



The Dubious Salvation of Jack V.: A Novel

Jacques Strauss

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For eleven-year-old Jack Viljee, apartheid Johannesburg is a rational and simple place. Whether he's picking fights with his little sister or fretting over his possibly gay best friend, Jack can always depend upon Susie, his family's black maid, for a word of sympathy and approval. The Viljee household, in its small way, mimics the politics of South Africa. But Jack's little world is upset by the arrival of Percy, Susie's teenaged son. When Percy catches Jack in a shameful moment, Jack discovers that even small acts of revenge can have unimaginable consequences. Subversively smart and unapologetically funny, Jacques Strauss's *The Dubious Salvation of Jack V.* is a powerful debut from a fearlessly original voice.

The Dubious Salvation of Jack V.: A Novel Details

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Author : Jacques Strauss

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From Reader Review *The Dubious Salvation of Jack V.: A Novel* for online ebook

Karen says

Jack V. is an un-likeable 11-year-old who has a lot to say. In between his observations (and obsessions) about death, executions, sex, and disfigured bodies, Jack has some insightful things to say about the larger issues of race, class, politics, and God. In that way, the book succeeds--even though I still don't like him. Then again, I'm sure most 11-year-olds (or my 11-year-old self) are annoying.

Lins says

The Dubious Salvation of Jack V. is a South African Portnoy's Complaint. It examines a sexuality, ethics, race and culture, politics, guilt and discrimination within the setting of a middle-to-upper class Johannesburg family, the Viljee's, and the family of their maid, Susie.

The frank discussion of masturbation and the preoccupation of an 11 year old boy with this and other bodily functions may be a bit much for some readers. Along with this is a concentration on the violence of the society around him, and a brutal examination of the snobbery inherent in the racial discrimination; whites contrasted with blacks, English with Afrikaans, other racial groups against each other. Religion and politics are also examined. But a major point of examination is the role of family --and in particular mothers-- in this world.

Jack V. is a child (and indeed an adult narrator) wracked with guilt over what he terms a "childish but nevertheless devastating" betrayal of his 'second mother', Susie. The book recounts a series of incidents leading up to this, and shows the aftermath.

For me the book was enlightening and aggravating by turns. I enjoyed reading it, seeing a unique perspective on South Africa and inside the mind of a young boy; but I was frustrated by the progress of the story, that we were promised a betrayal that was slow to play out. But the pay off was sensational. I will be reading this book again to savour it this time.

I received this book for free as part of the Good Reads First Reads.

Melanie says

A bittersweet memory of growing up by an English-Afrikaaner boy. The author got me on the opening page, crisp and descriptive simple language captured my attention and humor. A funny, irreverent and honest narration of funny observations, awkward events, the eccentric relatives, childhood friendships with subtle hints of the political. At its core, this is a book about a love relationship between Jack and his African nanny and what his one decision ultimately leads to. A heartbreaking yet poor conclusion with you left a bit hanging and for an unusual reason, the author just became indifferent and just takes off. Easy read and a great companion on the road as Jack and I are taking our summer vacation together.

Rick says

I'm sure this novel is deeper than I could possibly appreciate. Maybe my "meh" rating has to do with the fact that I know so little about South Africa.

Literary Review The says

Jacques Strauss

The Dubious Salvation of Jack V.

(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2011)

It's hard not to love the very existence of a funny South African novel, especially one that includes Apartheid. But the brilliance of the novel is not that you laugh out loud in the face of darkness. Rather this book succeeds because it manages to exist both as a compelling novel about eleven-year-old Jack and his betrayal of his housekeeper Susie—his “second mother”—and as a not-overbearing philosophical musing about life's meaning and the question of goodness. Strauss's honest portrayal of a privileged white child coming of age shows how the society's obsession with origins extends not only to divide blacks from whites, but the English from the Afrikaners, the straight from the gay, the cool from the uncool. Strauss shows us that when growing up on the right side of privilege, issues of manhood, cartoons, friendship, and masturbation concern children just as much as politics do.

