

Lewis & Clark

Nick Bertozzi

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Lewis & Clark promises to be “The Greatest Adventure of American History.” Happily, it’s a promise that Nick Bertozzi’s latest masterpiece of graphic nonfiction fulfills with wit, aplomb, and effortless storytelling.

Even the barest outline of Lewis and Clark’s historic journey would likely give the most seasoned of modern adventure seekers real reason to pause. Starting out in May of 1804, their expedition of exploration blazed a pioneering trail through the most remote and dangerous reaches of the Northwestern territories of the then-burgeoning United States, all in search of a water route to the Pacific, and at the behest of congress and then-President Thomas Jefferson.

Lewis, Clark, and their men walked, canoed, or rode on horseback across thousands of miles of untouched wilderness, laying claim to the land for the US while amassing an incredible number of specimens and information about the region and its resources. Along the way, they encountered friend and foe, natives and European exploiters of the people and the land, along with death, privation, swarms of insects, and worse. They were gone for three long, hard years and were considered dead well before they miraculously returned, walking out of the wilderness and into the national consciousness and history books.

At first glance, it would seem nigh impossible to properly capture within the allotted pages the true proportions of that epic expedition. Yet Bertozzi’s entertaining and illuminating treatment skillfully depicts not only the sheer scope of that worthy pairs’ various accomplishments—and they are many—but also their mercurial natures, all with nary a wasted pen stroke or narrative overstep.

Visually, Bertozzi’s vigorous line work is simply a marvel to behold. Alternately sinuous and fine, then abrupt, bold, and sharp, the artist mixes and matches his technique to meet the story’s demands beat by beat, even panel by panel, endowing the characters and their actions with a propulsive and vibrant immediacy, and a palpable sense of life. Those same characters are given voice by the artist-writer in real and effective ways, subtly providing bits of information about them and their world in wholly believable and engrossing ways.

Ultimately, *Lewis & Clark* is not just a great comic. It’s also a great piece of graphic nonfiction and one of the best examples of the genre available to readers today.

BILL BAKER (January / February 2011)

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