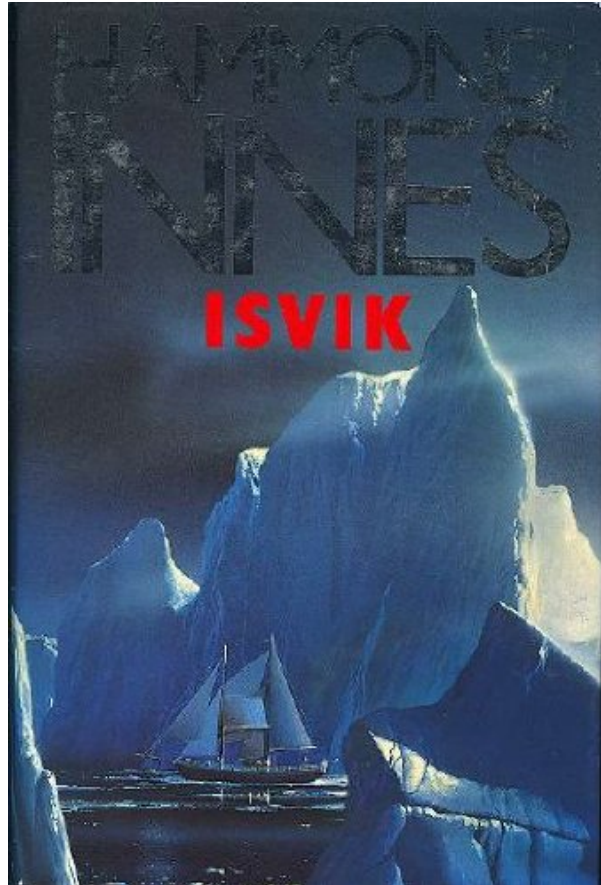
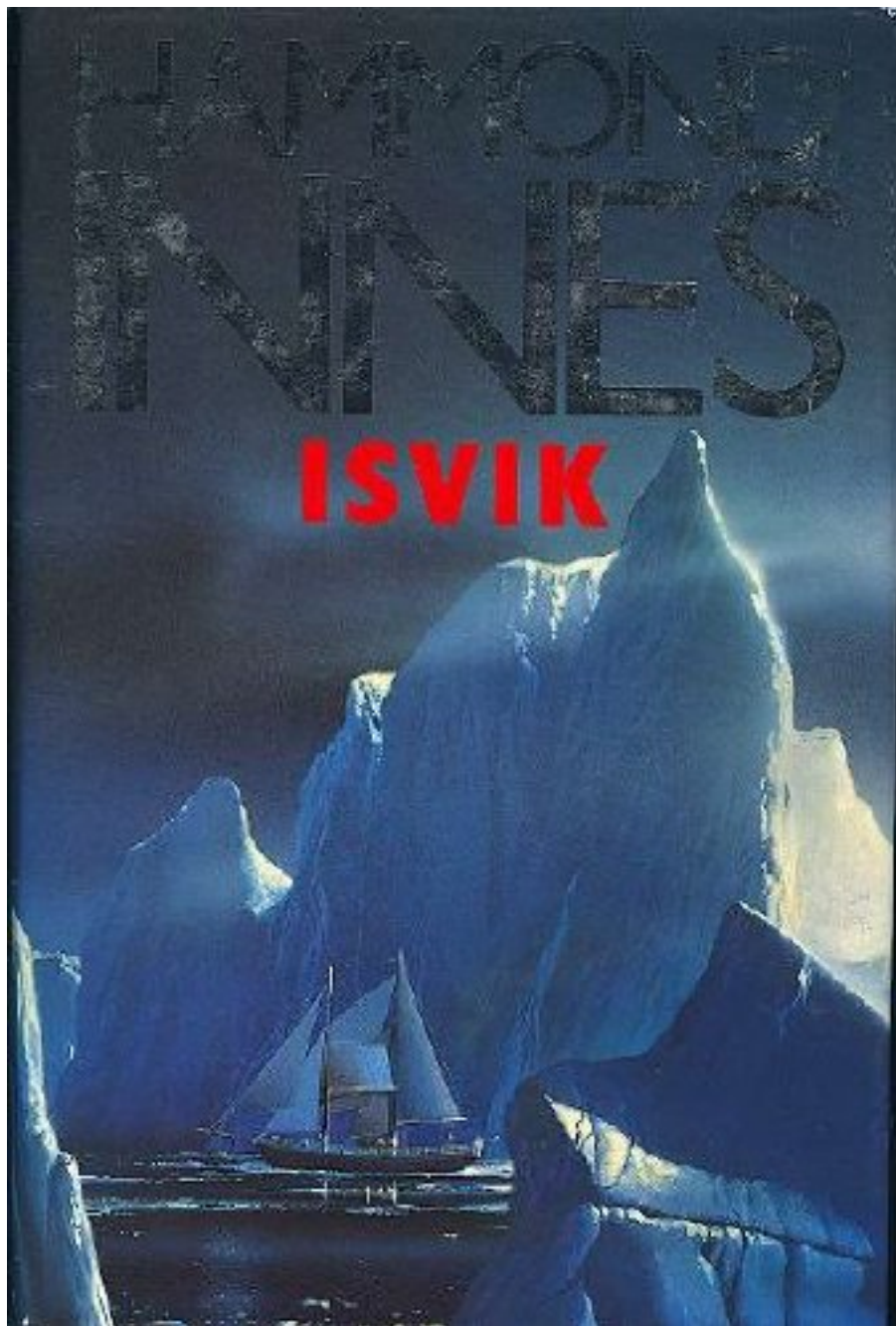


