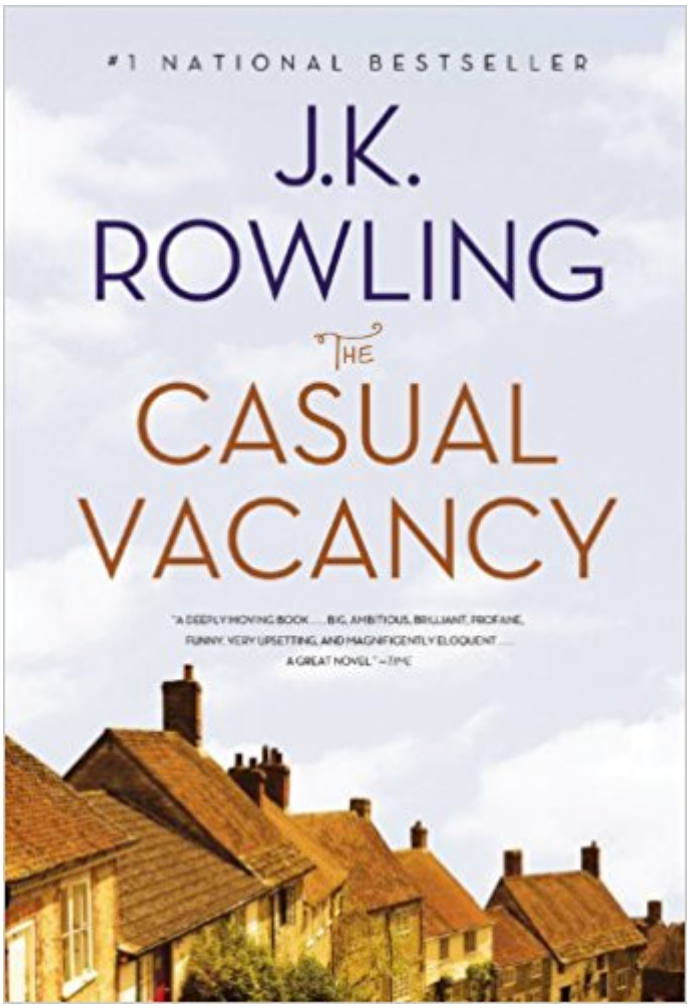
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The Casual Vacancy



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Synopsis

A big novel about a small town...When Barry Fairbrother dies in his early forties, the town of Pagford is left in shock.Pagford is, seemingly, an English idyll, with a cobbled market square and an ancient abbey, but what lies behind the pretty faÃƒÂ§ade is a town at war.Rich at war with poor, teenagers at war with their parents, wives at war with their husbands, teachers at war with their pupils...Pagford is not what it first seems.And the empty seat left by Barry on the parish council soon becomes the catalyst for the biggest war the town has yet seen. Who will triumph in an election fraught with passion, duplicity, and unexpected revelations?A big novel about a small town, The Casual Vacancy is J.K. Rowling's first novel for adults. It is the work of a storyteller like no other.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

On the face of it, Rowling's first adult book is very different from the Harry Potter books that made her rich and famous. It's resolutely unmagical: the closest thing to wizardry is the ability to hack into the amateurish Pagford Parish Council Web site. Instead of a battle for worldwide domination, there's a fight over a suddenly empty seat on that Council, the vacancy of the title. Yet despite the lack of invisibility cloaks and pensieves, Pagford isn't so different from Harry's world. There's a massive divide between the haves and those pesky have-notsÃ¢â ¬â •the residents of the Fields, the council flat that some want to push off onto Yarvil, the county council nearby. In tiny Pagford, and at its school, which caters to have and have-nots alike, everyone is connected: teenager Krystal Weedon, the sole functioning member of her working-class family, hooks up with the middle-class son of her guidance counselor; the social worker watching over Krystal's troubled mother dates the

law partner of the son of the dead Councilor's fiercest Council rival, who also happens to be the best friend of Councilor Barry Fairbrother; Krystal's great-grandmother's doctor was Fairbrother's closest ally; the daughters of the doctor and the social worker work together, along with the best friend of Krystal's hookup; and so on. When FairbrotherÃ¢â ¬â •born in Fields but now a middle-class Pagforder and one of the few people who can deal with the obstreperous KrystalÃ¢â ¬â •dies suddenly, the fight gets uglier. Rowling is relentlessly competent: all these people and their hatreds and hopes are established and mixed together. Secrets are revealed, relationships twist and break, and the book rolls toward its awful, logical climax with aplomb. As in the Harry Potter books, children make mistakes and join together with a common cause, accompanied here by adults, some malicious, some trying yet failing. Minus the magic, though, good and evil are depressingly human, and while the characters are all well drawn and believable, they aren't much fun. Agent: The Blair Partnership. (Sept. 27) --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

