

Forrest Gump Study Guide

Forrest Gump by Winston Groom

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Contents

Forrest Gump Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	4
Chapters 3-4.....	6
Chapters 5-6.....	8
Chapter 7-8.....	10
Chapters 9-10.....	13
Chapters 11-12.....	16
Chapters 13-14.....	19
Chapters 15-16.....	21
Chapters 17-18.....	23
Chapters 19-20.....	25
Chapters 21-22.....	27
Chapters 23-24.....	29
Chapters 25-26.....	31
Characters.....	35
Objects/Places.....	46
Themes.....	51
Style.....	55
Quotes.....	59
Topics for Discussion.....	66

Plot Summary

Forrest Gump by Winston Groom is a memoir of a "halfwit" in the 1960s-70s whose life is not "like a box of chocolates" but is not at all hum-drum.

Forrest Gump has an IQ of about 70, but realizes that he is smarter than a lot of "normal" people. He escapes "special school" by growing big and strong enough for football where he makes the All State team and is recruited by Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant of the University of Alabama. There Forrest meets Bubba, who teaches him to play harmonica, and the instrument changes Forrest's life. Forrest flunks out, is immediately drafted, messes up at Ft. Benning, GA, and arrives in Vietnam in time for the Tet Offensive. For rescuing his mortally-wounded friend Bubba, Forrest is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Recovering from a minor wound, Forrest meets Lt. Dan, whose philosophy about natural laws change Forrest's outlook on life. In Washington, DC, Forrest enjoys the President's hospitality but during a recruitment lecture ad libs that the war is "a bunch of shit."

Winning the Army's ping-pong tournament, he is sent to Beijing, where he rescues Chairman Mao from drowning. After an early discharge, Forrest finds Jenny, joins her band, becomes her lover, starts smoking marijuana, and loses Jenny. In a Washington, DC, antiwar protest, Forrest is arrested for assault, confined for psychiatric observation, "discovered" by NASA, and sent on a mission to Mars. With bristly Maj. Fritch and an orangutan, Sue, he waits four years for rescue when they land in New Guinea amidst cannibals and head-hunters. Forrest learns chess from the chief, Big Sam. After another White House visit, Forrest runs into Dan and they find Jenny in Indianapolis. A wrestling promoter convinces Forrest to join the lucrative business. As The Dunce, he becomes popular, but loses his money, Jenny, and Dan.

After an interval of professional chess and movie-making in Los Angeles, CA, Forrest and Sue go to Bubba's home town, start a small shrimp farm that grows enormous and profitable. Forrest hires many whom he has met during his adventures. Talked into running for the U.S. Senate, Forrest backs out when newspapers dig into his past. In Savannah, GA, Forrest becomes a famous one-man band, meets Jenny and her son, Forrest, Jr. He settles with Sue in New Orleans, contemplating the better life that Jenny and his son have without him and satisfied that his own life has never been "hum-drum."



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

In Chapter 1 Forrest Gump introduces himself as an idiot. Life has been no box of chocolates, he is treated shabbily, but on the whole life is pretty interesting. He knows when people cheat him and from literature realizes that idiots are smarter than people think. He is raised by a protective widowed mother, attends a useless special school for "funny fellers," until a growth spurt at age 16 gets him recruited for high school football. When Coach Fellers sees how fast he is, Forrest becomes a halfback and makes the All State Football Team.

Chapter 2 opens with the award ceremony, through which Forrest needs to go to the bathroom. When handed his award, he can think only to say, "I got to pee." He attracts the attention of the famous Coach "Bear" Bryant, but his IQ is too low for college—but not for the draft. Forrest innocently causes a brawl at the physical, fails another IQ test, and is temporarily deferred. A movie date with Jenny Curran results in another inadvertent disaster, and a judge, unable to order him into the Army, tells Mama to put him on a bus.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Chapter 1 opens with narrator Forrest Gump introducing himself as mentally slow, but contending that he is more perceptive than most people think. He shows a sense of superiority that later appears in racial matters, by looking down on "Mongolian idiots," properly termed sufferers of Down Syndrome. To illustrate that he knows when he is cheated over wages for work, Forrest tells a brief story. He has brief stories to explain many things. Forrest also claims to have read about idiots in literature, where they always seem smarter than others think. He cites Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, Shakespeare, Faulkner, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Such literary tastes must be explained later. Initially they strike one as being out of character.

Forrest summarizes his background: the origin of his given name, being half-orphaned as an infant and his protective mother's efforts to raise him normally. Forrest speaks without rancor about going to "special" school with "funny fellers," "retards," and "spasmos." Only one teacher, Miss Henderson, makes an effort to teach him anything—to read. The image of his father's death beneath tons of bananas on the loading docks comes back to Forrest while playing football, when opponents pile on top of him, and during the rapid acceleration of his NASA flight. Forrest suffers a banana phobia all his life and finds himself often having to deal with them.

Forrest grows quite large and football is his escape from the special school. The coach is frustrated that Forrest will not tackle anyone, lest he hurt him, because his mother



often warns him to be careful with smaller people. Forrest fears being "put away"—and, of course, eventually is later in the novel. In high school Forrest again meets Jenny Curran, the only child who is nice to him in first grade, and on whom he develops a crush that lasts through the novel. A scrape with other football players reveals to the coach Forrest's incredible speed and he is moved from defense (where he trains by smashing into an oak tree repeatedly) to halfback. Forrest makes the All State Football Team and gets his first suit and tie for the award dinner.

Chapter 2 begins shortly before the ceremonial dinner, with Forrest getting his shirttail caught in his zipper and being unable to urinate without tearing his pants open. After many long speeches, Forrest is desperate by the time he gets his award. He announces to the microphone, "I got to pee," a phrase that becomes a motif throughout the novel. Forrest often interjects vaguely-related materials into his narrative. The football theme is interrupted when he receives a baseball signed by all of the "New Yawk Yankees," which he treasures until a big dog chews it up. Philosophically, he observes that this sort of thing happens to him.

The chapter also introduces the renowned Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant of the University of Alabama, who is the first to have Forrest's IQ tested. He is too low to go to college, but not too low to be called to a draft physical. He notes dryly that it is 1968, meaning that the Army wants everybody. Later in the novel Forrest brings out the significance in the brutal escalation of fighting in Vietnam and the antiwar protests in the U.S. At the draft physical, Forrest reacts violently when surprised by an anal examination. This too becomes a motif. Forrest's love of scatology gradually grows clear and "shit" is his favorite curse word. A second IQ test gains him a temporary deferment.

A new aspect of life opens up when a boarder, Miss French, offers Forrest some divinity (a soft white candy) in her room. He eats 15 pieces before she gently seduces him. Divinity and sex become united in his mind. He shyly admits to the reader that he wishes Jenny had done that to him. The topic of sex makes him highly uncomfortable and he tells his sexual stories as circumspectly as possible, assuming the reader will get the picture.

The upshot is that while he keeps the secret from Mama, Forrest finds the courage to ask her what to do about Jenny, and Mama sets up a date. Forrest finds strange all of the killing in Bonnie and Clyde and his ill-timed laughter makes Jenny self-conscious. Trying to help her up, Forrest tears her dress. They are ejected and Forrest is arrested, taken "downtown," fingerprinted, photographed, and thrown into jail. Meanwhile, he worries about Jenny. Mama gets him out and accompanies him to the courthouse, where he cannot explain what had happened, but again has to pee. The judge decides that a stint in the Army would help Forrest, but he is exempt. The judge wants him anywhere out of town so in the morning Mama puts him on a bus. Forrest is destined to face a number of judges, who are never able to fathom how he gets into the predicaments he does and take the easy way out by getting him out of their jurisdiction.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Chapter 3 brings Forrest to the University of Alabama, where he briefly rooms in the "Ape Dorm" with crazy Curtis before settling into the basement. Football practice is grueling and Forrest is homesick. He is signed up for football player-friendly courses that go better than expected. Given the ball and told to run, Forrest scores four touchdowns in the opening game but is not invited to after-game parties. He meets Bubba, also alone, who lets him play his harmonica. Forrest also runs into Jenny, who invites him to hear her folk music group play.

In Chapter 4 Forrest learns to catch passes as a "secret weapon." Listening to Jenny's group play, he pulls out his harmonica without thinking and is invited to join. After a physical examination, Dr. Mills presents Forrest to medical students as an "idiot savant," but they are disappointed when he plays only "Puff, the Magic Dragon." Forrest discovers Jenny having sex with the banjo player and is fired from the band for his reaction. At the Orange Bowl Nebraska is beating Alabama badly when Bryant calls on Forrest to unveil his ball-catching. It only works a while before Nebraska catches on and flattens him. Alabama loses on the quarterback's mistake.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Chapter 3 oddly delivers Forrest to the University of Alabama in the heat of August, which he describes in colorful figures of speech. He is put up in shabby "Ape Dorm," filled with wild vandals, and briefly rooms with Curtis, an aggressive, refrigerator-sized mental eggplant. Football practice is grueling and Coach Bryant is not pleased with Forrest's preparation and ability. The athletic department's arrangements to coddle football players academically, using compassionate teachers, is lampooned. Forrest finds himself taking a graduate-level physics course, "Intermediate Light," and has an amazingly easy time with the calculations. The English teacher is hard-nosed, but finds Forrest's autobiography so original that fellow students are encouraged to do likewise. One intuits at this point that Forrest is an "idiot savant," a truth that is soon confirmed. The chapter concludes with Forrest starring in the first game but not being invited to any parties, which allows him to meet the harmonica-playing Bubba. Forrest claims that this changes his life forever. He also runs into Jenny again.

Chapter 4 builds on these developments at Alabama. First, on the football front, Forrest learns to catch passes to become Bryant's "secret weapon." He listens to Jenny's group sing (primarily Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul, and Mary) and, without thinking, joins in on the harmonica. This gets him a paying gig with the band.. At the same time, Forrest considers offering Jenny divinity, to him the necessary prelude to sex. In the classroom, Boone wants Forrest to write something serious, which leads to a discussion of Wordsworth and his contemporaries, and to Forrest suspecting that Boone does not



realize that he is an idiot. Throughout the novel, surprisingly few people in positions of power do realize it—even after Forrest admits it.

People at the University not being able to figure Forrest out reaches a climax when he is summoned for a physical (and recalls the draft disaster) and is stood before a hundred medical students to be proclaimed an "idiot savant." The doctor explains, building them up for a harmonica performance worthy of Liszt or Beethoven. They are disappointed when he plays "Puff, the Magic Dragon" and does not care what they think about him. Football and sex are intertwined, as Forrest talks about Alabama going to the Orange Bowl and him discovering Jenny half-naked with the banjo player in a car. Assuming that she is being molested (somehow he understands this but not consensual sex), Forrest pulls the man off, but Jenny is furious, and Forrest is fired.

Narration of the Orange Bowl in Miami provides Forrest a forum for expressing the racial views of society around him. Northern teams like Nebraska have integrated teams, and the black members seem enormous, even to six-foot, six-inch Forrest. When he catches the kick-off he is promptly flattened. At the half, Bryant tells Forrest it is time to fake out Nebraska by passing to him. Forrest contemplates the "Nebraska corn jerkoff niggers." Earlier, Forrest claims not to be prejudiced, for he has found most blacks to be nicer than most whites. He innocently parrots the language that he hears. Nebraska wins when Alabama's quarterback makes a ridiculous mistake, but hot-headed Bryant is philosophical about next year. Forrest says enigmatically that he gets no second year, drawing the reader into the next chapter.

