



## The Winter Pony

*Iain Lawrence*

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## **The Winter Pony** Iain Lawrence

In the forests of Siberia, in the first years of the 20th century, a white pony runs free with his herd. But his life changes forever when he's captured by men. Years of hard work and cruelty wear him out. When he's chosen to be one of 20 ponies to accompany the Englishman Robert Falcon Scott on his quest to become the first to reach the South Pole, he doesn't know what to expect. But the men of Scott's expedition show him kindness, something he's never known before. They also give him a name—James Pigg. As Scott's team hunkers down in Antarctica, James Pigg finds himself caught up in one of the greatest races of all time. The Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen has suddenly announced that he too means to be first to the Pole. But only one team can triumph, and not everyone can survive—not even the animals.

## **The Winter Pony Details**

Date : Published November 8th 2011 by Delacorte Books for Young Readers (first published January 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780385733779

Author : Iain Lawrence

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Animals, Horses, Fiction, Adventure, Childrens

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## From Reader Review The Winter Pony for online ebook

### Linda says

One of the saddest and most beautiful books about horses that I've read. Intrigued by the lovely cover, as well as the interesting subject matter - two teams racing to be the first to reach the South Pole a century ago, I couldn't help but shake my head in disgust at the men who thought horses would do well in such an environment.

Told from the point of view of a Mongolian pony with the unlikely name of James Pigg, this is a mostly accurate account of what actually happened on this doomed trip. The author's notes at the end expand on his research, and how deeply touched he was by the fate of these ponies, who struggled against brutal and harrowing conditions to do the best they could for their handlers.

The gentleness of the men involved, and their tender care of the ponies on the horrifying journey makes the story almost palatable. Also a gripping and exciting adventure story, with killer whales breaking through ice and crevasses opening up to swallow men and dogs and ponies, it keeps you on the edge of your seat and turning the pages.

If you are a horse lover, be forewarned there are some difficult scenes to read. In the end, though, I was deeply moved by the author's words and the fact that he chose to tell this story from the viewpoint of a small white pony named James Pigg, who you cannot help but love and admire, right till the very end.

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### Deedee says

Wow, I stayed up all night listening to this. A story about Scott's fatal expedition to the south pole and his use of ponies to pull his heavy sleds, as told through the eyes of one of the ponies named "James Pigg". There are a few humorous moments, but otherwise a very moving, sad story, but so very good.

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### Andrea at Reading Lark says

Review Posted on Reading Lark 7/7/13: <http://readinglark.blogspot.com/2013/...>

I picked this one up at the library because this past school year I had a student who was crazy about horses. I kept trying to find things for her to read and thought this might be a good fit. I also love well done historical fiction and knew virtually nothing about the explorations to the South Pole. I thought I could kill two birds with one stone: find something for the student and learn something.

I did learn a lot about Scott's expedition to the South Pole. It amazes me that so long ago with such primitive technology (compared to modern standards), men were willing to brave the Arctic unknowns. I'm sure they were propelled by their sense of adventure, but I cannot imagine voluntarily going on a mission like this one. The hardships these men and animals faced were terrifying. This is not a happy go lucky story about a pony

taking a romp in the snow. No, this novel left me in emotional shambles and is not one I would recommend to anyone who isn't ready to face the brutal environment of the South Pole.

My favorite thing about this story is that the pony, James Pigg, is the narrator. I was fascinated that Lawrence chose to write from this perspective instead of one of the men. I enjoyed rooting around inside of James Pigg's head to find out how the expedition affected the animals. It was a unique way twist to historical fiction and one I think many younger readers and adults alike will find appealing. James Pigg's perspective provided a chance for the reader to experience this journey in a far different than way than they would have with a human narrator.

I did appreciate that there were segments between James Pigg's story that filled in the historical details. These sections read more like nonfiction and provided me with the background I needed to truly understand the goals of the men. It also closed gaps in the story that could not be filled by James Pigg's knowledge.

My biggest issue with this novel is I found it to be terribly depressing at times. It was hard to make myself keep reading when I knew that the ending could not possibly be a happy one for all involved. It might be a bit too much for more sensitive readers. Hardship, animal cruelty, and death are common occurrences.

In spite of the amount of difficult material, there is also a lot of camaraderie and bravery in this story. The bonds between the men and the ponies shocked me. I didn't expect there to be such devotion between the two groups, but on more than one occasion, a man is willing to sacrifice his own life to save one of the animals.

I'd highly recommend this novel to anyone whose interested in the race to the South Pole, adventure/survival stories, and those who enjoy a well written, well researched piece of historical fiction.

One Last Gripe: I kept having to walk away from this one because of how depressing it got at times. I should have expected it, but it still punched me in the gut every time. Ultimately, it was what dropped the rating for me. It's a clear case of it's me, not you.

