

# **Flight of the Intruder Study Guide**

## **Flight of the Intruder by Stephen Coonts**

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## Plot Summary

The first novel published by Stephen Coonts was "Flight of the Intruder" in 1986, and the twentieth anniversary edition of the novel indicates that up until then he had written 13 more best sellers, several of which were made into films, including this book. It tells the story of Jake Grafton, a naval fighter pilot stationed on the USS Shiloh aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin during the Vietnam War. At the start of the novel, in the first of many air battle scenes, Jake's bombardier/navigator, Morgan McPherson, is hit by a stray bullet fired from a rifle as their A-6A Intruder aircraft flies low over North Vietnam. Morgan dies from the wound, and Jake takes this loss very hard. An emotional man who tries not to think too deeply about the mortal consequences of what he does in the war, Jake nevertheless cannot shake the growing conviction that the bombing targets he is being assigned are virtually worthless. He believes that political considerations are preventing the waging of the war in a way that will enable American forces to win it. He decides to take the matter into his own hands by enlisting his new bombardier/navigator, Virgil "Tiger" Cole and a squadron intelligence officer named Abe Steiger in his plan to bomb the North Vietnamese National Assembly building in Hanoi.

During shore leave in Hong Kong, Jake meets a young woman named Callie McKenzie who works at the American Consulate, and romance ensues. The two write to each other after Jake returns to duty, and they meet again when he comes to shore in the Philippines, after executing his secret mission with Tiger. The unauthorized bombing has been discovered by the squadron commander, Frank Camparelli, a fair man who nevertheless demands obedience to orders, and he organizes a hearing. Aided by changing political winds in Washington, Jake is exonerated at the hearing, and a bombing escalation in the war follows. Jake and Tiger are shot down on a mission, and parachute to the ground. An air force pilot named Frank Allen who had been briefly introduced earlier in the story tries to rescue them, but his plane also is shot down and he dies. Tiger is immobilized by a broken back but Jake locates him and then kills three armed Viet Cong with his pistols before the two are rescued by a helicopter. A Postscript describes the fate after the war of the principal characters, including Jake, who marries Callie, stays in the navy, and eventually takes command of a nuclear submarine.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

"Flight of the Intruder" by Stephen Coonts is a best-selling action novel first published in 1986 about American naval pilots fighting in the Vietnam War. Chapter 1 begins with a description of an A-6A Intruder plane being launched from the deck of an aircraft carrier 100 miles offshore from North Vietnam, piloted by the protagonist, Lieutenant Jake Grafton. With him is his bombardier-navigator, Lieutenant Morgan McPherson. Once airborne, the two engage in banter as they go through technical tasks on their approach to the coastline. When Jake spots a white beach, he radios to the aircraft carrier and descends to 300 feet. McPherson notes small arms fire from peasant farmers, and Jake sees the flashes from a sub-machine gun, and then tracers from antiaircraft artillery fire. He hears over the radio that the other A-6 bomber, piloted by Lieutenant Commander Earl "Cowboy" Parker, is not far behind him. Jake sees a surface-to-air missile (SAM), and descends to 200 feet to avoid it, while ejecting capsules of metallic fibers called chaff into the jet's slipstream to confuse the SAM's radar guidance. McPherson locates their bombing target, where enemy trucks are thought to be parked under trees. Jake drops a dozen 500-pound bombs on the forest site and races away at almost 600 miles per hour. The author notes this occurs in October, 1972. As the jet's four cluster bombs are armed, a bullet from a rifle shot by a peasant pierces the cockpit's side window and hits McPherson in the neck. Jake sees a battery of gunfire, and drops his cluster bombs on the site. On the way back to the carrier, he applies pressure to the unconscious McPherson's neck, despite having significant trouble piloting the jet safely with the one hand. Jake radios the carrier that his bombardier needs emergency medical attention. On the carrier, Jake's roommate, Sammy Lundeen, goes to the radio while the squadron's skipper, Commander Frank Camparelli, hurries to the air traffic control center. As Lundeen listens on the radio, the landing signal officer guides Jake to a landing. Lundeen runs to the flight deck. When the cockpit is open, Jake and the others realize it is covered in blood. McPherson is lifted out of the cockpit. Jake starts to say something to Lundeen, and then vomits.

In Chapter 2, Jake walks into the hangar bay late the next afternoon. He passes various planes, which do not hold their usual interest for him. He continues to the engine repair facility, where he asks the shop chief for a bit of scrap metal. The chief looks at Jake, who is about six feet tall, with grey eyes, a large nose, and a receding hairline. He is carrying a rolled-up flight suit under his arm. The chief gives him two pieces of rusted steel. Jake wraps them up with the flight suit, which he throws over the stern into the sea. He goes to Commander Camparelli's stateroom for a debriefing. Cowboy Parker is also there, with the squadron's executive officer, Commander Harvey Wilson. Jake admires Camparelli, but thinks Wilson is an officious fool. The group goes over Jake's written report, and he clarifies that the fatal gunshot to McPherson was the shooter's blind luck. Camparelli tells Jake to write a letter to McPherson's widow, and to avoid seeking wild revenge when he flies his next mission. Later, Jake and Sam Lundeen drink whiskey given to them by the squadron's flight surgeon, Mad Jack. Jake complains



about how unimportant their bombing targets are. Sammy remarks that at least the war is almost over, according to an announcement by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Jake is surprised at this. Lundeen realizes the announcement was made while Jake was on the mission, and apologizes.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

In the opening chapter, the author wastes no time establishing the action-based pace of the story and introducing plot elements that will dominate the book. Jake and his bombardier are launched off an aircraft carrier in the opening scene, and such catapulted takeoffs will become a staple of this air combat novel. Similarly, the daring piloting of Jake to avoid enemy missiles and gunfire will recur repeatedly in the story. A principal goal of the first chapter is to captivate the reader with an extended scene of aerial warfare, but a major plot element also is introduced when Jake's bombardier is shot. Jake's reaction of vomiting after he lands adds a layer to his characterization, making him not only a brave warrior but also sensitive to the tragedies of combat. When McPherson's death is confirmed in Chapter 2, Jake's burial of his friend's bloodied flight jacket at sea provides further evidence of his emotional depth. His disgust at the inconsequential bombing targets that the squadron continually is assigned to attack foreshadows the central event in the novel's plot, when Jake finally decides to make his own, unauthorized bombing raid. The news he hears that the war may soon be over merely adds to his sense of futility concerning what he regards as America's poor tactical approach to the war. Sammy Lundeen's recognition that the news of the war's mooted end is hard on Jake shows that Sammy is attuned and sympathetic to his friend's viewpoint.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3 begins with Jake having a nightmare in which the plane is diving out of control in a hurricane, while in the seat next to him, blood spurts from the headless neck of Morgan. He fights free of the sheets, stands, and realizes he has a hangover. In the shower room, he ignores a sign that allows showers only during certain hours to conserve water. He dresses and goes to the hangar deck, where a petty officer tells Jake his plane had just one bullet hole in it. He goes to Morgan's bunkroom, where a pilot named "Little Augie" Odegard and his bombardier, Joe "Big Augie" Canfield, are packing McPherson's things. They tell Jake that they think the war will continue for quite a while, despite Kissinger's statement. Jake goes back to his room and tries to write a letter to Morgan's wife, Sharon. His thoughts drift back to the first flight assignment for Jake and Morgan, in Washington state, before they were assigned to the carrier. They were flying through a valley at night on instruments, and only a timely warning from Morgan saved Jake from descending too low and crashing the plane. Finally, Jake writes several drafts of a letter to Sharon, before he ends up with a short and sincere offering of his sympathies. He wonders if the letter will help Sharon, and becomes angry again that his friend died over the bombing of a useless target, because government leaders did not have the gumption to order the fighting of the war in a way it could be won. Once more, he considers disobeying orders and bombing an enemy target of his own choosing.

Chapter 4 begins with rainy weather at sea aboard the carrier, the Shiloh. The men are anticipating five days of shore leave in the Philippines, which will involve leaving the Gulf of Tonkin and crossing the South China Sea, a 36-hour voyage. In the meantime, they have several more bombing sorties to complete. Jake sleeps for 14 hours before being awakened by Lundeen, who tells Jake he has been assigned to fly a refueling tanker plane. In the canteen, Jake greets Razor Durfee, who will be his bombardier/navigator on the flight. Razor takes notes while an air intelligence officer, Abe Steiger, briefs everyone over closed-circuit television. The duty weatherman says the clouds should clear at about 18,000 feet. Steiger then makes one of his customary dirty jokes to end the briefing. Grafton gets a letter from his parents, which he reads, and one from his girlfriend, Linda, which he saves for later. Razor questions whether Jake is mentally prepared to fly and says he is reluctant to risk his life with him, which angers Jake. Maggot, a young plane captain who services the aircraft, wishes Jake a good flight and offers condolences over the death of McPherson. Jake and Razor get in the cockpit, go through their preparations, taxi, and are launched into the air by the ship's catapult.



## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Jake's nightmare at the start of Chapter 3 is hardly more fantastical than the reality of his day job. In the dream, McPherson has lost his head, but the actual cockpit was covered in blood spurting from his neck. Similarly, the dream flight is through a hurricane, while the real flight weaved through a storm of bullets and missiles. Packing up Morgan's things and writing a letter to his wife are the necessary tasks that bring home the stark finality of what has happened. Jake does not know what he can write that will not sound inadequate, or worse, insincere. Wisely, he does not try for soaring prose, recognizing that nothing he can say will alter Sharon's sorrow. He, too, is grieving, and as a man of action, his response is to try to rectify the wrong of Morgan's senseless death by again considering the attack on a truly serious enemy target. In Chapter 4, the rainy weather symbolizes the sorrow that envelops Jake, even as the sailors anticipate shore leave. Razor Durfee's concern that Jake might not be mentally ready to fly accomplishes two goals. First, it sketches Razor as self-involved and unlikable, and second, it foreshadows troubles Jake will have with his mental condition as the stresses of the war mount on him. Maggot's appearance in the story is meant to demonstrate that Jake is admired and valued by many of the ship's crewmen.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

In Chapter 5, the plane ascends to 20,000 feet and is still in the clouds. Razor seems to have gotten over his bad humor. Jake radios to the ship, which tells him to ascend to 30,000 feet to look for clear skies. The tanker cannot join to a fighter plane for refueling in the clouds. The tanker emerges from the clouds at 28,000 feet, and Jake takes it up to 30,000 feet. A Phantom F-4 fighter appears and Jake releases the refueling device, called a drogue, which looks like a basket on the end of a hose. The fighter pilot extends his refueling probe and flies it into the drogue. A second Phantom also refuels, missing the drogue on its first try at the tricky maneuver. During a lull in activity, Jake takes out his girlfriend's letter and reads it. She writes that she is leaving him for another man. Over the radio, Jake is ordered to rendezvous with both Phantoms to give them extra fuel, which he does. He hears Cowboy Parker and then Sammy Lundeen declare "feet wet," which means both planes have dropped their bombs. Lundeen wants to rendezvous with Jake's tanker. When his Intruder arrives, he asks Jake to fly around and under it, to check for damage. Using a white light, he and Razor spot many holes in the right side and tail of the Intruder, probably from flak. Sammy says he has lost many of his flight instruments. He also is low on fuel, and although Jake already has distributed his extra fuel, he complies, over Razor's complaints. All the aircraft maneuver into a stacked position for landing in bad weather or low visibility. The tanker will be last to land. When the pilots state their positions and fuel measurements over the radio, Jake realizes that Lundeen's plane needs more fuel, so he approaches and extends the drogue again.

Several planes below Lundeen in the stacked configuration land safely, "trapped" by restraining wires that slow the aircraft as they hit the deck. Listening to directions from shipboard, Jake uses his instruments to guide Lundeen's plane, which is below him. He keeps the aircraft in line with the carrier's deck until it descends to 300 feet, when the clouds break and Lundeen can fly by sight. Jake then takes the tanker up higher and circles. The last Phantom in the air fails to catch the restraining wires and must circle again. Jake makes a hard landing to quickly refuel. Meanwhile, the Phantom "bolters" or misses the restraining wires once again. Jake takes off, and trails the Phantom as it makes an unsuccessful third attempt to land. Jake flies too low and almost hits the destroyer ship that guards the carrier. He then catches the Phantom and executes the difficult refueling maneuver just before the fighter runs out of gas. This time, the Phantom successfully traps. In bad weather, Jake then bolters and must make another pass at the deck. The air-operated windshield wipers stop working. With only partial vision, Jake manages to trap the tanker. On deck, he goes to the restroom and has a cigarette. Lundeen enters and tells him the Phantom pilot is thrilled at being saved by Jake's refueling maneuver. He also says the plane captain, Maggot, almost got sucked down an engine intake compressor. Jake goes to sick bay and comforts the still-frightened youth. In the ready room, the Phantom pilot, Fighting Joe Brett, promises to buy Jake a bottle of whiskey during shore leave, but the landing signal officer chastises





Jake for his bolter and two dangerous landings. Commander Camparelli dismisses Jake and then turns to the landing officer, growling at him to never publicly criticize one of his pilots again.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

The assignment of Jake to fly a refueling tanker plane provides the opportunity for an examination from the protagonist's perspective of another important aspect of aerial combat. The jets use huge amounts of fuel and if one of them fails to successfully execute the tricky landing on a carrier's deck, its fate could be to crash in the ocean without a tanker aloft to refuel it. The letter Jake reads from his girlfriend that says she is leaving him adds yet more stress at a time when he already is suffering from the death of his bombardier. The chapter then presents a situation in which Jake takes a calculated risk with his aircraft's fuel capacity to help Sammy Lundeen to land safely. This provides further evidence that Jake is a bold flier, although apparently not one given to wild risk-taking. Just when it looks like Jake is okay, Razor's concern about the pilot's mental toughness in the wake of Morgan's death proves to be at least partially justified when Jake has trouble landing the tanker, which is a skill heavily reliant on self-confidence. Even so, Jake shows he can still function under pressure when he catches and refuels the Phantom, giving its rattled pilot just the boost he needs—in terms of the plane and of his own state of mind—to finally land the craft. The portrait that is emerging of Jake is heroic, but not without flaws, and the human side of him as a combat pilot is what makes him interesting. Without the "weakness" of his emotions, he might as well be a robot, with all the dull predictability such a condition implies. What's more, his emotional volatility means that he is subject to making piloting errors, which adds an element of suspense or unpredictability to this action story.



# Chapters 6-8

## Chapters 6-8 Summary

Chapter 6 begins with Jake and bombardier Marty Greve in an Intruder flying alongside Commander Camparelli's plane as they approach the South Vietnam coast, where two companies of Viet Cong are dug in along a treeline. Camparelli takes the first pass, but his weapons-release system malfunctions and he cannot drop the bombs. Jake dives and releases a load, which forward air controllers in a nearby light plane tell him is right on target. He makes a second run, again on target. Back in his room, Jake tries to write a reply to his former girlfriend, but ends up tearing her letter to bits. The next day, he again flies to South Vietnam, this time with Big Augie as his bombardier. The other plane is piloted by a young man named Corey Ford who wants to become an astronaut, and a bombardier named Bob Walkwitz who is so woman-crazy that his nickname is "Boxman." Ground controllers and spotter planes direct them to nine enemy soldiers in woods along the edge of a road. Two other planes on the sortie drop bombs and strafe the site. The two Intruders follow, each dropping 16 bombs. Jake enjoys the sensation of flight as they return and land on the carrier.

In Chapter 7, when Jake awakens the next morning, he tells Lundeen that he is going to quit the navy. Sammy tells him they are headed for five days of leave in the Philippines, and he just needs to have fun. In the shower, Jake is angry again about the ridiculous bombing targets, and the death of Morgan. Back in the stateroom, Jake tells Sammy he hopes to get a good bombardier, because he is tired of bombing trees, and Sammy again warns him not to do anything foolish. Both men are assigned to fly planes to Cubi Point Naval Station in the Philippines for a new pilot to use in field qualification flights. The squadron assembles to watch a movie, before which Camparelli announces that the ship has a "Phantom," which means someone has been defecating in various places on board, which news causes uproar. After the film, Jake goes to the squadron personnel office, where he works on evaluations of two enlisted men in his division. One of the men, Hardesty, wants shore leave to visit his wife in the Philippines. Neither Jake nor the personnel chief knew the nineteen-year-old Hardesty was married. They call Hardesty in, and Jake explains severely that he was obliged to tell them he was married. Jake then decides to give the young man shore leave. Later, Jake encounters the intelligence officer, Abe Steiger, who tells him that Jake's sortie the previous day had resulted in a reported 47 enemy deaths. Jake screams at Steiger not to tell him such upsetting details.

In Chapter 8, Jake obsesses over the victims of the bombing. Later, Harvey Wilson irritates Jake by saying his written evaluations of Hardesty and another man named Jones are not good enough. Jake then takes the doctor, Mad Jack, on the flight to Cubi. Mad Jack has never been in a fighter plane shot from a catapult on a carrier deck, and he finds the experience unnerving. Lundeen is piloting the other plane on the trip, and he and Jake engage in a practice dogfight, which causes Mad Jack to vomit. Once they land, Mad Jack is a good sport about it, thanking Jake for a thrilling ride.



## Chapters 6-8 Analysis

In Chapter 6, the author provides another opportunity for Jake to shine when his commander's plane malfunctions. Jake's direct hits on the target not only save the mission but further establish his first-rate piloting skills. Back on the carrier, he makes another good decision in tearing up his former girlfriend's letter without replying to it. Because he is at sea in a foreign war, nothing he could write would help the situation. Similarly, his next sortie comes off without a hitch, and he even luxuriates in the sensation of flight on the return to the ship when the chapter ends. When he awakens in Chapter 7 convinced that he should quit the navy, the author's point is that a couple of successful raids on unimportant targets are far from enough to repair Jake's troubled state of mind. Two foreshadowing events are then repeated, when Jake again considers an unauthorized bombing mission and when the upcoming Philippines shore leave is mentioned once more. This technique sharpens the reader's anticipation of these events. The talk about the "Phantom" not only shows how men at war engage in crude comic relief from their life-threatening situation, but acts a symbolic representation of their disgust with the war and their desire to shirk the yoke of obedience. Jake's upbraiding of Hardesty for not revealing that he was married is a reaction to his own impatience with toeing the line, particularly with regard to the bombing targets. His anger at Steiger again shows that Jake is deeply sensitive to the human costs of war, on himself and on others. The dogfight in which Jake and Sammy engage during their trip to Cubi is no doubt good practice, but it also is a way for them to let off steam. By this point in the story, the author has done a good job of portraying the intense pressure under which these pilots function.



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

In Chapter 9, members of the squadron meet at the officers' club in Cubi. Cowboy analyzes the Phantom, who he says is addicted to danger. Jake says that is true of all of them, but Cowboy says Jake is careful, whereas Lundeen is wild, to which Lundeen objects. They meet one of the new bombardier/navigationers, Fred Mogollon, whom Boxman immediately dubs "Ferdinand Magellan." The group goes to the American Club, which is across a bridge from the base, in Olongapo City. The bridge, over an open sewer, is filled with beggars, which disturbs Jake. In the club, Boxman meets a girl he knows, Suzy, and another girl named Teresa joins them. Boxman wants to go to another club. The other men decline, so Jake accompanies him with the two young women. Outside the club, they see an American buying chicks and ducklings to throw into a pond full of crocodiles, which sickens Jake. In the bar, the same man starts molesting a girl. Jake approaches the man and lures him outside, ostensibly to feed the crocs. Instead, he and Boxman throw the man into the crocodile pool, although Jake holds onto him, and they safely retrieve the terrified sailor. A fight starts, the shore patrol arrives, and everyone runs. Jake sees Suzy signaling to him, and she takes him and Boxman to a safe place. After the coast is clear, Jake leaves Boxman with Suzy and goes back to the base.