Chapter 4's non-sequitur has Forrest thirsty for limeade like his Mama makes and trying to buy ingredients in a store. The proprietor is suspicious of him. He ends up buying peaches, which he strains through socks, which provide the predominant taste.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Chapter 5 opens with Bryant sadly informing Forrest that he has flunked out of school. The whole team shows up to say goodbye as Forrest catches the bus home to Mobile. There, Mama is crying because Forrest has been drafted. Forrest finds that Army people yell louder and swear more than football coaches. They arrive at Ft. Benning, GA, where the barracks are better than the Ape Dorm but the food is terrible but plentiful. Although he has never cooked, he is put in charge of the kitchen and, making his first meal in a steam boiler, causes an explosion that gets him confined to quarters every weekend until his unit is shipped to Vietnam. They arrive in Pleiku just as the shelling of the Tet Offensive begins. Shortly afterwards they are flown by helicopter to relieve Charlie Company in the jungle where, carrying all of the company's heavy equipment, Forrest meets up with Bubba, who fills him in on news from home.

Chapter 6 finds Sgt. Kranz assigning Forrest, fellow ammo bearer Doyle, and machine gunner, Bones, to a dangerous saddle between two ridges. They fall under heavy fire. Bones is killed and Doyle wounded. Forrest gathers Doyle up, racing through bullets to Charlie Company, bellowing, and is received as though he had just made a touchdown. Asked why he did this, he tells the commander that he had to pee. Kranz promotes Forrest to machine gunner and Bubba volunteers to be his carrier. Together they plan, after the Army, to shrimp together. When Bubba is shot in a rice paddy, Forrest ignores orders to run in after him. He rescues another man on the way, then reminds Bubba of the shrimp boats as he carries him back and plays harmonica for him while he dies. During fierce fighting, Forrest is shot in the ass and evacuated.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Chapter 5 opens with Bryant sadly informing Forrest that he has flunked out of school. The whole team shows up to say goodbye as Forrest catches the bus home to Mobile. There, Mama is crying because Forrest has been drafted, despite being an idiot (a sergeant asks Mama if she thinks that the rest of the draftees are Einsteins). Forrest finds that Army people yell louder and swear more than football coaches. At Ft. Benning, GA, the barracks are better than the Ape Dorm but the food is terrible but plentiful. Forrest is comforted that no one seems much smarter than he.

Although he has never cooked, he is put in charge of the kitchen. He mixes every ingredient he can find in a steam boiler, but has to turn it up too high and it explodes. Forrest has to run fast to escape Sgt. Kranz and the company commander, as 100 men sit covered in "Gump—Boiler—Stew." He is confined to quarters every weekend thereafter until they ship out to Vietnam, arriving in Pleiku just as the shelling of the Tet Offensive begins. Forrest graphically describes his first impressions of sudden death and lampoons aspects of military life (his C-rations are dated 1951). He realizes later



that he gives the wrong impression of the effects of shells hitting the officers' latrine. Just when they have dug livable foxholes they are flown by helicopter into battle. Carrying all of the company's heavy equipment, Forrest meets up with Bubba, who fills him in on news from home. Forrest observes wryly the difference in the reality one sees and what one reads in Stars and Stripes, the supposedly uncensored official publication of the Department of Defense.

Chapter 6 opens with Forrest recalling that Sgt. Kranz often says that they are not in Vietnam to understand but to do as they are told. Kranz orders Forrest, fellow ammo bearer Doyle, and machine gunner Bones to a dangerous saddle between two ridges. Forrest describes the tactics of both sides and the collapse of Charlie Company. He captures the fear of being fired on by invisible enemies. When Bones is killed and Doyle wounded, Forrest carries the latter to safety through a hail of bullets and is received as though he had just scored a touchdown. Forrest tells the commander that he had to pee.

Forrest describes pleasant time off with Bubba, eating, playing harmonica, and planning to captain a shrimp boat together after they are discharged. This is not to be, however, because Kranz promotes Forrest to machine gunner and Bubba volunteers to be his carrier. When Bubba is shot in a rice paddy, Forrest ignores Kranz's orders to run in after him. Bubba dies saying, "Home," and for the rest of the novel, shrimping becomes Forrest's obsessive dream. During fierce fighting that includes a misplaced napalm drop, Forrest is shot in the ass (scatology reinforced and the place of the wound later becomes critical when Forrest meets the President). He lies mourning his only friend and missing Mama and Jenny. He asks Kranz to make sure that Bubba's remains are flown out properly.



Chapter 7-8

Chapter 7-8 Summary

Chapter 7 describes Forrest's two months in the hospital at Danang. Not badly wounded, he finds it pleasant, but hears others crying all night for their mamas. The cot next to Forrest is occupied by Lt. Dan, whose philosophy about how natural laws govern the universe changes Forrest's outlook on life. Forrest takes up ping-pong and soon beats everyone. Afternoons he enjoys walking around the market. Eating shrimp reminds him of Bubba, and Mr. Chi explains how to breed shrimp in a swamp, giving Forrest an idea for what to do after the Army. He cannot operate a boat without Bubba, but he can work nets.

When the "mucky-mucks" tell Forrest that he has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for extreme heroism and will fly to the U.S. to be decorated by the President, he refrains from saying that the excitement makes him need to pee. Forrest hurries to tell Dan, but finds that he has been evacuated for better treatment. Worried that Dan might have died, Forrest returns to his bed to read a letter from Mama, saying that the house has burnt down and she is going to the poor house, and a second, from Jenny, condemning the immoral war and inviting Forrest to visit her in Cambridge, MA. Lt. Col. Gooch is assigned to accompany Forrest to Washington, DC, to tell him how to behave. Before leaving, Forrest beats the Army ping-pong champion and receives a good-bye note from Dan, which urges him to "seize the moment" when opportunity appears. IQ cannot measure curiosity or heart.

Chapter 8 opens over the Pacific as Gooch tells Forrest about what to expect, being a hero, and the need for his help in drumming up enlistments. The large crowd in San Francisco, CA, consists of violent protesters. Reacting as in the rice paddies, Forrest runs and hides in a bathroom. When he emerges, Gooch orders him onto the next plane, where civilian passengers shun them.

Forrest is thrilled to see Washington from the air, but in a bar they are again accosted about killing babies. Forrest finds the White House "pretty." Lots of Army people congratulate him. The President, Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) is a big old Texan. They read "some kind of bullshit" about Forrest, who is starving, before the President pins on the medal, pumps Forrest's hand in front of the cameras, and hears his stomach growl. LBJ invites him alone inside for breakfast, finds Forrest not talkative, turns on "The Beverly Hillbillies" and remarks that Forrest resembles Jethro. After eating, LBJ gives Forrest a tour and asks about his wound. LBJ shows the scar from an operation and Forrest pulls down his pants to show his wound. Photographers are on hand.

Gooch is sure that the newspaper pictures will ruin his career but prepares a patriotic speech about recruitment too long for Forrest to learn. Gooch shortens it to a single line: "Join the Army and fight for your freedom," to be said after Gooch delivers the rest. They try it out at a small college, but when someone asks Forrest what he thinks of the war,



he replies "It is a bunch of shit." Gooch is soon reassigned to Iceland, while Forrest goes to Fort Dix, NJ, for the remaining two years of his Army hitch. This changes when Forrest wins a berth in the All-Army Ping-Pong Tournament at Walter Reed Hospital. There he sees Lt. Dan, whose encouragement helps Forrest come from behind to win. Over three days, they talk about many things. Forrest is transferred to the U.S. Ping-Pong Team set to compete in China, a great diplomatic mission.

Chapter 7-8 Analysis

Chapter 7 depicts Forrest's two months in the hospital at Danang. Not badly wounded, he finds it pleasant, but others cry all night for their mamas. Three factors prove crucial going forward. First, Forrest meets Lt. Dan, whose philosophy about how natural laws govern the universe change his outlook on life. Second, Forrest is introduced to ping-pong and soon beats everyone. Third, during afternoon walks around the market, he learns from Mr. Chi how to breed shrimp in a swamp. Realizing that he cannot operate a shrimp boat without Bubba, Forrest sees a new way to keep his promise.

When the "muckity-mucks" tell Forrest that he has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for extreme heroism and will be flown to the U.S. to be decorated by the President, he proudly refrains from telling them that the excitement makes him need to pee. When he hurries to tell Dan, he finds that Dan has been flown home for better treatment. Worried that they are keeping from him the news that Dan has died, Forrest returns to his bed to read a letter from Mama about the house burning down. A second letter, from Jenny, condemns the fascists who keep the immoral war going, and invites Forrest to visit her in Cambridge, MA, if he gets a chance. Lt. Col. Gooch is assigned to accompany Forrest to Washington, DC, as a guide to behavior. Before leaving, Forrest beats the Army ping-pong champion and receives a good-bye note from Dan. It urges him to "seize the moment" when opportunity appears. IQ cannot measure curiosity or heart. For the rest of the novel Forrest takes this to heart. The ping-pong victory helps Forrest and Dan be reunited in Washington and leads to his next overseas adventure.

Chapter 8 opens over the Pacific as Gooch tells Forrest about being a hero and helping to drum up enlistments. In San Francisco they encounter not a hero's welcome but vegetable-throwing protesters against the war. Gooch insists that this is an isolated incident, but civilians on the next flight shun them (Forrest sees through Gooch's facile lie about their smell) and in a Washington bar a woman demands to know how many babies he has killed today.

Forrest enjoys seeing Washington from the air and finds the White House pretty with lots of lawn. He seems oddly surprised that the President is a big old Texan, as they are into the sixth year of Johnson's presidency. Officials read "some kind of bullshit" about Forrest, who is starving, before the President pins on the medal, pumps his hand for the cameras and, hearing Forrest's stomach growl, takes him inside for breakfast. Not finding Forrest talkative, LBJ turns on "The Beverly Hillbillies" and remarks that Forrest resembles the bumbling character, Jethro. After eating, LBJ gives Forrest a tour and asks about his wound. LBJ shows the jagged scar from an operation and Forrest pulls



down his pants to show his. Photographers capture this and Forrest is hustled back to Gooch, who worries only that the published pictures will ruin his career. Forrest is amused that his eyes are blacked out as in porno pictures. That it does not tally with Forrest's sexual innocence is inconsequential. In a later visit to the White House, Forrest remembers LBJ's homey touches compared to the stridency of Richard M. Nixon.

