a scant three pages. With the exception of Part I, Chapter 1, the text is presented in a standard chronological format with the earliest events presented first and the latest events presented last. Part I, Chapter 1 deviates from this by presenting the dramatic destruction of the Endurance and then returning in Part I, Chapter 2, to the earliest background of the expedition. The chronological structure is deviated from once again in the final segments of the text when the party is split into two groups—the larger group is dealt with first, and the smaller group is then discussed. The text also includes six black and white photographic plates showing photographs taken during the expedition and two black and white plates depicting artistic renderings of events on the expedition. The text quotes, briefly, a few journal entries written by various expedition members.

The text is written in a professional journalistic style and is imminently accessible and very enjoyable. The excitement of adventure and the thrill of danger are accurately captured and concisely conveyed to the reader. Indeed, the professional quality of the writing ensures the text will endure for many more years. The material presented is tightly focused on the expedition and only important details are offered. For example, there is little detail offered about sledging equipment or technique because, in the event, sledging was relatively insignificant to the expedition's survival. On the other hand, a considerable amount of detail is afforded pack ice formation and movement—as this topic is vital to a complete understanding of the expedition's ultimate disposition.

Quotes

"The order to abandon ship was given at 5 P.M. For most of the men, however, no order was needed because by then everybody knew that the ship was done and that it was time to give up trying to save her. There was no show of fear or even apprehension. They had fought unceasingly for three days and they had lost. They accepted their defeat almost apathetically. They were simply too tired to care.
Frank Wild, the second-in-command, made his way forward along the buckling deck to the crew's quarters. There, two seamen, Walter How and William Bakewell, were lying in the lower bunks. Both were very nearly exhausted from almost three days at the pumps; yet they were unable to sleep because of the sounds the ship was making.
She was being crushed. Not all at once, but slowly, a little at a time. The pressure of ten million tons of ice was driving in against her sides. And dying as she was, she cried in agony. Her frames and planking, her immense timbers, many of them almost a foot thick, screamed as the killing pressure mounted. And when her timbers could no longer stand the strain, they broke with a report like artillery fire," (p. 2).

"Shackleton's order to abandon ship, while it signaled the beginning of the greatest of all Antarctic adventures, also sealed the fate of one of the most ambitious of all Antarctic expeditions. The goal of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, as its name implies, was to cross the Antarctic continent overland from west to east.
Evidence of the scope of such an undertaking is the fact that after Shackleton's failure, the crossing of the continent remained untried for fully forty-three years—until 1957-1958. Then, as an independent enterprise conducted during the International Geophysical Year, Dr. Vivian E. Fuchs led the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition on the trek. And even Fuchs, though his party was equipped with heated, tracked vehicles and powerful radios, and guided by reconnaissance planes and dog teams, was strongly urged to give it up. It was only after a tortuous journey lasting nearly four months that Fuchs did in fact achieve what Shackleton set out to do in 1915," (p. 9).

"'May the Lord help you to do your duty & guide you through all the dangers by land and sea.'
'May you see the Works of the Lord & all his Wonders in the deep.'
These words were written on the flyleaf of a Bible given to the expedition by the Queen Mother Alexandra of England. Shackleton carried the Bible in his hand as he left the Endurance and walked slowly across the ice toward the campsite.
The others hardly noticed his arrival. They were busy crawling in and out of the tents, trying, numbly, to create some degree of comfort with what energy remained in them. Some arranged pieces of lumber to keep themselves off the snow-covered ice. Others spread pieces of canvas as ground-covers. But there was not enough flooring for everybody and several men had to lie directly on the bare snow. It made little difference. Sleep was all that mattered. And they slept—most of them embracing their nearest tentmates to keep from freezing," (p. 62).

"Though their floe remained undamaged throughout the pressure, Shackleton, who did not want a false sense of security to develop among the men, issued an Emergency Stations Bill on November 15. Unlikely as escape was, every man was assigned a specific duty in case the party should suddenly have to strike camp. If their route was to be over the ice, the sledge drivers would harness their teams with all possible speed with the other men gathered the stores and equipment, struck the tents, and then stood by the sledges. Or if, as they hoped, they could escape by water, they were to ready the boats," (p. 79).

