



Ice Station Zebra

Alistair MacLean

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A classic thriller from the bestselling master of action and suspense. The atomic submarine Dolphin has impossible orders: to sail beneath the ice-floes of the Arctic Ocean to locate and rescue the men of weather-station Zebra, gutted by fire and drifting with the ice-pack somewhere north of the Arctic Circle. But the orders do not say what the Dolphin will find if she succeeds -- that the fire at Ice Station Zebra was sabotage, and that one of the survivors is a killer!

Ice Station Zebra Details

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From Reader Review Ice Station Zebra for online ebook

The-vault says

By Alistair Maclean. Grade: B+

Alistair Maclean has proved time and time again that he is the master when it comes to war fiction. Ice Station Zebra is no exception.

The atomic submarine Dolphin has impossible orders: to sail beneath the ice-floes of the Arctic Ocean to locate and rescue the men of weather-station Zebra, gutted by fire and drifting with the ice-pack somewhere north of the Arctic Circle. But the orders do not say what the Dolphin will find if she succeeds – that the fire at Ice Station Zebra was a sabotage, and that one of the survivors is a killer,

The plot begins at the time of departure for Dolphin, the nuclear submarine of the United States Navy. Their mission is to find the survivors, if any of the practically destroyed US weather station known as Drift Station Zebra which is indispensable to the government. General Swanson, the commander of the submarine is known to be one of the calmest and composed leaders, a stickler for rules and only his own boss. It is this attitude that the protagonist of this novel, Dr. John Carpenter encounters when he tries to come aboard the submarine even though he had proper authorization required to do so. Claiming to be a specialist of some marine activity and a doctor too, he finally manages to board the submarine and the Dolphin sets sail, so to speak.

Facing many obstacles such as the unforgiving ice and treacherous waters, the Dolphin finally manages to reach the Arctic, somewhere in the middle of which the Drift Station Zebra was lost. On making contact with the weather station, the crew made efforts (and some almost got killed in the process) to rescue whoever survivors were left in the station and the equipment which are assets of the US government. While sifting through the station, they come across certain discrepancies. On investigating further, Carpenter comes to know that the station was intentionally burnt down in order to cover up for the already committed crimes and that there is a killer among the survivors.

On the event of the return of the Dolphin, the cat-and-mouse chase between the unknown killer and the good guys begins. One-by-one, a series of mishaps and murders strikes the Dolphin and they have to struggle to stay afloat. The protagonists, frantically trying to find out who the real killer is, have to put up a fight of their lives just to make sure that they do not fall prey to somebody's evil intentions when so much is at stake.

Alistair Maclean has a unique style of writing. For conventional fiction readers the language of novels is mostly in third person. But in certain Alistair Maclean novels, the language is in first person. There is no separate narration and the central character himself narrates. If well written this really adds flair to the script of the novel. The language used in the novel is really rich.

There are sequences when the Dolphin is in danger and is about to sink. These sequences really bring up the novel by more than a notch. The utter chaos, the macro-level hysteria, the complete frenzy was so well brought out that one could feel it right before his eyes. The characters of General Swanson and John Carpenter were very well sketched out. The only drawback was that the novel was dry. The novel is 400-odd pages long but the problem is that it lacks a necessary flavour and spice. On the face of it, it becomes very bland.

Overall, it is an interesting read for its detailing and unique writing style.

