

Four-Fisted Tales: Animals in Combat

Ben Towle

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Ben Towle's exciting graphic history *Four-Fisted Tales* covers animals in combat.

Towle reveals that animals have participated in human wars for centuries—sometimes in novel ways. Though covering what's expected of a book about animals in battle—as with the inclusion of dogs, horses, and carrier pigeons—the book completes its work in fresh, lively style. Unlikely battle participants, including seagulls, rats, and slugs, are featured in active roles, while a chapter on military mascots includes a goat, a baboon, a king penguin, and a pygmy flying phalanger. In eleven sections, the stories of these animals are revealed—most in dramatic vignettes, though some, as with the entry for ships' cats, are profiled in shorter, caption-centered accounts.

The stories showcase a variety of narrative methods. The tale of Wojtek the Bear is told in six wordless pages, followed by an illustration of a G.I. Joe-style bear action figure, with a caption that provides background on the bear's service. And the book begins and ends with a group of World War I soldiers who use a jar of glow worms as illumination, so as not to betray their position to their enemies. A courtroom is the setting for an investigation into the supposed military uses of dolphins: locating mines, guarding bases, identifying submarines, and seeking out and injecting enemy divers with compressed nitrogen to cause fatal embolisms.

Four-Fisted Tales is a stellar graphic history whose art is exemplary, capturing action, humor, and poignancy alike. The panels flow together with ease thanks to Towle's clarity, attention to detail, and eye for accurate, anatomical animal representations.

PETER DABBENE (July / August 2021)

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