

# **Dog Soldiers Study Guide**

## **Dog Soldiers by Robert Stone**

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# Plot Summary

"Dog Soldiers" by Robert Stone is a novel based on the events that occur between an American journalist, a merchant marine, and a suspect government agency regarding 3 kilos of heroin.

The story takes place during the Vietnam War. The 1960s are over but chaos still reigns supreme. The counterculture is expanding and people are becoming even more disillusioned with the government and the status quo. There are several good examples to show that the collective mindset of America has changed. The time period in the book reflects the changing political structure of the US as well as the world.

The book starts out with John Converse sitting on a bench in downtown Saigon. Converse is a journalist of sorts that has put himself on assignment in Vietnam with the hopes of writing a novel or a play. Converse had previous success as a writer but does not refer to himself as a first class journalist because he works for his father-in-law, Elmer Bender, an editor and publisher of a tabloid.

Converse realizes that his time in Vietnam will produce nothing so he decides to agree to smuggle 3 kilos of heroin into the US. In Converse's mind, he has a sure plan. With the help of friend and merchant marine Ray Hicks, Converse can make \$40,000. However, Converse is extremely naïve and things quickly go awry.

The heroin is sent to Marge Converse, John's wife, who lives in California. Hicks is followed and the pair is attacked by two men that claim to be Feds. Hicks and Marge go on the run with the heroin. Antheil, a regulatory agent is ruthless in hunting down Marge, Hicks and the heroin. When Converse returns home, he becomes one of the prey. Antheil is determined to track down the heroin. It is clear that Antheil has no intention of turning it in and is in fact a self-serving man with little integrity but the reputation and connections to pull it off.

Converse gives in and is taken by Antheil's men to the place Hicks and Marge are hiding out with the drugs. A shoot out ensues and Hicks, his mentor and law enforcement agents die. Hicks gets away but dies along the roadside, the heroin in his pack. John and Marge manage to get away with their lives.

Along the way the main characters meet up with many unsavory characters including June Owen, Smitty, Danskin, Eddie Peace, Dieter, and others.

Stone based his counter culture views on the activities of the Merry Pranksters, a group of people that traveled across the country in the 1960s. At the forefront of the movement was author and head prankster Ken Kesey.



# pages 1-50

## pages 1-50 Summary

The book starts out with John Converse sitting on a bench in downtown Saigon. The weather is hot and Converse is seeking shade. Converse sits down on a bench beside an American woman. After a few minutes they strike up a conversation. The woman is a missionary in Ngoc Linh province for 14 years. Ngoc Linh is a place that Converse has never been but has heard stories about and wonders why anyone would live there. The woman calls it God's Country. The pair chats as it is siesta time and things are moving slowly. Converse pauses to read a letter from his wife, Marge. The letter talks about a trip to New York and how it has changed.

The woman talks about language studies and the program she had founded with her husband who had recently died. Converse admires the woman's dedication although he does not necessarily agree with her. Converse finds himself attracted to the woman. When he asks her to dinner, she declines as she is leaving for the States to visit her in-laws.

Converse describes people on the street from the heavily made up girls to the monks and money changers.

Converse is a journalist of sorts. Converse does not refer to himself as a first class journalist because he works for his father-in-law, Elmer Bender, an editor and publisher of a tabloid.

"For seven years of his marriage to Marge, Elmer had employed Converse as a principal writer on 'Nightbeat', which his lawyers described as A Weekly Tabloid With a Heavy Emphasis on Sex" (pg. 23.)

It is not the job Converse had wanted. In fact, he had been a serious writer with some success. It was Converse's hope that he would be able to use his experiences in Saigon to write a book or a play. It was not working out as Converse had hoped.

Converse goes to visit Charmian, an American woman whose father is a judge in Florida. Charmian deals drugs and often supplies Converse.

"After his exercise in reality, Converse had fallen in with Charmian and the dope people; he became one of the Constantly Stoned" (pg. 24.)

Converse and Charmian had an affair but have faded away from that somewhat. Charmian shows Converse a brick of heroin and he examines it. Converse tries it and becomes ill because of the high quality. Charmian and Converse have a plan to smuggle three kilos of uncut heroin into the US aboard a merchant marine ship. Converse paid \$10,000 for the majority share in the drugs and should receive \$40,000



for the sale in the States. Charmian worries about the plan but Converse assures her that Marge is trustworthy, as is Hicks, his friend and transporter.

Sergeant Janeway at the JUSPAO office thinks about how to implement stricter regulations for the "bao chi" or journalists. Many people get the accreditation even though their credentials are sketchy at best. The majority of those people are thieves or smugglers.

Converse meets Jill and Ian Percy, a couple that he is friends with on a casual level. Jill has an interest into going to topless bars and is always looking for people to take her. Ian does not seem to care. The Percys meet Converse at the Crazy Horse.

The friends are all drug users, which is evident by the way they speak to one another. They sit in a bar drinking "33" beer and talking about the state of Saigon. "33" beer is said to be made with formaldehyde yet it seems to be the drink of choice. Converse sticks with whiskey.

There is a lot of talk of politics and the upcoming elections. Ian is an agronomist with the Australian government. Ian is a pacifist and he is not pleased by his latest employer - the South Vietnamese government. Ian didn't seem to like anyone.

"He also hated the South Vietnamese government and its armed forces, Americans and particularly the civilians, Buddhist monks, Catholics, the Cao Dai, the French and particularly the Corsicans, the foreign press corps, the Australian government, and his employers past - and, most especially - present." (p. 27)

The trio talks a lot about people leaving Vietnam and how no one wants to be "the last rat" to leave. The conversation turns to Charmian and her probable ties to Colonel Tho.

Converse is reminded of a trip the trio took to Cambodia and the horror they witnessed.

During dinner there is an explosion at the tax office nearby. Many people go to the site. The people sit on the street picking concrete out of their flesh. The bomb had been set off using plastique. The trio talks about who the bombers might be. When arriving at the site Jill is the only one that can see through the crowd. Jill reports that a lot of people have been killed, including children. It is a hard scene to take. They stay until the Arvin arrive with barbed wire to cordon off the site.

