



The Sea Wolf

Jack London

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The novel begins when Van Weyden is swept overboard into San Francisco Bay, and plucked from the sea by Larsen's seal-hunting vessel, the Ghost. This ship's evil captain, Wolf Larsen - The Sea-Wolf - is a murderous tyrant who uses his superhuman strength to torture and destroy, his brilliant mind to invent sick games, and his relentless will to control his mutinous crew. Pressed into service as a cabin boy by the ruthless captain, Van Weyden becomes an unwilling participant in a brutal shipboard drama. Larsen's increasingly violent abuse of the crew fuels a mounting tension that ultimately boils into mutiny, shipwreck, and a desperate confrontation.

The Sea Wolf Details

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Author : Jack London

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Genre : Classics, Fiction, Adventure, Literature

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From Reader Review The Sea Wolf for online ebook

Joe says

Anyone who needs a good shot of testosterone but thinks the movie 300 was a little to homo-erotic should read the Sea Wolf. This book makes Hemmingway run off like a little girly man. The main character is a woosy book-worm literary critic who gets press-ganged into a sealing crew led by the cruel and ruthless Wolf Larsson. Larsson is one of the greatest villians I've had the pleasure to read--he's intelligent and brutal, but at times you even sympathize with him.

By the way, I especially suggest this book to people who consider themselves vikings.

Mahdi Lotfi says

هنگامی که نیاز به تستوسترون خوب دارید اما فکر می‌کنید فیلم 300 کمی هموفیلیک است باید کتاب Sea Wolf را بخوانید. این کتاب همنگوی را مثل یک مرد کوچک و لطیف می‌کند. شخصیت اصلی یک منتقد ادبی و بی‌مهر است که مجبور می‌شود به خدمت یک کشتی شکار ماهی بپیوندد که توسط یک کاپیتان بی‌رحم و وحشیانه به نام ولف لارسون هدایت می‌شود. لارسون یکی از بزرگترین شرورانی است که تا به حال در ادبیات خوانده‌ام؛ او هوشمند و وحشیانه است، اما گاهی شما را حتی با او همدرد می‌کند.

به هر حال، من به ویژه این کتاب را به کسانی پیشنهاد می‌کنم که خود را وایکینگ می‌دانند. هر کس که به تستوسترون نیاز دارد اما فکر می‌کند فیلم 300 کمی هموفیلیک است، این کتاب را بخواند. این کتاب همنگوی را مثل یک مرد کوچک و لطیف می‌کند. شخصیت اصلی یک منتقد ادبی و بی‌مهر است که مجبور می‌شود به خدمت یک کشتی شکار ماهی بپیوندد که توسط یک کاپیتان بی‌رحم و وحشیانه به نام ولف لارسون هدایت می‌شود. لارسون یکی از بزرگترین شرورانی است که تا به حال در ادبیات خوانده‌ام؛ او هوشمند و وحشیانه است، اما گاهی شما را حتی با او همدرد می‌کند.

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Jim says

I've read quite a few of London's books although it was years ago for most. I've reread a few, but somehow never got to this one. I'm glad I remedied that. Wolf Larsen & Hump are certainly two of the most vivid & interesting characters I've had the pleasure to encounter. The story was all the more intriguing because it

explores the meaning & purpose of life through a rousing adventure. London based much of it on a sailing voyage he took to Japan which explains the reality of the setting.

Wolf Larsen is the penultimate materialistic man. He believes life is nothing more than a seething vat of yeast where the stronger eat the weaker for no other reason than they can. He believes in no afterlife or gods. He holds to no law save that of the jungle, but he's completely rejected any sort of society. On top of that, he's the captain (last of the tyrants) of a seal hunting ship, so is the ultimate authority in a small, violent world peopled by fantastically hard & damaged men.

Humphrey (Sissy) van Weyden is so pitifully sheltered that it's amazing he took the ferry without an adult to accompany him, even though he's 35 years old. He quite believably winds up on the Ghost & under Wolf's rule. The story is mostly about the growth of Hump into a man under this harsh tutelage.

I didn't give it 5 stars simply because of the ridiculous Victorian love theme running through it. It was awful. I thought that Maud Brewster was well drawn especially for the times, though. She certainly wasn't the robust, kick-ass heroine of modern fiction, but she grew at least as much as Hump did.

My edition is an old rip from audio book cassettes I got from the library. It wasn't abridged & was read by Frank Muller or Mueller. He did a great job.