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From Publishers Weekly

Like the old pro he is, Innes (*The Doomed Oasis*) in his 29th thriller takes an improbable hero and an even more improbable scenario and weaves a dramatic adventure that will keep readers guessing until its startling climax. Peter Kettil, a wood preservation specialist struggling to establish his own business, joins an expedition to the Antarctic in search of an ancient frigate whose frozen remains were spotted by glaciologist Charles Sunderby just before his plane crashed in the ice. Moving forces behind the trek are the dead man's widow, Iris, and Iain Ward, a mysterious Scotsman who agrees to provide financing if he can accompany the crew. Unsettling questions arise about the possible connection of Argentina's desaparecidos to the hunt for the frigate and about two men who exhibit deep interest in the widow. Increasingly frustrated by his inability to solve these riddles and to discover the motivations of his companions, Kettil finally learns the ghastly truth during a most unexpected confrontation in the icy depths of the rediscovered vehicle. Atmospheric settings rendered with striking verisimilitude contribute substantially to the story's appeal.

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Rough notes, discovered on the body of a glaciologist whose plane had gone down in the waters of the South Atlantic, launch an expedition bent on recovering an ancient ship whose ghostly image the glaciologist had seen.

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Most helpful customer reviews

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Directionless first half and weak characters redeemed by strong conclusion

By H. Jin

Ship timber specialist Peter Kettil swaps cruising around East Anglia for an extended journey into the gale-ridden waters of the Antarctic in this intriguing but inconsistent Hammond Innes thriller. Kettil is drawn into an expedition to locate and recover an ancient ship trapped in the southern ice-pack, spotted by aerial surveyor Charles Sunderby moments before he is killed in a plane crash. Sunderby's widow, Iris, bankrolled by mysterious "pools winner" Ian Ward, is determined to find the ship for both its historical interest and to prove her husband was right. But who is Iris, and what are her true motives? Do her enigmatic South American relatives hold the answer? Does the ship have any connection to the Argentinian Disappeared political prisoners? And who or what is Ian Ward, who has come into millions in a pools win nobody can find evidence of?

It's a solid basis for an Innes thriller, and he has pulled off these sorts of stories brilliantly many times. But 'Isvik' has its fair share of problems, and despite an excellent ending, the book does not stack up well against his best work.

The problems are twofold:

Firstly, the characterisation. While most of Hammond Innes' books feature an "everyman" protagonist through whose eyes we observe more interesting characters, Innes takes that element to the extreme here. Peter Kettil is a very weak and colourless narrator, and his main purpose is to constantly ask questions that are never answered. Despite expressing reservations about the trip and its purpose, he never stands up for himself, being content to just drift along with the journey. Ian Ward is similar; there are implications that he is everything from a government agent to an arms runner, but very little of his character is revealed. He's supposed to be shadowy and mysterious, but comes across as stubborn and abrasive, demanding instant decisions and answers from everyone else while never answering questions himself. He clearly knows more than he's letting on, but how much he knows, and what his true purpose is, is never really explained. Iris Sunderby is at different times a strong no-nonsense businesswoman and a drug-taking flaky girl who sleeps with her relatives to gain information. At least Angel Connor-Gomez is consistent, being a clear antagonist with few redeeming features beyond his superficial charm.

Secondly, the story takes a long time to kick into gear. I know that Innes' books have always been more about the journey than the destination, but the first half of 'Isvik' doesn't go anywhere. There is some character insight into Iris and Angel, and some background to the Disappeareds, but the constant back-and-forth argument over the Connor-Gomez family tree adds nothing to the story. Unlike 'Solomons Seal', say, the exact relation of Angel, Carlos, Eduardo and Iris to each other has no direct relevance to the plot, and too much of the first half is bogged down in these roundabout discussions. The book does pick up significantly once the characters are on board the ship and begin sailing, but this is only in the last 100 pages of the book.

One thing I will say, the conclusion of 'Isvik' is outstanding, providing a horrifying but plausible answer to the questions raised throughout the book. Fans of earlier Innes books such as 'Maddon's Rock' and 'The White South' will find plenty to love here, with familiar elements such as a long trek over the ice and the

abandoned ship locked in a frozen wasteland. It's a pity the earlier parts of the book couldn't provide a better build up to one of Innes' best ever climaxes.

The second half thankfully redeems 'Isvik' from what is a pretty lacklustre beginning. Fifty years after his first books, it does seem that Innes was less able to pull together his complex, interlocking, personality-driven stories like he was in the past. But the payoff in 'Isvik' is (mostly) worth it, so I would still recommend it to those Innes fans who can overlook a few flaws in their hero's style.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Why was this made into audio book

By W. Fish

I can't imagine why anyone would publish this book in audio format. The story is told in first person and the character telling the story is an incredible whiner. The narrator makes a worthy effort at trying to put some spine into his voice but the author has created a spineless, insecure, overweight character who snivels throughout the book. What was Hammond Innes thinking?

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