

Captain Pantoja and the Special Service Study Guide

**Captain Pantoja and the Special Service by Mario
Vargas Llosa**

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Plot Summary

Captain Pantoja and the Special Service by Mario Vargas Llosa takes place over a span of three years, 1955 to 1958. The main protagonist Pantaleón Pantoja, has just been promoted to Captain in the Peruvian Army. A career administrative soldier, Pantoja enjoys a reputation as a straight arrow and an upstanding member of his country's armed forces. On the day of his promotion, Captain Pantoja meets with several high-ranking officers to receive the details of his next assignment. Pantoja is thrilled at the thought that the generals wish to personally give him his new orders and Pantoja is nearly beside himself with anticipation.

Pantoja, his wife Pocha and his loving mother, Leonor, will be moving to Iquitos in the Amazon jungle region of Peru. Captain Pantoja, puffed up with the praise lavished on him by his superiors, has been given a rather challenging task and instructed to maintain the highest degree of secrecy in carrying out his duties. In short, Captain Pantoja is entrusted with the responsibility of researching and implementing a prostitution service dedicated solely to meeting the physical needs of Peruvian Army personnel stationed on remote installations in the Peruvian Amazon. Initially, Pantoja is somewhat ambivalent about his new assignment. However, because he is a model soldier and intensely proud to wear the uniform of the Peruvian armed forces, he throws himself into his work with great enthusiasm and spectacular efficiency. As a result of the delicate nature of his assignment, Pantoja must work undercover. His wife and mother must never find out what the Army has instructed him to do. As part of establishing the Special Service (the name of the Army's prostitution ring), Pantoja forms close working relationships with pimps, prostitutes and hustlers in the Iquitos area. These characters eventually become Pantoja's surrogate family.

While Pantoja busies himself with the Special Service, another matter is coming to the fore in the Amazon region. A rogue monk named Brother Francisco has been gathering followers from all over the region. Francisco preaches that crucifixion is the way to salvation and his devotees are known to make sacrifices of small animals as well as insects. However, concern over Francisco's sect (known as the Brothers of the Ark) reaches the level of widespread panic when a young boy is crucified in the town of Moronacocho. "The Boy Martyr" as he is known, is worshiped and prayed to by those who follow Brother Francisco. When an old woman is crucified, the Peruvian government instructs the Army to capture Brother Francisco.

The Special Service becomes increasingly popular among all branches of the Peruvian military and soon Pantoja has his hands full. However, when he hires a prostitute known as the Brazilian and stories of the Army's Special Service begin to spread throughout the region, Captain Pantoja's professional and personal lives start to crumble and trouble begins.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Captain Pantoja and the Special Service is the story of a straight laced Peruvian Army officer who is given a shocking task. Women in the local villages around Iquitos are being raped by the soldiers stationed there. As a deterrent to the attacks, Pantoja's superiors choose him for a top-secret assignment. Captain Pantaleón Pantoja has been assigned to Iquitos in the Amazon jungle. From Iquitos, Pantaleón will run a prostitution operation which will cater specifically to the soldiers stationed in the Amazon District. Pantoja is instructed to keep the entire operation (including his part in it) a secret from everyone.

At the opening of the first chapter, Pantaleón Pantoja, his wife Pochita and his mother Leonor excitedly await the day. Pantoja has recently been promoted to Captain. With the new rank, Pantoja will receive new orders and he and his family will relocate. Pochita and Mother Leonor are eager to find out where Pantoja's next assignment will take them. Pochita would like to go to Lima, the capital city of Peru. Mother Leonor, on the other hand, would prefer to return to Chiclayo.

The next episode features Brother Francisco addressing a group of people. It is night and Francisco is asking the crowd to pray with him. The chapter then resumes with Pantoja entering a meeting. Pantoja's superior officers (the heads of the quartermaster unit and other high-ranking Peruvian Army officers) request that he appear in person to receive the details and location of his next assignment. First, Pantoja meets Colonel López López and General Victoria. General Tiger Collazos also attends the meeting. The other officers enthusiastically congratulate Pantoja. They shake his hand and clap him on the back. Captain Pantoja then learns the details of what the army would like him to do. The generals and Colonel López López all agree that Captain Pantoja's new assignment is a delicate one.

The narrative takes another brief detour to a recent telephone conversation between General Collazos and General Scavino. Scavino has difficulty understanding Collazos because of a problem with Scavino's telephone. The story returns to Pantoja's meeting with the other officers. General Victoria and Tiger Collazos continue to lavish praise on Pantoja for the outstanding work he did when stationed in Chiclayo. After another departure into Scavino's conversation with Collazos, Captain Pantoja finds out what his superiors have planned for him.

Tiger Collazos explains to Pantoja that soldiers assigned to details in the Amazon jungle have been raping the local women. Old women, as well as younger women, have been raped by the soldiers. Furthermore, local Amazon District government organizations are up in arms over the situation and civil authorities are demanding that the Army take immediate action to resolve the matter. López López, Victoria and Collazos decide that Pantoja is to arrange for prostitutes to visit the soldiers regularly in order to keep the



soldiers from attacking women in the small towns. Pantoja, Pochita and Mother Leonor will be moving to the small city of Iquitos.

Again, the story breaks away from Pantoja. The action moves to several episodes concerning the soldiers' attacks on women in the small towns. Several minor characters are introduced, giving the reader the idea of the pervasiveness of the rapes.

The most important of the secondary characters mentioned in this chapter is Commander (Father) Beltrán. Commander Beltrán is also an army chaplain, hence the title of Father. An outspoken Catholic priest, Beltrán makes no secret of his displeasure with the soldiers' behavior and his disgust with the Peruvian Army in general.

The captain is given preliminary instructions before leaving for Iquitos. Pantoja is told that he is not to wear his uniform, nor is he allowed to attend any formal events. Pantoja's office is to be located on the outskirts of Iquitos rather than on the military base. General Scavino warns Pantoja that no one is to find out that the Peruvian Army is connected to this special operation. Pantoja is utterly dismayed. Furthermore, he is told not to socialize with the other officers or their families and to find a small house in the city because he is forbidden to live on base. Lieutenant Bacacorzo is assigned to work as Pantoja's liaison officer. Bacacorzo will report directly to the heads of the quartermaster unit and the other officers in command.

Later, Pocha and Mother Leonor both notice that Pantoja is not as thrilled about Iquitos as they expect. Pantoja does not elaborate on his feelings of fear and panic. Captain Pantoja passes on the instructions he received in that morning's meeting. Mother Leonor tries to press her son for information but Pantoja does not reveal anything more.

Pantoja goes about the business of researching and implementing the Special Service. Bacacorzo gives Pantoja a list of nightclubs and adult spots where he might establish contacts in the red-light community. On Lieutenant Bacacorzo's recommendation, Pantoja visits a club where he first encounters Chino Porfirio Wong, a local pimp, and Madame Chuchupe, a woman who owns and runs a brothel. Porfirio gives Pantoja a quick overview of the brothel and prostitution situation in Iquitos and nearby Loreto. Pantoja spends the evening drinking and talking with Madame Chuchupe, Wong, and Chuchupe's lover Freckle the dwarf. He returns home at five o'clock the next morning. Pocha and Mother Leonor are horrified that Pantoja has a hangover. Pocha is absolutely convinced that Pantaleón Pantoja is up to no good.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader is introduced to the narrative's three main protagonists. The newly-promoted Captain Pantoja, his wife Pocha, and Pantoja's mother Leonor live together and all three are excited to learn where they will be living next. Captain Pantoja's service record establishes the character as somewhat prudish. It becomes clear that Pantoja is proud to be a soldier/administrator and that he follows orders to the



letter. Captain Pantoja is chosen for the special assignment because of his thorough, unquestioning compliance and his rigorous attention to detail.

Secondary characters are introduced throughout the chapter. Pantoja's superior officers are introduced, giving the reader some idea of the intricacies of the military chain of command. The reader comes to understand that everyone in the Peruvian Army answers to someone higher up. The phenomenon of the soldiers' attacks on local women serves to reinforce the belief that there is something about the Amazon jungle which alters the soldiers' physiology, prompting an increase in their sexual drive. Conversely, the introduction of Brother Francisco and his brand of religious fanaticism also feeds the belief that the jungle and its environs somehow lend themselves to extreme behavior of one sort or another.

Of note in this chapter is Vargas Llosa's handling of contemporaneous events. That is to say, rather than presenting simultaneous events one at a time, the author splices happenings and conversations together, giving the narrative a somewhat disjointed tenor. The narrative's humorous undertones are prevalent in this first chapter. There is also something of the absurd at work here, evidenced by the fact that those in command of the Peruvian Army would actually view prostitution as a viable solution to the recent unprovoked attacks on local women.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 begins with "Dispatch Number One." The dispatch is a memorandum from Captain Pantoja to General Tiger Collazos. It is revealed in this dispatch that the prostitution operation that will cater to the needs of Peruvian Army personnel is to be known as the SSGFRI (Special Service for Garrisons, Frontier and Related Installations). Captain Pantoja outlines exactly what occurred in his initial meeting with Collazos and the other superior officers. The Captain reiterates the instructions that he is to live as a civilian while carrying out the business of the SSGFRI. The Special Service operations office/command post is located outside the city of Iquitos on the banks of the Itaya river. Sinforoso Caiguas and Palominos Rioalto are chosen to assist Pantoja and the operation. Caiguas and Rioalto are chosen for this particular assignment because of their exemplary military records and "a certain indifference toward persons of the opposite sex," as well as a proper understanding of the top-secret nature of the Special Service.