Converse goes to My Lat where he picks up a supply of malaria pills. Converse has been running a low grade fever but does not seem too concerned. One of the other journalists, a first class journalist named Mac Lean, tells Converse that he should see the beach as it is the most beautiful in the country. Converse has come to relate the beach to leprosy and declines.

Converse gets a room and is approached by a prostitute. Converse sends her away. He only wants to find Hicks.



## pages 1-50 Analysis

John Converse is a man that is slowly giving up his dreams and ideals. Converse is moving along with the times, a highly controversial and radical time in the 1970s during the Vietnam War. The world has begun to change drastically and this can be seen in Converse's behavior.

Converse decides to take advantage of his time in Vietnam and arranges to smuggle heroin into the United States. The plan is to send it to Marge via Ray Hicks and then get the drugs cut and sold. There is a lot of money to be made. Converse seems to have no thoughts about getting caught or any of the other consequences that might arise. Marge is already addicted to pain killers and it is not a far leap for the reader to guess that Marge will soon become addicted to heroin.

The Converses have an open relationship which means that he freely cheats on his wife with other women. The affair with Charmian seems to have been interesting and hopefully, profitable. Charmian is just one of the expatriates that call Saigon home. Converse spends most of his time with expatriates although he does intend to go home at some point.

Sergeant Janeway sees what is happening with the smugglers but is relatively powerless to stop it. Converse does not try to hide his motives although he never confesses.

The reader gets a solid picture of Saigon at this time. There are random explosions with no obvious purpose. The bombings are commonplace for some while others, like Jill, have great difficulty with the senselessness of it all. Converse has learned to overcome his own moral objections to write about the happenings in Saigon, something which sells newspapers.

"I'm prepared to take chances at this point and I don't respond to the moral objections" (pg. 39.)

There are also descriptions of prostitutes, lepers, opportunists, smugglers, and thieves.



# pages 51-103

## pages 51-103 Summary

It is just after dark when Converse meets up with Hicks. Converse teases Hicks about the fact that he is still toting around a copy of "The Portable Nietzsche." The men discuss the plans to smuggle the heroin (scag) into the US. Hicks is unsure because although he has an almost foolproof way of transporting the drugs, he is uncomfortable about the trip. Scag makes Hicks uneasy. The men talk about the CIA and many other things.

Converse finally convinces Hicks to take the briefcase. After the men part, Converse thinks that Hicks is probably a psychopath after all.

The story shifts to the Odeon Theater where Marge works with Rowena and a man known as Holy-O. The theater is a pornographic theater so the clients the women come across are typically sleazy or secretive about their presence. The women talk about drugs. Marge wants to try a new drug just because it sounds like a good one. Marge asks Holy-O if she knows a doctor that will write the prescription.

Several timely topics come up including J. Edgar Hoover and Charles Manson. Holy-O begins to get upset about Manson. Marge points out that they agreed not to talk about him.

Later in the evening Marge drives home. Mrs. Diaz, the babysitter, asks the usual polite questions before going home. Marge gets a message from her father. After taking one of the Dilaudid pills she calls Elmer. Elmer and his surgically enhanced wife pick up the phone at the same time as always. The conversation between Marge and Elmer is cryptic. Marge mentions that Elmer's phones are tapped. They talk about John. Elmer thinks it is time for John to come home. Elmer tells Marge to visit him the next day.

Marge hangs up from Elmer, checks on Janey and goes to bed in a drug induced, deluded way.

Hicks makes it to California. Hicks had devised a new way to get the drugs ashore now that there were more agents checking packages and using drug sniffing dogs. Hicks watches the agents on board. There are three or four of them dressed like hippies, offering joints to people.

Hicks tries to read Nietzsche but cannot seem to grasp it tonight. Hicks thinks about the few books he has read, one of which was written by Converse. Hicks had great affection and respect for Converse. Hicks also thinks about his time in Japan, becoming a Zen master, and his failed marriage to Etsuko.



Hicks goes ashore and checks into the Seaman's YMCA. He rests for a while and then goes out. Hicks gets drunk. He talked with Finnish Alex, the bartender at the Golden Gateway.

Hicks calls Etsuko who is extremely unhappy to hear from him. The second call Hicks makes receives the same response. Finally Hicks calls Marge to arrange for a time to drop off the package the next morning.

Later a young guy approaches Hicks and asks if he wants to help kill a rich man that night. The guy says the man is gay and they have a date planned. The guy needs help and Hicks looks like the type of guy that could do it. Hicks agrees to help. After the kid leaves, Hicks calls the mark and tells him about the kid's plan.

Hicks goes back to the YMCA, horribly drunk. The next morning when he wakes up he feels wretched. Hicks is disturbed to see that he had been playing with his gun the night before.

Hicks arrives at Marge's house. Marge is a mess after having spent a night filled with terrible dreams. Hicks is upset to learn that Marge does not have the money. She was going to go to the bank but decided to go to the aquarium instead. Hicks is angry and tells Marge that she is a screw up. Marge is hung over and probably still stoned. She is wearing dirty clothes, drinking burnt coffee and does not seem to have a handle on anything. Marge is not sure what to think of Hicks.

"He carried the hallucinatory circus scent of patchouli oil, the smell of dope and cold-eyed freakery" (pg. 95.)

Hicks makes advances on Marge. Marge makes no move to stop him.

Two men approach the house. One is Broadway Joe, the kid from the night before. Hicks has been set up. Hicks explains that the men are not federal agents, they are take-off artists. The men want the heroin, claiming that it belongs to them. Marge wants to give it to them. Hicks says the men will kill them anyway. One man is handcuffed to the toilet. Hicks hits Broadway Joe and knocks him unconscious. The man in the bathroom issues threats as Marge, Janey, and Hicks make their escape.

## pages 51-103 Analysis

The meeting between Hicks and Converse is brief and lets the reader know that the men have known each other for a long time. Converse is not at all concerned about the transaction which strikes Hicks as odd. Hicks wants to know what he is getting himself into yet agrees in the end even though Converse does not reveal the identity of his partners.

