

Those We Carry

Scott Saxberg

Reimagined Press (Sep 6, 2024)

(312pp)

978-1-06-891540-6

Those We Carry is a tragic, triumphant novel about wartime love.

Perseverance despite a tragic past leads a budding hero into the horrors and humility of World War II, and eventually to love, in Scott Saxberg's novel *Those We Carry*.

Ardagh is a Canadian civilian living in Fort Williams, Ontario. His bucolic existence is punctuated by the traumatic death of his nephew and the subsequent trial that rips his family apart. Ardagh also prepares to be deployed to Europe with the Lake Superior Regiment of the Canadian Forces.

Ardagh's spiraling is compounded by another tragic loss following an ice-harvesting accident. Along with his best friend and his two brothers, he enters the war as an emotional wreck. He has dubious optimism about the salvation he may achieve by fighting with the Allied forces.

Meanwhile, Koos lives in the strategic Netherlands port area of Bruinisse, where Hitler has solidified part of the Atlantic wall to prevent an Allied invasion. The town is divided by the war; many families are forced to declare uncomfortable allegiances with the German war machine as part of the Dutch SS. Koos encounters several young men who wish to court her, including a German naval officer from whom she gleans important information that she shares with Dutch Resistance contacts in the town. Koos's family is protective, especially when her affections for enemy soldiers appear to eclipse her loyalties to the resistance cause.

Following several intense battles and heavy losses, Ardagh's regiment settles in the Bruinisse region, precipitating his fateful first encounter with Koos. An immediate romance envelops the two. The narration of the daily dramas of their lives becomes intertwined with that which establishes the backdrop of the waning days of the war.

Those We Carry is based on a true story and secures emotional currency in its battle scenes and burgeoning, tumultuous love story. For Ardagh's regiment, entering the war in the final months of the Allied invasion, danger lurks in every new advancement. Scenes of carnage trade with those devoted to the romance, with the ravages of war taking the leading role. Indeed, Ardagh and Koos's relationship is compressed to a handful of encounters. In the end, Ardagh's personal evolution, not his romance, propels most of the story's momentum. By carrying the spirits of those he lost along the way, he deepens in maturity, growing into his capacity to love others and ultimately himself.

With crisp attention to historical details, *Those We Carry* is a tragic, triumphant novel about wartime love.

RYAN PRADO (November 1, 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.