Captain Pantoja goes into a lengthy discussion of the process of turning the Itaya depot into a suitable work space. It turns out that Pantoja, Caiguas and Rioalto devote the better part of an entire week to cleaning and organizing the site. Apparently, prior to the Army's use of the Itaya location, it was used by Brother Francisco's followers—those belonging to a radical religious sect known as The Brothers of the Ark—as well as a reputed sorcerer by the name of Master Poncio. The members of Brother Francisco's sect conducted animal sacrifices at the Itaya site. Consequently, Pantoja and those assigned to help him spend a considerable amount of time clearing away small animal carcasses. The decimated remains of monkeys, dogs, wildcats, parrots and even herons are found. It seems that Poncio and his devotees used the site as a place to conduct rituals of some sort involving hallucinogenic drugs. The hallucinogenic used, ayahuasca, while producing euphoria and a state of mental expansiveness, also induces vomiting as well as excessive urination and explosive diarrhea. These human excretions, coupled with the leftover animal remains, had rendered the Itaya depot nearly useless. In addition, Pantoja discovered that the site was overrun by rats.

The second part of Pantoja's dispatch to General Collazos outlines his plan for establishing the SSGFRI. Pantoja informs his superior that a questionnaire will be devised to determine the exact number of Army personnel who will be utilizing the Special Service. The questionnaire will be distributed to company leaders. It is determined that only unmarried soldiers will be allowed to utilize the prostitution services. Company leaders are asked to determine how many times per month each enlisted man will need (or want) to use the service and approximately how long each session with the "specialist" (prostitute) will last on average. Pantoja informs Collazos that Madame Chuchupe and her lover Freckle the dwarf will assist the Special Service as administrative personnel and that the two will also help to screen and indoctrinate the prostitutes being used. Pantoja elaborates on his own "training" process, as he is



completely unfamiliar with the workings of a prostitution service. According to his mathematical calculations, Pantoja determines that in order to meet demand, a total of 104,712 "services" will be necessary on a monthly basis; calling for a permanent prostitute staff of approximately 2,115. The captain admits that these figures are quite high and he expresses some doubt as to the Special Service's ability to meet such a demand, initially at any rate.

The middle portion of Chapter 2 recounts a nightmare Pantoja has about the Special Service. Pantoja, leading a formation of prostitutes past the generals on the grandstand, experiences shame and humiliation. The "specialists" refuse to conduct themselves with even a modicum of decorum and prove themselves to be quite a bit of trouble for the prudish Captain Pantoja. The women will not keep in formation and begin undressing, posing, and preening in front of Pantoja's superior officers.

Chapter 2 ends with Dispatch Number 2, from Pantoja to General Tiger Collazos. This dispatch outlines the process by which the prostitutes will be selected for the SSGFRI and the administrative protocols which will be implemented. The official colors of the Special Service are red and green.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2's detailed and lengthy dispatches serve two distinct purposes. First of all, the dispatches represent for the reader what is commonly known as "military-speak." In other words, Vargas Llosa gives the reader a glimpse into the military's way of communicating. Much of what Captain Pantoja writes would not be nearly as humorous were it written in standard civilian language. The tone is serious and very formal. That Pantoja reiterates the details of his first meeting with Scavino and the generals belies the tendency toward redundancy that military and/or bureaucratic bodies are famous for. It is clear that Pantoja is making every effort to address the orders given to him in a sterile, serious manner even though what he has been asked to do is nothing short of absurd, not to mention illegal and (in some people's view) immoral. These dispatches are also examples of an extreme use of euphemism—using certain words to downplay or obscure the true meaning of what is being said. One example of euphemism in this chapter would be referring to the Army-sanctioned prostitution ring as the "Special Service for Garrisons, Frontier and Related Installations" (SSGFRI). The use of euphemism is one of the hallmarks of "military-speak."

The dispatches in Chapter 2 serve to further establish Captain Pantoja as a character who leaves nothing to chance. His level of spit-and-polish conscientiousness is impressive indeed as evidenced in his extremely detailed account of the lengths to which the character goes to prepare the Itaya depot for the Special Service's use as a command post. Pantoja enjoys his work, no matter what the assignment. He approaches each task with enthusiasm which would set any soldier apart from his peers.

Especially humorous is the manner in which Pantoja discusses sexual matters by way of euphemism. For Pantoja, even sex, when it has to do with Army operations, is a very serious matter.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The majority of Chapter 3 is comprised of a letter from Pocha Pantoja to her younger sister, Chichi. In her letter, Pocha recounts her experiences in Iquitos. Pocha tells Chichi of her disappointment at not being able to live as the other officers and their families do. She informs her sister that Captain Pantoja's top-secret assignment has put a strain on their family, especially as it concerns Mother Leonor. It seems that when they lived in Chiclayo, Mother Leonor enjoyed an active social life, hobnobbing with the commander's wife, playing cards and hosting tea parties. Since arriving in Iquitos, however, both women find themselves living in relative isolation. They are not permitted to set foot on the military base, swim in the pool or do their shopping at the PX (post exchange, where prices are lower than in the civilian stores). For her part, Pocha has tried to make the best of it, befriend a neighbor whose name is Alicia. Alicia is a friendly woman who takes walks with Pocha and cooks delicious local dishes for them. Mother Leonor, it turns out, has taken to "consoling herself with religion," (p. 45). Captain Pantoja tells Pochita and Mother Leonor that he is a spy and the two women have difficulty imagining who her husband could possibly be spying on in such a small, out-of-the-way town like Iquitos.

Pocha writes that Pantoja has been staying out late, socializing with low characters and that he has come home drunk on more than one occasion. Pocha and Mother Leonor have been to Moronacochoa to hear the famous Brother Francisco preach to hundreds of people. She tells her sister that Brother Francisco has some sort of hypnotic power over people and that Mother Leonor is no exception. Pocha finds small animals nailed to crosses all over the house. Mother Leonor has taken to crucifying spiders, mice, and other creatures as a kind of ritual sacrifice aimed at atoning for her sins. Pocha is horrified. Pocha tells Chichi that the women of Loreto are basically loose, brazen and not to be trusted around men. She tells Chichi of an episode in which a woman comes to their door asking if any laundry needs doing. It just so happens that the young lady is one of the infamous "washerwomen of Iquitos" and a prostitute.

Chapter 3 ends with a dream Captain Pantoja has about the pain and embarrassment the character experiences due to his hemorrhoids.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In Chapter 3, the author continues to manipulate both narrative form and language. Pocha's letter to her younger sister Chichi is conversational in tone and rather free-form in terms of structure. The letter reads much like a chat between two sisters. What is significant about the beginning of this chapter is that it informs the reader of narrative events from the perspective of a character who is at the effect of Captain Pantoja. As Pantoja's wife, Pocha has no control over what befalls her as a result of her husband's



occupation. Pocha feels (and is at the mercy of) the effect of Captain Pantoja's mysterious assignment in that the restrictions placed on Panta are also restrictions on Pocha.

In contrast to her husband's rather clinical view of sex and sexual situations, Pocha Pantoja's letter is peppered with bawdy references to sexual relations. The letter is gossipy and progresses in fits and starts. Pocha takes breaks and resumes the letter later. In addition, Pocha's recounting of the "washerwoman" incident provides a minor foreshadowing of what is to come. Pocha's suspicions are as yet unfounded but she intuitively knows something is amiss.

Narrative progression is disguised as gossip. For instance, in this chapter, the reader learns of Mother Leonor's initiation into the ways of the Brothers of the Ark. Rather than relying on a standard linear episode, Vargas Llosa allows the reader to follow the characters by way of what Pocha says to Chichi. In the case of Chapter 3, Chichi is also the reader.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 opens with a dispatch from Rear Admiral Pedro Carrillo, Chief of the River Forces of the Amazon to Captain Pantoja's superiors in the Peruvian Army. In his message, Carrillo grants Pantoja and the SSGFRI permission to use a Navy vessel (the S.S. Pachitea) for transporting Special Service personnel to and from military installations in the Amazon region. The Rear Admiral informs Army high command that in exchange for using the boat, the Peruvian Navy would also like to utilize the services of the prostitutes of the SSGFRI. Once the boat is appropriated by the Army, the Pachitea will be known as the Eve. The Eve, according to Pantoja's request, will bear no military insignia. The naval crew, headed by First Subofficer Carlos Rodriguez Saravia, will be briefed on the delicate nature of their mission to ensure their full cooperation and to minimize risk to the "specialists" and their associated administrators.

