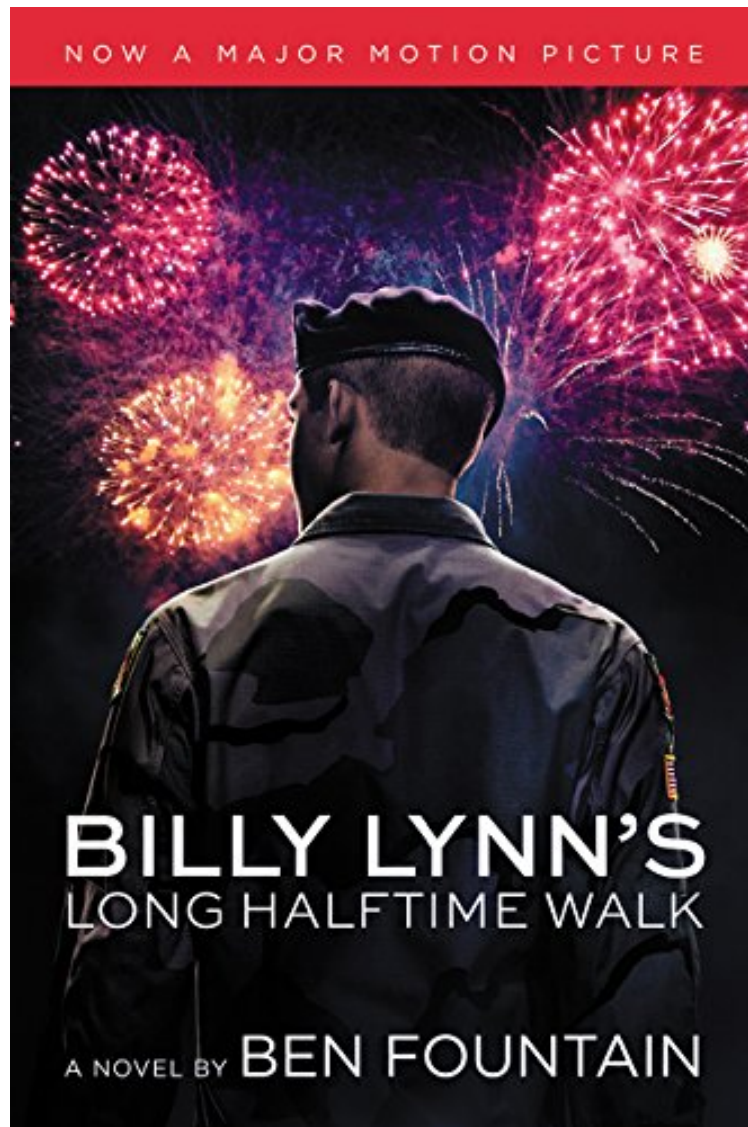


(Get free) Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk: A Novel

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk: A Novel

Ben Fountain

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Ben Fountain : Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk: A Novel before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk: A Novel:

779 of 814 people found the following review helpful. A Piece of Americana By Woodsy Wilds As a seventy year old woman who doesn't own a TV and lives in Maine, it's unlikely that a book about soldiers, football, and high rollers looking for a movie deal set in Texas would compel me to write my first review, but this book did. It's a piece of Americana that tells us about ourselves in the same way that say To Kill a Mockingbird or Death of a Salesman

reveals pieces of the puzzle that is America. I somehow feel better for having read this book which is why, I guess, some of us read in the first place. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A modern-day Catch-22 that holds its own in that incredible comparison - it's funny, sharp, trenchant, and humane

