



The Requiem Shark

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William Williams is forced into an apprenticeship with ex-slaver turned pirate Bartholomew Roberts. Set in the 18th century, the novel follows the captain and crew and their quest for treasure whilst evading the British Royal Navy.

The Requiem Shark Details

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Author : Nicholas Griffin

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Bibliophile says

Nicholas Griffin's *The Requiem Shark* traces the short bloody career of the pirate Captain Bartholomew Roberts, as shown through the eyes of his crewman, William Williams, a fellow Welshman. Roberts appoints the literate Williams as his scribe and personal biographer (since Roberts himself cannot write, but wants his deeds memorialized).

As with *The Masquerade*, which I read earlier this year, Griffin is masterful in his evocation of an 18th century world that is both recognizable and utterly alien. *The Requiem Shark* is no "Pirates of the Caribbean" fantasy of life under the Jolly Roger; instead we are treated to a full and horrifying bout of scurvy that leaves the crew wrecked, as well as mid-battle amputations, treatments for venereal disease before antibiotics (it ain't pretty, folks!) and the precise damage that a powder burn will do to the human anatomy.

I didn't really love the characters, though, which is why I'm not recommending this quite as enthusiastically. Williams - our main narrator - is a bit of a whiner and I just never really connected with him or his struggles; Roberts, in contrast, is a fascinating character (a teetotalling pirate captain is certainly unexpected) but we're never inside his head enough. My other favorite character was Innocent, a free black man who became a pirate and is a devout Christian, save for one little matter: his instruction in Christianity came from a man who took a perverse pleasure in substituting Christ into the story of Odysseus, so Innocent believes that Christ killed his tormentors with a giant bow and wandered for ten years before he came home. Again, though, there's too much of Williams and not enough of Innocent for my taste!

In short, *The Requiem Shark* was very long on very convincing atmosphere and somewhat shorter on plot and characterization. I liked it, but I wouldn't necessarily want to read it again.

Ann says

An excellent true life pirate tale!

Todd Stockslager says

Very good for a blind library catalog search of fiction about pirates in the aftermath of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie. And for a first novel by Griffin. Decent action, good dialogue, wry sense of humor paces the story following the main characters of the legendary pirate Bartholomew Roberts and his young pressed recruit William Williams, who becomes Roberts' muse and friend of sorts.

Captures the pirate life through the sometimes modern sensibilities of Williams, which might ring false except as our surrogate he speaks and sees for us as we would see.

Ps. They never find the Juliette

Alicia says

While I want to like the subject matter - the life and times of one of the most notorious pirates of all time - this just isn't very good. The plot is hard to follow and jumps so frequently you often lose the thread. Very much a first novel in need of a good editor.

C.A. Lear says

The Requiem Shark is one of my favorite novels and will go down--I predict--as one of the greatest pirate stories ever written. Mr. Griffin must've spent endless hours researching the era. This is loaded with interesting historical bits and colorful characters. Not Disney pirates, mind you. This is the real stuff: mean, scheming, stinkin, greedy, murderers. I can see this made into a movie.

David says

I enjoyed reading this book very much, but it goes from being highly entertaining fun to harrowing descriptions of hardships and horrors and finally a very sad ending, which was quite appropriate to the story in terms of historical accuracy. Still, I would have preferred something less accurate if it could have been less bleak. Or would I just be complaining about the fake happy ending if the author had written one to please readers? Not great literature, but definitely a good read (and quite impressive for a first novel).

Rhosyn Roberts says

I've always been drawn to pirate tales and since watching Black Sails my interest in all things pirates was brought back to me and as a welsh woman I was of course drawn to the famous Welsh pirate Black Bart Roberts. I really enjoyed this book, it combined both fact and fiction yet stayed loyal to both accounts. It was entertaining and also educating and I found William Williams to be a sympathetic lead character even though he did do some wrongs. Captain Roberts was great, but I wish we could've learnt more about him or had more conversations between him and William towards the end. The twists in the end were great, if not annoying, but satisfactory as it reflected the fates of so many pirates in those times. The book is not for the faint hearted either, it depicted gruelling descriptions of disease, scurvy, deaths and the scene with the vomiting women was pretty grotesque, but it added to the reality to the story. I wished we had more books like this.