This novel is now 110 years old. You should have read it or at least be familiar with the overall story line through one of the movies. Edward G. Robinson (1941) or Charles Bronson (1993) were perfect picks for Wolf Larsen. Christopher Reeves as Humphrey van Weyden was perfect, too. (See update below.) If you haven't, then beware

***** **Spoilers Below** *****

As far as bad-asses go, Larsen could give lessons. While he completely lacks empathy, he's quite the practical psychologist. He out thinks all his opponents (that means everyone) or beats the crap out of them if that seems the reasonable or most expedient thing to do. He hurt Hump's arm for days simply by gripping it briefly. He killed men without a qualm, usually with enjoyment.

When he decided to poach his brother's hunters, he takes one down to his cabin alone for a 'discussion'. *He towered like a Goliath above Wolf Larsen. He must have measured six feet eight or nine inches in stature, and I subsequently learned his weight -- 240 pounds. And there was no fat about him. It was all bone and muscle.*

A fight is heard & Larsen emerges a bit red faced from exertion, but otherwise unharmed. The giant is carried out.

In many ways, Larsen reminds me of one of Ayn Rand's heroes, if he'd been raised as a savage. Larsen certainly acts as if he had to fight for every scrap since he was a babe, which makes his intellectual accomplishments the more amazing & his lack of any hint of empathy or society even worse. Larsen says it is simply a lack of opportunity that he didn't outdo "The Corsican" (Napoleon). I believe him.

Larsen's basic philosophy is described here.

'And the highest, finest right conduct,' I [Hump] interjected, 'is that act which benefits at the same time the man, his children, and his race.'

'I wouldn't stand for that,' he replied. 'Couldn't see the necessity for it, nor the common sense. I cut out the race and the children. I would sacrifice nothing for them. It's just so much slush and sentiment, and you must see it yourself, at least for one who does not believe in eternal life. With immortality before me, altruism would be a paying business proposition. I might elevate my soul to all kinds of altitudes. But with nothing eternal before me but death, given for a brief spell this yeasty crawling and squirming which is called life, why, it would be immoral for me to perform any act that was a sacrifice. Any sacrifice that makes me lose one crawl or squirm is foolish; and not only foolish, for it is a wrong against myself, and a wicked thing. I must not lose one crawl or squirm if I am to get the most out of the ferment. Nor will the eternal movelessness that is coming to me be made easier or harder by the sacrifices or selfishnesses of the time when I was yeasty and acrawl.'

Larsen is a noble creature, though. (Note, I did not write 'human'. He's more akin to a shark in his single-minded voracity than his namesake which is a social animal, although not thought so by London.) If nothing else, he's admirable simply because he's such a perfect bastard, much like Lucifer to whom he is likened.

While he has all his faculties about him, Larsen is almost god-like. When they fail, he becomes an object of pity to Hump & Maud, although he certainly asks for none & does his best to reject it. The hell he descends into is a fitting end, too. Nothing could be a worse punishment for him & he certainly deserves plenty.

Hump & Maud certainly found themselves under Larsen's tutelage. I'd say they owe him a great debt, but one doesn't owe anything to the predator or the natural forces of the world. One survives them or is eaten. At the end of the novel, I can imagine both going on to doing great things. Both were wasted in their previous lives, mere drones that were awakened into their full powers by the adversity they faced & overcame. I doubt much in the way of physical or mental hardship will ever daunt them. They also found their moral limits. Stupid as they were, they owned them well. Like their teacher, they were comfortable with themselves, an awesome state of being.

Update 9Jan2014: I watched the 1993 version of this movie with Charles Bronson & Christopher Reeves. Both were perfect for their parts as I suspected they would be. The movie wasn't entirely faithful to the book, but it did stick to the theme pretty well. The romance was done far better, but Bronson didn't directly give the philosophical speech I quoted above. That was a shame, but it was still well worth watching.

BrokenTune says

"Do you know the only value life has is what life puts upon itself? And it is of course overestimated, for it is of necessity prejudiced in its own favour. Take that man I had aloft. He held on as if he were a precious thing, a treasure beyond diamonds of rubies. To you? No. To me? Not at all. To himself? Yes. But I do not accept his estimate. He sadly overrates himself. There is plenty more life demanding to be born. Had he fallen and dripped his brains upon the deck like honey from the comb, there would have been no loss to the world. The supply is too large."

I remember watching the tv adaptation of Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf* with my gran, but all I remember are

images of sails and the ocean. I don't remember anything of the story from that time. So, when *The Sea-Wolf* came up as a buddy read, I jumped right on it.

The story is told by Humphrey van Weyden, a wannabe author and self-professed gentleman, who is shipwrecked and picked up by the crew of *The Ghost* and their Captain - Wolf Larsen. Contrary to Humphrey's (Hump's) expectations, he is not set ashore but is Shanghaied by Larsen, who is short of crew and short of time.

