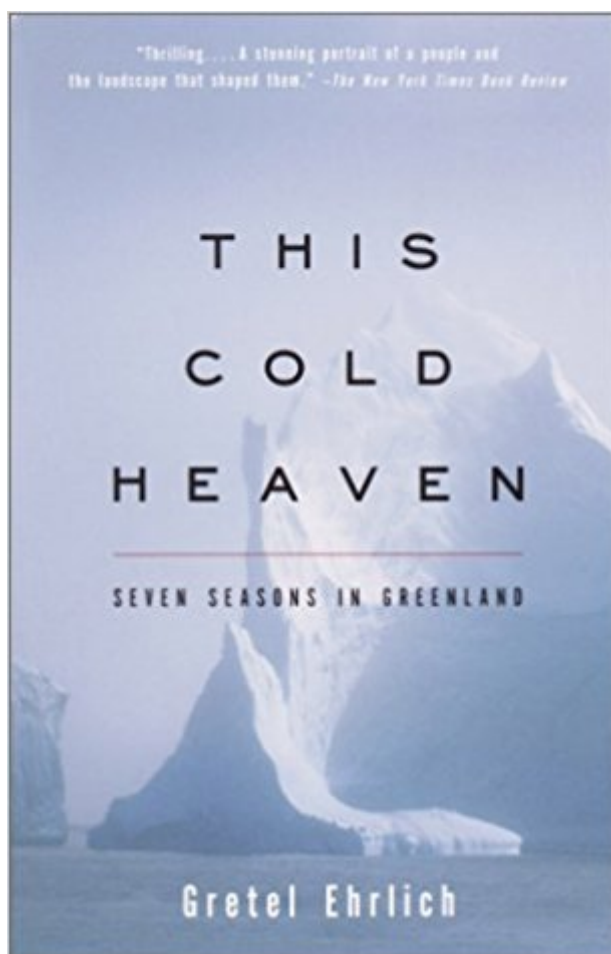


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# This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons In Greenland



## Synopsis

For the last decade, Gretel Ehrlich has been obsessed by an island, a terrain, a culture, and the treacherous beauty of a world that is defined by ice. In *This Cold Heaven* she combines the story of her travels with history and cultural anthropology to reveal a Greenland that few of us could otherwise imagine. Ehrlich unlocks the secrets of this severe land and those who live there; a hardy people who still travel by dogsled and kayak and prefer the mystical four months a year of endless darkness to the gentler summers without night. She discovers the twenty-three words the Inuit have for ice, befriends a polar bear hunter, and comes to agree with the great Danish-Inuit explorer Knud Rasmussen that "all true wisdom is only to be found far from the dwellings of man, in great solitudes." • *This Cold Heaven* is at once a thrilling adventure story and a meditation on the clarity of life at the extreme edge of the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

From the acclaimed chronicler of open spaces, Gretel Ehrlich, comes a stunning and lyrical evocation of a practically unknown place and people. Beginning in 1993, Ehrlich traveled to Greenland, the northernmost country in the world, in every season--the four months of perpetual dark (in which the average temperature is 25 degrees below zero), the four months of constant daylight, and the twilight seasons in between--traveling up the west coast, often by dogsled, and befriendng the resilient and generous Inuits along the way. Greenland, unlike its name, is 95 percent ice--a landscape of deep rock-walled fjords, glaciers, narwhal whales swimming among icebergs the size of football fields, walruses busting through oceans of shifting ice. In the far north,