Alaric says

A gritty, but basically authentic tale of true pirates (and about as far from Mr Depp as it is possible to get). The language takes a page or so to get used to, but I would heartily recommend it as an outstanding novel.

Madhatter says

Loved this book!!! Felt like a very authentic pirate tale, with no real heroes, only humans with varying levels of vice and virtue!

Rebecca says

I generally don't like swashbuckly pirate adventure books, but this was a great read. It's "Treasure Island" for adults, with mayhem, pillaging, and great character development and plot. I bet even men who don't like reading that much will find themselves drawn into this novel.

James says

A ripping yarn. I still love pirates, despite the best efforts of Disney and all the wannabe bandwagon riders (the picture book collection in the Children's Department is replete with abominations like this). My favorite historical pirate is the hapless Stede Bonnet, but running a close second is the foppish model for Captain Hook and *The Princess Bride*'s Dread Pirate Roberts, the all-time-booty-plundering champion (over four hundred ships captured in less than four years), Bartholomew "Black Bart" Roberts.

The Requiem Shark is the tale of his last voyage, as observed by a real-life seaman on Roberts' flagship *Fortune*, ship's fiddler William Williams. The novel is exhaustively researched. I understand Griffin even worked as a deckhand on a reproduction sailing ship to learn the mechanics of tall-ship sailing. It shows. The depiction of work processes has a compelling specificity reminiscent of Melville. Also, and not in the best way, reminiscent of Melville is the character Innocent, a liberated slave and religious visionary (he is the sole adherent to his own peculiar faith, which is based on a conflation of the Gospels and the *Odyssey*), who is more or less a stand-in for *Moby Dick*'s Pip.

Griffin is frequently guilty of the kind of 'poetical' inexactitude decried by B.R. Myers in *A Reader's Manifesto*, but he just as frequently produces concrete, vivid, powerful prose. I'll be a long time forgetting the image of Williams, crazed by hunger and thirst after weeks in the sweltering doldrums, sucking life-saving blood from the malodorous body of a freshly-killed ship's rat. I also thought Griffin's harrowing attention to the ravages of scurvy was worthy of praise. I've read a lot of sea stories, and scurvy, which was a major and totally misunderstood health concern in the age of sail, is rarely even mentioned.

I have two major objections. The title is never explained. Requiem sharks are a class of shark. I suppose they are totemic of Roberts and his ilk in that they inhabit warm waters and they account for a large proportion of shark attacks on humans, but I would have liked a little language in the narrative to make the connection.

The other objection has to do with a journal that Williams keeps at Roberts' request. The journal is recorded in an elaborate code that involves a series of rotating languages rendered in arbitrarily assigned symbols. At one point in the narrative Williams is injured in his writing hand and must employ Phineas Bunch, the cabin boy, as his scribe. We are asked to believe that Williams devises a system whereby he dictates in English and Bunch, believing he has been taught to write English, actually writes encoded Latin (?!?!), as though languages differed from each other only morphologically and were syntactically identical. This device sets up the novel's final, dark, Highsmith-esque twist, but it raised my I-don't-buy-it flag. It momentarily threatened to sink the whole enterprise.

Jud says

A pirates life!

I didn't realise it was based on a true story until the authors note at the end. What an amazing tale. The characters are very well imagined, they seem very alive. There's an incredible amount of humour in the book too considering the subject matter - I laughed out loud many times.

Sarah says

Great story made even more interesting through the revelation that it's based on history.

Steven Jr. says

A very realistic depiction of the pirates' lifestyle, with a lot of historical background accuracy without being an info dump. Although there are moments of romance, this is no sentimental pulp telling of a "deadman's" tale! The tension of violent conflict and the disgusting details of disease are very rooted in historical reality, yet it is an adventurous work of fiction. I recommend it to those who want a true adventure tale without the mixed fantasy elements so much pirate fiction seems to have today.

Lisa Cindrich says

Just not feeling it right now, but the first couple of chapters were actually quite decent. Plus, I have the doorstopper, War of the End of the World, to somehow try to read this month. Right, JAY???