Marge Converse is a drug addicted mess. The work at the Odeon Theater fits her personality and allows her to behave in any way she likes. The people Marge works with are in the same boat as she is, willing to experiment with drugs, although Marge is





clearly addicted. When Marge arrives home, she seems to slide into the role of the mother. After Mrs. Diaz leaves, Marge takes one of the pills after tending to Janey. The conversation between Marge and Elmer is quite strange. Marge tells her father that she is just messing around with the new drugs. Elmer does not seem to find the confession unusual; he just wants to know if she is suicidal. Marge also tells her father that she has given up sex. No one says why Elmer's phones are tapped. It could be a joke, paranoia or there is information yet to be had.

The reader gets to know Ray Hicks in this section. Hicks is a lifer in the merchant marines. Many years ago he fell in love with Zen Buddhism, the Japanese culture and a woman named Etsuko. Hicks cannot let go of certain aspects of his life, including Etsuko. This is a pattern of his and Etsuko is not willing to tolerate being bothered by him any more. Hicks plans to return to Japan after he retires.

It is clear that Hicks was once a good strong leader. Over the years something has happened to Hicks. He has become cold and callous to the point of being dangerous. Converse may not have been far off when he accused Hicks of being a psychopath. It is unclear why Converse would work with Hicks, aside from the opportunity, if it meant putting his wife and child in the path of an unstable man.

Hicks is fully aware of what is going on around him although he tries to blot it out. The incident with Broadway Joe in the bar is very strange yet Hicks does not pick up on the man's plan. It becomes clear the next day when Joe and the other man arrive at Marge's house. Hicks has been set up by these men who claim to be federal agents. Marge is naïve enough to believe them.

Hicks' behavior toward Marge is unacceptable considering his relationship with Converse, yet Marge likes the behavior. Hicks is still upset with Marge for her incompetence. If Marge didn't owe Hicks money Hicks would most likely flee and leave Marge to her own devices.



## pages 103-156

### pages 103-156 Summary

Hicks and Marge head for the bank in Marge's mustang. Marge laments leaving Janey at June Owens' house but Hicks says it was the right thing to do. June can deliver Janey when he returns from Saigon.

Hicks drives up to a house in the desert. There are people in the house. Hicks seems to know at least one of the men. The others are not friendly. No one in the house is interested in buying the heroin. Hicks and Marge leave. In the night, they have sex.

Converse has returned to the States only to find that Marge and Janey are gone. Someone painted a devil on the wall above Janey's bed. Converse, alarmed, checks with the landlord to ask if Marge had left any messages. She had not. The landlord says people have been coming and going during the time Marge was gone. Marge's co-workers at the Odeon tell Converse that Marge has not shown up for work in a week. Converse is filled with cold dread.

Converse calls Elmer from a pay phone, suddenly paranoid that the house phone might be tapped. Elmer tells Converse that someone is probably following him. Elmer tells Converse to lose the tail and to come to see him. Elmer knows what has happened.

Converse takes a cab to Macy's where he hopes to escape. He has used this ploy in the past. Converse identifies the people following him, one of which is the bearded man. Several quick maneuvers get Converse away from the men. Converse goes to Elmer's office.

Elmer tells Converse that Janey is in Canada with family. No one knows where Marge is but Elmer believes that she is with Hicks. Elmer says he expects such behavior from Marge because she is disturbed. However, Converse is supposed to be smarter than that. Converse says he has been waiting all his life to screw up this much. Elmer congratulates him on a job well done.

Elmer talks about the Feds, his opinion of Converse's situation, and Antheil. Elmer gives Converse the name of a lawyer and tells him what steps to take next. While in the office Elmer and Frances try to get Converse to write a couple of articles.

Converse stays in the office to talk and drink with Douglas. Douglas asks Converse about being in Vietnam. Douglas wants to know the details of being in Saigon during the war, what it was like to be faced with death and destruction. Converse tries to explain that he isn't the one to ask. For a true picture of Vietnam, Douglas should ask a grunt. As a journalist, Converse spent a lot of his time in peaceful areas and hotels. There were times, however, when Converse went out on the line. He talks about the fear and how it became too much. Douglas asks if it is common to be so scared that just being there makes one cry.



"'I have the impression,' Converse said, 'that it's fairly unusual. I think it's usual to cry when you're hurt. But to cry before is uncool'" (pg. 131.)

Marge and Hicks drive to the strip to get breakfast. Hicks says he is going to visit Eddie Peace. If anyone can get rid of the heroin, it's Eddie. Marge and Hicks go to Laurel Canyon to Eddie's house. Eddie is not at home. Lois tells them that Eddie no longer does the things that they did in Malibu and he won't want to be bothered. After some conversation Lois tells Hicks where to find Eddie.

Hicks and Marge go to the Gardena Auditorium to see Eddie. He is in a room filled with extras who are being berated by a director. After some conversation Eddie agrees to meet them at Quasi's so they can talk. On the way out, Eddie offers sex to Hicks, who declines.

Converse wakes at seven in the morning and for a moment forgets that he is in Elmer's office. Converse leaves the building and walks around the city. He thinks of his mother and decides to go and visit her at the hotel. Converse tells his mother that they are going to go to lunch. Converse's mother has some mental issues, perhaps dementia. The lunch is relatively pleasant until Converse noticed the two men that had been following him.

## pages 103-156 Analysis

Marge seems to be slipping away even more as the tale goes on. She exhibits no true character and seems to be a parasite of sorts, one that goes along with whatever everyone else is doing. She seems to have no mind or will of her own. Beyond the first day she does not lament Janey's absence and has nothing to say about John. Marge is representative of the "Turn on, tune in, drop out" generation.

Hicks is trying to make headway in getting rid of the heroin. Since Hicks has his money, it seems strange that he would continue to be involved in the scheme since there seems to be no real payoff in the end.

Converse still shows extreme naiveté when it comes to the seriousness of his predicament. Elmer has much more experience with the Feds considering his background as a Communist. Elmer has enough insight to give Converse much needed advice. Finally, Converse begins to become wise to the situation and realizes that he is not safe anywhere



## pages 156-204

### pages 156-204 Summary

The two men had grabbed Converse. They were in the kitchen of an unidentified house or apartment. Converse has been drugged and is being interrogated by the two men - Smitty and Danskin. It takes a long time for Converse to convince them that he has no idea what happened to Marge and Hicks.

Smitty takes delight in working Converse over. No matter what Converse says, Smitty is determined to beat him. Converse has been drugged so any defenses he may have had are shattered.