Originally reviewed at: www.the-vault.co.cc

Rod says

I Read Ice Station Zebra when i was away at Boarding School 1965 it was the second of Alistair MacLean Novels I Also read and thoroughly enjoyed "Night Without End" was the first I still feel it was the First Book to start my addiction for a good thriller just another Tip for the Author
I would have to give this Book 4 stars

James says

One part Agatha Christie, one part Hunt for Red October, this ended up being better than I thought it would be, because I had some real doubts over the first 75 or so pages. It really plods along over those early few chapters, taking a while to set up the story, show each of the main characters, show you the ship in what feels like more detail than needed, although you're aware that a lot of it will come into play later, and it does. Once the ship is finally underway, however, the adventure picks up. It is one of those thriller/mysteries where there's one mishap or problem after another that requires creative, quick thinking and plenty of physical and mental resolve. The pacing is much better in the latter 75% and keeps a steady gait throughout, never slowing too much before something else happens, especially once the crew knows there's a killer in their midst. I enjoyed how the narrator/POV character didn't reveal his own secrets with the reader either, not until later, only giving hints, and how many of his actions are esoteric and mysterious, making you wonder if you're following a reliable narrator at all. One point that irked me a little is that the author is clearly British, and as such many of the Americans sometimes speak exactly how the British think Americans might speak, not all "Howdy" cowboy-like, but in that the American characters sometimes use terms and phrases and mannerisms that remind me of British officers rather than Americans. Maybe it's just me, but it felt like a rather clear limitation of the author. My other beef is with the ending: (view spoiler) Just a thought. Otherwise, a fine book once it actually gets underway. I haven't seen the film, but I knew Ernest Borgnine was in it and I imagined him as the captain in the book, but I guess he wasn't in the film. Alas.

Patrick Nichol says

This is a first-rate Cold War thriller that stacks up well against the Tom Clancys of the world.

The book is also completely different from the famous Rock Hudson film.

MacLean's novel is a finely-crafted whodunit set in the frigid High Arctic.

Why did a fire break out on the British Arctic research station Zebra? And why is a U.S. nuclear submarine obliged to rescue, taking along a mysterious British physician with carte blanche from the Pentagon?

Toss in subterfuge, Soviets and constant jeopardy and you have a sensational reading recipe.

Highly recommended.

Joni Dee says

Ice Station Zebra is Not Responding

Drift Ice Station Zebra is not answering. In fact, after reporting a catastrophic fire which killed a few of its men, the remote British arctic monitoring station went off grid. Since it's a drifting station, due to the north pole's circular motion, nobody can actually pin point where it is. The West's recon planes are getting nothing and even the surprising assistant from the Russians who sent an "Ice Breaker" class ship, came up with nothing.

American naval officer and submarine skipper, Commander Swanson, takes the USS Dolphin, which is docking in Scotland, on a rescue mission. The Dolphin is a state of the art Nuclear sub, second to none in the US Navy and the entire world.

Just before they embark, the narrator, Dr Carpenter, requests permission to board the rescue mission. A strange directive from Washington affirms the Doctor's unique status. Swanson doesn't trust him, nor do his men, who are as good they come. Things get even trickier when Carpenter shares Ice Station Zebra's real purpose and the fact that he suspects foul play.

Before getting to the novel itself I feel compelled to explain what drove me to grab an "old" Alistair MacLean classic.

First, by reviewing a classic thriller from 1963, I hope to expose some of you younger readers to a masterpiece, which is high up there among the mystery titans as Christie and Simenon. Second, as a thriller novelist myself I have been looking up to the old masters for inspiration, having read a few Poirot books recently. I exclaim that Ice Station Zebra has provided much.

Alistair MacLean does extremely well to draw the reader without the need of using any "fireworks and pyrotechnics". The scenery is dreary at best. There aren't many tools one can use when describing the inside of a Nuclear sub, or the wide desolate plains of the arctic. Nonetheless these are the perfect sceneries to pose as a fertile ground for mystery and eeriness.

I immediately identified with both Dr Carpenter, and the honest Commander Swanson. While Carpenter tells the story first hand, it is clear that he has something to hide. This is even more contrast vis a vis his admiring descriptions of Swanson's infallible, placating and impeccable character.

The plot has twists and turns, no stone is left untouched and no one is beyond suspicion. Carpenter does well to expose us readers to more information bits by bits, on a need to know basis. The readers are left aching for information, much like Commander Swanson at times.