Dispatch Number Three from Captain Pantoja to General Collazos follows Carrillo's naval memorandum. Pantoja advises Collazos to see to it that red porpoise oil no longer be used in meal preparation. According to Pantoja's personal research, red porpoise oil has aphrodisiacal properties and may be contributing to the increased sexual appetites of the Peruvian Army troops stationed in the Amazon region. Pantoja requested that Pocha prepare all his food with red porpoise oil and found that this led to such agitation that he was compelled to engage in sexual activity so often that it made Pantoja uncomfortable. Pantoja also reveals to Collazos that, in an effort to carry out the task set before him, he personally tests the efficacy of several folk remedies purported to increase a person's desire for sex. To this end, Captain Pantoja admits to sampling drinks and concoctions made from several different kinds of tree bark and various herbs found in the Amazon region.

Following Dispatch Number Three is another memorandum addressed to the Peruvian Army high command. This particular communique is from Colonel Andrés Sarmiento Segovia, Commander of Air Battalion No. 42 of the Amazon District. In his message, Segovia gives Captain Pantoja and the SSGFRI permission to use a hydroplane to transport Special Service personnel to Amazon River locations otherwise unreachable by boat. Segovia voices his concern about the propriety of the Special Service, since he sees the mission as standing in opposition to the military's code of ethics. He stipulates that the hydroplane known as the Requena will be renamed the Delilah and that the Army will be held financially responsible for its maintenance. Segovia also informs the Army that the hydroplane is to be camouflaged in such a way as to prevent observers from identifying the Delilah as belonging to the Peruvian Air Force.

The first service mission of the SSGFRI happens on September 13, 1956 at the Horcones installation located on the Napo River, under the command of Second Lieutenant Alberto Santana. The pilot mission is a success. The soldiers who receive services from Pantoja's "specialists" are happy and relaxed when the SSGFRI departs.



Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 resumes with a flurry of dispatches sent back and forth between various military personnel. It should be noted here that the circle of individuals involved in Pantotja's secret mission widens with each message. At this point in the narrative, it becomes obvious that the secret assignment given to Captain Pantoja cannot remain a secret very much longer. This set of dispatches alerts the reader that the SSGFRI is no longer simply a solo venture of the Army. The Peruvian Navy is now involved, by virtue of its agreement to loan the SSGFRI a boat in which to transport prostitutes between installations. Similarly, the Peruvian Air Force also becomes a part of the prostitution network now with Pantoja's use of an Air Force hydroplane. Of especial importance here is the fact that both the boat and the hydroplane are given names of infamous temptresses found in the Bible. Eve, the first woman in the Bible, was responsible for convincing her mate Adam to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Adam's decision led to Man's fall from grace and subsequent exile from the Garden of Eden. Similarly, Delilah was a woman who tempted the mighty Samson. Delilah's machinations resulted in Samson's humiliating loss of strength and eventual blindness. That these vessels should be responsible for carrying women who tempt the Peruvian Army is no accident. This fact of naming also plays into the specter of religion, sex, and atonement present in the overall narrative.

Dispatch Number Three from Captain Pantoja to Tiger Collazos adds humor to the narrative in two distinct ways. To begin, the belief that red porpoise oil in the soldiers' rations increases their sex drive is humorous because it signifies Pantoja's persnickety attention to minor details. Secondly, this episode is humorous because of Pantoja's blind wish to follow his superiors' orders to a tee. The captain is so invested in doing an exemplary job as a soldier/ administrator that he willingly subjects himself to a variety of folk concoctions. Even more humorous is the way in which Captain Pantoja goes about reporting the results of his "experiments."



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

At the opening of Chapter 5, it is revealed that Pocha is pregnant. Pocha and Mother Leonor notice that Captain Pantoja is especially cheerful. He tells his wife that his happiness comes from the fact that the Special Service has been in operation for six months and that he is pleased with the results.

Chino Porfirio tells Madame Chuchupe and Freckle that he has seen Captain Pantoja out on the town with the newest "specialist"—an infamous prostitute by the name of Olga Arellano Rosaura (known to all as "The Brazilian"). Chuchupe and the others discuss the Brazilian's reputation for driving men mad. Supposedly, two men killed themselves for love of the tantalizing young woman.

At a gathering of the Brothers of the Ark in the nearby town of Moronacocho, Mother Leonor witnesses the crucifixion of a young boy. The boy's death is the talk of the town. People have begun to carry small prayer cards bearing the boy's image. He is being heralded as a martyr. Word of the Special Service is beginning to spread and Pantoja's project gains some notoriety; so much so that some of the higher ranking Peruvian Army officers are beginning to feel uncomfortable and slightly embarrassed. What began as a secret mission is no longer much of a secret. Pantoja tells his liaison officer Lieutenant Bacacorzo that General Scavino refuses to meet with him. Bacacorzo tells Captain Pantoja that the captain should be proud of what he and the Special Service have accomplished. Eventually, Scavino and Father Beltrán meet with Captain Pantoja, who informs the two men that the SSGFRI is serving 10,000 soldiers each week. Beltrán is outraged and accuses Pantoja of exaggerating. The prostitutes now refer to Captain Pantoja as "Mr. Pan-Pan" and to the command post on the Itaya River as "Pantiland."

Complaints come flooding in from installations which have not been serviced. Pantoja's operation is over-extended and the SSGFRI is having difficulty keeping up with demand. Collazos and Scavino agree that they have created a monster and that there is no reasonable way to phase out the Special Service.

Captain Pantoja assures the local authorities that Mother Leonor, while an admitted follower of Brother Francisco, nonetheless had nothing to do with the martyring of the young boy at Moronacocho.

Pantoja receives permission to hire more prostitutes for the Special Service. He interviews the Brazilian officially. Olga Arellano Rosaura becomes the highest-paid "specialist" in the SSGFRI.

Sinchi, a popular local radio personality, visits the command post to discuss things with Pantoja. Sinchi tells Captain Pantoja that people are starting to ask questions about him



and the Special Service. Sinchi offers not to reveal what he knows about Pantoja and the SSGFRI for a small fee, paid to him each month. Pantoja realizes that Sinchi is attempting to extort money from him and has Sinchi thrown into the Itaya River. Sinchi vows to get even with Captain Pantoja in his next radio broadcast.

Four more "specialists" are hired to service Peruvian Army personnel. Pocha begins having nightmares that she and Panta are crucified. The mayor of the small town of Nauta has presented the Army with a petition; Mayor Paiva Runhuí requests that senior citizens who are also veterans be allowed to receive services from the SSGFRI.

Pochita and Alicia go out for ice cream. The two women overhear people gossiping about a new brothel: Pantiland. Pocha has no idea that Pantiland is really the Itaya River command post named after her husband, Captain Pantoja.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Sinchi's arrival on the scene heralds the first instance of hypocrisy in the narrative. "The Voice of the Amazon" is no more honorable than the low characters Pantoja must interact with in order to get the SSGFRI off the ground and secure its prolonged success. Porfirio Wong's revelation that he has seen Captain Pantoja out with the Brazilian signals the reader that somehow Pantoja's solid moral fiber is beginning to show signs of imperfection. Thus, the author proves that the main protagonist is nothing more than another man whose sexual desires lead him far astray. Pantoja fails to recognize that he has fallen into his own trap—the trap of unlimited, readily-available flesh. Captain Pantoja's illicit affair with Olga Arellano Rosaura also provides narrative reinforcement for Wong's claims that the Brazilian is absolutely irresistible to men. The first five chapters of the novel serve to chronicle the rapid (albeit unsurprising) growth and notariety of the SSGFRI and the not-so-gradual inflation of Captain Pantoja's professional ego.

General Scavino's refusal to meet with Captain Pantoja represents the Peruvian Army's desire to keep Pantoja at arm's length. While the SSGFRI is running smoothly and at maximum capacity, the problem of the rapes can be quietly shuttled into the background. The indication here is that while Pantoja is accomplishing what the Army wanted him to accomplish, the Army is unwilling to deal with him as a soldier; preferring him to maintain his pimp status. The large number of soldiers served on a weekly basis, however, also represents the reality that the mystery of Pantoja's mission is fading fast. Referring to Captain Pantoja as "Mr. Pan-Pan" and the command post as "Pantiland" places Pantoja in the same category as Chuchupe and Snotnose—both purveyors of flesh who are known professionally by names other than those they were born with.

The boy martyr of Moronacocha provides a foreshadowing of Pantoja's future in the Peruvian Army. It becomes clear that at some point, since what Pantoja is doing is basically illegal, the Army will eventually be forced to sacrifice one of its own in order to appease its opponents and to shift the blame onto the least powerful person in the situation.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

In Dispatch Number 15, Captain Pantoja reports to General Tiger Collazos that the SSGFRI has completed its first year. According to Pantoja, the SSGFRI has met and exceeded all of its projected goals and that in twelve months the "specialists" have provided over 10,000 service acts for the Peruvian Army. In celebration of their successful inaugural year, the prostitutes of the SSGFRI compose a special song. "The Hymn of the Special Service" is sung to the tune of "The Mexican Hat Dance." Captain Pantoja proudly furnishes Collazos with the lyrics to the hymn.

