

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### MASTER OF ALASKA

*The saga of Alaska's first Russian Governor, Aleksandr Baranov*

Roger Seiler

Manuscript

## BOOK REVIEW

In this gripping tale of historical fiction, a man faces a brutal landscape and forms alliances with the native tribes of Alaska as he attempts to set up a fur trade and keep the British from usurping Russian territory.

Based on the story of the merchant Aleksandr Andreievich Baranov, who served as governor of Russian Alaska from 1799 to 1818, author Seiler (*Naked Thinkers*, 2012) re-creates a fast-paced account of Baranov's Alaskan adventures. "Entrusted with a mission for Catherine the Great and for mother Russia," Baranov sets out for Alaska in 1790. He survives both a shipwreck and an earthquake and earns the Aleut name *Nanuq*—"the polar bear, the great white hunter"—because he "learned to hunt...and speak [the] language well." The merchant's intimate relationship with the tribal peoples takes center stage: his "eternally loyal" Aleut friend Kuponek helps teach him the native Alaskan way of life. Baranov's rivalry with the real Tlingit warrior Katlian, whom Seiler gives a rich back story, is one of the most important conflicts of the book—Katlian declares war on Baranov's Aleut allies. Given all the challenges Baranov faces, success isn't always assured, and Seiler capitalizes on that tension by creating a suspenseful buildup to the moment when Baranov unveils "the first ship built in Russian America...that can sail across the Pacific taking our furs to market." Seiler's retelling of Baranov's experiences are well-researched, covering everything from the proper names for traditional Aleut creations, like the *nigilax*, a walrus skin boat, to background on Baranov's life before he left for Alaska. But the author admits to also taking liberties with certain characters. The governor most likely had two mistresses while living in Alaska, but Seiler combines the two women to create Anna, a Native Alaskan woman that in this account Baranov marries "because it better serves the structure of this story." Despite these liberties, Seiler ably merges history with his own capable storytelling.

An informative, exciting read that stays true to its real-life inspiration.

## EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media's excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indieexcerpts>.