

The Timewaster Letters

ROBIN COOPER



'Cooper's letters are absurd, pointless,
and very, very funny.'

RICKY GERVAIS

'Probably the funniest book
you'll read this year.'

GUARDIAN

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The hilariously surreal correspondence of Robin Cooper, frustrated children's author, fairy-spotter and fancy-spoon collector, in the bestselling tradition of the Henry Root letters - but with an entirely fresh perspective

The Timewaster Letters Details

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Victoria says

I have never before felt so utterly let down and lied to by a bunch of cover acclamations. "Downright hilarious", claim the *Observer* and "the funniest book you'll read this year" state the *Guardian*. Ugh. I should have guessed, I suppose, when I saw the other acclaims written by comedians such as Avid Merrion (of *Bo' Selecta!* fame) and Matt Lucas. The truth is, I simply don't find them funny. I would rather not be slapped in the face with silliness and blatancy, but that is a personal preference.

The Timewaster Letters is a collection of correspondences between Mr Cooper and a variety of societies, groups and associations. They, as promised, are a complete waste of everybody's time – recommending ridiculous ideas, making ludicrous suggestions and asking absurd questions, all in the name of humour. The replies range from polite indulgence to complete ignorance or their own witty comebacks.

There are a few moments that raised the odd smile – I liked his letter to the Halibut Society, for instance, and I did laugh out loud once (but only once – and I forget why). The humour here though just doesn't work. Cooper simply tries too hard to be funny and it comes out forced, obvious and looking a little pathetic. In an attempt at making the recipients look foolish, all he actually manages to do is to make himself look like a childish, attention seeking, asinine idiot and in actual fact, the beneficiaries come out of this remarkably well.

The Timewaster Letters is genuinely a waste of time – not just for the recipients of the letters as intended, but for the reader and for Cooper himself. Even if the more obvious style comedy is your 'thing', the concept of this book gets old incredibly quickly and I don't know why anyone would choose to pick up the second volume. However, should you decide to take up reading this ridiculous collection, do yourself a favour and merely dip into it occasionally, when passing, and read just one or two selections at a time. That way, you may smile a little now and then, maybe even laugh a little, without getting (too) bored by an old and transparent concept.

Katie says

On the one hand, this book is hilarious. On the other hand, I felt bad for some of the people who spent the time to write back each time, only to receive more and more obnoxious letters from Robin Cooper until they realized it was all a joke.

The book starts out strong with his letter to a garden catalog asking them to include his scarecrows made of beef (with diagrams!), then gets even funnier with his description of a bird trap that drowns the birds in syrup. The catalog writes back and says they are bird friendly and tells Robin never to write again. Most of the letters have the same pattern, if he receives any answer at all.

My favorite is the letter to the Ball and Roller Bearing Manufacturers Association asking them to write to his son "Michael" who "threatened to flood the house when we are out if we so much as touch one of his bearings" in his collection of 95,000 ball-bearings.

The book is a quick, silly read perfect for breaking the monotony at children's baseball games.

Lala says

If you want to waste your time then read this book. How utterly boring and pointless. I thought I would enjoy it after laughing all the way through Joe Lycetts book. They couldn't be any more different!

Geri Lloyd-Jones says

This book starts off ok...but after a while it just gets stupid & I was glad when it was finished! The whole thing was just plain stupid & not that funny after all, like some kid had written it...what a let down. I found myself questioning whether the people who had thought it was "very, very funny" had infact read another book!!

Ian Pindar says

I can't believe I have not reviewed this book. This is the funniest book I have ever read, superseding Monty Python's Big Book. I fought for oxygen the first time I read this, literally and physically. There are parts of this book that are hilarious with a capital 'Hil'. The section on paint colours, birdbox and mayoral maces I use in times of therapy, it is much cheaper than professional help.

If I am ever stuck for a present for 'an uncle' 'Granddad' 'dad' male friend' as Blue Peter might say, I buy them this. The inform them this is the funniest book I have ever read! What more recommendation do you need? Word of caution, this is British humour.

