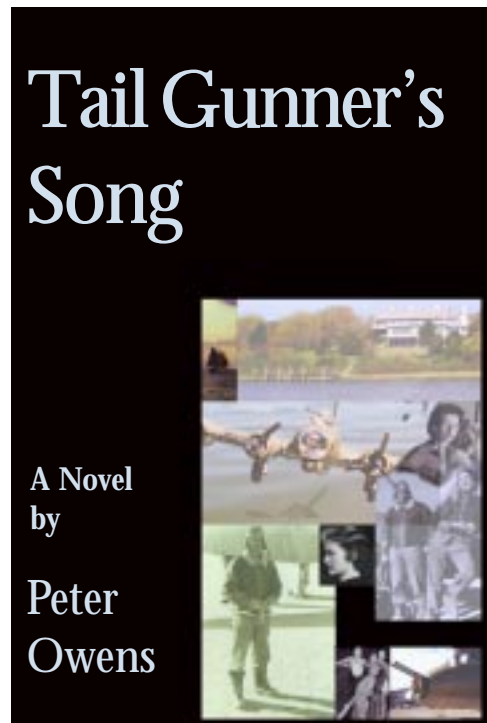


Tail Gunner's Song, a novel

by Peter Owens, a presentation and synopsis

494 pages, 143,000 words



Based upon a true story, *Tail Gunner's Song* is about two talented musicians who grow up in the roaring twenties and depression trying to discover the meaning of bravery, sexuality, romance, love, loyalty, and unspeakable fear as World War II eventually sucks them into its lethal vortex.

It is about young women stumbling into a national upheaval in feminine identity that has been

shredded by two wars and the unraveling of Victorian virtue.

Caught in erotic entanglements rushed by events, the characters of *Tail Gunner's Song* lurch into our modern age desperate to discover who they are as the world's most horrifying war swoops over them before they are fully formed. Fighting for their lives in the air and for love on the ground, Johnny and Angel wrestle with their demons, passions, and fears. They are boys—innocent, rambunctious, adventuresome, and magnetic—but their women and their country demand that they be men. *Tail Gunner's Song* is their story, their collision with life, its failures, frustrations, hungers, hilarities, and punishing dangers.

We begin with a glimpse of their final flight as their damaged B-17 heavy bomber limps into a furious thunderhead over the mountains of New Guinea on their final flight before being shipped home. Seasoned warriors of eighty-three missions blessed by luck and growing skill, tail gunner Johnny and Angel his pilot must face their moment of truth. Battered by the vicious storm and shredded by enemy fire, their luck runs out, and they are exposed utterly to all that they have ever been—their character, friendship, judgment, and bravery, frozen in the face of death.

So who are they, and what will they do? What propels people in the face of war and death?

Continued on next page

Reviews of Rips

Peter Owens' first novel

"Rips... a wonderful read... packed with adventure, romance and stunning depictions of nature." — Boston Globe book columnist Katherine A. Powers, writing for Delta Airline's Sky Magazine

"A rip-snorting read! I was well hooked. The history was fascinating, as was the constant sense of menace. Great characters, furious pace."

—Award-winning British writer Graham Joyce, author of ten novels

"Rips is a great historical novel full of action, adventure, romance and memorable characters.

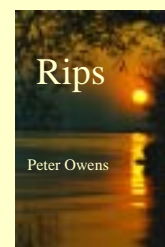
Ripping through this dark but ultimately uplifting story is the mighty St. Lawrence River, which acts as a metaphor of the history of the North American experience, where the themes are

identity, exuberance and survival... I highly recommend this book." — Ernest Hebert, author of *The Old American*, *The Dogs of March* and five other novels.

"With the river and sudden turns of war sweeping along its compelling and culturally diverse characters, the adventure story is a ripping good yarn set against the authentic backdrop of regional history... the river itself a vital and imposing character in the unfolding tale, not unlike Mark Twain's *Mississippi River*."

— John Golden, *Watertown Daily Times*

"More than a history lesson, it's filled with believable characters, carefully crafted drama, and intriguing insights into North America's past..." — Todd Moe, *North Country Public Radio*



About Tail Gunner's Song... continued

We segue to Johnny at five falling from a giant maple tree in his backyard while playing war games with his older brother—Johnny's first encounter with the requirements of courage. Stitched up without Novocaine by a country doctor, Johnny howls, sobs, faints, and wakes up giggling to the arrival of Angel, playing his piccolo to their trademark song, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home."

We meet Johnny's stern, forbiddingly macho father who craves that Johnny become a warrior hunter but fears he may be a sissy. We meet his mom, devoutly Catholic, eager to nourish Johnny's passion for music, his deeper sensibility and goodness. Johnny and Angel—inseparable buddies—tangle with bigots who sneer at Angel, the "wop," and Johnny, the shrimpy little rich boy, whose dad owns the stone quarry and controls the livelihoods of the men in their village. They fly together in Angel's dad's biplane, narrowly surviving an engine fire during which Johnny discovers the paralysis of fear and Angel an uncommon defiance of danger.

