



The Guardship

James L. Nelson

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Shortly after Thomas Marlowe's arrival in Williamsburg, Virginia, all in that newfound capital city are speaking his name. With the bounty from his years as a pirate--a life he intends to renounce and keep forever secret--he purchases a fine plantation from a striking young widow, and soon after kills the favorite son of one of Virginia's most powerful clans while defending her honor. But it is a daring feat of remarkable cunning that truly sets local tongues wagging: a stunning move that wins Marlowe command of Plymouth Prize, the colony's decrepit guardship.

But even as the enigmatic Marlowe bravely leads the King's sailors in bloody pitched battle against the cutthroats who infest the waters off Virginia's shores, a threat from his illicit past looms on the horizon that could doom Marlowe and his plans. Jean-Pierre LeRois, captain of the Vengeance--a brigand notorious even among other brigands for his violence and debauchery--plots to seize the colony's wealth, forcing Marlowe to choose between losing all or facing the one man he fears. Only an explosive confrontation on the open sea can determine whether the Chesapeake will be ruled by the crown or the Brethren of the Coast.

The Guardship Details

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Author : James L. Nelson

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From Reader Review The Guardship for online ebook

Steven Toby says

History and Adventure

This is the story of Captain Marlowe, a pirate who decides to go straight around the year 1700. Retired to a tobacco plantation near the new state capital, Williamsburg, his former pirate captain is after him and when he accepted command of the colony's guardship he unwittingly sets up a climactic battle with the pirate ship Vengeance.

The story has numerous subplots including a romance, and the author shows his ability to create a suspenseful plot with loads of action and intrigue.

However, this book didn't come off quite as well as his series of Viking Ireland books. While he doesn't make obvious errors in naval terminology or local color — I would notice both of those, having visited Williamsburg many times and owned 7 boats over a lifetime of sailing — I found quite a few improbable events in the plot. The ships are not described enough that I felt I knew what they were like, and what description was there seemed like it might be wrong.

For example, full rigged ships are described with spritsail topmasts like the VASA (1628), while there's a gaff rigged sloop with modern, triangular headsails. I think by 1700 all full rigged ships would be built with a jibboom and modern headsails, and a Navy boatswain could easily convert any older vessels. When the new Vengeance goes aground while pursuing the guardship, the battle should have ended in half an hour. Marlowe should have tacked immediately, crossing the pirates' bow and delivered a raking broadside. Another tack and the other broadside and there wouldn't have been much left of the pirates. Launching small boats using stay and yard tackles — his reason for continuing to flee — takes far too long to expose the guardship to boarders on the disengaged side! Indeed, several of the naval actions seem poorly conceived. The notion that the captured merchantman is more than a match for the Navy guardship simply isn't believable.

Plus, the notion that Marlowe could have been commissioned into the Royal Navy just on the governor's say so seems sketchy compared to the bureaucratic Admiralty. Marlowe doesn't have any records of prior service and of course he can't admit he learned to fight a warship from Captain Lerois the pirate! So, just too many flaws that make it hard to suspend disbelief.

Paul says

I like novels with heroes (not really the right word for Thomas Marlowe, but he is the main protagonist) with a dark history. I also can't resist a story which takes me to places I can't physically travel to, i.e. the past. With The Guardship, James Nelson introduces the reader to a character filled with angst and turmoil, looking for a new start. Life doesn't work that way. Thomas's past catches up with him, much to his benefit, as he endeavours to defend his home colony from pirates who have more than opportunistic plunder in mind. The characters are well developed, the action is vivid and the narrative is nicely paced and delivered. I look forward to more from Thomas Marlowe and his adventures.

Patrick SG says

Had read this author's "Revolution at Sea" series and enjoyed that. It was set mainly around Rhode Island, which I was familiar with, and this book is set in and around Williamsburg and Tidewater, which I'm even more familiar with, so I thought I'd enjoy it even more. Sad to say I didn't. The book is best when it's on the water and the author's experience with sailing ships is put to great use in creating realistic, tense nautical action. When it's ashore, the action is only a cut above a soap opera with rather cardboard characters. It was this part of the book that caused me to start and stop reading it over the course of about two months. Although I have to say the author does get his Virginia geography pretty spot on, creating a realistic setting for these characters, blasé though they may be.

M. Sprouse says

A solid read it you like a historical-action novel. I read this at the beach near where it's supposed to have taken place, so I tried to temper my enthusiasm and be objective. Like so many readers have mentioned it's an engaging, nautical romp. It does have a couple of twist, but you can see them coming a mile away. Yes, the characters are one-dimensional, but people and life was fairly straight forward at that time. In the end it was hard to decide between 3 stars and four. Either way, I plan on reading the next in Thomas Marlowe series.

Jim says

This is the first of James Nelson's three novel series entitled the Brethren of the Coast (a name given to pirates who worked the coast of the southern English colonies. The hero of the series is Thomas Marlowe, a wealthy individual who arrived in Williamsburg, the new capital of the colony of Virginia, just two years prior to the setting of this novel, which is 1701. Marlowe quickly entered the society of the colony, buying a tobacco plantation and setting himself as one of the wealthier planters around Williamsburg. But to his great chagrin, he is not accepted by the upper crust of the colony: he set all of his slaves free and began paying them wages to work the plantation; he maintained a secret past that kept many suspicious of him and his unsourced wealth.

The colony's governor soon makes Marlowe captain of the royal guardship, which is supposed to protect the colony, and especially Williamsburg, from the predations of pirates. This sets the stage for the entire novel.

