



The Hopeless Life Of Charlie Summers

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Hector Chetwode-Talbot, Eck to his friends, has left the army and is slightly at a loss as to what to do next, when he is approached by an old army pal, Bilbo Mountwilliam. Bilbo runs an investment fund company and business is booming. Bilbo persuades Eck to join the company as a 'greeter' for moneyed clients. All Eck has to do is supply the contacts with entertainment and large G&Ts and then the fund managers will do the rest. Soon Eck is able to buy himself a luxury sports car and decadent flat. It is on a golfing trip to France that Eck first meets Charlie Summers, a fly-by-night entrepreneur whose latest scheme is to import Japanese dog food into the UK. Soon Charlie lands on Eck's doorstep with his suitcase, intent on staying and relaunching his dog food business in the area. But with the financial crash looming, Eck begins to ask himself if they are so very different...

The Hopeless Life Of Charlie Summers Details

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Diana says

I was recommended Paul Torday a few years ago, before Salmon Fishing in the Yemen was released as a film and really became popular. I enjoyed it, but for me this book is far better. It kept me gripped from start to finish, showed a lot of insight, and of course Torday's excellent crisp writing. Perfect mix of great writing, insight, humour and intrigue.

Stuart Bain says

Another fantastic book from Paul Torday. If you want hard and fast meaningless action/thriller novels go elsewhere.

This is a subtle thought provoking book about how we fill our lives up with things that don't really matter. Add on top of this fantastic underlying humour from Charlie with his dog food, beetroot and singing.

Best book I've read in years.

Liz Stevens says

Paul Torday seems to have a habit of having a very slow start to his books. Although this was interesting I did not feel compelled to keep picking it up to read

Agnese says

An unremarkable book. A story of common miseries like those that one can find in any newspaper everyday. Charlie Summers, the main loser among losers, is the only interesting character for his emotional depth. The others, including the narrator, are quite flat and boring. Nothing new is said in this book, nothing intriguing, no amusing or provoking ideas that can catch the reader's imagination, surprise him, make him wonder. An aloof description of discouraging, everyday chronicle. Some hints of comments or criticisms that could revive the story are unconvincingly scattered through the narration and never unfolded, so that they can easily pass unnoticed. The result is an ordinary report of the facts that shows no interest or strength to portray those aberrations and weaknesses of human nature that are at their origin.

Julian Lees says

Amusing but a little predictable in the end. Not as good as Salmon Fishing in the Yemen.

Birgitt Krumboeck says

I absolutely loved it! I am so sad that Paul is no longer among us. Perhaps he is writing in the Great Beyond... I certainly hope so!

Jane says

Whilst I can't fault the writing I didn't gel with any of the characters or the subject matter as I imagine in a couple of months time I will be hard pushed to remember much about it.

Emanuele says

Premesso che del buon Torday, talento (editorialmente) maturato troppo tardi, ho letto "Pesca al salmone nello Yemen" e "La ragazza del ritratto", entrambi piacevoli ed oltre la sufficienza, questo "Vita avventurosa (in realtà l'aggettivo originale è hopeless che ha tutta un'altra valenza) di Charlie Summers" non si discosta molto dalla valutazione dei precedenti. Torday è uno scrittore molto pacato, racconta storie piacevoli con ingredienti ben dosati tali da non stancare: un amore più o meno complicato, un malessere psicofisico del protagonista verso la propria condizione lavorativa ed un plot di fondo che ha sempre qualcosa che incuriosisce il lettore (il salmone nello yemen, una ragazza che esce da un quadro e in questo caso l'incontro con un personaggio grottesco come Charlie). Lo scrittore inglese non strafà, non esce mai dai suoi schemi e da quegli elementi che gli hanno fruttato la notorietà al grande pubblico, ma non ce n'è bisogno, non gli si chiede nulla di tutto questo, Torday è(ra) un po' come quei registi da cui sai che tipo di film aspettarti, ma lo guardi lo stesso, appunto perché lo sai!

Charlie Summers è l'emblema del fallimento, un uomo che usa stratagemmi e piccole truffe per tirare avanti buttandosi in qualunque tipo di avventura gli si pari davanti, ovviamente con esiti nefasti. Charlie però non ci sta, ed oltre al fallimento rappresenta la voglia di vivere e di realizzarsi e dimostrare agli altri (ma anche a se stesso) di non essere un inadatto alla vita, un perdente, un reietto.

La voce narrante è quella di Hector Chetwode-Talbot, Eck per gli amici, uomo razionale, quadrato, solitario... ma anche solo. Lasciato l'esercito inglese, dopo una brutta esperienza culminata con un attacco errato ad un territorio protetto dell'Afghanistan, trova lavoro presso una società di investimento gestita da un suo compagno d'armi, Bilbo, nel ruolo di accompagnatore dei clienti più facoltosi a cene lussuose o partite di golf, insomma un pr d lusso, ottimi guadagni e poca fatica. Un giorno nel sud della Francia incontra per caso Charlie Summers rimanendone affascinato. Da quel momento in poi le loro strade si incroceranno più di una volta con risvolti inaspettati.

In conclusione consiglio questo libro a chi già conosce lo stile dell'autore, se invece dovete iniziare con un suo libro vi consiglio il suo successo "Pesca al Salmone nello Yemen". Se non leggete da tanto tempo o venite da un libro pesante o che non avete finito perchè vi ha deluso, questo vi ridarà quella spinta per riprovare.