Pantoja receives a telegram informing him that Pocha has given birth to a healthy baby girl and named her Gladys.

Colonel Peter Casahuanqui, chief of the Borja installation located on the Marañón River contacts Captain Pantoja. Apparently, while the SSGFRI personnel are stranded at Borja for eight days because of severe weather, one of the prostitutes, Maclovia, elopes with First Sergeant Teófilo Gualino. The two are subsequently found in the town of María de Nieva after being sheltered by members of Brother Francisco's sect, the Brothers of the Ark. Maclovia is returned to the Itaya command post and Gualino is stripped of his rank and thrown in jail for four months, given only bread and water for rations.

Pantoja receives a supposedly anonymous letter from Sinchi, threatening him with exposure. Sinchi tells the captain that he has been seen in the company of the Brazilian and that Sinchi will reveal this information on the air if Pantoja refuses to give him a cut of the SSGFRI profits.

General Collazos approves Captain Pantoja's request to increase the number of SSGFRI "specialists" from twenty to thirty. Members of the Peruvian Navy express their displeasure because the Navy is not mentioned in the Hymn of the Special Service.

Sinchi receives a letter from a group of disgruntled civilians in the town of Requena, protesting the fact that civilians are prohibited from using the SSGFRI. The men implore Sinchi to use his influence as a local radio celebrity to champion their cause. They have seen the Eve making trips back and forth to the local naval base and have even gone so far as to ask the sailors about the mysterious comings and goings. The sailors deny the existence of the SSGFRI.

Maclovia (with the help of her cousin, Rosa) writes a letter to Pocha asking Pocha to intervene on her behalf and ask Captain Pantoja to allow her to return to work with the SSGFRI.



Commander (Father) Godofredo Beltrán Calila requests, and is granted, a discharge from the Peruvian Army. He cites the SSGFRI as his primary reason for relinquishing his military commission.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The letter Sinchi receives from the men in Requena foreshadows the kidnap and murder of Olga Arellano Rosaura ("the Brazilian") which takes place in Chapter 8. It should be noted that Chapter 6 signals the unraveling of the SSGFRI as well as the beginning of the end of Captain Pantoja's shining military career. The discovery of Pantoja's illicit love affair with the Brazilian tells the reader that Pantoja's personal life has begun its inevitable downhill slide. In addition, the fact that Pantoja learns of the birth of his daughter via telegram is further evidence that Captain Pantoja is becoming disconnected from his wife and mother. Pantoja's primary responsibility is no longer the care and well-being of his family. The "specialists" of the SSGFRI and their associates are now Pantoja's de facto family.

Maclovia's marriage and abandonment of her duties with the Special Service represent Captain Pantoja's inability to control the secret he is instructed to protect. This episode also serves to alert the reader to the randomness of matters of the heart. Furthermore, Maclovia's letter to Pocha provides contrast to Pocha's letter to her younger sister Chichi presented in Chapter 3. Whereas Pocha's letter reveals information that applies to known events in Pocha's life, Maclovia's letter serves as a reminder to Pocha that her husband is, in a way, a total stranger. The letter also functions to validate Pocha's suspicions from Chapter 1.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter 7 is the text of a radio broadcast. Sinchi, the host of the show, opens with a daily segment called "A Little Bit of Culture." In this segment, Sinchi tells his listeners the story of the famous House of Iron. The House of Iron, designed by the French inventor Eiffel, the same man who designed the Eiffel Tower, is a well-known landmark in the Iquitos region of Peru. Initially a German hotel, the House of Iron was purchased by Loreto Anselmo de Aguila and moved, piece by piece, to the town of Loreto that bore his name. The building proved to be uninhabitable in the sweltering Amazon summers. After changing hands once or twice, the House of Iron eventually became the Iquitos Social Club.

Sinchi then turns his attention to the local scandal of prostitutes servicing soldiers on outlying military bases. He blasts Pantoja for being a pimp and a corrupter of decency in Loreto. Sinchi does not realize that Pantoja is actually an army officer carrying out orders. After a minutes-long tirade, Sinchi interviews Maclovia, a former "specialist" with Pantoja's SSGFRI. Maclovia has some difficulty staying on the topic and she tells her story in a roundabout way. Eventually, however, Maclovia succeeds in revealing things about the SSGFRI which send Sinchi's listeners into an outrage. She tells of how Pantoja would interview each "specialist" by having them undress so that he could examine them visually before hiring them. The story that Maclovia tells of the joys of working for the SSGFRI make it seem like an enjoyable and profitable experience.

Upon learning of her husband's involvement with a prostitution ring, Pochita takes Gladys and leaves Loreto. At the airport, Sinchi approaches Pochita and requests an interview. Pochita refuses, telling Sinchi to interview Captain Pantoja instead. Pochita wants nothing whatsoever to do with Pantoja. She is disgraced and humiliated.

Captain Pantoja has a nightmare in which the Brazilian claims to be Pochita.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Sinchi's radio broadcast is another example of the author's use of alternative structures to help the novel's narrative progress. Providing the text of the broadcast allows the reader to engage the story in a different way. Also at play here is the fact of Sinchi's duplicity. In other words, the reader witnesses firsthand the rhetoric of a man who is essentially dishonest, using the medium of radio to fashion himself as a responsible journalist and entertainment personality. Sinchi's use of Maclovia to supposedly expose Pantoja and the Special Service becomes an almost moot point, given what the reader knows about the character's true (off-air) personality. Also at issue is the way in which Sinchi prods Maclovia to tell her sensational story. Maclovia, who is obviously illiterate, is completely and utterly unaware that Sinchi is simply using her to further his own



extortionist agenda. It can also be said that Sinchi is attempting to manipulate Captain Pantoja as well. The radio announcer believes that by releasing the more lurid details of Pantoja's "interviewing" methods, Pantoja will be shamed into paying Sinchi the money he demands. Finally, the radio broadcast functions as the author's commentary of the often dubious integrity of those who set themselves up as champions of justice and altruistic public servants.

Pocha's leaving her husband is a natural step on the downward progression of her husband's life. Furthermore, removing herself from their home in Iquitos proves that Pocha has her limits. In this way, the character is represented as someone whose values remain unchanged throughout the course of the novel.

Finally, Captain Pantoja's nightmare in which the Brazilian and Pochita become interchangeable signals the character's lack of control over the significant women in his life. The fact that he does not recognize his wife is an indication that he does not recognize his core values any longer. The lines between reality and fantasy are blurred by the nightmare. It is as though Pantoja has been living his fantasy life as though it were reality and vice versa. The Brazilian represents that part of Captain Pantoja that is motivated purely by desire and the immediate gratification of his sensual appetites. Pocha, on the other hand, represents that part of Panta which is firmly rooted in reason and responsibility. Pocha also represents Pantoja's real first love, the Peruvian Army.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

It has been eight months since his wife left Captain Pantoja and the task of awakening her son has fallen to Mother Leonor. Pantoja leaves Loreto for Huallaga. He is going to pay a visit to visit his old friend, Captain Alberto Mendoza. He and Mendoza attended the Chorrillos Military Academy together. Captain Pantoja continues his affair with the Brazilian. Pantoja has taken to having sex with new "specialists" as part of the interview process. By this time, Pantoja is completely obsessed with sex. Mendoza tells Captain Pantoja that other officers envy him his assignment with the SSGFRI. Pantoja assures Mendoza that the affair with the Brazilian is purely a professional arrangement. In reality, Pantoja is jealous of the time the Brazilian spends servicing other soldiers. In a strange turn of events, Sinchi learns that Pantoja is actually an army officer and begins to praise him over the airwaves. Given the soldiers' attacks on local women and the SSGFRI's role in bringing the attacks to a halt, Sinchi declares Pantoja a kind of hero and demands that the Army give him a commendation. Pantoja threatens to kill Sinchi if Sinchi mentions the SSGFRI on the radio again. The demand for SSGFRI servicing increases exponentially.

There has been a rash of attempted crucifixions in the Amazon region and Army officials have been given the responsibility of finding and capturing Brother Francisco. As yet, they have been unable to locate the illusive monk, much to the dissatisfaction of ranking officers. As a result of a network of Francisco's followers, he has managed to elude the authorities. General Tiger Collazos and other Peruvian Army commanders feel that apprehending fugitives would be better handled by local law enforcement. An elderly woman is crucified while more than one hundred people watch. General Scavino tells General Collazos that soldiers have been secretly joining the Brothers of the Ark. Villagers crucify a subofficer who is dressed in civilian clothes. The man survives. Hundreds of Brother Francisco's followers are subsequently arrested by the Army.

News of the SSGFRI has spread and local civilians are now turning out in droves each time a convoy arrives to service military personnel. Collazos tells Scavino that eight men attempted to kidnap a convoy of "specialists."

Collazos decides that the Special Service has gotten out of hand.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Captain Pantoja's life is in tatters. However, he still refuses to realize that the Army is allowing him to be a scapegoat. His single-mindedness, a quality for which his superiors once praised him, has become his undoing. Even though his wife has left him and taken their daughter with her, Pantoja's first thoughts are of the SSGFRI and its expansion. The character lives in a state of complete preoccupation with carnal experiences and it



is as though Pantoja is standing beside himself, watching his entire life fall apart before his very eyes. Intellectually, Captain Pantoja knows that something has gone terribly wrong. He is either unwilling or (more likely) unable to stop the process.

