



Broken Jewel

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For three years after the fall of Manila, 2,100 Allied civilians have been imprisoned at Los Baños Internment Camp, 40 miles to the southeast and notorious for its horrendous conditions. American Remy Tuck, the camp's resident gambler, struggles daily with his Japanese army captors to keep his community of Americans, Brits, and Dutch alive, as they stave off starvation and protect one another from vicious punishments. Remy's son, Talbot, now nineteen, has become a man while in captivity. Headstrong to the hilt and a nimble thief, Tal can move like a snake under the guards' noses and defies their orders at every opportunity.

On the other side of the barbed wire, looking down on the camp, is the Filipina Carmen, a "comfort woman" who has been kidnapped by the Japanese, raped, and forced into sexual slavery to service the Imperial Japanese Army. Carmen battles to keep herself physically and emotionally intact. A favorite of one of the guards, she accepts his occasional kindnesses but has eyes only for Tal, whose fortitude in the face of great suffering astounds her. Tal, in turn, looks up to Carmen's high window and sees the grace and courage with which she endures her imprisonment. Without speaking, the two fall in love above the encampment grounds.

As the tide of the war in the Pacific turns against the Japanese, tensions and danger in the camp escalate. In the face of all but certain execution at the hands of their captors, Remy and Tal enact a daring plan to save their fellow prisoners and the woman Tal loves.

Broken Jewel Details

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From Reader Review Broken Jewel for online ebook

Kay Roseberry says

A must to read

if you like historical fiction based upon the facts of events, you will read this book and won't put it down until you finish. This is a very intense book. I laughed, I cried, I held my breath, I loved, I feared. I hated, and I cheered! I glowed with pride for our military. Characters are real with different names. Wow what a learning experience! Thank you David Robbins for the time you gave to share this story for the victims of the war. It is sad that the cruelty by humans towards other humans still thrives. We, the people of our planet that want peace, seem to be outnumbered by those who want power and will trample anyone in their way. Just my opinion.

Cindy says

It took me a lot longer than usual to finish this book due to my heavy work schedule the last week but mainly I would emotionally tire after a few chapters. This book tells the story of the 2100 civilians imprisoned by the Japanese for greater than 3 years at Los Banos after the fall of Manila. Mr. Robbins tells the story of these people with unbelievable detail and historical accuracy. The two main characters Remy and Talbot are a father and son team that exemplify the true meaning of survivors. If you have ever read Ben Sherwoods The Survivor's Club you will know what I mean when I say that Remy is the Connector and Tal is the Fighter.

Steve says

I have read Robbins' The Last Citadel (2003), which deals with the Battle of Kursk (July and August 1943), and Liberation Road (2004), which deals with the Red Ball Express (August 25 to November 16, 1944). Although I think Robbins overly romanticizes his historical novels, the history is sound and the characters are usually excellent paradigms for everyman caught in history's momentous events. His characters become the readers' eyes and perceptions of these events. Broken Jewel is a fictionalized account of the 11th Airborne Division's February 23, 1945, raid on Los Banos, the Japanese internment camp for civilians 40 miles south of Manila. The raid liberated over 2100 civilians.

Robbins explains the title of the book:

ichioku gyokusai - one hundred million broken jewels. In early 1945, this slogan appeared throughout Japan, expressing that the nation's entire population was prepared to be "shattered," or exterminated, together in a final, absolute commitment to the war and the emperor (p. 265).

That fatalistic commitment to war and their belief in their superiority to other peoples led the Japanese to execute large numbers of civilians at other camps. The Allies, knowing that the invading armies would be unable to advance fast enough to prevent the executions, successfully raided the camp at Cabanatuan on January 30, 1945, liberating 500 civilians and POWs (many survivors of the Bataan Death March), then

raided Los Banos less than a month later.

As in his other historical novels, Robbins is interested in providing the reader with everyman's eye level perspective on the events. He achieves his breadth of perspective in *Broken Jewel* by focusing on three fictional characters, tied together by blood or love: an imprisoned father, his 19 year old son, and a "comfort woman," an enslaved Filipina, used against her will by the Japanese as a prostitute for the soldiers. She is, in the story, the "love" of the son, although they've never met, only viewed each other from afar. Through these three the reader comes to know the internees, the enslaved women, the soldiers who guard the camp, the Filipino guerrillas who assist in the raid, and the larger than life American soldiers. The father and son, of course, become involved with the guerrillas and the raiding army as guides and authorities on the camp's layout, giving the reader knowledge of the planning and strategy of the raid. There are several other interesting characters who interact with these, providing additional points of view.

