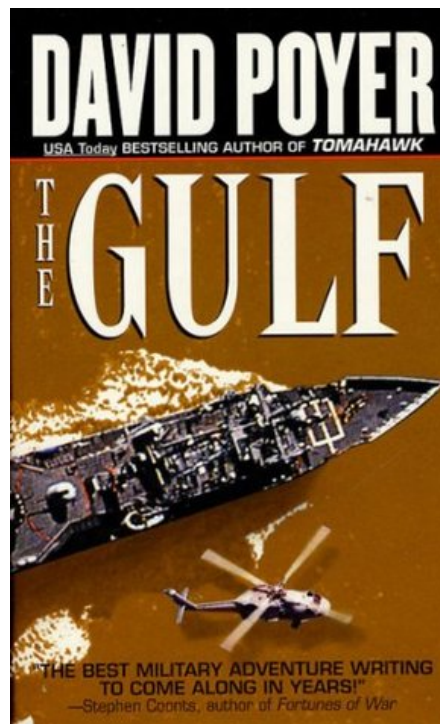




The Gulf

David Poyer

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Aboard the guided-missile frigate U.S.. Turner Van Zandt, Lieutenant Dan Lenson and his dedicated crew take on daring assignment; escort a convoy of supertankers through the mine-filled gulf.

For Lenson and his men, however, the danger is only just beginning. When a missile from hit-and-run enemy sinks a U.S. destroyer, every ship and aircraft in the area goes on red alert.

As all hands prepare for the inevitable showdown with a hostile Middle Eastern nation, Benjamin Shaker, the destroyer's hair-trigger captain, plots his own secret form of revenge. If he isn't stopped, it will soon mean disaster for the entire Gulf region--and maybe the world.

The Gulf Details

Date : Published July 9th 2013 by St. Martin's Paperbacks (first published September 1st 1990)

ISBN :

Author : David Poyer

Format : Kindle Edition 463 pages

Genre : Fiction, War, Military Fiction, Thriller

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From Reader Review The Gulf for online ebook

Varrick Nunez says

I was in submarines, never in the surface fleet, but the story rings true on all the significant points. The evidence handling for urinalysis testing was depicted incorrectly, no big deal for the story.

Also, I can't imagine that any ship would accept a transient duty servicemember so casually, so Phelan's character is implausible. When we had a guy miss movement from Fremantle, Australia, it was handled by the Aussie police. It's kind of a big deal. The Pakistani police would have run Phelan down quickly, the proverbial sore thumb. But liked the redemptive story line and accept the author taking a bit of artistic license there.

Paul says

I love these novels. Why hasn't anyone written the USAF equivalent?

George says

Again a very dissatisfying ending...way too many loose ends

Jim says

Much better than the first in the series. Hope the upward trend continues.

Larry says

The second of the Dan Lenson series (now up to fourteen books), carries the strengths and weaknesses of the first book ("The Mediterranean"). The strengths include a clear depiction of day-to-day operations on US naval vessels, in this case a frigate, and a fairly clear depiction of the US navy's role in the Persian Gulf toward the end of the Iran-Iraq War. The central character, a LCDR named Dan Lenson, is XO to a captain whose prior ship was sunk by an Iranian cruise missile, and who is determined to place the "USN Turner Van Zandt" on a war footing, even though it is involved in something of a shadow war. As XO, it is Lenson's duty to carry out the will of the captain, whatever his personal doubts about the wisdom of it. It is fairly clear that the captain, Benjamin SHaker, will use the Van Zandt to avenge the loss of his earlier ship (though it's not quite that starkly obvious, even to him).

There are a set of secondary stories: one about a navy senior chief on a minesweeper, another about two officers attached to the helicopter detachment on the Van Zandt, another about a petty officer who is a drug user/dealer, and yet another about a senatorial aide on an information-seeking mission about naval policy in the gulf. (The aide is a tough woman who asks tough questions of both navy leadership and the Saudis, and who also serves as Lenson's future love interest.) The secondary stories are not without interest, but they take

the focus away from the Van Zandt's central story arc, and they're a lot to juggle. Later books in the series solved the issue by focusing on the naval part of the story.

Viewed as a whole, the series is the best saga written about the post-World War Navy. Viewed individually, there are weaknesses, though Lenson develops as a character over time (as in real life, I guess).

David says

Read multiple times

A. Bowdoin Van Riper says

The Gulf tries to be at least three different things: 1) A naval procedural about life on frigates and minesweepers -- the vital, unglamorous "small ships" of modern naval warfare ; 2) A sprawling, multi-stranded chronicle U. S. naval operations in the Persian Gulf during the closing years of the Iran-Iraq War; 3) A chapter in the ongoing chronicle of the career of U. S. Navy officer Dan Lenson. It is, in short, hugely ambitious. It would take a superb writer – a C. S. Forester or a Patrick O'Brian – to integrate the three stories successfully, and David Poyer is merely a competent one.