While on board, Hump transforms from a man of thought into a man of action, while witnessing the brutality of life at sea and especially the brutality of *The Sea-Wolf*, Captain Larsen.

"Wolf - tis what he is. He's not blackhearted like some men. 'Tis no heart he has at all."

It's an interesting book in which London explores human motivation and philosophises about the meaning of life and the value that society attaches to one profession over another. It is not always easy to follow, London's train of thought, however, and it is not at all clear whether some of the views are the author's own. In some ways, I was reminded of Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, with its anti-hero Captain Nemo, whose disdain for human society somewhat parallels that of Larsen - except that Nemo had reason that are more relatable than those of Larsen.

The Sea-Wolf remains a mystery until the end.

Despite this, tho, the story works - even as just a simple story of adventure.

The only aspect that really grated on me was that London felt it necessary to add an element of romance into the adventure and side Hump with a lady journalist, who he falls in love with. This is not the grating bit. The grating bit is that she's a pretty strong character and her falling for Hump - who is a patronising wimp - is pretty unlikely. It's Hump's interaction with the lady journalist and his description of her as feeble and weak, even though she does more than her fair share of manual labour on the ship, that really made me want to kick him over-board.

"You are one with a crowd of men who have made what they call a government, who are masters of all the other men, and who eat the food the other men get and would like to eat themselves. You wear the warm clothes. They made the clothes, but they shiver in rags and ask you, the lawyer, or business agent who handles your money, for a job."

'But that is beside the matter,' I cried.

Not at all. It is piggishness and it is life. Of what use or sense is an immortality of piggishness? What is the end? What is it all about? You have made no food. Yet the food you have eaten or wasted might have saved the lives of a score of wretches who made the food but did not eat it. What immortal end did you serve? Or did they?"

Leon Enciso says

Reto 26- 2018 Book Challenge: *Un libro con un animal en el titulo.*

Matt says

Jack London's take on Nietzsches's dubious concept of the *Übermensch*.

In the confined space of a seal-hunting schooner in the middle of the Pacific Ocean the most captivating antagonist ever, captain Wolf Larson, highly intelligent with superhuman physical strength, have it out with the somewhat stodgy protagonist Van Weyden, an intellectual bookworm, scholar, and landlubber. Their philosophies and views on life couldn't be more different.

The whole thing is embedded in an exciting adventure on high seas and spiced with a love story at the end, which, to my taste, is a little bland.

A recommended read for fans of *adventure-philosophy*, in which sometimes bones get broken to underpin an argument.

The book confirms the impression I already had after reading *The Iron Heel*, namely, to regard Jack London as a serious writer.

(Update 1/27/2018)

While reading the critical/annotated edition of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* I didn't expect to find a quote from *The Sea Wolf* in one of the footnotes. Hitler's notion of "Race interests" as trumping any moral notions and that ethics is never entitled to a timeless validity (contrary to Kant's beliefs) can also be found much earlier among epigones of social Darwinism, even in popular culture. Jack London's character Wolf Larson answers to the question of ethics and if he believes in right and wrong:

"Not the least bit. Might is right, and that is all there is to it. Weakness is wrong. [...] One man cannot wrong another man. He can only wrong himself. As I see it, I do wrong always when I consider the interests of others."

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Kenchiin says

"You stand on dead men's legs. You've never had any of your own"
A book full of truth.

Matt says

"I believe that life is a mess," [Captain Wolf Larson] answered promptly. "It is like yeast, a ferment, a thing that moves and may move for a minute, an hour, a year, or a hundred years, but that in the end will cease to move. The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all..."

- Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf*

This is just like *Moby Dick*, if *Moby Dick* had been written by Hemingway. That's a good thing.

Of all the classics I've read, sometimes grudgingly, *Moby Dick* frustrated me the most. I like everything about it, in theory. It is epic in scope, big in ideas, and populated by fascinating characters. It has whales, and ships, and tyrannical captains, and harpoons, which are some pretty good ingredients, if you ask me. But I despised it.

Turns out, I should have been reading *The Sea-Wolf* instead. There are some differences, of course. Both have ships, but in *The Sea-Wolf* you substitute seals for whales, and rifles for harpoons. Also, where *Moby Dick* is bloated and obscure, *The Sea-Wolf* is blunt, pared-down, and direct. It is a flint-hard epic told in a lean, mean 281 pages (in my Modern Library paperback edition).