J. K. Rowling has said that she considered writing The Casual Vacancy under a pseudonym. Had she done so, Rowling probably would have learned what itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s like to be a midlist authorÃ¢â ¬â •unpublicized, unnoticed, and unhappy. Like many midlist titles, this one is perfectly fine, but in no way outstanding. Set in Pagford, a picturesque West Country village, this very British book has a clever, if arcane, centerpiece: a casual vacancy, an opening on the village council. When Barry Fairbrother drops dead of an aneurysm, his death sets off a chain reaction. A strong supporter of keeping a poor council estate as part of Pagford (he grew up there), Fairbrother is opposed by a smug, controlling businessman (Vernon Dursley, writ small) who wants to rid the village of the Ã¢â ¬Å“undesirables.Ã¢â ¬Â• FairbrotherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s demise causes a crisis at the council and in the personal lives of many, including a teenager to whom he gave a helping hand. As everyone knows, Rowling is very good at creating worlds, and here she effectively shows the stifling (for some) and satisfying (for others) constraints of village life. Somewhat less successful are her characters, who wouldnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t seem out of place in a British soap opera: not surprisingly, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s her several teen characters, the tortured and the torturers, who jump most from the page. As for her prose, well, that was never RowlingÃ¢â ¬â„¢s strong suit, and it lumbers more than it soars. To give credit where itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s due, one of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s richest women wrote her book and is willing to take the critical lumps when she didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t have to do anything more than stay home and count her money. She must like to write. --Ilene Cooper --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Having read some of the more negative views, I have to say this: Would you have ranked "1984", "The Bluest Eye", "The Grapes of Wrath", or "Great Expectations" so badly? Guess what, some of the best stories aren't fun-filled light reading! Some of the best works are disturbing, even sad. So, if your view of literature is that a book can only be worthwhile if you can breeze through it having a fun adventure, then don't bother with this book. This is something else entirely.That said, "The Casual Vacancy" is a disturbing character study. It is written in third-person omniscient point of view. It does require some effort to handle a story with some 18 or so viewpoint characters, so this book will be at too high a reading level for some. I normally don't like the omniscient POV, but this story had to be told that way and Rowling handles it with expertise.So, what is this book about? It is about pain and cruelty and why people become cruel. There are no traditional protagonists or antagonists, just people going through life. Rowling explores the various ways that people become cruel, angry, or jaded with each main character showing a different form of cruelty and a different reason for it. And, this book is about the people that get hurt by other people's pain and anger.This isn't an easy book to read, probably the reason so many have reviewed it negatively. But, this is a brilliantly written book, just not for everyone.This novel is written with a seldom-seen narrative structure. In this structure the story begins with a simple, perhaps commonplace, connection between a group of people (in this case, someone dies, which has some effect on each of these characters). The narrative then explores how each character's life led him or her to be present for that connecting event and then the character moves on past the single event. As this structure is used for a character study, the connecting event may not even be particularly important. Instead, we see a collection of interconnected characters as the main thrust of the novel, rather than a single story unfolding. In this case, we follow how the death at the beginning of the novel affects approximately 18 characters.I highly recommend this book to those who want to read something thought-provoking and actually about the real world. But, if you want some light reading that you don't have to think about, then stay away from "The Casual Vacancy".To those who reviewed it negatively because it wasn't like Harry Potter, I can only ask whether they were paying attention. Rowling explored many of these themes, hidden behind the window dressing of fantasy, in those books. That is why Harry Potter was not just another of the countless stories about magical children. She continues this exploration in "The Casual Vacancy", but without the magic and without the restrictions of children's literature.Edited to add: I realize that Rowling has described this as a dark comedy. I don't know why she has said that. Perhaps she had intended this to be a comedy, and there are some satirical scenes, but it grew into something else as she developed and revised it. Whatever the case, I saw very little that was humorous in this book. I did greatly appreciate the book, but I don't know why she

would claim it was a comedy, dark or otherwise.

Like many other readers, I was delighted to hear awhile back that JK Rowling had an adult novel for us...adult like it was written for adults, not that it was going to be some erotic romance or anything like that. I preordered a copy the day it became available, and lamented the fact that I couldn't pick it up as soon as it arrived, since I was traveling overseas at the time. Meanwhile, as reviews started popping up around the internet, I was disappointed to read that people seem to have quite mixed opinions about this novel.After reading the entire thing, I can see why people have these mixed feelings. This novel is nothing like Harry Potter in the story elements, the chief among them being that this is set in the actual world without any magic, no true heroes or villains, and no one overwhelmingly charming or likeable. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the only character in this novel who isn't mildly repulsive in some way is our deceased gentleman, Barry.With all that in mind, if you only liked the Harry Potter series because of the magic and all that, this novel won't be your kind of thing. Rowling breaks any mold we may have put her in, shows us that she's not afraid to tackle evil in the real world, and really demonstrates what a remarkable writer she is. If nothing else, it took me at least four or five HP books before I shed some tears, but this one had me going by the end.Rather than telling us a story about good versus evil, this novel is about life. Regardless of where you're from, you can probably recognize something of your life in one or more of the characters, whether that's the unhappy/happy marriage, the singledom with or without a child, neglect and abuse, going beyond expectations to break the stereotype of your life, or just being an average teenager. The teens in this novel aren't without their flaws either: they are cruel, confused, destructive, and trying to find their way to adulthood. Oh, and most of them hate their parents. Shocker!I feel like I can't review this without at least mentioning to y'all that there are some difficult situations, and if you've got triggers for things you can't read, this might hit them. There's abuse, both emotional and physical. A lot of talk about drug use and what it's like for an addict trying hard to stay clean. There are many instances of bullying and the self-injury that can result from that. This book really does not pull any punches when it comes to these hard truths of life, and shows us what can lie behind closed doors inside any of our communities. But if these situations are hard for you to read, I would say be warned that they exist.In some ways, this was an exhausting read, but I mean that in the best way. I'm glad I read it, and I'm happy to have it on my shelf, yet I won't be picking it up again for awhile. What I can say is that I'm very excited to see what Rowling comes up with next, and that people who enjoy good writing or character studies will enjoy this one.

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