"On the floor he looked up into Smitty's face. It was an undersea face; the eyes were only part of an inflated bag of venom behind it" (pg. 157.)

Smitty beats Converse until Danskin is convinced that Converse is telling the truth. The men finally believe him but not before burning his hand on a glowing hot burner.

Hicks wakes up in the shack in the canyon. There are police in the canyon and Hicks is sure that they will find the shack shortly. Hicks wakes Marge who is feeling sick again. Hicks gives her some drugs to take the edge off of her withdrawal. Hicks drives to a motel that rents bungalows. Marge feels sicker and cannot even eat. When Marge awakes, Hicks breaks into the heroin and they proceed to use it. Suddenly Marge is almost deliriously happy. Hicks asks Marge if she remembers anything that has happened since Smitty and Danskin were at the house. Marge says she remembers everything.

Converse goes to visit Elmer's lawyer. Converse is not impressed. The lawyer gives Converse advice on how to handle himself should he decide to go to the police.

Converse finds June Owen and goes to visit her. Converse asks how June got mixed up in everything. June talks about her affair with Hicks. Converse asks June's opinion on how everything could have gone wrong. June says it would make sense to look back to Vietnam as that is most likely where it started. June tells Converse about her previous experiences running drugs and about Antheil. Antheil is a lawyer and a regulatory agent, not a cop. His methods are unusual.

Converse spends some time with June. They get high and begin to become intimate when Converse remembers an incident that took place in Cambodia.

Marge wakes up in the night. Eddie and a couple come to the hotel. Hicks comes out of the bathroom armed with two guns. After Hicks puts the guns down Eddie introduces the couple - Gerald and Judy. Gerald is a writer. Gerald says that he wants to write a book about the drug scene, the heroin scene in particular. However, because Gerald has never done heroin, he thinks that he should try it so he can speak about the



experience first hand. Hicks and Eddie have a confrontation about it. Eddie says he is doing Hicks a favor. Hicks has no idea how hard it will be to move the scag as it is. Gerald is willing to pay \$6,000 and probably more just to get a taste. Jody is an heiress and money is no object.

Eddie shoots up first. The next person is Jody. Hicks sticks a needle into Gerald but does it wrong on purpose. Gerald collapses. Marge runs to Gerald and knows that he is in big trouble. Hicks and Marge leave. Marge asks what happened. Hicks explains and although he realizes that he took his rage out on the wrong person, he blames it on being drunk.

## pages 156-204 Analysis

Converse is deeply confused by what happens at the house with Smitty and Danskin. The author makes it seem as if the men had crossed paths before, other than the time at Macy's. Converse seems to be expected to know who they are and what the entire situation is about with no one giving an explanation. It is strange that the men would be so cruel to Converse and then simply let him go after determining that he really did not know where to find the heroin or his wife. Making an example out of Converse makes little sense in light of the situation. Additionally, it is clear that the men work for Antheil. This makes little sense, as well, considering that Antheil is a lawyer and regulatory agent. It is unclear at this time what other illegal activities Antheil has his hands in. If he is truly an agent, is he a zealot willing to do anything to stop the drug smuggling or does he have other motives?

Hicks' behavior is becoming more radical and unpredictable. Hicks has taken a personal interest in making a big score and is offended when Eddie tries to sell off part of the stash. Hicks reacts badly even though he stands to make more money this way. Gerald and Jody are nice people that do not deserve the harsh treatment dished out by Hicks. Although Marge is somewhat upset, she continues to go along for the ride. The reader can assume that this is not the last meeting between Eddie and Hicks.



## pages 204-267

### pages 204-267 Summary

Converse returns to the house on Telegraph Avenue. Mr. Roche almost, gleeful, tells Converse that the lock has been changed. Converse points out that he has paid the rent. Roche says it is being taken care of. When Converse goes into the apartment, he sees Antheil, a tall broad shouldered man. There are two other men in the room. Antheil takes Converse and goes into Janey's room. Antheil begins to talk about Converse's play and the downfalls in the main character. Antheil asks Converse if the play is autobiographical in any way, the main character is in fact Converse. Converse shrugs.

The conversation turns to June and Converse's current predicament. Antheil chastises Converse for being so stupid. Converse refuses to talk without a lawyer. Although Antheil has no proof, he is a clever man and Converse knows it. Antheil tells Converse that he should just let him go free and the people he has burned will pick him up off the street within 24 hours. Converse has clearly crossed the wrong people.

Antheil says, "Did you think about who you were cutting in on, running scag? The bike clubs. The black dudes in Oakland. The syndicate. I think I'll feed them your ass" (pg. 208.)

Antheil goes on to berate Converse and ask what he was thinking when he made the plans to smuggle the heroin into the States. Antheil says it is obvious that Converse is an educated man.

Antheil says, "You turned yourself into an animal for a dirty payoff" (pg. 209.)

Antheil begins to ask questions about Marge. Converse gives Antheil some background. Antheil says he knows all about Marge's background - where she went to school and worked, etc. Converse begins to talk about her family. Antheil says he wants to know how to deal with Marge. What type of person is she? Is she someone that would betray her husband and take off with three kilos of heroin and another man or is she a victim of circumstance? Converse thinks about it and says that Marge is pretty moral

Once again Antheil tells Converse that he is the one that can save him and Marge from the trouble they are in with many different types of bad people. Unless Converse and Marge does what Antheil says, they will both die. Converse explains once again that he does not know where Marge is and therefore cannot reach her. Antheil says he thinks Marge and Hicks are with Those Who Are. Converse has no idea who or what Antheil is talking about and says so. Antheil says that Those Who Are is a group of nasty people. They are also friends of Hicks. Antheil goes on to explain that Those Who Are consist of extremists, faggots, and dealers. Antheil calls them scum of the earth. Antheil wants Converse to convince Marge to come out to spare a lot of commotion, injury, and perhaps death.



Converse considers what Antheil has been saying and is not convinced. Converse threatens to walk away. Antheil says he cannot. Converse says that the entire pan seems to be illegal. Antheil tells Converse not to worry about it. Then Antheil tells Converse that he needs to get out of town for a while. Danskin and Smith are in charge of transporting Converse to his new location.