In much the same way that the main protagonist is unable to contain his desire for sex and more sex, so large numbers of people are unable to resist the call of the Brothers of the Ark. Like Pantoja, those who give themselves over to the blood lust of Brother Francisco's hypnotic teachings are incapable of steering clear of actions that could prove their own undoing. Whereas once the Army was unable to prevent its soldiers from raping women, the Army now finds itself powerless to stop its recruits from joining the rogue religious sect. The message in this chapter is one of excess. There is an excess of earthly (physical, sexual) obsession as well as an excess of religious fervor which leads people to crucify one another. The author seems to be offering the parallel situations as a cautionary missive. Too much of anything, even though it is initially pleasurable, is to be strictly avoided. Martyrdom is the underlying theme of this chapter. Once again, the Amazon jungle becomes a place of mysterious power and allure as those living there seem to be under one spell or another much of the time.

Interestingly, Mayor Morey is about to re-enter the narrative. However, this time he will appear as a perpetrator rather than an advocate for victims.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

This chapter contains a series of reports printed in the newspaper *El Oriente* which chronicle the events surrounding the murder of 23 year-old Olga Arellano Rosaura, better known as the Brazilian. The first article gives the details of the Brazilian's funeral. The article goes into some detail, describing the scene at the public cemetery in Iquitos. Much to the surprise of those gathered to witness the spectacle, the SSGFRI's most noted "specialist" is buried with full military honors. Her casket is attended by several soldiers in full military dress. Adding to the surprise and confusion of those in attendance is the appearance of Pantoja in his Peruvian Army uniform. Until this time, the townspeople of Iquitos and Loreto were unaware of Pantoja's military affiliation. Father Beltrán officiates and the Brazilian is given a multi-rifle salute. Even more shocking is Pantoja's passionate eulogy. Pantoja's decision to eulogize Olga Arellano Rosaura comes back to haunt the captain.

The second article in Chapter 9 gives a full account of the events leading up to the Brazilian's murder at Nauta near Cacique Cocama Bend. At a drunken birthday celebration on the night of December 14, 1956, Teófilo Morey and several young men from Requena hatch a plot to kidnap the prostitutes of the SSGFRI "to forcibly enjoy the charms of these misguided women" (p. 200). Morey, it is noted, is the mayor of Requena at the time of the incident. He and the other men, resentful of the services being rendered to Peruvian Army personnel, decide to take matters into their own hands and ambush the SSGFRI en route to a military installation. On the night of the attack, six of the prostitutes including the Brazilian are kidnapped and several of the women are raped. During a gunfight with military troops, the Brazilian is shot and killed by friendly fire. Intending to make the Brazilian's murder appear to have been committed by the Brothers of the Ark, Morey and the others nail the young woman's corpse to a tree. Knockers and Freckle are both wounded in the failed kidnap attempt.

Several pages from *El Oriente* are devoted to telling the perplexing story of the Brazilian's life. Born to a mother with a reputation as a severe alcoholic, Olga spends her childhood in an orphanage operated by the Seventh Day Adventists. When she is thirteen, Olga scandalizes the town of Nanay by running away with Richard Jay Pierce, Jr., a young American missionary. Unable to live with the shame of what he has done, Pierce commits suicide by hanging himself. Shortly thereafter, another young man, captivated by Olga Arellano Rosaura's beauty, also kills himself. It is then that Olga moves to the city of Manaus in Brazil. This is how the young woman comes by her nickname. Olga returns to Iquitos several years later, having established herself as one of the region's most beautiful and accomplished women of ill-repute. Following an incident in which she is discovered having sex with a married Army officer in a movie theater, the Brazilian joins Pantoja's Special Service.



The penultimate section of Chapter 9 is a letter written to El Oriente's editors. The letter is from Brother Francisco, rogue religious zealot and founder of the Brothers of the Ark. "The Epistle to The Good Concerning the Wicked" is printed in its entirety. In it, Brother Francisco renounces Morey and his accomplices and claims that his followers are not interested in raping and murdering innocent victims but are concerned with the salvation of their immortal souls.

Subsequent to the Brazilian's death, Captain Pantoja requests that Morey and the other men from Requena be brought before a military tribunal and tried for their crimes. The Army denies his request and goes so far as to deny that the Special Service is in any way affiliated with the Peruvian Army.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Once again, the author uses a different form of language to tell the story of Captain Pantoja and the Special Service. In this instance, the reader must rely on newspaper accounts to learn what happens to the Brazilian. First of all, using a series of newspaper articles provides the reader with information which is condensed and synthesized into a congruous whole. This gives one the opportunity to follow the narrative without having to address characters' feelings and provides an objective view of the events being reported. For the most part, this is true of Chapter 9. Interestingly, however, there are brief instances of emotion conveyed by the newspaper editors themselves. Given that El Oriente is a small, local paper, one can easily accept a show of subjective expression as appropriate, given the size of the community.

In another way, however, Vargas Llosa's technique of using an alternate language form accomplishes much the same end as the radio broadcast text. That is to say, one is allowed to read between the lines and gauge the true personality of those responsible for crafting the material being read. The tone of Chapter 9 is primarily objective, but there is nevertheless something sensational in the way the events surrounding the Brazilian's life and death are presented. The portion of the chapter devoted to Morey and his accomplices' failed attempt to capture and rape the "specialists" is at once factual and sensational. The same can be said of El Oriente's telling of Olga Arellano Rosaura's personal history. There is a gossipy feeling to this section, much like Pocha's letter. One can almost visualize the citizens of Iquitos shaking their heads upon reading of Olga's mother's infamous alcoholism and the young woman's sordid, unfortunate affairs. Olga Arellano Rosaura is at once painted as a lost little girl and a wanton, bewitching man-eater. The Brazilian is at once a victim of circumstance and one who victimizes men for her own perverse entertainment.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The final chapter of *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* opens with Mother Leonor remembering a nightmare from the previous evening: "A cockroach is eaten by a rat who is eaten by a lizard who is eaten by a jaguar who is crucified and whose remains are devoured by cockroaches" (p. 218). Captain Pantoja puts on his uniform, telling his mother that the charade is over with now and that everyone in Iquitos knows that he is in the Army. Pantoja is scheduled to meet with General Scavino this morning. Mother Leonor voices her shame at Panta's having delivered the Brazilian's eulogy. Pantoja explains to Bacacorzo that he is the one to be held responsible for the events surrounding the scandal of the Special Service. Bacacorzo tells Pantoja about a rumor circulating that he and Pantoja were lovers.

Scavino reprimands Captain Pantoja severely for choosing to give the Brazilian's eulogy. Scavino also voices his extreme displeasure with the way the SSGFRI, and by extension the Peruvian Army, is perceived by the public. Captain Pantoja learns that the Army has decided to shut down the SSGFRI for good. Pantoja's military career is in shambles. Pantoja receives orders to dismantle the command post on the Itaya River. Everything associated with the Special Service is to be destroyed and quickly disposed of. Scavino then instructs Captain Pantoja to travel to Lima the following evening to meet with General Victoria and General Collazos.

Pantoja, with the help of Chuchupe, Freckle, Chino Porfirio Wong and the "specialists" completely dismantle Pantiland. During the process of clearing away all traces of the SSGFRI, Sandra tells the others that Brother Francisco is dead. Reports are saying that Brother Francisco was crucified by his followers at his own request. Chuchupe and Porfirio Wong try to convince Captain Pantoja to leave the military and go into business with them. Pantoja graciously declines their offer, stating that being a soldier is all he has ever wanted to do.

General Collazos receives a reprimand from his superiors for failing to apprehend Brother Francisco alive and bring him to justice.

Victoria and Tiger Collazos assure Captain Pantoja that he will not receive another promotion for quite a long time. Panta arranges to meet Pocha and Gladys so that he can visit with his daughter. His commanding officers tell Pantoja that he will next be assigned to the Quartermaster Unit at the Pomata installation at near Lake Titicaca. Pantoja is genuinely confused by the Army's decision to discontinue the operations of the SSGFRI. The captain tells Collazos and Victoria that he has proof in black and white of the astounding success of the Special Service. He offers to provide them with graphs, charts, mathematical calculations verifying his claims that the SSGFRI is a viable, invaluable entity. He stands before the two generals, realizing that his military future is in grave jeopardy. Nonetheless, Captain Pantoja flatly refuses to tender his resignation



from the Peruvian Army. Pantoja will not leave the Army. The Army will have to leave Captain Pantoja.

Pocha and Captain Pantoja resolve their difficulties and the family is reunited.

Ironically, in this chapter General Scavino, Sinchi, Lieutenant Bacacorzo, Commander (Father) Beltrán, and Lieutenant Santana all engage in sexual activities with former "specialists" of the SSGFRI.