This is some of the best writing I have read by James Nelson. His prose is richly descriptive; his action non-stop and the twists and turns of the story and Marlowe's fate keep the reader riveted.

A great book.

Hyeronimus says

Un bellissimo libro di avventure marinaresche!

Qui non c'è un'approfondita introspezione psicologica dei personaggi, ma l'azione è sempre protagonista, non c'è un attimo di tregua, non ci sono cadute di tensione, l'adrenalina è costantemente sopra il livello di guardia e costa fatica abbandonare la lettura.

Non ho ancora letto nessun libro di Patrick O'Brian, altro scrittore di avventure marinaresche, peraltro più famoso di Nelson, e non posso pertanto fare paragoni, ma posso affermare con sincerità che non vedo l'ora di iniziare il romanzo successivo della serie e calarmi nuovamente nelle avventurose pagine che vedono Thomas Marlowe protagonista.

T. Kozumplik says

another heave ho yo ho ho ripping yarn. Great swashbuckler!

Erin Moxam says

This is not the usual genre I read, but somewhere along my travels I ended up with the second book in this series, so I thought I should read the first one. I thought if nothing else I would enjoy the historical aspects, but I really enjoyed the whole book. Pirates, intrigue and excitement on the high seas, what more could you ask for? I liked the characters and I really liked how the author gave a lot of detail about the history of the area and the ships without dragging you through it or going on and on. He balanced what you needed to know to understand the story without boring you with too many details. A good, adventurous read, I look forward to the second one!

? Pat Gent says

This was a pretty fun, light romance, very swash-buckling adventure tale. Sort of formulaic, but a good read in spite of that.

I don't usually go for the adventure books, and almost never for the romances, but this one wasn't too sappy-drippy with the love story, and who doesn't love a pirate that is trying to remake himself into a gentleman?

I'll probably read the next book in the series, just because I want to see how things end up for Elizabeth and Marlowe.

Julia Maiola says

It honestly surprises me that this book does not have a higher rating. I went into it with mediocre

expectations, having just picked it off the bookshelf by chance. Wow, was I blown away. It is quite the page turner. Sometimes it seemed that buildup and tension didn't lead to anything, but it held my attention nonetheless and the stakes were certainly high enough that it mattered to know what would happen next. The characters were all likeable, even the antagonists in their own way. I'm not one for romance but found myself rooting for the main couple anyway. If you're worried, the romance does not make up a huge part of this book. The focus is on the action. An all around enjoyable and recommended read. 5 stars because I simply could not stop reading it.

Elron says

Entertaining nautical fiction, but practically a romance novel.

Luis Suarez says

Puedo decir que es un buen libro pero hasta ahi. Es de esas literaturas que te ayudan a pasar el rato y llenandote de conocimientos con respecto a un punto específico, en este caso la piratería en la costa de la Estados Unidos colonizada, en que el tabaco era el principal producto y hacían de Virginia el estado más prospero de esta colonia británica. Los personajes tienen un plus, que están bien hecho y por ello vives la historia con ellos, hasta el punto de la historia pasar a ser intrigante en cuanto a los acontecimientos. Los escenarios están bien escritos a como era un colonia inglesa para esa época: la economía, la política, la esclavitud, entre otros aspectos resaltantes de la historia. Parte de la idea que el ser humano puede cambiar pero en una etapa muy temprana de su vida, en este caso Malaquias Barrow cambió a Thomas Marlow a la edad de 25 años, seres del cielo a la tierra por la influencia de un buen maestro. Un ejemplo interesante a estudiar.

Dianna says

I had a hard time retaining my interest in the storyline and characters. It wasn't bad writing; for some reason, I was just never engaged in the adventure.

Aeseyman says

Oh, what a fun story! Swashbuckling pirates and ladies in distress, set in the English colony of Virginia at the start of the 18th century. Fully believable, relatable characters involved in a suspenseful story that kept my attention all the way through. I especially loved the description of the psychological warfare of *vaporing* employed by the pirates. No historical notes at the back of this book, unfortunately. And what's with the author's choice of names for his main characters' right-hand-men: Rumstick and Bickerstaff. Regardless, I look forward to the next book in the series.

Phillip says

I went into this novel with a pre-cemented love of all things pirates, particularly Captain Blood, by Raphael Sabatini. The only pirate novel that has disappointed me is Tim Powers' On Stranger Tides, which was confusing, slow at times, and too "other-worldly" for a pirate novel. Here, Nelson has concocted a group of characters are all interesting and engaging, and thrust them into an adventurous tale of a man's desire to escape his villainous past and start over again in the New World. For a time he succeeds, but it's fairly clear early on that he will not hold his secret long. Like any good pirate novel, Nelson has included an engaging and in ways, unexpected love story. The Guardship is the first in a three-novel series of the main character, Thomas Marlowe, but it could very well stand alone, like Captain Blood, as a complete story that ends more than satisfactorily at the end.

I also want to focus on Nelson as a writer--he is exceptional. He was inspired by parents who were both English teachers, and their influence on him shows in his vocabulary, and original sentence structure. One of his many effective strategies is to explain the scene from the perspective of the protagonist, and then immediately begin at the beginning of that same scene, but tell it from the perspective of the antagonist, or any other character important to the scene. This is brilliant. He does this a number of times throughout the story, and I cannot imagine loving this novel as much as I do had he not provided the stories from multiple perspectives. Nelson is a great writer, folks, and not a one-hit wonder. I enthusiastically will delve into the final two books in this trilogy, but for now, am overwhelmed by how much I enjoyed this novel. It brought me several days of pure enjoyment as I watched the injustice, and the revenge play out just as I would have hoped. Sheer perfection!
