



The Captain's Dog: My Journey with the Lewis and Clark Tribe (Great Episodes)

By Roland Smith

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Born the runt of his litter and gambled away to a rusty old riverman, the Newfoundland pup Seaman doesn't imagine his life will be marked by any kind of glory--beyond chasing down rats. But when he meets Captain Meriwether Lewis, Seaman finds himself on a path that will make history. Lewis is just setting off on his landmark search for the Northwest Passage, and he takes Seaman along. Sharing the curiosity and strength of spirit of his new master, Seaman proves himself a valuable companion at every turn. Part history, part science--and adventure through and through--*The Captain's Dog* is the carefully researched, thrilling tale of America's greatest journey of discovery, as seen through the keen, compassionate eyes of a remarkable dog.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In addition to *Girl of the Shining Mountains* (reviewed above), which gives Sacagawea's perspective on Lewis and Clark's exploration, Smith's (*Thunder Cave*; *Jaguar*) historical novel imagines the duo's epic 1804-1806 journey through the eyes of Captain Lewis's Newfoundland dog, Seaman. The novel opens in 1808, when two former members of the expedition discover Seaman living with Nez Perce Indians; one of them presents the pair with Lewis's red-leather journal, rescued by Seaman. This opening framework may be mechanical, but the novel eventually hits its stride: as the traders read aloud the entries (actual text from Lewis's journals), they trigger Seaman's flashbacks. The canine's perspective, both fresh and original, is most effective in objectively relating a diverse array of customs and tribes. The narration strikes a note of humor, too, especially when Seaman offers insight into a dog's life: "Dogs know humans better than they will ever know us." Seaman's voice, however, does not adhere to a canine purview as cannily as Henrietta Branford's recent *Fire, Bed and Bone*, and the narrative occasionally lapses into admonishment (e.g., when Lewis berates himself for his failed iron boat scheme, Seaman mentally recounts the man's resume of accomplishments). An author's note offers little historical perspective on the expedition, but readers may well leave with a thirst for more of Lewis and Clark's adventures. Ages 10-up. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

Grade 5-8-This is the story of the Lewis and Clark expedition as witnessed by Seaman, the massive Newfoundland dog that accompanied the two captains. Faithful to their original diaries, the novel brings to life the day-to-day challenges faced by the team charged with the task of exploring the American West and searching for the legendary Northwest Passage. Action and adventure abound: frequent attacks by grizzly bears and voracious mosquitoes, arduous crossings of nearly impassable landscapes, mutiny and desertion, and close encounters with both friendly and hostile Indians. However, while Seaman's narration is inventive, Smith has difficulty sustaining it, mainly because the dog is such a minor player in the momentous events that he describes. His point of view often seems too omniscient and introspective, resulting in a narrative that sounds uncomfortably human. Only when he recalls a purely canine memory such as marking trees does he snap readers back to the realization that this storyteller is indeed four-legged. Still, this occasional awkwardness does not diminish the scope and power of this entertaining introduction to an episode of American history rarely celebrated in fiction. For another novel about Seaman and his role in the expedition, look to Gail Langer Karwoski's *Seaman* (Peachtree, 1999), a lively account in which this brave animal is a much more central character.

William McLoughlin, Brookside School, Worthington, OH

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Review

"Fresh and original."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Action and adventure abound . . . [An] entertaining introduction to an episode of American history rarely celebrated in fiction."—*School Library Journal*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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