

Steamboat Seasons: Dawn of a New Era

Kendall D. Gott

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The historical novel Steamboat Seasons follows a ship's captain as he witnesses nineteenth-century tensions along his route.

A sequel that can be read as a standalone, Kendall D. Gott's historical novel *Steamboat Seasons* follows a ship captain's adventures through the Reconstructionist-era US.

From a home base of St. Louis, an unnamed steamboat captain pilots his vessel up and down the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and other waterways, following instructions from his company's management to make profitable deals. His trips as far north as St. Paul and as far south as New Orleans are recounted in great detail, including the mechanisms of how a steamboat works and the types of cargo he carries, ranging from goods like logs and whiskey to human cargo (often impoverished immigrants seeking better lives).

But all is not smooth sailing. A saboteur is on board the ship. Further, the company's management hints at changes that will galvanize the shareholders. And the captain's former flame, Ann, makes an appearance on his vessel; her chaotic behavior threatens both the captain and his crew's integrity. Racial tensions between freed slaves and immigrants also converge on the crew, forcing decisions about what constitutes fair treatment.

As it moves through one season on the rivers, the story mixes mundane events with exciting ones. Its cast is fleshed out with telling details: the captain, for example, is understood to be a stingy man, and his colleagues remark on his beaten-up old hat, which he could afford to replace if he wanted to. The shadow of the Civil War persists for him and those around him, with heavy alcohol and tobacco use proving prevalent. Beset by trauma but aided by luck, the captain is a survivor, and his drive informs his actions throughout the book.

But the prose is heavy with exposition. There are paragraphs devoted to the intricacies of the Civil War and its aftermath, as well as to the agricultural and economic aspects of the regions that the boat travels through, impeding the story's momentum. Attention to detail is apparent, though, as with the maps that appear at the book's beginning to provide a detailed picture of the steamboat's routes along US waterways.

Grammatical and typographical errors are present and distracting, as is the fact that the prose switches between the past and present tenses. Dialogue tags are infrequent, muddling conversations throughout. But period slang adds color and dynamism to the cast's exchanges, while the era's misogyny and racism are represented and realistic.

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JEANA JORGENSEN (June 14, 2022)

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