It is only at the ultimate ending when Carpenter rounds up the lot, and like a skilful cold-war era Hercule Poirot delivers the conclusion.

Throughout the novel we learn that the fire which erupted on Drift Ice Station Zebra was no accident at all; It turns out that Drift Ice Station Zebra was far more than a meteorologist station; And we will soon learn that not Carpenter nor the survivors are what they seem, and nothing should be taken at Face Value.

Whoever met me personally, knows that I'm extremely busy during the day at work, and tremendously busy at evenings (with full-of-energy toddlers). However, I breezed through this novel in less than a week, as it seemed to stick to my fingers. A rave 5 star review (6 if there was such a mark).

Originally posten on Brittany's Pages

Ann aka Iftcan says

Ok, I enjoyed the book but frankly the movie SUCKED big time. Even Ernest Borgnine (who is a great character actor, btw) couldn't save this one. His character didn't even appear in the book, the whole ending was messed up and. . .

Oh wait, I'm supposed to be reviewing the BOOK. :o)

The book is a great read, but then I haven't found a single one of Maclean's books that I didn't enjoy.

I like the interplay between the characters in this one and the descriptions of the ice pack actually made me feel COLD they were so good.

Not having ever made it onto a nuclear sub, I have no idea if the descriptions were accurate or not. But the way that sailors relate was real--I grew up Navy and watched even non-nukes react to each other this way. When you are out at sea and your life depends on the guys around you, you quickly develop a family type relationship.

All in all, a nice taunt thriller.

Mike says

A classic adventure tale, although the narrator kept a lot of secrets from everyone including the reader.

Intending this book to fulfil the Seasonal Reading Challenge WINTER CHALLENGE 2017

25.4 - Nick KY's Task: White Winter, Yellow Moon, book 1, option B. The book is on page one of the list Ice and Snow.

Dhiraj Sharma says

Along with HMS Ulyse, Golden Rendezvous and San Andreas this is one of the best MacLean Novels.

A USN Nuclear Submarine dashes to the Arctic to rescue a British meteorological team trapped on the polar ice cap. However except the protagonist nobody knows that the rescue attempt is really a cover-up for one of the most desperate espionage missions of the Cold War.

MacLean is at his favourite territory here i.e the Sea. The climax is the proverbial "tables were turned".

Believe me nobody writes like Maclean and Ice Station Zebra will keep you biting at your nails till the last page.

L.A. Larkin says

High tension and a lot of mystery about the central character. But who is the real hero? The Brit or the US

submarine captain? The ending is a who-done-it. The details of the submarine under the Arctic sea ice and how the submarine breaks through to rescue a British team near death, is stunning. A great adventure.

Michael says

Typical Alistair MacLean novel from the 1960s. Man vs. nature. Man vs. machine. Man vs. man (cold war setting). A rescue mission to a remote polar outpost is much more than it seems. Adventure at the North Pole with an atomic submarine. (MacLean loved the sea and loved writing about boats.) Don't worry about character development (there is none) or being tempted by the weaker sex (there are no women in this story). This is an actioner and we get right down to it from page one. I love it! Loved reading MacLean growing up and still love him today (at least his early stuff anyway). Highly recommended.

Thomas Strömquist says

Good MacLean thriller! For some reason this, along with Night Without End, showed off some of the writer's abilities for me. I have never felt the cold so much in stories (I have a tendency to sometimes forget the setting or time of year and so forth in a story) as I did in these ones. Not one of the best, but a quick and fun read.

Rosemary says

The first part of this contained too much information about submarines for my taste, but they quickly reached the arctic ice where it became more interesting, and the second half was gripping.

Simon says

Not perfect, but has aged much better than Ian Fleming's novels about James Bond and stands heads and shoulders above most modern spy thriller books that's for certain. (Tom Clancy and his ilk) The characters are pretty well-defined with distinctive personalities even though not many words are spent on their characterization, the plot actually takes its time to build up logically and the prose can occasionally get quite beautiful when describing the Arctic landscape.