My Favorite Thing About This Book: I loved the structure of it. The balance between fact and fiction was superb.

First Sentence: The year is 1910, and a great adventure is beginning.

Favorite Character: James Pigg

Least Favorite Characters: The men who steal James Pigg from his herd

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### **Darlene Jones says**

Wow! Amazing. There aren't enough adjectives to describe how wonderful this book is. If I was cranky the next morning it's Mr. Lawrence's fault - I couldn't stop reading.

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### **Ms. Yingling says**

A white pony is taken from the wild and used in Robert Scott's 1910 expedition to reach the South Pole before his rival Amundsen. The conditions are brutal, but after several years with horse breakers who are

very cruel, James Pigg, as the horse is called by the men on the expedition, is pleased to be treated kindly and ready to work hard for the men. In alternating sequences, the preparations and progress of the two explorers are detailed. The horses and men all battle the elements the best they are able, but the end result is grim and death-filled.

Strengths: The South Pole exploration is certainly a great story of survival and battling the elements, and I can't think of too many other stories on the subject. We live in a world where there are very few frontiers left to conquer, so reading a story of one such adventure from the point of view of a horse involved is innovative and interesting. I didn't think about this title originally for my survival readers, but it will be great for them.

Weaknesses: Hesitate to give this to horse-loving girls, since so many horses die! There's something about Lawrence's work that I have trouble connecting with. I can't promote his Wreckers books as much as one of our teachers does.

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### **Ian P says**

I am a ten year old and I read The Winter Pony. At first I had high hopes for it after I had read the back of the novel. It starts off like many books were the main characters life sucks, but in most of those it turns out all right, except in The Winter Pony it just gets better then it gets worse than before. The main character gets captured by Romans and is basically a slave. Then he gets sold and he makes it half way to the South Pole and turns around and heads back to camp. The very next day he goes back on the exact same path. All the other ponies die and then just before the main character reaches the South Pole his master literally shoots him in the back of the head. It said on the back of the book... two men race to be the first to reach the south pole, one will win and one will die, with an unexpected hero, a pony named James piggy {the main character}. Which is exactly the opposite of what happens... so not only is it a bad book it also lies which is not very inspiring to read it. I actually threw it out, my mom said I should donate it and I said "I don't want to put anyone else through that". So no matter what your age I highly recommend against reading the winter pony. [Because it suuuuuuuuuucks]. I wish I could give it no stars.

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### **Manybooks says**

Although I would of course NEVER go so far as to in any way suggest that Iain Lawrence's The Winter Pony should be banned or removed from public and school library shelves, this is truly and personally one of the most depressing and annoyingly infuriating children's novels I have had the misfortune to read. For as very much a horse and pony enthusiast, I can simply and utterly not all that well stomach and accept the cringeworthy fact that basically ALL of Robert Falcon Scott's Siberian ponies end up dead or rather that they will all end up dead (some of course starve or freeze, but oh so very often, they are callously shot in order to feed Scott's men and their dogs, their canine companions). And while I do in fact realise that this to and for me horrifying state of affairs is very much and likely historically accurate and thus also the sad reality, it has most certainly made The Winter Pony an at best massively frustrating and anger-inducing reading experience for me, and one that I have to admit I probably could not have even handled as a child (especially since the entire premise of both Robert Scott's and his rival Roald Amundsen's bitter and frantic race to be the first to reach the South Pole was and remains in my opinion not only something massively unnecessary in every conceivable way, but really just for the vain personal glory of these two "gentlemen" being the first to reach the former).

And that at least in my own and humble opinion the above is not EVER even remotely criticised and condemned enough by author Iain Lawrence within the pages of The Winter Pony really does personally chafe and smart, and even though I guess I do to a certain point appreciate that the author is honest with

regard to his own hero-worshipping of Robert Scott and his Antarctic expedition to be the first to reach the South Pole, this admission does not make me enjoy The Winter Pony in any manner of speaking. No, and indeed, Iain Lawrence's admission that he considers Scott as a personal hero of sorts actually and on an emotional level makes me really and utterly despise the novel, the narrative of The Winter Pony with every fibre of my being (as while Iain Lawrence might well and readily admit that Robert Scott did make many mistakes, he still seems to consider him as laudable and praiseworthy, and that is something I for one simply cannot and will not EVER accept, especially since I for one do not even remotely see any major consideration and authorial thoughts with regard to the fate of the expedition ponies, and that while Robert Scott and his men of course also suffered and yes indeed mostly died, they at least had a personal choice, something that their animal resources, their ponies and even their dogs certainly did not in any way, shape or form ever have).