A more modern, slightly more acerbic version is The Raymond Delauney emails. I have never read the Henry Root letters.

joolz says

I was caught away from home with an hour to wait for someone, and with a dying tab battery, so I popped into Oxfam to get a non-e read and picked this up, glad I did. Got half way through the book there and then, sitting in the car.

The concept is that Cook writes letters to companies with oddball ideas/comments and publishes them, together with the replies he gets. The result is a very funny book that sometimes makes you feel sorry for his 'victims' but also, at times, makes you respect the restraint and dignity of the people who are giving polite replies to letters obviously written by a complete nutter. His letter to a 'Secondary Metals....' organisation saying they should have more confidence in themselves and rename themselves the '*Primary Metals...*' org is funny, but gets a kind and helpful reply explaining what secondary metals are, a win for the 'victim' there I think! The staff at Dorling Kindersley come out of it very well, although his letters to them are surreal!

My favourite is a letter asking a clarinet organisation how he can get 200 clarinettists to come to his house for his wife's birthday. He wants them to pick up their instruments as she walks in so she thinks they are going to play, but the birthday surprise is that they should then put down their instruments and leave without

playing a note. That was funny enough, but he adds he must have concert standard clarinet players. Arf arf :-D

James says

Basically prank calls to various organizations, agencies, and associations by written letter correspondence. If you appreciate absurdity you will likely enjoy a quick breeze through this collection. Some were laugh-out-loud worthy, but unfortunately the concept grows tired and obnoxious over the length of a book. The correspondence is not malicious as much as it is a test of absurdity on an unwitting participant. Still, I think it is worth a pickup or a coffee table.

GeraniumCat says

This book caused a number of sense-of-humour failures - I kept finding myself disapproving rather of the whole enterprise. I'm obviously not as silly as I think I am.

Chris says

I wish i could give a minus star for wasting paper.

first a history lesson: back in 1980, satirist, writer, rake and playboy, Willie Donaldson came out with 'The Henry Root Letters', a genuinely funny lampooning of the rich famous and pretentious by a true wit. look up willie in wikipedia, he lived quite a life.

Now comes a new generation of 'wits' and standards have clearly fallen. Robin cooper has also had the idea of writing provocative, obviously spoof letters to various people and organisations and printing both sides of the correspondence. i say 'obviously' spoof because of the low standard of deceptive prose, but the victims seem not to spot it.

Cooper's letters are obvious, shrill and unfunny which probably explains why the replies are similarly leaden and flat. He is the classroom wag and the cheeky chappie on the playground but he is nowhere near publishable material. In donaldson's hands the spoofs would have been smooth parodies of the skill of craig brown.

it's a timewasting read and certainly time wasting to review and read about, but if it sends you to revisit the henry root originals, it will have been worth it.

Ioana says

Hilarious little stories, but became quite repetitive towards the end, so it doesn't lead me to believe that it is a style that transcends well enough in an entire book, just because as you progress you unfortunately use that novelty factor.

Kevin SharkIson says

The clue is in the title. Somewhat entertaining, mostly a load of tosh

Mr John A Burton says

Laugh out loud hilarious

What can I say, this book had me laughing out loud all the way through-it is hilariously funny. I earn buy-in you don't want to draw attention to yourself-don't read in public -fantastic book

Roney Lundell says

I found it rather silly than funny. Robins letters are often so silly that it must be apparent to the companies and organisations that it must have been clear to them that they were the subject of a joke made on their behalf.

The title is a good description of how I wasted my time reading this book.

Jovis says

Completely hilarious. Cooper had lots of interesting yet absurd ideas. It's funny that a number of his respondents go along with him and are even considerate. I reckon the best ones are those that he invents - stories, poems, mascots, tools, events. Oh, his sketches! Undeniably the funniest.

James Lowe says

Not really absurd enough to be genuinely hilarious and too absurd to gently coax semi-serious replies. Some letters within are very funny but they are few and far between unfortunately.
