



# Gooseberry Island

*Steven Manchester*

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## **Gooseberry Island** Steven Manchester

They met at the worst possible moment...or maybe it was just in time. David McClain was about to go to war and Lindsey Wood was there at his going-away party, capturing his heart when falling for a woman was the last thing on his mind. While David was serving his country, he stayed in close contact with Lindsey. But war changes a person, and when he came home very little had the same meaning that it had before – including the romance that had sustained him. Was love truly unconquerable, or would it prove to be just another battlefield casualty?

*Gooseberry Island* is the most nuanced, dramatic, and romantic novel yet from a writer whose ability to plumb the depths of human emotion knows few peers.

## **Gooseberry Island Details**

Date : Published January 6th 2015 by Story Plant, The (first published December 25th 2014)

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Author : Steven Manchester

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# From Reader Review Gooseberry Island for online ebook

## Read, Run, Ramble says

My review (as published at Read, Run, Ramble):

***Thank you The Story Plant via Netgalley for providing me with an early copy of this book!***

David is an Army Ranger. Lindsey grew up with a military father and is now helping her father deal with his PTSD. The two meet at what some might call the worst possible time – the night before David leaves for Afghanistan. Yet the two of them decide that beginning the relationship is doable despite the timing. Through letters, Skype, and email they get to know each other and even fall in love, but when David returns events don't unfold quite how either of them thought they would and the relationship is put to the test.

There were many things in this book to love – the exploration of PTSD, the fact that war doesn't end for a soldier just because he or she returns home, the strains put on families and friends when loved ones deploy, and Manchester's beautiful writing. However, there were a few things that I didn't love so much. The romance was just a bit much for me – too cheesy, sappy, and perfected. Even the "tough spots" were too scripted feeling to me. To be fair, most romance isn't for me so in that vein, it is fair to say that many will love it. And at times the plot line felt jumpy or choppy – whole chunks of time where I'd be left wondering, "What happened and how much time really just passed?" This was mostly during David and Lindsey's meeting and then again during David's time in Afghanistan.

As for the characters, other than David's and Lindsey's romantic sides being way too much for me, I liked them all. Manchester shows many sides of the aftermath of war and deployment and I feel like he did so in a very authentic voice. Several different relationships are covered – parental, spousal, sibling, friendly, and so many more.

To sum it up, this book is worth the read. Manchester's story sheds light onto a subject that I feel many would benefit from and it was enjoyable.

***I was provided with an ARC of this book by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. All thoughts and opinions are my own. I am not compensated for any of my reviews.***

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## Kathleen says

Every once in a while a novel comes along that is so powerfully compelling and thought provoking that it will pull at the heartstrings and stir the soul, for me, that novel is author Steven Manchester's Gooseberry Island.

David McClain is an Army Ranger, who is deploying for his first twelve month combat tour of duty in Afghanistan. Before he leaves his home on Gooseberry Island, he hoped that he might meet a special someone who he could write to and look forward to coming home to while on tour. All he wants is to find the right woman, the girl of his dreams, his soul mate.

Lindsey Wood knows first hand the horrors of PTSD. Her father Denis is a decorated Operation Desert Storm veteran, who is struggling with nightmares from his tour in Iraq. Lindsey is his caretaker, but his bouts with his inner demons and alcohol abuse often leads to Lindsey being on the receiving end of her father's violent fits. He has struggled so much that he lives in a constant state of emotional catastrophe, and has even committed himself to the local VA Hospital for treatment on numerous occasions, but nothing seems to help him and he doesn't know how much more he can take.

Lindsey and David meet on the beach the afternoon before he ships out, when Lindsey's dog trips David while running. There is an instant connection between Lindsey and David, and he asks her to go with him to his going away party. They spend the whole night on the beach sitting on a park bench talking until the sunrise. They vow to stay in touch with each other while David is away for the next year, and meet up at the same park bench on the beach when he comes home. But no one can imagine the changes that would occur in their lives, and the traumatic toll it would take from being away from each other for a year.

Author Steven Manchester weaves a powerful, compelling, and emotional tale that easily draws the reader into Lindsey and David's story. Told in an alternating third person narrative, the reader follows Lindsey and David as they try to maintain a long-distance relationship while he serves a twelve month tour in Afghanistan. The reader follows Lindsey as she goes about her life at home, as she tries to help her father cope as he struggles with PTSD, while dreaming of a future with David when he comes home from his tour of duty. The reader also follows David as his tour in the Kabul Province of Afghanistan with the Fourth Ranger Battalion will change his life forever, as he too struggles internally with the traumatic combat experiences that he endured. David's internal struggles follow him home from his tour, and it will take a powerful beacon of light to guide him back home.

