



★ **The Secret Lives of Glaciers**

M Jackson

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When it comes to glaciers, Dr. M Jackson is a linguistic sorcerer, making you fall in love by proxy with the geological memory-keepers. In the early pages of *The Secret Lives of Glaciers*, she captures a burst of aurora borealis from a bowl of Iceland's Breiðamerkurjökull glacier:

Blazing yellows, purples, greens, swirls of pinks and whites The northern lights pulsed through the ice ... throwing light like a candle-lit chandelier, like a phosphorescent ocean wave, like a field at midnight populated with hundreds of summertime fireflies.

The description awakens instant yearning, but it's a phenomenon that future generations risk missing. Iceland's breathtaking glaciers are shrinking. And though this reality is seized upon by those who want to combat global warming, it's also met with ambivalence from some Icelanders, who have a strong sense of history that is inseparable from glacial progressions and retreats. Jackson's text moves with historical and scientific precision to show that human beings and glaciers exist in reciprocal relationship to one another, and have done so across epochs of glacial progressions and retractions.

In Iceland, glaciers may be useful as land borders and as sources of study and tourism, but their unpredictable jökulhlaups (glacial floods) have been known to wipe away whole families and livelihoods, and so a glacier in retreat is not necessarily regarded as a tragedy. Jackson holds this complex truth in one hand, and in another dispenses with the claims of climate change deniers who outright argue that humans have no impact on the ice. Glaciers speak to our future just as much as we speak to theirs, and M Jackson's epic examination of their place in humanity's story is compelling.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January/February 2019)

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