I've often found that reading an alleged "classic" means that I'm in for an intellectual struggle. Not here. *The Sea-Wolf* reads like a modern page-turner. London does not mess around with long setups. The novel starts with Humphrey Van Weyden – a doughy, soft-handed trust-fund lad with literary aspirations – on the deck of a ferry in San Francisco Bay, espousing his unearned opinions about the mathematical ease of seamanship. Before he can finish that thought, and before the end of the fourth full page, that ferry has been sliced open in a collision with a second ship, dumping Humphrey into the sea.

Humphrey, a proto-metrosexual, is picked up by a sealing schooner called the *Ghost*. The *Ghost* is captained by one of literature's great creations, Captain Wolf Larson. Larson is a stunning character, by turns brutal and brilliant, part psychopath and part poet. He is described in almost otherworldly terms by Humphrey, who is the novel's first person narrator:

[M]y first impression, or feel of the man, was not of [his height], but of his strength. And yet, while he was of massive build, with broad shoulders and deep chest, I could not characterize his strength as massive. It was what might be termed a sinewy, knotty strength, of the kind we ascribe to lean and wiry men, but which, in him, because of his heavy build, partook more of the enlarged gorilla order. Not that in appearance he seemed in the least gorilla-like. What I am striving to express is this strength itself, more as a thing apart from his physical semblance. It was a strength we are wont to associate with things primitive, with wild animals, and the creatures we imagine our tree-dwelling prototypes to have been – a strength savage, ferocious, alive in itself, the essence of life in that it is the potency of motion, the elemental in short, that which writhes in the body of a snake when the head is cut off, and the snake, as a snake, is dead, or which lingers in a shapeless lump of turtle-meat and recoils and quivers from the prod of a finger.

For the bulk of the novel, up until a plot turn that I will not reveal, the narrative is rather episodic. Scenes of action and acclimation (where Humphrey begins to transform into that which he detests) are interspersed with a dialectic between Humphrey and Larson. The two men are philosophical opposites, with Humphrey representing a familiar strand of liberal humanism, concerned with goodness, right action, and the immortal soul. In opposition, Larson is a kind of Nietzschean narcissist, concerned only with himself and achieving his own ends, whatever the cost to others. Humphrey is initially appalled by Larson, a stance he attempts to maintain even as he nurtures a near-obsession with understanding him. Of course, as you might expect,

Humphrey is drawn to certain aspects of Larson's being. Specifically, he starts to reevaluate himself as he grows harder, stronger, a competent seaman, while toiling on the *Ghost*. This is, in a way, simultaneously a celebration and a deconstruction of masculinity.

The Sea-Wolf is really a joy to read. The secondary characters are mostly excellent, if a bit shallow. There are some memorable dramatic set pieces featuring men against nature, and men against other men. The writing is vivid, especially the descriptions of the sea, of storms and squalls and dead calms. London is also quite adept at capturing the functioning of a turn-of-the-century sailing vessel. He was once on a vessel like the *Ghost*, and that experience shows.

I am often leery of books that attempt to have characters debate the deeper meanings of life. When I read them, I feel like I've stumbled into a room full of half-baked freshmen who've finished half a semester of Philosophy 101. *The Sea Wolf* has a tendency to get close to this threshold with the interactions between Humphrey and Wolf. Ultimately, though, it wears its philosophical and psychological complexity lightly. I could swallow their endless debates because they were sweetened by scenes of dash and excitement, while their competing theories were demonstrated with instances of primal brutality. In other words, London does a good job of showing *and* telling, rather than just telling. He is also almost giddy in the way he mixes genres and changes tones. One moment things are super dark, the next, things might be as light and delicate as new-fallen snow. And yes, I know I'm speaking in riddles, but I don't want to ruin any surprises.

This is an imperfect novel. While the relationship between Humphrey and Wolf Larson is mesmerizing, a separate pairing later on does not work nearly so well. Even when there are false notes, though, London keeps the tale afloat. His world – of sailors and their ship and the sea – is so fully realized that it makes up for many, if not all shortcomings. Besides, at less than 300 pages, the kind of imperfections I'm talking about are not fatal. I cannot say the same for the imperfections of *Moby Dick*.

Classics can be a chore. Not this one. This is like eating a candy bar and calling it exercise.

Sketchbook says

A breathless, over-the-top "Pop" adventure. Based on Jack London's travels (sensitive sissy confronts beastie schooner captain), it presents in technicolor the author's double vision of himself. Between wrenching physical jousts, the duelists quote Swinburne, Milton & Omar Khayyam. For the Douglas Sirk finale there's a mermaid from Boston. "My man," sighs she, offering her lips to the newly muscled chappy after his captivity. The Darwinian seafaring manners: bitchin' & butch.