"Worsley named the place 'Mark Time Camp,' but it didn't seem an especially appropriate name. It implied that they had halted only temporarily, and would soon be on the move again. But nobody really believed they would.
After five days of exhausting struggle, they were suddenly idle. Now there was almost nothing to do, except to think. And there was altogether too much time for that.
Many of them, it seemed, finally grasped for the first time just how desperate things really were. More correctly, they became aware of their own inadequacy, of how utterly powerless they were. Until the march from Ocean Camp they had nurtured in the backs of their minds the attitude Shackleton strove so unceasingly to imbue them with, a basic faith in themselves—that they could, if need be, pit their strength and their determination against any obstacle—and somehow overcome it," (p. 100).

"To make matters worse, the problem of food—especially blubber for cooking—was again approaching the critical point. It was three weeks since they had killed a seal, and the meager store of blubber from the Adélies was almost gone. Their stock of provisions from the ship was also nearly exhausted. On March 16, the last of their flour was used up. It was made into dog pemmican bannocks, and several men nipped and nibbled at their 1-ounce portions for more than an hour," (p. 121).

"The first few minutes were crucial—and they were maddening. The oarsmen did their best to pull together, but they were clumsy and out of practice, and hampered by their own anxiety. The encircling ice fouled the oars, and collisions were unavoidable. Men crouched in the bows of each boat and tied to pole off the bigger pieces of ice, but many outweighed the boats themselves.
The raised sides of the James Caird and the Dudley Docker were an added hindrance. They made the seats too low for proper rowing, and though cases of stores were placed under the four oarsmen in each boat, it was still an awkward business," (p. 140).

"He checked his calculations over, and the expression of puzzlement gave way to one of worry. Once more he ran through his computations; then he slowly raised his head. Shackleton had brought the Caird alongside the Docker, and Worsley showed him the position—62º 15' South, 53º 7' West.
They were 124 miles nearly due east of King George Island and 61 miles southeast of Clarence Island—22 miles farther from land than when they had launched the boats from Patience Camp three days before!" (p. 155).

"From where they stood around the blubber stove, the cliffs of their side of the island were less than 15 yards away. They rose straight up 800 feet into the air, leveled off for a bit, then climbed skyward again to a height of perhaps 2,500 feet. But their little niche of gravel was relatively thick with life—'a land of fatness, Antarctically speaking,' James noted. Farther down the beach, ten seals lay basking in the sun a short distance from the water. There was also a small rookery of ringed penguins high up on a rock to one side, and periodically little bands of gentoo penguins waddled up out of the water to survey these strange creatures who had come in from the sea. There were birds, too—skua gulls, paddies, cormorants, and Cape pigeons," (pp. 178-9).

"More and more, as the days wore on, they fell inescapably into the routine of their existence. Each evening before supper they would take one final long look to seaward to make certain that the dark shape of a ship or a wisp of smoke on the horizon had not been overlooked. But when they had satisfied themselves that no relief vessel was to be seen, they would go into the hut for supper.
Afterward Hussey would often play the banjo for a time. But the short period in the evening before the blubber lamps were extinguished was devoted mostly to talk. Almost anything could serve as a topic of conversation or debate, though their rescue was the primary subject, with food running a close second," (p. 200).

"'Monday April 24th...We took Good bye with our companions, & set sail on our 870 miles to South Georgia for assistance at 12-30 & at 2 P M we came to a stream of ice which we managed to get through in about an hour. Then we were in the open sea wet through but happy through it all.'
McNeish's log.
'Monday, 24th. April.'
'Wild Camp for Rating Chron. 192/262'
'Took departure in James Caird at 12-30 p.m. Steered N.N.E. 8 miles, then E. 1 mile to a break in the stream ice here running E and W'
'Wind: to 4 p.m. WNW 6 [approx. 30 MPH]...'
Worsley's log," (p. 218).