--Jena Salon

The Dubious Salvation of Jack V was reviewed in The Literary Review. "The Lives of Saints" Fall 2011

Corey Dutson says

Well that was a waste of my time. Nothing happened. It was a story about a boy growing up... sort of. All I really gained from this book is learning just how screwed up South Africans were. Those were some racist, racist people. Wow.

Carlin MacKenzie says

As someone who is british/south african boy like Jack Viljee, this book was exceptional in tying together the true to life feelings of an 11 year old boy. This book isn't afraid to bare all and Jack V may be the most true to life character I've had the joy in reading.

Literary Relish says

Jacques Strauss' novel sees apartheid-era South Africa through the eyes of Jack Vilijee; a mollycoddled, middle class and thoroughly muddled up eleven year old boy. With a Boer Father, English Mother, a sexually confused best friend and a black maid called Susie to whom he devotes as much love and reverence as he would his own mother, Jack, a boy who has never been completely comfortable with the idea of having black servants (unlike his Boer friends), is thoroughly confused. Confusion that, upon the arrival of Susie's troubled son Percy into his world, threatens to bubble up and reek havoc on his peaceful existence.

The beauty of running a book club full of completely diverse and intriguing people will always be the opportunity to try books you may not have picked up otherwise. I am not, unlike my other half, adverse to picking up brand new authors and approaching something without many expectations and I did initially get excited about the South African theme. Beyond the obvious facts, I have read disgustingly little account of life in apartheid-era South Africa and, although I understood from the cover alone that the story would probably be restricted by the white, child narrator, I was at least expecting something and, sadly, came away with precious little to enlighten me.

The 'coming of age' element to the book is utterly convincing and hilarious in places; with the frantic 'skommel'ing (i.e. masturbating :-)) in various different places and into various household objects punctuating childish portraits of friends and family and juvenile problems blown out of all proportion. However, despite my appreciation for Strauss' sympathetic young narrator and his universal trials and tribulations, certain elements left me mightily confused. The story is supposedly narrated by Jack as an adult yet there seems to be no hint of retrospection and the South African world ceases to be the deeply troubled place it was at the time and remains viewed through the tunnel-vision of an eleven year old boy. Let me be clear that I didn't want to read an 'apartheid' book, which would perhaps have been just a bit too obvious, however, I would have liked to learn much more about what life was like in the country at that time for everyone.

Although the clearly dramatic events occurring just out of our vision did become frustrating at times, it did help add a film of darkness over this otherwise innocent account. Racism, pedophilia and all manner of other evils lurk in the background to threaten Jack's bubble and gave the book a little more depth than it might have had otherwise. Jack's friend Petrus; who wants to be a mermaid or an air-hostess when he grows up, adds amusement and tragedy to the tale and his Boer family and their apparently wild differences from 'English' South Africans was something I had never considered and would certainly like to explore in the future.

This is Strauss' debut novel and I'm intrigued to see what he offers next; whether it will be more South African tales or whether he will branch out somewhere entirely different. This book, interestingly enough, completely divided the boys and girls at book club, with the boys seeming to gain much more from it...perhaps recognising a bit of themselves in his quite ordinary (servants aside), boyhood.

A mixed review all in all!

<http://relishreads.blogspot.co.uk/201...>

Kaj Peters says

I had the feeling that the novel kept building up to something but couldn't deliver. It has too many characters and the ones that are most important (Susie, Percy) are not fleshed-out enough. Maybe this is also because I couldn't understand the many political references and have little feeling with the historical context. I could appreciate the tongue-in-cheek humour that portrays the depraved psyche of an eleven year old boy. This novel may be flawed, but Jacques Strauss is still a talented new voice that begs to be heard.

Marvin says

The charming voice of an 11-year-old boy, with an English mother and an Afrikaner father, introduces us to his life in a comfortable suburb in Johannesburg, South Africa in the early 1980s. The premise and the narrative voice have considerable promise. The boy's observations seem random, though, and give more weight to his experiments with masturbation than to the more interesting bits about his relationship with Susie, his black housekeeper/nanny, which are the meat of the book. The voice is also inconsistent, at times seeming, if anything, too naive for an 11-year-old and at other times way too sophisticated, as in the following: "I always thought that humanity, not taken individually, but aggregated, their sentiments, their thoughts, their actions, their systems, their judgments, was an ineffective but still functioning ballast against the arbitrary, the random, the absurd, the power lines in the way of the mast, the cancer in the spine, and all the other things which were improbable, individually, but still happened an awful lot, when aggregated. But there were men in prison serving longer sentences for burglaries and traffic violations [than Susie's son did for murdering his father], so one could only conclude that humanity, rather than a ballast against the arbitrary, was, through paperwork and forms and stamps and considered judgments and all that was officialdom, its very agent."

