

READING GROUP GUIDE

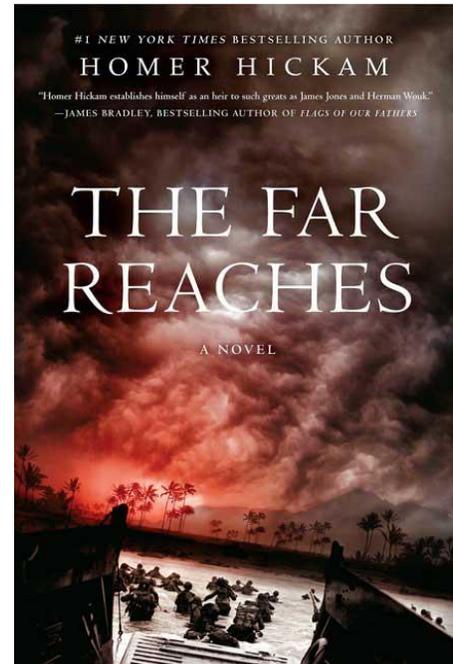
The Far Reaches

A Novel

By Homer Hickam

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Far Reaches* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Far Reaches*.

About the Book

The year is 1943 and World War II in the Pacific rages on, with Americans engaged in desperate battles against a cruel and cunning enemy. Coast Guard Captain Josh Thurlow is on hand for the invasion of Tarawa as the United States Navy begins the grand strategy of throwing her marines at island after bloody island across the Pacific.

As blood colors the waters around Tarawa, Josh flounders ashore through a floating graveyard of dead Americans and joins the survivors, determined to somehow wrest victory from disaster. Gravely wounded, and nearly driven insane by the heat, blood, and carnage of the desperate battle, Josh expects to die. Instead, he is spun off on one of his greatest adventures when Sister Mary Kathleen, a young and pretty Irish nun, nurses him back to health, then shanghai's Josh, sidekick Bosun Ready O'Neal, and three American marines to a group of beautiful tropical islands invaded by a brutal Japanese warlord. Josh and his little band must decide whether to help the Sister fight the battle she demands, return to Tarawa and the "real" war, or settle down in the romantic splendor of the South Seas.



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Hickam expertly weaves the adventures of these hot-blooded characters tighter and tighter until the Sister's secrets and sins are finally revealed during a horrific battle in the lair of the warlord. With an incredible eye for historical detail, edge-of-your-seat writing, and the talent of a master storyteller, Homer Hickam delivers another, page-turning tour de force.

About the Author

Homer Hickam is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Rocket Boys*, which was made into the acclaimed movie *October Sky*. He is also the author of the previous Josh Thurlow novels, *The Keeper's Son* and *The Ambassador's Son*. He is married to Linda Terry Hickam, an artist, who is also his assistant. They share their time between homes in Alabama and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Discussion Questions

Below are some ideas for discussion in your group. Please contact Homer at <http://www.homerhickam.com> to let him know when you're meeting. He might even be able to answer your questions via telephone!

- (1) The book opens with the battle of Tarawa. Had you ever heard of this battle? What would you think would be the American public's reaction today to so many of their troops killed in a single battle?
- (2) Did this novel make you want to read a non-fiction book about Tarawa?
- (3) What's your opinion of Josh Thurlow? What did you like about him? What did you dislike?
- (4) Who was your favorite character in the novel? Why?
- (5) Homer calls this novel, like all his Thurlow novels, a story of love in a time of war. Do you agree with that, in this case? What kind of love is portrayed in this novel?
- (6) Why do you think Ready loved Sister Francis Marie? Why do you think she shunned him for so long?
- (7) What did you think of Sister Francis Marie? If she was sitting in this group, what would you ask her?
- (8) The Sister has a secret sin she cannot reveal to anyone but a priest throughout most of this novel. Did you guess what it was? Or was it more than one?



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- (9) Do you understand why she acted as she did after being captured by Colonel Yoshu?
- (10) Why do you think Colonel Yoshu wanted Sister Francis Marie back? Do you think he loved her? Was he in any way a sympathetic character?
- (11) What do you think of some of the metaphysical aspects to the story? The talking corpses on Tarawa, Purdy the Pelican, Dave the Megapode? What do you think the author was trying to reveal with these moments?
- (12) Why didn't the people of Tahila just pack up and leave when they knew the Japanese were going to attack them?
- (13) Why do you think Josh got so drunk when he arrived at Tahila?
- (14) Josh and Colonel Burr clearly have a past that has led them to dislike one another. Why do you think living on Tahila seemed to make them more friendly?
- (15) Would you like to live on Tahila and in their culture?
- (16) Did you like the way the story ended? How would you have liked it to end?
- (17) Did this story have a moral?
- (18) Would you read another Josh Thurlow novel?

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