In Chapter 10, Sammy tells Jake they have four days' leave in Hong Kong. At breakfast, Lundeen explains that they need to get away for a few days until the episode with the sailor at the crocodile pond is forgotten. They catch a cheap flight with a friend in the local flying club and book into the luxurious Peninsula Hotel. The next morning, Jake is still thinking about finding one good target to bomb. He goes for a run, and sees a young woman sketching. On the way back, he stops and talks to her, and discovers she is American. Her name is Callie McKenzie and she works at the American Consulate. She hesitantly agrees to meet him for tea that afternoon at the Peninsula Hotel. Back at the hotel, Sammy admits to Jake that he is the Phantom. He says the random defecations were a protest against the stupidities of their job, but he has quit doing that now. Jake and Callie have tea, and then move to the bar, where Jake is more comfortable. He learns that she is a language expert, fluent in Mandarin and studying Cantonese. Jake talks about his small-town upbringing and his earliest flying experiences as a teenager, before he entered the navy. Callie works with refugees who want to immigrate to America, and she describes the difficult conditions of their lives. She has to go home to dress for a Consulate event that night, so Jake walks her to the ferry. She agrees to see him the next day, and he kisses her. Back at the hotel, Jake thinks about how crowded Hong Kong is, and how hard he tries to keep his mind off the reality of the real people his bombs are killing.



## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Chapter 9 evokes the borderline lawlessness of young men at war who are released back into general society for a few days. An evening that begins with camaraderie ends in fighting and flight from the military police. Jake is troubled by the poverty he sees on the way to the nightclubs, but the young women are portrayed as looking for a good time, with no mention made of the prostitution that is infamous in the Philippines, especially around military bases. The author shows no interest in dealing with social issues that would detract from the straightforward narrative of airmen at war. The misbehavior of the sailor is punished by Jake and Boxman, who then escape unscathed. In Chapter 10, it even seems that Jake's episode of vigilantism is rewarded when he and Sammy go to Hong Kong, where Jake meets the charming Callie. Sammy's admission that he is the Phantom does not seem surprising, given Cowboy's earlier characterization of Sammy as wild. The conversation between Jake and Callie provides an opportunity for the author to establish the backgrounds of both characters, which helps to give them more dimension and make them seem more real. Jake's concern about the crowds in Hong Kong implies that his mind is still preoccupied with his disturbing role in the deaths of uncounted people who will be forever faceless to him.



# Chapters 11 and 12

## Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

In Chapter 11, Sammy tries to get Jake to accompany him with an Australian woman he met and her girlfriend, but Jake declines, much to Lundeen's annoyance. When Callie arrives at the hotel, Jake introduces her to Sammy. She likes him, although she thinks he is a little crazy. They walk through the streets of Hong Kong, heading toward Victoria Peak. They kiss, and go into a restaurant for dumplings and beer, and then take the ferry across the harbor. They take the tram up the steep hill to Victoria Peak, which has magnificent views of the city and harbor. Callie points out the apartment where she lives. Through a coin-operated telescope, they can see mainland China. They talk about what they believe in, and Jake says his primary belief is in his own ability to survive the war. He surprises himself by telling her about Morgan's death, and she is sympathetic. At a restaurant, they disagree over whether America should be in Vietnam. Callie says her brother, like her, does not think the war is a good idea, and Jake becomes irritated, calling her brother a coward. She responds angrily that her brother lost both his legs in Vietnam, and she stalks out of the restaurant. Remembering where her apartment is, he follows her, and when he finds her door, she draws him into the apartment.

In Chapter 12, the officers' club is full and raucous as Jake and Sammy enter it. Many of the men are gambling and Cowboy, who once furnished a house from his winnings, is doing well at a dice table. Razor introduces Jake to Virgil Cole, who will be his new bombardier. Cole is very quiet, with cold blue eyes. Downstairs, the men in the Tailhook Bar are taking turns riding a mock cockpit propelled by compressed air along rails that go out French doors and over a stagnant pond. The rider must use split-second timing to grab a wire with a spring-loaded hook to avoid being dunked in the pond. Cowboy appears, and pushes Jake into the contraption. Like everyone else, Jake misses the wire and is dunked. He tries two more times, catching the wire on the third attempt. Jake volunteers Lundeen for the next ride. Sammy takes bets, and catches the wire the first time. Back in the bar, Jake puts socks on the feet of a totally naked sailor lying facedown on a table. He talks with a captain, mentioning that the officer is wearing a hat in the club. The captain realizes this means that by tradition he should buy drinks for the house, which he does. Early that morning, Jake sits on the grass outside the bar, looks at the carrier in the bay, and thinks about the death of Morgan and the worthless bombing targets, to which he will have to return in two days.

## Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

In Chapter 11, Sammy's attitude toward the Australian women is purely hedonistic, but Jake's response suggests his serious intentions toward Callie. Their walk through Hong Kong, the ferry ride, and the tram trip up to Victoria Peak are presented as a kind of postcard to the Asian capital's scenic beauty. At the same time, the budding romance of the couple looks as if it will bloom beautifully, but the author inserts a small plot twist



when Jake criticizes Callie's brother before realizing he was crippled in the war. This glitch in the romance is quickly overcome, however. In Chapter 12, the "good clean fun" of soldiers on leave is portrayed with gusto. The author also inserts an important new character in this scene, with the arrival of Virgil Cole. The device that emulates a plane trapping on a carrier deck is an amusing parody of what the pilots must do in earnest during war, and it suggests that without the killing, the excitement of their jobs would be unadulterated. Cowboy's skill at the gaming tables and Sammy's ability with the mock cockpit symbolize the good luck that soldiers must have to survive war. Jake's failure to catch the hook on his first two tries could be because he is unfamiliar with the game, but also could be a way of reiterating that his concentration is still somewhat impaired by the impact of Morgan's death. Indeed, by the end of the chapter, he is sitting on the club lawn in the early morning, dwelling again on Morgan and the useless targets for which good men are dying.



# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

In Chapter 13, the carrier departs and a new pilot nicknamed New Guy practices landing and taking off. That night, Jake interviews Hardesty, who was supposed to bring his marriage papers. Hardesty produces them, and Jake sees that the boy married just two days earlier, which means he had lied when he said he wanted shore leave to visit his wife. Jake chastises the sailor severely for not being truthful. He wants to write up a complaint, but Commander Camparelli says to let it go. The commander says he will do the same thing concerning his discovery that Jake and Boxman threw the sailor into the crocodile pond and got in a fight, but he says Jake will be unofficially grounded during the next shore leave. Camparelli also reveals that he knows Lundeen is the Phantom, and says he had better stop that activity. Jake relays this information to Sammy. He then walks around the ship, thinking of Callie and of Morgan. It occurs to him that perhaps the best bombing target would be the leadership of North Vietnam. He gets a map of Hanoi and reconnaissance photos from Abe Steiger and takes them to his room. He decides that the best target would be the Communist Party headquarters in Hanoi.

In Chapter 14, Jake watches sailors load defused bombs into the fighter plane's bomb racks. He checks the work and then climbs aboard with Virgil Cole. The plane captain, Maggot, asks what the target is, and Jake points out a power plant on the map. He then watches as the bosun, Muldowski, launches other planes from the catapults. Jake howls with joy as their plane is launched. The planes enter a formation and fly at 22,000 feet, heading for North Vietnam. This is an Alpha Strike, containing bombers and a large contingent of support aircraft. The formation encounters thick overcast, which will hinder attempts to locate the power plant. One of the support planes develops a hydraulic problem and has to turn back. Cole locates the target by radar and Jake looks for a hole in the clouds. The radar shows that a SAM is approaching their plane. Jake eludes it, but more SAMs are arriving. He dives through a hole in the clouds, sees the target and drops the bombs at 9,000 feet. Exultantly, he returns to the carrier. At the post-flight briefing, it turns out that Jake and one other pilot were the only ones who dropped over the target, although neither could wait around to see exactly where the bombs landed. Later, Cole praises Jake for his brave flying. Jake is then called to the air wing office for an interview with a reporter named Les Rucic. The operations officer introduces Jake by using his nickname, "Cool Hand." Rucic asks if Jake's bombs hit the power plant, but Jake says he cannot be sure. Rucic asks if he might have hit nonmilitary targets, which annoys Jake, but he maintains his civility as he ends the interview and leaves the room.

## Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Jake's desire to punish Hardesty for lying about his marriage is ironic, considering that he is thinking about an unauthorized bombing mission, which would require deception of his superiors. This emphasizes the conflict in Jake's mind between his recognition that a





soldier's principal duty is obedience to his superiors and his growing conviction that he must commit a serious breach of the rules. Camparelli's response, that Hardesty's transgression should be ignored, just as the commander largely intends to do concerning Jake's episode with the sailor at the crocodile pond, demonstrates that good leadership requires a sense of proportion concerning the misdeeds of soldiers in wartime. The commander regards both Hardesty's and Jake's rule-breaking as minor, just as he does Sammy's distasteful antics as the Phantom, but when Jake starts planning to attack North Vietnam's leaders, it amounts to a big escalation in potential wrongdoing. In Chapter 14, Jake completes a successful bombing run, but the power plant has been bombed a number of times and is not considered essential to the North Vietnamese war effort. His satisfaction over eluding enemy fire and releasing his bombs over the target is once again short-lived. This time, Rucic is the cause of Jake's discomfort, when he presses the question of whether nonmilitary targets might have been hit. Rucic, who says he is a former military flier, must know as well as Jake does that collateral damage is unavoidable in wartime bombing, and the last thing Jake needs in his current frame of mind is a reminder that innocent people might be dying because of his actions. This conversation simply gives him further incentive to attack a target of indisputable importance.



# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

In Chapter 15, Jake goes to the ship's library and gets a map and a book on North Vietnam. Back in his room, he realizes neither of these items is new or detailed enough to be useful in planning a raid. Nor does he know if Cole would agree to such an expedition. Because of a temporary pilot shortage, Jake and Cole are assigned to fly a night mission in an A-6B, which carries four missiles. Jake is not B-qualified, but Cole has experience. Jake is not B-qualified, but Cole has experience. They fly to North Vietnam, targeting suspected truck parks on Hanoi's outskirts. Cole warns Jake not to look outside when he fires the missiles, or he will lose his night vision. The enemy releases four SAMs and Jake releases chaff to confuse the SAMs' radar. He fires two missiles, looks outside, and is temporarily blinded. He flies by instinct for a moment, until his vision returns, and works at evading the SAMs. He spots the target and fires a third missile. Cole announces that an enemy MiG is closing in. Jake wants to escape but Cole demands that they fire the final missile. Jake drops to 2000 feet and fires. He then descends to 400 feet to avoid the MiG but makes an error with the throttle and stalls the engines. At 100 feet, he gets the standby power going, barely avoiding a crash. Back at the ship, Jake is told that the support planes shot down the MiG. Sammy asks how Cole performed, and Jake says he was a tiger, which promptly becomes Cole's nickname.

In Chapter 16, while the other men watch a movie, Jake takes a shower. He notices that his hands are shaking like those of an old man. He realizes that stalling the plane's engines had been a major error, and worries that he is losing control of himself. He dresses, and then sees Mad Jack, who realizes he is stressed and prescribes a movie and a good night's sleep. Later, Jake tells "Tiger" Cole of his plan to bomb the Communist Party headquarters. Tiger says he will talk to Abe Steiger about getting the good surveillance material they will need. Abe then meets with them both, and reflects that he feels his own role in the war is very safe compared to theirs. He agrees to help. After Tiger leaves, Jake apologizes to Steiger for yelling at him earlier, but Abe says he realizes he should not have revealed how many men Jake killed in the bombing raid. Two days later, the three men look at a chart. Abe could not get good visual materials on the Communist Party headquarters, so they have decided to bomb the National Assembly building. They go over the plan, which is to drop four bombs on the assigned target, a power plant, and then fly over Hanoi to drop the last eight bombs on the National Assembly building. Tiger says he flew eight bombing missions over Hanoi in 1967, and it was heavily defended. As Jake and Tiger head toward the plane, they admit that they are frightened.



## Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

The principal purpose of Chapter 15 is to establish that Virgil Cole is a determined soldier who would be a good ally to Jake in any effort to attack North Vietnam's leaders. Jake does another fine job of combat flying on the night mission, even though he has had no experience firing missiles in the dark, and he displays careful judgment in electing to escape before releasing the final missile. Cole's refusal to allow this prudent exit shows that the bombardier will push his pilot to the limit. However, Jake's mistake with the throttle after firing the final missile underscores the danger of pushing too hard in his stressed mental state. The nickname of "Tiger" that Cole earns is a kind of insurance that if Jake's will falters, his bombardier will be there to support him. In Chapter 16, the extent of Jake's emotional frailty is depicted by his severely palsied hands, and Mad Jack's prescription of a night's rest shows that medicine can do little to alleviate the stress of fighting a war. When Jake reveals his plan to Tiger that the latter agrees to attack the North Vietnam leadership, it is no surprise that the bombardier agrees to participate. Jake's mending of fences with Abe Steiger is a necessary step toward the enlistment of the intelligence officer's crucial aid in the plan, but it also makes sense from a psychological perspective, because Steiger feels a little guilty that the men in the aircraft are the ones taking all the personal risk. Tiger's revelation that he flew on eight missions over Hanoi, all of which encountered strong resistance, adds even more tension to their unauthorized sortie.



# Chapters 17-19

## Chapters 17-19 Summary

Chapter 17 begins with Jake in the Intruder cockpit awaiting launch. Bosun Muldowski holds up a sign that says the ship cannot generate enough steam to catapult the aircraft at top speed. Jake takes off successfully. Flying in darkness, he reaches the target and drops four bombs. As they head for Hanoi, the directional cursor fails and Cole says they will have to bomb without computer guidance. Jake sets the bombs to release one at a time rather than in groups of two, which will reduce their effectiveness but increase the chances of a hit. Over Hanoi, he flies upside down to avoid a missile. He eludes two more missiles, drops the bombs over the target, and dives to 100 feet to avoid another SAM. He ascends suddenly, and another SAM locks onto them at 3,000 feet, and Jake dives to 50 feet to elude it. In another plane, Big Augie says Jake's plane looks okay. Jake is shaken, and Cole calms him before he lands. After the briefing, Abe Steiger asks the two if they hit the National Assembly building, but they cannot be sure. Later, Camparelli tells Steiger to update the intelligence charts to include the SAMs that attacked the Intruder.

In Chapter 18, Steiger shows Jake an intelligence report three days after the mission, which indicates a bomb had fallen within ten feet of the National Assembly, breaking all the windows and killing three bystanders. Jake tells Tiger, whose only comment is, "No cigar." Jake and Sammy get a visit from New Guy, who tells them he wants to quit flying and be transferred to a desk job. They try to talk him out of it, but fail. After that, New Guy is not shunned by the rest of the squadron, but is treated with less respect. Later, Cowboy introduces Jake and Tiger to a friend of his, an air force pilot named Major Frank Allen, who is making an inter-service liaison visit to the ship. Early one morning, the reporter, Les Rucic, tries to question Jake about the death of Morgan McPherson. Jake angrily walks away.

In Chapter 19, Jake is in the cockpit when Cowboy runs up with a last-minute change of target, from a suspected fuel dump to several parked enemy MiGs, which are heavily defended. The MiGs are in Laos. Jake and Tiger decide to take a straightforward approach over North Vietnam, which will attract flak but will give the MiGs' defenders less time to prepare for their arrival. As lead pilot, Jake gives the others instructions over the radio once everyone is airborne. He tells Tiger that they may be flying into a trap. In the mission planning room, Camparelli notices that the SAM sites where Jake said the missiles had attacked on his previous mission are still not marked on the charts. He calls in Abe Steiger, who confesses that the SAMs were not at that site. Meanwhile, the three planes on the mission arrive in the valley where the MiGs are parked. They fly low and fast through the twisting length of the valley. Jake looks over at the plane in which Corey Ford and the Boxman are flying, and sees it suddenly explode. The runway appears, and Little Augie's and Jake's planes veer to either side of it. Jake's Intruder takes a hit, and he quickly shuts down one engine. He sees a MiG and bombs it. The



two remaining planes return to the carrier. After Jake lands, Cowboy offers condolences, and Jake bursts into tears.

## Chapters 17-19 Analysis

Two malfunctions in Chapter 17 add difficulties to the unauthorized mission. First, the underpowered catapult threatens to disrupt a smooth takeoff, but Jake shows his resolve in overcoming that problem. Next, the onboard computer failure leaves the two-man crew with no option but to reduce the ability of their bombs to do damage by dropping them sequentially. Jake's aerial acrobatics over Hanoi are perhaps the book's highpoint of his piloting skills, as the author pulls out all stops in making the key scene exciting. Cole's ability to calm Jake before they land shows the necessity of teamwork in this dangerous venture. In Chapter 18, the discovery that their bombs just missed the target is probably necessary from a practical, plot-structuring viewpoint. If the author had chosen for the bombs to destroy the National Assembly building and kill members of the country's leadership, he would have been taking major liberties with the course of the real Vietnam War, which would have created difficulties for readers who are aware that no such event ever occurred. By avoiding this outcome of the bombing mission, the author avoids changing history in his novel, which helps to increase the story's believability. Three other important plot developments are also packed into the chapter. First, New Guy's announcement that he wants to quit flying combat missions is offered as a stark contrast to the just-completed heroics of Jake and Tiger. Second, the seemingly random introduction of Major Frank Allen into the story actually foreshadows a key supporting role he later will play in the plot. Third, Rucic's attempt to get Jake to talk about McPherson's death once again underscores the reason for Jake's unauthorized mission, even as it emphasizes the unpalatable role played by this representative of the media in reporting on the war. The headlong pace of the novel continues in Chapter 19, when Jake and Tiger once again narrowly escape death on a bombing mission, even as one of their companion aircraft is destroyed. Not content merely with this action scene, the author also shows Camparelli uncovering the deception of Jake and Tiger concerning the bombing over Hanoi. This discovery of their disobedience has been carefully juxtaposed with yet another example of their heroism, to ensure that the reader's sympathies remain with Jake and Tiger. Jake's tears over the death of his companions come only he lands, showing that he can keep his emotionalism in check whenever he needs to display steely resolve.



# Chapters 20 and 21

## Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

In Chapter 20, Jake awakens with a headache from a sedative Mad Jack had given him. He goes to the hangar to look at Devil 502, the Intruder he had flown the previous day. The squadron maintenance officer, Joe Wagner, tells him he was very lucky, because artillery fire had come very close to cutting off half the tail. Also, the big shell that knocked out the engine probably would have caused the plane to crash or explode if Jake had not reacted immediately by closing off fuel to the engine. Jake later sees New Guy at the duty officer's desk but avoids him. Camparelli calls Jake into his stateroom. The commander says he knows about the unauthorized raid, and lectures him angrily about his lack of obedience, which he considers criminal. He has written and will file a report on the incident, and he commands Jake to report to Mad Jack for a complete physical. Afterwards, he and Tiger are to go to Cubi Point on a cargo plane, to await arrival of two new airplanes, one of which they will fly back to the carrier. Mad Jack conducts the physical and then asks Jake if he is fit to fly. Jake replies that he does not know the answer, because he is a pilot, not a doctor.

