



★ **Polar Tales: The Future of Ice, Life, and the Arctic**

Fredrik Granath

Melissa Schäfer

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Fredrik Granath and Melissa Schäfer spend months each year documenting wildlife in Norway's Svalbard region, a "ground zero of global warming" Arctic environment that they characterize as the "roughest and toughest," but also "the most fragile place you could imagine." Through *Polar Tales*, their observations and astonishing color photographs record images of the endangered landscape.

Powerful visual stories portray an environment on the brink of collapse, where melting ice shrinks animals' habitats, and food and shelter are vanishing. Polar bears, on top of the Arctic food chain, are the most visible symbols of climate change. Granath and Schäfer's magnificent bear portraits capture bears being playful, tender, and terrifying. Gut-wrenching shots show a newborn seal's brutal, short life; because there's no shelter left on its ice patch, after a few hours it is eaten by a bear, itself stressed and starving.

Schäfer's photographs display an amazing and vibrant landscape: countless shades of blue are frozen in ribbons of ice formations; every hue of white and yellow shimmers in polar bears' fur against the snow. Most images are gorgeous, but there are also realistic wildlife portraits complete with blood-soaked snow. The showstopper is a rare, ethereal image of a bear den, shot hours after it was abandoned by a ravenous mother bear and her cubs after months of nesting.

The coda reveals Granath and Schäfer's personal experiences and shots of their bathroom-sized hunting shack, where they take turns sleeping while the other stokes the furnace and guards against bears. Despite the hardships, they cherish their time in Svalbard, describing how time slows down and "we are always present."

Polar Tales is an eloquent portrayal of a unique place that calls for swift action on climate change—to save Svalbard and its bears, and to keep winter from "fading from our planet."

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2020)

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