

Shasta and Her Cubs: The Struggle for Survival

Lane Robson

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Shasta and Her Cubs shines with the writer's love of his subject.

When mother grizzly Shasta gives birth to her three cubs, Kodiak, Koda, and Mato, she spends her time nurturing and protecting them so that they'll grow up in the tough mountainous environment rugged and well-prepared. Lane Robson's *Shasta and Her Cubs: The Struggle for Survival* showcases a well-informed, sensational nature story.

Right from the first page, Shasta is a mom with a mission: she's got three young nursing cubs. And it's no easy task. The oldest, Kodiak, is a male that she knows will grow large while Mato is far too small for his age—"because he was smaller, he'd need the protection of his siblings." Once they've grown, Shasta ventures out of the den to investigate their climactically harsh surroundings before exposing her young ones to them.

Robson shines at this point. Not only is the prose clear, it's also filled with specifics to the animals themselves. A nearby dead moose, though a source of food for her and her cubs, is suspicious to Shasta as she considers if it was killed in an avalanche or "perhaps even killed by a male grizzly?" After consuming some of the moose carcass, Shasta urinates, hoping "the smell would linger and dissuade the coyotes or other animals from returning right away." These bits of information show both strong knowledge of bears in their habitat and a good sense of drama creation within the text itself. This land is tough and, as the title suggests, survival is a struggle.

Overall, it's difficult to make out what sort of book *Shasta and Her Cubs* is. From the beginning, its prose seems to delve into almost Disney-type stories of animals with humanlike tendencies—e.g., "Shasta smiled as she considered her choice of such a good den"—while the aforementioned details make it seem at times like a documentary set to prose. Certainly the well-researched facts with resources included at the end make *Shasta and Her Cubs* an intelligent read. Yet when it creates "characters" out of these facts to forge passages that ping-pong between nature facts and a narrative fantasy, it's confusing how to interpret the piece as a whole.

Shasta and Her Cubs might make for educational entertainment for young readers. Or it might be a good pleasure read for an adult nature buff. It's hard to say, but there's no denying the brains of a nature-based narrative like *Shasta and Her Cubs* and the writer's love of his subject.

JAMES BURT (October 21, 2015)

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