In Chapter 21, Jake is with Tiger at the officers' club in Cubi Point. He has a pocketful of quarters, with which he calls Callie. He asks her to fly to Manila to visit him. She puts him on hold, and then returns and says she can come in two days. He thanks her, and at the bar, Tiger tells him he is the luckiest man he has ever met. He meets Callie in Manila and they catch a prop plane flight to Cubi. They walk across the bridge from the base to a hotel where Jake has pre-paid for the best room available, which turns out to be awful. They go for a ride to a beach, but the road is terrible and the journey extremely uncomfortable. On the beach, which is clean and deserted, they walk and he tells her about his situation, which he thinks probably will end in a court martial, and in any case, will end his navy career. They make love on the beach. Back at the hotel, their room reeks of insecticide. At dinner, Callie gives Jake a sand dollar for luck, which she found that day on the beach. Back in the room again, the bedsprings creak terribly, but they enjoy the closeness of each other. In the morning, Jake takes Callie to the base and gives her a tour of an Intruder, letting her sit in the pilot's seat. He says he loves her. Tiger arrives and says they have to get in the air. Jake and Callie say goodbye.

## Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

Jake's discovery in Chapter 20 that his quick reflexes saved the airplane and its occupants from being destroyed is further evidence of the combination of luck and skill required to survive as a combat pilot. After such an intense experience, it seems natural that Jake finds it hard to interact with New Guy, who now represents anyone who elects not to risk his own life in defense of the country. In contrast, Camparelli's outrage over Jake's disobedience adds moral complexity to the question of whether and when a soldier should take unauthorized initiative in an attempt to improve the effectiveness of



his efforts in battle. Mad Jack's examination of Jake ends with the simple question of whether he is mentally fit to fight, and neither man seems quite sure of the answer. Here, the author may be suggesting that warfare induces a kind of insanity in its participants, since the act of war itself can be regarded as insane. In other words, to fight a war, a man cannot be in his "right mind." In Chapter 22, Jake's phone call to Callie is a plea for compassion and caring, to help him through this time of violence and death. To her credit, Callie makes changes in her own important work schedule to come to Jake. The terrible condition of the hotel in which they stay adds a little comic relief to the story, and also points out that their bond already is much stronger than the small inconvenience of poor accommodations. The hotel's condition also symbolizes the moral and physical ravages of war, just as the clean beach represents an island of normalcy and beauty to which the world will one day return. In the love affair of Callie and Jake, the author shows how the violence and ugliness of war can be fertile ground for feelings of warmth and connectedness, whose importance is enhanced by the troubles that surround the lovers.



# Chapters 22 and 23

## Chapters 22 and 23 Summary

In Chapter 22, back on the carrier, Sammy tells Jake that he lied to the commander, saying he had no knowledge of Jake's desire to run an unauthorized bombing mission. He asks Jake not to expose him. Jake goes to see Camparelli and Cowboy. The commander wants to know the whole story of the Hanoi attack. The skipper then asks if Lundeen or Cowboy knew, and Jake says no. Camparelli says a formal hearing will be held the next day. Later, thinking about Callie, Jake goes to the ship's store to buy an engagement ring. The presiding officer at the hearing is Captain Farleigh Copeland. He asks Mad Jack to give a medical report on Jake. Mad Jack says he is in top condition, except for palsied hands, which is a familiar sign of stress in combat aviators. Copeland then establishes that Jake went after only one unauthorized target. He asks why Jake did it, and Jake gives a long, eloquent answer that recognizes the need of soldiers to obey but also defends his own position that war must be fought hard, attacking meaningful targets, if America is to win. Afterwards, Jake shows Sammy the engagement ring he bought. Camparelli enters their room and announces that there probably will not be a court martial. He says the current political climate in Washington favors escalation of the war, and it therefore would look bad to court martial a pilot for doing just that. He then confines both Jake and Sammy to the ship for the next two times it comes to port.

In Chapter 23, America escalates the war with heavy B-52 bombings of North Vietnam. Reading the American newspapers, Jake sees that anti-war protests are mounting across the U.S.A. At the duty officer's desk, New Guy asks Jake to cover for him for a half-hour while he gets a hamburger, and Jake agrees. At the desk, he learns that Rabbit Wilson has refused to fly a tanker plane, claiming it had an engine problem. Wilson enters and gives Jake a hard time about being a "hot dog." The maintenance officer, Joe Wagner, calls and says there is nothing wrong with the tanker Rabbit refused to fly. Camparelli then permanently grounds Rabbit for getting cold feet once too often, which makes Jake laugh. Jake reads a letter from Callie, and puts the engagement ring in a zippered pocket of his flight suit. He and Tiger are sent with a group to attack a SAM site on Hanoi's outskirts. B-52s will follow up their attack. On the approach, Jake's Intruder is hit by flak and loses an engine. Coming in slowly to the target, a wing is hit and begins spraying fuel. Jake drops the bombs over the target but then realizes the Intruder is losing too much fuel to make it back to the carrier. Flying low over Hanoi, the plane is hit by small arms fire. They keep going, and the B52s start bombing, but the Intruder catches fire, and they eject. Jake feels rain as his parachute opens, and then he is pummeled by blows, and blacks out.





## Chapters 22 and 23 Analysis

Sammy's lie in Chapter 22 about having no knowledge of the Hanoi raid reflects the unwritten code that compatriots do not expose each other's secrets, and it provides an example of when lying is excusable, just as Camparelli earlier pointed out to Jake concerning Hardesty's lie. It might seem odd that Jake buys an engagement ring for Callie in the midst of this drama, but he is reaching out for something good and true in his life, as a counterbalance to the moral quandary of war. The scene in which Jake is asked at the hearing why he attacked the National Assembly provides the author with a chance to make a statement through his protagonist about the important soldierly attributes of obedience and aggression, and how they can conflict, especially when civilian politicians display uncertainty or timidity in directing the course of a war. Even so, Jake has painted himself into a corner by deliberately disobeying orders, and the author takes the only way out to save Jake's career. The politicians declare a change of policy, which makes it politically unwise to punish Jake. The punishment Camparelli distributes, of two consecutive confinements to the ship during shore leave, is mild compared to his earlier rage over Jake's disobedience. This suggests that Camparelli's anger was at least partly a performance that he felt was necessary in his position as commander.

The implementation of America's new war strategy in Chapter 23 is accompanied by news of increasing civilian protests at home, both of which developments are taken from actual historical events. The episode concerning Rabbit Wilson, which ends in his permanent grounding, provides the simple satisfaction to Jake of vengeance, yet it has the curious effect of taking Wilson out of harm's way, which is exactly why Jake took offense to New Guy's decision to stop flying. The similarity is that both New Guy and Wilson have now been branded as cowardly, which, in the code of the warrior, is a fate worse than risking death in combat. That very risk escalates later in the chapter, when Jake and Tiger are finally shot down. The novel's central drama of the unauthorized flight having now been resolved, the author has turned to the last major plot development that remains, which is the question of how the hero will react to the enemy at close quarters, when he no longer occupies his fighting machine.



# Chapters 24 and 25

## Chapters 24 and 25 Summary

In Chapter 24, Major Frank Allen, the air force pilot who is a friend of Cowboy's and visited the carrier, is in the air seeking a target when he gets a radio message about a downed intruder. He flies toward the site. Meanwhile, Jake is having a dream about Tiger and him in coffins. He awakens, and realizes he is hanging upside down in his parachute, but he can feel the ground about a foot below him. He cuts free, but realizes he has severe pains in his side and in one knee. He radios for Tiger, who weakly says he cannot get out of his chute. Frank Allen radios, telling Jake stay put and a search party will find him in the morning. Laboriously, Jake stumbles through the jungle, searching for Tiger, who says he thinks his back is broken. Allen checks his charts and realizes the area is heavily defended. Tiger stops responding to Jake's radio calls, and sometime during the night Jake falls down and lapses into exhausted sleep.

In Chapter 25, at his base in the morning, Frank Allen learns that neither Jake nor Tiger is responding to check-in radio calls. He returns to the area with nine other piston-engined Skyraiders, whose approaching noise awakens Jake. Over the radio, he tells the fleet when one of the planes comes directly over his head. The rescuers spot a parachute, and Jake says he will approach it to look for Tiger. He finds Tiger lying on a boulder, and gives him water. He tries to pull the parachute out of the treetops, but fails. In the air, Allen is worried about the lack of gunfire, which looks like a trap. He and other planes make a strafing run. Allen's plane is hit, and he crashes. Jake hears the crash, but can do nothing. Allen is still alive, but trapped in the wreckage and badly injured. He gets out his pistol and when a Viet Cong soldier approaches, he shoots him. Allen then radios to the air, begging that his aircraft be destroyed before he is executed by the enemy. A Skyraider approaches, fires, and Allen's world goes dark.

## Chapters 24 and 25 Analysis

Major Allen, who was introduced only briefly earlier in the story, now returns in Chapter 24 as the potential savior of the downed airmen. Jake's dream as he hangs upside down in the tangled parachute is rather pedestrian, just as his other dream was. His waking world is easily as intense as his dream life. Allen tells Jake to stay in one place, the best advice for anyone who is awaiting a search party, but Jake immediately begins struggling through the jungle in search of Tiger, which probably surprises no one. The immobilizing injury of Tiger puts Jake into the potential position of playing the hero, which is a perfect plot development for an action yarn. Jake's location of Tiger with the help of the Skyraiders brings the two heroes back together again, which leaves escape from enemy territory as the last hurdle to overcome. The author shows how difficult this will be when Allen's plane is shot down in Chapter 25, and he dies in his attempt to save Jake and Tiger. The loss of this soldier makes it even more important that the two

airmen be rescued, especially given the novel's theme that good men have died in the war for dubious purposes.