The naval procedural – centered on the frigate *Turner Van Zandt* and the minesweeper *Audacity* – is, by far, the most successful of the three stories. Poyer uses his own experience as a surface-warfare officer to good effect, bringing to life the rhythms of shipboard routine and the complex web of relationships that binds the crew. He captures the feel of the Persian Gulf equally vividly: the smothering heat, the grittiness of blown sand, and the unnatural warmth of the water. The drama built around the larger naval campaign is intermittently effective: gripping in the small moments of confrontation, but unconvincing in the big set-piece battles, which too often seem dictated by the demands of the plot rather than by any real-world strategy.

Lenson's story, by a wide margin, works least-well and least-often. Part of the problem is Lenson himself: a hero too blandly two-dimensional to engage the reader or generate sympathy or interest. Clearly meant to be a Horatio Hornblower or Richard Bolitho for the 20th century, he lacks both their verve and their vulnerability. The book's least convincing (and least necessary) subplot, involving the captain of the *Van Zandt* and his thirst for revenge against the Iranians, seems shoehorned into the story in order to provide Lenson with a career-defining crisis in the midst of a story that wouldn't otherwise provide one. Later in the story, for the sake of giving Lenson a love interest, Poyer transforms the book's only significant female character – Congressional staffer Blair Titus – from a tough, competent professional woman on a mission to a simpering girlfriend anxious about Her Man's safety in battle.

Poyer, to be fair, faces a significant challenge in writing his tales of the modern U. S. Navy: the lack of a full-blown war to provide life-or-death challenges for his hero. C. S. Forester and Patrick O'Brian had the wars against Napoleon, Douglas Reeman had World War II, and Stephen Coonts (*Flight of the Intruder* and *The Intruders*) had Vietnam. Poyer is forced to make do with the "little wars" and politically constrained interventions of the eighties and nineties. It's not an insurmountable problem, but – in *The Gulf* at least – Poyer still hasn't figured out how to solve it.

Eric_W says

The Van Zandt is a naval frigate on convoy duty in the Persian Gulf at a time when the Iranian War is in full swing. The new captain, Ben Shaker, is determined to avoid a repeat of the loss of his earlier command, a destroyer that was sunk by an Iranian missile. Men had died because they were wearing the new, sharp-looking polyester clothes that melted onto the skin during fire fighting, and had their feet horribly burned because they had abandoned the standard leather shoes for the more flammable cordovan that held a shine better.

Dan Lenson, a character from an earlier novel (*The Circle*) and maybe the unluckiest officer in the Navy, having survived an Arctic sinking and the attendant inquiry, is the XO on the Van Zandt. Shaker is out for revenge, and that leads to a confrontation between Lenson and Shaker as the ship becomes a pawn in U.S. gunboat diplomacy.

Interestingly, readers at Amazon.com validated my observation that if you like Tom Clancy, you will not like Poyer. Clancy is much more escapist, whereas Poyer attempts to realistically portray what it is like working on a naval vessel during the late 20th century. Poyer is a former naval officer, and the books reflect that. A scene describing the fire-fighting efforts after a ship has been hit by a missile was horrifyingly realistic. Clancy hasn't delivered since *The Hunt for Red October*, which was great, and he's become a mere shill for the high-technology, can't-do-anything-wrong-superman military. As one reader noted: "Clancy is escapism. Poyer is life."

Another character is Blair, an investigator for Senator Talmadge on the House Armed Services Committee. She's in the Middle East on a fact-finding tour, trying to decide if the billions being spent on the Navy are being appropriated for the right kind of equipment. The major threat to the shipping lanes is coming from small torpedo/gunboats that don't even show up on radar, and can scurry back to safe ports in Iran or Iraq. As a result of their harassment, insurance rates are escalating for tankers going through the Straits of Hormuz, and the Navy seems unable to do much about it. There are also rumors of a small submarine that is unaccounted for. It was purchased by Iran from Germany, but can't be found where it should be, and sonar does not work well in the shallow waters of the Gulf.

Then there is the human element. The captain of the Van Zandt has his own grudges, one of the corpsmen is handing out drugs to make friends and feed his own addiction, and the helicopter pilots have personal problems of their own. Despite his loyalty to the captain, when Lenson discovers the captain and the gunnery officer attempting to override the safety mechanisms and fire off a nuclear missile at Iran following the destruction of the ship's helicopter by an Iranian gunboat, he aborts their efforts. That leads to an investigation and a suicidal retaliatory raid on a hidden Iranian port by the Van Zandt and another American destroyer.

Pure escapist fiction, but it's hard to knock nautical realism.

Mark Luongo says

An FFG Story

Didn't disappoint as it brought back many memories of serving aboard a PERRY class frigate. I remember all the changes that took place on board after the U.S.S. Stark was hit in 1987. The author talks about that. The acronyms drive me nuts, but I'm just out of practice I guess. I found the ending a bit abrupt but I suppose I wanted a good story to go on.

Daelith says

Quit at page 161.

Fredrick Danysh says

Set in the Persian Gulf, this tells a story of the navy at war and the people who man our military ships. The action is centered on the crew of the USS Turner Van Zandt.