Allison says

Oh my god. This book is...well, it defies description.

At first, I thought "Oh, illegal seal hunting, violence, and poor health conditions on a ship lost in the Bering

Sea. What's not to love?" (Note the heavy sarcasm.)

Turns out, all of those things have a very minor role in the story. It is mostly about the learning experiences of a gentleman aboard a brutal ship, and his conversations with the captain, who is a very unusually educated man. I could go on for pages about the discussions that they have, and the overall character of the captain, but I will spare you.

Jack London is an incredible writer. His writing style is very descriptive while still managing to say exactly what he means in very few words. I really enjoyed reading this book because of it.

I really enjoyed this book. I would definitely recommend it as a quick, but though - provoking read.

Rebecca McNutt says

This classic adventure on the high seas, made into a miniseries in 2009 in the city of Halifax where I live (finally some great films being made around here!), this book is full of terror, confusion and mayhem as a man fights for survival with a ruthless sailboat captain and his unruly crew, but ultimately they make peace with him and what unfolds is one of what I think is Jack London's best works.

Paul O'Neill says

An enjoyable sea faring tale, and not entirely what I was expecting.

The first half of this book would receive a solid four stars. It gets a bit boring at the end. The main reason being that I'd rather the 'sea wolf' character was indeed the main character. We've come a long way in what we want from our characters (thanks GRRM!) and their motivations. Is it wrong that I liked the 'bad guy' in this book and wanted to know more about him, his motivations and also agree with his pirate behaviour? Instead we follow a rich, spoiled gentleman on this voyage.

Still a good read.

Also, this book must set some record for the most times the word 'poop' is used in a book.

Semih Eker says

3,5'tan 4 verdim diyebilirim.

Eser kesinlikle kötü de?il, konu olarak da anlat?m olarak da ba?ar?l? ama baz? olaylar üzerinde çok durulmu?. 272 sayfal?k Oda Yay?nlar? versiyonunu okudum, bence 150 sayfa civar? yaz?lsa daha etkili olabilirdi, belki de i? yo?unlu?umdan dolayı? ara vererek okuyabildi?im için bana öyle geldi.

Spoiler vermeden k?saca eserin içeri?ine de?inmek gerekirse;

Humphrey Van Weyden isimli eserin birinci a??zdan anlat?c?s?(kendisi bir yazar ve babadan zengin), bindi?i geminin kaza yapmas? sonucu denize dü?er, Hayalet isimli ay? bal??? avc?l??? yapan bir gemiye

s???narak hayatta kalmaya çal???r. ?çerik olarak Hayalet'te geçen olaylar anlat?lmaktad?r.

Jack London, insan?n ruh halinin bulundu?u ortama ve ya?ad??? olaylara göre evrimle?mesini gayet güzel i?lemi?.

Eseri sevmedim diyemem ama san?r?m ben Martin Eden'deki tad? arad?m ama ne yaz?k ki bulamad?m. Gerçi bir insan, hayat?nda kaç kere Martin Eden gibi bir eser yazabilir ki :)

Son olarak, eserdeki Kurt Larsen de ara ara güzel konu?uyor ama kesinlikle bir Martin Eden de?il :)

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Sea Wolf, Jack London

The Sea-Wolf is a 1904 psychological adventure novel by American novelist Jack London. The book's protagonist, Humphrey van Weyden, is a literary critic who is a survivor of an ocean collision and who comes under the dominance of Wolf Larsen, the powerful and amoral sea captain who rescues him. Its first printing of forty thousand copies was immediately sold out before publication on the strength of London's previous The Call of the Wild....

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Dorcas says

This was my absolute favorite "desert isle " book choice as a teenager. I absolutely *adored* it .Which is a bit unusual, I know. But there you have it. I cant tell you how many times Ive read this.

Basically, the hero Humphrey "Hump" is tossed overboard during a storm at sea and picked up by a passing sealer ship captained by the infamous "Wolf Larssen ". Wolf has no intention of carrying Hump to his destination. He can become one of the crew and tow the line or he can be eaten by the fishes. His choice.

Over the course of the book Hump goes from being a bit of a wet noodle (but a gentleman) to a much stronger, self reliant man. Its a great character study but also a pretty exciting adventure. Wolf Larssen can be quite terrifying, especially when he nears his end...

I take one star off my rating for Wolf Larssens philosophy rants of 'man is a worm, a mould' etc. I used to skim those parts. And the violence and profanity can be a bit much. But the story...oh I love it!

CONTENT:

SEX: None.

