

Members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition find trouble at every turn on their long journey through the uncharted West. If not trouble in the form of hostile Indians, bad weather, rough water, scarcity of food, then trouble among themselves.

Corps of Discovery

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# **CORPS OF DISCOVERY**

**A Novel**

**of the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1803-1806**

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This is a work of historical fiction based on recorded historical events for the most part. The names of historical figures have not been altered. About many of these figures little is known, however; the author has taken the liberty to speculate on their personalities, specific behaviors, and interrelationships, but has also endeavored to make use of those facts available from the record.

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## PROLOGUE

**William Clark**

December 1803

He had marked the snuffing of each lamp this evening, the last spark of each fading campfire shoot skyward. He had measured that slow procession toward sleep as he might the steps of a long march toward a decisive battle.

Men in tattered buckskin had lugged their kettles to the river, scrubbed them clean in the bone-chilling water and dusky air, lugged them back. They had sorted their bedding, playfully poked and shoved one another, stoked their pipes, and stared out across the wide valley of the Mississippi to catch the sun's fading glow. He had listened to all the taunts and complaints and divined every whisper among them. He had felt fear in the wind as it howled out of the west and battered their sleepless tents.

The merchants back in St. Louis had said it often and plainly enough. Only the sun and the moon, and a few desperate, whiskey-soaked fur traders, ventured into the West. The wind escaped from it. The rivers, too. That Missouri, which a few miles to the north collided broadside with the Mississippi, rumbled in wide and fast, impatient and ominous. The traders had tried that river, but not many had made it as far as a few hundred miles. Boats went under. Men, too, as the savage inhabitants descended like beggars to a feast, fattening themselves on stolen cargo and blood.

*Jeffrey W. Tenney*

In a few months, he and Meriwether Lewis, and these recruits, would add their names to the list of ill-advised West-bound explorers. These recruits—who could not stack their weapons without them collapsing like the ruins of a burned out barn—were to make for a military force, and by strength of character and discipline bring that vast wilderness to its knees.

In the morning, Meriwether would make the cold ride south from camp to St. Louis. He would continue their efforts there to engage able boatmen. With the freeze taking solid hold and snow beginning to fall, he could well be Clark's last chance before spring to send a letter homeward. Inside his cabin, Clark propped himself at Lewis's writing desk. He brightened the oil lamp as he bid to brighten his own spirits, then dipped his pen and began to write.

*Dear George,*

*St. Louis, Louisiana Territory  
December, 1803*

*Be assured that I am in best of Helth, though still considurable plagued by Troubles of back and neck. I trust all among Family and Friends are well. I can chearfully report that word of the session of Louisianna to the U.S. has Arrived in this Territory long since, and that the Foreign authorities here now see our Mission to be harmless to their interests. As much as I expect President Jefferson eagerly awaits first news of our Success, I expect that Mission to comense without delay once ice has bidden this river fare well.*

*With this post you will find a bird's feather, of a species Unknown to us and given to me by an Indian traveling the river. I am sure it will add some Charm to Ma's collection. Plese in all haste report to York's Mammy that my Man too is in fine helth, being trubled only by Himself, in such manner as perpetual Homesickness and an immoderate Fear of the Savages we expect to meet as we Persue our Object. I have let York out to Service with our friend Meriwether Lewis, to atend to the Captain's needs in town and to be watchful of his mood, which of Late has been sorely decomposed, brought on I fear by the weight of his Charge.*

*I regret not having advised you sooner of our Difficulties in finding soldiers Worthy of this vast Enterprise. Perhaps you Could have in some*

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*way lent us aide, as there are Many here in the West who remember your name and Deeds from the War. Many Gentlemens sons have sought our company, but those I find unsuted to the labours and fatiges we are Certain to encountre. From the Remander I find little to chose in the way of Character, though some are fine specimins of Physiqe and exceptunal with rifle and ball. Among those few we now have in camp, some demonstrate notable Talents in shaping wood and iron to good Purpose.*

*Our serch for men Capable of guiding our boats has Proved even more troublesome. As you are aware, St. Louis is peopled most notably by those of French and Indian blood, many of Whom are known to the Missouri and its trade in fur. But among them Capt. Lewis and myself find Few that are well informed and Fewer that seem capable of Honest work. They claim undo Pride in their Accomplishments, for which Evidence is scarcer than a comely woman in these Parts. I fear there is some Real chance this Mission will Fail for such Deficences no matter that we are well supplied in all Materiel and remane Resolute in Spirit.*

*Not withstanding all Disappointments and anoyance I expect to be well Ocupied until spring frees us to our Persutes. Beside toiling to make Soldiers out of scoundrels, I will Devote much time to improving M.L.'s keelboat. For a big bark she's a capable design but will make a poor Defense. It is a floating Fort we will need if there is a grane of Truth in the stories told by these river men. We will find no welcoming from the Savages, as their Loyalties, if such a word can be used to Describe those People, are given to the British fur companies in the North. Few of the good souls we have met in this Countrey offer us any Chance whatsoever of reaching our British cousins, though I sincearly doubt there is a tribe of Indian on the Continant so capable of stopping twenty American Rifles well fortified upon our Vessel. Praye we can mold soldiers to the Match of their Weapuns, and that this Corps of Discovery, as our President has named us, can discover something More than the ties to its own Breeches. I am honoured to be Yr. Mo. Ob. servant and Lov. Brother.*  
W. C.

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