Now and finally, while I do realise that The Winter Pony seems to be popular enough, emotionally and personally, I am only willing and able to consider a one star ranking at best for this novel (as the engaging, first person narrational writing style notwithstanding, Iain Lawrence's ploy of having one of the ponies, by the name of James Pigg, tell the sad story of Scott's expedition and the trials and tribulations, the death and destruction encountered, it just does not remove the taint of authorial heroism, of having Iain Lawrence think of Robert Falcon Scott as a to admire and perhaps even to emulate intrepid explorer, instead of primarily depicting him as who and what he in my opinion always was, a ridiculously foolish man full of vanity who obviously cared more about glory and successfully racing and beating Roald Amundsen to the South Pole than about the deadly dangers of the Antarctic for man and beast).

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### **Sarah Smithers says**

Too much death to be a children's book, and I just started.  
Poor pony gets picked to go to the south pole with that guy who died.  
Holy shit this can't end well..

This book haunted me for days afterward...the only redeeming thing about it was that after he shot all his hardworking ponies, he and his whole damn party died...for nothing. Another guy got there first and got the glory..

But it was a great story about the life of those who went down there. ANd it was based on his actual diary, that I also looked up on line. A great website, that even had pictures of the ponies and the people. It really brought life to the story of his push to get to the pole.

But sad..too damn sad.

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### **Jensen Gomez says**

This book is probably one of my new faverote books. It was truly amazing and heartwarming. I would recomend it to anyone who likes horses. It was deffinatly a sad story and at the end its really sad.

This story is about a horse who was captured when he was really little, he was taken and trained harshly. He moves from home to home, working to hard then getting sold again. By the time he is 8 he was already worn out and "old". Then he was chosen as one of the 20 ponies to travel to the south pole. During this long hard journy the horse explaines what it was like. He watched his friends die around him and he doesnt know when

he'll be next.

A great read. Another thing that's cool about it is its narrated by the horse.

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## Virginia Brace says

This is marked Historical Fiction because the pony, James Pigg tells the story of Captain Scott's 1910 attempt to reach the South Pole using motor sledges, dogs, and Russian ponies. If junior readers can accept the idea of a pony understanding the feelings of his handlers and his fellow work ponies, and you can accept the frequent death and suffering of ponies and men, and you can accept the descriptions of the hungry and vicious dogs and the horrors of months in the Antarctic you will learn something about the expedition of both Scott's team of explorers who failed and Amundsen's team of explorers who managed to reach the South Pole in 1910. I think this is not the best telling of the dramatic story for junior readers.

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## Becky says

By the time I was halfway through *The Winter Pony*, I knew I had made a mistake, a big mistake. It isn't just that all the animals die, the ponies, the dogs, and lots of other Antarctic animals that were killed for food or fur, or both. It isn't just the fact that almost all the human characters die too.

I think it's the fact, and this is purely subjective on my part, that it was all so pointless. What could possibly be heroic or noble about starving to death and/or freezing to death? For what did these men risk their lives? The men had a choice. They, for whatever reason, were excited and motivated and aware of the risks and hardships. The animals, well, they had no choice at any point. The animals were essentially doomed from the moment they were selected to be a part of Robert Falcon Scott's quest, his mission, to be the first to the South Pole.

Why am I focusing on the animals instead of the men? For the simple fact that this book does. *The Winter Pony* is told through a pony's perspective. The pony hero is James Pigg. The novel opens with James Pigg free and running wild, happy and innocent. It ends with him being shot and fed to the remaining dogs and men. (The men, the dogs, the ponies, all shared the same fate, it was just a matter of when.)

The author seems to like and respect Robert Scott, and has sought to tell the story honestly for better or worse. He does point out that big mistakes were made by Scott on his journey, that the story could have had a different ending, if Scott had made different choices, better choices. One of the mistakes is that Scott failed to push the ponies hard enough at the beginning. He had planned to create a supply cache, "One Ton Depot" at a certain degree, he stopped short of his goal for the sake of the ponies. On his return journey, he never came close to reaching the much-needed supplies that would have saved his life and the lives of his men. If he had stuck to the original plan, then he would have reached his supplies. There were other mistakes made as well.

There was nothing in Ian Lawrence's novel that made me like or respect Scott.

*The Winter Pony* stays relatively close to the facts. James Pigg's part in the story is stretched and expanded to tell more of what it was like to be one of twenty (or is nineteen?) ponies on the expedition.

The narrative switches between the pony's perspective AND an omniscient narrator that shares plenty of information.

## Philip says

My first five-star review in some time, but well-deserved. This was truly a brilliant concept, beautifully executed and with a truly moving narration by Edoardo Ballerini that makes this a solid book-on-CD recommendation. "The Winter Pony" tells the amazing and at times horrific story of Captain Robert Scott's attempt to reach the South Pole from the point of view of one of the Manchurian ponies brought along to pull their sledges, (who knew?). Although I've never been inside a pony's head, the voice of the story seems somehow perfect for that of a pony, consistently brave and innocent and trusting, while still managing to convey the full range of emotions experienced in a life of pretty much unceasing hardship. Over the course of the story, the pony also accomplishes the difficult task of creating distinct, three dimensional portraits of both the human and animal characters of the story.

