



## Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning

*Dorothy Ours*

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## **Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning** Dorothy Ours

His trainer said that managing him was like holding a tiger by the tail. His owner compared him to "chain lightning." His jockeys found their lives transformed by him, in triumphant and distressing ways. All of them became caught in a battle for honesty.

Born in 1917, Man o' War grew from a rebellious youngster into perhaps the greatest racehorse of all time. He set such astonishing speed records that *The New York Times* called him a "Speed Miracle." Often he won with so much energy in reserve that experts wondered how much faster he could have gone. Over the years, this and other mysteries would envelop the great Man o' War.

The truth remained problematic. Even as Man o' War---known as "Big Red"---came to power, attracting record crowds and rave publicity, the colorful sport of Thoroughbred racing struggled for integrity. His lone defeat, suffered a few weeks before gamblers fixed the 1919 World Series, spawned lasting rumors that he, too, had been the victim of a fix.

Tackling old beliefs with newly uncovered evidence, *Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning* shows how human pressures collided with a natural phenomenon and brings new life to an American icon. The genuine courage of Man o' War, tribulations of his archrival, Sir Barton (America's first Triple Crown winner), and temptations of their Hall of Fame jockeys and trainers reveal a long-hidden tale of grace, disgrace, and elusive redemption.

## **Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning Details**

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# From Reader Review Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning for online ebook

## Rena Sherwood says

If you only read one book about Big Red, make it this 2007 biography by Dorothy Ours. After reading it, I wonder why Walter Farley would turn his hand at writing a *fictional* biography. Big Red's life was colorful enough as it was. Unlike many other biographies of champion racehorses, this one isn't afraid to show the dark side of racing, such as "hopping" horses and jockeys throwing races. (However, there is no evidence that any shenanigans happened during Man o' War's career -- which is amazing in and of itself.)

There are details not available in other biographies of Man o' War's life, such as his owner trying to show Big Red off to his neighbors in the Philadelphia Main Line. Red was nearly killed because of his high string nature, which didn't exactly mesh with suburbia -- even the suburbia of 1920. The book ultimately shows why Man o' War was voted the most important thoroughbred of the twentieth century in American racing.

And if you happen to have the Breyer Man o' War (any of them) then now you'll know what inspired the model horses. Or any of the other myriad of art forms featuring Man o' War, for that matter.

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## Casey says

Pretty boring account of Man-O-War's life and racing history. For serious racing fans it may have been more intriguing, but it seemed too full of stats and race times/circumstances and did not have much of a story line or connect outside historical events. Not the best horse racing book I have read.

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## Caroline says

Having completed biographies of seabiscuit and secretariat, I decided that my next horse book should be about man o'war. I knew that he is considered to be the greatest racehorse of the 20th century, but I didn't know much else. That is definitely not true anymore. This book tells, in great detail, the overwhelming story of this great horse. Dorothy Ours has clearly done a great deal of research (and working for the horse racing museum in Saratoga no doubt gave her a huge amount of access to information) and puts forth a definitive volume of the life of man o'war.

The story itself lacks some of the pizzazz of the stories of recently popular legends. It lacks the Cinderella story feel of seabiscuit, and doesn't have quite the same savior-in-a-time-of-need feel that secretariat had. It nonetheless tells a breathtaking story about a horse whose strength and power have not been seen again. Definitely worth a read for racing aficionados, although without the other charms of other racing legends, it might feel dense for a general audience.

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## Joseph J. says

I return to this every summer to read of Man O' War's Belmont and Saratoga exploits. As well researched and written as the mega-hit *Seabiscuit*, this is a must read about that underdog's grandsire and possibly still the greatest horse ever!

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## Patty says

I enjoyed this well-researched and documented equine story and learned quite a bit about Thoroughbreds and the early days of horse racing in the US. Not a full five stars for me, but a solid 4.5! Anyone interested in horses won't want to miss this one.

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## Alger says

I went into this book with lowered expectations, that somehow Ours managed to undershoot.

On the upside, this really is a learned and completed guide to the life and career of Man o' War. Ours' is extremely reliable on every angle of this extraordinary horse. So that's the good part, I now know a lot of things about Man o' War.

The downside is that this is not interesting in itself. This book has no spark, no sense of momentum or personality or narrative. This is compounded by Ours' failings as a writer. The text reads like racing forms stitched together with awkward segues. The racing form feel plays out as "comments overheard at the track" and speed statistics presented in long long lists. Ours actually gets most animated in her prose when she is describing why times varied, how track conditions affected times, post positions, and all the rest of the minutia of track life. Where she is at her weakest is when writing about anything else.

Ours' greatest failing as a writer is her habit of repeating information a couple of times, then again, then again. This is how we get paragraphs like this from p. 203 of my hardcover copy, "Setting sail along the backstretch and discouraging Grier, Red set a brilliant pace, reaching the half mile in :46 3/5 and hammering out six furlongs in 1:10 flat. Saratoga's track record was 1:10 and two. No Travers winner ever had shown such insane early speed." This reads fine until you think about what she is saying there, which is repeating that the horse ran at record speed three times in a row (of course no Travers winner had ever run that fast, because it is a record speed. That is what record means). Moreover, she will repeat that same observation about that race and others at random intervals throughout the rest of the book. Aside from this very irritating echoic habit, Ours is just not very good at deciding what should be interesting to the reader. I laughed outright at page 236 where she seems to get really excited about Windsor, Ontario being **SOUTH OF DETROIT** and burns up a paragraph describing how strange Canadian geography is.

