

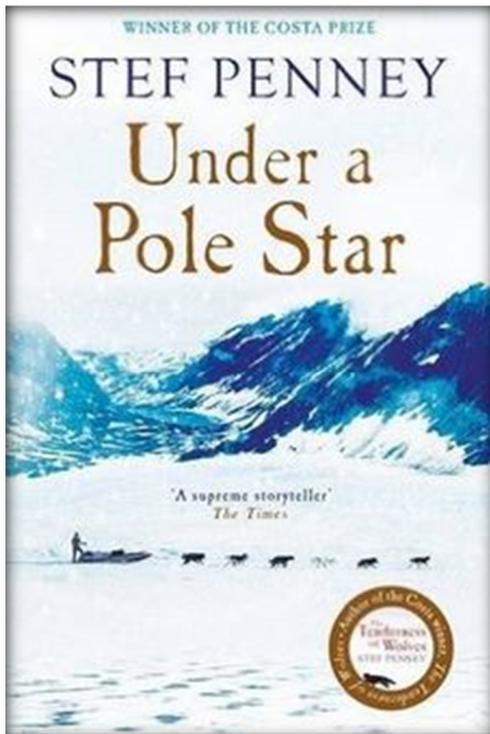


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your next book

Quercus

## LoveReading Reader reviews of **Under a Pole Star** by Stef Penney

**Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.**



**Alison Battye**

***Stef Penney's writing is stunningly beautiful.*** Like "an iceberg, eroded to expose the skeleton of a ship", you will want to delve deeper into this nuanced and subtle adventure.

*This is one of those novels that you couldn't have imagined yourself, but are delighted that someone else has.*

*Flora Mackie is a magnetic character. As a child she travels to the Arctic on her father's whaling ship, making friends with Inuit children, and embracing this harsh life. She goes on to train as a meteorologist, and refuses to give up her dream of returning to the North. In fact this novel is populated by*

*uncompromising and unconventional women, who all push boundaries and explore new territory in their own way.*

*This is historical fiction, but it is also geographical fiction. We too fall in love with the alien seascapes and icescapes, which are described with such tenderness. The sky is like "the inside of a shell" or is "the congealed grey of an oyster's flesh". Penney's light touch is not restricted to landscape. She is able to capture in a phrase or two an exact emotional nuance, like the split-second broken stride of a woman walking away from a lover, "snapping the thing that stretched taut between them".*

***This is a sensuous and beguiling story of love, loss and discovery.***

## **Sarah Musk**

***A breathtaking book about polar exploration in the late nineteenth century.***

***It has it all - love, rivalry, hardship. Everyone who reads this book will be mesmerised.***

*I really enjoyed this book. The story is gripping, the characters are absorbing and the Polar landscape is so vividly described you can almost smell the ice and cold. I have read another book by Stef Penney and thought that was brilliant too - she has not disappointed with her newest book.*

*Flora and Jakob - the two main characters - are completely credible in how they are and in their love. Flora has such an interesting background - she was taken on whaling trips by her captain father. Her childhood is very much a part of who she becomes as an adult and the same with Jakob. He has a more difficult childhood but both of them emerge as strong minded, independent people.*

*The deception and rivalry in polar exploration is very believable and the reader can completely see how the privations and hardships people endure leads to intense rivalries and an urge for glory. The only slight criticism is that the 1948 visit to the Arctic which Flora makes in old age does not ring quite true. It doesn't even seem necessary - she comes across as cold and unsympathetic whereas when she was young she was so warm and passionate. I wish I had not encountered old Flora because she was such so sympathetic and compelling in her past I found it difficult to reconcile the two.*

*Otherwise a fantastic read and thoroughly recommended.*

## **Humaira**

*I was excited to read 'Under A Pole Star' because the synopsis had me straight away. Then the big book arrived. I was intimidated to say the least. But I pulled through and read it. More like devoured it. **It was brilliant. It was Beautiful. It was everything you need in a book.***

## **Lou Woods**

***The ambitions of men, and the hopes of women, wrapped up in an epic journey through ice and heartbreak. Absorbing, yet somehow for me unsatisfying.***

*I was unsure what to expect from this novel. It's size and the fact it starts with a*

*glossary made me wonder if I would have to keep looking things up to understand it, something that has put me off novels before. I was pleasantly surprised to find this not the case.*

*The writing style is absorbing. You are quickly drawn into the story, and the prologue sets out a mystery you hope will be unravelled as the book progresses. The mysterious Snow Queen has a tale to tell, she has placed her name firmly in history, at a time when women struggled to find their own place among a misogynistic society, and I was intrigued to read on.*

*Ice and loneliness feature heavily in this story, both the arctic setting, and the loneliness that comes with setting yourself apart from other people, being different, yearning for something more. Flora has an unusual childhood, it has made her separate from her peers, someone unique in the world. She embraces her differences, but society does not, and this leaves her seeking something passionate, something real. Her story, set alongside the stories of ambitious men, all striving to be the first to claim their place in history, will keep you reading.*