Ferien_uk says

I received this book for free through Good Reads First Read, and it wasn't something I would normally pick up in a bookstore. However, I enjoyed it immensely. Not only was it an interesting story, but also gave a lot of insight into the history, politics and culture of South Africa as seen through the eyes of an 11-year-old boy.

The main character and narrator, Jack V, was likeable although extremely flawed. Although South African culture is an important element of this book, Jack is also just a typical 11-year-old boy and the story could have been set anywhere and still been as enjoyable. The book describes a time in a child's life where they are old enough to start forming opinions about things, but still young enough that they believe everything is black and white and that everything their parents say must be right.

If someone were to ask me the plot, I couldn't really give one as it is more a series of incidents rather than one long story, but the book was well written and the stories flow from one to another in a way that makes sense to the reader.

I would recommend this book to friends. It is different to anything else I have read, very enjoyable and easy to read.

Matt says

A sort of short coming of age novel that I think wants to be a South African version of Huck Finn; we get a young man born to privilege in SA who has to sort of grow beyond the racism and classicism of his experience, through, as it turns out, his love for his nanny, Susie.

I don't think it totally works, honestly-- Jack is never as interesting as Huck, for starters, as likeable. I think for the critique to work, it's important that Jack comes from privilege, but it also makes him a bit unlikeable, unlike Huck. Also, he doesn't really have adventures, instead just has episodes.

The structure of the book is really unconventional-- it's true that the chapters follow roughly in chronological order, but they are almost more topical-- so you'll have a chapter about the family vacation to Durban, but that will in effect touch off a whole series of digressions about vacations, reflections on the poor, since some are met there, about wanting to be part of another family because Jack sees an appealing substitute clan, etc. It's interesting, the way all the ideas sort of dovetail together, though it made it sort of hard to get into the book, too, as it lacks a really propulsive drive.

I liked it well enough, and I am kind of a sucker for learning what it's like to be other places And really, SA remains a place of great interest. I thought this book was good for what it was-- a coming of age story with some distance built in and some room for critique-- but for me, at least, it never really grabbed me by the collar and forced my attention.

Kirsten says

I think this will go down as a favorite. The writing style is effortless and engaging, and although I'm normally a slow and easily-distracted reader, I couldn't put it down. The narrator is (often uncomfortably) honest about what it's like to be 11, and although the themes are universal, we're given a glimpse into South Africa from a perspective I haven't before seen. This book is a rare find - a fast and easy read that's also thought-provoking and uncompromising in its literary integrity.

Jim Elkins says

Snappy writing here, and I learned a lot about South Africa, from a certain standpoint. It would be an excellent novel to read as an antidote to Coetzee et al (see also the notes on Vladislavic's novels, which have the same function). Strauss had a very different upbringing, and that shows brilliantly here: he was "half English, half Afrikans" and grew up very privileged. His sense of race, history, land, and place are wonderfully divergent from Vladislavic's.[return][return]But this isn't quite a novel: it isn't enough mulled over, the material isn't re-imagined, it isn't the result of layers of fiction and mediation. It's experience, presented in the fragments in which it came, lightly fictionalized. The book has no forward momentum: it's crystalline both in the good sense (clear, economical) and the bad sense (fragmentary, inert).

Coreen Tossona says

Definitely an original story, but I think the problem is the story is told from the point of view of a self-obsessed 11 year old boy. Many children are selfish at that age, so it makes the narrator kind of unlikeable. His love for Susie, the housekeeper & caretaker is identifiable and makes him redeemable, except for the way Jack plots to keep her all his and affects people along the way. The setting in South Africa makes the book interesting, but other than that the story never really gives you that moment or feeling you're hoping for.