Overall, this is a book for horse enthusiasts and track people that probably would not have sold or been read so widely if not for the success of *Seabiscuit* (to support this observation, please note that my copy of this book has 4 cover blurbs, and two are from Hillenbrand and one is from a writer on the *Daily Racing Form*).

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## Lexi says

This book was about the greatest racehorse ever. It talks about his records and how great he was. "Man O' War may set a new (stakes) record this afternoon and beat Wildair by a couple of lengths," It says that he has a lot of fans and a lot of people who loved him. "A good many of those who go to the tracks on days when Man O' War is scheduled to start really do not care whether he is confronted with a contest or a mere gallop" (page 208). It also talks about his ups and downs and how he always recovered. Even though he had a short career he still got a lot of money out of it and still had many fans. The main characters in this book were Man O' War, his owner, and the jockey that rode him.

I think the author of this book did a good job. She said almost everything she could about him. This was published in 2006 and he raced in the 20's, to write this book she must of had to do a lot of research. This is probably the best biography of him. I learned a lot about him and it helped me a lot in my Extravaganza project. I don't think a lot of people I know would be interested in it except for some of my barn friends. The only people that would want to read it are the people who like horses and like racing. If you don't know who Man O' War is before your probably wont want to read it. You have to like the horse and racing to get into the book.

I rate this book a 3.5 out of 5. I chose 3.5 because it was a long book and at times it was kind of hard to get into reading it. It wasn't quite a 4 because I don't think I want to read it again. I would rather read a shorter story about him. It wasn't below 3 because I did like it at moments and I got a lot of information from it for my project. I love horses but I don't know much about racehorses so it was nice to know more about a horse who was so famous. Before reading it knew a little bit about him but after reading it I could explain to people who he was and what he did.

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## Lisa James says

Stunning bio of the greatest racehorse of the century, & the people who loved him & surrounded him. I loved the fact that there were photos included, but kind of sad that there was only one section of them. This is a must have addition to the library of every race fan!

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## Stephanie A. says

Love the horse and the general story, but it's tough to make racetrack history compelling.

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## Janelle says

It's hard to read this book and not call Man o' War the greatest. I liked that the author broke down a lot of racing concepts to showcase just how great his accomplishments were and how extraordinary the people around him were that took him to the top. He seemed like more machine than animal in the way he mowed down his competition, and while I knew his track record going into this book, the writing kept me on the edge of my seat when describing his races and the odds against him in some cases. This is a good memorial read to Big Red.

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## Wendy says

This is *the* authority on Man o' War! You won't find a better reference on the subject. Ours did some serious research, and it shows.

Hopefully this will help debunk that stupid myth that Man o' War 'was originally "My Man o' War"!!' that everyone repeats as fact, which is ridiculous.

There are several other urban legends she debunks, and interesting facts she unearths in their place. Not only that, but she manages to make the whole thing interesting and engaging. How rare is that?

Definitely pick this book up and keep it forever. I have two copies, one hardcover and one paperback, in case one is ever lost or damaged. I think this is what horse books should strive to be.

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## Susan says

I decided to read this book for two reasons: (1) What little I knew about the horse called Big Red was impressive and (2) Laura Hillenbrand. I devoured her book about Sea Biscuit and she wrote a positive review about this book. When I started reading I thought the content was background for more information to come about Man O'War. It never came. I did learn a lot about horse racing and more about horses in general than I knew before reading the book. But it was dry and mostly boring and I can't help thinking it didn't do the horse or the story justice.

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## Carrie White says

This book, man. I'm heartbroken that it's over, and even though I knew how it was going to end--and that it had to--these were some difficult characters to let go of, particularly as an equestrian. I also felt like the author rushed the ending a bit, and would have liked to hear more about what happened AFTER Red's racing career ended.

Overall, the writing style here is incredibly easy to read, the research is well done, and the story is told in a very complete and knowledgeable way. You're given a very full version of who and what and where, and you're definitely given the pieces you need to fall in love with the horse. That's not to say that parts of it weren't hard to read, b/c let's be clear--this is about racing, and if we think racehorses are mistreated now, it's nothing to what they used to go through. So there were definitely sections where I thought I would have to put the book down, just to keep specific knowledge out of my head.

Boy am I glad I didn't. This one goes directly onto my 'must read again soon' list.

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**John says**

Amazing! If you like horse racing you'll like this book about arguably the greatest horse that ever lived.

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**Sarah Beaudoin says**

Man o'War was a surprising disappointment. The lore around the horse is so fantastic that I'm not quite sure how Dorothy Ours managed to make it seem dull. Each race is reported dutifully but with so little color and context that it felt like reading the race guides at the track. Even her chronicle of Man o'War's final race with Sir Barton was a slog. If you are just looking to learn about Man o'War, this book fits the bill but if you're looking for an enjoyable read, skip it.

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