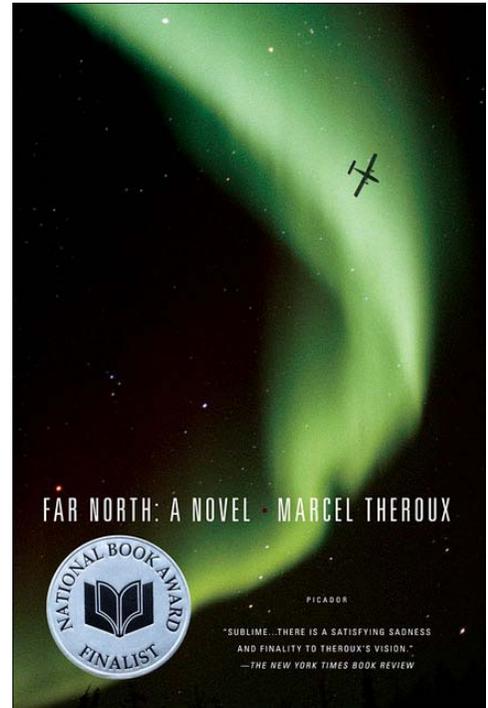


# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Far North* A Novel

by Marcel Theroux

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Far North* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Far North*.

### About the Book

*My father had an expression for a thing that turned out bad. He'd say it had gone west. But going west always sounded pretty good to me. After all, westwards is the path of the sun. And through as much history as I know of, people have moved west to settle and find freedom. But our world had gone north, truly gone north, and just how far north I was beginning to learn.*

Out on the frontier of a failed state, Makepeace—sheriff and perhaps last citizen—patrols a city's ruins, salvaging books but keeping the guns in good repair.

Into this cold land comes shocking evidence that life might be flourishing elsewhere: a refugee emerges from the vast emptiness of forest, whose existence inspires Makepeace to reconnect with human society and take to the road, armed with rough humor and an unlikely ration of optimism.

What Makepeace finds is a world unraveling: stockaded villages enforcing an uncertain justice and hidden work camps laboring to harness the little-understood technologies of a vanished civilization. But Makepeace's journey—rife with danger—also leads to an unexpected redemption.

*Far North* takes the reader on a quest through an unforgettable arctic landscape, from humanity's origins to its possible end. Haunting, spare, yet stubbornly hopeful, the novel is suffused with an ecstatic awareness of the world's fragility and beauty, and its ability to recover from our worst trespasses.

## About the Author

**Marcel Theroux** is the author of three novels, *A Blow to the Heart*, *A Stranger in the Earth*, and *The Confessions of Mycroft Holmes: A Paper Chase*, which won a Somerset Maugham Award. He lives in London.

## Discussion Questions

1. Given that she barely reads, why does Makepeace make such a point of preserving books for posterity?
2. The author Arthur C. Clarke famously said “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”. How does this relate to the world of *Far North*? How much of the technology that you use every day operates on principles that you understand? What are the implications of a society that increasingly depends on incomprehensibly sophisticated forms of technology?
3. What's the difference between Makepeace's evaluation of herself and the way she comes across to the reader?
4. How does Makepeace feel about herself in relation to her ancestors? Is she right to feel this way?
5. Is Makepeace convincingly female?
6. What is the effect of the author withholding information about Makepeace's gender?
7. Eben Callard mentions something called Daniel's Fire. What do you think this is?

8. Why do Makepeace's family leave the U.S.? What is the attraction of a fresh start? What are they fleeing from?
9. To what extent are you persuaded that man-made climate change is a real problem? What evidence would it take to persuade or dissuade you of its importance? Why do you think it inspires such strong views? What position does the author of *Far North* appear to take?
10. Is this a despairing book? What consolation does it offer us?
11. Makepeace lives several generations into the future. How does our life look to her? How do the lives of your grandparents and great-grandparents look to you?
12. It's an underlying assumption of modern life that the future will be better than the past. Why is this necessarily the case? Has it always been true?
13. Makepeace feels that Shamsudin represents a different kind of person from her. What is the difference between them as Makepeace perceives it?
14. What does the future hold for Makepeace's daughter?
15. In Chekhov's play, "Three Sisters", Vershinin says: "It could be that our present life, which seems so normal to us, will in time seem strange, uncomfortable, mindless, unclean, and perhaps even corrupt." How does this relate to the aims of speculative fiction?
16. Life on earth will end one day. How, if at all, is this fact relevant to the way we live now?

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