When Johnny travels to Cape Cod for summer vacation with mom, we meet Evy, a cleverly comic coquette who teaches Johnny, barely twelve, the wicked joys of sex and conspires with him to fool his priests about his hilariously rampant sins. She is his first love, his introduction to his wondrously carnal demons.

A few years later during a college summer on Cape Cod, we meet Alma, nearly a head taller than Johnny, wildly sexy yet suffering from a deep longing to be beautiful, which she is not. She wins Johnny with her body and scolds him for never loving her. Johnny is small, always the "squirt" whose magnetic innocence attracts the girls and ignites a rivalry with Angel, now tall, handsome, charming, roguish—their friendship forged in music and boyhood adventure.

With a piano mounted on the deck of their oyster sharpie sailboat, they serenade Cape Cod mansion girls while bumping clam rakes with rough, depression-era shell fishermen who are scornful of these college boys invading their shoreline, their taverns and hometown girls. For Johnny and Angel life is a reckless search for joy punctuated by stumbles, sudden discoveries, beautiful music, and conflicted, bumbling love. Beneath their common exuberance, however, Johnny suffers from fits of doubt, while Angel cultivates a pilot's bravado that always seems to serve them well.

At a pool table in Mad Jack's Tavern, a fisherman's haunt, Peggy from the local shacks seduces Angel with her sultry moves and searing wise-ass candor. Beneath her raw gum-snapping veneer lurks an elegant diamond in the rough. When her sullen ex-boyfriend beats her to a pulp and dashes her dream for a stylish life, Angel turns his affections to Alma, Johnny's lover whom he cannot really love with his heart.

Johnny can't let Alma go even though he discovers Liney—sweet, innocent, pretty, and warm, who breaks out in hives at the thought of sex with Johnny, yet she offers him the intimacy he craves Johnny wants both Alma's lust and Liney's gentle caring. The friendship between Johnny and Angel is nearly shattered by jealousy, salvaged only by shared self-deprecating amusement at their own ungovernable needs.

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More reviews of Rips...

"With wisdom and compassion his muscular prose leads us through myriad complex adventures.... Rips is a deeply affecting and exciting novel. I look forward to seeing other books by this talented author."

—California Writer Shirley Stuart whose fiction has appeared in the Kenyon Review.

"Rips is an immediate go, the characters solid, the narrative skillful and forward-moving.... The book is not only a ripping good story with compelling characters but also a splendid insight into the America that we don't know so well.... a vivid image of the great St. Lawrence River that is truly unknown to most Americans, and it does so with a strong feeling for the natural world that is in the tradition of the best writing in Fenimore Cooper." —William Barker, English Professor Emeritus, Fitchburg State College

"The characters are so real and vivid. Owens has wonderfully captured the earthy nuances of life in the time they lived.... the writing is beyond comparison — really first-rate and compelling. I couldn't put it down!"

—Theresa Barbo, President of the Cape Cod Maritime History Association and author of Murder Hill

Peter Owens is an award-winning...

- Journalist
- Software author
- Web publisher
- Professor (UMass Dartmouth)
- Fiction Writer

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About Tail Gunner's Song... continued

Even after they ship out to the Pacific war, their longings trail them. Angel falls madly in love with the voluptuous Maxeen, a doomed Australian war widow, and Johnny accuses Liney of tossing him away for a British fighter pilot she meets in a Nottingham hospital where she is shipped to tend wounded allied troops. Liney responds with stunning truths that shock Johnny into a renewed and regretful love. Johnny and Angel gather local girls from a military bakery near their base in Australia and stage a raucous cabaret, the war raging, the danger of their missions building to a fever pitch over two harrowing years. To the end they play, yet yearn for life and love.

Tail Gunner's Song is based upon the true story of the last B-17 heavy bomber to be lost in combat during the Pacific War, just before shipping home to safety. Only one of them makes it home alive. It is a story about their vitality and imperfect formation as young men, about Johnny's life-long bout with crippling fear, assuaged only by the music he plays on his piccolo, trapped in the lethal bubble of his tail gunner's canopy.

It is a story about an enormously rich friendship shaped by music, fun, fear, danger, and the clumsy intimacy of men struggling to understand themselves. They charge through life armed with the brave face of bravado and a baffling crowd of personal demons. And in the face of death, they become who they always were, one fated to death and the other to survive, their lives cemented in loyalty and trust.

I offer *Tail Gunner's Song* for your consideration.

About Peter Owens

Current position

Professor, [English Department and M.A. In Professional Writing Program, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth](#), 1982-present.

Education

- Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in writing, [Harvard University](#), Cambridge, MA, March, 1982.
- Master of Education (Ed.M.) in writing, [Harvard University](#), June, 1980.
- Bachelor of Arts (honors) in English, [Wesleyan University](#), Middletown, CT, June, 1968.