By way of update, specialist Rita goes to work for a local pimp named Snotnose. Specialist Knockers goes into business for herself and opens a very successful brothel on the highway to San Juan. Radio personality Sinchi bemoans the paucity of extortion victims and sensational news stories since the Brothers of the Ark disbanded and the SSGFRI is no more.

The narrative ends the way it begins. Pocha wakes her husband early in the morning, reminding him that it is time for Captain Pantoja to go to work.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 is a chapter of things coming apart and things being put back together again. Captain Pantoja has reached the end of his usefulness where the Peruvian Army is concerned. To his amazement, Pantoja's pet project, the SSGFRI, is being shut down. Pantoja is sincerely surprised that the same men who gave him the assignment, knowing that he would excel, are now ashamed of the Special Service and his part in it. For all intents and purposes, Captain Pantoja is finished. The protagonist, while sorely disappointed that his "baby" is to be put down, is still rather oblivious to the reasons why he is being punished. Pantoja knows that his affair with the dead woman brought dishonor on the uniform he had so proudly worn, but he staunchly refuses to admit to any definite wrongdoing in the way he conducted himself as head of the Special Service, especially in terms of delivering Olga's eulogy.

Mother Leonor's nightmare has to do more with consumption than religion or murder. The nightmare is an startling example not only of the food chain, but of the military chain of command to which her son has become so attached. Panta, in the end, becomes a victim of the system that created him. He is the one chosen as a sacrifice on the Army's altar of scandal and shame.

The most interesting and enlightening facet of this final chapter is the irony the author uses to tell the reader that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Most humorous is the knowledge that several of the men who could be considered major players in the narrative all end up having sex with the women formerly employed by the SSGFRI. Not one of the men mentioned come to Pantoja's aid when he is called onto the carpet to face the high ranking Army officials alone.

The "family" of those directly involved in the Special Service come to appreciate Pantoja for the same reasons that the Army valued him so highly. The scene in which Pantiland

is disassembled is quite touching. One discovers exactly how important the Special Service has become to Porfirio Wong, Freckle, Chuchupe and the others. It is these supposedly low characters who ultimately benefit from the SSGFRI. They are changed, indeed, as their attitude toward service comes to echo Captain Pantoja's sentiments. With the exception of a few of the specialists, the characters all return to their former occupations, their former lives. In a manner of speaking, the same can be said of Pantoja, Pocha, and Mother Leonor.

Since he refuses to resign his commission, Captain Pantoja is sent to the Lake Titicaca area. The geography is completely the opposite of that found in the sultry Amazon jungle. It is colder, clearer, less likely to fuel the flames of a person's passions. The narrative itself is circular in that Pantoja's story begins and ends with Pocha waking her husband early in the morning. In the end, Pantoja neither wins nor loses, and the SSGFRI becomes a small episode in one family's life.



Characters

Captain Pantaleón (Panta) Pantoja

Pantaleón Pantoja is a career officer in the Peruvian Army. Pantoja lives with his wife, Pocha, and his mother, Leonor. Both women dote on Captain Pantoja and he enjoys his traditional role as head of the household and sole provider. During the course of the narrative, Pantoja and his wife have a daughter named Gladys. Pantoja is a by-the-book soldier who never questions his superiors. Much to his credit, he can always be called upon to complete an assignment on time and to the glowing satisfaction of his superiors. Very much a "company man" type, Pantoja's self-effacing demeanor is often mistaken for gullibility. Pantaleón Pantoja is something of a prude. A teetotaler and early riser, Pantoja's personality undergoes a startling change when he becomes fully involved in the running of the Special Service. Caught up in the world of the flesh, Pantoja eventually succumbs to his baser instincts and engages in a steamy love affair with a well-known prostitute: Olga Arellano Rosaura (aka "The Brazilian"). The prostitutes under his command in the Special Service refer to Captain Pantoja as "Mr. Pan-Pan." Pantaleón Pantoja also suffers from hemorrhoids.

Pocha (Pochita) Pantoja

Pocha is Pantaleón Pantoja's doting wife and Gladys' mother. Although no physical description of her is given, one might assume that Pocha Pantoja is quite an attractive young woman. Pocha is a homemaker and sometime-companion for her mother-in-law, Leonor. Pocha is modest and, like her husband, rather straight-laced. She is very proud of the progress Panta makes as a soldier/administrator and is extremely supportive of her husband's career. Pocha especially enjoys the amenities associated with being an officer's wife. Pocha has a younger sister whose name (or nickname) is Chichi. The assumption that the sisters are quite close is borne out by Pocha's letter to Chichi in Chapter 3. A traditionalist by nature, Pocha is shocked at her husband's sexual awakening upon their arrival in Iquitos. Pocha is devastated when she discovers her husband's affair with the Brazilian. However, what forces her to leave Captain Pantoja is his involvement in the Special Service.

Mother Leonor Pantoja

Leonor Pantoja is Captain Pantoja's mother. Ever loyal to her beloved son, Leonor believes he can do no wrong. At one point, Pocha tells her sister that Leonor "treats her son as if he's still a baby and a little saint" (Chapter 3, p. 53). Like Pocha, her daughter-in-law, Leonor makes the most of Panta's esteemed position as an Army officer. Leonor is good-natured, if a trifle myopic when it comes to Panta. Upon reaching Iquitos, Leonor becomes a devotee of Brother Francisco and the Brothers of the Ark. One reason for her surprising entrance into the extreme religious sect is Leonor's lack of



social outlets. As a result of Captain Pantoja's assignment as head of the Special Service, Leonor, like Pocha, is unable to socialize with the other officers' families and is therefore left without companionship. Leonor is Captain Pantoja's most ardent supporter. She is invested in keeping their small family together and as such is instrumental in reuniting her son and daughter-in-law after the Special Service is left in shambles and Captain Pantoja falls from favor within the Peruvian Army.

Leonor Curinchila (aka Madame Chuchupe)

Madame Chuchupe is the owner and proprietress of a brothel in Iquitos known as Casa Chuchupe. Her brothel boasts some thirty prostitutes and is a favorite nightspot in Iquitos. Chuchupe is instrumental in helping Captain Pantoja recruit prostitutes for the Special Service. Pantoja bestows the title of Corps Leader on Chuchupe. Chuchupe is the lover of a mestizo (mixed-race) dwarf named Juan Rivera (aka Freckle). According to the narrative, Chuchupe "breathes honey" (Chapter 1, p. 18).

Colonel Ezequiel López López

Colonel Ezequiel López López, Chief of the Accounting and Finance Section of the Peruvian Army, is one of Captain Pantoja's commanding officers. López López, along with Generals Victoria and Collazos, is responsible for Pantoja's promotion to Captain and subsequent assignment as head of the Special Service.

General Victoria

Another high ranking Peruvian Army officer, General Victoria is initially skeptical about instituting the Special Service but agrees to give his permission to go ahead with the plan.

Commander (Father) Godofredo Beltrán Calila

Peruvian Army chaplain and the most outspoken military opponent of the Special Service. Beltrán is the Chief of the Corps of Military Chaplains, Region V (Amazon). The priest objects to the existence of the Special Service on moral grounds. Commander (Father) Beltrán eventually leaves the Peruvian Army but subsequently petitions to have himself reinstated. In Chapter 10, Beltrán has sex with Peludita, one of the "specialists" hired by Pantoja to serve the soldiers and sailors.

General Felipe (Tiger) Collazos

General Felipe Collazos is Chief of Administration, Supply and Logistics for Region V (Amazon) of the Peruvian Army. Nicknamed Tiger, General Collazos is one of Captain Pantoja's superior officers. Collazos is responsible for coming up with the idea of the



Special Service. Tiger Collazos wears a mustache, the ends of which he twirls during moments of extreme stress. General Collazos is also a chain smoker who feels a significant amount of guilt for not being able to conquer his addiction to nicotine.

Porfirio Wong (aka Chino Porfirio)

Porfirio Wong (whose nickname Chino is the Spanish word for Chinese) is a Chinese-Peruvian pimp and business associate of Madame Chuchupe. Porfirio is a sleazy character who speaks stereotypical Asian English. That is to say, Porfirio substitutes the letter "l" for the letter "r." Thus, Porfirio uses words like "pletty" and "dlink" for "pretty" and "drink." Porfirio is aware that he is somehow different from the other Latin characters in the narrative, but he behaves un-selfconsciously. In some ways, the character even manages to capitalize on his uniqueness by carving out a small niche for himself among the petty criminals of Iquitos. Wong is also one of the locals working closely with Captain Pantoja in the daily operations of the Special Service. Wong is notorious for never having any money. Regardless of his poverty, Chino Porfirio always manages to have a good time at others' expense. Wong is an opportunist and something of a gossip.

General Roger Scavino

General Scavino is the Commander in Chief of Region V (Amazon) in the Peruvian Army. In Chapter 10, Scavino engages in sexual activity with the specialist named Peludita. It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that General Scavino has gray eyes (p. 38).

