

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



David Grann is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and an award-winning staff writer at *The New Yorker* magazine.

His newest book, *The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny, and Murder*, was published in April of 2023. With the twists and turns of a thriller, it tells the true saga of a company of British naval officers and crew that became stranded on a desolate island off the coast of Patagonia and descended into murderous anarchy. The book explores the nature of survival, duty, and leadership, and it examines how both people and nations tell—and manipulate—history.

Grann is also the author of *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*, which documented one of the most sinister crimes and racial injustices in American history. Described in the *New York Times* as a “riveting” work that will “sear your soul,” it was a finalist for the National Book Award and a winner of the Edgar Allen Poe Award for best true crime book. It was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller and named one of the best books of the year by the *Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Time*, and other publications. Amazon selected it as the single best book of the year.

The book has been adapted into a major motion picture directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone, Robert De Niro, and Jesse Plemons, which will be released in the coming months. For middle schoolers, Grann has also released *Killers of the Flower Moon: A Young Reader’s Edition*, which the *School Library Journal* called as “imperative and enthralling as its parent text.”

Grann’s first book, *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon*, was #1 *New York Times* bestseller and has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. Shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, it was chosen as one of the best books of 2009 by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and other publications. The book, which the *Washington Post* called a “thrill ride from start to finish,” was adapted into a critically acclaimed film directed by James Gray and starring Charlie Hunnam, Sienna Miller, Robert Pattinson, and Tom Holland.

One of Grann’s *New Yorker* stories, *The White Darkness*, was later expanded into a book. Mixing text and photography, it documented the modern explorer Henry Worsley’s quest to follow in the footsteps of his hero, Ernest Shackleton, and traverse Antarctica alone. The story is currently being adapted into a series for Apple starring Tom Hiddleston.

Many of Grann’s other *New Yorker* stories were included in his collection *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes*, which was named by *Men’s Journal* one of the best true crime books ever written. The stories focus on everything from the

mysterious death of the world's greatest Sherlock Holmes expert to a Polish writer who might have left clues to a real murder in his postmodern novel. Another piece, "Trial by Fire," exposed how junk science led to the execution of a likely innocent man in Texas. The story received a George Polk award and was cited by the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer in his opinion regarding the death penalty. Several of the stories in *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes* have also served as source material for feature films, including "The Old Man and the Gun" with Robert Redford and Sissy Spacek, and "Trial by Fire" with Jack O'Connell and Laura Dern.

Over the years, Grann's stories have appeared in *The Best American Crime Writing*; *The Best American Sports Writing*; and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. His stories have also been published in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Atlantic*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and *Wall Street Journal*.

In addition to writing, Grann is a frequent speaker who has given talks about everything from *Killers of the Flower Moon* and the importance of historical memory to the dangers of complicity in unjust systems, and from the art of writing and detection to the leadership methods of explorers, such as Ernest Shackleton.

Grann holds master's degrees in international relations (from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy) and creative writing (from Boston University). After graduating from Connecticut College, in 1989, he received a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and did research in Mexico, where he began his career in journalism. He currently lives in New York with his wife and two children.

Author Website.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Why did the Wager crash? Was the expedition of the Wager destined to fail? Why or why not?
2. Why would someone want to join the British navy in the 1700s? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a career in the navy during this time?
3. What are three ways that racism and colonialism impacted what happened with the Wager's crew and how they perceived their experiences? How did colonialism and racism impact events surrounding the Wager and the accounts emerging from them?
4. What was the most memorable part of this book for you? Why did it make an impression?
5. Read your favorite passage from the book out loud and explain why you liked it or what it made you think about.
6. Was this non-fiction book fun to read, or was it a little dry? Did the author need to "spice it up" or "tone it down"? How could they have managed that?

7. What made this book different than other books on this subject? Do you think it is better or worse than other books on this subject matter?

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

A new account of the Wager Mutiny, in which a shipwrecked and starving British naval crew abandoned their captain on a desolate Patagonian island, emphasizes the extreme hardships routinely faced by eighteenth-century seafarers as well as the historical resonance of the dramatic 1741 event. On a secret mission to liberate Spanish galleons of their gold, the 28-gun HMS Wager was separated from the rest of its squadron rounding Cape Horn in a massive storm. Beset by typhus, scurvy, and navigational problems, the ship struck rocks, stranding its beleaguered crew on a remote island in Chilean Patagonia. In the months that followed, harsh conditions and meager provisions would test storied British naval discipline. Captain David Cheap, who had spent a lifetime at sea but was new in his rank, ruthlessly managed the group's larder. A dispute with gunner John Bulkley over a risky plan to sail a makeshift craft back home through the Strait of Magellan turned violent. A few bedraggled sailors would find their way back to civilization, prompting high-stakes courts-martial and sensational accounts in the British press. Grann (*Killers of the Flower Moon*, 2017) vividly narrates a nearly forgotten incident with an eye for each character's personal stakes while also reminding readers of the imperialist context prompting the misadventure. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Best-selling Grann is a top nonfiction author, and the drama of this tale along with an in-the-works major film adaptation, reportedly to be directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Leonardo DiCaprio, will inspire even more interest.