Speaking of that: It's also at least as much a wilderness survival story as a spy novel, and I didn't mind that. The Arctic almost comes alive and becomes a character in the book, being a more memorable antagonist than the Soviet spies.

Bob Mayer says

One of the classic thrillers. Made into a decent movie.

Back in the good old days when the Soviets were the bad guys the Cold War was cold. Really cold in this case. MacLean was a master story-teller with fast paced plots. The race to Ice Station Zebra is classic; one thing this book taught me as a writer is that you can push the limits to develop characters. While some things might seem amazing coincidences-- why not?

I commanded an A-Team in 10th Special Forces so we did Winter Warfare every year. I can empathize with trying to conduct operations in the cold. And, unfortunately, we got the added specialty of maritime operations after graduating the Royal Danish Navy's Fromandkorpset combat swim course-- being in the North Sea in November wasn't fun-- but locking out of a sub really sucked. I don't know how those guys do it on those submarines.

If you're looking for a fast, fun read, I recommend this book.

Conrad Kinch says

I've always had a fondness for Alistair MacLean. My father would return home from work in Dublin City centre and leave his wool coat steaming in the hall. There was a second hand bookshop near the train station and he would stop off on Fridays and special occasions and buy a handful of paperbacks. The rules of the game were as follows, if I'd been good, I would be directed after dinner that "You might find something interesting, if you look in my coat."

If reports were bad, these might mysteriously disappear. A little personal reconnaissance before the appointed hour was acceptable, but woe betide the Kinch minor that tried to snaffle one before his time. MacLean, Captain W.E. Johns, Richard Jeffries, Rosemary Sutcliff and a variety of boy detectives features a great deal. Henty was bigger and only came solo, as there was a limit to what Dad's pockets would hold. Curiously enough, I don't recall ever getting Ice Station Zebra.

The tale on the face of it is simple enough, there has been an accident at a British Antarctic Base and a US Navy Nuclear Submarine is dispatched to help. On board is Dr Carpenter, a mysterious Englishman, who is tasked with discovering what exactly occurred at the station.

As is traditional in an Alistair MacLean nothing is quite as it seems. Dr Carpenter, who is also a narrator, is revealed as steely eyed secret agent demonstrates the typical MacLean virtues of immense physical endurance, dogged determination and deeply cynical humour. There is no sex or romance in the story and comparatively little violence as the most brutal struggles of the book are pit man against the landscape. The nuclear submarine USS Dolphin is a prominent character in the action, this is not a techno-thriller in the Clancy mould. MacLean is far more interested in men than machine. This is a relatively short book, I read it over a day. It is also an old fashioned story in that it is one where things happen. There is precious little time for reflection or character development, not when there are Reds to outwit and icy tundras to cross.

In a strange way Ice Station Zebra has more in common with classic Christie mysteries like "Murder on the Orient Express" and "Ten Little Indians" than the bullet laced thrillers of our own day. The hero must solve a puzzle against the clock while trapped with his array of suspects. Ultimately despite his brute strength, weapons and the exotic locale, Dr Carpenter must resolve things the old fashioned way, by thinking.

And for those of you who like that sort of thing, this is exactly the sort of thing that you like.

Straker says

A sort of anti-James Bond spy novel, with no female characters at all and settings that are anything but glamorous, yet for the most part a highly enjoyable Cold War era page-turner. Two caveats: MacLean, a Scotsman, puts far too many Britishisms in the mouths of his American submariners, something I'm very surprised wasn't caught in the editing process. Also the ending, one of those "let's gather everyone in a room and reveal the murderer" set pieces, seems to belong in a different book, perhaps something written by Agatha Christie or Rex Stout. That aside, the novel is briskly entertaining and definitely worth a few hours of your time.