# Chapter 26 and Postscript

## Chapter 26 and Postscript Summary

In Chapter 26, Jake lies on the ground, distraught from having heard the drama of Allen's fate over the radio, and aware that a man had died trying to save him. Tiger says he heard also, and he wants Jake to escape while he can. The radio says four enemy soldiers are approaching them on foot. Urged by Tiger, Jake runs away, but he stops when he realizes he cannot leave Tiger alone. He creeps back, holding one of his two pistols cocked. A Skyraider approaches and fades. Jake sees three enemy soldiers with automatic rifles standing over Tiger, hitting him and laughing. Jake stands, partially obscured by trees, and approaches. Just as one man spots him, Jake shoots him in the chest. The two other men dodge as he fires at them. After several shots, he kills one of them, and turns to the third man, who is wounded. Jake's first pistol is out of bullets, so he fires the second gun as the other soldier shoots his rifle. Something hits him in the head. When he regains consciousness, Tiger tells him it looks like he was grazed on the temple by a bullet. All three of the enemy are dead, and Tiger says Jake looked like Wyatt Earp. Jake radios to the rescuers, who send a helicopter. After Tiger is carried aboard, Jake and a crewman grip hands and laugh with relief as the helicopter flies them to safety.

In the Postscript, the author wonders what happened to the characters in the squadron. He says Camparelli became an air wing commander, Little Augie resigned from the navy and became an orange farmer in California, and Big Augie became a dentist in Philadelphia. Tiger recovered from his injuries and eventually returned to flight duty but died seven years later in a crash with an inexperienced pilot during a training mission over Oregon. Cowboy became a millionaire oilman in Texas. Sammy quit the navy, rode around America on a Harley Davidson for two years, and then became a successful novelist. Jake became a commander of a submarine-class carrier and married Deborah Smith. The next section explains that the preceding part of the Postscript was written after the novel's first publication in 1986, but it was not included in that edition. The author says Callie McKenzie's name in the original version of his novel was Deborah Smith. Twenty years after the book's first publication, the author writes that his attitudes about war and the Vietnam conflict have not changed from the ideas he dramatized in this novel.

## Chapter 26 and Postscript Analysis

Jake's initial impulse to take Tiger's advice and run from the oncoming foot soldiers makes the point that brave men are not exempt from fear of death in war. Self-preservation is a powerful instinct, but the mark of heroism is to overcome such fear in service to a higher moral ideal, and Jake realizes he could not live with himself if he left Tiger to die. This dilemma and the way Jake resolve it are true to the character, but they also set up an act that puts the final stamp of heroism on Jake. After Jake guns down



the enemy soldiers with two blazing pistols, Tiger aptly describes him as looking like the Old West icon, Wyatt Earp. The essence of air warfare is physical removal from damage wrought, while ground combat can be face-to-face. In moving from the air to the ground, Jake demonstrates that he does not need the protection of an airplane to be a war hero. The Postscript is interesting, because the publishers decided not to include it in the 1986 first edition of the novel. It adds a mythical note to the tale, by extending the personal stories of the characters past the end of the book. This rather old-fashioned technique might have struck the editors as superfluous, but the Postscript might also have been deleted for the practical reason of leaving open the possibility of further adventures of the novel's characters, by giving no indication of what happens to them after this story ends. In any case, twenty years later, the author makes it clear that the novel was, on at least one level, a polemical exercise for him. In other words, it was an opportunity for him to voice his own opinions about Vietnam and about warfare in general through the ideas and actions of his characters.



# Characters

## Jake Grafton

Jake Grafton is the novel's protagonist. An ace navy bomber pilot, he cuts a heroic figure at about six feet tall, with clear grey eyes and a prominent nose. He is a highly skilled and courageous pilot with quick reflexes and good judgment, but he has several other characteristics that prevent him from being a caricature. Jake has strong emotions and is attuned to them. He also thinks hard about what he does and the consequences of being a warrior. On several occasions in the book, he enters situations that fill him with fear, and he often suffers from shaky hands because of the stress of his job. When he considers how inconsequential many of the bombing targets are in the war, it fills him with rage, and if people annoy him with thoughtless remarks or boorish behavior, he is capable of striking back verbally or even physically. On the other hand, when a friend dies in combat, he is capable of bursting into tears. His attachment to his girlfriend is deep, and his loyalty is strong to his fellow soldiers, who nickname him "Cool Hand.". Even so, Jake makes several mistakes in the course of the novel. More than once, he makes an error while piloting a plane, which shows that he is not a comic book superhero incapable of doing wrong. He also attacks another sailor who is misbehaving on leave, and the consequences of this rash reaction could have been fatal. The most potentially damaging decision he makes is to bomb an enemy target that has not been authorized by his superiors. This shows that Jake is a hard-headed, independent thinker with an anti-authoritarian streak that he usually keeps in check but that can occasionally get out of control. In the end, Jake saves Tiger and himself with an act of derring-do that puts him firmly in the company of traditional action heroes.

## Virgil Cole

Virgil Cole is Jake's replacement bombardier/navigator after his first partner on the two-man crew is killed in battle. Virgil is very quiet, with steely blue eyes, and he proves to be such a resourceful and courageous airman that Jake nicknames him "Tiger." Often, Cole makes decisions in the heat of battle that push Jake toward further accomplishments, and his composure under pressure has a calming effect on the excitable Jake. Tiger's calm seems to be so consistently unbroken that Jake is finally moved to wonder aloud if Tiger ever is frightened, to which his friend replies that he is terrified. Cole's experience as a bombardier/navigator also plays a key role in several scenes, helping to extricate Jake and him from tight spots. He's very decisive, even to the point of convincing a reluctant Jake to phone Callie from the Philippines and ask her to fly all the way from Hong Kong to visit him. Tiger's repeated proof of his value as a friend and a fellow soldier makes his rescue by Jake at the end of the book all the more poignant.



## Sammy Lundeen

Sammy Lundeen is Jake's roommate on the aircraft carrier and his good friend. Sammy is a fine pilot, although perhaps a little reckless. He is a lover of fun and a prankster, whose greatest energies seem to be saved for chasing women and partying during shore leaves. He is the kind of soldier who copes with the ever-present threat of death by searching for a good time whenever possible. Sammy reacts even to his darkest thoughts about the futility of the missions on which the fighter planes are sent by pulling a prank, although in that case it is an unpleasant one of secretly defecating in unexpected places around the ship. He is perhaps a touch self-involved and not as overtly heroic as Jake but he is a likable fellow, and Jake knows he can rely on him.

## Callie McKenzie

Callie McKenzie is Jake's girlfriend. An attractive young woman employed by the American Consulate in Hong Kong, she speaks several languages and specializes in helping Chinese people to get permission to immigrate to the U.S.A. She has an artistic streak, and enjoys painting landscapes. Callie is against the war in Vietnam, particularly because her brother lost both legs in combat, but she recognizes that Jake strongly believes he is doing his duty for the country, and she respects his decision. She makes it clear to him that his straightforwardness is very important to her. She also knows that flying is central to his self-image, and she supports his profession as a pilot. Callie comes from a family of academicians, but she never displays any snobbishness or sense of a difference in background between Jake and her. She is a warm-hearted, intelligent, and honest person.

## Frank Camparelli

Commander Frank Camparelli is the leader of the A-6 air squadron aboard the aircraft carrier, which means he is in charge of 400 men and 16 aircraft. Short and powerfully built with a crewcut, he is a 20-year navy veteran and a disciplined, canny commander. The men respect and admire him, but do not dare to call him by his nickname, the "Old Man," to his face. Camparelli understands the pressures under which his men are working, and he shows that he is willing to overlook small breaches of decorum, but when it comes to men doing their duty and obeying important rules of conduct, he is stern and inflexible. In short, he is a classic military leader, in touch with his men and their needs but loyal above all to the navy code and to whatever his superiors decide, right or wrong, is best for America.

## Earl Parker

Lieutenant Commander Earl "Cowboy" Parker is a tall Texan and the air squadron's operations officer. His responsibilities extend to the smooth operation of the entire squadron, which means he carries the blame if things go wrong. This makes him a



stickler for detail, a good coach, and a demanding boss, but Cowboy has not lost his sense of fun, and his subordinates greatly appreciate his willingness to join sometimes in high jinks designed to let off steam. When Jake attacks the North Vietnamese National Assembly without authorization, Cowboy's private response to his ace pilot is that he only wishes it would have been a direct hit.

## Harvey Wilson

Commander Harvey Wilson is the squadron's executive officer and the villain of the piece. Fat, with beady eyes, he is next in line to command the squadron after Camparelli, but Jake and many of the other men dislike him intensely. Jake sees him as a perfect example of a man who manages to rise to an important position in an organization on no merit whatsoever. Wilson regularly berates Jake for what he calls shoddy paperwork, and for being a "hot dog" pilot, which infuriates Jake. Late in the story, Wilson gets his comeuppance when Commander Camparelli permanently rescinds his combat flight status, on the grounds that Wilson does not have sufficient gumption to pilot a navy fighter plane in wartime.

## Morgan McPherson

Lieutenant Morgan McPherson is a junior officer and Jake's bombardier/navigator when the story opens. He and Jake have a strong and trusting friendship, but on the first sortie described in the novel, Morgan is hit in the neck by small arms fire while the plane is flying low over enemy territory, and he bleeds to death. Morgan's death preoccupies Jake for much of the novel, and is the catalyst to his decision to conduct an unauthorized bombing mission.

## Abe Steiger

Abe Steiger is one of the squadron's air intelligence officers. He makes a thoughtless mistake by revealing exactly how many enemy soldiers were estimated to be killed by Jake in one of his attacks, which is the last thing the pilot wants to know. Later, Abe makes up for this error by agreeing to supply intelligence information necessary to Jake and Tiger in planning their attack on North Vietnam's leadership. Abe is morally upright, as he demonstrates by not falsifying the mission report in a way that would have prevented Camparelli from discovering that this bombing had been completed in secret. Abe was willing to help Jake and Tiger with what he believes is a good cause, but he draws that line at changing the charts in a way that might put other pilots in harm's way.