Gooseberry Island is a heart wrenching but inspirational story that will pull at your emotional heartstrings. Author Steven Manchester weaves a richly vivid and chilling description of David's tour of duty in Afghanistan, and brings to light the invisible scars that many of our returning service men and women bring with them when they return home. The author provides the reader with a thought provoking tale that raises the awareness of the effects that PTSD can have upon our military. Just because our service men and women come home in one piece, doesn't always mean that the war is over, for many the internal struggles have only just begun, and for some the struggle is too much get past. According to the author's letter to the reader, he calls upon his own personal experience of serving in Operation Desert Storm to weave a story that details the brutal experience of combat service, and the struggle our military veterans encounter when they return home, and the emotional helplessness it causes their loved ones. This is a story that was twenty years in making, one that was written as a wonderful tribute to our nation's military service people and their loved ones. This is a story that will resonate with you for a very long time.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of the book from the author / publisher via NetGalley in exchange for my honest review.

<http://jerseygirlbookreviews.blogspot...>

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**Carolien says**

**\*ARC provided via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review\***

*Expected publication: January 6th 2015 by The Story Plant*

★★★ emotional stars...!

I was really happy to get an ARC for this one as I have a weak heart soldier stories. I've never read a book from Steven Manchester before and I was eager to start this one. Although I had some issues with the story, it didn't disappoint me!

The story is about David and Lindsey. David is about to be sent off to Afghanistan when he meets Lindsey. They connect immediately and during his year in war, they keep contact. But war changes a person, and when he came home very little had the same meaning that it had before – including the romance that had sustained him. Was love truly unconquerable, or would it prove to be just another battlefield casualty?

When reading this story I immediately felt it was written by a man. It sounds silly, but when I think about it, I noticed that most books I read are written by women. And there is a small difference in that. Hard to explain, but I felt that the writer wanted to focus on romance and war and life after at the same time. And something didn't work in that.

The book starts really strong and even though there is some kind of insta-connection between David and Lindsey, that didn't bother me. It was sweet, maybe a bit sugary sweet, but it had a great build-up and good side characters and conversations. The middle part is when David is in Afghanistan and you get pieces of his world and Lindsey's world. Very detailed soldier actions that get to you but also feel...overwhelming. The final part is when David gets back and I had the most difficulty with that. I absolutely understand David's state of mind but I couldn't connect with him nor Lindsey anymore. His mind was absent and dark and at one point it really goes wrong...the romance afterwards...I couldn't feel it anymore.

Maybe the story would have been stronger if the romance was made stronger. Don't get me wrong, this way it's much more real and believable, but it made me disconnect with the characters. Also the short chapters and the fast change in POV made it harder to get into the story.

So would I recommend it? I liked the story but for me, it was lacking something. The flow, the way you are sucked into a story, those kind of things. But that's also very personal, so...maybe you just need to find out!

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### **M.M. Hudson says**

Review of: Gooseberry Island by Steven Manchester Check out my review of this excellent novel by Steven Manchester. I have read all of his books and they are so good!

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### **Philomena Callan Cheekypee says**

I've not heard of this author before and I feel as if I had my head stuck in the sand. This book totally engulfed me. I started it on a long car journey and apart from stopping to eat I could not put it down until I'd finished.

David's an army ranger. The day before he goes to war in Afghanistan he meets Lindsey on the beach. They both have been looking for their soul mate. Through David's eyes we read of the emotional turmoil David goes through while in Afghanistan and when he comes home. We read of how he deals with survivor's guilt.

We also read of what's happening in Lindsey's life.

The author portrayed these characters brilliantly. They came across so real and relatable. The storyline is brilliant. As for my emotions well they were certainly messed up. At a certain point in this story I literally had tears rolling down my face. Anyone that reads my reviews knows that's a rare occurrence for me.

As soon as I can I'll be topping up my Amazon account and 1-clicking the other books from this author. If they affect me like this one did then I'll be very happy. I highly recommend this absolutely brilliant read.

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## **Richard says**

Review copy kindly provided by author and GR friend Steven Manchester.