PROFANITY : Moderately heavy use of B, D, H

VIOLENCE: Moderate (the captain is a brute and there are scenes of seal hunting)

PG -PG 13

Daniel says

"We were talking about this yesterday," he said. "I held that life was a ferment, a yeasty something which devoured life that it might live, and that living was merely successful piggishness. Why, if there is anything in supply and demand, life is the cheapest thing in the world. There is only so much water, so much earth, so much air; but the life that is demanding to be born is limitless. Nature is a spendthrift. Look at the fish and their millions of eggs. For that matter, look at you and me. In our loins are the possibilities of millions of lives. Could we but find time and opportunity and utilize the last bit and every bit of the unborn life that is in us, we could become the fathers of nations and populate continents. Life? Bah! It has no value. Of cheap things it is the cheapest. Everywhere it goes begging. Nature spills it out with a lavish hand. Where there is room for one life, she sows a thousand lives, and it's life eats life till the strongest and most piggish life is left."

Those are the words of Wolf Larsen, arguably the baddest bad-ass ever to grace the pages of any seafaring novel, including those by Melville and Conrad, and perhaps any novel overall. Wolf Larsen, captain of a hunting vessel, beats up several men at once, hard-bitten sailors and seal hunters among them; chokes one of his men to win an argument; fixes a shark to starve to death, revenge for the shark having bitten a sailor's foot clean off; wagers which of his men will commit suicide; carries on a conversation as bullets whiz past; and beats the snot out of his brother, rival sea captain Death Larsen. That's right, his brother is named Death Larsen! And the name's not just for show:

He towered like a Goliath above Wolf Larsen. He must have measured six feet eight or nine inches in stature, and I subsequently learned his weight -- 240 pounds. And there was no fat about him. It was all bone and muscle.

Wolf Larsen's a great character because he's not just some mindless, musclebound brute. No, he's highly literate and well-read (and self-educated to boot), and able to clearly explain why he does what he does, as evidenced in the passage above. He's able to spar with his opponents not just physically, but verbally as well.

OK, maybe "The Sea Wolf" isn't great literature, but it is brilliantly trashy fun -- and well-written trash at that. Why isn't this book as widely read as "The Call of the Wild" and "White Fang?" Perhaps because most of us stop reading Jack London after junior high school (for some reason), while "The Sea Wolf" is the manliest of all manly men's books. Lord knows I, for one, was not ready to encounter Wolf Larsen in junior high school. Frankly, I'm probably not ready for him now.

What's interesting about "The Sea Wolf," and I doubt I'm the only reader to feel this way, is that even though we the readers are presumably supposed to see Wolf Larsen as the book's villain and sympathize with the narrator, Humphrey Van Weyden, well, fuck that. Hump -- yes, that is his nickname -- has a bookish, idealistic, romantic view of life. (That final trait comes to the forefront after love interest Maud Brewster shows up halfway through the book.) Those character traits simply pale in comparison to Wolf Larsen's kick-ass, every-man-for-himself pragmatism. I think it's the rare reader -- or at least the rare male reader -- who, even though he likely has much more in common with Hump than with Wolf Larsen, wouldn't, had he the option, choose to be the latter. London may have even intended the book to be read that way.

"The Sea Wolf"'s only real weakness comes in its final pages, when the romance between Humphrey and Maud becomes sickeningly sweet. (Wolf Larsen's reaction, had he read this section of the book, would have been, I'm guessing, "Bosh!") Perhaps London was trying to make up for all the amputations, fisticuffs and testosterone-drenched manliness in the pages that preceded -- or maybe compensate for the homoeroticism in Hump's descriptions of Wolf Larsen's physique. London needn't have bothered. The book was awesome without the romance.

Despite that shortcoming, though, I highly recommend "The Sea Wolf," especially to men who wish they were a bit less like Humphrey Van Weyden and a bit more like Wolf Larsen.