Hicks and Marge arrive at a new place in the desert. Marge is unsure if this is Mexico as she sees many people in Mexican attire. Everyone stares at them strangely and Marge asks if they should go away. Hicks says the people will fade away since they are not cops.

Hicks takes Marge inside one of the large buildings. There seems to be some type of service going on. A boy approaches Hicks. They chat and Hicks asks where he can find the boy's father. Hicks introduces the boy as Kjell. Kjell tells Hicks where to find his father.

Hicks laments the fact that he just missed a man named Gibbs. He also laments that the cable car is gone. Hicks had been looking forward to riding in the cable car. Hicks and Marge would have to walk up the steep hill. At the top of the hill Hicks and Marge see a large building. There are no trees around the building. There are lights and loudspeakers adjacent to a bell tower. There are many strange and ominous symbols including swastikas and a serpent. A red-faced man with little hair emerges from the building. The man has a Dutch or German accent. Hicks says they took a chance that he would still be there. There is some strange hostility or animosity between the two men as well as some level of affection. Hicks tells the man that they climbed a long way and asks for some beer.

The man, whose name is Dieter, is some sort of Zen master with a strange hatred of many things and people. Dieter is also paranoid. Marge goes off to freshen up. Hicks goes with her to show her where to find the dope. Marge prepares to shoot up in her leg. Hicks warns her to be careful. Marge says she is bothered about Janey and maybe she will get the same thing as Gerald.

Hicks talks to Dieter about moving the heroin. Dieter refuses. Kjell says that the only drugs they have on site now are mushrooms. Dieter says that Hicks never should have left them. Hicks just keeps talking about the good fishing and how he misses it.

Kjell talks about the inception of the place known as El Incarnacion del Verbo. It was formerly a Jesuit mission house. Kjell also talks about how people used to think that Dieter was God.

Marge and Dieter butt heads. Marge is a former Communist with a strong set of beliefs. Marge thinks Dieter is a fascist. Marge blames need for the troubles in the world and says everyone would be better off if the whole world was bombed. Dieter chastises Marge for her warped thinking and ideals.

"When you say that, it's cheap junkie pessimism. If you spend your time making holes in yourself and tripping on cracks in the wall - how else can you think?" (p. 231)





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"When you say that, it's cheap junkie pessimism. If you spend your time making holes in yourself and tripping on cracks in the wall - how else can you think?" (pg. 231.)

Converse, Smitty and Danskin go to the Fremont hotel. Converse realizes that men aren't going to kill him and he celebrates. Smitty and Danskin play chess and get into a confrontation when Smitty plays poorly and loses.

Later, while Danskin sleeps Smitty starts to talk non-stop about his life including his job at the agency with Antheil. Converse can't get him to shut up. Things get even more uncomfortable when Smitty makes a pass at Converse. Danskin puts a stop to it.

The next day Smitty talks a lot about how he could be a great writer and how he could give ideas to Converse. Then Smitty berates Converse about the tabloid and the trash they publish.

Throughout the trip Smitty's behavior becomes increasingly erratic. Danskin is able to control him to a degree. Danskin also tries to impress Converse by telling him about his 9 year prison sentence.

Antheil stands waiting for the men to arrive. It is obvious that Antheil is mad about something. There were some snafus in the plans to approach Dieter's house. Antheil waits behind as the men climb a bluff to get to the house. The men end up stranded on a bluff, in the wide open.

## **pages 204-267 Analysis**

In this section the reader learns some more details about Antheil and the Agency and a great deal more about Smitty and Danskin. Antheil is a big man with a great ego. Although he is a Fed, Antheil works under his own rules. Antheil will use any means necessary to get the job done and to get what he wants regardless if it is legal. There is some part of Antheil that respects the law but the drive to be powerful plus the greed blurs the lines of right and wrong so that they barely exist. This is how Antheil can send people like Smitty and Danskin to beat up Converse and take him into custody.





Converse feels as if he has no choice at this point. Even if he chooses not to accept Antheil's help, the men will undoubtedly pursue and dog him every step of the way, convinced that Converse will go to Marge, and therefore, the heroin.

Antheil has a great deal of experience and takes delight in berating Converse for his stupidity. Until this point Converse still had not realized the full gravity of the situation. Even now Converse still does not fully understand that it is likely that he, Marge and Hicks will die terrible deaths.

Smitty reveals his true colors in this section. It was hinted at earlier that Smitty was a sadist and not terribly stable. At the hotel Smitty shows just how crazy he is as well as being a pathological liar. Smitty tells Converse about being in Vietnam, which is not true. Converse finds out that the only place Smitty has been is in jail. Antheil has Smitty believing that he will have a place in the Agency. Smitty thinks Antheil is a god.

Hicks and Marge take the next step on their journey to Dieter's compound. Dieter professes to be a spiritual guru but has a lot of hostility and no discernible qualities of a traditional guru. Marge immediately hates the place and Dieter. It is learned that Hicks grew up at the compound, which explains a lot of his characteristics, actions and beliefs.

Dieter is unwilling to help saying that he no longer has connections. Hicks does not believe it and badgers Dieter to make some calls. Dieter continues to refuse.

Danskin also regales Converse with his stories about prison and madness. Danskin is with the Agency for the moment because he is forced to be, so he may as well enjoy the ride. Danskin tells Converse that Smitty has no chance of getting into the Agency, that he has the brains of an Airedale and will believe anything Antheil says.



## pages 267-342

### pages 267-342 Summary

Marge wakes up and immediately goes for the heroin. Her doses are much too strong and they cause her to vomit and pass out. When she wakes up she speaks with Hicks and Dieter. Dieter tries to explain how things used to be before he succumbed to the American Dream.

There is a warning signal although no one is sure what it means. Dieter says they should all try again and that Marge and Hicks are welcome to stay. It is not long before a shot rings out. There are no hunters in the area and it is suspected that Hicks and Marge were followed. Hicks says that it is not possible. Marge thinks June sold them out as no one else knows where they were going. Hicks refuses to believe it.

Hicks talks about leaving and finding a way out. There are no trails, only the locals know how to get down from the compound. Dieter says it is dangerous.

