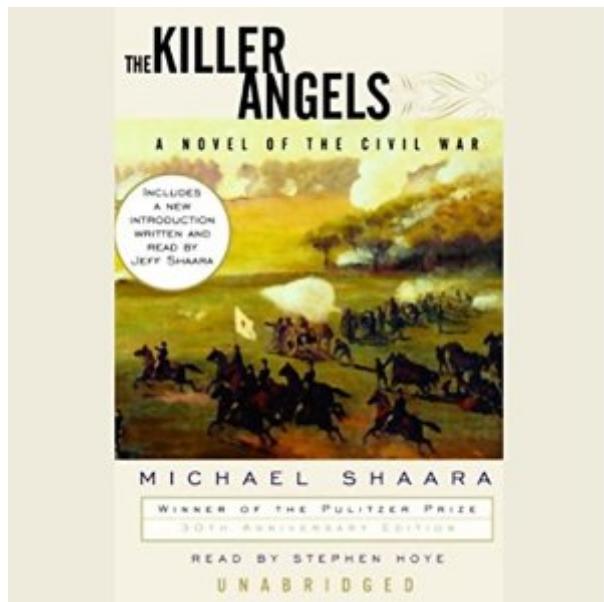


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# The Killer Angels: A Novel Of The Civil War



## **Synopsis**

After 30 years and with three million copies in print, Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning Civil War classic, *The Killer Angels*, remains as vivid and powerful as the day it was originally published. July 1863. The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia is invading the North. General Robert E. Lee has made this daring and massive move with 70,000 men in a determined effort to draw out the Union Army of the Potomac and mortally wound it. His right hand is General James Longstreet, a brooding man who is loyal to Lee but stubbornly argues against his plan. Opposing them is an unknown factor: General George Meade, who has taken command of the Army only two days before what will be perhaps the crucial battle of the Civil War. In the four most bloody and courageous days of our nation's history, two armies fight for two conflicting dreams. One dreams of freedom, the other of a way of life. More than rifles and bullets are carried into battle. The soldiers carry memories. Promises. Love. And more than men fall on those Pennsylvania fields. Bright futures, untested innocence, and pristine beauty are also the casualties of war. *The Killer Angels* is unique, sweeping, unforgettable, a dramatic re-creation 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. For those who want to know more I refer you to Shelby Foote's "Stars In Their Courses." I aim this review at those who are unsure of whether a Civil War novel is what they want to read. Be assured you will not be disappointed. This is a truly fine book, especially for the uninitiated, as I was. I recommend this book to all without hesitation.

This fine example of what historical fiction should be, which I first picked up to read as an eighth grader, was the gateway into my now militant obsession with the Civil War and my idolization of Gen. Joshua Chamberlain. The well-deserved rave reviews that litter the front and back covers drew me to it, but Shaara's powerful writing style and stunningly human characters drew me INTO it. Not surprisingly I worship the film Gettysburg and have accumulated a large collection of Civil War and Chamberlain-related literature, though some have suggested this is slightly abnormal for a fifteen year old. While reading The Killer Angels one must wonder at Shaara's amazing ability to portray the major players of the battle, whose real personalities must have since been lost over a century of historian analyzation, as real people. I absolutely love this book and jealously guard my much-used copy. To enjoy it you don't have to be a Civil War buff or even know anything about the battle, you only have to be prepared to appreciate what is epic and human in the midst of this otherwise horrifying war.

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. Chamberlain was not a trained soldier, but a college professor. But he was definitely a born leader. He started the Civil War as a lieutenant colonel and finished as a brigadier general. His heroics in leading his men on Little Round Top is a thing of legend, probably saved the Union and earned him a Medal of Honor. I have found that once Gettysburg has gotten under your skin, you'll never tire of reading about this important battle that changed the course of the war. For fictional accounts, Killer Angels is about as good as it gets.

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