This novel is a hard-hitting portrayal of the effects of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on a loyal American soldier, David, who had been deployed to Afghanistan for a year. He arrives there convinced of the rightness of American intervention, but ends up struggling with the repercussions of his experience when he is confronted by events which he can do little or nothing to alleviate. It also discusses the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the Department of Veterans Affairs in handling this problem.

Manchester pulls no punches when describing the physical and mental agony soldiers go through. However, all is not doom and gloom. David and his girlfriend Lindsey, although temporarily upset by the separation of war and the trials of PTSD, go through a wholesome romance which is not without importance for David's difficult situation.

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## **Dianne says**

When David met Lindsey, he was prepared to go off to war, but not for the beautiful woman who stole his heart hours before he left. Would she be his saving grace through the horrors of war, an angel sent to keep him focused on returning home and giving him a brief reprieve from his living hell through their correspondence and contact? She tells him things he needs to hear, but he cannot tell her things he needs to say. David cannot talk of what is really happening or how bleak his life has become. When he finally make sit home what he has seen and done in a foreign country becomes like a time bomb just waiting to explode, he feels poisoned, not good enough for Lindsey. No matter what his heart tells him, his soul has been crushed, the nightmares are constant, awake or asleep, and he unwillingly cocoons himself in the depths of PTSD.

Lindsey has seen through her own eyes, the after effects of war. Her father was destroyed, never could shake the inner turmoil from battle. Is she strong enough to help David? Will he let her or will he risking making their love another casualty of war?

Steven Manchester's **Gooseberry Island** comes alive when Lindsey and David meet and continues to grow page by page as the drama in this powerful love story unfolds. Mr. Manchester has a style that allows his readers to see and feel every scene and every swelling emotion as we follow this tale through dark tunnels, jagged twists and raw mental upheaval. He has managed to bring dark and light together in a bond of love, while touching on a subject that can wrench the very soul from a person. Through it all, there is a strong

romantic atmosphere, that is rich and deep, while sometimes teetering on a precipice as one fights to hold on and gain balance and the other fears the heights of a joy they do not believe they deserve. Once again, with a style as unique as his fingerprints, Steven Manchester will steal your heart and soul in exchange for the beauty of his words.

If you have never truly seen the mental and emotional devastation caused by war and survivor's guilt, your eyes will be opened by this dramatic read.

You know that feeling when you just win the lottery for the big bucks? That's how I felt when Steven Manchester offered me an ARC edition in exchange for my honest review!

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## **Cynthia says**

Had no idea it was going to be about PTSD, but it sure opened my eyes on the subject.

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## **Kristin (Kritters Ramblings) says**

Check out the full review at Kritters Ramblings

David is headed off on a year long tour to Afghanistan and has yet to meet "the one." Right before his going away party, Lindsey Wood stumbles into his life and a year long correspondence begins.

To start a relationship with a year long correspondence is the ultimate love story! Minus my issue below, this book felt real and I appreciated Steven Manchester's focus on PTSD and especially the interesting look at Lindsey's dad from Vietnam war and David with the current war in Afghanistan. I liked that Manchester put both characters in this story to show the different side effects of PTSD.

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## **Diane Moyle says**

I have read most of Steven Manchester's novels and all have been wonderful. This is no exception and in my opinion, is his best. In this story, he puts a face on post traumatic stress disorder and what our troops returning from the Middle East endure.

David is preparing to deploy to Afghanistan for a year. On his last night stateside, he meets Lindsey and they have an immediate connection. They stay in touch and their bond continues to grow and flower. Then, David loses one of the men on his ranger team to a roadside bomb. Next, he is selected for a special assignment to eliminate a Taliban fighter. Although the mission is aborted, David witnesses a horrendous act that leaves him devastated. As his deployment continues, he must perform acts that overwhelm him and leave his faith shaken. David returns after his year, a different man. He can't face Lindsey and his life spirals out of control. Lindsey is no stranger to PTSD. Her father also suffers from the disorder and turns to alcohol to dull the pain. David's life and their love hangs in the balance.

Mr. Manchester handles this difficult subject with great compassion. He brings to life the hardships that are suffered by our returning servicemen. His characters have depth and the story is compelling. It is not only a novel, it helps to inform the reader of the difficulties experienced and the silent life and death struggle that goes on every day around us.

I highly recommend this book. It is not only a superb story but a terrific way to educate you on the amazing toll that answering the call of duty demands of our young men and women.