Smitty is becoming more erratic and wants to shoot things from down below. Another shot is heard and Kjell screams. Smitty has killed his horse for no reason. A man comes to the compound and describes Smitty and Danskin. Hicks says that they may not be cops after all.

Antheil and the others try to figure out how to get up top since there are no trails. Antheil says the locals, including the police, know how to get up there. The men formulate a plan. Converse will yell up to Marge and say that they have Janey. If Marge doesn't give up the heroin, everyone will be killed, including Janey.

Marge becomes hysterical when she hears John's voice and the threats against Janey. Hicks says that there is no way they could have Janey because June turned her over to Elmer. Marge is unconvinced. Marge takes the heroin to a point where it can be seen. She tells the men to meet her in the village.

Marge approaches the men and Converse tells them not to hurt her. In a flash, Converse is wrestling for Smitty's gun, telling Marge to run. Danskin mocks Converse. Every thing turns to complete chaos. There are guns being fired as well as various explosives and weapons being used. All the while Dieter is giving Zen quotes over the loudspeakers.

Hicks has been shot. Converse gets to him and Marge. They discuss the dire situation. Converse and Marge leave Hicks to fend off the intruders and get to the Land Rover to make a get away. Hicks' plan entails shooting up the men's cars so they are stranded.

Hicks returns to Dieter's house. Hicks and Dieter argue about leaving the mountain. Dieter tells Hicks that he is badly injured. Hicks just wants more dope and he can make it. Dieter tells Hicks to leave the dope and get away. Dieter tries to prove a point by



running away, pretending to throw the heroin off the side of the mountain. Hicks shoots and kills Dieter.

There is a long scene in which Hicks knows he is dying and he recalls many things from his past. Hicks makes it to the pick up point but by the time Marge and Converse get there, Hicks is dead. Marge and Converse know that they have no choice but to go on the run.

Antheil and Angel find Hicks' body. Attached to Hicks' pack is a white tissue, signaling surrender. The heroin is in his pack. Angel says they can just dump the body but Antheil insists on burying him with dignity.

## **pages 267-342 Analysis**

The story ends in complete chaos yet with some sense of closure. Converse and Marge are back together. It is hinted at that Marge will at least try to get clean. Both realize the mistakes they made and just want to get out of the situation.

The biggest realizations involve Hicks. Somewhere along the way Hicks has become so obsessed with the heroin and the money that everything else falls to the wayside. Dieter returns as Hicks' master guru and teaches Hicks what is important. Hicks realizes what he has done when he kills Dieter. Hicks regains some of his integrity by protecting Marge and Converse as they escape.

Antheil shows some honorable traits when he decides that he can live with letting Marge and Converse escape. He also honors Hicks' memory by speaking over his body and insisting on a proper burial.



# Characters

## John Converse

John Converse is a California native that has been sent to Vietnam. Converse is a formerly serious writer who became a tabloid journalist for his father-in-law's publication, *Nightbeat*. Converse once dreamed of writing a novel but has lowered himself to writing sensationalized stories about the Vietnam War. Converse does not take his job seriously and it is easy to see why as he is unable to report real and noteworthy news. Converse has been in Vietnam for about 18 months when he prepares to return to the US to see his family. Converse gets the idea to purchase three kilos of pure heroin that he will smuggle into the US. Converse enlists help from his friend, Ray Hicks.

Converse is somewhat delusional in thinking he can pull off a job of such magnitude. Converse is a timid man with more than a touch of paranoia, not good qualities found in a drug smuggler. Still, Converse smells fast money. If Converse can pull off the job, he stands to profit \$40,000. However, as soon as the caper begins, things begin to spin out of control. Converse must figure out a way to get himself and Marge out of a jam that was self-created.

## Ray Hicks

Ray Hicks, is a merchant marine and a friend of John Converse. Hicks is also a drug smuggler. Hicks is the person chosen by Converse to smuggle the heroin into the US. Hicks has a strong belief system that includes mysticism. He takes chances without weighing the risks which makes him the perfect person to smuggle the dope into the US.

Hicks takes the heroin aboard his ship that is traveling from Vietnam to California. Hicks will take the heroin to Converse's wife, Marge. Antheil's men catch up to Hicks as he is delivering the heroin to Marge. Hicks and Marge have to go on the run to avoid being killed. They take the heroin.

Hicks was once a great leader and solid Marine but Vietnam has taken its toll on him. Still, Hicks relies on his training and survival instincts to get safely away from Antheil's men the first time. Hicks is not always so lucky.

Hicks turns to his guru, Dieter, a spiritual man that lives near the Mexican border. Hicks thinks Dieter will provide refuge as well as advice about his current predicament. Dieter is against taking or selling drugs. Even though Dieter eats mushrooms, he considers heroin to be a "filthy drug."

The author states that the character of Ray Hicks was based on Merry Prankster and author Ken Kesey.



## **Marge Converse**

Marge Converse is the wife of John Converse and the daughter of Elmer Bender. Marge, who works at a porn movie theatre, is a drug addict.

## **Dieter**

Dieter, a spiritual visionary, is one of the people that is able to resist heroin, which he refers to as a "filthy drug." Dieter is Hicks' former guru. Dieter is not the type one would picture as a guru as he is somewhat hostile and paranoid.

## **Elmer Bender**

Elmer Bender is Marge's father. Bender owns and operated a seedy tabloid titled Nightbeat.

## **Antheil**

Antheil is a regulatory agent gone rogue. He has no morals or qualms about the way he gets the job done.

## **Smitty**

Smitty is one of Antheil's men. Smitty is psychotic and not terribly bright but he usually does what he is told.

## **Danskin**

Danskin is another one of Antheil's men. Danskin is highly intelligent but mentally unstable and violent.

## **Gerald and Jody**

Gerald and Jody are the couple that meet up with Hicks through Eddie Peace. Gerald ends up dying from an overdose.

## **Eddie Peace**

Eddie Peace is an old comrade of Hicks from their Malibu days. Peace tries to help Hicks move the heroin.

## **Kjell**

Kjell is Dieter's 16-year-old son.

## **Angel**

Angel is a cop that assists Antheil on the raid of Dieter's compound.