Gooch recovers, prepares a long, patriotic speech about recruitment for Forrest to deliver and, when it proves more than Forrest can learn, delivers it himself and lets Forrest simply proclaim the ending: "Join the Army and fight for your freedom." They try it out at a small college. Unfortunately, someone asks Forrest impromptu what he thinks of the war, and he replies candidly, "It is a bunch of shit." Gooch hustles him out of town and is soon reassigned to Iceland, while Forrest goes to Fort Dix, NJ, to shovel coal in the Steam Heat Company for his remaining two years in the Army. This changes when Forrest wins a berth in the All-Army Ping-Pong Tournament held at Walter Reed Hospital. There he sees Lt. Dan, whose encouragement helps him come from behind to win. Over three days, they talk about many things. When Dan mentions Einstein's theory of relativity, Forrest writes out the whole formula, amazing him. Forrest is transferred to the U.S. Ping-Pong Team set to compete in China, a great diplomatic mission.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

Chapter 9 finds Forrest in Peking, coached by Mr. Wilkins about bowing, adjusting himself in public, and table manners. By day, Forrest does well in matches and by night is entertained. A trip to the Peking Duck Restaurant goes awry and Forrest tours the city and is arrested as a spy. Wilkins orders him to wear a helium balloon and an identifying note, which makes Forrest feel like a fool. On a bus trip, Forrest rescues Chairman Mao from drowning but is criticized by Wilkins for saving America's greatest enemy. Wilkins reverses himself when Forrest is hailed as a hero by the Chinese, who suggest restoring diplomatic relations after decades of estrangement. They honor Forrest with a parade and at lunch Forrest sits beside Mao, to whom he declares the Vietnam war "a bunch of shit." Photographers capture Mao's delighted reaction. When Wilkins tells him that by Chinese custom Mao is now responsible to him forever, Forrest cuts the biggest fart of his life, making Wilkins gag and attracting attention. Forrest is returned to Fort Dix for early discharge. He knows that he should go home and care for Mama, wants to begin shrimping, and yearns to see Jenny. He buys a ticket to Boston.

In Chapter 10 Forrest reaches Cambridge, MA, with no address for Jenny, other than the Hodaddy Club, where her letter says that the band plays. The place fills with college geeks, who cheer when Jenny makes her dramatic entrance. Forrest does not recognize her and during a break cannot reach her. He ends up behind the club, playing his harmonica. Jenny hears it, throws herself into Forrest's arms, and pours out her story of wandering, which ends with "The Cracked Eggs" and living with Rudolph, a Harvard philosophy student. Forrest is disappointed but accepts her offer to stay with them. Jenny arranges for Forrest to join the band, introduces him to Dr. Quackenbush, an ex-lover, who invites Forrest to audit a new course, "Role of the Idiot in World Literature." When Rudolph leaves, Jenny seduces Forrest and, discovering him to be a fine lover, asks where he has been all her life. "Aroun," he answers. Sleeping in the same bed thereafter, Forrest is the "happiest feller in the world."

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Chapter 9 finds Forrest in Peking, being coached by Mr. Wilkins, a "turd" who is always on his case about bowing, not adjusting himself in public, and table manners. Forrest finds chopsticks impossible and his clothes are, therefore, constantly stained. A trip to the Peking Duck Restaurant goes awry and Forrest gets a tour of the dreary city and while walking back to the hotel, lost, he is arrested as a spy. Wilkins orders him to wear a big helium balloon at all times and a note saying who he is and where he is staying. It makes Forrest feel like a fool.

On a bus trip, Forrest plays a central role in an unorthodox version of a historical event. Chairman Mao once swims for photographers in the Yangtze River to show his virility far



into old age. In this account, Forrest sees Mao drowning and, unlike Mao's retinue, takes action, jumping in and finding him under water. Forrest is treated as a hero by the Chinese but criticized by Wilkins for saving the U.S.'s greatest enemy. Forrest insists that he is merely doing the right thing. This attitude is reiterated by Nixon later in the novel. Wilkins has to reverse himself when the Chinese hail Forrest's heroism and suggest restoring diplomatic relations. They honor Forrest with a parade in Kumingtan—a clever mistake, as this refers to Mao's bitter enemies, the Nationalists on Taiwan. At lunch, Forrest sits beside Mao, to whom he declares the Vietnam war "a bunch of shit." Photographers capture Mao's delighted reaction.

Later, when Forrest gives a boy on the street a ping-pong ball, newspapers label the picture of it being playfully bounced off his head as "Young Chinese Displays His Hatred of American Capitalists." Forrest often finds newspapers distort his fame and/or demean his mental abilities. When Wilkins tells him that by Chinese custom Mao is now responsible for him forever, Forrest cuts the biggest fart of his life, making Wilkins gag and attracting unwanted attention. It seems that this time the flatulence is intentional. The next time it happens, in Los Angeles, it seems to take Forrest by surprise. Forrest is returned to Fort Dix for early separation from the Army. He knows that he should go home and care for Mama but also wants to begin shrimping and yearns to see Jenny. He buys a ticket to Boston.

Chapter 10 finds Forrest waiting for Jenny at the only address he has for her, the Hodaddy Club. He waits hours for her and gets comments on his uniform from the college clientèle. Forrest does not recognize Jenny and cannot get through to her between sets. He ends up sitting behind the club, where he begins playing his harmonica. Jenny hears him, throws herself into Forrest's arms, pours out her story of wandering, which ends with "The Cracked Eggs" band and living with Rudolph, a Harvard philosophy student. Forrest is, of course, disappointed that Jenny is not free, but accepts her offer to stay with them. Jenny also arranges for Forrest to join the band, introduces him to Dr. Quackenbush, an ex-lover, who invites Forrest to audit his new course, "Role of the Idiot in World Literature." Forrest summarizes the opening lecture, providing a brief history of village idiots, court jesters, and other objects of laughter. Writers depict them as a "device of double entendre," to discover the deeper meaning of foolishness. When Quackenbush suggests that they stage *King Lear*, Forrest wonders why he is there. Finally, when Rudolph leaves, Jenny seduces Forrest and, discovering him to be a fine lover, asks where he has been all her life. "Aroun," he answers. Forrest is still reticent to talk about sex—and shocked when Jenny strips and asks him straight-out to fuck her—but he concludes that sleeping in the same bed with Jenny makes him the "happiest feller in the world."

Note while reading the chapter how, while playing harmonica in the alley, Forrest muses about the advancement of his playing, mentioning "chromatic stop" and runs on C major. Considering that he is largely self-taught on the harmonica, whence comes the vocabulary, even for an idiot savant? Quackenbush's course suggests why in Chapter 1 Forrest had mentioned his readings on this topic. Whether he has followed through and read the books is never mentioned; he may simply recall the substance of Quackenbush's opening lecture. Finally, note that Jenny's radical reinvention of herself

is not unusual in the context of the late 1960s, particularly among artists. One of her first tasks with Forrest is to get him out of uniform and into good second-hand clothes.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

Chapter 11 opens with Forrest summarizing the makeshift staging of the King Lear/Tom O'Bedlam scene in Shakespeare's King Lear and commenting on the dialog. All stops when Forrest's torch sets fire to the set. Quackenbush screams that he will get revenge. Cape aflame, Forrest runs home to Jenny. The Cracked Eggs become popular and buy a tour bus. The drummer, Mose, introduces Forrest to marijuana and Forrest's playing—and sex—become phenomenal; soon he is smoking daily, until Jenny suggests he slow down. Forrest resists, because dope gets rid of all his worries. During a gig in Provincetown, Jenny walks in on two girls seducing Forrest, throws him out and flees.

Seeing Jenny on television, protesting the war, Forrest heads to Washington, finds her, newly released from jail, promises no more dope or playing with bands and is taken back. Hearing about Forrest's Medal of Honor, the Vietnam veterans participating in the demonstration enlist him as their spokesman. Jenny gets him into uniform and wraps him in chains. At the Capitol, fellow GI's in uniform throw their medals on the steps. An announcement is made when Forrest throws his, so hard—thinking of Bubba and Dan—that it knocks out someone on the portico. Police charge in using tear gas and billy sticks and arrest Forrest for assault on the Clerk of the U.S. Senate and for resisting arrest. The judge lectures him before committing him to 30 days of psychiatric observation at St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

Chapter 12 finds Forrest at St. Elizabeth's, frustrating his psychiatrist, Dr. Walton, with ink blot tests. Forrest is grateful that in the physical examination he does not have to bend over. Fellow patients remind him of nut school. Days later, Walton introduces Drs. Duke and Earl from the National Institute of Mental Health. Surprised at Forrest's math skills, they administer additional tests before declaring him a phenomenon. His brain is like a computer. They send him to Houston, TX, to the Aeronautics and Space Center for a special mission that might help him avoid jail for assault.

NASA tests Forrest every possible way and asks him to go on the first mission to Mars. His companions are Maj. Janet Fritch, a space rookie, and a docile female orangutan named Sue, a veteran of three flights. Training is intense, particularly as Forrest's brain is turned into a backup for the backup computer. Letters to Jenny come back "Addressee not Known." When the day comes, Forrest is scared to death and newspaper headlines are unkind about his mental faculties. The first attempt at launching is postponed and during a second, an angry male orangutan is mistakenly strapped in place of Sue. Fritch tries to warn ground control just as the rocket begins to rise.



Chapters 11-12 Analysis

In Chapter 11 Forrest summarizes Quackenbush's makeshift staging of the scene in which King Lear and Tom O'Bedlam interact and comments intelligently on the dialog. Playing the fiend Flibbertigibbet, Forrest is too tall for the set and his torch accidentally sets the hut on fire. The ensuing panic is comically told, as Forrest grabs the girl playing the fool and jumps out the window with her. Quackenbush screams that he will get revenge on Forrest. Cape aflame, Forrest runs home to Jenny. That is the end of Forrest's career at Harvard. Later in the novel, he will knowingly exaggerate his time at the august university and the extent of his experience on the stage.

The focus shifts to the Cracked Eggs, as they become popular and buy a tour bus. Drummer Mose introduces Forrest to marijuana and his playing is phenomenal; Forrest agrees with Mose that it also does a lot to enhance sex. Soon Forrest is smoking daily, until Jenny suggests that he slow down. Forrest resists, because it gets rid of all his worries, which have not seemed excessive. Jenny insists on a vacation after their upcoming gig in Provincetown. There, backstage, Jenny walks in on two groupies seducing Forrest and throws him out without a hearing. Lonely, Forrest considers his limited options. Fortunately, he sees Jenny on television news, protesting the war in Washington and heads into the building chaos.

Learning that Jenny has been released from jail, where her long hair is shaved off for fear of lice, Forrest offers her his Army watch cap, promises to smoke no more dope and play in no more bands, which only lead to temptation. He is taken back. Hearing about Forrest's Congressional Medal of Honor, the Vietnam veterans participating in the demonstration enlist him as their symbol. Jenny gets him back into uniform and wraps him in symbolic chains. At the Capitol, fellow GI's in uniform cast their medals on the steps. An announcement is made when Forrest steps forward. Thinking of Bubba and Dan's sacrifices, he throws his so hard that it knocks out someone standing on the portico. It is Forrest's bad luck that the man is the Clerk of the U.S. Senate. Police react brutally with tear gas and billy sticks and arrest Forrest for assault and resisting arrest. The latter seems likely a trumped up charge, given Forrest's personality. The judge piously lectures him before committing him to 30 days of psychiatric observation and a bus takes him to St. Elizabeth's Hospital, as he has long feared, thanks to Mama, to be "put away."

Chapter 12 characterizes the hospital by rooming Forrest with Fred, who has been there a year, suffering multiple personalities, and by the remark that fellow patients remind Forrest of "nut school." The psychiatrist, Dr. Walton, gets frustrated when Forrest sees in the ink blot test only ink blots and openly admires his genitalia after ordering him to undress for a physical examination. Miss French and Jenny earlier had been pleasantly surprised, but Forrest appears not to understand. He is grateful that Walton does not make him bend over.