## Dr. Jack Catton

Dr. Jack "Mad Jack" Catton is the squadron's medical officer. He is a good doctor and a fair man, who does not attempt to analyze Jake's fitness to be a pilot beyond assessing his physical health. During the hearing after the unauthorized bombing mission, Mad





Jack is asked if Jake's judgment is good, but he declines to offer an opinion. He has a tradition of coming to a crew's rooms after a particularly tough mission and giving them little airline bottles of bourbon. Mad Jack knows he cannot protect the men from the intense mental stresses of war, and he has the wisdom to merely encourage them to relax and get as much sleep as possible.

## Les Rucic

Les Rucic is a reporter who comes aboard and interviews crew members about the progress of the war. He interviews Jake on more than one occasion, but Jake dislikes the man's probing questions, which strike him as a search for the opportunity to publish sensational material rather than an honest attempt to get at the truth. Rucic says he was a military pilot, but he shows little sympathy for Jake and the other fliers.

## Frank Allen

Major Frank Allen is an air force flyer who went to school with Cowboy Parker. He comes aboard the aircraft carrier on a military liaison program, in which different branches of the service interact and exchange information and expertise. Later in the novel, Major Allen is sent to try to rescue Jake and Tiger after their plane is shot down, but Allen's plane also is downed during the rescue effort, and he dies.

## Razor Durfee

Razor Durfee is a bombardier/navigator in the squadron who briefly crews with Jake after Morgan McPherson is killed. Razor says he is worried about his own safety, because he is not convinced that Jake is mentally fit to fly, which infuriates Jake. Later, however, Jake and Razor make amends, and work together effectively.

## Maggot

Maggot is a young plane captain, whose job is to make sure the aircraft are in good physical shape. His father has had health problems stateside, and Jake advises him on how to get in touch with his father from the ship. Later, Maggot is almost killed on the job, and Jake visits him in sick bay. Maggot represents the young crew members who look up to Jake.

## Hardesty

Hardesty is a 19 year-old enlisted man who wants shore leave to get married. Jake grants it, but later, it turns out that Hardesty lied. Jake wants to punish him, but Camparelli advises him that the transgression is not important. Meanwhile, Jake is



planning a huge transgression of his own. Hardesty therefore represents a lesson in good judgment for Jake as a leader of men.

## **New Guy**

New Guy is a pilot who is never named except by his nickname. Shortly after he joins the squadron, he arranges a transfer to a desk job on the ship. He is not shunned by the other pilots for this decision, but he loses their respect. He represents those in the service who are unwilling to risk their lives in war, even as they watch their fellow soldiers do so.

## **Little Augie Odegard**

"Little Augie" Odegard is one of the squadron's pilots. He is a small man, just tall enough to be a pilot, but he is a good flier.

## **Joe Canfield**

Joe "Big Augie" Canfield is Little Augie's bombardier/navigator. He looks nothing like Little Augie, and in fact is black, whereas the pilot is white, but he is big, so he gets the "Big Augie" appellation.

## **Corey Ford**

Corey Ford is a pilot who wants to be an astronaut some day. He dies when his plane is hit by enemy fire during a raid and explodes.

## **Bob Walkwitz**

Bob "Boxman" Walkwitz is Corey Ford's bombardier/navigator. His nickname derives from his almost constant preoccupation with women. Boxman dies in the same explosion that kills Ford.

## **Fairleigh Copeland**

Captain Fairleigh Copeland conducts the hearing on board the carrier after the strike over Hanoi by Jake and Tiger is discovered. Copeland asks Jake tough questions, but he is fair.



# Objects/Places

## USS Shiloh

The USS Shiloh is the name of the aircraft carrier that supports the A-6 naval air squadron to which Jake belongs.

## A-6A Intruder

The A-6A Intruder is a naval fighter bomber that Jake pilots, named in the book's title.

## Gulf of Tonkin

The Gulf of Tonkin, off North Vietnam, is where the USS Shiloh is located during much of the novel.

## Subic Bay

Subic Bay in the Philippines is also the name of a U.S. naval station that adjoins another naval station called Cubi Point. The sailors go there for leave and sometimes for new equipment or supplies.

## Tailhook Bar

The Tailhook Bar, in a downstairs portion of the officers' club at Cubi Point Naval Station, is where the men ride a mock cockpit down a rail, making bets over who can avoid being dunked by the contraption into a stagnant pond.

## Olongapo City

Olongapo City, familiarly known by the sailors as Po City, is a town in the Philippines across a bridge from the naval bases, where the men go on shore leave to meet women and drink in nightclubs.

## Pauline's Bar

Pauline's Bar is a nightclub in Po City where Jake and Boxman become irritated by a boorish sailor and dunk him in a crocodile-infested pond.



## Hong Kong

Hong Kong is the major Asian city where Jake goes for five days on leave and first meets Callie McKenzie, who lives and works there for the American Consulate.

## Peninsula Hotel

The Peninsula Hotel is a luxurious and expensive hotel where Jake and Sammy stay during their five-day leave in Hong Kong. Jake and Callie have afternoon tea there on their first date.

## National Assembly Building

The National Assembly building is the governmental center of the North Vietnamese leadership in Hanoi. It becomes the target for an unauthorized bombing raid by Jake and Tiger, but the two succeed only in breaking all the windows in the building.

## SAM

SAM is an acronym for surface-to-air missile, which is the most powerful foe of the Intruder pilots. Jake does quite a bit of aerial acrobatics in the book to avoid SAMs.

## Rockeyes

Rockeyes are cluster bombs the Intruders carry. The pilots generally release these bombs, about 250 of which are encased in one 500-pound shell, after they have dropped their load of larger bombs.

## Camparelli's Stateroom

Camparelli's stateroom is where the squadron commander sometimes invites his officers for strategic meetings or to discuss problems. It is more spacious than the other officers' quarters.

## North Vietnam

North Vietnam is the site of most of the bombing sorties in which Jake participates. Various locales are attacked, in the countryside and near the capital, Hanoi.

## South Vietnam

South Vietnam, the ally of America during the war, is occasionally bombed by the Intruders when occupying Viet Cong forces are identified there.



# Themes

## The Folly of Irresolution

Much literature deals with the tragedy, or sometimes the pathos, of characters who cannot make up their minds. It could be argued that not only the central theme but the purpose of this book is an argument that irresolution in war is deadly. In this case, the war is in Vietnam, and the hesitancy is on the part of American politicians and other decision-makers who fail to authorize a full-scale onslaught of U.S. forces against the enemy. At least, this is how the protagonist, Jake Grafton, assesses the situation. In the novel, as in real life, many Americans protest the war, but Jake's position is that America has already entered into it, and now must do everything in its power to win. The author recognizes the anti-war sentiment, particularly through the comments of Jake's girlfriend, Callie, but no mention is made of socio-political conditions that led to America's involvement in the war. In other words, the question of whether this particular war was right or wrong, whether it was justified or immoral, is not addressed. The only point the author seems concerned about making is that soldiers must have the full support of their leadership. If they are used in ways that might advance political aims but will not give the soldiers a fair chance to win the war, then they are fighting and dying for nothing, which is a moral tragedy. With this theme, the author takes a polemical stance in the novel, establishing the terms for what he believes is fair treatment of soldiers in general, and the soldiers who fought the Vietnam War in particular.

## Fear Is Not Cowardice

Jake Grafton is the quintessential war hero. He has fabulous piloting skills, great judgment, and a steely demeanor in combat that earns him the nickname "Cool Hand." He flies one death-defying mission after another in this novel, surviving even as his bombardier/navigator and several other compatriots are killed in combat. When he is finally shot down and parachutes into enemy territory, he not only locates his immobilized crewman despite his own injuries, but kills three enemy soldiers in handgun combat while orchestrating his rescue by helicopter. Yet despite such stellar achievements, Jake is often deeply frightened before he goes into battle. Afterwards, his hands shake as badly as if he were a very old man. He sometimes resorts to tranquilizers to get to sleep, and often to liquor, and has nightmares. He tries not to think about the people he has killed, and reacts emotionally when others suggest that the war might be immoral. He is so upset when his bombardier/navigator dies that he throws up, and when he lands after a mission during which two other men are killed in aerial combat, he bursts into tears. The author's point in showing the emotional, often frightened side of Jake along with the bold and heroic side is to indicate that courage is not a trait that excludes fear. Indeed, true courage consists of doing something difficult despite the presence of great fear. Cowardice is the decision to avoid the difficult because of fear, as New Guy does in the novel when he requests to stop flying combat



missions. Harvey Wilson does the same thing in grounding his own plane for mechanical troubles that do not exist. Jake and the other pilots are contemptuous of those men, because they would never make such choices for themselves. They have courage, which means they will continue to take the difficult path despite the presence of tremendous fear.

## The Limits of Obedience

A soldier's first duty is obedience to higher authority. Without obedience, chaos would prevail in the ranks. Commander Camparelli says as much several times in the novel, and in the Postscript to his book, Stephen Coonts writes that he put his own convictions into the mouth of Camparelli. Even so, the central plot element in this story concerns the execution of a plan by the heroic protagonist to disobey orders. After this act of disobedience is executed, Jake Grafton and Tiger Cole miraculously escape not only a court martial but any serious punishment at all. Even Camparelli, who has been fiercely eloquent on the seriousness of their disobedience, punishes them only by taking away two consecutive leaves when the ship next comes to port. It is as if he secretly agrees with what they have done, but cannot voice that agreement, because it is his duty to be stern. One of his chief officers, Cowboy Parker, privately tells Jake that he admires the unauthorized attack over Hanoi, and only wishes the bombs had hit their target. It would seem that the unquestioned need for military obedience has its limits. In this novel, that limit comes when top leadership fails to support its own soldiers by providing them with every opportunity to end the war victoriously. Jake's action is one of vigilantism. Frustrated and handcuffed by the powers-that-be, he feels driven to taking the law into his own hands. Like most stories of heroic vigilantes fighting for just causes, Jake gets away with it. Stephen Coonts is under no illusions about the primacy of obedience in the military, yet in allowing Jake's serious breach of obedience for the sake of a rip-roaring tale, the author indulges the side of his own personality that admires the conviction of the righteous vigilante.

