

HOW TO DODGE A CANNONBALL

A NOVEL
DENNARD DAYLE

BOOK
CLUB
GUIDE





Welcome to the Book Club Guide for

HOW TO DODGE A CANNONBALL

by Dennard Dayle

Please note: In order to provide book clubs with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal aspects of the story, as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *How to Dodge a Cannonball*, you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

Thank you. Your attention means everything. Whether you like *How to Dodge a Cannonball* or love it, you've vindicated a lifetime of fixation on wisecracks, history, and Joseph Heller's ghost. It's uplifting to learn all my choices to date were correct. I've drifted dangerously close to reflection in the past. Now I can move forward without fear.

But really, this book is my dream. A comic plea for a relationship with the past, or at least the present. Releasing my spin on American history outside an asylum still feels like a miracle. Somehow, my thoughts on local race, war, and race wars fit snugly into 336 pages. No country or deity can live up to America's self-image. But we can get sixty percent closer if we admit how we got here.

I hope you enjoyed Anders's journey through the first U.S. civil war. The opening still makes me cackle.

Sincerely,

Dennard Dayle

Author & Future Deserter

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What's the regiment of your bookclub called? I.e. "Harrow's Harriers" fit in beside "The Wild Cat Regiment" and "Corn Exchange Regiment." Put it to a vote with your reading group. If voting fails, fight it out.
2. What follows Anders around the war? What's his Catch-22?
3. In many ways, Anders is a classic satirical fool. But they're rarely wrong about *everything*. What intelligence is Anders missing, and what intelligence does he have? What does he learn? Make your diagnosis.
4. What about other fools throughout the book? Do they learn anything?
5. Allegiances to nations, armies, families, religions, races, genders, systems of government, and employers are freely adopted and abandoned in *How to Dodge a Cannonball*. What loyalties survive scrutiny, if any? Why?
6. Several unbalanced adults pitch their way of life to Anders. Who makes the best pitch? Worst? Why?
7. Letters, fliers, reviews, and an entire play are littered throughout the book. How did the collage of formats impact your reading experience? Any favorites?
8. On said play: which ending of *The Mechanical Abacus* is closer to your vision of the future? How would your version end?
9. Play some rounds of Marry/Date/Kill:

Round 1 - Thomas, Joaquin, Mole

Round 2 - Lee, Pickett, Ewell

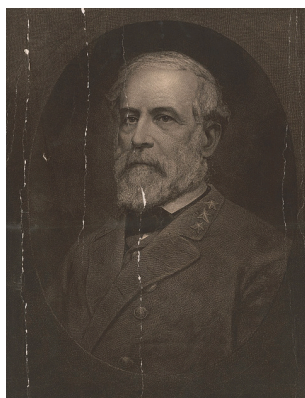
Round 3 - Harrow, McClellan, Columbia I

Round 4 - Gleason, Wendy, Slade
10. After chasing valor, Anders concludes that earning your freedom is an insult, and dying for it is a tragedy. Not quite the company line. Do you agree with that sentiment? Why?
11. If it weren't besieged, could San Valentin be saved? Should it be? How do you save a state in cult-like denial about its own origins and fortune?
12. Gleason answers Anders's not-so-hypothetical question on race with "I'd stay white" (pg. 277). What do you think of his reasoning: "Black Anders is a confused mockery of Northern and Southern values. And ours" (pg 278).
13. How exactly do you dodge a cannonball?

PICKETT'S CHARGE

HISTORICAL NOTES

Pickett's Charge – Dumber Than Fiction



Robert E. Lee
Vastly overrated.

Pickett's Charge, the suicidal sprint that ends Anders's Confederate career, isn't a comedic invention. General Lee assumed that white supremacy didn't need cover, and one long, exposed charge would break the Union's center. His subordinate Longstreet disagreed. If you've worked under a self-proclaimed genius, you know what happened next. Longstreet's plain complaint of "I believe it will fail," remains history's driest punchline.



General Pickett
Low job satisfaction.

The titular General Pickett served under Longstreet. In his later years, Pickett expressed resentment for bearing the debacle's name. And in his middle years. And immediately. Pickett bore a grudge against Lee for the rest of his life, which was rather long for a failed insurrectionist.



George Gordon Meade in Uniform, Full Length Portrait
Thriving.

General Meade had a good day.

TURNCOATS, MOCK PORTRAITS

TURNCOATS: FACES OF TREASON

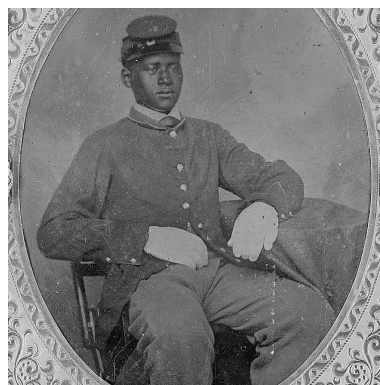
Rare photos of the Harriers in inaction—coming soon to the Museum of Revised History.



District of Columbia. Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, at Fort Lincoln

TROOP INSPECTION, TWO HOURS BEFORE DESERTION

Harriers assembled for an inspiring photo, under threat of flogging. Every soldier pictured defected.



Seated Black Soldier, Frock Coat, Gloves, Kepi

PVT. THOMAS LOBDELL, ONE DAY BEFORE DESERTION

A rare survivor of both Gettysburg and San Valentin. When asked about the Fort Mojave desertion, Lobdell said to “Ask Lincoln.”



Unknown | [George Hardy] |
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

SLADE JEFFERSON, ARMS ENTREPRENEUR & HOSTAGE

Wrongfully accused of selling arms to both sides, one can only speculate what Slade Jefferson endured as the Harrier’s hostage. During Reconstruction, his disappearance became a rallying point for traders against federal overreach.

TURNCOATS, MOCK ARTIFACTS

TURNCOATS: THE TRAITOR'S TOMB

Rare salvage from San Valentin—coming soon to the Museum of Revised History.



Crown | Portuguese | The Metropolitan Museum of Art

FLEA COMBAT ARENA

Flea Fights kept troop morale high and savings low. The flea trainer and bookie, Pvt. Thomas J., followed his customers into treason.



Crown | Portuguese | The Metropolitan Museum of Art

LIGHTLY-STAINED HANOVER CROWN

The crown of U.S. monarch Queen Columbia I. And, briefly, Prince Polus I.



Smith and Wesson | Smith & Wesson Model 1 ½
Second Issue Revolver (Serial No. 30451) With Case
| American | The Metropolitan Museum of Art

GOLD-INLAID PISTOL (ORIGIN UNKNOWN)

An ornate firearm found on a Harrier's body in 1863. Bears the Jefferson Firearms logo, like most weapons found on the dead. Likely stolen.

FIELD RESOURCES

YOU'VE SURVIVED

The only victory possible in war. Celebrate by learning more about cannonballs:

The Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1845-1877: An open Yale course on the Civil War, from the buildup to its aftermath. It seems slavery was involved.

The Cornerstone Speech: An early speech by the Confederate vice president on the motives of his revolution. It seems slavery was involved.

The Gladstone Collection of African American Photographs: A visual gallery of Black Americana, primarily from the Civil War. Slavery seems to have been notable.

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