Days later, Walton introduces Drs. Duke and Earl ("Duke of Earl" being a song popular early in the 1960s) from the National Institute of Mental Health. Surprised at Forrest's



math skills, they administer additional tests before declaring him a phenomenon with a brain like a computer, and send him to Houston, TX, to the Aeronautics and Space Center for a special mission. Duke suggests that cooperating with NASA might help Forrest avoid jail for assault, and since Forrest wants to find Jenny, he will do anything to get free. NASA tests him in every possible way and asks him to go on the first manned mission to Mars. His companions are introduced: Maj. Janet Fritch, a space rookie, and a placid female orangutan named Sue, a veteran of three flights. When launch day comes, Forrest is scared to death and newspaper headlines cruelly mock him. Last-minute preparations are chaotic, quite unlike NASA's meticulous procedures. The first attempt is scrubbed and immediately restored, but an angry male orangutan is mistakenly strapped into the spacecraft. Fritch tries to warn ground control just as the rocket begins to rise.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

In Chapter 13, the crush of acceleration reminds Forrest of his daddy's death. Once weightless, Fritch lets them unbuckle and orders Forrest to fetch bananas to placate the ape while she radios home. She is told not to let the mistake go public. When not asleep, Fritch bitches about one thing or another, while Sue demands attention but is calmed by the harmonica. The ape lusts after Fritch and finally catches her. Feeling sorry for Sue being strapped in for two days with no bathroom break, Forrest lets him pee in a bottle, which Sue then throws at Fritch before ripping up the control panel. The astronauts are tossed like corks and the capsule begins an emergency reentry in the South Pacific. Sue activates the parachute, saving their lives. Fritch radios that they are in Borneo (actually New Guinea), surrounded by natives in grass skirts and flayed hair. It is a World War II Cargo Cult, waiting for the god to return. The astronauts worry that they are cannibals.

In Chapter 14, the fierce, scowling natives knock, but the astronauts pretend not to be there. Eventually Sue stares down the biggest warrior, causing him and others to faint. Sue revives this leader, who learns English during the war at Yale. His American name is Sam. Fritch reacts like a POW, giving name, rank, and serial number, but Forrest enters a conversation about the University of Alabama and Harvard, knowing that he is stretching the truth. They are assigned to a grass hut and guarded, but given no food, and worry about being the tribe's next meal. Drums and chanting sound all night, which in the morning Sam explains is the frustrated tribe demanding to cook the visitors. Sam has dissuaded them. Fritch grows belligerent, but Sam contends that the surrounding pygmies—head-hunters—would kill them outright if they escape his people. Sam suggests that they sacrifice their ape as a diplomatic gesture and help the natives achieve a stable cotton industry.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

In Chapter 13, the crush of acceleration reminds Forrest of his daddy's death beneath a ton of bananas. Once in orbit, Fritch lets them unbuckle and orders Forrest to fetch bananas to placate the ape. NASA orders her not to let the mistake go public. Forrest finds life without gravity pleasant but daydreams of what to do after he returns. When she is not asleep, Fritch bitches about one thing or another. The ape demands attention but calms down to the sound of the harmonica, which makes headlines when televised. Forrest seems confused about how secret the mission is, describing them on live television feeds and also observing silence. The orangutan, still called Sue, lusts after Fritch and finally catches her. Forrest believes that Sue needs to pee after being strapped in for two days and provides a bottle (laughably low-tech for NASA). Finishing, Sue throws it, smashing the glass and sending yellow globs around the cabin. A big one hits Fritch in the face, allowing Sue to rip up the control panel. All three are tossed like



corks and the capsule careens downward toward the South Pacific. Sue pulls the lever that releases the parachute and saves their lives. Fritch radios that they are in Borneo—but then discovers it is New Guinea, surrounded by natives in grass skirts and flayed hair. It is World War II's Cargo Cult, waiting for the god to return. The astronauts worry, rightfully, about cannibals. This obscure reference is somewhat explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 14 continues the New Guinea adventure, with the astronauts looking out at fierce, scowling natives. Fritch's reaction to knocking is ludicrous: pretending that no one is home. Sue again takes initiative, glaring out, making the native faint or flee. Sue revives the man with another convenient bottle of urine and they all grow submissive. Forrest remarks that it reminds him of the "coons" in the Nebraska game, but with hair like Mad Tom in King Lear. The leader speaks English, having been recruited by the Office of Strategic Services during the war as a guerrilla fighter and trained at Yale. His American name is Sam. Fritch reacts stiffly as a POW: name, rank, and serial number, but Forrest enters a conversation about the University of Alabama and Harvard, knowing that he is stretching the truth. Assigned to a grass hut and guarded, but given no food, the astronauts worry about being the tribe's meal. Drums and chanting continue all night, and when Forrest protests in the morning, he learns that the tribe has been waiting since 1945 for presents to resume parachuting from the sky and, disappointed, wants indeed to cook the visitors. Sam has for now dissuaded them. When Fritch demands action, Sam reveals that the surrounding pygmies—head-hunters—would kill them if they left. Sam suggests that they sacrifice Sue as a diplomatic gesture and, as a non-sequitur, that they help achieve a stable cotton industry.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

Chapter 15 sees the astronauts planting acres of cotton for weeks. Sue's life is spared to help with the labor. Sam spends evenings teaching Forrest to play chess and gets angry when Forrest regularly wins. Forrest realizes that if he loses, Sam will let them be eaten. Fritch gets raped in the bushes but seems not to mind and moves in with Grurck. Over the years, Forrest and Sue learn to communicate and Sue tells his sad story of being in a carnival show with Doris, a lovely orangutan. He misses Doris as Forrest misses Jenny.

The cotton harvest is immense and Sam prepares for an auction. Forrest is close to losing his first game to Sam when he uses having to pee as an excuse for stepping away. He gathers Fritch, Grurck, and Sam to run, but Sam heads them off. Reluctantly, he orders them to the cauldron to feed the hungry. Before Sue is can be put in, the pygmies attack, release the fugitives, and prepare to boil Sam and his people. Resigned to his fate, Sam advises Forrest to play harmonica for the pygmies, who are "crazy about American music." Sam goes in with a splash and his followers chant "boola-boola."

In Chapter 16 the fugitives are taken to the pygmies' village and Forrest tells their king that they are American musicians. A harmonica song sets the king dancing. Forrest claims that Sue plays spears and Fritch knives. This puzzles the king, but he orders them provided. The fugitives flee again into the jungle but are cut off by a river. From the far shore come rifle shots, which drive the pygmies back. It is a NASA rescue squad, apologetic about taking four years, but figuring that the astronauts can make money selling their story. Fritch decides to stay with Grurck in the jungle, and Sue also disappears. Forrest considers staying, but has "other weenies to roast." He gets a big welcome in Washington and another visit to the White House, and meets a different President, unsure, delusional, and neurotic. Forrest is released from government service with no criminal record—and no money.

Chapters 15-16 Analysis

Chapter 15 shows how the astronauts spend the next four years, planting acres of cotton. Sue's life is spared to help with the labor. Sam, Yale's chess champion for the four years he spends there, introduces Forrest to the game and gets angry when Forrest soon is regularly winning. Forrest realizes that Sam is keeping them alive only in order to vindicate himself. Fritch gets raped in the bushes but seems not to mind and moves in with Grurck. Over the years, Forrest and Sue learn to communicate by expressions and gestures well enough for Sue to tell his sad story of exploitation and the loss of Doris, his lovely orangutan mate. He misses Doris as Forrest misses Jenny.



The cotton harvest is immense and Sam prepares to auction it. Forrest is about to lose his first chess game but uses having to pee as an excuse to step away. He gathers Fritch, Grurck, and Sam to flee, but they are surrounded. Sam feels bad about sending them to the cauldron to feed the hungry. They are spared when the pygmies attack and Sam and his tribe are readied for the cauldron—even though the pygmies find cannibalism repelent. Resigned to his fate, Sam advises Forrest to play harmonica for the pygmies, who are "crazy about American music." When Sam goes in with a splash, his doomed followers chant "boola-boola," the Yale fight song. The harmonica ploy proves immediately useful, but Sam's unorthodox chess moves also prove critical later in the novel when Forrest turns professional.

Chapter 16 finds Forrest fed up, being not freed but strung from a pole like a wild pig and carried to the pygmies' village. When the king asks why he is living with "awful cannibals," Forrest tries the American musicians gambit. A harmonica song sets the king dancing. Forrest then claims ludicrously that Sue plays the spears and Fritch the knives. While this puzzles the king, he nevertheless orders the "instruments" provided. The fugitives make it only as far as the river, but from the far side come rifle shots, which drive the pygmies back. Forrest alludes to "Ramar of the Jungle," an early-1950s television series. It is a NASA rescue squad, apologetic about taking four years, but figuring that the astronauts can make money selling their story. Fritch elects to stay with Grurck in the jungle, and Sue also disappears. Forrest considers staying but has "other weenies to roast."

Forrest gets a big welcome in Washington and another visit to the White House, where he meets a different President, unsure, delusional, and neurotic. The depiction is far more savage, but Forrest claims to like the man. He simply observes through innocent eyes and lets Nixon bring himself down. Much of the chapter is farcical. Among the pratfalls used are the Vice President having to pee—a commentary on his intelligence, according to the novel's motif—the President avoiding television, particularly "To Tell the Truth," getting upset over the word "TAPES," and trying to sell wrist watches as Forrest leaves. Seeing people outside the White House wearing rubber Nixon masks, Forrest figures that this is a very popular president.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

In Chapter 17 Forrest learns that Mama has run off with "some protestant." He grabs a plastic garbage bag to shelter himself from the pouring rain, only to find a homeless person beneath it, warming himself on a grate. Learning that Forrest is new in town, the man gives him a new bag and shares space. It is a badly-aged Lt. Dan. They exchange stories, with Dan waiting to die and declaring "natural laws" and the "scheme of things" to be "philosophic bullshit." When Forrest says he plans on finding Jenny, wherever she is, Dan volunteers to help. Forrest phones Mose, learns of the band's break-up, and gets a Chicago number for Jenny. From an ex-lover there, he learns that Jenny has moved to Indianapolis to work at Temperer Tire Co. Forrest and Dan take the bus there and find Jenny on her lunch break.

In Chapter 18 Jenny sends Forrest and Dan to a tavern while she finishes work, and Dan gives Forrest money to arm-wrestle one of the patrons. This turns into a \$150-\$200 a week livelihood. Jenny tells how her life has not been a bowl of cherries, being arrested at demonstrations, living in a filthy Chicago commune, and missing Forrest, who supposedly dies on the NASA mission. The three settle into living together.

One day, Mike, a man in a white suit, Hawaiian shirt, and gold necklaces, introduces himself and suggests that Forrest become a professional "rassler," with an earning potential of \$250,000 a year. Wondering what the catch is and wanting to be a shrimper, Forrest agrees without talking to Jenny. Dan becomes his manager. They take the bus every day to a downtown gym, where Forrest learns impressive fake moves that hurt no one. When Forrest is unable to learn some moves and admits that he is an idiot, Mike gives him a stage name and costume: "The Dunce." Seeing him in diapers and a dunce cap, Jenny is shocked, but Dan assures her that all of the costumes are humiliating. Forrest's first match is in Muncie, IN, against "The Turd."

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

Released from government service with no criminal record and no money, Forrest in Chapter 17 phones the Roman Catholic Little Sisters of the Poor in Mobile and learns that Mama has run off with "some protestant." Religion has played virtually no role in the novel and this is one of only two places in which its intolerance comes to the fore.