Publications

Man-made Disasters: Oil and Chemical Spills, Lucent Books, Thomson Gale Publishers, 2003

Rips, an historical novel, 306 pages, [America House](#), 2000. Boston Globe book columnist Katherine A. Powers, writing for Delta Airline's Sky Magazine: "Rips, by Peter Owens, a wonderful read it is, too. Set on the St. Lawrence River during the French and Indian War, it has an authentic historical feel and is packed with adventure, romance and stunning depictions of nature."

"Rumblings," literary essay in the book [Living North Country: Essays on Life and Landscapes in Northern New York](#), North Country Books, 2001, edited by Neal Burdick and Natalia Singer, St. Lawrence University.

"Super Thinkers Peetnik Mysteries" produced by Fablevision, Inc. [www.fablevision.com](#) for Verizon.com, interactive educational mystery stories, 2002, story consultant, forthcoming.

"The Crash of the High Looping Curveball," literary essay, [Bay Forest Publishing](#), On-Line Reader, June 2000.

KidNews, award-winning World Wide Web, Internet writing service for students and kids around the world. Includes stories and features by over 10,000 authors from around the world. Discussion forums in journalism for students and teachers. Launched February 10, 1995 from UMass Dartmouth, moved to current location Jan. 5, 1995. Acquired by Elaine Floyd of Newsletter Resources, Oct. 19, 1999. Currently I am Editorial Consultant for KidNews.

Kids on the Net, British Web site for kids, teachers, and schools run by trAce On-line Writing Community. I designed the original Kids on the Net during the winter and spring, 1998, now being run by trAce at Nottingham Trent University, England. Currently I am Editorial Consultant for Kids on the Net.

Classroom Newspaper Workshop, Tom Snyder Productions, software for teaching the complete process of generating school newspapers and newsletters all the way from the idea stage through layout, design and production, March, 1995.

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[Research Paper Writer](#), comprehensive simulation software for teaching research and investigative writing, developed under a grant from the Apple Computer Corporation, winner of 1991 EDUCOM Distinguished Software Award and Parents' Choice Foundation Amazing Achievement Award in 1991, published by Tom Snyder Productions. Upgraded 1994, Windows version, 1994.

[Super Scoop](#), computer program for instruction in journalism and writing, for Apple II computers, 1 disk, teacher's manual and student guide, published by COMPRESS, a division of Wadsworth Publishing Co., February, 1985, Mac and Windows versions, 1993. Super Scoop-PC, a version of Super Scoop for the IBM-PC series of microcomputers and compatibles, published by COMPRESS, June 1987. 2nd Edition user manuals, Super Scoop, revised, designed and illustrated by me on PageMaker publishing software and published by COMPRESS, September, 1987. Upgraded PC-version, 2001.

[On Your Mark, Get Set, Preparing for the SAT](#), computerized SAT coaching package for Apple and IBM computers, 10 disks plus written materials; authored all verbal sections (5 disks), published by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986.

Other Publications:

The Guardian of London, [frAme](#), North American Review (fiction), The Smith (fiction), New England Offshore, Soundings, Multihulls Magazine, Cape Cod Times, The Register, The Patriot, Fremont News-Register, Union City Leader, Siren, Temper, Massachusetts English Teacher, Journal of Computing in Higher Education, "Multimedia Educational Software: A Challenging Era for Software Design and Authorship," spring, 1992. Popular Computing magazine, McGraw-Hill, over two dozen articles, software reviews, book reviews, 1982-1985.

Awards:

Kids Rule the World, book dedication, EFG, Inc. Distributed by Writer's Digest Books, "An Interactive Internet Writing Kit," 2000, available through www.kidnews.com

[KidNews](#) rated among the Top 5% of all sites on the Internet by Point Survey, selected as Link of the Week for January 8-15, 1996 by Computer Currents Interactive, chosen by Learning in Motion for Top Ten list of educational WWW sites, Sept. 1995, and more than three dozen other awards.

UMass Dartmouth Teacher of the Year, 1993.

Three Distinguished Software [EDUCOM/EDUCAUSE](#) Awards for Research Paper Writer, Super Scoop I and II July, 1987, July 1991.

Amazing Achievement Award, Parents' Choice Foundation, 1991, for Research Paper Writer
New England Press Association, three Special Awards in General Excellence, for investigative journalism on the environment and public affairs reporting, open circulation class, 1974, 1975, 1976.

Journalism job experience:

Writing Coach, Standard-Times of New Bedford, 1984-85, worked with and instructed 17 staff writers and editors. News Editor, The Register newspaper. Edited, designed, and supervised editorial production of 28 to 56-page portion of paper; wrote editorials, investigative features, news, opinion columns, Yarmouth Port, MA, 1977-79. Associate Editor, Barnstable Patriot, investigative features, editorials, news, columns, Hyannis, MA, 1972-77. Interim Editor, Reporter at Union City Leader, CA; Staff Writer at Fremont News-Register (daily); editorial assistant at Cape Cod News; free-lance writer, 1969-72.

Personal Interests:

Sailing, kayaking, rowing, bicycling, graphic design, painting, sculpting