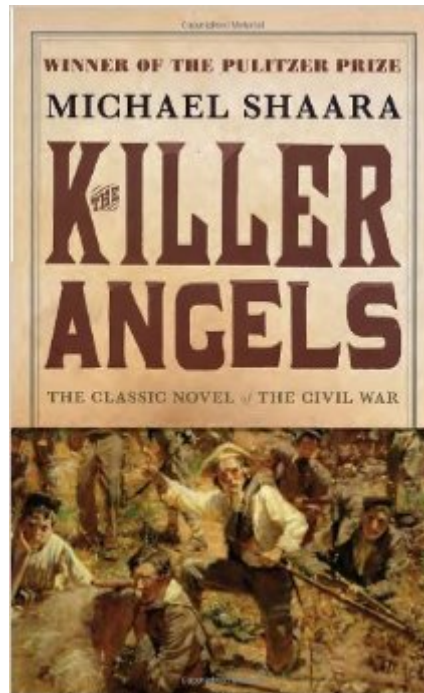


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The Killer Angels: The Classic Novel Of The Civil War (Civil War Trilogy)



Synopsis

“My favorite historical novel . . . a superb re-creation of the Battle of Gettysburg, but its real importance is its insight into what the war was about, and what it meant.” —James M. McPherson

In the four most bloody and courageous days of our nation’s history, two armies fought for two conflicting dreams. One dreamed of freedom, the other of a way of life. Far more than rifles and bullets were carried into battle. There were memories. There were promises. There was love. And far more than men fell on those Pennsylvania fields. Bright futures, untested innocence, and pristine beauty were also the casualties of war. Michael Shaara’s Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece is unique, sweeping, unforgettable—the dramatic story of the battleground for America’s destiny.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At least that was true until I read Michael Shaara’s “Killer Angels.” Now I’m a goner. I have bought five more books on the Civil War including McPherson’s “Battle Cry of Freedom,” a huge tome that promises to fill me in on the whole historical context, time, place, politics, all of it. All this happened because I was interested in a single book. This is Michael Shaara’s fault. It is of no consequence that the prospective reader may not have the slightest interest in war, the Civil War in particular, guns, Gettysburg, generals, muskets, artillery, smoke, fire, or death. All the reader need be interested in is a good book that is a pleasure, an enlightening experience, to read. If you like reading, if you enjoy books that captivate, that keep you turning pages, that won’t let you sleep, then buy this book. Let me note here that the author indulges in several literary devices that might pain

the true Civil War buff. He uses interior monologues which are, of course, pure fiction (though based on written material of the time). He also centers his story on two major fights that took place at Gettysburg: the battle of Little Roundtop, and Pickett's Charge, even though quite a lot of other great moments occurred there. Both these battles are told well, and the characters of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain - the commander of the 20th Maine who held Little Round Top against attacking Confederates to the "last bullet," and James Longstreet, commander of the I Corps of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia who had serious differences with his superior over the tactics used at Gettysburg, are explored at depth. By necessity, Shaara could not tell, in a single novel (for that is what this book is), all that happened those three fateful days.

Most times, I would much prefer to read a work of nonfiction as opposed to historical fiction. But after reading dozens of books about the Battle of Gettysburg, it was refreshing to read Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Killer Angels*. This fictional account gives us a viewpoint not to be found in nonfiction works. What makes *Killer Angels* different is that each chapter is written through the eyes of the various leaders from both the Union and the Confederacy including Buford, Longstreet, Lee, Chamberlain, Armistead, as well as an English observer, Fremantle. Shaara used diaries, journals, letters and memoirs to recreate not only what was happening on the battlefield, but also, what these men were thinking, seeing and feeling. It's as if you're an eyewitness to history. *Killer Angels* does not attempt to cover every minute of the Battle of Gettysburg. In fact, Shaara focuses on four main aspects: Buford's establishing Union lines on good ground before the battle, Longstreet's ambivalence about fighting at Gettysburg, Joshua Chamberlain and the 20th Maine defending Little Round Top and Pickett's Charge. I found myself especially haunted by James Longstreet. Once a carefree, amiable man, he's still reeling from the recent deaths of 3 of his 4 children in one week. Robert E. Lee's number two man, he knows that a frontal attack (Pickett's charge) will be disastrous. He is tortured that Lee won't listen to his advice, and inconsolable after so many men are killed. "Along with all the horror of loss, and the weariness, and all the sick helpless rage, there was coming now a monstrous disgust. He was through. They had all died for nothing and he sent them...The army would not recover from this day." I also gained an appreciation for Joshua Chamberlain.

I am one of those people who first read Michael Shaara's *"The Killer Angels"* after seeing the film *"Gettysburg."* Consequently the book's novel idea of telling the story of the Battle of Gettysburg by focusing on five key participants--General John Buford and Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

for the Union, along with Generals Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet and Lewis Armistead for the Confederates--was not a new idea to me. Through the eyes of these five men the crucial points of the battle--preventing the Confederates from taking the high ground on July 1, stopping Hood's division from sweeping the Federal left flank on Little Round Top on July 2, and the high water mark of the Confederacy with Pickett's Charge on July 3--are crystallized as desperate actions agonized over by the leaders who have to make the crucial decisions. Even though these five men are battlefield commanders, they still manage to personalize the battle in which more Americans were killed than were lost in the entire Vietnam War. Shaara's son Jeff has published a Civil War prequel and sequel to his father's book, but those volumes cover more than a single battle and the focus on a limited number of characters does not work as well. Still, I appreciate that the rest of Chamberlain's story is developed, since it is the college professor from Maine who emerges from both "The Killer Angels" and the Ken Burns PBS documentary on "The Civil War" as the idealized citizen-soldier of the war. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of both this novel and its film, are that they make the defense of Little Round Top by the 20th Maine the high point of the Battle of Gettysburg rather than Pickett's Charge, and that it is the name of Armistead rather than Pickett that we will not forget from that most famous charge.

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