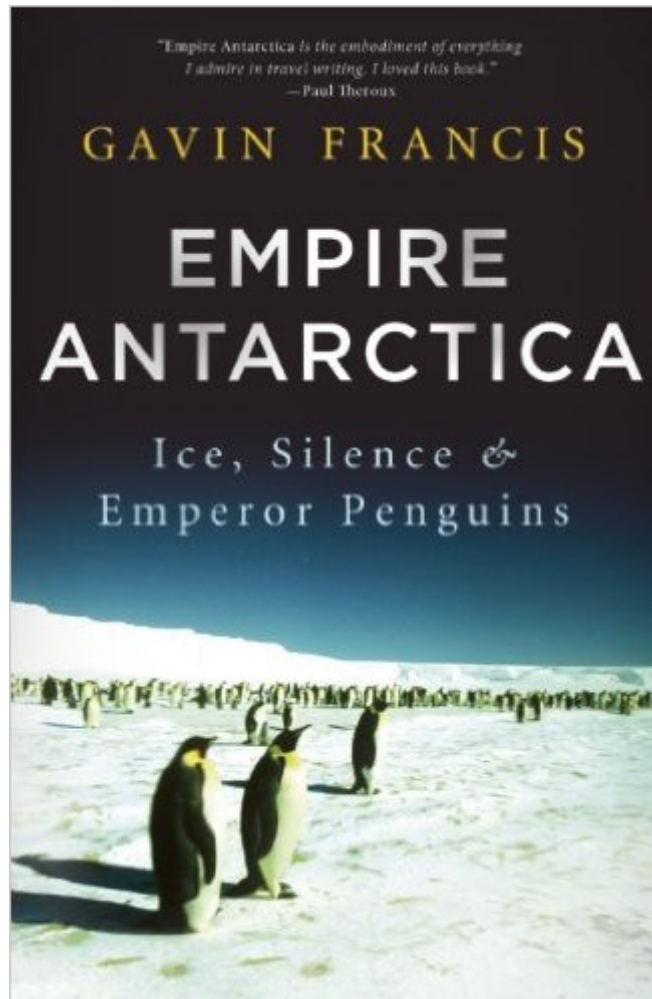


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# Empire Antarctica: Ice, Silence And Emperor Penguins



## Synopsis

Gavin Francis fulfilled a lifetime's ambition when he spent fourteen months as the basecamp doctor at Halley, a profoundly isolated British research station on the Caird Coast of Antarctica. So remote, it is said to be easier to evacuate a casualty from the International Space Station than it is to bring someone out of Halley in winter. Antarctica offered a year of unparalleled silence and solitude, with few distractions and very little human history, but also a rare opportunity. Throughout the year -- from a summer of perpetual sunshine to months of winter darkness -- Gavin Francis explores the world of great beauty conjured from the simplest of elements, the hardship of living at 50 c below zero and the unexpected comfort that this penguin community brings, for this is the story of one man and his fascination with the world's loneliest continent, as well as the emperor penguins who weather the winter with him. Combining an evocative narrative with a sublime sensitivity to the natural world, this is travel writing at its very best.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This beautifully written book is everything that a travel book should be. There is the personal experience of a long trip to Antarctica and wintering over with thirteen other people, each with his or her own strengths, weaknesses, and quirks, each battling emptiness differently. And there is nature - the ice, stars, and penguins. Reading this book I was frequently reminded of *Arctic Dreams* by Barry Lopez. The descriptions of the adventures of famous polar explorers, of what they experienced - cold, dark, misery, and sometimes glory - are wonderful. This book has been

shortlisted for the Book of the Year award in Scotland and deservedly so. I highly recommend it.

I bought this book on the strength of a review from the Economist. The review didn't rave about the book but portrayed it as an interesting perspective of life by an intelligent author, clarified by the solitude of Antarctica and enhanced by the lives of the emperor penguins who kept the author company through the continent's long and dark winter. Various stories of the Antarctic are woven with the author's own experience in a way that break down the distinction between 'them' and 'us'. Somehow, the contrast of the author's matter-of-fact voice with the extraordinary experiences he describes brought the Antarctic to me. I have read various accounts of Amundsen, Scott and Shackleton but this was the first time I understood that these were, in reality, people who had an ordinary side to their lives from which the heroic came. I'd recommend the book to those who are interested. Antarctica is the scene, but life is the play.

The author longs to be the 'zdoc' - the doctor who winters over at the British Halley Antarctic station- and lo and behold gets the job. His explanations of why he wants to do this in the first place are as interesting as his descriptions of what it is like to watch everyone else leave and then hunker down, both physically and psychologically, with the small winter crew as they each do what they do- cooks and mechanics and scientists- through a long Antarctic winter. His descriptions are so evocative that even though this is a place incredibly unlike anything most of us have ever seen, we can get a flavor of the place, the weather, the people, the light, the ice, the dark, the heroic history, and the amazing cycle of life of the Emperor penguins. Okay, sometimes maybe his language might have been just a bit too fanciful for my taste, but I will credit the intensity of the environment for this. I found myself feeling like the author must have- as I realized that the one year cycle of the story was winding down, I did not want it to end. I have read other captivating books on Antarctica, but this one is so personal that it really gives dimension to all the emptiness and silence he describes.

The author's love affair with metaphors and similes is like a moth's attraction to bright light. The excess of 'as' and 'like' is so excessive that it detracts from the story. That is just one glaring example of where the editor should have stepped in.

Empire Antarctica is a thoroughly enjoyable and interesting read, with exactly the right balance of the author's own observations and those of his predecessors, in particular Apsley Cherry-Garrard's *The Worst Journey in the World*. Gavin Francis writes completely honestly and without any

pretension, in the tradition of the best travel writers. The only reason I'm giving the book four stars instead of five is because of the author's annoying habit of using commas where semicolons are required. And why didn't his editors correct this?

Empire Antarctica is one of the most interesting books I have read quite some time. The descriptive writing is almost lyrical and allows the reader to see the wonders of all the beautiful landscape and sky. Who would think of "pillow fighting clouds" as a description? I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys exploring other worlds.

My spouse asked for the book as a gift. She read it almost non-stop and loved it. She learned a lot about things that interest her and was happy with me for getting it. And given the cloud system, I can download it on our second Kindle as well and read it too.

What beautiful writing about an amazing experience. Especially interesting to anyone who has been on an Antarctic cruise. So many topics are explored - the experience, weather, skies.

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