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### **Victoria Brinius says**

There are only a few authors that I stop what I am reading and read immediately. That means a lot coming from me, because I read more than one book at a time. With that being said, Stephen King is one and so is this author Steven Manchester. I have read three of his other books and am EAGERLY awaiting until I get my hands on the rest. There are so many things about this book that I do not know where to start. The plot is heart felt and relates to a lot of people. Who doesn't have a loved one overseas? The love story is long distance and not based on physical attraction like so many other books out there today. Instead it is about a mutual love and camaraderie that bond these two people together through thick and thin. This is also a drama as well. The drama and loss of war is a huge part of this book. The author doesn't hold back and I cried at the cost of war.

However that is not my favorite part of the book. My favorite part is that the author tells it how it is and he is spreading awareness for combat related PTSD. We have so many soldiers that give their lives for our freedom.

Between the romance and war there is a great lighthouse "scene", a father looking for redemption and family ready to move forward.

I had a question about the end of the book, about a who character's family was. Te author answered my question! That made the book all the more interesting to me. I am giving this book a 5/5 (really want to do a 6/5, but amazon only goes up to 5/5). I was given a copy to review from the author and The Story Plant, however all opinions are my own.

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### **Elaine says**

If this book were to be made into a movie, it would be shot in soft focus and shown on the Hallmark TV Channel. I have to say, I really struggled to find anything I liked about it.

The day before David is due to fly out on a 12 month tour of duty in Afghanistan he meets Lindsey and they



share a magic time under the stars, talking the night away and separate vowing to keep in touch with each other over the next year. They do this via telephone, email and skype and during David's time in Afghanistan build a very close connection and eventually realise they are in love. Lindsey is the daughter of a Gulf War veteran, Denis, a PTSD sufferer and when she vows to David that she will always be there for him, no matter what, she should really have had some inkling of what to expect when he returned home, and been ready to stand by her words.

I didn't like the way the story unfolded when David returned. I would have liked to have seen him at least attempt to try and fit in with civilian life, but he seemed to be suffering from PTSD the second he stepped off the plane, as shown by his refusal to even see Lindsey on his return. For her part, when he tells her he isn't ready to see her, Lindsey stays away from him, not trying to help him at all really.

As time goes on, David finds solace in alcohol and following a drinking binge is involved in a horrific car accident which leaves him at death's door in hospital. The whole family and Lindsey are gathered around him and told that he is on the verge of death. The priest comes to give him his last rites and utters words to the effect that he has never seen anyone so loved. Really? Anyway, I digress, but bear in mind his horrific accident and the fact that he was expected to die at any moment, when he does survive and comes around – the day after he is standing up and the next thing we see is him walking into the courthouse for his trial – with seemingly no long standing injuries whatsoever. What I did find disturbing is that he did not even lose his driving licence for crashing a car whilst steaming drunk!

Things happen that don't really have any relevance to the plot – all of a sudden Lindsey's ex boyfriend Joe turns up trying to woo her back – we had never heard from him before and never heard from him again anyway. Then her boss, Walter, tries to woo her, again without success, but I couldn't understand why Lindsey would carry on working with him after that.

I really got quite irritated reading the book, especially as the author constantly seemed to attempt to further explain the character's thoughts and feelings, like the voiceovers you used to get at the end of the Waltons – way too much telling and not enough showing. I quite often felt that I was being educated and not entertained. Just not a good read at all. Thanks to the publishers for the review copy.

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## **Yvonne says**

It's the night before he is scheduled to go to war when David McClain meets a beautiful woman named Lindsey Wood. At his going away party, they spend the whole evening together, alone, getting to know each other. Their attraction clicked immediately and, even though he was leaving the country the next day, they vowed to continue their relationship.

David and Lindsey keep close contact through letters, e-mail and they are even able to Skype with each other. Their love continues to grow stronger with each passing day.

Then, after David's service comes to an end, he returns home. However, things are not the same. Their love is still there, but the war has changed David. There are things he had gone through that a civilian couldn't understand. He tries to handle it on his own, but it's not long before he realizes that he's suffering from PTSD and needs help. Lindsey wants that help to be her, but he doesn't want to drag her into his tormented world.

I thought I might be bothered that David and Lindsey seemed to fall in love so fast, but it worked. The relationship is written in a way that makes sense and feels natural. Their story is poignant and heartwrenching.