# Objects/Places

## Heroin

Heroin is one of the main objects in the story. John Converse, wanting to make some type of profit while in Saigon strikes up a deal with Charmian, Converse's lover and a drug dealer. Early in the story Charmian shows Converse a brick of heroin and he examines it. Converse tries it and becomes ill because of the high quality. Charmian and Converse have a plan to smuggle three kilos of uncut heroin into the US aboard a merchant marine ship. Converse paid \$10,000 for the majority share in the drugs and should receive \$40,000 for the sale in the States. Charmian worries about the plan but Converse assures her that Marge is trustworthy, as is Hicks, his friend and transporter.

While heroin is illegal in the United States, it seems to be part of daily activity in Saigon. Smuggling heroin into the US is a very risky venture, one that Converse never thinks through to the end. Even when being transported on board a merchant marine ship, there are chances that Hicks, and therefore Converse, will be caught.

The high value of the heroin causes a confrontation between Hicks, Marge and Antheil's men. Heroin is a highly addictive substance, particularly when it is in a pure form like the bricks sent by Converse. Along the way, Marge, who is already addicted to pain killers, becomes addicted to heroin.

## Vietnam

The story takes place during the Vietnam War in the early 1970s. Converse has been in Saigon for 18 months, working as a reporter for his father-in-law's sleazy tabloid. Converse talks a lot about the atmosphere in Saigon as well as its people and customs. The first interaction between Converse and the missionary woman sets the tone for Converse's relationships with others.

There are many places discussed by Converse, including Ngoc Linh, where the missionary lives and teaches. Ngoc Linh is a place that Converse has never been but has heard ominous stories about and wonders why anyone would live there. The woman calls it God's Country. My Lat is another location mentioned. Converse goes there to get his malaria pills and to see Sergeant Janeway.

While in Saigon, Converse lives in room number 16 at the Hotel Coligny. The place is operated by Madame and Monsieur Colletti. It is not the nicest place as can be seen in the squashed lizard story.

The people of Vietnam are seen as being opportunists eager to take advantage of Americans. There are many mentions of chaos, prostitutes, smugglers, thieves, lepers and so forth. There are also instances of random violence which have ceased to shock Converse.



## California

California is the home state to John and Marge Converse. It is also the drop site for the heroin being delivered by Hicks.

## Berkeley

Berkeley is a radical town in California. It is the home of John and Marge Converse.

## Saigon

Saigon is the city in which John Converse is stationed while in Vietnam.

## Dieter's House

Dieter's house is the safe haven sought by Hicks and Marge while they are on the run. Hicks hopes that Dieter can help him sort out the mess while giving spiritual advice.

## Hotel Coligny

Converse lives in room number 16 at the Hotel Coligny. The place is operated by Madame and Monsieur Colletti.

## Elmer's Office

Elmer's office is the one safe place that Elmer and John can discuss the problems at hand. John sleeps there. It is also the home of "Nightbeat."

## Odeon Theater

The Odeon Theater is the pornographic movie house where Marge works.

## Nightbeat

Nightbeat is the name of the tabloid Elmer owns and operates. It is also Converse's employer.





# Themes

## Heroin

Heroin is one of the main themes in the story. It becomes so important that it takes over the minds of those dealing with it. Stone has a clear picture of the drug culture and how it changes people, particularly during trying times. Early in the story Charmian shows Converse a brick of heroin and he examines it. Converse tries it and becomes ill because of the high quality and strong effect it has on him. Charmian and Converse have a plan to smuggle three kilos of uncut heroin into the US aboard a merchant marine ship. Converse paid \$10,000 for the majority share in the drugs and should receive \$40,000 for the sale in the States. Charmian worries about the plan but Converse assures her that Marge is trustworthy, as is Hicks, his friend and transporter.

While heroin is illegal in the United States, it seems to be part of daily activity in Saigon. Smuggling heroin into the US is a very risky venture, one that Converse never thinks through to the end. Even when being transported on board a merchant marine ship, there are chances that Hicks, and therefore Converse, will be caught.

The high value of the heroin causes a confrontation between Hicks, Marge, and Antheil's men. Heroin is a highly addictive substance, particularly when it is in a pure form like the bricks sent by Converse. Along the way, Marge, who is already addicted to pain killers, becomes addicted to heroin. Until the end, the heroin reigns and causes death and destruction in its wake.

## Selfishness

There are many examples of selfishness in the book, starting with the people in Vietnam that are willing and eager to take advantage of others. Converse often works to please himself and seems to be less interested in the activities involving Marge, his wife.

While in Vietnam Converse decides that it is time he got something for nothing. At one time, smuggling heroin would not have been on his mind. However, with his career in the toilet so to speak, Converse sees a way to capture his piece of the American dream and to make a lot of money regardless of who it might hurt. Converse simply wants money.

Hicks has changed drastically from his early days in the merchant marines. Hicks was once devoted to his job and was a formidable leader. Along the way Hicks became jaded. Part of that comes from all he has seen. There is also the unquestionable fact that Dieter raised Hicks and his anti-America, anti-establishment attitudes have affected Hicks deeply.

Antheil is another example as he shuns the integrity linked to his job and instead becomes self serving and ruthless.



## Changing America

The story takes place during the Vietnam War. The 1960s are over but chaos still reigns supreme. The counterculture is expanding and people are becoming even more disillusioned with the government and the status quo. There are several good examples to show that the collective mindset of America has changed.

The time period in the book reflects the changing political structure of the US as well as the world. Many are against the Vietnam War, claiming that it is not a fight that involves the US. Others simply want to know why the war is going on as no one ever seems to explain the causes.

Antheil represents the shift from the iconic G Man to the self-serving politician that was coming to light more and more during the 1970s.

There is a constant thread through the story about Communism, from the activities of Elmer to the aura of Dieter's compound. There is also the major thread of the communists in North Vietnam against the anti-communists in South Vietnam, including the US and other allies.

Stone based his counter culture views on the activities of the Merry Pranksters, a group of people that traveled across the country in the 1960s. At the forefront of the movement was author and head prankster Ken Kesey.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view used "Dog Soldiers" by Robert Stone is the third person and omniscient. This is particularly accurate when setting and time period are of great importance to the story. Third person allows Stone to give the reader great insight into the sights and sounds encountered on the journey and to develop a sense of personality and vision regarding each character. The use of this point of view is especially important considering the drastic difference in various cultures from the Vietnamese to the American and Mexican-American.