*I enjoyed the book, but found myself unsatisfied as it concluded, I felt there was more to tell. Flora is a strong woman, but as she strives hard to reach her ambitions, she gives up too much of herself in the process. There are stories I wanted exploring further, and characters who deserved more time in the narrative, especially the Inuit stories. They feature so heavily in the fabric of the story, yet are reduced to objects of ridicule in more ways than one.*

### **Sandra Rabiasz**

#### ***Beautifully described golden age of exploration and the story of its pioneers.***

*It's the late 19th century and a golden age of exploration is propelling scientists and explorers to the uncharted frozen regions of the north. Amongst them are American geologist, Jakob de Beyn and, most unusually, a young woman Mrs Flora Athlone. The story that follows is beautifully told with absolutely stunning descriptions of Greenland and the hypnotic appeal of its cold and ice. The logistics of mounting an expedition, colonialism, the attitudes of society to women and the nature of friendships and loyalty are all extremely well observed. However, the relationship between Flora and Jakob, which is at the heart of the novel, just does not work for me. I do feel that this is a case where a lot less would definitely be more! Running at a hefty 600 pages the endless passages describing their physical relationship - always in graphic detail - are*

*unnecessary. These scenes become merely tedious and only end up reading like some sort of anatomy manual. The story isn't moved forward in any way and the emotion and passion between the two works best when they aren't actually together. The book is very good as a story of polar exploration but, unfortunately, as a love story it left me cold!*

### **Annie Day**

*An engaging story of the love between two 19th century Arctic explorers, set in Greenland, the UK and the USA. This is an ambitious tale of a love story set in the context of early Arctic exploration. **The story is beautifully told, with evocative descriptions of life on a whaling ship, Inuit customs and the stunning Arctic landscape.** Flora and Jakob are both portrayed as flawed characters with an obsession for the frozen north and this makes their stop-start romance quite believable.*

*The descriptions of the early explorers with their colonial ambition, rivalries and questionable approach to native peoples were interesting and engaging, if a little uncomfortable at times.*

*It is a very enjoyable novel. My only slight criticism is that at times I think it is a little too ambitious and this is reflected in the fact that 'Under a Pole Star' a rather lengthy book.*

Twitter @dayann1

### **Rachel Gray**

*A beautifully descriptive novel of the picturesque but dangerous Arctic and the early explorations that occurred there. Unfortunately lacking in enough character development to keep me engrossed. I enjoyed reading Under a Pole Star, I thought Penney's descriptions of the Arctic landscape were beautiful; she painted an emotive picture of the beauty of the land, but also the danger and threat that the land possessed. Penney's writing style was a joy to experience, and I'm definitely going to be picking up another of her novels in the future.*

*I also enjoyed the accounts of the early explorers' journeys in the Arctic, I thought this was very well researched by the author, and well described.*

*This was a very long novel, and I was slightly disappointed to find that it dragged on at times, there was a large part of the novel at the beginning; which described Flora and Jakob's early lives before they even met and this, I believe,*

could've been condensed somewhat, to allow the actual romance to begin sooner in the novel.

*I was also disappointed by the characters in this novel. Flora was cold and aloof and as a result of this was impossible to connect and relate to, or feel anything towards. I had the same problem with the other characters in the novel. I found them to be quite poorly developed meaning I had little feelings towards them, and little interest in seeing how the story and the relationships progressed.*

**Overall I thought this was a novel that contains some beautiful descriptions of the Arctic, but unfortunately lacks enough character development to really pull me in.**

<http://acascadeofbooks.blogspot.co.uk/>

### **Edel Waugh**

*This is not merely a story, but an epic journey through past and present, a story of love and adventure and combining both. The main character of the story is Flora, the book goes back and forth in time with this character and we get to see the unconventional yet wonderful upbringing she had while being on board a ship with her father set sail for the Arctic Circle. Flora Mackie (The Snow Queen) lived a colourful life with travel, men, love and adventure, she was a pioneer for female explorers made even more inspiring as she was someone so young. This was an uplifting and very enjoyable story, the love between Flora and Jakob being some of the most memorable and tender moments of the story. **This is a book you will remember long after you have finished the last page. I highly recommend this if you enjoy stories about the golden age of exploration.***

<http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/2016/10/under-pole-star-by-stef-penney-review.html>

### **Angela Rhodes**

*In 1889 twelve year old Flora Mackie, daughter of a whaler from Dundee crossed the Arctic Circle for the first time, and this is where her love began, a love for exploration and nature began. The press, named her "The Snow Queen" and though she struggles to be taken seriously, Flora is determined to become a scientist, and by chance she gets the chance to lead a British expedition to Greenland, back to the Eskimo's she befriended as a child, back to endless days and dark nights. Manhattan raised Geologist Jakob De Beyn, wanting*

adventure, joins the exhibition, his and Flora's meeting is a fateful one, as is Lester Armitage the leader of a rival exhibition, these three become obsessed, with the frozen seas, meadows and beauty of the frozen North. **'Under a Pole Star' is one of the most beautiful, captivating novels I have ever read, this is not just a story about an expedition, it has romance, courage, strong women, handsome men, I loved it!!** I now want to go on an exhibition, I want to be 'Under a Pole Star'.

