



Only Joking: What's So Funny About Making People Laugh?

By Jimmy Carr, Lucy Greeves

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Britain's hottest young comedian presents a seriously funny, up-close look at joking matters—from the social origins of laughter, to the art and craft of humor, to why we can never remember the punch line—featuring over 300 jokes.

As the host of the hit game show *Distraction* (now in its third season on Comedy Central) and one of the premier stand-up acts working today, award-winning comedian Jimmy Carr has won over millions of fans around the world with his trademark rapier wit, laced with "exquisitely economical and perfectly timed one-liners" (*The Guardian*). For this book he teams up with friend and fellow comedy writer Lucy Greeves to take an in-depth look at where humor comes from and how it works, through exploring its purest form: the joke.

Only Joking begins with the mechanism of laughter—how it happens and why even infants do it—then delves into the power of the punch line, exploring the basics of all jokes, from the use of shock and surprise to advanced stand-up techniques such as the "pull-back/reveal." Carr and Greeves go on to explore taboo humor, jokes that bomb, and the psychology of finding something funny. They look into the long-standing connection between politics and humor, and discuss the survival prospects for contentious jokes in the current political climate. Throughout the book they conjure up a supporting cast of colorful joke enthusiasts, from Sigmund Freud to Lenny Bruce, and discuss their influence on the jokes we tell today. Surveying across national, ethnic, and gender divides, this rollicking analysis of why joking will always be close to the human heart is an irresistible exploration of humor that makes clear why we need a good laugh now more than ever.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Carr, a British standup comic and host of the game show *Distraction*, and his friend Greeves, a freelance writer, deserve a round of applause for this entertaining and educational book about the history and practice of humor. In a delightfully roundabout way—leavened with a joke or witticism at the bottom of each page—the authors discuss theories of comedy, delving into trickster traditions, whether animals understand jokes, gender differences in joking, children's humor ("What's yellow and dangerous? Shark-infested custard"), ethnic and dirty jokes (e.g., the Aristocrats, made famous by the Penn Jillette/Paul Provenza movie), politically incorrect humor and the social role of antiestablishment humor. Tucked here and there are some delightful digressions, including a short bio of a dirty-joke collector, a history of joke books and the story of the development of television laugh tracks. In the end, Carr and Greeves remind readers not to confuse "seriousness of purpose" with a "solemn" attitude: just because people joke about something doesn't mean they're not taking it seriously. And that goes for the history of joking, too. (*Sept.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review It's hard to talk about comedy without sounding, at least part of the time, like a humorless pedant: see Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. But it isn't impossible, as British comedians Carr (host of the Comedy Central game show *Distractions*) and Greeves prove in their lively, intelligent, highly readable, often hilarious coverage of all aspects of what makes people laugh--at least, in the English-speaking world. (Carr and Greeves carefully point out that humor is culturally based, and what is hilarious to one culture may merely baffle another.) Specific topics include why we need to laugh, the role joking plays in society, what kind of people become professional comedians, and the ever-changing standards for what kind of jokes go too far. American readers, used to the knee-jerk anti-intellectualism of most U.S. comics, may be surprised and delighted by how comfortably Carr and Greeves, both graduates of Cambridge University, discuss the most high-flown theories of comedy. Then again, many of the best British comics of the last two generations, such as Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, and the Monty Python crew, have had strong academic credentials. And never fear, the book is packed with jokes, many of them by professional stand-ups, most of them absolute howlers, that illustrate Carr and Greeves' arguments. *Jack Helbig*

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About the Author

Jimmy Carr is a fast-rising comedy star in both his native England and the United States, where he has had numerous television appearances. Best friend **Lucy Greeves**, a freelance writer, met Jimmy while they were students at Cambridge University.

Users Review

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