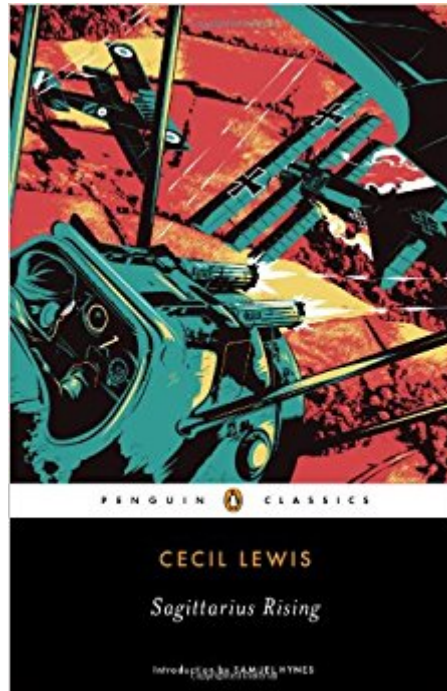


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# Sagittarius Rising (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

A memoir by a WWI fighter pilot, with the adventurous spirit of *War Horse* and the charm of *The Little Prince*—A singular, lyrical book, *Sagittarius Rising* is at once an exuberant memoir from the Lost Generation and a riveting tale of the early days of flight during World War I. Cecil Lewis lied his way into the British Army—his Royal Flying Corps at age sixteen and was ordered to a squadron on the Western Front only a year later. At the time, flying was so new that designers hadn't even decided on basic mechanics such as how many wings a plane should have. Despite this, Lewis mastered virtually every kind of single-engine plane in the RFC, going on to excel in active duty and even to dogfight the Red Baron—and live to tell the tale. Full of infectious charm and written with the prose and pacing of a novel, *Sagittarius Rising* beautifully recounts Lewis's harrowing exploits in the sky alongside his wild times of partying and chasing girls while on leave in London. His coming-of-age story is unlike any other WWI memoir you've read before. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for *Sagittarius Rising*:  
“This is a book everyone should read. It is the autobiography of an ace, and no common ace either. The boy had all the noble tastes and qualities, love of beauty, soaring imagination, a brilliant endowment of good looks . . . This prince of pilots had a charmed life in every sense of the word; he is a thinker, a master of words, and a bit of a poet.”  
•George Bernard Shaw  
“A magical evocation of the lonely battle fought in the clouds.”  
•The Daily Telegraph  
“Classic . . . the definitive account of aerial combat  
full of passion and poetry.”  
•The Independent  
“I have read a number of different accounts of aviators in the First World War, but the world that Cecil Lewis unveils in *Sagittarius Rising* is unlike any other I have previously read about. What makes this book so special is not only Cecil Lewis’s story, but the way in which he shares his life experiences. He writes so eloquently, painting an amazingly detailed picture with his words . . . If I had to pick the one book that I could own on the personal accounts of aviators from the First World War, this book would be it. [Lewis’s] ability to captivate your imagination with his words makes for a book that is very difficult to put down once you start reading it.”  
•Aero (January 2007)  
“This beautiful work evokes the air war of 1914-1918 in an unusual and moving way. It was written by a sensitive artist who, unlike so many of his comrades, had his life preserved by a series of fortunate assignments during his career as a combat pilot. He thus acquired the skill to match his love of flying, and so survived the war. Given that Cecil Lewis left school at 17, lying about his age to get into the Royal Flying Corps, his ability with words is astounding. Even more remarkable is that much of his 1936 *Sagittarius Rising* is written with passionate, embracing enthusiasm of youth. His foreword wryly acknowledges this, asking the reader’s forgiveness for his inclusion of some tentative romantic encounters  
a book that everyone who loves aviation should read.”  
•Aviation History (November 2007)  
“If you want to read one book which best captures the heroic infancy of flying, then *Sagittarius Rising* is it. Forget St-Exupery, Lindbergh or even Richard Hillary. Cecil Lewis got there before any of them, and in this magical memoir summed up the terrible beauty of flying, and fighting the first air war, waged in the skies above the Western Front.”  
•Nigel Jones, BBC History Magazine  
“*Sagittarius Rising* is his stirring, often moving, account of his years with the corps, fighting on the Western Front. The vivid descriptions of dog-fights (including an encounter with the Red Baron) and the exhilaration of flight transcend Boy’s Own Paper banality through his poignancy and lyrical depth.”  
•The Times  
“This pretty new Penguin edition of his book sports an eye-catching cover illustration by Matthew Taylor and a wonderful Introduction by aviation historian Samuel

Hynes...it's mighty good fun to spend time in airman Lewis's company."Open Letters Monthly