Henry Avila says

Millionaire Humphrey van Weyden, a bookish gentleman, (who reads anymore) was coming back , from visiting a close friend in the East Bay shore. Crossing the waters to San Francisco , again, his ferry boat collides in the thick fog, with a steamer. Quickly sinking her, the dilettante, can't swim, good thing he has a life preserver on... going overboard, amid piercing cries, in the gloom, drifting in the chilly waters, out through the Golden Gate (before the bridge was built). The tides and winds sweeping him , to the open sea, rescue vessels can't see Mr.Weyden, in the "pea soup", nobody around him, a quiet calm prevails. It makes the survivor, very distraught, knowing the end is near, he screams into the darkness, despairingly, and slowly going insane. Numbness through his whole body, as time goes by, but how much, elapses. Sleep takes the victim, to another world , but he awakes, and sees a three masted schooner, heading directly at the lonely man . Barely missing his skull, watching the uncaring boat, pass by, helpless to shout out, Humphrey, dead tired, has no voice left, too much seawater, consumed. Captain Wolf Larsen spots the tiny object in the ocean, brought on board, later thinking, was this good or bad? Asking to be taken back to the city, the captain of the " Ghost," refuses, he's heading for Japan, this is a seal-hunting schooner, not a pleasure cruise. Owner , captain, tyrant, his word rules, the twenty seamen hate him, with a passion, they the worst of the scum, criminals, killers, thieves, on any sea. But are afraid more, of the Wolf, he has killed many... Makes the wealthy man, a cabin boy at 35, working in the galley, with the slimy, dirty, filthy, disgusting, "Cooky", and he's the cook! Treating the millionaire, like a lowly slave, the vicious chef, delights in tormenting Weyden, who's choice is, work or die. Survival of the fittest, Wolf Larsen, believes that, a very strange combination of intellect and brute strength, discussing philosophy and literature (life is valueless, except to itself). With the newest crewman, "Hump", between terrorizing everyone on the vessel and putting down a

deadly mutiny. The captain has a brother, too. "Death" Larsen, arch-rival on another seal-hunting steamer, owner, skipper, of the well armed, larger, "Macedonia", and in the area. Trouble is coming, the ocean is vast, but the seals, are in the same place, they, the siblings, hate each other with enthusiasm. The seals blood flows freely on deck, as the beautiful animals, are butchered, for their skins, why ? For women's coats. Humphrey has to somehow escape this hell hole. Leaving the Ghost, is not easy, if he stays, the primitive Wolf Larsen, will kill him, someday. Complications arrive, five people are rescued, off the stormy coast of Japan, shipwrecked, four are immediately made crewmen, whether they want to be or not. There have been losses, on the "Ghost", one is a woman...Maud Brewster, a poetess, this is 1904, the lonely gentleman, has read her poems, and enjoyed them. He starts to fall in love, and he a part-time, literary critic and reviewer of her work, in magazines....One of the best Jack London novels, full of terrific adventures, and excitement, with splendid characters, especially the unforgettable Wolf Larsen.

Wanda says

31 JUL 2014 -- will start this one on Saturday, 2 AUG. Tomorrow, 1 AUG, is a day off from work and I will also give a listen-to Eugenie Grandet on BBC Radio 4X. So, the Sea-Wolf and I will sail together on Saturday. See you Saturday Sea-Wolf.

2 AUG 2014 -- Chap. 5. The Sea-Wolf is a nasty piece of cod. He is bossy and overbearing. A bully personality is his way of life. A man who dearly needs a major time-out. Another baby-man.

3 AUG 2014 -- Chap. 8. "Sometimes I think Wolf Larsen mad, or half-mad at least, what of his strange moods and vagaries. At other times I take him for a great man, a genius who has never arrived. And, finally, I am convinced that he is the perfect type of the primitive man, born a thousand years or generations too late and an anachronism in this culminating century of civilization."

3 AUG 2014 -- Did you know Jack London called his California home Wolf House? See here -

http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolf_H...

His nickname was also Wolf. Neat.

5 AUG 2014 -- As I am reading, I wonder if Larsen's meanness toward others and ill-treatment of others is a coping mechanism for some tragedy which occurred in his life or perhaps is a cover-up for personal unhappiness. Maybe Larsen never wanted to be a sea captain and fell into the position by happenstance. Maybe Larsen had other dreams for himself. Or, maybe he really is a nasty old sea-dog.

Chap. 17 - One thing I was beginning to feel, and that was that I could never again be quite the same man I had been. While my hope and faith in human life still survived Wolf Larsen's destructive criticism, he had nevertheless been a cause of change in minor matters. He had opened up for me the world of the real, of which I had known practically nothing and from which I had always shrunk. I had learned to look more closely at life as it was lived, to recognize that there were such things as facts in the world, to emerge from the realm of mind and idea and to place certain values on the concrete and objective phases of existence.

Chap. 21 - Of all places, Hump meets a contemporary in the wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Crazy!

Chap. 33 - Isn't this a great exchange between Hump and Larsen?

Larsen: "Oh, nothing," he added softly, as if he were drowsing; "only you've got me where you want me."

Hump: "No, I haven't," I retorted; "for I want you a few thousand miles away from here."

Chap. 39 - "I remember only one part of the service," I said, "and that is, 'And the body shall be cast into the sea.'"

