



The Grey Raider

John Flanagan

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It is October 1863, and the American Civil War is in full swing. The Union has a preponderance of men, munitions and manufacturing and the pendulum is swinging its way. But the Confederates have a powerful bargaining point in any peace negotiations: the CSS Manassas, commanded by the audacious Captain Pelle.

The Manassas is a commerce raider, searching the seas far and wide for the Union's merchant fleet. And when it finds the enemy, it sends the ships and their million-dollar cargoes straight to the ocean floor.

As the ships go down, insurance rates go sky high, and Abraham Lincoln is under extreme pressure to stop the Manassas dead. But with the Union Navy stretched to breaking point blockading the South's ports, only one ship can be spared to seek out the Confederate raider.

Enter Captain Samuel Stacy and the USS Oswego. Stacy is tenacious and bull-headed and, perhaps more importantly, has a long-standing feud with Pelle.

There is nothing he wants more than to send the 'grey raider' to a watery grave. After all, the outcome of the war may depend on it ...

The Grey Raider Details

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From Reader Review The Grey Raider for online ebook

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘One ship can turn the tide of war.’

October 1863. The American Civil War is in full swing, and while the Union is gaining the upper hand, the Confederates still have a powerful weapon in the form of the CSS Manassas. The CSS Manassas, a sloop of war, hunts down Union merchant vessels, sending them and their cargo to the bottom of the ocean. The CSS Manassas is powered by both sail and steam, and is armed with two pivoting seven-inch Brooke rifles and six thirty-two pounder smoothbore broadside guns. Her commander is Captain Nathaniel Pelle. So far the CSS Manassas has sunk or burned sixty-two ships and insurance rates are skyrocketing as a consequence. She is well equipped for the missions she has been carrying out, and President Lincoln wants her stopped.

‘That damned Rebel pirate ship has caused us nothing but trouble for the past year and a half!’

The Union navy is stretched to breaking point because of its blockade of the South’s ports and cannot spare a squadron to hunt the CSS Manassas. One ship is detailed to pursue her: the USS Oswego, under the command of Captain Samuel Stacy. Can the USS Oswego succeed? Captain Stacy was once a colleague of Captain Pelle, but there is a longstanding feud between the two men. Captain Stacy will be more than happy to sink ‘the grey raider’.

At the same time as the USS Oswego hunts for the CSS Manassas, a beautiful Confederate spy, Kitty Averill, is trying to avoid Pinkerton’s agents. Kitty Averill learns some information which could be vital to Captain Pelle, if she can deliver it to him and if he believes her.

This novel is loosely based on the true story of the CSS Alabama, a commerce raider that attacked Union ships until it was sunk by the USS Kearsarge outside the French port of Cherbourg in 1864.

I really enjoyed this novel: the detailed description of the ships and their weapons and how both were operated; the feud between Captains Pelle and Stacy which coloured their actions and responses; the actions of Kitty Averill; and the various people at Cherbourg and elsewhere who were part of the story. If you enjoy nautical adventure, especially 19th century nautical adventure, you may enjoy this novel. The two captains are the main characters, and my favourite – as written – is definitely Captain Nathaniel Pelle.

Note: My thanks to NetGalley and Random House Australia for an opportunity to read an advance copy of this novel.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Phil Scott says

alright book, very long and at some points tedious

Anthony Dunk says

A rollicking good nautical adventure set during the US Civil War. The main antagonists are naval captains, Stacy and Pelle, who are on opposite sides, but once served together and have a long-standing grudge against each other. They play a game of cat and mouse around the globe in the ships they command, culminating in a final thrilling confrontation.

Having previously read Flanagan's excellent Rangers Apprentice series, I was truly impressed at how he has so flawlessly transitioned into a great writer of adult fiction.

Leigh says

In my top 5 of 2015!!!

Alice says

This is a novel set in the American Civil War. It follows a Southern ship, the Manassas who has sunk about 60 US merchant ships and who the South needs to have any chance of the war turning in their favour. But the tide is turning against them. The US ship, Oswego has been tasked with hunting down the Manassas and due to the captains of the two ships already having bad blood, Captain Stacy, of the Oswego, is more determined than most to see the Oswego sunk.

Denise says

2.5/5

Tracey says

Two Captains, two ships - go head to head in a rip roaring battle fought on land and sea.

During the Civil War the Confederates are relying on the CSS Manassas and Captain Pelle to disrupt the Union supply lines by sinking ships and making sea travel as perilous as possible. Pelle's success on the sea pushes up insurance rates and the Union needs to stop him. The Union turns to Captain Stacey of the USS Oswego. A man who is bull headed but determined to succeed at any cost to sink the Manassas. Adding to the intrigue Stacey and Pelle have a history that makes the battle very personal.

What a cracking read, action packed, intense and an intriguing battle of wits between two very different men. There is a lot to like about Flanagan's Grey Raider.

Flanagan has done his research and he seamlessly takes you into this wonderful nautical world. You really do feel that you are on the deck of the ship, that you understand the intricacies of cranking up the steam

engine and setting sail. The battle scenes are blunt and horrendous, necessary in their brutality of war but it is not gratuitous violence. As a story teller, Flanagan does not cram the research down your throat but is done so that it folds naturally into the events of the story. The events that unfold in France are fascinating as the two crews become entertainment for the local dignitaries as they become embroiled in local politics and subterfuge.

The characters are well crafted and imperfect. Pelle is seen as the nobler of the two men, his crew will do anything for him. Stacy is quick to react, quick to temper, unpleasant but fair. Both men are respected for their abilities on the sea and it is their stories that weave everything together. The supporting characters lift off the page and enhance the story. In particular Kitty the female Confederate spy, (who should have her own series) who is being followed by a brutish Pinkerton agent attempts to provide assistance to the Manassas. The crews of both ships are well realised and have their own unique voices.

Flanagan has made this story completely believable with great characters, lots of action and a really engaging read.

Thanks to Netgalley and Random House.

D.A. Cairns says

Really well written, and well researched. Cool characters. Easy to read entertainment with slices of humour and plenty of action. The blending of historical fact and fiction was seamless. I was totally there. I particularly liked the character of Kitty, a strong and resourceful woman and enjoyed the final sea battle.

Glenn says

It was an okay read - certainly not in the same league as Rangers Apprentice... For me, the story did not flow - not enough support character development (Havelock and Morrison) etc... Was really excited to read this, but now feel a little disappointed...