When Forrest grabs from the gutter a plastic garbage bag to shelter himself from the pouring rain, finds beneath it a homeless person, warming himself on a grate and, furthermore, learns that it is a badly-aged Lt. Dan. They exchange stories, with Dan just waiting to die and reversing himself on "natural laws" and the "scheme of things"; they are just "philosophic bullshit." When Forrest says that he plans on finding Jenny, wherever she is, Dan volunteers to help. They spend the night in a mission flophouse,



Dan refusing to endure a sermon in exchange for free supper. He hates "Bible-thumpers." Forrest phones Mose, learns of the band's break-up, and gets a Chicago number for Jenny. From an ex-lover there, he learns that Jenny is Indianapolis, and Forrest Dan take the bus there. As in many places, the police take them for derelicts and order them to move on or be arrested. They find Jenny during her lunch break.

In Chapter 18 Jenny sends Forrest and Dan to a tavern while she finishes work. Dan makes a bittersweet comparison of the "bouquet" of Ripple vs. Red Dagger, two brands of cheap wine intended only for getting drunk. Dan gives Forrest money to arm wrestle one of the patrons and, when he wins, believes that they have found a way to earn a livelihood. Jenny takes them to her little apartment and they catch up. When Dan has to pee, Jenny asks if he can manage on his own. Forrest does not say it out loud, but considers that a veteran having to pee in his hat and dump it into the toilet says it all about that war.

The three settle into living together. Forrest and Dan earn \$150-\$200 a week arm wrestling while Jenny retreads tires. One day, Mike introduces himself and suggests that Forrest become instead a professional "rassler," and talks of how top names like The Masked Marvel, The Incredible Hulk, Gorgeous George, and Filthy McSwine earn \$250,000 a year. Wondering what the catch is and wanting to be a shrimper, Forrest agrees without talking to Jenny. Dan becomes his enthusiastic manager. They take the bus every day to a downtown gymnasium, where Forrest learns the dramatic fake moves that the crowds love and that, theoretically, hurt no one. Jenny worries. When Forrest is unable to learn some moves and admits to being an idiot, Mike gives him his stage name and costume: "The Dunce." Seeing him in diaper and dunce cap, Jenny is shocked, but Dan assures her that all the costumes are humiliating. His first match is in Muncie, IN, fighting "The Turd."



Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary

In Chapter 19 Mike explains that because The Turd has seniority, Forrest must lose the match and remember that it is just a show. The Turd is playing to the crowd when Forrest enters the ring. Forrest sidesteps a charge, sending The Turd into the crowd. He returns angry, attacking Forrest for real with a folding chair and slamming his head into the floor. Dan screams at the referee but Mike restrains him. Between rounds, Mike reminds Forrest that he gets \$500 to lose. Jenny looks upset and embarrassed. The Turd hurts him again, but Forrest allows himself to be pinned. Jenny and Dan weep over him and he feels humiliated. During the ride home, Jenny wants Forrest to quit, but Mike offers a raise and a guaranteed win. The crowds love Forrest through a series of victories. He receives fan mail and dunce caps are sold as souvenirs. When their savings reach \$5,000, Jenny urges them to start their shrimp business in Bayou La Batre, but Forrest feels like he is accomplishing something. When he wins the Eastern Division championship belt, Jenny tells him that wrestling has gone too far, his "fans" are screwballs, and he is a weekly television spectacle. They have \$10,000 and need no more. She wants quiet respectability—and perhaps children. She understands fame from her music days, but it got her nowhere. Forrest remains stubborn.

In Chapter 20 Mike tells Forrest that he must lose to The Professor, because fans like underdogs. Forrest objects, even for \$2,000, but takes the deal. At the end of her rope, Jenny asks Forrest not to do it, and Dan suggests that Forrest double-cross Mike and beat The Professor, and bets all \$10,000 against the odds. Jenny refuses to attend or take part in dishonesty. On the ride, Forrest is ashamed to cheat Mike, who has treated him well. The Professor gouges Forrest's eye and puts ants in his diaper in the first round, but Forrest throws him over the ropes in the second, leaving himself dizzy from performing the "Airplane Spin." The Professor ties Forrest up like a mummy, knocks him out with a book, and pins him. Mike is elated, but Forrest vows never to wrestle again and turns down the \$2,000. Dan accepts it, since they have nothing left. They find that Jenny has cleared out, leaving a farewell note that talks about the happiness of being with Forrest but needing to settle down. Forrest has changed. She begs him not to find her again. Forrest feels like an idiot for the first time in his life.

Chapters 19-20 Analysis

Chapter 19 depicts in vivid detail the "rasslin" game and its colorful actors. It opens with Mike explaining that because The Turd has seniority, Forrest must lose the match—and must remember that this is a show. Forrest describes the opening bout, The Animal vs. The Vegetable, how The Turd plays to the crowd as Forrest reaches the ring, and how by sidestepping a charge Forrest angers the Turd and suffers real pain in return. Jenny looks upset and embarrassed and, when Forrest allows himself to be pinned, both Jenny and Dan weep over him. Forrest feels humiliated. During the ride home, Jenny



wants Forrest to quit, but Mike offers a raise and a guaranteed win. The costume must remain. Conflict is building.

Forrest next beats The Human Fly and becomes a crowd favorite. Next comes The Fairy and a series of others. Forrest begins receiving fan mail and dunce caps are sold as souvenirs. Soon they have saved \$5,000 to start a shrimp business and Jenny urges them to go, but Forrest is not quite ready. He feels like he is accomplishing something for the first time since the Orange Bowl (or maybe China). When he wins the Eastern Division championship belt, Jenny tells him that rassing has gone too far. His "fans" are just screwballs and he is a weekly television spectacle. With \$10,000 saved, they need no more money, and Jenny wants quiet respectability—and perhaps children. She understands fame from her music days, but it got her nowhere. As he had over marijuana use, Forrest remains stubborn and will pay the price.

In Chapter 20 Mike tells Forrest that he must lose to The Professor to keep up his popularity, because fans like underdogs. Forrest objects, even for \$2,000, but takes the deal. At the end of her rope, Jenny begs Forrest not to do it. Dan agrees that it is time to go shrimping and suggests that Forrest beat The Professor so they can win big by betting their whole \$10,000 against two-to-one odds. Forrest agrees, although he is ashamed to cheat Mike, who has treated him well. Jenny refuses to take part in the dishonesty. Forrest describes the match in particular detail, including how The Professor comes from behind and wins. Mike is elated, but Forrest vows never to wrestle again and turns down the \$2,000 purse. Dan accepts it, since they have nothing left. Back at the apartment, they find that Jenny has cleared out, leaving a touching farewell note loving Forrest but needing to settle down. She begs him not to find her again. Notably, Forrest feels like an idiot for the first time in his life.



Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary

In Chapter 21, Dan feels guilty about pushing Forrest to wrestle and goes his own way as Forrest takes the bus to Mobile, feeling miserable. During a change-over in Nashville, Forrest sees a sign for the Grandmaster's Invitational Chess Tournament. Watching a grumpy-looking old man in the lobby play chess with himself, Forrest points out a tactical mistake. The man calls the comment shrewd and invites him to finish the game. Forrest overcomes an impossible position to win. The man, Mr. Tribble, an 80-year-old former grand master, takes Forrest to dinner and suggests that he enter the tournament and earn a lot of money. When Forrest is arrested for loitering, Tribble bails him out, buys him breakfast, and convinces him to compete in Los Angeles for a \$10,000 prize. They become partners. Tribble coaches Forrest but finds that he knows every move, so they go site-seeing. At a movie studio, they meet a Mr. Felder, who wants Forrest to test for a movie.

In Chapter 22 Forrest beats a variety of first-round opponents to reach the finals, and goes to the studio on a day off, where he is made up to play *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* opposite his idol, sexy but obnoxious Raquel Welch. Her dress is torn off during one take, and while they hide in the jungle, Sue, an extra on a Tarzan film, swings by on a vine. Sue helps Welch cover up with banana leaves and leads them onto the Santa Monica Freeway. Welch grows indignant over being "butt neckid" but turns up her nose at several clothing stores. Finally finding something in Giani's, she realizes that she has no means of paying and a security detective arrests them.

Chapters 21-22 Analysis

In Chapter 21, Dan feels guilty about pushing Forrest and goes his own way. Blaming his own big head and feeling miserable, Forrest catches the bus to Mobile. During a change-over in Nashville, he sees a sign for the Grandmaster's Invitational Chess Tournament but does not want to waste \$5 on the entry fee. Watching a grumpy-looking old man in the lobby play by himself, Forrest points out a tactical mistake. The man calls this shrewd and invites him to finish the game. Kindly Mr. Tribble, an 80-year-old former grand master, helps Forrest change sports but still be chasing a big-money prize—\$10,000—at a tournament in Los Angeles. Finding that Forrest knows every move in the book, the pair goes site-seeing and at a movie studio meet a Mr. Felder, who wants Forrest to test for a movie.

In Chapter 22 Forrest beats a variety of opponents in short order and on the day off before the finals, returns to the studio. In a flurry of action that leaves him disoriented, Forrest is made up to play *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, amazingly with his idol Raquel Welch, whom he has longed to meet. She turns out to be a typical self-absorbed star and in a rubber mask Forrest has even more difficulty than normal convincing her



that he is not staring at her breasts. Reviving the "I got to pee" motif, Forrest has no choice but to pee in the lagoon. Welch smells it and accuses him and Forrest, for the first time in his life, tells a lie.

During the next take, Welch's dress is torn off, and while they hide in the jungle, Sue, an extra on a Tarzan film, swings up on a vine. He helps Welch cover up with banana leaves and leads them through a fence to safety—onto the berm of the busy Santa Monica Freeway. The trio walks to Hollywood. Welch is indignant over being "butt neckid" but turns up her nose at several clothing stores. Finally finding something in Giani's, she realizes that she has no means of paying. In a touch of irony, having flared at Forrest for staring at her world-famous breasts, Welch now flashes them to the salesman as proof of her identity, but he says that that happens every day here. A security detective arrests them.

As he has several times, Winston Groom deals lightly with the facts. There is a film *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, and Raquel Welch does play in a science fiction thriller, making the most of her breasts, but she does not appear in this film. Sue's appearance is a true *deus ex machina* in the ancient Greek tradition, a vine substituting for the rescuing god's chariot.



Chapters 23-24

Chapters 23-24 Summary

In Chapter 23 two carloads of police respond to Giani's to take Forrest, Sue, and Welch to jail. Tribble bails out Forrest and Sue, while Felder with a "platoon of lawyers" deals with the hysterical star. Forrest figures that his movie career is over. In a rented tuxedo, Forrest faces "Honest Ivan" Petrokivitch, using moves that are not "in the book," but picked up from Big Sam. As the tension grows, Forrest cuts "a humongus baked-bean fart," and Ivan leaves his piece where Forrest needs it in order to win. When Ivan protests, Tribble pleads Forrest's innocence of doing anything intentional to distract or offend. Forrest is not disqualified but warned to behave. Suddenly, Sue swings in on a chandelier, drops on the board, and the hotel goes into panic. Tribble suggests that they leave swiftly and part company. Tribble gives Forrest \$5,000 to get them to Alabama and start a venture. He asks to stay in touch. Forrest wishes that he were not "such a loony tune."

