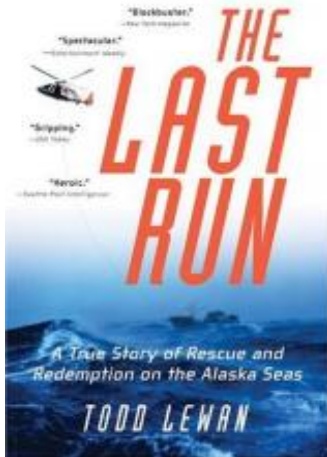

The Last Run: A True Story of Rescue and Redemption on the Alaska Seas

by Todd Lewan



About the Book

It was a desperate mission that made front-page headlines and captured the attention of millions of readers around the world. In January 1998, in the dead of an Alaskan winter, a cataclysmic Arctic storm with hurricane-force winds and towering seas forced five fishermen to abandon their vessel in the Gulf of Alaska and left them adrift in thirty-eight-degree water with no lifeboat. Their would-be rescuers were 150 miles away at the Coast Guard station, with the nearby airport shut down by an avalanche.

The Last Run is the epic tale of the wreck of the oldest registered fishing schooner in Alaska, a hellish Arctic tempest, and the three teams of aviators in helicopters who withstood 140-mph gusts and hovered alongside waves that were ten stories high. But what makes this more than a true-life page-turner is its portrait of untamed Alaska and the unflappable spirit of people who forge a different kind of life on America's last frontier, the "end of the roaders" who are drawn to, or flee to, Alaska to seek a final destiny.

Discussion Guide

1. Who was more responsible for the *La Conte* incident, Mark Morley or Scott Echols? Explain your opinion.
2. The author, Todd Lewan, includes a significant amount of background information on each of the members of the *La Conte* crew. Does this enhance or detract from the story for you in any way? Would you feel differently about the crew members if you had not known their histories? Why or why not?

3. Discuss overfishing and how it played into the crew's decision to search out more dangerous waters in the hope that they would bring home a more profitable catch. Does your knowledge of this practice affect your feelings toward the crew members?
4. It is quite ironic that because of the extra fish that the crew caught, the boat was too heavy, rode too low in the water, wasn't as maneuverable as it otherwise would have been, and sank. What do you think caused the crew's common sense to cloud over in such a way as to cause this to happen? How could the crew members' combined experiences with fishing have let their judgment become so skewed?
5. Once Ted LeFeuvre saw that Bob Doyle was one of the men he had risked his and his crew's life to save, his immediate reaction was to think, "I can't believe it ... We saved Bob Doyle? ... Throw him back." Do you think this was a justified reaction, based on Ted LeFeuvre's history with Bob Doyle?
6. Towards the end of the book, Bernice Honnold gets a visit from Bob Doyle and Mike DeCapua. In your opinion, why don't Bob and Mike tell her the reason for their visit and the gift of fish? Also, why don't they choose to stay to thank Lee Honnold in person?
7. After Bob and Mike leave the Honnold house, Bernice "watched them cross the lawn and turn on the sidewalk. She stood there in the doorway watching them. Then she felt a chill and closed the door softly." Why is it important to note that she "felt a chill"? What, if anything, does it signify?
8. When David Hanson realizes that he accidentally typed "Hanlon" instead of "Hanson," what does this signify? What do you think Hanson means when he remarks, "We're not all that far apart, are we, Mr. Hanlon?"
9. The story of David Hanlon serves as a "book-end" for this story. Do you feel that this was an appropriate way to both open and close the book? Can you think of an alternative way that all the pieces of the story could have been tied together?
10. In some ways, this story is not a new one. Fishermen go out, boats sink, some make it back, others don't. What about this book makes it original? How does the author tell this story in such a way as to set it apart from others in this genre?

Author Bio

Todd Lewan joined the Associated Press as a correspondent in 1988. In 1996 he became an editor on AP's international desk, and later a national features writer. In 1998 he received several feature-writing prizes for this story.

Critical Praise

"Blockbuster."

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