Robbins is able to tell the story of the camp without excessive emphasis on the horrors, as novelists too often do. He is more interested in how people survived such horrible conditions than in describing them, so his emphasis throughout is hope and how people sustain it in such conditions of privation and brutality. With its hopeful and optimistic ending, the novel is a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit and its capacity to overcome severe emotional scars. The story is well told and engaging. [Please read his notes; they help with the historical perspective]. I highly recommend it for readers of historical novels.

Nic says

Fantastic writing and great characters, plus an epic plot taken from the pages of a little lesser-known WWII history. I especially liked the annotations at the back that explained on whom the characters were based and which episodes really happened.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Most excellently excellent in every way. Plot, characters, research, historical significance, writing and editing---all superb. It took two or three chapters for me to sort out the characters and settings, and after that it was non-stop great reading.

There are so many stories from World War II that haven't received adequate coverage. This is one of them. I learned a great deal while at the same time being swept away by the story of privation, brutality, courage, hope, and heroism.

Don't neglect the annotations at the back of the book. I placed a sticky note to mark the page and referred to them after reading each chapter. These notes fill in exactly how real events were incorporated into the novel.

Cheryl A says

Well researched fictionalized account of the rescue of more than 2000 Allied citizens held at Los Banos Internment Camp in the Philippines. Author David Robbins has created two composite characters, Remy and

Talbot Tuck, father and son, who have been quietly keeping hope alive for the fellow internees. As the American forces begin to return to Manila, life in the camp begins to become more harsh. Guerrilla activity in the area heats up and a captive "comfort woman" Carmen, begins to pass information about the camp to the local resistance leaders. When news of atrocities at other camps filters into Los Banos, Remy and Tal know that time is short.

Quiet resistance with dignity and honor highlight the characters of this novel. While the action is based on historical fact, with author's notes to clarify actual events, the heart of the novel is with these characters. The author honors the actual internees of Los Banos and other camps, as well as the brave men and women of the Philippines. An excellent read.

Suevw says

Loved this even tho it was a bit "hard" to read due to the realities portrayed and got somewhat "gritty"- Be sure to ck out and revisit the authors' web page and his info cc writing - amazing - Thanks for all that and PLEASE keep at it Mr Robbins.

Ann Rieth says

What a book to start my 2016 challenge! This was a great telling of another grim yet oh-so-true travesty of man's inhumanity to man and woman! It's also timely, since the Japanese government has just now finally acknowledged that Comfort Women (sex slaves by any other name) were provided to the Japanese army during WWII by their leaders. It's also an honest account of the Japanese internment of Filipinos, Americans and others in a brutal camp near Manila, and of the rescue of 2,100 of those prisoners in a daring raid by local guerrilla fighters and U.S. Army soldiers.

Barbara says

"I doubt that any airborne unit in the world will ever be able to rival the Los Banos prison raid. It is the textbook airborne operation for all ages and all armies." Gen. Colin Powell

The most interesting part of this novel was the annotations for each chapter. Since this a fictionalized story of these events reading about the actual events and sources was very helpful and added to the impact.

Becky says

This was a very enjoyable read - I particularly liked that it was a war story about heroic civilians. While I'm not at all well-read in this genre, I feel like civilians in WWII novels are usually straightforwardly tragic victims, while soldiers get to run around kicking Nazi ass and saving the day. None of these characters allow themselves to remain victims, which makes them an especially compelling kind of admirable.

Fabulous amounts of research that sit lightly on the page.

I found the whole Reservoir Dogs-esque scene near the end a bit confusing, but I was also pretty sleepy.

And, oh yes, my creative writing class is mentioned in the acknowledgements :D

Sam Bucu says

I'm not much of an avid reader when it comes to war novels... except for GWTW and this one. What really caught my attention was that this novel was set in the WWII Philippines, with a Filipina comfort woman as one of its main characters (and her name was Carmen, which reminded me right away of Carmen Rosales who was a WWII sharp-shooter makapili assassin)....

This novel is but an interesting read. It appears, as indicated by the author in the annotations, that most of the events illustrated in the story were actually inspired by the real events that took place in the setting of the novel. As IN, to the very detail of it.

I would like to recommend this book for those who are interested towards history; our own history for that matter. You'll surely enjoy consuming this one.

Justin says

Historical novel based on the Los Banos Internment Camp for civilians in the Philippines WW2 and its liberation. The strength of this book was surely the characters and their development over the novel. You could really understand and feel the emotions of the captives as well as the Japanese soldiers and American servicemen who liberated the camp. Dragged at times, particularly in the mid-section of the book.

Teddy says

I don't usually give a synopsis of a book in a review, but in this case I think it is needed because the synopsis that is given on the good reads page is sorely lacking. The author claims it is a story of love and war and loss, which in general, I suppose is true, however the details are kind of pertinent in this story to help you decide if you really want to spend your time reading it.