8 1.5-hour cassettes --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cecil Lewis's *SAGITTARIUS RISING* probably does deserve its classic status. It is, after all, a memoir of the role of aviation in the First World War. Aviators at that time were true pioneers, and most of them were brave - or foolish - daredevils to boot, tempting fate every time they took to the sky in their fragile machines. I read the book mainly because this new edition from Penguin Classics (2014) features an introduction by one of my favorite authors, Samuel Hynes. Hynes's *FLIGHTS OF PASSAGE* is perhaps one of the best WWII memoirs about flying. And, more recently, Hynes wrote an excellent and very personal sort of history of WWI aviators, *THE UNSUBSTANTIAL AIR*. I loved both of those books. Unfortunately, although I loved the Introduction, the Lewis book fell a bit flat for me as a memoir. The style seemed overly ornate and the language dated - to be expected, I suppose, but Lewis's many stories and anecdotes of the flying exploits by him and his fellow pilots too quickly became redundant, to the point that I began skimming long portions of the narrative. Yes, he talks of his training, mates lost in fiery crashes, stupid mistakes made by himself and others, of his growing sense of mortality, and, sometimes, burnout and dread which got him posted temporarily back to England from France. He describes his many sorties over the long days of the Somme, near misses and mechanical failures, getting lost and forced landings - all those things are in there. He also gives a glimpse into his post-war days as a civilian pilot instructor in China - mostly a fruitless enterprise. Lewis wrote his book twenty years after the war, when he was not yet forty, but felt like his life was half over. (In fact he lived to be 99.) He makes a number of comments about war that are still true in these days of global war and terrorist strikes everywhere, and the accompanying political rants so ubiquitous in today's news. "People who cannot learn from their mistakes are damned ... What have we learned from ours? We are, collectively, the most evil and destructive of human creatures. We back up our greeds and jealousies with religion and patriotism ... No one knows where to put their faith, so they believe nothing. Moral and social standards are confused ... The fear of feeling the ground slipping from under their feet drives whole nations back into mediaeval despotism ... But emulating the ostrich, though it may bring relief for a space, does not solve the problem. It leads straight back to self-immolation on the altar of outworn patriotism, that is, to barbarism ..." Lewis made these observations in 1936. Hmm ... Not much has changed in eighty years, has it? He contemplated higher things too, remembering "the cynical wartime prayer: 'O God -

if there is a God, save my soul - if I have a soul.'" But Lewis believed he had a soul - "a drop of the Life Force" - although he wasn't sure about heaven and displayed a dark sense of humor."If, in heaven, my grosser qualities were to be purged away, leaving me all 'good,' so much the worse. The devil was the pepper in my curry; remove it, and how flat the dish would taste."And, speaking of his 'grosser qualities,' Lewis is disappointingly circumspect about his 'jolly good times' when he was on home leave, although there are intimations of a girl friend or two. Perhaps it's his 'gentlemen don't tell tales' training. Nevertheless, there is not very much of his personal life here, aside from some time spent with this philosopher father, who enlisted in the army, refusing to take a commission. Bottom line: SAGITTARIUS RISING is a worthy, if not terribly interesting book. I would recommend it to readers interested in the history of aviation and warfare. (But I still think that the Hynes books are much better.)- Tim Bazzett, author of the memoir, BOOKLOVER

Cecil Lewis first came to my attention when I read "Captain Ball" by Alex Devaney. His words, "The most self-confident aces began to wonder when their turn would come" - "Faced by the empty chairs of men you had laughed and joked with at lunch. And, miraculously, you were still there. Until tomorrow", quoted there, just touched me, and my curiosity about him led me to this book. It has been on my To Read list ever since. Now I finally got to it, it was fantastic. Cecil Lewis lived in dangerous times and penned his memories of them (some 20 years later) in a wonderful way. He didn't seem to make himself look anything other than what he really was. At least, I didn't get the feeling he was trying to show himself as a hero. Yes, he spoke of his feats. But he as easily told of his mistakes and errors, even making fun of himself on their account. Quite a character, he seemed to be. And a great read this book was. Wish I'd known the man himself.

For those of us who love reading, who treasure a very few books as much beloved friends, we are sometimes fortunate enough to find a volume that touches our hearts, and is instantly propelled to a special level of reverence. Such is Cecil Lewis's Sagittarius Rising. This incredibly sensitive and perceptive man's book, while concerning many months of the WWI years, is not a war story. Instead, the author speaks from the perspective of 20 years after the events described, to tell of living these years, of his daily joys and fears, of how it felt to be passing through tumultuous, terribly important times, knowing that he was experiencing history, and trying to show us that history is made by ordinary men. Cecil Lewis led an extraordinary life by any measure. Sagittarius Rising is an extraordinary tale.

Frightening to discover the parallels between the observations of pre-WWII Cecil Lewis (WWI Pilot) and the current state of cultural affairs. Fascinating read that provides a first-person, young man's view of the birth of air combat and the Great War to end all wars.

Very Interesting and revealing story of air combat during WWI. It has the grit and emotion of a first person narrative, underscored by a youthful narrator.

"We were trained with one objective - to kill". "We had one hope - to live". A wonderfully written book, at one stage the author states "When it was over (WW1) we had to start over". Imagine the trauma? Once into the book, one is completely absorbed...think about six (6) pages describing clouds. Extraordinary. He talks about the first time flying in moonlight, in darkness and no instruments. How did they do it? Cecil Lewis describes going on to China after the WW1 to start up the fledgling airways, the hard work training locals and language barriers. This is a 'keeper', for, to revisit will always be a renewed thrill.

This is a wonderful book on the joys and tribulations of flying!! The author does a superb job of capturing the thought process of a pilot as they tackle the different realms of flight. As a pilot I have to laugh at some of the passages as they mimic some of the thoughts that I have had while flying. I'm not a huge WW1 fan, but with all of the great praise thrust upon this book I ventured forth and purchase it. I wasn't disappointed at all and I've already read through half of it while reading another outstanding aviation book. This book belongs in the library of anyone who wants to collect all the great aviation writers.

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