In Chapter 24, Forrest and Sue reach Mobile. Visiting the Little Sisters of the Poor home, Forrest is told to ask around in the park, where someone recalls Mama working for a dry cleaner. Mama falls into Forrest's arms, crying, just like he remembers her, but is fired when a pair of pants she forgets about in her excitement catches fire. Forrest picks the owner up and puts him into an oversize laundry machine set on "spin," and comforts Mama by claiming to have a plan. Forrest and Sue take the bus to Bayou La Batre, find Bubba's parents, and with the daddy's help fix up the late Tom LeFarge's property, laying mesh nets, seeding the pond with tiny shrimp, and feeding them with cottonseed meal. They go on to set up three more ponds. Forrest hopes that his honest work will win Jenny back.

Chapters 23-24 Analysis

In Chapter 23 two carloads of police respond to Giani's and after some standard police tough-guy dialog, filtered through Forrest's dialect, take Forrest, Sue, and Welch off to jail. Tribble bails out Forrest and Sue, while Felder with a "platoon of lawyers" deals with the hysterical star. She screams that Forrest's movie career is over, as he had pretty much assumed on his own. The odd interlude serves to reunite Forrest and Sue, to provide Forrest a sidekick for the rest of the novel in lieu of Dan. By reminding the reader of how Forrest mastered chess over for years in New Guinea, it also sets up the final chess match. Sue is smuggled into the hotel and locked in their room.

In a rented tuxedo, Forrest faces "Honest Ivan" Petrokivitch, using moves that are not "in the book," but rather picked up from Big Sam. A great deal of chess jargon is used, with references to classic gambits. Non-fans can simply gloss this over. Forrest has names for Big Sam's moves in the same style, which add humor. As the tension grows, Forrest cuts "a humongus baked-bean fart," which stuns Ivan into leaving his piece



precisely where Forrest needs it in order to win. Recall Forrest's intentional flatulence responding to Gooch. When Ivan protests, Tribble pleads Forrest's innocence of doing anything intentional to distract or offend. The official rules are debated at some length and Forrest is not disqualified but warned to behave. Suddenly, Sue swings in on a chandelier—a substitute vine—drops on the chessboard, scattering the pieces, and the hotel goes into panic. Tribble suggests that they leave town swiftly and part company. Tribble gives Forrest about \$5,000 to get them to Alabama and started in some venture. He asks to stay in touch. Forrest wishes that he were not "such a loony tune."

In Chapter 24, Forrest and Sue reach Mobile. Next morning, they visit the Little Sisters of the Poor home, passing the vacant lot where the Gump house had stood. The head sister can only suggest that Forrest ask around in the park. They head to a dry cleaner where one woman hears that Mama is working. She falls into Forrest's arms, crying, just as he remembers her. She is fired for burning a pair of pants in her excitement to get to Forrest, who steps in, picks the owner up, and puts him into an oversize laundry machine set on "spin." Forrest comforts Mama by claiming to have a plan. Forrest and Sue take the bus to Bayou La Batre, find Bubba's parents, and with the daddy's help fix up a dilapidated property, lay mesh nets, seed the pond with tiny shrimp, and feed them cottonseed meal. They go on to set up three more ponds. Forrest hopes that his honest work will win Jenny back.



Chapters 25-26

Chapters 25-26 Summary

In Chapter 25, Forrest and Sue's first shrimp harvest earns \$865, and over the next two weeks they make \$9,700.25. Bubba's daddy is proud of them and in Mobile Mama is also—for doing so well while being retarded. Forrest tells her about expansion plans and asks her to move down and be their accountant. Celebrating with a big meal and a drink, Forrest hears Curtis' crude voice. Curtis tells his and The Snake's sad stories, and Forrest invites Curtis to work for him. They earn \$30,000 the next year and keep expanding. Mama quits crying. Longing for Jenny, Forrest takes the bus to Mobile to look up her mother and ask her whereabouts. Mrs. Curran believes that she and her husband are in North Carolina. Forrest wishes Jenny good luck but is as heart-sick as when Bubba is killed. He realizes that Jenny has done what she has to do and would have been foolish to marry a real idiot. Still, he had hoped to be with her some day.

Forrest returns to Bayou La Batre, vowing to make a success of his business. That year they gross \$75,000, Forrest hires Snake, Coach Fellers, and his two goons. The newspapers run a story about "Certifiable Idiot Finds Future in Novel Marine Experiment." Forrest brings Mr. Tribble into the business as financial planner to protect their earnings from the IRS. They form corporations: "Gump's Shellfish Company," "Sue's Stuffed Crabs, Inc.," and "Mama's Crawfish Étouffée, Ltd." Soon the businesses are bringing in half a million a year and employ 300, including The Turd, The Vegetable, and Mike. They cannot locate Dan. Raquel Welch does television ads. As they diversify, Forrest hires Prof. Quackenbush and Col. Gooch, both of whose careers have gone bad. Mama buys them a big house and insists that Forrest dress like a professional. He is given the keys to Mobile and joins various boards of directors.

There is talk of running Forrest for the U.S. Senate, but Forrest insists to his manager, Mr. Claxton, that he is just an idiot. Claxton insists that politics needs the "salt of the earth." Since Mama wants Forrest to run he does. He reads a short prepared speech suitable for an idiot and then takes questions from a reporter who summarizes all of the nation's woes and asks which is the most pressing issue. Forrest declares he needs to pee. Everyone cheers and "WE GOT TO PEE!" becomes a campaign slogan, brilliant because it proclaims relief. It looks as though Forrest will win until the big Eastern newspapers dig into and reveal Forrest's "checkered career," including flunking out, arrests, drug use, and psychiatric observation. When Forrest is said to have been involved in a Hollywood sex scandal, Claxton declares that they are ruined. Forrest longs for the simple working life with Sue and knows that things will get worse in Washington. He gathers a few belongings and some cash, says goodbye to everyone, and with Sue rows away. They catch a bus to Savannah, on the ticket seller's advice.

Chapter 26 finds Forrest and Sue in rainy Savannah, GA. With nothing to do, Forrest plays harmonica and by day's end collects \$5 in his coffee cup. They sleep in the park and every day Forrest plays, steadily earning more. To avoid monotony, he adds a



keyboard and drums. With a few days practice he can play a wide variety of songs, while Sue collects donations. One day, Forrest finds Dan, shining shoes under a plastic garbage bag. Dan teams up with them and tells of his many failures, thanks to drinking. One day a newspaper reports on "Derelicts Loitering in Public Park," so they consider moving to Charleston.

Forrest notices a little boy staring at him from the crowd and recognizes the boy's mother—Jenny. She and husband Donald have lived in Savannah for three years. She had heard from her mother about the giant shrimp business. She has named her son Forrest after his biological father and is sorry to have left Indianapolis without telling Forrest that she was pregnant, but The Dunce routine had her too worried. The boy is smart and wants to be a football player or astronaut. Donald knows nothing about the boy's father but is a good provider and kind. Jenny calls her son over to meet an old friend with the same name and then lets him return to playing with Sue. Jenny kisses Forrest on the forehead, fetches her son, and leaves. Forrest and Sue play tic-tac-toe and Sue always wins.

Forrest orders Tribble to give 10% of his profits each to Mama and Bubba's daddy and to put 80% in trust to little Forrest. Forrest figures that the boy is better off with Donald and Jenny. He, Sue, and Dan begin traveling around the South, ending up in New Orleans, watching the "fruitcakes." Jenny writes and sends pictures. Forrest has occasional sex with a stripper, Wanda. Mostly, they just cruise the French Quarter. Forrest tells his whole story to a reporter who wants to write about the "best one-man band" he has ever heard, but the story cannot be printed because no one would believe it. Forrest thinks about dreams, about how things might have been, and about how old he may grow. He knows that he will always look back on a life that has not been hum-drum.

Chapters 25-26 Analysis

Chapter 25 recalls the abundant cotton harvest on New Guinea, as Forrest and Sue pull in over 300 lbs. of grown shrimp harvest, sort them, and sell them at the seafood packing house for \$865. Over the next two weeks they earn \$9,700.25. Bubba's daddy is proud of them. Forrest and Sue take the bus to Mobile, where Mama is also proud of him for doing so well, despite being retarded. She never lets him forget—as though he could. Forrest tells her about expansion plans and asks her to move down and be their accountant. Mama agrees, but worries about being bored. Celebrating with a big meal and a drink, Forrest hears Curtis' crude voice. He is on waivers from the Washington Redskins for biting the owner's wife at a party and is working as a longshoreman. He tells Forrest that The Snake has played for several professional teams under the influence of drugs and is now an assistant coach in Georgia. It seems surprising when Forrest invites Curtis to work for him.

The business earns \$30,000 the next year and keeps expanding. Significantly, Mama quits crying. Longing for Jenny, Forrest visits her mother and learns that Jenny and her husband are in North Carolina. Forrest wishes Jenny good luck but is as heart-sick as



when Bubba is killed. It is a dramatic, touching moment. He realizes that Jenny has done what she has to do and would have been foolish to marry a true idiot like himself. Still, he had hoped to be with her some day.

Forrest returns to Bayou La Batre determined to make a success of his business, and the novel now accelerates its pace to tie up all of the loose strings. That year they gross \$75,000, Forrest hires Snake, and the retired Coach Fellers and his two retired goons. The newspapers run a story entitled "Certifiable Idiot Finds Future in Novel Marine Experiment." Since Bubba's daddy had known how to go about farming in the Vietnamese fashion, it is a wonder that no one had tried this lucrative method in the bayou, but Forrest never mentions it. He next brings Mr. Tribble into the business as financial planner to protect their earnings from the IRS. They form three corporations: "Gump's Shellfish Company," "Sue's Stuffed Crabs, Inc.," and "Mama's Crawfish Etouffée, Ltd." Soon the businesses are bringing in half a million a year and have 300 employees, including The Turd, The Vegetable, and Mike. Sadly, they cannot locate Dan. Raquel Welch does television ads. As they diversify, Forrest hires Prof. Quackenbush and Col. Gooch, both of whose careers have gone bad. Mama buys them a big house and insists that Forrest dress like a professional.

Forrest receives the keys to Mobile and joins various boards of directors. There is talk of running him for the U.S. Senate. Forrest insists to the slick political operative, Mr. Claxton, that he is just an idiot, to which Claxton replies, politics needs the "salt of the earth." Jesus' saying (Matt 5:13) originally lauds those who suffer persecution for Jesus' sake, but comes to signify the best of any certain class of people. One wonders how convinced Claxton is that IQ 70 people make the best politicians, but he soon shows how versatile he is at applying spin. Since Mama wants Forrest to run, he does. Forrest reads a short prepared speech suitable for an idiot to deliver, but then dangerously takes questions. Recall what happens when he ad libs in the recruitment speech earlier. A reporter summarizes at tedious lengths all of the nation's considerable woes and then asks which Forrest sees as the most pressing issue. Forrest once again declares that he needs to pee. Everyone cheers and "WE GOT TO PEE!" is taken up as a chant. Mama is angry, but Claxton proclaims this an excellent campaign slogan, for it signifies relief.