By Josh Mauthe
One of my all-time favorite novels is Joseph Heller's seminal World War II satire Catch-22, a vicious, funny, trenchant take on the insanity of war. So when I heard numerous comparisons between Ben Fountain's Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk and Heller's masterpiece, it would be safe to say that my interest was piqued. I'm fascinated by portraits of war with a satirical bent - it's no accident that so much of my bookshelf is filled with writings about and from the Vietnam War - and the idea of finding a modern take on all of that was super up my alley. Having read Billy Lynn finally, I totally understand those comparisons; while Billy Lynn is very different from Catch-22, there's much of the same DNA to be found there: a horror at the violence of war and the way it kills part of us; the conflict between a desire to support your friends and a disgust at the war as a concept; an unflinching look at the way war changes those who fight in it. But Billy Lynn has a very different primary target than Catch-22; while Heller was primarily focused on the insanity of war, Fountain wants to question American "patriotism," with its easy platitudes, empty cliches, and pointless grandstanding that has little bearing or meaning on the conflict and those who fight in it. Set entirely during a Dallas Cowboys football game, Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk follows our title character and his fellow grunts from Bravo Platoon as they are theoretically being honored for wartime valor. Survivors of a battle that was captured on video that became a viral hit, especially on Fox News, Lynn and his platoon mates are on a "victory tour" around the country, which mainly means that they're used in photo ops, forced to endure awkward handshakes and congratulatory ceremonies, and deal with an agent who's in the midst of attempting to turn their story into a film. Meanwhile, Bravo Platoon is dealing with their own issues: an inability to fit back into the home front, a rapidly growing disgust at the disconnect between themselves and those who they're protecting, and their increasing unease at their impending return to Iraq and the battle front. All of which sounds like heavy fare, and in lesser hands, it could be. But in Fountain's hands, Billy Lynn is rapid-paced, funny, moving, and just plain incredible. From the pitch-perfect depiction of every platitude every soldier hears to his capturing of the vulgar, violent repartee of the soldiers, Fountain gives us a picture of barely controlled anarchy, as Bravo jeers at the civilians who don't understand them, leers after the members of Destiny's Child (from a distance, of course), comments on politics, and find a way to make peace with their largely symbolic role in everything around them. Plunging us into the title character's running commentary, Fountain gives everything a perfectly arched approach, both understanding the awkwardness of all of these events but also the distance between Billy and a world that only loves the idea of him, not the reality. Lynn isn't some warrior poet, some complex philosopher; he's a roughneck, albeit one smart enough to see through the pomp and circumstance and roll his eyes at the ridiculously contrived patriotism on display, and see how it's all about theater, not true love of country. But more than that, Fountain never lets his themes and ideas overtake the characters and the emotional rhythms of the story. Yes, this is a book about how American patriotism has become a political necessity, and a ticket for grandstanding; yes, it's a book that's entirely focused on how soldiers are often only thought of in theory, of how we cope with war by imagining it as a movie, and of how we so often forget our wars or only think of them in abstract terms. But even with all of that, what sticks out in Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk are the small moments - the trauma as the PTSD kicks in for our soldiers during an absurd halftime show, the rhythms the soldiers have developed in dealing with older men who have their own stories, the profane but hilarious banter between men who have long since quit caring about social norms, the dead-on capturing of every single cliché (my favorite is Fountain's repurposing of 9/11 as "nina leven," a meaningless phrase without clear impact anymore)...it's these moments that make Billy Lynn so effective. Like Catch-22, its targets are clear, its humor sharp, its chaos perfectly controlled - but more than that, it's the book's humanity and heart that makes it so great.

308 of 322 people found the following review helpful. Pitch-perfect look at a group of soldiers, and their place in 'at home' culture

