

THE ARCTIC GOLD RUSH: THE NEW RACE FOR TOMORROW'S NATURAL RESOURCES. By ROGER HOWARD. London and New York: Continuum, 2009. ISBN 9781441181107. xii + 259 p., maps, notes, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$25.95, UK £16.99, Cdn\$27.95.

The Arctic Gold Rush begins with a detailed and dramatic description of the 2007 Russian flag-planting on the seabed at the North Pole—an episode easily visualized by anyone who has seen James Cameron's *Titanic*, since, as author Roger Howard explains, the Russian mission was carried out in the same submersibles used in the film (Mir 1 and Mir 2). The flag was placed on the ocean floor by veteran undersea explorer Anatoly Sagalevich, who also appeared in the movie. "It is tempting," Howard comments, "to view the Arctic as the likely setting of a ... brutal, bitter and bloody confrontation waged between rival international powers that are desperate to acquire the world's diminishing supply of natural resources. From this viewpoint the provocative [flag-planting] appears, if not quite an opening round, a premonition of the trouble that lies ahead." But, he explains, the central argument of his book is that such a scenario is "even less likely to happen in the Arctic than elsewhere" (p. 10).

The book is divided into three parts. The first, "The Setting," contains a concise and reasonably accurate overview of Arctic geography, climate, and history. Then several chapters provide details on "The Issues": sovereignty, oil, natural gas and other resources, sea lanes and shipping, and finally environmental concerns. Next, "The Contestants" devotes a chapter each to Russia, the United States, Canada, and other Arctic nations. Like the introduction, every chapter in the second and third sections opens with a scenario that might have come from a movie script. Invariably, Howard (who is a journalist by profession) begins by outlining, in vivid prose, the most dramatic possible future developments, making international conflict appear all but inevitable. Then he gives a more thoughtful and nuanced evaluation, showing that armed conflict is in fact highly unlikely. For example, in the chapter on oil (titled "Black Gold"), he recounts how recent studies using "the latest scientific methods and instruments" seem "to make a compelling case that the Arctic is set to become a new frontline for oil and natural gas exploration." The estimated extent of Arctic reserves has "fostered speculation that the regions will be the setting for future 'resource wars'" (p. 63). But, says Howard, the stark drama of the worst-case scenario is unlikely ever to be played out. Instead, we can expect a "much more complicated picture ... to emerge" (p. 70). Most oil reserves lie within established borders, and even where this is not the case, the governments involved have "amicable relations that are too strong to be undermined by disagreements over one particular issue." The long Arctic winter, high insurance premiums, the high cost of extraction and transport, and the possible development of alternative energy sources all limit the appeal of northern oil fields, no matter how extensive they may be (p. 71–80).

No doubt Howard has employed this "bait and switch" technique in order to broaden the popular appeal of his book, but surely most readers will soon weary of watching him set up straw men only to knock them down. Specialists will easily be able to spot factual errors, such as the statement that Martin Frobisher's crew went ashore "near Alaska" (p. 36). The structure of the book provides another problem: inevitably, there is considerable overlap between the issue-by-issue and nation-by-nation sections. For example, the particular attitude of each Arctic nation towards northern oil reserves is covered in Part 3; a reader with a special interest in the oil question would have to skip awkwardly between the "Black Gold" chapter and the Russian, American, and Canadian chapters.

Nevertheless, *The Arctic Gold Rush* is an excellent introduction to and survey of current national and international Arctic issues for general readers. Despite the sprinkling of relatively minor errors, the author has done some solid research, and he provides levelheaded and reasonable assessments. Howard's conclusion—that there should be cooperation among Arctic nations—is hardly surprising or new. Still, this book is far superior to most journalistic works on the Far North and its future.

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WORLD OCEAN CENSUS: A GLOBAL SURVEY OF MARINE LIFE. By DARLENE TREW CRIST, GAIL SCOWCROFT and JAMES M. HARDING Jr., with a Foreword by SYLVIA A. EARLE. Richmond Hill Ontario: Firefly Books, 2009. ISBN 978-1-55407-434-1. 256 p., maps, b&w and colour illus., glossary, further reading, index. Hardbound. US\$40.00.

This beautiful book in coffee table format aims to reveal the story behind and initial outcomes of the Census of Marine Life, the effort of a global network of researchers who have been studying the diversity, distribution, and abundance of marine life for almost a decade. It promises to be a timely and compelling read for all concerned with life in the oceans.

For those with a natural curiosity about our ocean planet, this new book by an award-winning author and two experienced marine educators is indeed timely and well-written. Superbly designed, the book evokes the majesty and mystery of life in the oceans through the use of captivating photographs, novel graphics, and easy-to-read text. Thorough and consistently high editorial standards are readily apparent. The only publishing error observed was an inaccurate transposition from metric to imperial units in the caption of a photo on page 209.