While the book drags just a bit in the middle as they trudge across the ice, it is reflective of what must surely have been the mind-numbing tedium of the journey itself. Actually, what impressed me is that the story didn't drag even more; this could have easily become a boring story as the party sits out endless delays and blizzards. But in fact, the book is never a page away from some fascinating detail, unexpected adventure, or simply a passage of beautiful writing. Each chapter is also begun with a separate brief narrative that fills in details of the expedition that the pony wouldn't know, or about Scott's competition to reach the Pole, Roald Amundsen. Altogether, "The Winter Pony" is a story that is both moving and beautiful as well as (I have to assume) historically accurate. If I had any criticism at all, it would probably be with the book's title/cover. The whole thing comes across just a little too "fairyland" or "girl and horse"-ish unless you already know what the story is about; and I would never have picked this up from the title/cover alone if I hadn't stumbled across a review somewhere. My other comment -- not on the book but on its marketing -- is that this is seen as "a children's book," which I find totally misleading. I believe any adult who loves adventure, exploration, animals or simply good writing/story-telling will both enjoy and be moved by this exceptional story.

On a semi-related note, I've mentioned before but will mention here again: I think the world would be a much better place (and the younger generation would be better positioned to inherit an uncertain future) if people read more about people like Scott & Amundsen, Mallory & Irvine, Shackleton, Younghusband, Livingstone, Burton and Chapman Andrews; and spent less time worrying about Brad & Angelina, Snooki & the Situation, Schwarzenegger and Kardashian!

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## Ellen says

I feel I could never in good conscience recommend this book to any young reader because it is so, so unbelievably sad, made even worse when you are an adult and you know how the story ends. It is beautifully written as Iain Lawrence is a masterful writer but just when you think the story can't get any sadder, it does, and then it does again, and again. I can't imagine any young person making it all the way through to the end. And, I further have to add that the cover image is a dis-service to the book buyers as it may have a pull the wool over the eyes of a young horse loving reader who think this might be a nice horse adventure story to read even if as it describes the race to the South Pole. White horse, lavender/pale blue cover - looks sweet. It isn't.

The Author does say in his author notes that he had a really hard time writing this story and found it very hard to go on writing it. It's an amazing story to tell but would be a very hard book to sell. As a bookseller, I don't know how one would position this book to sell it to its greatest advantage.

Consequently, I don't know how to rate this book so I've given it no stars.

Brilliant writing, the horrific is horrific, there's just too much horrific for this audience level.  
Maybe I am not seeing this book in the correct light.  
Maybe offer it to someone who thinks their life is as bad as it gets and is full of self pity.

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### **Rachel says**

It was depressing. I didn't like how the author 1.killed James Pigg, 2.made Capt. Scott lose, and 3.killed Capt. Scott and his friends. I know that's how it was in real life, but if the story was going to be that sad, why write a book about it at all?

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### **Kelsi says**

Oh God, why would you bring ponies to the South Pole? Why?!

Wow. That was probably the saddest book I've ever read, and that includes Black Beauty. The Winter Pony is the new Black Beauty but in the South Pole. But, like Black Beauty, it'll have a special place in my heart, because this book is a masterpiece. Heartbreaking prose that tells the story of a pony named James Pigg, and the race to the Pole.

I actually waited to read this because I knew it was going to be sad. I read all these cutesy-cute reads beforehand, which I shouldn't have done, because now The Winter Pony seems even more depressing! God, I'm going to go to my bookshelf and pick the happiest read there. Now every time I see a gray pony, I'll think of this book!

Kidding aside (I was kidding?) this was a great read, I'd just wait to let younger kids read it. This will break a little kid's heart, and it sure broke mine. Forget the pretty cover, this ain't a cute pony read. This really happened and that's what makes it all the more sad. Robert Scott really did bring all these ponies to the South Pole.

As you have probably already guessed, ponies die in this. Some of the ways are horrible, ponies having to be hit in the head with a pick because they're slipping into the water where killer whales are waiting for them, having their heads bashed-in, it's a really horrifying story, especially for horse lovers.

I can't help but give a shout-out to the author: Well done Iain Lawrence. Just well done. Thank you for writing this book, it's been really eye-opening for me. Now, maybe I'll be a little tougher next time I'm cold and I don't have a jacket! Okay, I'm being serious now, thank you sir, this was a heartbreaking book and I loved it. \*Wipes tear away\*

All in all, heartbreaking but wonderful book!

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