



## John Dollar

*Marianne Wiggins*

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## **John Dollar** Marianne Wiggins

Charlotte Lewes, a young Briton newly widowed by the Great War, departs for colonial Burma in 1917 to escape the ruins of her life. As a schoolteacher in Rangoon she is rejuvenated by the sensuous Oriental climate, and she meets John Dollar, a sailor who becomes her passionate love and whose ill-fated destiny inextricably binds her to him. On a festive seafaring expedition, the tightly knit British community confronts disaster in the shape of an earthquake and ensuing tidal wave. Swept overboard, Charlotte, John Dollar, and eight young girls who are Charlotte's pupils awake on a remote island beach. As they struggle to stay alive, their dependence on John overwhelms him, and an atmosphere of menace and doom builds, culminating in shocking and riveting scenes of both death and survival.

## **John Dollar Details**

Date : Published December 1st 1999 by Simon & Schuster (first published 1989)

ISBN : 9780671039554

Author : Marianne Wiggins

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## From Reader Review John Dollar for online ebook

### Nancy says

Another book I'm not going to finish. I know a lot of maybe interesting things are going to happen, but John Dollar, I'm not that into you.

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### Alex says

I was just reminded that this is apparently Lord of the Flies with girls, and totally gross and disturbing. That sounds fun!

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### Lisa says

1. I only read this because Marianne Wiggins was Salman Rushdie's wife. I don't know or care if she still is.
2. This book is completely derivative and has not one original thought.
3. They eat John Dollar.

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### Nate Hendrix says

People shipwrecked on an island that then eat each other. I only made it about 50 pages in and gave up. I liked the idea, but way to slow and not that great.

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### Selena says

This book was just not for me.

'John Dollar' was written plainly to shock the reader and demand our understanding of the primitive human nature.

The writing was complex, confusing, and elusive. Who is this widow named Charlotte that we read about at the beginning? What is so special about her that we need to spend 2/3 of the book following her treck across the ocean to tudor eight little girls? From the beginning I knew I was in for a tough read when I can make no connection to Charlotte whatsoever.

And then the author takes us around to the lives of eight little girls, all different, if not a bit strange. And when the girls and Charlotte finally come together with Captain John Dollar, all the pieces have fallen together for complete disaster.

When their ship goes down, the girls along with John Dollar wash up ashore an uninhabited island. With no

means of food or fresh water, the girls battle it out against savage mother nature while attempting to tend to John's wounds. But we all know it only lasts so long before something snaps and self preservation, as is human nature, takes over. And when that happens, some of these sweet little girls just aren't so sweet after all.

Read this if you must but be warned: You're in for a rough ride.

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### **Audra (Unabridged Chick) says**

To say this was a disappointing book doesn't even come close to articulating the real heartbreak I felt finishing it. Painted as a female answer to Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, John Dollar describes the days after eight girls, one woman, and one man are washed ashore on a deserted island off Burma.

Writing this review was more challenging than I expected, and I decided to do some quick searching for other thoughts on this novel to see if I was missing some subtle but crucial element. What I discovered quickly is that the release of John Dollar was almost completely overshadowed by a more momentous literary story: the call for death of Wiggins' then-husband, Salman Rushdie.

In some ways, I feel like this book is constantly being overshadowed by something more momentous. Wiggins herself seems to be unsure if she is writing an homage to *Lord of the Flies* or an entirely inventive examination of human nature. (In an interview, Wiggins admits that the landscape she visualized while writing was actually the same scenery from the 1963 film version.)

Almost two-thirds of the book is spent setting us up for the coming Shock and Awe. Charlotte, the schoolteacher, is properly liberal and free-thinking enough to gain our sympathy; the various children represent all the stock characters needed for an examination of colonial life: the zealot, the symbiotic twins, the indigenous servant. John Dollar, the itinerant ship captain, is strapping and handsome. The characters cheerfully recall Robinson Crusoe and Kipling; we the reader are constantly bombarded with hints that the Fall is coming.

Using a technique that seems more clever than helpful, Wiggins peppers the margins with text from other books and strange subheadings. I found it distracted from an already fractured story. When the Horrific and Shocking events occur, the scenes are so veiled and oblique that they are hard to realize; the oomph never really appears.

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### **Glenn Sumi says**

Comments on my "re-read" review of *Lord Of The Flies* reminded me I had read this fascinating novel, often considered LOTF with girls instead of boys.

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### **Mary says**

Sweet toasted Jesus, this book is violent. It was recommended to me as "*Lord of the Flies*, but with a bunch of Victorian schoolgirls in Rangoon." Apparently, Wiggins read Golding's book on a plane and thought, "It

would never happen that way with girls."

I think her next thought must have been, "It would be WAY worse, and with more cannibalism and torture and rape." *John Dollar* is probably the most macabre work of literature I've ever set my hands on. It takes Golding's basic plot and turns it inside out, then spirals off in ten different directions, all of them impossibly terrifying. Not for the faint of heart. I read it with the idea of possibly adding it to my tenth-grade curriculum, which already includes *Lord of the Flies*. But no. I can't teach this thing. I'm already spending enough of my own money on classroom supplies without having to buy a class set of barf bags.

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### **Calley says**

*Lord of the Flies* just got its period. Wow. This book will shake you up. It manages to be both the biography of a wayward feminist traveller, a study in adolescent dynamics, a scathing commentary on colonialism, and a nauseating thriller all rolled into one. HOW DOES SHE DO IT, you're wondering. Well, read this book. Then, reread it.

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### **Orla Hegarty says**

I am grateful that one of my GR friends had this book mentioned on their re-read of *Lord of the Flies*. I had never heard of it.