Dalton Lynne says

Ice Station Zebra was pretty good - once you got halfway or more into it. Before that time, it felt quite plodding ... far from engaging. This is the reason I knocked off one star from the review. It also didn't help that the narrator was a bit on the dull side. Otherwise, I'd have given it four stars because when everything came together it was fairly solid.

However, I also have to add that when the bad guy was 'revealed' at the end, it wasn't surprising, as I'd already pegged who the villain was - not necessarily because of anything particular I picked up on, but merely because I think I've seen enough movies, and read enough whodunit books, to be able to figure out with a fair amount of consistency who the bad guy is. This was one of those times.

IMO, this story would be more entertaining as a movie - and because there is a movie based on the book I plan to see it, even though I've heard that the book is far better. At any rate, after having read this (which was my first Alistair MacLean book), I'm definitely interested in picking some of his other writings

Lily Lindsey-Aubrey says

All the books Alistair MacLean has blessed this world with that I have read, I have loved. But this one tops them all, and has landed right on the top of my favourite books list. Every time I read it, it gets better, too.

I'm a really sensory person. I love the nitty-gritty bits, the times when a writer makes you *feel everything*. MacLean does just that. There's one chapter that is just so intense that I actually caught myself holding my breath by accident while reading it.

Besides the wonderful, engrossing, colourful descriptions, there are also plot twists that blow the mind. In fact, one of them I forgot about the second read-through, and got to enjoy all over again.

Then there's the never-ending fascination an unreliable narrator provides. It doesn't stop at the thrills physically and emotionally, it also bends the mind. I makes me think, which makes it the best kind of thriller there is.

Whether you're into thrillers or not, I would definitely recommend this book.

Oliviu Craznic says

Beneficiind de o ecranizare celebr? ?i inspirat din fapte reale (Opera?iunea CIA „Cold Feet”), acest roman detectivistic de tip „Agatha Christie” (un submarin trimis s? salveze membrii unei sta?ii pseudometeorologice arctice aflate în deriv? se treze?te la bord cu un sabotor care trebuie identificat) nu este printre capodoperele lui MacLean.

Ceea ce nu este o problem? - toate c?r?ile lui Alistair MacLean se citesc cu pl?cere, chiar dac? nu toate te las? f?r? grai.

Varianta ap?rut? la noi, „Misiunea Cobra” (!), la Editura Lucman, este bine tradus? - bravo Mihai C.

Niculescu! (titlul a fost schimbat probabil pentru c? zebrele nu par a?a periculoase ca ?erpii cobra...), bine redactat?, bine tehnoredactat? - dar asta se întâmpla în 1998, a?a c? nu m? mir? deloc, dup? 2000 au început e?ecurile editoriale pe scar? larg?.

Ian says

I first read this when a young teenager about 40 years ago. Alistair MacLean was my favourite author at the time, but back then I was a bit disappointed with this one. On reflection I'm pretty sure this was because I had seen the not very good Rock Hudson star vehicle film first, which was massively different to the novel and all a bit over the top and silly . Forty years on, with the gradual dissipation of my grey matter taking effect in a positive way for once, I'd forgotten most of the detail of the plot and so enjoyed it immensely. Dr.Carpenter, our narrator, arrives at a state of the art (in 1963) US nuclear sub (the Dolphin) with orders for its US Commander Swanson to give him every assistance in effecting a rescue of the survivors of a fire at Drift Station Zebra, a British meteorological research station located on the Arctic ice pack. The story fairly rockets along with lots of twists and turns as Carpenter, Swanson and the crew of the Dolphin continually risk their own lives to save the stranded and helpless men. There is sabotage and murder aplenty as the real reasons for the urgency of Carpenter's mission begin to reveal themselves against a backdrop of Cold War espionage. Funnily, one of the things I really enjoyed this time around was the stuff that really placed the story in it's time. Like the smoking inside the sub with a special air purifier installed as the crew would mutiny if not allowed to smoke on board and also the pride shown in the ultra modern garbage disposal method - into the sea in polythene bags.....no worry about global warming and melting ice caps back then.