the polar Inuit--the "real heroes"--still dress in bear and seal skins, and hunt walrus, polar bears, and whales with harpoons. The only constant is weather and the perilous movements of ice, the only transport is dogsled, and the closest village may be a month and a half-long dogsled journey away. The people share an austere and harsh life, lightened with humor and the fantastic stories of Sila, the god of weather, Nerrivik, the goddess of waters, of humans transforming themselves into animals, and interspecies marriages. Interwoven with Ehrlich's journey is the even more remarkable story of Knud Rasmussen, the founder of Eskimology, an Inuit-Danish explorer and ethnographer who took some of the most hazardous and brilliant expeditions ever, including a three and a half-year, 20,000-mile adventure by dogsled across the polar north to Alaska. Like Rasmussen, Ehrlich learns that the landscape of Greenland is "less a description of desolation than an ode to the beauty of impermanence." Alternately mind-expanding, gripping, and dreamlike, *This Cold Heaven* is a revelation. --Lesley Reed --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The book's epigraph, "I am nothing. I see all," comes from Emerson, but it might have been spoken by any of the shamans, mythical animals or spirit guides who inhabit this haunting work. It also catches the tenor of Ehrlich's concerns, for as an essayist and a naturalist, she frequently explores the relationship between the physical world and the province of the unseen. In the summer of 1993, recovering from a lightning strike that left her with a dodgy heart, Ehrlich (*A Match to the Heart*) set out on the first of many journeys to Greenland. Over the next seven years, she made her way across the high Arctic, traveling by dogsled, skiff and fixed-wing airplane, "in a country of no roads, where solitude is thought to be a form of failure." Inspired by the expedition notes of Knud Rasmussen, the brilliant Inuit-Danish explorer and ethnographer who recorded what Ehrlich calls the "lifeways" of the Inuit people, she traveled with subsistence hunters, spending weeks at a time on ice. Stylistically, Ehrlich achieves an arctic clarity, pared down and translucent. Because she is not content to merely narrate events, her divagations, as well as Rasmussen's, serve as jumping-off points for all manner of inquiry just as the Eskimos, to borrow her metaphor, used "ice as a flint on which their imaginations were fired." Reading Ehrlich, one gets the impression that she has no fixed idea about the progress of her journeys across the snow or the page. This very vulnerability, along with the narrative's pervasive sadness and loss, infuses the book with a quiet power. Maps and illus. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This woman truly loves the high north, with all its paradox and ambivalence . . . Erlich paints the

beauty and complexity of northern Greenland (before reading this book it never occurred to me to think of Greenland as HAVING a "north" and "south"!) and the struggle a tiny minority are having to maintain their ancient -- and sustainable -- ways of life. I'd classify this first of all as a love story between woman and land, but it is a love story in which the sentient observer is aware of the problems with the beloved, and yet still remains committed. This is not a "been there, seen that, got the T-shirt" travel book -- Erlich is drawn to Greenland no fewer than seven times, in various seasons, and she lives with the people in traditional housing (including tents on the ice). She encounters the brutality of bureaucracy as well as the incredible hospitality of the Inuit -- and at the same time she does not shrink from the pervasive alcoholism and domestic violence that are a sad feature of northern life, nor does she neglect to mention the impact even in Greenland of the growing pollution in "the south" (i.e. North America). Her thesis is essentially Romantic in a philosophic sense . . . subsistence living was/is hard but authentic. The coming of modernity, with its internet connection, TV, store-bought goods, etc., has removed both the means and the incentive for a life of integrity. She leaves it to the reader to see the Greenlandic experience as paradigmatic of the wider world. Read this book - it will lift your heart and trouble your mind, and leave you wanting more.

Extremely well written and interesting. Gretel paints a picture in the readers mind. The landscape and the people come alive for the reader and create a lasting visual presence in the minds eye.

This amazing book opened my eyes to the Inuit culture and homeland in a most unexpected way. I really bought it hoping to learn something about Inuit kayak hunters, but that aspect of Inuit hunting life is not heavily covered in the book. Instead, the author takes us on many wonderful journeys by dogsled and gives the reader a most fascinating viewpoint - right behind the dogs. We experience the hard but thrilling life of the skilled Arctic hunter as described by an articulate passenger in the sled, and in that way we come to know the people of the north country in a most sympathetic way. I recommend this book to anyone who loves beautifully written adventures. They are here.

An awesome read. Exactly what I had hoped this would be. A wonderful narrative of the lands I wish I could visit (or even live in), despite the harsh climate conditions...

Gretel Ehrlich's wonderful book has been a nightly treat, savored at the fireside. Since the lives of the Greenland Inuit are so remote from daily experience, it takes quite a bit of adjustment to enter

into their perspective. Ehrlich accomplishes this through an obsessive, recurring immersion, reminiscent of her hero Knud Rasmussen. She went back to Greenland seven times, for goodness sakes! The focus she achieves through these revisitings, and our chance to re-encounter characters and experiences, builds a powerful emotional bond. I felt a real loss when I had to say goodbye to these characters for the final time. This is a deceptively beautiful, powerful book.

Another "travelogue for the soul." This author does these incredibly well. If you're into this kind of thing and don't like lightweight "new-agey" stuff, read Gretel Erlich.

I read this book to learn about the land (and ice!) of Greenland before we go there next year. And I learned a lot, from a lady who's spent time with the native Greenlanders in their villages and on their excursions in summer and winter. The book is well-written and kept me involved in her experiences all the way through. Now we know more of what we will see next year.

Since I am obsessed with Greenland, this book was totally fascinating. And real.

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