

★ **The Last Whaler**

Cynthia Reeves

Regal House Publishing (Sep 3, 2024)

Softcover \$20.95 (332pp)

978-1-64603-508-3

A whaler and his wife experience a tragedy and new beginnings in Cynthia Reeves's poignant historical novel *The Last Whaler*.

Tor loves whaling. Each summer, he leaves his family in Norway and sails to icy Svalbard to hunt. But Tor's wife, Astrid, is haunted by the loss of their son, Birk, and feels desperate on the farm without him. Though he's reluctant, Tor allows Astrid to accompany him to the whaling station. There, he and Astrid begin again, rekindling their romance and finding beauty in the unforgiving land where life is fragile. The Arctic weather, looming war, and Astrid's mental health lead to uncertainties, while an unexpected pregnancy and a missed window for escape propel the couple toward tragedy again.

The book begins a decade after Astrid's summer at the whaling station, when Tor returns to make peace with her death. Its timelines and narratives braid together—in effect, mirroring the tumult of the couple's last year. Astrid's letters to Birk chronicle her descent into despair, while Tor's retelling years later supplements her narrative, detailing his grief and guilt over his family's deaths. Both narratives are raw and heartrending, with the couple unabashed about discussing topics like mental and maternal health and the impact of the loss on their intimacy.

The descriptions of the harsh Arctic landscape are lucid, at times ethereal. Nature plays a prominent role in Tor and Astrid's relationship: the "soft clink" of "silvery bubbles" whispers to Tor as he grieves; Astrid searches for an undiscovered plant species to name in Birk's honor. And if without mitigating the deep, irreversible losses experienced by all involved, the story's somber conclusion brims with hope.

The Last Whaler is a vibrant historical novel in which grief and triumph are set against the severe Arctic wilderness.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (September / October 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.