Catch-22 is the title of Joseph Heller's novel, published in 1961. The story centres on Captain Yossarian of the 256th United States (Army) bombing squadron in the Second World War, whose main aim is to avoid being killed.

Joseph Heller's experience of flying bombing missions during World War II inspired Catch-22, one of the most admired novels of the post-war years and one of America's most potent anti-war books. Captain Yossarian is a bombardier on a Mediterranean island in 1943 who starts to break down under the pressures of war. When he tries to be relieved from duty on the grounds of insanity, he is stopped by the military's "Catch-22." This unwritten regulation states that anyone who wants to avoid combat cannot be insane, and anyone who wants to fight must be insane but is fit to fight. Similar military double talk plagues Yossarian and several other characters except for Yossarian's friend Orr who outwits the Catch-22 and eventually escapes to Sweden. Yossarian vows at the end of the book to do the same. The novel is written from several points of view, skips back and forth through time, and moves from cartoonish farce to horrifying reality involving rape and death. The many characters are vivid and memorable though most of them appear only briefly in the narrative. The highly satirical novel was not only a bestseller but it coined the expression Catch-22 which has come to mean any no-win situation. Buck Henry's screenplay for the 1970 movie version of Catch-22 took episodes from the novel and fashioned them into a conventional, chronological narrative, though both the outlandish humor and ghastly violence was retained. Alan Arkin is properly confused and frustrated as Yossarian and the supporting cast is an impressive series of tragi-comic performances. Fans of the book missed the
complex structure and varying points of view of Heller's original but for the most part the long and uneven movie is an ambitious adaptation of a very tricky novel. Only three years later, a television version of *Catch-22* was broadcast with Richard Dreyfuss as Yossarian. His performance was so overblown that one questioned the character's sanity, thereby negating the whole point of the book. The TV-movie was little seen and quickly forgotten.

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