

As an entry in the BookLife Prize, *All for One - Love, War, & Ghosts* received the following assessment from a *Publisher's Weekly* reviewer (furnished here in full with no editing):

Assessment:

Plot/Idea: *All For One: Love, War, & Ghosts* opens like a YA coming-of-age story, showing the three boys bonding in the carefree years of their youth. Their youth ends when Henry's draft number guarantees his conscription for military service during the Vietnam War. Following the pact of childhood loyalty, the 'Musketeers' enlist together, promising to keep each other safe, a promise that Henry and Rob are unable to fulfill. A vast tonal shift in the second part of the story explores the results of those events 50 years later, when a mysterious man begins to blackmail Henry and Cathy, right as Rob returns. McGuinn explores the legacy and costs of war that veterans carry long after their service, and the concepts of loyalty and duty to friends, as well as potential life paths not taken. The shift in tone from light-hearted to the very serious topics at the end is unexpected, but works in a very thematic form of storytelling.

Prose: Written in a plainspoken, accessible tone, *All For One* is an easy read. The temporal shifts between the decades are smooth, thanks to a steady voice, providing continuity across the years and serving as a reminder of how a person's past will bleed into the present. While her writing makes sparse use of metaphor or lyrical imagery, McGuinn's words carry emotional resonance in the small details that serve to highlight the trauma of war, loss, and love without overstating these feelings.

Originality: *All For One* is an interesting tale of trauma, loyalty, and loss that follows a group of friends throughout a turbulent, changing era. While the war in Vietnam plays a central role in the plot, the story itself is not fundamentally a war story, nor does it focus on PTSD, as much as that also plays a role within the story. Fundamentally, this is a story about how the changes that happen through life affect the bonds of childhood, and how the trauma of war is carried by veterans and their families long after they come home. The romanticized loyalty of their youth plays a sword that cuts both ways, binding the friends together, but also trapping them in cycles of silence, debt, and regret.

Character/Execution: McGuinn writes her characters with an eye for realism rather than according to an archetype. While each character represents tones important to the underlying message of the story, they also feel like full characters, each with flaws and virtues. The characters avoid becoming genre cliches as their flaws are never resolved, but carry the weight of those circumstances and troubles, informing their decisions and actions throughout the narrative and showing the lasting effects of trauma over an intergenerational span.

Date Submitted: July 10, 2025

The report on *All for One – Love, War, & Ghosts* can be accessed online, along with my other books:

<https://booklife.com/profile/sheri-mcguinn-1561>

Should you use any quotes from this review, credit The BookLife Prize.