"There was a moment of confusion, then they felt her roll sickeningly to starboard as she fell off into the trough of the sea and they knew instinctively what had happened. Both Shackleton and Worsley scrambled to their feet and looked forward. The frayed end of the bow line was dragging through the water. The lump of ice was gone—and the sea anchor with it.
Shackleton thrust his head below and shouted for the others to get the jib. They hauled it out, frozen into a rumpled mass. Crean and McCarthy crept forward over the heavily rolling deck, dragging the sail with them. The rigging, too, was frozen and had to be beaten into compliance. But after a long minute or two they got enough ice off the halyards to hoist the jib to the mainmast as a storm trysail.
Slowly, grudgingly, the Caird's bow once more swung around into the wind, and all of them felt the tension go out of their muscles," (p. 234).

"It was a curiously quiet moment, almost devoid of rejoicing. They had accomplished the impossible, but at a staggering price. Now it was over, and they knew only that they were unutterably tired—too tired even to savor much more than the dim awareness that they had won. They managed, however, to shake hands all around. It seemed somehow the thing to do.
Yet even in that small moment of victory, tragedy threatened. The surf inside the cove was especially heavy. It had swung the Caird's stern around, and she was pounding against the rocks," (p. 256).

"But they were tired now to the point of exhaustion. They found a little sheltered spot behind a rock and sat down, huddled together with their arms around one another for warmth. Almost at once Worsley and Crean fell asleep, and Shackleton, too, caught himself nodding. Suddenly he jerked his head upright. All the years of Antarctic experience told him that this was the danger sign—the fatal sleep that trails off into freezing death. He fought to stay awake for five long minutes, then he woke the others, telling them that they had slept for half an hour," (p. 269).

"A few minutes later they heard his footsteps running along the path, but nobody paid much attention. He was simply late for lunch. Then he put his head inside and spoke to Wild in a tone so breathless that some of the men thought he sounded casual.
'Hadn't we better send up some smoke signals?' he asked.
For a moment there was silence, and then, as one man, they grasped what Marston was saying.
'Before there was time for a reply,' Orde-Lees recorded, 'there was a rush of members tumbling over one another, all mixed up with mugs of seal hoosh, making a simultaneous dive for the door-hole which was immediately torn to shreds so that those members who could not pass through it, on account of the crush, made their exits through the "wall," or what remained of it.'
Some put their boots on—others didn't bother. James put his on the wrong feet.
Sure enough, there was a small ship, only about a mile offshore," (pp. 278-9).

Topics for Discussion

After reading the text, do you think that Shackleton's expedition could have accomplished a trans-polar sledging expedition given their equipment and state of readiness? In retrospect, what additional equipment should have the expedition taken?

How do you think the expedition was thought of 'back home' in England, in the midst of World War I?

On one occasion Shackleton refused to allow his men to bring in a few seals that they had shot earlier in the day—he considered their retrieval too risky due to the conditions on the ice. Several weeks later, facing severely restricted rations, many of the men thought Shackleton's decision to have been foolish or incorrect. In retrospect, do you think Shackleton made the right decision?

After reading the book, would you like to visit places like Elephant Island and South Georgia Island? Do you find them to be romantic destinations, worthless wastelands, or exotic adventure locales?

Imagine yourself as an expedition member—would you be more frightened of leopard seals, killer whales, drowning, or freezing to death? Discuss.

One man lost a few teeth, another man lost most of one foot, and all of the men suffered frostbite, exhaustion, stress, and hunger. Given this, if offered the chance would you volunteer to make such a journey of exploration? Why or why not?

Rather than wait for a suitable rescue ship, Shackleton made several abortive attempts to retrieve his marooned expedition members from Elephant Island. Discuss these early, unsuccessful attempts. Was Shackleton being foolhardy? Was he being realistic in his expectation to affect a rescue with whatever ship was at hand?

Consider the social and historic legacy of Shackleton's expedition. How did the failure of the expedition change the political and scientific world? How did the triumphant survival of all of the members of the expedition change people's larger attitudes about polar exploration?

The text functions remarkably well as journalistic history. Do you think the text could function equally well as a novel? Why or why not?