By Nathan Webster
When I first heard about this book (and Karl Marlantes' blurb), I assumed it was written by a veteran - it isn't, and that's really amazing, because this is a pitch-perfect look into a soldier's experiences. I say that as a veteran (of Desert Storm) and an embedded journalist in Iraq in 2007-09, so I have some first-hand knowledge with what he describes. To me, the voices and actions of the characters are dead-on accurate. It's got some flaws, which I'll get to first so I can finish strong. In my mind, the flaws are because he's trying so hard at writing something big and memorable, and it gets away from him at times. The conclusion veers into melodrama. Up until the last 40 pages or so, I could pretty much buy the events as possible real-life occurrences. But the end features a couple moments where I couldn't quite suspend disbelief. While the civilians he describes behave realistically, there's times when it feels very much like the author's "meta rant" against the American mindset - he sets up some characters as one-dimensional straw men so he can show his disdain. I agree with what he's presenting, but it doesn't always feel like a story - more like he's trying to inject a point into the fictional narrative. Which is fine, but not if it's obvious like it sometime is. Most of the time, the story is told in present-day perspective with some flashbacks. Very occasionally, he switches into describing the future, and that's awkward. For me, I would have liked no 'future look' at all. So, okay, those things threw me off. Everything else is very strong. Marlantes called it a "Catch 22" of the Iraq War - but that's not accurate, because to me it's not really a satire. Fountain isn't over-dramatizing events (except occasionally as I note), or exaggerating things for comic effect -

it feels real, not deliberately over-the-top. Billy Lynn and his fellow soldiers are often treated as props by the civilians they encounter - it might seem unlikely, but it's not. When I came back from Desert Storm, I was treated nicely, of course, but as a prop for the patriotic feelings for others - nobody cared about 'me,' but they did care about their opportunity to tell me how proud they were about America, my service, the troops, blah blah blah, and then I had to hear their two-cent opinion about every little tactical decision (I was a photographer who drove a Humvee - Gen. Schwarzkopf didn't keep me in his loop...). That disconnect comes across very accurately in Fountain's narrative. This is what homecoming is like. So in the crazy situation that Fountain has put them in, the characters look for what's familiar - and that's their fellow soldiers. The voice of those soldiers - all infantrymen - is spot on. This IS how infantrymen behave, especially when they're in a small group being gawked at. It's them against the world, and the fights they get into, arguments they have, flouting authority (but not their sergeant's), all ring very true. Billy Lynn, the 19-year-old hero and main character, reminds me of some of the soldiers I met - very confident and self-assured, but not on a very deep level, like it wouldn't take much for the act to fall away. He's a hero you'll root for. It's tough to describe the plot because I don't want to give things away. I think a reader should know not to expect some tragedy at the end that betrays your affection for the characters. There is a Hollywood subplot about a possible movie that's entertaining, and probably truthful, but I wouldn't know. A thinly-described parody of Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones is good for comic, and not-so-comic relief (he should have just named him). Obviously, a cheerleader comes into play. Military readers should be aware of places they'll need to suspend disbelief - a Silver Star would take much longer to award than described here; I find it very hard to believe that the group of men would have to go back to Iraq at the conclusion of the "Victory Tour," and I wish Fountain came up with some kind of reason (even if contrived) to explain that; getting into fights in an Army dress uniform and then walking around afterwards and still look presentable would be very difficult. But I really liked this story. I like any book that honestly tells a soldier's story. It's refreshing to read a book about the homecoming, or at least scenes at home, rather than another story that takes place in Iraq itself. I think a military audience would really like this book, and will laugh and be annoyed at the right parts. But I'm not sure the right civilian audience will ever read "Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk." It's a solid reminder, even in fictional form, that soldiers are not props for our own conflicted feelings of feel-good patriotism, which is so rarely backed up by actual deeds or service. If people have nothing to offer returning veterans but, "you know, what we really should do in Iraq/Afghanistan is..." then they should say nothing at all.

New York Times Bestseller Now a Major Motion Picture "Brilliantly done . . . grand, intimate, and joyous."—New York Times Book Review "Mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters: read this giant-hearted novel."—MARIA SEMPLE, author of *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* Three minutes and forty-three seconds of intensive warfare with Iraqi insurgents—caught on tape by an embedded Fox News crew—has transformed the eight surviving men of Bravo Squad into America's most sought-after heroes. Now they're on a media-intensive nationwide tour to reinvigorate public support for the war. On this rainy Thanksgiving Day, the Bravos are guests of a Dallas football team, slated to be part of the halftime show. Among the Bravos is nineteen-year-old Specialist Billy Lynn. Surrounded by patriots sporting flag pins on their lapels and support our troops bumper stickers, he is thrust into the company of the team's owner and his coterie of wealthy colleagues; a born-again cheerleader; a veteran Hollywood producer; and supersized players eager for a vicarious taste of war. Over the course of this day, Billy will drink and brawl, yearn for home and mourn those missing, face a heart-wrenching decision and discover pure love and a bitter wisdom far beyond his years. Poignant, riotously funny, and exquisitely heartbreaking, Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is a searing and powerful novel that has cemented Ben Fountain's reputation as one of the finest writers of his generation.