Mayor Teófilo Morey

Teófilo Morey is the mayor of a small Amazon town called Requena. At the beginning of the narrative, Morey and other local officials are up in arms about the attacks on village women perpetrated by soldiers stationed in the region. As the story progresses, however, Morey learns of the Special Service and advocates for civilian access to the prostitution ring. Resentful because the Special Service is off-limits to them, Morey and a small band of disgruntled men from Requena decide to kidnap the Brazilian and several other prostitutes in hopes of receiving sexual services. Their plan backfires, the Brazilian is murdered, and Morey and his accomplices are captured and incarcerated.

Brother Francisco

A itinerant monk, Brother Francisco is a religious fanatic and founder of the rogue sect The Brothers of the Ark. Brother Francisco travels the Amazon region, sometimes dragging a large cross, preaching a message of apocalypse and sacrifice. Those who attend Brother Francisco's sermons often become hypnotized by his charisma and become followers. Those who espouse Brother Francisco's doctrine of sacrifice are known to sacrifice living beings of all sorts: insects, small wild animals, and eventually



human beings. After successfully eluding capture, Brother Francisco is finally taken prisoner by the Peruvian Army only to be rescued by a small group of his most staunch converts, taken into the jungle and crucified at his request.

Colonel Montes

Pantaleón Pantoja's former commanding officer. It is Colonel Montes' recommendation which eventually secures Pantoja's promotion to Captain and his subsequently being put in charge of the Special Service.

Olga Arellano Rosaura (aka The Brazilian)

The most famous "specialist" associated with Captain Pantoja, Olga Rosaura is known as The Brazilian because of time spent in that South American country. The only daughter of Hermes Rosaura, Olga spends a troubled childhood and adolescence in the Iquitos/Loreto area before running away and making a name for herself as a famously irresistible prostitute. It is said that more than one unsuspecting man has met his death for love of the Brazilian. Eventually, she and Captain Pantoja become lovers, causing Pantoja's wife to leave him. After she is murdered in a foiled plot to kidnap her, Pantoja delivers an emotional eulogy at the woman's funeral which hastens the collapse of Pantoja's military career and the entire Special Service project. The Brazilian's life is chronicled in a newspaper account in Chapter 9.

Lieutenant Bacacorzo

Bacacorzo is assigned to the Special Service as Captain Pantoja's aide and liaison officer. It is Bacacorzo's responsibility to apprise the Peruvian Army command of everything that happens concerning the SSFGRI. Bacacorzo and Pantoja eventually become close friends. Bacacorzo understands most clearly why Pantoja is the officer chosen to head the Special Service. In Chapter 10, Bacacorzo receives "service" from the "specialist" named Coca.

Germán Láudano Rosales (aka Sinchi)

Sinchi is an anti-government, anti-Army advocate and media personality. He regularly speaks out against the soldiers for the scandalous way they are behaving in the jungle. Sinchi is respected by his radio audience. Sinchi tries to extort money from Captain Pantoja in exchange for not mentioning the SSFGRI on his radio program. In Chapter 10, Sinchi also has sexual relations with one of the "specialists" of the SSFGRI.

Juan Rivera (aka Freckle)

Freckle is a dwarf and the unofficial mascot of Madame Chuchupe's brothel. Freckle is also Chuchupe's lover. Captain Pantoja puts Freckle in charge of ensuring that the prostitutes of the Special Service remain on task, as it were, and that the women are kept away from the soldiers before and after services are rendered. Freckle's bravery during the attack at Nauta is laudable.



Objects/Places

Hotel Lima

The hotel where Pantaleón Pantoja, his wife and mother stay upon first arriving in Iquitos.

Chiclayo

A city located in Peru. Prior to moving to Iquitos, Pantoja was stationed at Chiclayo.

Iquitos

The town in the Amazon jungle where Pantaleón Pantoja is stationed.

Lima

The capital city of Peru.

Lake Titicaca

A large lake in South America. Pantoja is stationed at Lake Titicaca after the Special Service falls into disrepute.

Moronacocha

Site of the martyrdom of a young boy.

The Delilah

Name of the military hydroplane used by the Special Service to transport the "specialists" to remote Peruvian Army installations.

Pantiland

Nickname given to the Special Service headquarters. Pantiland is a play on the name "Pantoja."



The Mau Mau

A brothel/nightclub located in Iquitos.

The Hymn of the Special Service

A song of celebration composed by the prostitutes under Captain Pantoja's command. The Hymn of the Special Service is sung to the tune of the Mexican Hat Dance.

The Voice of Sinchi

A radio program broadcast from the city of Iquitos. Sinchi is a radio announcer and general rabblouser.

The House of Iron

A well-known landmark in the town of Loreto, Peru. The House of Iron was designed by Eiffel, the same French architect who designed the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Chorrillos Military Academy

School Pantoja attended as a young military cadet. The academy is located in Huallaga.

Viborachado

A drink made from inexpensive brandy in which a poisonous snake is marinated. Viborachado is thought to be an aphrodisiac.

Puerto Arturo Encampment

A military installation located on the Huallaga River in Peru.

Requena

A small town in the Amazon jungle and the site of the Brazilian's murder.

Aladdin Panduro's Lamp

A well-known restaurant in the river town of Bethlehem. Aladdin Panduro's Lamp is supposedly known for its tacacho, a local dish made from mashed green bananas and pork.



Themes

Sacrifice

The question of sacrifice (both secular and religious) is one of the more important themes in *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service*. In this instance, the word itself refers to more than one kind of sacrifice. To begin, Captain Pantoja sacrifices the pomp, camaraderie, and ceremony he is so proud of in order to carry out the orders his superiors give him. Pantoja is not permitted to wear his uniform, live in base housing or socialize with other officers. He is a military man who takes his role as an officer very seriously. In effect, the Peruvian Army is Pantoja's life and to give up those things that mean so much to him as a soldier is the ultimate mark of Pantoja's commitment to his job. In the beginning, it is well established that Pantoja's comportment is always impeccable. Indirectly, Pocha and Mother Leonor are also giving up the comforts of their former way of life. The two women are socially isolated from the other officers and their families as well as being unable to access services on the military base. At one point, Pocha complains to her sister about having to use the municipal swimming pool rather than the pool on base: "I went once and there must've been a thousand people, how disgusting..." (46).

Conversely, sacrifice has an altogether different meaning for those belonging to the Brotherhood of the Ark. Brother Francisco, the sect's leader, makes numerous reference to Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross and the members of the Brotherhood believe that sacrifice in the form of crucifixion leads to spiritual freedom and redemption. In addition, the Brothers and Sisters crucify small animals (and in some cases, human beings) as a way to atone for sins and secure one's spiritual salvation.

Sacred Sex vs. Profane Sex

Sex underlies much of what happens in *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service*. Of course, providing prostitutes to the Peruvian Army is Pantoja's assigned task. However, the question of sex itself is much broader than the characters themselves realize. For the purposes of this analysis, the sex which takes place in the narrative can be divided into two categories: Sacred Sex and Profane Sex. By way of definition, sacred sex refers to those instances in which there is no financial benefit for either party engaged in the act itself. For instance, marital sex (such as that between Pantoja and his wife, Pocha) can be seen as sacred sex. The use of the word "sacred" does not refer to any religious tenet, but is simply used as a differentiating device. On the other hand, profane sex refers to sex as a commodity: something provided in exchange for money. This applies to Pantoja's special unit as well as to the the privately-owned brothels in and around the town of Loreto and the infamous "washerwomen" of Iquitos.

Over the course of the narrative, sex also becomes something of an obsession for at least two of the characters. For Captain Pantoja, whose usual duties as part of the



Quartermaster Corps concern procuring goods and services necessary to daily military operations, providing the Peruvian army with sexual service is no different than procuring machinery or pencils. His interest in profane sex begins as something directly related to his work. However, this interest eventually becomes Pantoja's preoccupation as he finds it necessary to engage in profane sexual activity (that is, sex outside of his marriage to Pocha) more and more frequently. This same phenomenon occurs in the case of Luisa Cánepa who, after being "violated by a sergeant, a corporal, and later by a private" eventually becomes a prostitute who calls herself Knockers.

Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy as a theme in this narrative which is revealed in stages. The first and perhaps most glaring example of hypocrisy has to do with the Peruvian Army's insistence on Pantoja remaining undercover because of the potentially damaging nature of the Special Service. It is hypocritical of Pantoja's superior officers to order him to establish a prostitution service for its soldiers and then to deny him the life of one of their own. That is to say, Collazos, Victoria, and the other generals expect Pantoja to work for them but not among them as such. On the one hand Captain Pantoja is expected to carry out orders but on the other hand, no one is to know that his orders originate with the generals. Captain Pantoja accomplishes his assigned task so efficiently and with such success that the Special Service grows beyond the Army's control and Pantoja is the one who suffers for having done his job so well.

In addition, Sinchi, the radio announcer is also a hypocrite. While he considers it his responsibility as a journalist to expose corruption and wrongdoing in the region, Sinchi nonetheless extorts money from Captain Pantoja while condemning Pantoja and the Special Service in his radio program. Sinchi is as guilty as those he seeks to bring to justice.

