



## Soul Catcher

By Michael C. White  
ISBN: 9780061340734

### Introduction

*Soul Catcher* is a bold and exquisitely written epic novel about two people on the run in the Northern states before the Civil War—a tracker and the runaway woman slave he has pursued—and the harrowing and heart-rending journey home that will change them forever.

Augustus Cain is a man in a corner. In Richmond a few years before the Civil War, he faces a past that he dreams of forgetting, a present without prospect or fortune—and with the loss of his horse, his most precious possession, at the gambling table—a clouded and uncertain future. But he has a skill that has given him some success if not pride: he is an expert tracker of runaway slaves. Then a wealthy plantation owner named Eberly, who holds a gambling IOU from Cain, comes to him with a proposition: if Cain will travel into the North and retrieve a runaway named Rosetta, Eberly will pay him more than Cain has ever made before and forgive his debts.

So begins a journey into the heart and soul of America in the years before the war that will threaten to tear it apart. Cain and his companions—the Strofe brothers and the malignant man named Preacher—follow Rosetta to upstate New York and Boston and then take up their hard ride South, a trip that for Cain and Rosetta will become an unforgettable test of character and will, mercy and compassion.

### Questions for Discussion

1. How does Cain justify his life as a slave catcher? Is Cain essentially an evil man or merely a man of his times?
2. Cain is someone deeply troubled by inner demons. What are some of these demons and what part do they play in his character?
3. The novel is very much a physical journey. How does this journey mirror or spur Cain's spiritual journey?
4. Cain likes to read Milton's *Paradise Lost*. How is the poem used in the novel and how does its story of Satan's rebellion against God reflect Cain's conflict?
5. How are the four slave catchers—Cain, the Strofe brothers, and Preacher—different?
6. Little Strofe is often singing ballads. What part does music play in the novel? In particular, how does it comment on the larger themes of the story?
7. The Fugitive Slave Act (part of the Compromise of 1850, which was passed in an effort to prevent a conflict between North and South) forced Northerners to help in the apprehension of runaways. How does this play out in the novel?
8. Rosetta is a woman who is both embittered, yet still filled with hope. How do these two aspects conflict in her?
9. In addition to the subject of slavery, *Soul Catcher* also becomes a love story about Cain and Rosetta. And yet, under the distorting effects of the slave system, can love really exist between two people, one white and one black?
10. John Brown was considered both a crazed fanatic and a prophet of change. How does the novel portray him?
11. Violence plays a large role in the novel. For instance, John Brown says that America is in need of "a lot of killing." Can violence ever be justified? Can it ever be redemptive?
12. Any historical novel can be, if it is effective, relevant to contemporary times. What about the novel resonates with America today?
13. In the novel's epilogue, we see that Cain has made a choice. What does this suggest about Cain and about his times?

### About the Author

Michael White teaches at Fairfield University and is an entertaining and illuminating speaker. He is the author of three *New York Times* Notable Books and lives in Connecticut.