This story brings you directly onto the battlefield, as well as, what a soldier grows through upon returning home. It's an emotional read with realistic characters. There are so many aspects to this story – romance, dealing with the war before and after, abuse, PTSD – it will tear your heart out. Gooseberry Island is beautifully written and draws out all your emotions. It makes you cry and there are times you will even smile. Steven Manchester knows how to touch his readers' hearts.

FTC Disclosure: The author and NetGalley provided me with a copy of this book to review. This did not influence my thoughts and opinions in any way. All opinions expressed are my own.

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## **Katie says**

This is my third Steven Manchester emotional experience and I must say that if you love emotion and values and intense situations, you must pick up a book from Mr Manchester. Each book has been extremely different and Gooseberry Island had distressing in scenes and something that everybody should read in order to learn more about how our soldiers hurt not just in the field of battle, but the suffering that continues on their return to us. My father is a veteran and Gooseberry Island gave me an understanding that I never realised I needed. The ordeals my father went through with Veteran's Affairs was a long battle and fortunately in the end he won. But still today, my Dad has not fully returned, parts of his mind and soul are still over in Vietnam somewhere, lost.

David McClain has been dating Allison for two weeks and they've been on four dates now. He wants to get to know her deeply before departing for Afghanistan, but Allison is only interested in fun. When he spoke with an old sea captain, the old guy gave him some great advice. He needs to stop looking for a woman, he has to make his own luck and to make a wish thanking the universe in advance while voicing it out to sea. David thought this was strange, but Captain Eli has never steered him wrong before.

“Thank you for bringing me the girl of my dreams.”

Funnily enough while jogging a few minutes more, Lindsey Woods was walking along the same beach. There was a connection that felt as old as time and the pair couldn't stop looking into each other's eyes.

Now Lindsey isn't an innocent in the field of returned servicemen. Her father was an Infantryman in the Gulf War and when he returned, he wasn't the same man. Lindsey had to live and support her father ever since and it hasn't been easy.

When David told Lindsey he was being deployed the next day, she was surprised, disappointed with their bad timing, but knew she had to keep in touch with David and await his return. They shared a magical night on the beach the night before he left and promised to write during the 12 months he will be gone.

David trained with the Army to become an Airborne Ranger; this was his first tour of duty, excited and eager

to get to work were his first feelings when arriving. They soon turned to sleepless nights, nightmares and heartache. David and Lindsey kept in contact, but soon David started to pull away when the darkness invaded.

When David returns home, it isn't as exciting as he thought it would be. He's still suffering from his experience and has withdrawn from everyone including Lindsey. Lindsey tried with all her might to bring David into the light, but David is too lost and broken.

Can the two soul mates overcome David's trauma and live happily ever after? Will David seek help before it's too late? Can he let go of some of his guilt in order to heal? What are David's plans if he leaves the Rangers?

Follow David through his life's journey of self-discovery, during his deployment and what happens upon his return. Gooseberry Island allows its readers the insight into the lives of returned servicemen and the rigmarole they have to face every day. This is another terrific read by Mr Manchester.

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## **Wanda says**

I've said it before – Steven Manchester has a very definite style of his own. His books all display beautiful descriptive writing, poignancy, and include an inspirational message, and this one will simply warm your heart.

Gooseberry Island is the story of a love between Lindsey Wood and David McClain. It is a love that will make you smile and feel good for a short time, but eventually turns to sadness and heartache. It is a deeply moving story that has themes of love, joy, tears, and forgiveness.

And the story unfolds from beginning to end with ease and at a moderate pace. It toggles between two relationships – David and Lindsey, and Lindsey and her father.

The relationship between David and Lindsey felt real from the beginning, and I especially liked the mutual respect they had for each other. It was as though they had known each other their entire lives instead of just one evening together. David is portrayed as a victim of PTSD, and he is searching to find peace again. As a result of his service in Afghanistan, where he spent 12 long months, his anxiety level becomes so severe that he has problems functioning at a normal level. David's mind is riddled with guilt and he is not in control of his life.

Lindsey's father, Denis Wood, had been an infantryman in the first Gulf War, so Lindsey had the utmost respect for men and women in uniform. Denis Wood was a decorated Operation Desert Storm veteran, but lived in a state of uncontrolled emotions since his return home.

I highly recommend Gooseberry Island, a moving story from an author who never disappoints. My rating is 5 stars.

I received a complimentary copy of this book from the Author and publisher, through NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.