The final, most humorous instances of hypocrisy are found in Chapter 10. As Pantoja and the Special Service slip further and further into disrepute, the narrative reveals that Lieutenant Bacacorzo (Pantoja's Liaison Officer), General Victoria, General Tiger Collazos and General Scavino (Pantoja's commanding officers), Father Beltrán (former Army chaplain and vehement opponent of the Special Service), and Sinchi the corrupt radio announcer all receive "services" from the prostitutes Pantoja was ordered to hire.



Style

Point of View

The majority of Vargas Llosa's novel is written in third-person perspective. However, Chapter 3's letter from Pochita to her sister Chichi and Brother Francisco's "Epistle to the Good Concerning the Wicked" in Chapter 9 are both written in first person. In addition, Chapter 9 also features articles from the newspaper *El Oriente* and Captain Pantoja's eulogy for Olga Arellano Rosaura ("the Brazilian"). In his eulogy, Pantoja refers to himself as "we." Also, Sinchi's radio broadcast in Chapter 7 (presented in the form of a transcript) is in first person. The use of various perspectives gives the narrative texture. By including letters, radio broadcast transcripts, news accounts and military communications, as well as brief accounts of several of Captain Pantoja's nightmares, the author manages to broaden the scope of the work. Part chronicle, part standard novel, *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* develops a life of its own. The overall impression is one of a dossier covering the events surrounding the inception and demise of the Special Service. The novel gives the reader an experience much like leafing through newspaper reports, military memos, journal entries and printed transcripts in order to understand what happens, how and why. Vargas Llosa goes one step further, however, by including actual conversations.

Setting

Captain Pantoja and the Special Service takes place in the South American country of Peru. Specifically, the action of the novel is concentrated on the town of Iquitos and the surrounding area. Iquitos (as well as Loreto, Moronacocha and Requena) are all situated in the Amazon jungle region of Peru. In addition, several rivers are mentioned. The assumption is that these smaller rivers all feed into the Amazon. As such, there is an unspoken expectation of wildness and sensuality in the novel that is associated with the jungle itself and with remote locations. The Amazon jungle, it seems, is mysterious as well as unpredictable and happenings in the narrative are framed in such a way as to reinforce this assertion. The main protagonist, his wife and mother leave the more cosmopolitan Chiclayo area and depart for Iquitos only to be subjected to heat, humidity and the unpredictability of the Amazon. In addition, the jungle figures prominently in the narrative not only as a geographical reality, but as an entity itself. Although the Peruvian Army has established several military installations in the Amazon region, there is nonetheless something untamed about the people there—the religious and the secular.

Within the Iquitos/Loreto area, there are other significant settings in the narrative which serve as mirror opposites. For example, there are several brothels mentioned in the novel. The Mau-Mau, The One-Eyed Cat and The Little San Juan are three such places. Conversely, the Brotherhood of the Ark (a rogue religious sect led by Brother Francisco) is associated with the towns of Moronacocha, Requena, and the small village of Dos de Mayo. These vastly divergent locations represent a convergence of the sacred and the



profane, the holy and the unholy, all within the Amazon jungle region. Following this train of reasoning, Captain Pantoja makes a journey from the profane (Iquitos) to the sacred, more pristine location of Lake Titicaca, the largest lake in South America.

Language and Meaning

Captain Pantoja and the Special Service was originally written in Spanish. There are Spanish words as well as words from South American Indian languages included in the English translation. Primarily, the Spanish and Indian words used in the novel are plant names or names of particular types of food or drink. For instance, cocobolo, chuchuhuasi, and clabohuasca are names of trees found in the Peruvian Amazon region (p. 67).

Military-speak is also utilized in Vargas Llosa's novel. Dispatches sent by Captain Pantoja and the other Army officers use a language that would be unfamiliar to civilians. The dispatches themselves are all very formal in their tone and much of the language can be considered euphemistic. Since no one is to know the nature of Pantoja's assignment (he is made responsible for organizing a group of prostitutes), the language used in the dispatches is purposefully vague. For example, the term "specialist" is a military euphemism for "prostitute" and "daily service" is a euphemism for "sex act." Interestingly, the citizens of Iquitos and Loreto use the term "washerwomen" to refer to prostitutes who solicit business by going from house to house, asking if there is any "laundry" to be done.

Also, journalistic language is used in the news reports featured in the novel as well as in the radio transmissions known as "The Voice of Sinchi." In direct contrast to the clipped style of the newspaper articles is the "Epistle" of Brother Francisco. In his letter, Francisco uses language similar to that of a manifesto. The sentences in his letter are long and rambling. Punctuation is sparse and Francisco uses capital letters for emphasis rather than relying on the language itself to make strong statements.

Finally, language comes into play in the case of the pimp (Chino) Porfirio Wong. Chino is Spanish for Chinese. Wong is Chinese-Peruvian and the author capitalizes on this fact. That is to say, rather than simply identifying the character as part-Asian and allowing this to be sufficient, Vargas Llosa's Porfirio Wong is unable to pronounce the letter "r" and uses the letter "l" instead. There are many examples throughout the narrative of this phenomenon. The Peruvian characters often imitate Wong's speech but never in Wong's presence. On page 178, for example, the Brazilian says to Captain Pantoja, "What a pletty baby. I scaltch yol head."

Structure

The novel is divided into ten chapters totaling 244 pages. Each chapter varies in format, however, giving the novel more depth than a linear narrative would have. For instance, some chapters are written as military dispatches while others are in the form of letters. There is even a manifesto of sorts featured in Chapter 9 (Brother Francisco's "Epistle").



The narrative follows a relatively straightforward format in terms of the chronology of events. Of particular note is the way in which the author presents simultaneous events. For example, rather than dealing with one episode at a time, the narrative action bounces back and forth between things which happen concurrently in different places. In Chapter 1, snippets of conversations are strung together with no mention of place and no transitions. Thus, on the printed page, it appears as though all the dialogue belongs to one happening; one individual conversation when, in fact, this is not the case. This technique gives the narrative a cinematic feel. In other words, one could easily imagine "cutting" from one scene to another as in a film. Since this "cutting" happens on the page, however, the effect is (at least in the opening chapter) somewhat confusing.



Quotes

"The rain had washed the rain from the cross, but the 'brothers' had caught that holy water in rags, buckets, dishes, they drank it and were cleansed of their sins" (Chapter 10, p. 236).

"Dead for a couple of days and rotting like cream of wheat" (Chapter 10, p. 237).

"The animals on the river began to grunt, to bellow, and the fish came out of the water to bid farewell to Brother Francisco who was ascending" (Chapter 10, p. 234).

"...[T]he many people who attended the wake for Olga Arellano Rosaura approached the coffin and admired through the transparent glass, shining intact under the funeral candles, the dark beauty of the Brazilian!" (Chapter 9, p. 212).

"They crucified the old woman Ignacia Curdimbre Peláez in the little square in Dos de Mayo at midnight with 214 inhabitants of the town present..." (Chapter 8, p. 167).

"[A] group of fanatic recruits, secretly organized into an Ark, attempted the live crucifixion of an Indian to ward off a storm, which had to be prevented at gunpoint by the unit's officers" (Chapter 6, p. 137).

"It being impossible to provide each location with the chamber pot that Corps Leader Chuchope requested [...] four feed buckets were provided" (Chapter 4, p. 74).

"The Jungle had imparted such ferocious passion and hardening to him that in order to recover his self-control and peace of mind he had to resort to the solitary vice" (Chapter 4, p. 68).

"Though at times she wears pants that are so tight she has to use a shoehorn to get them on, still she doesn't go around arousing the men, she doesn't give them such fresh looks as the other women Iquitos" (Chapter 3, p. 56).

"[T]he dirty part of this business is that this religion has a mania for crucifying animals and I don't like that because every morning I find cockroaches, butterflies, spiders nailed to her little crosses and even a mouse the other day..." (Chapter 3, p. 54).

"Do you want them laughing at you in Lima? What kind of officers do you have that four witches can snatch a prisoner out of your hands?" (Chapter 10, p. 227).

"The people smeared their faces and bodies with blood from the cross and they even drank it. Now they've started to worship the victim. There are prayer cards of Santa Ignacia in circulation already" (Chapter 8, p. 167).



Topics for Discussion

Define euphemism and cite examples from the text that could be considered euphemisms.

Chapter 3 is a letter written by Pocha to her sister Chichi. In your estimation, why does the author use a letter to reveal narrative details?

The narrative contains several military dispatches. Explain what makes the dispatches so humorous in terms of the overall narrative.

Define irony and give examples from Chapter 10 which support your definition.

What reasons do the Army superiors give for choosing Captain Pantoja to establish the Special Service?

In what way could Captain Pantoja and the Special Service be considered a circular narrative? Include in your answer an observation of the novel's opening and closing scenes.

Discuss the ways in which the Brotherhood of the Ark and the Special Service balance one another. At which point in the story do these two very different entities overlap and what is the result?

What reasons do the prostitutes give for their loyalty to Captain Pantoja and the SSGFRI?

Who is the Boy Martyr of Moronacochocha? Why is his death significant to the Brotherhood of the Ark?

How does Captain Pantoja and the Special Service problematize questions of right and wrong/good and evil?