.com Best Books of the Month, May 2012: Billy Lynn and his Bravo squad mates have become heroes thanks to an embedded Fox News crew's footage of their firefight against Iraqi insurgents. During one day of their bizarre Victory Tour, set mostly at a Thanksgiving Day football game at Texas Stadium, they're wooed by Hollywood producers, smitten by Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders, and share a stage at halftime with Beyonce. Guzzling Jack and Cokes and scuffling with fans, the Bravos are conflicted soldiers. "Okay, so maybe they aren't the greatest generation," writes debut author (!) Ben Fountain, who manages a sly feat: giving us a maddening and believable cast of characters who make us feel what it must be like to go to war. Veering from euphoria to dread to hope, Billy Lynn is a propulsive story that feels real and true. With fierce and fearless writing, Fountain is a writer worth every accolade about to come his way. --Neal Thompson "[An] inspired, blistering war novel... Though it covers only a few hours, the book is a gripping, eloquent provocation. Class, privilege, power, politics, sex, commerce and the life-or-death dynamics of battle all figure in Billy Lynn's surreal game day experience." (New York Times) Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is not merely good; it's Pulitzer Prize-quality good . . . A bracing, fearless and uproarious satire of how contemporary war is waged and sold to the American public." (San Francisco Chronicle) "A masterful echo of 'Catch-22,' with war in Iraq at the center. . . a gut-punch of a debut novel... There's hardly a false note, or even a slightly off-pitch one, in Fountain's sympathetic, damning and structurally ambitious novel." (Washington Post) "Fountain's excellent first novel follows a group of soldiers at a Dallas Cowboys game on Thanksgiving Day... Through the eyes of the titular