The main story is about a woman who is forced to be a prostitute in a Japanese war camp. It was depressing and didn't seem to have anything to redeem itself even to the end.

It is just way too depressing a story for me and I guess not at all what I was in the mood for and I can't ever imagine myself being in the mood for this story.

Bree T says

December 1944, Los Baños prison camp, Manila, The Philippines. Over 2000 prisoners of war are currently being held by Japanese forces, among them Remy Tuck, a gambling man and his young son Talbot. Talbot is known around the camp as a thief, a bit of a trouble maker and he struggles to keep his head down, keep the Japanese who run the camp from noticing his antics.

Most of the camp is starving, their rations pitifully low and being cut all the time by those in charge for anything they view as an infringement upon their rules. When US fighter planes are spotted low over the camp and a drop is made and acknowledge, Remy, Talbot and their fellow prisoners can't help but find hope that the Americans are coming for them, that they might soon be freed from this horrible place.

On the other side of the camp is Carmen, a Filipina woman taken as a captor by the Japanese as a "comfort woman" for the Japanese soldiers and officials at the camp. She services anywhere between 20 and 40 men per day, some of whom beat her, refuse to wear the Japanese condom known as saku and treat her with disrespect, little more than a whore even though they are the ones who have made her one. Only Kenji, the Japanese-English translator whose job it is to interpret between the prisoners and the officials treats her with any real kindness.

As the balance of power shifts in the war in the Pacific, the Japanese start ruthlessly executing prisoners of war rather than allow them to be rescued or taken from camps by American soldiers. Los Baños faces the same fate unless the prisoners themselves, the Filipino guerillas and the Americans landing in Manila can work together to pull off one of the ultimate air and ground operations in military history.

September was the Philippines for Shannon over at Giraffe Days' Around The World In 12 Books Challenge. I was originally a bit panicked as I had a huge amount of books to get through for September (still working on that!) and I had nothing on my shelves or in my TBR pile that would've counted. I scanned the catalogue at my local library with a keyword of Philippines and one of the results (out of very few) it returned was this book, Broken Jewel. It's loosely based on real life events and there's a handy notes section at the back of the book which breaks down chapter by chapter, what occurrences in the story are true and what others are inspired by. I found this very helpful, because as I've mentioned before, my history knowledge is appalling. I only took compulsory Australian history in high school and when I read books that are mired in realism, I always realise just how lacking my knowledge really is.

Conditions inside Los Baños are terribly distressing but all too easy to imagine, even though I've never been starving, limited to a few handfuls of rice and some boiled weeds a day. I've never had to live without proper showers, running water, electricity and a functioning bathroom. The disease and malnutrition that these people must've faced is simply horrific. At one stage it is mentioned that the babies ration of milk is reduced to a pint a week, which is just under half a litre (about 470mL) in metric terms. My baby is 1, so he's well on solid foods, eating 3 proper meals a day and he still drinks 360mL of full cream milk a day which is almost the entire weekly ration for a baby at Los Baños towards the end of the imprisonment.

I think I'm picking the wrong books for this challenge because one of the things Shannon mentioned that she'd like us to consider in our reading was did the book make us want to visit the country, etc. I think out of the 9 books I've read for this challenge, probably 6 or 7 have taken place during a revolution, military coup or war and most of them detail heinous things which means I don't get to experience the country in its best light and usually doesn't lead to me wanting to visit if I could!

I had no idea prior to reading this book that Japan were not signatories to the Third Protocol of the Geneva Convention (which relates to the treatment of prisoners of war) until 1953. In fact they didn't sign anything relating to the Geneva Convention until well after the end of the second World War and their treatment of prisoners during the second world war was utterly vicious. They were raised to live for and die for, the Emperor with seemingly little concern from the powers that be for what happened to them or to those around them or those they had to go through.

I have to admit, I went into this book not really expecting much, it was just the only option I really had from my local library but I ended up really enjoying it. It was meticulously researched, the notes in the back are evidence of that but it was also just a really well written story. Even in my totally different world I could imagine myself as Los Baños with these people, I loved Remy and his protection of Talbot, his skill and his sacrifice. I didn't always understand the connection between Talbot and Carmen but I admired the fact that he could look past her history, the fact that she had been so appallingly treated.

Really glad I read this book – I'll keep an eye out for the author's other titles.

Dolores says

A riveting novel of war, love, and survival, set against the backdrop of an improbable rescue, the Los Banos prison raid in the Philippines....one of the most daring episodes of World War II. I had recently read a factual account of that amazing rescue...decided to try this one. It was very interesting and well-written, with characters you really care about.