### Publisher's Weekly

Bestseller Grann (*Killers of the Flower Moon*) delivers a concise and riveting account of the HMS Wager, a British man-of-war that ran aground on a barren island off the Chilean coast of Patagonia in 1741. Part of a squadron sent to capture a treasure-laden Spanish galleon during the War of Jenkins' Ear, the Wager became separated from the other ships while rounding Cape Horn and wrecked several weeks later. The starving crew soon disintegrated into rival factions, including one led by gunner John Bulkeley, who became increasingly critical of Capt. David Cheap. Five months after they'd been marooned, Bulkeley and 80 other crew members commandeered the Wager's longboat and two other small vessels and set sail for Brazil, abandoning Cheap and his few remaining loyalists to their fate. Fewer than half of Bulkeley's group survived their nearly 3,000-mile journey through the Strait of Magellan and up the coast of Argentina, but he was treated as a hero, until Cheap miraculously appeared back in England and accused him of mutiny. Though the showdown between Cheap and Bulkeley is somewhat anticlimactic, Grann packs the narrative with fascinating details about life at sea--from scurvy-induced delirium to the mechanics of loading and firing a cannon--and makes excellent use of primary sources, including a firsthand account by 16-year-old midshipman John Byron, grandfather of the poet Lord Byron. Armchair adventurers will be enthralled. (Apr.)

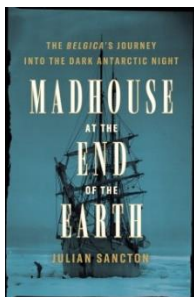
### Kirkus Reviews

The author of *Killers of the Flower Moon* and *The Lost City of Z* returns with a rousing story of a maritime scandal. In 1741, the British vessel the Wager, pressed into service during England's war with Spain, was shipwrecked in a storm off the coast of Patagonia while chasing a silver-laden Spanish galleon. Though initially part of a fleet, by the time of the shipwreck, the Wager stood alone, and many of its 250 crew members already had succumbed to injury, illness,

starvation, or drowning. More than half survived the wreckage only to find themselves stranded on a desolate island. Drawing on a trove of firsthand accounts--logbooks, correspondence, diaries, court-martial testimony, and Admiralty and government records--Grann mounts a chilling, vibrant narrative of a grim maritime tragedy and its dramatic aftermath. Central to his populous cast of seamen are David Cheap, who, through a twist of fate, became captain of the Wager; Commodore George Anson, who had made Cheap his protégé; formidable gunner John Bulkeley; and midshipman John Byron, grandfather of the poet. Life onboard an 18th-century ship was perilous, as Grann amply shows. Threats included wild weather, enemy fire, scurvy and typhus, insurrection, and even mutiny. On the island, Cheap struggled to maintain authority as factions developed and violence erupted, until a group of survivors left--without Cheap--in rude makeshift boats. Of that group, 29 castaways later washed up on the coast of Brazil, where they spent more than two years in Spanish captivity; and three castaways, including Cheap, landed on the shores of Chile, where they, too, were held for years by the Spanish. Each group of survivors eventually returned to England, where they offered vastly different versions of what had occurred; most disturbingly, each accused the other of mutiny, a crime punishable by hanging. Recounting the tumultuous events in tense detail, Grann sets the Wager episode in the context of European imperialism as much as the wrath of the sea. A brisk, absorbing history and a no-brainer for fans of the author's suspenseful historical thrillers. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

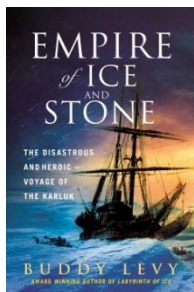
## SOLITO READALIKES - FOOTNOTES

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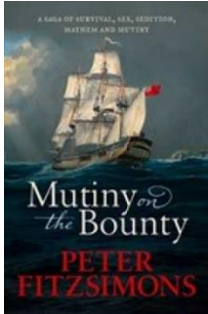
### **Madhouse at the end of the earth: the Belgica's journey into the dark antarctic night by Julian Sancton**

Drawing on the Belgica's crew's diaries and journals and exclusive access to the ship's logbook, this epic tale of a polar expedition that went terribly awry follows the crew, as they, condemned to months of endless night and plagued by a mysterious illness, descend into madness.



### ***Empire of ice and stone: the disastrous and heroic voyage of the Karluk* by Buddy Levy**

the ill-fated voyage of the steam-powered brigantine Karluk in 1913. Under the command of Capt. Bob Bartlett, the Karluk was the principal ship of the 1913–1916 Canadian Arctic Expedition led by explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Shortly after setting sail in June, it became clear to Bartlett that the Karluk had been improperly chosen and outfitted for the journey: the engine periodically gave out and essential supplies had been loaded onto her sister ships. By early August, the Karluk was completely icebound.



***Mutiny on the bounty: a saga of sex, sedition, mayhem and mutiny, and survival against extraordinary odds* by Peter FitzSimons**

The mutiny on HMS Bounty, in the South Pacific on 28 April 1789, is one of history's truly great stories - a tale of human drama, intrigue and adventure of the highest order - and in the hands of Peter FitzSimons it comes to life as never before. Commissioned by the Royal Navy to collect breadfruit plants from Tahiti and take them to the West Indies, the Bounty's crew found themselves in a tropical paradise. Five months later, they did not want to leave. Under the leadership of Fletcher Christian most of the crew mutinied soon after sailing from Tahiti, setting Captain William Bligh and 18 loyal crewmen adrift in a small open boat.