soldier, Fountain creates a minutely observed portrait of a society with woefully misplaced priorities. [Fountain has] a pitch-perfect ear for American talk..." (The New Yorker) "Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is a big one. This is the brush-clearing Bush book we've been waiting for." (Harper's Magazine) "Brilliantly done . . . grand, intimate, and joyous." (New York Times Book) "For Memorial Day why not turn to a biting, thoughtful, and absolutely spot-on new novel, Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk... This postmodern swirl of inner substance, yellow ribbons, and good(ish) intentions is at the core of Ben Fountain's brilliant Bush-era novel." (The Daily Beast) "Ben Fountain combines blistering, beautiful language with razor-sharp insight... and has written a funny novel that provides skewering critiques of America's obsession with sports, spectacle, and war." (Huffington Post) "A brilliantly conceived first novel . . . The irony, sorrow, anger and examples of cognitive dissonance that suffuse this novel make it one of the most moving and remarkable novels I've ever read." (Nancy Pearl, NPR, Morning Edition) "Seething, brutally funny... [Fountain] leaves readers with a fully realized band of brothers... Fountain's readers will never look at an NFL Sunday, or at America, in quite the same way." (Sports Illustrated) "Biting, thoughtful, and absolutely spot-on. . . . This postmodern swirl of inner substance, yellow ribbons, and good(ish) intentions is at the core of Ben Fountain's brilliant Bush-era novel." (The Daily Beast) "The Iraq war hasn't yet had its Catch-22 or Slaughterhouse-Five, but Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is a contender... A wicked sense of humor, wonderful writing and, beneath the anger and outrage, a generous heart." (Tampa Bay Times) "It's a darkly humorous satire about the war at home, absurd and believable at the same time." (Esquire) "Darkly comic... Rarely does such a ruminative novel close with such momentum." (Los Angeles Times) "Fountain's strength as a writer is that he not only can conjure up this all-too-realistic-sounding mob, but also the young believably innocent soul for our times, Specialist Billy Lynn. And from the first page I found myself rooting for him, often from the edge of my seat." (Minneapolis Star Tribune) "[A] masterly . . . tightly structured book [with] a sprawling amount of drama and emotion." (The Rumpus) "Passionate, irreverent, utterly relevant Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk offers an unforgettable portrait of a reluctant hero. Ben Fountain writes like a man inspired and his razor sharp exploration of our contemporary ironies will break your heart." (Margot Livesey) "[T]he shell-shocked humor will likely conjure comparisons with Catch-22 and Slaughterhouse Five... War is hell in this novel of inspired absurdity." (Kirkus s (starred review)) "A truly wondrous first novel." (Shelf Awareness) "[T]he Catch-22 of the Iraq War... Fountain applies the heat of his wicked sense of humor while you face the truth of who we have become. Live one day inside Billy Lynn's head and you'll never again see our soldiers or America in the same way." (Karl Marlantes, bestselling author of Matterhorn) "Ben Fountain stormed to the front lines of American fiction when he published his astonishing... Brief Encounters with Che Guevara. His first novel will raise his stature and add to his splendid reputation. Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is both hilarious and heartbreaking." (Pat Conroy) "Fountain is the Pen/Hemingway Award winner of the bristly and satisfying Brief Encounters with Che Guevara, so I expect lots from this book." (Barbara's Picks, Library Journal) "Ben Fountain's Halftime is as close to the Great American Novel as anyone is likely to come these days—an extraordinary work that captures and releases the unquiet spirit of our age, and will probably be remembered as one of the important books of this decade." (Madison Smartt Bell) "While Fountain undoubtedly knows his Graham Greene and Paul Theroux, his excursions into foreign infernos have an innocence all their own. In between his nihilistic descriptions, a boyishness keeps peeking out, cracking one-liners and admiring the amazing if benighted scenery." (Cleveland Plain Dealer) "So much of Fountain's work... reads with an easy grace... [S]ometimes genius is anything but rarefied; sometimes it's just the thing that emerges after twenty years of working at your kitchen table." (Malcolm Gladwell, The New Yorker) "Here is a novel that is deeply engaged with our contemporary world, timely and timeless at once. Plus, it's such fun to read." (The Millions) "The chasm between the reality and the glorification of war hasn't been this surreal since Joseph Heller's Catch-22." (Sacramento Bee) "...wickedly affecting... Billy Lynn has courted some Catch-22 comparisons, and they're well-earned. Fountain is a whiz at lining up plausible inanities and gut-twisting truths for the Bravos to suffer through." (Philadelphia City Paper) "[A] wonderfully readable book [which] does something similar to Why Are We in Vietnam?, asking hard questions about the cultural short-sightedness that contributed to our involvement in Iraq. As a veteran myself, I can attest that it's spot on." (BookRiot) "To call Fountain's work enjoyable would be an understatement because it quite simply is one of the best novels written in the past five years." (Texas Books in) "The best book about the Iraq War and Destiny's Child that you'll ever read." (Entertainment Weekly) From the Back Cover New York Times Bestseller Now a Major Motion Picture "Brilliantly done . . . grand, intimate, and joyous."—New York Times Book "Mothers, father, sons, and daughters: read this giant-hearted novel."—MARIA SEMPLE, author of Where'd You Go, Bernadette Three minutes and forty-three seconds of intensive warfare with Iraqi insurgents—caught on tape by an embedded Fox News crew—has transformed the eight surviving men of Bravo Squad into America's most sought-after heroes. Now they're on a media-intensive nationwide tour to reinvigorate public support for the war. On this rainy Thanksgiving Day, the Bravos are guests of a Dallas football team, slated to be part of the halftime show. Among the Bravos is nineteen-year-old Specialist Billy Lynn. 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