### **Vicky-Leigh Sayer**

*Under a pole star is a sweeping epic, that would make a wonderful film, reminiscent of Titanic. Flora Mackie is the daughter of a captain of a whaling ship. From a young age despite her Father's protests she has joined him aboard ship, even though it is 'no place for a young lady'*

*But Flora is no ordinary young lady and her experiences on her Father's whaling ship leave her hungry for adventure and exploration.*

*This taste for adventure ultimately leads Flora to the Arctic. Where she meets fellow explorer Jacob De Beyn for the first time.*

*Their attraction to each other is neither instant nor mutual, but as they get to know each other, so begins a mutual respect for each other.*

*It is only when they are parted that they realise the true extent of their feelings. And so begins an affair that is unconventional bordering on scandalous for the times we are reading about.*

*Does the course of true love ever run smooth? Or are our two intrepid explorers headed for heartbreak?*

*'Under a Pole Star' is a sweeping epic, that would make a wonderful film, reminiscent of Titanic. **Please don't let the 600+ page length of this novel put you off reading, for me it didn't seem long at all, and was well worth the time invested.***

<http://thewelshlibrarian.blogspot.co.uk>

### **Hannah Ward**

*When I saw this book I was intrigued to read it as it sounded interesting. **The amount of research that must of gone into this book is outstanding.** It is a big book and at times I did feel like it could of been condensed down a bit. **It was awe inspiring to read about Flora and the era** though. I would give*

Stef Penney's books a go though.

<https://echoesinanemptyroom.com/2016/11/02/under-a-pole-star-by-stef-penney/>

### **Victoria Emerson**

*After thoroughly enjoying 'The Tenderness of Wolves' I was excited to read Under a Pole Star. Unfortunately it left me a little disappointed.*

*It is a huge novel, set in the Arctic and full of adventure. **The writing is excellent as always and the description of the Arctic is spot on.***

***There is much to like about this book, but it is very long and in parts slow.** I feel that it would have been better had it been edited with a harsher hand.*

### **Sarah Davis**

*I really loved Stef Penney's debut novel so was really looking forward to reading her latest book set in the arctic. I was not disappointed as 'Under the Pole Star' is **a beautiful and evocative read**. Penney has that rare ability to literally transport her readers into another world such is the skill of her finely tuned descriptive writing. Although the book was long with nearly 600 hundred page I couldn't put it down as I was so absorbed in the story. Penney's vivid descriptions of the frozen landscape and her knowledge of arctic exploration is very commendable and it was clear that she has researched her themes really well. There are numerous characters each brought vividly to life on the page, but it is the character of Flora Mackie dubbed 'The Snow Queen' by the media that really stands out. Whaler's daughter Flora who is obsessed with going north is a strong credible woman who will stop at nothing to achieve her life's ambitions', Flora's story is fascinating and interesting.*

*'Under the Pole Star' is definitely a perfect read for the long dark winter evenings.*

*Twitter handle: @sardav64*

### **Jane Macleod**

*From the start of the book, you will be immersed in the 1880's life of Flora Cochrane - a real pioneer, she struggles to ensure that gender doesn't become*

*an obstacle to following her dreams. Following her mother's death, Flora accompanies her father on a whaling trip, where she sees and experiences life and culture that many of her peers will never have the opportunity to - she becomes the Snow Queen by the press and her name becomes synonymous with scientific research and expeditions to the North. Deep down Flora like many girls of her age, see's marriage as a must, but ultimately she knows that to once again travel to the North she has to compromise on the perfect marriage, and succumb to a marriage of convenience. Like the whaling trips of the era, Flora must be patient to finally find happiness, and know that she was master of her own destiny. **A beautiful historical story, with great atmosphere. A real eye opener to a past life and the role of women.***

### **Bev Farningham**

*Follow the path to the freezing north. Follow your ambition. Follow your heart. Love will find a way. Set in the late 1880's, Flora is introduced to the north at Greenland as the daughter of a whaler who is now widower at the tender age pf 12 she is dubbed the snow queen and grows to love this country and its people and wishes to return once her father decides she is now of an age when the men could be dangerous for her to get an education, much less a job, as a woman was nigh on impossible but she persevered in meteorology and then decides to run an expedition to the north in her own name as no-one would hire her. To this end she marries a wealthy man whom she does not love and sets off. He is injured and she has to lead it alone which is rather difficult for her to be accepted. But her knowledge of the country and its people heal a few bridges. Then her path crosses that of Jakob, a geologist. Over the years many things change and they are thrown together before being torn apart, again and again. Into this u have a man intent on getting to the North Pole and also making his name as a true discoverer in the name of the USA, even if this involves lying.*

*What drives these characters? They are selfish, elusive and ruthless. To be honest I found that the sex scenes detracted from the novel. They were too drawn out and repetitive. **A well-researched and written novel** of 600 pages none the less and also an insight into how the Inuit's lived - and survived just 3 questions. Would give it 4 stars*