Since many of the facts in the book are historically accurate, it is even more important to impart them as such even if they are woven into the story. This creates a true to life feel about the Vietnamese as well as the American counter culture. and their journey as well as the overall feel of what it was like to experience the drastic changes that began to come about during the 1960s and 1970s.

Additionally, it allows the reader to get insight into things that may not have been seen and heard by John Converse or the others, to learn about the story through various sets of eyes and to experience the journeys of the characters like Marge, Hicks, Antheil, and the others. It also allows the reader to get a clear view of the changing situation in America and how it affects the story and culture as a whole.

The point of view also allows the reader to experience and understand the vast difference in beliefs systems, politics, and views on society.

## Setting

The story takes place during the Vietnam War in the early 1970s. Converse has been in Saigon for 18 months, working as a reporter for his father-in-law's sleazy tabloid. Converse talks a lot about the atmosphere in Saigon as well as its people and customs. The first interaction between Converse and the missionary woman sets the tone for Converse's relationships with others.

There are many places discussed by Converse, including Ngoc Linh, where the missionary lives and teaches. Ngoc Linh is a place that Converse has never been but has heard ominous stories about and wonders why anyone would live there. The woman calls it God's Country. My Lat is another location mentioned. There are many references to Saigon, where Converse stays. There are also flashbacks to the horrors of Cambodia.

Upon returning to the States, the rest of the story takes place in various locations in California. The Converse's are from Berkeley. Much time is spent in San Francisco,



Oakland, and various small towns around the area. The story culminates in Southern California, near the Mexican border.

The author describes Dieter's compound as being filled with white washed buildings atop a hill. It is, in some ways, set up like a military facility due to the lights and loud speakers.

There is a disturbing scene in the Converse house when John finds the devil picture above Janey's bed.

## Language and Meaning

"Dog Soldiers" by Robert Stone takes place in the 1970s and the language is used in such a way to reflect the time period. As the book takes place in California for the most part, the American English is the language of preference. Although some of the characters are bilingual, there is little to no foreign phrasing used. The beginning of the book places John Converse in Vietnam wherein some of the people use particular Vietnamese words or phrases although they are explained.

The characters use many expressions that are not necessarily explained, although the meaning is usually clear through the use of supporting text. There are also many references to events of the day, particularly the Vietnam war, protests, the counter culture and political issues.

As the story takes place in the 1970s, the language reflects the time period through the use of dated phrases from the 1960s and 1970s, such as groovy, far out, outta sight, etc. There are also many drug references, using street names such as scag for heroin, etc.

Over all, the language and meaning in "Dog Soldiers" is in no way laborious and lends an air of reality and flavor.

## Structure

"Dog Soldiers" by Robert Stone is a novel based on the events that occur between an American journalist, a merchant marine and a suspect government agency regarding 3 kilos of heroin. There are no chapters or breaks in the text which makes it slightly more difficult but separated enough so that the reader does not become confused.

The book slides from one topic and/or one character to the next in chronological order. Stone often ties them together in some way, such as the fact that both characters, although unknown to each other, may be dealing with being pursued by Antheil and his men. Because there are no chapters or breaks in the text whatsoever, the reader is sometimes confused as to which character is being referenced; which character is experiencing which scene. It is worked out eventually.

The structure is lacking in the characterization of Marge. Although Marge is one of the main characters, she is non-descript. Marge seems to have no character or personality. Supposedly, this state is brought on by the drugs.

The first part of the book takes place in Vietnam. The second and longest part of the book takes place in California.



## Quotes

"For seven years of his marriage to Marge, Elmer had employed Converse as a principal writer on 'Nightbeat', which his lawyers described as A Weekly Tabloid With a Heavy Emphasis on Sex."

P. 23

"After his exercise in reality, Converse had fallen in with Charmian and the dope people; he became one of the Constantly Stoned."

p. 24

"I'm prepared to take chances at this point and I don't respond to the moral objections."

p. 39

"I am afraid, Converse reasoned, therefore I am."

p. 42

"Let smiles cease," Converse said. "Let laughter flee. This is the place where everybody finds out who they are."

p. 56

"He carried the hallucinatory circus scent of patchouli oil, the smell of dope and cold-eyed freakery."

p. 95

"I think it's usual to cry when you're hurt. But to cry before is uncool."

p. 131

"On the floor he looked up into Smitty's face. It was an undersea face; the eyes were only part of an inflated bag of venom behind it."

p. 157

"You turned yourself into an animal for a dirty payoff."

p. 209

"When you say that, it's cheap junkie pessimism. If you spend your time making holes in yourself and tripping on cracks in the wall - how else can you think?"

p. 231

"He was not very high, not high at all, it seemed to him - but prone to small marginal



hallucinations."  
p. 294

"In many ways, he thought, the adventure had been instructive."  
p. 340

## Topics for Discussion

How do you think Converse feels about losing his former idealism? What causes Converse to change? What does Converse mean by "moral objections?" How does the change in Converse's behavior mirror the upheaval of the times?

There are many similarities between Hicks and Converse. Compare and contrast the two men. Also include a list of major differences, e.g., Hicks' notable military career.

Explain in detail why Converse trusts Hicks with such a large and dangerous undertaking. Would you trust Hicks? Why? How can Converse be sure that Hicks will not try to rip him off? What about Hicks makes him seem trustworthy?

What might it be like to be an expatriate in Saigon during the Vietnam War? Look to as many characters as possible to get a clear picture, e.g., Jill and Ian Percy. What might it be like to be an expatriate in Saigon today?

Discuss in detail Converse's opinion of "Nightbeat" and working for his father-in-law. How does this help or hinder Converse's career as a writer? What do Converse and Elmer Bender have in common? Explain

Examine the lessons Hicks may have learned during this time. How did going back to Dieter's change Hicks' perspective? If Dieter and Hicks were so close, what was the source of the hostility and negative behavior? What might happen to Dieter's compound now that he is dead?

What do you think will happen with John and Marge? Will they have to stay on the run for the rest of their lives? Will Antheil pursue them? Will they be able to get Janey back from Canada?