

Catch-22 by Joseph Heller



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Author: Joseph Heller

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Catch-22 is like no other novel we have ever read. It has its own style, its own rationale, its own extraordinary character. It moves back and forth from hilarity to horror. It is outrageously funny and strangely affecting. It is totally original.

It is set in the closing months of World War II, in an American bomber squadron on a small island off Italy. Its hero is a bombardier named Yossarian, who is frantic and furious because thousands of people he hasn't even met keep trying to kill him. (He has decided to live forever even if he has to die in the attempt.)

His problem is Colonel Cathcart, who keeps raising the number of missions the men have to fly.

The others range from Lieutenant Milo Minderbinder, a dedicated entrepreneur (he bombs his own airfield when the Germans make him a reasonable offer: cost plus 6%), to the dead man in Yossarian's tent; from Major Major Major, whose tragedy is that he resembles Henry Fonda, to Nately's whore's kid sister; from Lieutenant Scheisskopf (he loves a parade) to Major -- de Coverley, whose face is so forbidding no one has ever dared ask him his first name; from Clevinger, who is lost in the clouds, to the soldier in white, who lies encased in bandages from head to toe and may not even be there at all; from Dori Duz, who does, to the wounded gunner Snowden, who lies dying in the tail of Yossarian's plane and at last reveals his terrifying secret.

Catch-22 is a microcosm of the twentieth-century world as it might look to someone dangerously sane. It is a novel that lives and moves and grows with astonishing power and vitality. It is, we believe, one of the strongest creations of the mid-century.



Reviews of the **Catch-22** by Joseph Heller

Marg

That was fifty years ago. I was ten or eleven, *Catch 22* was a year old or maybe two. My brother, in college, recommended this book. I liked it so much I read it beginning on New Year every year until I went to college. I just reread it for the first time in forty some years. It's still brilliant. It's still startlingly funny and it still hurts down deep.

It rose above the realistic novels written immediately after the Second World War. It rose above Mailer and Jones and Shaw. When asked why he'd never written another book like *Catch 22*, Heller's answer was "Who has?" Of course he was right. A couple of the great wave of novels that followed the Second World War stand shoulder to shoulder with the catch; *Slaughter House Five* and Gunter Grass's *Dog Years* come to my mind. Lots of very good novels came out of the war, first novels from writers like Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer, Irwin Shaw and James Jones, Thomas Heggens, who won a Tony for the stage version of his novel, *Mr. Roberts*, James Gould Cozzens, who won a Pulitzer for *Guard of Honor*. None of those good books compare. *Catch 22* entered the language. For a few years the blue paperback with the dancing soldier puppet was everywhere.

Yossarian, the novel's hero, spends the novel trying not to die in the war. A difficult job, since his colonel raises the number of missions he must fly from twenty-five to seventy, in an attempt to impress the *Saturday Evening Post*. Since I last read this I served in the army, where sooner or later everybody winds up working for Colonel Cathcart. I'm thinking that besides its anarchic appeal for youth, there were at that time millions of Veterans many of whom shared it's cynicism about the organizations they worked for.

If you've never read it, you've missed a great read. If you read it a long time ago It might be time to enjoy it again. I suspect you'll still laugh whenever Heller tells you to. And like love at first sight it will probably still break your heart.

Xor

Catch-22 was a dark and comedic novel that turned from "Oh no this'll be some funny war story" but as you get to the middle you realize how horrific the situations become, and you start pitying the characters and hating some, and later learn they die horribly, some suicide some being mutilated by plane engines or drowning or being thrown from windows. You start feeling panic and anger for people who you know are innocent and are telling the truth, yet their witnesses lie and plunges him into a word of hate and injustice, and scenes where you cry out of pity, where you know that guy didn't deserve to die, yet still did... oh it was still funny at some parts.

But this novel is definitely not for the younger audience out there. It contains a significant amount of prostitution and some rape, with lots and LOTS of graphic detail in both ways (but most detail during bloody scenes, not much sexual details).

Anyways, this novel is a classic and will forever stay in my heart as one of the most influential stories I have ever read.

LadyShlak

Someone I knew in college once asked us for a plot outline of this book. We laughed at him. It's

literally -- not just figuratively, but literally -- indescribable. This is one of the genuinely remarkable novels of the 20th, or any, century.

Gann

This is quite possibly my favorite book of all time. It is the perfect mix of humor and crude, harsh reality. It explains life in the military during WWII, but in a way that would make you think it's all fiction. Though much of the book is based on Heller's personal experience, his masterfully constructed characters (all 42 of them) would make you believe that they are all created by different people. Every chapter is a different story, each character a different personality, and all of them more hilarious than the one before. Every person should not only read this book, but own a copy, quote from it, and be the one person in the room that knows that M&M stands for not Mars and Murrie, but Milo Minderbinder.

Getaianne

I accept that this book has a place in the American literary canon. That doesn't make it a very good book, though.

The juxtaposition of absurd humor, implacable bureaucracy and the horrors of war makes for a unique storytelling approach. However, the book belabors its points and is far too long and repetitive. Not recommended.

Iraraeal

If you don't realize that this book is meant to be hilarious, almost to the point of satire, then it will be very confusing to read. However, if you embrace the attitude, it becomes hilarious and entertaining. A must-read classic. This book stirs the imagination and continuously entertains. There were times I laughed out loud and attempted to tell friends about the funny thing I just read. Of course that usually ended with "you have to read it for yourself".

Story aside, the 50th Anniversary Edition is a great purchase. It has the original story, plus some pretty interesting history and reactions to the story.

Pryl

I just finished *Catch 22* and decided to write my feelings, thoughts, opinions about the book now. First and foremost, I found *Catch 22* to be a sad story, but I laughed out loud on several occasions. The characters are sublimely absurd, yet tinged with tragic humanity. The story is repetitive and not confusing to follow. At the same time, I had to stop several times and think on how it would end. Yossarian is heroic in one sense, not wanting to bend to the madness surrounding him, yet he balks at ever really wanting to help someone. He wants very much to live, but never states what he wants to live for. I could go on Hellerizing, but I will conclude by saying *Catch 22* is a unique type of novel. *Catch 22* is maddening to read, but I'm glad I finally read it. the book is excellent , funny and tragic

The actor who reads it, does an incredible job, but as the book is episodic rather than having a narrative through line., i did wish that i had a print copy on hand so that i could go back over part and refresh my memory over who each character was

i am enjoying it in the car. i would give it 5 stars if i could have had a print copy to use from time to time , to help me locate where i was

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