



***Author Emma Houghton explains how the idea for *The Dark* emerged:***

The idea for *The Dark* first germinated from a documentary on the new British Antarctic Survey Halley VI ice station – it’s an extraordinary-looking building consisting of eight modules on hydraulic legs, with skis on their base, designed to keep it above the ever encroaching Antarctic ice. Think of an enormous blue and red segmented caterpillar surrounded by thousands of miles of frozen wasteland and you’ve pretty much got the picture.

The real star of the show, however, was Antarctica itself – for half the year much of the continent is engulfed in 24-hour darkness, and most of its 70 ice stations are completely inaccessible for up to eight months. Some of them are unmanned in winter, but a good proportion, like Halley, operate all year round with a skeleton staff totally cut off from the outside world over the long winter months.

All this made my writer brain light up like an aurora over the South Pole. Imagine being cooped up with just a dozen or so people for eight solid months, many in total darkness. What if something went wrong? What if one of the crew fell seriously ill? Or worse, what if *somebody* went completely off the rails? As it turned out, my wildest imaginings weren’t that much of a stretch – I discovered numerous tales of people who succumbed to the physical and psychological stress of spending all that time stuck at the frozen ends of the earth.

From then it was simply a case of deciding who to plunge into this icy fate, and what exactly would befall them. Plus a *ton* of research. I watched lots of videos, and read nearly every blog written by all the doctors, scientists and technicians that ever did a stint in Antarctica – thankfully a lot of people took the time to document their experience of ‘overwintering’ in Antarctica. Even so, creating my fictional ice station and populating it with credible characters was one of the most challenging things I have ever attempted. Perhaps not quite as challenging as getting through an Antarctic winter, admittedly, but a year spent mentally inhabiting such an extreme and confined environment was demanding. Still, I loved every minute of it, and I’m immensely proud of the result, and I hope *The Dark* will bring this extraordinary place alive for all its readers.