It looks as though Forrest is a shoe-in until the big Eastern newspapers dig into and reveal his "checkered career." The summary of the expose provides a summary of the novel's action, including flunking out, arrests, drug use, and psychiatric observation. When Forrest is said to have been involved in a Hollywood sex scandal (a silly exaggeration), Claxton declares that they are ruined. When Tribble advises Forrest to lay low, Forrest takes it to extremes. Having painted a miserable picture of life at the top of the corporate ladder, longing for the simple working life with Sue, and knowing that things will get worse in Washington, Forrest gathers a few belongings and some cash, says goodbye to everyone, and rows away with Sue. They catch a bus to Savannah, on the unknown ticket seller's advice that it is a nice place.

Chapter 26 finds Forrest and Sue in rainy Savannah. It so reflects the day on which Forrest finds the homeless Dan in Washington, that one expects him again to show up.



With nothing to do, Forrest plays the harmonica in the park and collects \$5 in his coffee cup by day's end. They sleep there and every day Forrest plays, earning more each day. To avoid monotony he adds a keyboard and drums, which he masters within days. One day, Forrest finds Dan, shining shoes under a plastic garbage bag. He asks jokingly if Forrest and Sue are married, declares himself a real Communist, but then takes it back: the Communists would not want him. Dan teams up with Forrest and Sue. He recounts his many failures, thanks to drinking. When a newspaper reports on "Derelicts Loitering in Public Park," they consider moving to Charleston.

Forrest notices a little boy staring at him from the crowd and recognizes his mother, Jenny. She and husband Donald have lived in Savannah for three years and, having heard from her mother about the giant shrimp business, wonders what Forrest is doing, again homeless. She has named her boy's Forrest—after his biological father. She is sorry that she left Indianapolis without telling him that she was pregnant, but The Dunce routine had her too worried about how the baby would turn out. Happily, Forrest Jr. is smart and wants to be a football player or astronaut. Jenny calls him over to meet an old friend with the same name. Jenny kisses Forrest on the forehead and they leave. Forrest and Sue play tic-tac-toe, with Sue always winning.

Forrest orders Tribble to turn over 10% of his personal profits each to Mama and Bubba's daddy and put 80% in trust for Forrest Jr. Forrest sadly and honorably concludes that the boy is better off with Donald and Jenny. He, Sue, and Dan begin traveling, ending up in New Orleans, watching the "fruitcakes." Jenny writes and sends pictures. Forrest has occasional sex with a stripper, Wanda (arguably the novel's most gratuitous odd detail), but mostly, they just cruise the French Quarter. Forrest tells his whole story to a reporter who wants to write about the "best one-man band," but it cannot be printed because no one would believe it. The press stays with Forrest to the end. Forrest thinks about dreams, about how things might have been, and about how old he may get. He knows for sure that he will always look back on a life that has not been hum-drum.



Characters

Forrest Gump

Narrator and protagonist Forrest Gump describes his life as an idiot as not "like a box of chocolates" but also not at all hum-drum. He has an IQ of about 70, making him, he figures, an imbecile or a moron rather than idiot. He prefers the term "halfwit." He is named for a Confederate Army general, Nathan Bedford Forrest, who also founds the Ku Klux Klan. Young Forrest is brought up sheltered by his widowed mother, and often threatened with being "sent away" if he misbehaves. He attends only first grade in public school in Mobile, AL, before being put in a special school. He is the brightest of the children but shunned and mistreated. At age 16 Forrest stands 6'6" and weighs 242 lbs., however, and is a fast runner. He is recruited by a high school football team. He excels there and at the University of Alabama, despite his IQ scores, before flunking out and being drafted. At Alabama, Forrest meets Bubba, who teaches him to play harmonica, an instrument that changes his life. After boot camp misadventures, Forrest arrives in Vietnam for the Tet Offensive. He is reunited with Bubba, whom he carries as a casualty out of a rice paddy.

Recovering from a minor gunshot wound, Forrest becomes friends with a Lt. Dan, whose philosophy about natural laws change his outlook on life. He is always ready to seize the day. In Washington, DC, Forrest receives from the President the Congressional Medal of Honor but then fails as a recruiter, ad libbing that the war is "a bunch of shit." Winning the Army ping-pong tournament, Forrest goes to China, where he rescues Chairman Mao from drowning. Declaring again that the Vietnam war "a bunch of shit" earns him an early discharge.

Forrest looks up Jenny Curran, his childhood sweetheart, joins her band, becomes her lover, is introduced to marijuana, and loses Jenny. Seeing her on television in Washington, DC, Forrest goes there and joins the antiwar protest. Arrested for throwing his Medal of Honor too energetically, he is confined for psychiatric observation at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, where he is "discovered" by NASA and is sent on a mission to Mars. He gets as far as an emergency landing in New Guinea. There he befriends Big Sam, who teaches him to play chess. NASA rescues Forrest after four years and after a visit to the Nixon White House he again meets Dan and together they go to Indianapolis to find Jenny. A promoter, Mike, signs Forrest up for "professional rasslin." Forrest ends up very popular, but loses \$10,000 in savings, Jenny, who cannot stand what Forrest has become, and Dan, who feels guilty.

Alone, Forrest next hooks up with a former chess champion, Mr. Tribble, who convinces him to enter a tournament in Los Angeles. Forrest reaches the finals and on the day before is arrested in Hollywood, dressed as the Creature from the Black Lagoon along with "butt-neckid" Raquel Welch and the orangutan Sue that he last sees in the New Guinea jungle. Forrest and Sue head to Bubba's home town and start a small shrimp farm that grows enormous and profitable. Forrest hires many of the people he has met



during his life's adventure. Talked into running for the U.S. Senate, Forrest backs out when newspapers dig into his past. He and Sue go to Savannah, GA, where Forrest becomes a famous one-man band. He meets Jenny and her son, Forrest, Jr. Forrest and Sue travel around, settling in New Orleans. There, he contemplates the better life Jenny and his son have with Donald and knows that, looking back, he will never see his life as "hum-drum."

Jenny Curran

The only child in public school who does not run away from Forrest Gump and sometimes lets him walk her home, Jenny becomes the love of his life. Jenny continues in public schools while Forrest is in "special school," but they meet again in high school, by which time she has grown beautiful. At their mothers' insistence, they go on a movie date that turns disastrous, with Jenny's blouse getting torn and Forrest being thrown in jail. They next meet on the Quadrangle at the University of Alabama, where Jenny takes music and drama classes and plays in a folk band. When Forrest attends a concert and joins in on harmonica, Jenny invites him to become a member. They are estranged when Forrest discovers Jenny having sex with the banjo player in a car and pulls the man off of her.

After Forrest is drafted, Jenny is said to drop out of school and join the antiwar protest, but in fact is thrown out after being caught in a guy's room, goes to California to be a flower person, dislikes everyone being stoned all the time, moves to Boston with some guy who turns out to be gay, takes up with a serious peace marcher who turns out to be a terrorist, has an affair with a married Harvard professor and then with a shoplifter who gets her arrested. She decides to pull herself together. She joins The Cracked Eggs band and lives with a Harvard philosophy student. Forrest goes to find her after he is discharged from the Army. He finds Jenny scarcely recognizable with "hair down to her ass," sunglasses indoors, blue jeans and a shirt "with so many spangles on it she looks like a telephone switchboard." She sings and dances wildly, but Forrest cannot understand the words.

After boyfriend Rudolph leaves, Jenny condemns all males as "lazy, irresponsible, selfish, low-down lyin shits," strips, and asks Forrest bluntly to fuck her. He gawks as she teaches him all about sex. When Jenny catches Forrest being seduced backstage by two girls, she throws him out without hearing an explanation. She goes to Washington, DC, for the antiwar demonstrations, returns to The Cracked Eggs briefly, but begins drinking, goes to Chicago, shacks up briefly, and continues to Indianapolis, to work at Temperer Tire Co., making retreads. Jenny takes in Forrest and Lt. Dan when they trace her there, but disapproves of Forrest becoming a "professional rassler." She tells him that rasslin has gone too far, that his "fans" are just screwballs, and that he is a weekly television spectacle. They now have \$10,000 and need no more money. She wants quiet respectability—and perhaps children. She understands fame from her music days, but it got her nowhere. Forrest remains stubborn.



Jenny leaves Indianapolis, declaring in a note that she loves Forrest but cannot live with what he has become. She asks him not to search for her again. She does not reveal that she is pregnant. Years later, they run into one another in a Savannah, GA, park. She introduces Forrest Jr. and tells of being happily married to Donald. Forrest knows that they are better off without him, but sets aside 80% of his vast income from the shrimping business he has built in the interim for Forrest Jr.'s future.

Lt. Dan

Lt. Dan plays a major role in Forrest Gump's life, teaching him always to seize the day. They first meet in intensive-care in Danang, Vietnam, where Forrest is being treated for a minor gunshot wound and Dan suffers two punctured lungs, a severed intestine, spinal separation, a missing leg, and third degree burns over half of his body, the result of a shell exploding inside his tank. Before being drafted, Dan teaches history in Connecticut. After officer training school he is commissioned a lieutenant. He is intelligent and philosophical about U.S. mistakes in Vietnam. Dan talks to Forrest about how natural laws govern the universe and result in everything that happens to anyone. When flown to the U.S. for better treatment, Dan leaves Forrest a good-bye note urging him to "seize the moment" whenever opportunity appears. IQ cannot measure curiosity or heart.

They next meet at Walter Reed Hospital near Washington, DC, where Dan has lost both legs, is terribly scarred around the face, and still connected to tubes. He claims to be fine. Year pass before they meet again, on the streets of Washington, where Dan is homeless, half-bald, unshaven, eyes bloodshot, and missing most of his teeth. He sits on sidewalk grates for warmth beneath garbage bags that keep out the driving rain, wheeling himself around on a handmade wood cart. He reveals that after being discharged from the Army, he returns to Connecticut to teach, but is offered only math. His wife divorces him on grounds of "incompatibility." He gives up on life when his wrong-sized artificial legs are stolen and he is fired for drinking on the job. He gives most of his disability pension to fellow bums, while waiting to die. He still wears his medals, under his jacket, to fill the hole where his spirit or soul used to be. He now calls "natural laws" and the "scheme of things" "philosophic bullshit."

When Forrest says he plans on finding Jenny, wherever she is, Dan volunteers to help. Spending a night in a mission flophouse, Dan refuses to endure a sermon in exchange for free supper. He hates "Bible-thumpers." In Indianapolis, IN, Dan promotes Forrest as an arm-wrestler, they earn good money, and a "professional rassler" promoter convinces them to join that circuit. Dan objects to Forrest being called "The Dunce," but Forrest does not mind. Dan opposes Jenny, with whom they live, when she tries to get Forrest to quit. Dan bets their \$10,000 bankroll on Forrest and, when he loses, goes his own way, feeling completely shamed. When Forrest later makes it good shrimping and hires many of the people he has met along the way through life, he cannot find Dan, who has vanished. Later, in Savannah, GA, Forrest and Sue find Dan polishing shoes. He joins them for their wanderings in the South that end in New Orleans as the novel closes.



Forrest sees the fact that Dan, on his roll-around, has to urinate in his hat and dump it into the toilet as proof that Vietnam was a terrible war.