# Style

## Point of View

"Flight of the Intruder" is written in third person, from the viewpoint of the protagonist, Jake Grafton. The author delves into Jake's thoughts and emotions, which often are consumed by his extreme dissatisfaction over the way the Vietnam War is being conducted by leaders he has never met, who he believes are unwilling to authorize hard-hitting tactics that would allow American forces to win the war. This conviction is driven home not only through Jake's thoughts but in his conversations with fellow officers, with his girlfriend, Callie, and in a memorable speech he makes during the military hearing that is called concerning his unauthorized bombing of a Hanoi target. Also prominent in Jake's thoughts and emotional reactions are how he copes with the constant threat of death in war and an ongoing self-assessment of his mental toughness and ability to make the right split-second piloting decisions in the midst of combat. This focus on Jake's internal life makes him by far the most well-rounded character in the novel, even as it suggests that he is the most introspective of the officers in the air squadron. Another effect of this unwavering focus on Jake's viewpoint is that his larger-than-life deeds in combat are tempered by his doubts, fear, love, and anger, all of which make him more human and therefore make his heroics all the more laudable. The author's decision to stick to Jake's point of view narrows the novel's focus, yet also deepens insight into the main character.

## Setting

The novel has two principal settings. The first is aboard the aircraft carrier USS Shiloh, which contains the 400 men and 16 planes of the air squadron to which Jake Grafton belongs. The carrier is usually off the coast of Vietnam, but the ocean has only a minor part in the setting, mostly as an undesirable place to crash a plane. Jake often wanders around the ship, visiting many sections of it, including the hangars, ready room, the deck, staterooms, other officers' rooms, the mess hall, the latrines, and he spends time in his own quarters. Taken together, these descriptions of such locales on the ship create a sense of a contained place that nevertheless is wide in the variety of its settings, and a sense also emerges of the strength or even the security of the carrier. In contrast, the second principal setting is full of danger and uncertainty. It is the cockpit of whichever aircraft Jake is flying, usually an Intruder fighter plane. In this setting, to which the novel frequently returns, split-second decisions can mean life or death, and fear goes hand-in-hand with acts of courage. Even the takeoffs of the planes, as they are catapulted by a ship's mechanism into the air, and their return landings, in which the pilots must descend at high speed and catch restraining wires to avoid a crash, are fraught with danger. Other settings include occasional shore leaves that take place in the Philippines and Hong Kong. In these places, it seems as if the immersion in peace is so sudden that the soldiers cannot fully make the shift into calmness, and their





recreation is always edged with frantic or stressed emotions. No setting in this story is safe. Every place the men go is dominated by the reality of war.

## Language and Meaning

This story is full of semi-technical jargon and acronyms that refer to the naval military, airplanes, aircraft carriers, and combat. The official names of aircraft are provided, such as the E-2 Hawkeye and the KA-6D tanker. Equipment on board planes is described and often gets an acronym for future reference, such the visual display indicator (VDI), the electronic counter-measures panel (ECM), the intercom system (ICS), and a radio navigation aid called TACAN. Many of the air squadron officers' job titles and sites on the aircraft carrier get acronyms, including the officer-of-the-deck (OOD), the Carrier Air Traffic Control Center (CATCC), the landing signal officer (LSO), and the executive officer (XO). Weaponry has acronyms and nicknames, including surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and cluster bombs (Rockeyes). The men also give each other nicknames, including Cool Hand, Little Augie and Big Augie, Tiger, Rabbit, Razor, New Guy, and the Old Man. These and many other specialized terms are vital to the creation of a realistic military world. Without such language, the ability of the reader to enter fully into the milieu of the characters would be greatly compromised. Aside from the jargon, the novel's language is not particularly unusual or challenging. Many of the characters do not appear to be highly educated, and they use everyday language, with a sprinkling of profanity that would be expected of men in combat. The book obviously was written with the intent of gaining a wide readership, and the language does not impede that intention. This is an action novel, which has little need of long sentences or inventive metaphors. It uses active verbs and punchy sentences to help generate scenes of excitement.

## Structure

The book opens with a quote from the ancient Greek poet, Ovid, about the unnamed mythological figure Icarus, who wears wings to fly toward the sun, which melts the wax that holds the wings together. A Foreword by Ward Carroll mentions that the novel is not about naval aviation or the Vietnam War but about the folly of making combat sacrifices in vain. He notes that the original title of this book was *For Each Other*. A Preface by Stephen Coonts in the 20th anniversary edition of the book (2006) tells how he came to write it after retiring from the navy as a fighter plane pilot in the Vietnam War. The story proper is divided into 26 chapters, each one headed simply by the spelled-out chapter number. A Postscript, part of which was written for the first edition of the novel but was not published, describes the fate of major characters after the war, names a few real naval officers upon whom Coonts based some of his characters, and ends with his conviction that dedicated soldiers still exist in America and need to be supported by proper decision-making from their superiors. In terms of time, the story covers only a few months of the Vietnam War in 1972. It ends in the fall of that year, when American bombing missions intensified even as civilian protests against the war escalated at home. The novel's progression is linear, without any flashback or flash forward. Back

stories are limited, and the only significant amount of detail concerning the characters' lives before the war are provided by Jake and Callie in conversation with each other after they first meet. The straightforward structure serves the novel's action scenes, which are numerous.



## Quotes

"Your pickle is hot,' he told the pilot, referring to the red button on the stick grip which the pilot could press to release the weapons." Page 5.

"Your intentions were good, but I'm here to tell you that no matter what the circumstance, sound judgment is the only damn thing on God's green earth that's going to keep you alive long enough to die in bed." Page 24.

"It was dark and the noise was unbelievable and I couldn't see anything and I could feel myself being pulled toward that compressor." Page 75.

"They were bombing the hell out of an area containing nine tiny men; precision really didn't matter." Page 85.

"I ought to find a fat target way up north and bomb the living shit out of it. One good target. For all of us." Page 123.

"A pilot just bides his time until his plane can take him away again, into the air. He feels like a visitor when he's on the ground." Page 132.

What you try to do, Jake thought, is to keep it fuzzy in your mind that you kill real people." Page 139.

"Our POWs are going through hell while long-haired creeps in the States are burning their draft cards or hiding in graduate schools and trying to convince themselves the war is immoral because they know, deep down, that they don't have the guts to fight." Page 153-54.

"You wait for the brief, you wait for the cat shot, you wait to get shot at. It's an old complaint, as old as the first warrior, but knowing that doesn't make the waiting any easier." Page 198.

"As they inverted the ghostly city covered the canopy above their heads. The weaving fingers of fire were everywhere but Jake's eyes were on the missile." Page 223.

"He died bombing a bunch of trees. I only wish he and I had been swinging with our best punch against a target that made sense when he caught that bullet." Page 276.

"He realized that only when the SAMs and tracers were reaching for him, only when he was naked and running flat out, did he feel fully alive. He had become addicted to the adrenaline high of taunting death." Page 285.

"The man's rifle flashed repeatedly as Jake tried to aim at the squirming figure. He squeezed the trigger just as something hammered into his head." Page 325.



## Topics for Discussion

Jake Grafton thinks the strategy of America's leaders in Vietnam is too timid to allow its soldiers to win the war. If you were to argue against Jake's viewpoint, what evidence or lessons could you use from America's subsequent engagement in wars in other countries that have entrenched cultural heritages similar to that of Vietnam, such as Afghanistan and Iraq?

Risking one's life to bomb targets of no perceived significance certainly would be demoralizing, but Jake admits that he does not know who makes the target decisions, and he is not involved in political considerations. The people on both sides of this issue seem to have insights and blindnesses. What are they?

Two characters in this novel, New Guy and Harvey "Rabbit" Wilson, display cowardice. In both cases, they apparently are driven by a sense of self-preservation. If the war is being conducted in a manner that risks lives for no good purpose, as Jake contends, why are the actions of these two men cowardly? Why are they not simply intelligent?

Commander Camparelli is stern about Jake and Tiger's unauthorized bombing raid on Hanoi, but part of him also is sympathetic to why they did it, and Cowboy Parker privately admits that he admires them for it. If something is wrong, as Camparelli insists, then how can it be admirable? Concerning this issue, discuss the roles of aggression and judgment in war.

Jake mentions once that the beggars in Po City upset him when the squadron visits the Philippines on leave, but neither he nor the men seem concerned about the sleazy nightclubs and prostitution that the presence of American military bases have spawned. Why do you think they do not consider or dwell upon such moral questions?

After Jake and Tiger try to destroy the National Assembly building, Sammy Lundeen waylays Jake before he goes in front of the hearing committee and says he lied to Commander Camparelli. Sammy says he denied any knowledge of Jake's plan, and he asks Jake to support him in this, which means he wants Jake to lie. Discuss whether you think Sammy's request is fair, and assess the roles of truth, deception, loyalty and disloyalty in this situation.

When Major Frank Allen's plane is shot down as he tries to rescue Jake and Tiger, he is trapped in it, and begs for his fellow pilots to strafe and kill him before the enemy reaches him. In the novel's Postscript, Stephen Coonts mentions that this is a purely fictional scene, not inspired by any real event. What would you do if you were the pilot who received that radio plea from Allen? Would you be able to kill your fellow soldier? Tell whether you think it would be the right or wrong thing to do, and defend your position.