Maud looked at me, surprised and shocked; but the spirit of something I had seen before was strong upon me, impelling me to give service to Wolf Larsen as Wolf Larsen had once given service to another man. I lifted the end of the hatch cover and the canvas-shrouded body slipped feet first into the sea. The weight of iron dragged it down. It was gone.

"Good-bye, Lucifer, proud spirit," Maud whispered, so low that it was drowned by the shouting of the wind; but I saw the movement of her lips and knew.

9 AUG 2014 -- I enjoyed the heck out of this book! My only regret is that I do not know enough about ships and sailing to fully appreciate London's wonderful descriptions of both. This book is the story of Hump's progress from a man who has everything only to realize everything is not measured in "stuff;" but, rather, in a man's reliance on himself.

Martha says

This has got to be one of my all-time favorite novels. I've read it over and over and over :) Jack London (an atheist to the chore) is one of our great, American authors. His story is extremely gripping and intense, while he weaves throughout the story-line his thoughts of God vs. Atheism. The protagonist (the Christian) and the antagonist (the Atheist) are frequently involved in debates about right vs. wrong, design vs. accident, and God vs. evolution. Jack London does not, however, endorse either view in his book (of course, as he is an atheist, he puts forth stronger arguments in support of his own beliefs). This book really made me think. Oh, and of course the story is amazing!!!

brian says

this has gotta be one of the biggest piece of shit pulpy ridiculous shitshows of a novel. ever. and i freely admit that i love it. yeah, that's right. this is my *Valley of the Dolls*.

here's the deal: an effete bookworm gets on a boat that crashes just off the san franciscan coast and is scooped out of the water and brought onto the seal-hunting *Ghost*, headed to Japan, and captained by Wolf Larson, the darkest, most demented and brutal guy to walk the planet. this guy makes ahab, kurtz, and bligh look like merril fucking stubing. no shit. and he's got a brother named Death! Death Larson! and Wolf Larson! i mean, c'mon. (Death Larson: "...golden bearded like a sea-king... six feet eight or nine inches in stature – 240 pounds. And there was no fat on him. It was all bone and muscle.")

our faithful narrator, one – wait for it, wait for it – 'Hump' Van Weydon describes Wolf as "*not immoral. merely unmoral.*" forget leopold, loeb, or raskalnikov: Wolf Larson is the true nietzschean superman. here's a typical bit of dialogue that Wolf happily spews while observing one of his crewmen:

Look at him, Hump. Look at this bit of animated dust, this aggregation of matter that moves and breathes and defies me and thoroughly believes itself to be compounded of something good; that is impressed with certain fictions such as righteousness and honesty...

in another scene, to more fully express the idea that the human animal can never fully accept death even if the intellect believes it has, Wolf strangles Hump into unconsciousness while waxing philosophic on the old body/mind dialectic... purty cool.

through the course of the book, Wolf Larson beats the shit out of multiple men at once, climbs a ladder with attackers hanging off his arms back and legs, he beats the crap out of Hump, Johnson, Leach, Johanson, Cooky, and, yes, even Death Larson. he beats up a shark. yes. a shark. after tossing Mugridge overboard, Wolf spies a shark fin, and with a single arm he hoists Mugridge out – the sharks leaps out of the water and bites off Mugridge's foot! naturally, while the crew scrambles for a tourniquet, Wolf's gotta teach the shark a lesson. later on, Wolf tries to set himself on fire, laughs when knives are thrown at him, and, finally, he fully enjoys it as his brain slowly shuts down. yeah, you read that right. unfortunately, the book gets kind of good (y'know, really good. not, like, gloriously deranged good) at the end when Hump, Maud Brewster (the fast-talking NYC poetess), and Wolf get shipwrecked on a tiny island inhabited by angry seals and some kind of mysterious neurological condition shuts down Wolf's body bit by bit eventually reducing him to a blind, deaf, mute, quadriplegic who conveys his profound and nihilistic joy at the universe's ultimate 'fuck you' by flashing a crooked smile and tapping messages out with a single finger.

you really gotta read this shit to believe it. it's fucking great. it's the book that Uma Thurman's character in *Sweet and Lowdown* would have written. it's the book i wish i'd written. and i gotta profess a deep love for jack london. multiple novels about dogs? and now this? fuck yes, man. you are my hero. i spent this past new year's at london's favorite bar, The First and Last Chance Saloon (named such as it's right on the water: the sailor's first chance to get drunk upon arrival and last chance upon departure), the very bar where jack london wrote *The Sea Wolf*. explains a lot. he must've been shitfaced when he wrote this madhouse. absofuckinglutely.

well, don't know if i wanna give this five stars or one star, so i'll be a total pussy and give it three.
