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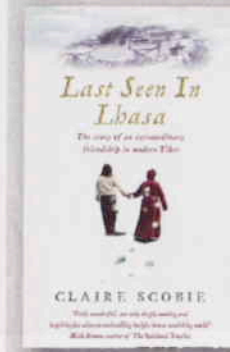
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the magazine for book lovers

Last Seen in Lhasa

Claire Scobie

While parts of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China have long been associated with the 1933 novel *Lost Horizons*, about an utopian valley where immortals live in perfect harmony, the modern reality is far different. For



almost a decade Scobie has visited Tibet, first from her home in England and latterly from Australia. Tibet has fascinated explorers and writers for hundreds of years, but rarely have so many layers of its existence been revealed in one book. Perhaps there will be too many layers for some readers, with Scobie using her journalistic skills to research and write movingly about its botany, Buddhism, Chinese invasion, subsequent marginalisation and grief of Tibetans, Lhasa's modern consumerism, the beauty of Tibet's hidden valleys, her own search for enlightenment – and most importantly, friendship with an

itinerant Buddhist nun.

Scobie's quest to fill a spiritual aridity, an aching emptiness inside, is in counterpoint to the enlightened life of the nun she calls Ani, dreadlocked when she first meets her, with cranberry cheeks matching her Tibetan tunic, a warm smile and earthy womanliness. This was a friendship often requiring an interpreter, but the two women's connection transcended language, as the nun living as a pilgrim and hermit allowed Scobie a glimpse into her pursuit of spiritual perfection.

★★★★ Rider Books \$35.00

Reviewed by Jennifer Somerville