I read *LOTF* in high school (almost 4 decades ago) and it was torture. The violence. The endless classtime we spent analyzing the flowerful and unreachable (to me) language. I had no interest in re-reading that particular adolescent high school english class torture.

But this book. THIS BOOK.

I found myself laughing quite a bit in the clever way Ms. Wiggins drew the largish cast of English colonial characters in the first half of the book. This character development allowed the dark twist of the storyline to have a 'show don't tell' feel throughout the devastating shipwrecks that occur and the depths the mostly child survivors dove into for survival.

However, some of it \*is told\* and it is horrific and perhaps that is why it is compared to *LOTF* so often in these reviews. But the characters and group dynamics are so much more complex and believable than I remember in *LOTF*.

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### **ToniS says**

Crazy book. Amazing language. Horrifying story. I read it years and years ago and I still think about it sometimes. Like everyone says, it's sort of a female version of "Lord of the Flies," but you can really get lost in thinking about what it means in a post-feminist movement world.

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## **Steve says**

Boring. Contrived. Un-original. Un-realistic. Un-readable (unless you're stuck on a plane and this was your only book, d-oh!)

Genuinely amazed there are any positive reviews on this site, although now that I've discovered the author is married to Salmon Rushdie I have to assume her fans were largely spillovers?

At anytime on any page I could have closed this book and never again reflected upon it nor was my life made any richer for having completed it.

It's billed as a 'female' Lord of the Flys but frankly that's insulting to women.

According to the author women/girls will utterly surrender in the face of danger or crisis. Cowardly and incapable these young females utterly capitulate in the face of every disaster and challenge they face.

There is no inherent 'survival' instinct in them as there are in their fellow humans. Nope - according to the author females are only capable of social conflict and pettiness whilst sitting around expecting to be rescued (or murdered).

Courage, fortitude and capability are not traits possessed by women if the authors account of this manufactured tragedy is to be believed. Instead we can expect any and all women who find themselves in physical crisis to just cry a lot and.... well..... yeah, just cry a lot and have complete mental breakdowns.

The 'horrific' scenes are forced and were included only for shock value in order to BE horrific - as if she and some friends sat around and said "what would be really freaky" kinda stuff to help the book make a name for itself.

Worst part is that in order to arrive at these oft-promised horrors the reader must slog thru 80% (!) of a story about colonial life in 1920's Burma (Myanmar)for British ex-pats. To quote another ex-pat lost in the jungles of wherever "the Horror!"

Indeed, the only thing truly 'horrific' is the fact readers must slog thru page after page of irrelevant, mindless musings of unremarkable characters in order to get to the banal, manufactured in advance 'horror' scenes at the end of the story.

Don't make the mistake I did and assume there must be 'something' to this book to garner all the good reviews - there ISN'T.

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## **Gerald Camp says**

Wiggins reportedly asked herself, upon reading "Lord of the Flies," what would a group of girls had done? This book is her answer. Girls aren't any more sweet than boys when left without adults, it seems.

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### **Melissa says**

Amidst the news about an upcoming exciting, not at all derivative or formulaic remake of *Lord of the Flies* movie but WITH GIRLS, astute librarians tasked with finding *LotF* books but WITH GIRLS for the literary set provided this title (as well as Libba Bray's *Beauty Queens*, which is queued somewhere in my endless line of to-be-listened to titles since I've decided that I don't have nearly enough physical books to read). Is this truly the *Lord of the Flies* but WITH GIRLS book of your dreams? The answer is sort of. Unfortunately, *John Dollar* seems like it wants to be a few different books, a scheme that usually doesn't end well because none of the things it wants to be are done as effectively as they should be. There's a confusing prologue that isn't really cleared up in retrospect, a lot of backstory about a character who isn't even the latter half of the book, some terrifying bits about colonialism that I don't necessarily think Wiggins intended to be as scary as the *LotFbWG* bits but here we are, and then everything segues rather abruptly into stranded on the island mayhem. The writing is lovely but maddeningly vague (for example, although I read enough to know that it was a bad scene, I remain unsure as to who exactly did what to those turtles) and a few dozen pages of confusing island times left me unable to justify why those girls did what they did (view spoiler). I guess I just like to revel in my gross denouements a little longer, you know? That's got to be one of the reasons that one reads *Lord of the Flies* but WITH GIRLS, or at least this one.

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### **Nitya says**

This book is intense! The setting is Burma, just after WWI. A young British widow, Charlotte has gone to Burma to teach the children of wealthy British colonials. On a weekend jaunt to a nearby island with parents, children, and her lover, John Dollar, a nightmare unfolds, an earthquake followed by a tsunami that leaves only the children, young girls all, alive. At first anyway.

The happenings on the island are foreshadowed in the beginning of the book, as Charlotte's dead body travels by mule, escorted by one of the girls, now an old woman. After finishing the book, I went back and reread the first part just to see exactly what the author had foretold.

I loved the bit of Charlotte I got to know. She was a woman ahead of her time, living alone, moving among the Burmese people, watching and studying them- a minority of one. She is solitary, isolated from the British upper class, although she does mingle with them, mostly because of her affiliation with their children.

She meets John Dollar after a morning swim with dolphins, (riding on one's back) which is described beautifully. He is a sailor, an intelligent and interesting man, and he and Charlotte defy convention with their intensely sexual love affair.

The little girls' characters really take over the book after the tsunami. I loved being inside their heads, getting to know each of them. I wanted more, wanted to know and hear more about these people, about John Dollar and Charlotte. That is my only complaint or critique of the book, it moved too quickly and I wanted more glimpses into the souls of these wonderful people whom Marianne Wiggins gave us.

The book is only 214 pages long, and I'd have liked more.

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