Bob says

Clever stuff. Reads like a dream. This combines complexity with simplicity and farce with gritty reality. Almost impossible to describe. Charlie Summers is a magnificent invention who occupies the pages in a way that no other character I've ever read has. Charlie appears throughout the novel the way that old friends, welcome and unwelcome alike, appear through our lives. It's totally convincing and surprisingly moving. I should be getting on with work but it took over. One of those books that you feel saddened to finish.

Cheryl says

This book was interesting, it felt very much like a real life autobiography. I liked the style of it being someone telling you their story, it was quite engaging. It was really the Life of 'Eck as much as Charlie. I don't have anything in common with any of the characters but they are quite likeable in their way, if a little stereotypical in places perhaps. I started off disliking Charlie and liking the honest upstanding Eck but by the end of the book it was the other way round.

I definitely preferred the Charlie story, he's a really interesting character. The Eck story is a nightmare waiting to happen.

The romance element is not particularly romantic, until he goes to France to see her on impulse. He's not particularly nice to Harriet and I felt he took advantage of her in the home they inherited. There is a small quote here that almost made me laugh "One day Harriet would, I have no doubt, learn to live a normal life in a normal way, stop being a recluse, marry, have children, and join a book club. A girl like that deserved a happy life". Wow that's how to make a girl happy - marry, kids, book club! Bloody male writer!

I found by the end of the book Eck to be a selfish, greedy, cowardly man. An utter idiot. He started off seeming so fair and upstanding and honest. He got away with it all and poor Charlie suffered. He didn't find peace!

It was cleverly written and the comparison of the two men, from their physical appearance to their actual character/personality was well made.

4 stars is a little generous perhaps but 3 is too harsh, it wasn't thrilling book or particularly exciting but it was a nice read nonetheless.

Susan says

Didn't finish

Elke Koepping says

Truly exceptional! Well written, very sarcastic but quite true in the essence. Grandiose, I can only recommend the book.

Deb says

After some internal wrangling I have plumped for 3 stars. The story really only deserves 2 in my opinion as the characters are quite flat and the storyline dull. However, despite this, I actually enjoyed reading it - a gentle, undemanding read at a busy time of year - so 3 stars it is!

Karen says

I am thrilled to have discovered author Torday, and dismayed that I have finished reading everything he has written to date. Excellent and versatile author. I loved the humor in "Salmon Fishing on the Yemen" but his other books remind me of Ian McEwan--more serious commentaries on modern life and social customs. At the beginning of this book, Charlie Summers is a side character, a buffoon, a joke--by the end, he is a hero.

Marianne says

“Arrangements were then made to show Charlie to his room. This turned out to be a servant’s room, a long way from the rest of the bedrooms, and showed no sign of recent use. There was a small bed about five feet long, a washbasin and not much else in the way of decoration. A bathroom with a lino floor across the corridor was thrown in as additional hospitality. It was lit by one of the new low-energy bulbs, which seemed barely to register any form of electric current, emitting a glow similar to what might have been produced by half a dozen fireflies”

The Hopeless Life of Charlie Summers is the fourth novel by British author, Paul Torday. After ten years in the army followed by a few in private security, Hector Chetwode-Talbot (Eck to his friends) is at a loose end. Then he gets a call from Bilbo Mountwilliam, a few years ahead of him at school and now fabulously rich, thanks to the hedge fund he runs. Bilbo offers Eck a well-paying position: all he has to do is entertain his well-off friends and get them interested in investing in Mountwilliam Partners.

His job sees him in the south of France, playing golf with his friend, Henry (Lord) Newark when they first encounter Charlie Summers, looking rather shop-worn, in hiding from HM’s Customs and Revenue regarding certain VAT irregularities. But Charlie is nothing if not resilient, and is soon back in the country with (yet another) get-rich-quick scheme, this one involving Japanese dog food. His audacious plans see him establishing himself in Gloucestershire and trading on a case of mistaken identity.

Eck has always had a niggling feeling about the ethics of his job, and finds himself even more wary when Bilbo has him meeting with a mysterious Afghan. The feeling that he is being followed is dismissed: he is distracted by his ever growing feelings for his second cousin, Harriet. And then the Global Financial Crisis begins to bite: “...the invisible, locationless money ebbed and flowed around the world, a great tide of wealth. Each high tide was higher than the last; each low tide less marked. No one quite knew where it all was, or which debts were going to be repaid, and which not. Yet, here and there, one or two people were beginning to ask: where’s the money?”

In this novel, Torday explores the environment that produced the GFC, as well as touching on money

laundering, greed (of course!) and guilt. Also featured are con-men (of varying degrees of magnitude), emetic dog food, beetroot-coloured wine, a few somewhat careless jihadists, an unexpected inheritance, green hair dye, a friendly-fire incident and a kidnapping.

Torday's characters are wholly believable: each has their strengths and weaknesses, and the decisions they make in life are completely understandable. Several of the characters have appeared in earlier novels, notably Harriet Chetwode-Talbot, Eck, Charlie and Elizabeth Gascoigne. There are plenty of laugh-out-loud moments, and only the most cynical reader will not choke up toward the end. Torday just keeps getting better, and readers who enjoy this book will look forward to *More Than You Can Say*. Just brilliant!