Paul (Bear) Bryant

A real person incorporated into the story, Bryant is a legendary football coach at the University of Alabama. Seeing Forrest Gump playing high school football, Bryant wants to recruit him, but Forrest scores only 70 on the IQ test. It appears that his football career is over, but when Forrest gets into trouble with the law, he somehow ends up at the University. Forrest notes that Bryant gives speeches like his high school coach, Fellers, but clear enough for even a "simpleton" to understand. Bryant means business. Bryant sits on a tower, looking down like "the Great Gawd Bud" and reacts to anything that displeases him, on or off the field, by assigning laps. He is not pleased that Forrest cannot catch passes and begins drilling him to become a "secret weapon." During the Orange Bowl, Bryant promises to make "shit-for-brains" Forrest President of the United States if he pulls out a victory. The quarterback ruins those chances and Bryant has to tell Forrest that he has failed two courses. The Coach has tears in his eyes at losing a player whose like will never be seen again.

Bubba

A football player at the University of Alabama, Bubba (no last name mentioned) is sidelined with a broken foot and nowhere to go after the first game. Also not being invited to parties, Forrest Gump sits with him, listening to him play harmonica, and asking him if he may try. This changes Forrest's life forever. Bubba swears that he has never heard anything so good and lets Forrest keep the instrument. They become good friends. When Forrest flunks out of school, Bubba sees him off and promises to keep in touch. Bubba's foot injury ends his scholarship, he drops out and is drafted. Bubba and Forrest are reunited in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive. When Forrest becomes machine gunner, Bubba transfers to be his carrier. They talk of going to Bubba's home, Bayou La Bato, to work on shrimp boats as Bubba has his entire life. Bubba figures that they will make a fortune co-captaining. When Bubba is shot in a rice paddy during an ambush, Forrest ignores orders to fetch him. Carrying him back, Forrest reminds Bubba of the shrimp boats and plays "Way Down upon the Swanee River" on harmonica. Bubba dies saying, "Home." Later in the novel, Forrest visits Bubba's parents, admits to them that the Vietnam War is for nothing, and builds the enterprise beyond anything that Bubba had hoped.

Mr. Chi

A shrimp vendor in Danang, Vietnam, Mr. Chi shows PFC Forrest Gump where he breeds shrimp in a swamp, giving Forrest an idea for what to do after the Army. Chi's process, which Forrest studies carefully is "so simple even an imbecile can do it." Years later, Forrest makes a fortune shrimping in Bayou La Bato, LA, using Chi's methods.



Mr. Claxton

Forrest Gump's campaign manager during his short run for the U.S. Senate, Claxton insists that politics needs "salt of the earth" like Forrest. He prepares for Forrest a short speech suitable for an idiot and when Forrest tells the audience that the most pressing issue is him needing to pee, Claxton turns this into a campaign slogan, brilliant because it proclaims relief. It looks as though Forrest will win until the big Eastern newspapers dig into and reveal Forrest's "checkered career," and Claxton declares that they are ruined.

Curtis

Forrest Gump's roommate at the University of Alabama, Curtis (no last name mentioned) first appears standing in the doorway with a wild, wary look on his face. His eyes bug out, he has no front teeth, a squash nose, and hair that stands straight up. He is not tall but built like "an icebox otherwise." His first words are to condemn Forrest's hometown, Mobile, AL, as "candyass" and brag about his, Opp, where they make peanut butter. Curtis throws in so many cuss words that Forrest cannot catch the point of his angry raves. Curtis takes offense when Forrest points out a solution to lost lug nuts and Forrest moves to the basement. Curtis is prejudiced against blacks, like many team mates. Stories about Curtis' antics reach Forrest at intervals through the novel. As Forrest's shrimping business succeeds, he runs into Curtis in Mobile. He is on waivers from the Washington Redskins for biting the owner's wife at a party and is working as a longshoreman. He tells Forrest that The Snake has played for several professional teams under the influence of drugs and is now an assistant coach in Georgia. Forrest invites Curtis to come work for him in Bayou La Batro, LA.

Mr. Felder

A Hollywood movie producer, Felder mistakes Forrest Gump for an actor during a studio tour and invites him to audition. Felder casts Forrest as The Creature from the Black Lagoon opposite his idol, Raquel Welch.

Coach Feller

The football coach at Forrest Gump's unnamed newly-built high school, Fellers and one of his "goons" get frustrated trying to teach him to block for fear of hurting opponents. Fellers shouts a lot and makes Forrest practice tackling on an oak tree until he sees Forrest running away from students hazing him and appreciates his blazing speed, which takes the team to the state championship. Late in the novel, Forrest hires Fellers and his goons to work in his shrimping business.



Miss French

A Gump family boarder who works for the telephone company, Miss French is generally a recluse, but during a thunderstorm offers teenage Forrest Gump some divinity (candy) in her room. He eats 15 pieces before she gently seduces him, advising him to keep his eyes shut. Although he fears Mama's reaction and conceals the incident, it gives him a new outlook on life. He would have preferred Jenny Curran do those things to him, but realizes that it is unlikely, given how he is. While Forrest is in Vietnam, he learns that Miss French accidentally burns down the house while blow-drying her cat.

Maj. Janet Fritch and Sue

A NASA space rookie and a veteran of three flights, Fritch is a nasty-tempered woman astronaut with a mixing bowl haircut, while Sue is a docile female orangutan, much more easy-going than males of her species. Forrest Gump fills out the first U.S. manned mission to Mars. During chaotic last-minute preparations are chaotic, an angry male orangutan is mistakenly strapped in in place of Sue but retains her name. The substitute molests Fritch and tears up the cabin, requiring an emergency re-entry, which lands them in New Guinea. Fritch reacts like a POW with her name/rank/serial number ("Major Janet Fritch, United States Air Force. Serial number 04534573. That's all I'm going to tell you.") The head aborigine, Sam, who has studied at Yale, explains that he alone is keeping the cannibals from eating them. Fritch is belligerent and Sue dejected. They are set to growing cotton.

After a few weeks, Fritch is raped in the bushes but seems not to mind and moves in with Grurck. She swears Forrest to silence. As the years go forward, Forrest and Sue learn to converse with expressions and gestures. Sue reveals that his parents are abducted in the jungle when he is a baby and his relatives reject him for eating too much. One day he enters a village and is sold to an institution in Paris. There he meets lovely orangutan Doris and falls in love. People around the world watch them have sex. It is embarrassing. In Japan Doris is sold and Sue grows grouchy. NASA buys Sue. He misses Doris as Forrest misses Jenny. Forrest is reunited with Sue in Hollywood, CA, where Sue is appearing as an extra in a Tarzan movie and Forrest plays the Creature from the Black Lagoon. Sue tags along with Forrest after they and Raquel Welch are arrested and released. Sue tries to help Welch cover her nakedness with banana leaves. Sue remains Forrest's partner in establishing the shrimp business that grows into a mighty empire.

Lt. Col. Gooch

The Army officer who accompanies PFC Forrest Gump home from Vietnam to receive his Congressional Medal of Honor from the President, Gooch arranges for tailored uniforms, accommodations, and transportation. His job is to coach Forrest on how to behave. When they land in San Francisco, CA, antiwar protesters chant and pelt them with tomatoes. Gooch tries to act dignified, wiping one off his face. In Washington, DC,



the President excludes Gooch from breakfast and a White House tour during which photographers capture LBJ and Forrest comparing scars. That afternoon, the colonel is enraged at newspaper pictures that are sure to ruin his career. He recovers, gets a long, patriotic speech written for Forrest to deliver to encourage recruitment and when Forrest is incapable of learning it, delivers it himself until Forrest's punchline: "Join the Army and fight for your freedom." They try it out at a small college. When someone asks Forrest what he thinks of the war, he replies "It is a bunch of shit." Gooch hustles him out of town. The tour is canceled and Gooch is transferred to a weather station in Iceland. By this point, he is talking to himself with a "weird, nutty laugh." When, late in the novel, Forrest's shrimp farm turns into an enormous business, Gooch is among the former acquaintances fallen on bad times whom Forrest hires.

Gladys Gump (Mama)

A fine person, widowed just after Forrest Gump's birth when a load of bananas crushes her husband as he unloads at the docks, Mama lives on a small pension from the United Fruit Company and takes in boarders. She sits and talks to Forrest to calm him. When he gets older and she learns that boys haze him, she isolates him, but whenever he does anything wrong, she warns him about getting "put away." The actions create psychological problems later. Mama starts Forrest in public school but after first grade he is placed in Miss Margaret's "nut school." Mama has the grippe when Forrest wins his football award, but watches as he receives a "special" high school diploma, weeping because he has also received a draft notice. She praises the Lord when Forrest receives a temporary deferment, invites Jenny Curran over for an ice cream float and funds a disastrous movie date, and then packs Forrest off to the University of Alabama for more football.

Mama writes every week while Forrest is in Vietnam and he replies in ways that should not make her cry. The day that he is to leave Vietnam a letter arrives saying that Mama's house has burned down and she figures that she will be living with the Little Sisters of the Poor, but when Forrest gets back from New Guinea, a sister says that Mama has run off with "some protestant." He is relieved that she has someone. After his trip to Los Angeles, Forrest returns to Mobile and finds Mama, working in a dry cleaner. She says the "polecat" protestant ran off with a 16-year-old within a month. Mama is fired for burning a pair of pants in her excitement at seeing Forrest. He gives her money to tide her over while he sets up his shrimp farming business and, when it succeeds, makes her an executive, naming one of his companies "Mama's Crawfish Étouffée, Ltd."

Miss Henderson

Miss Henderson is a pretty high school teacher who teaches Forrest Gump to read one-on-one. She gives him Tom Sawyer and other books to read. She is the only teacher who bothers with education and Forrest feels badly about sometimes having "nasty" thoughts about her.



Lt. Hooper and Sgt. Kranz

The company commander and non-commissioned officer in charge of Forrest Gump's section of the Third Brigade from basic training at Ft. Benning, GA, through combat in Vietnam. Hooper and Kranz both chase Forrest around with a meat cleaver after Forrest blows up the kitchen during training, while at Pleiku, Kranz leads to safety the survivors when the first shells of the Tet Offensive. While on patrol, Kranz jokes that they are walking back to the U.S. via Laos, China, Russia, the North Pole, and Alaska.

Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson

Unnamed but skillfully depicted, Johnson is the 35th President of the United States, an amiable Texan who grimly presides over the unpopular Vietnam War that destroys his presidency. Johnson is depicted pinning on PFC Forrest Gump the Congressional Medal of Honor, providing him breakfast, noting that Forrest resembles Jethro on "The Beverly Hillbillies" television program, and showing him a jagged scar from a gall bladder operation. Forrest drops his pants to show LBJ his own battle scar, and news photographers capture the moment.

Chairman Mao Zedung

The "Buddha-looking," 80-year-old leader of "Red China," Mao is swimming for photographers when Forrest Gump sees him drowning and dives in to rescue him while everyone else does a "Chinese Fire Drill" on shore. Forrest finds Mao underwater on the third dive and delivers him to a boat. The crew leaves Forrest to swim ashore on his own. The Chinese honor Forrest with a parade in "Kumingtan" (a clever "mistake" on Forrest's part, since that refers to Mao's fierce enemies, the Nationalists in Taiwan). At lunch, Forrest sits beside Mao, to whom he declares that the Vietnam war "a bunch of shit." Photographers capture Mao's delighted reaction.

Mike

Dressed in a white suit, Hawaiian shirt, and gold necklaces, Mike (no last name mentioned) introduces himself to Forrest Gump in an Indianapolis tavern and suggests that he become a professional "rassler," claiming that the top acts earn \$250,000 a year. Forrest and his manager Dan take the bus every day to a downtown gymnasium, where Forrest learns all the fake moves that can be done with no one getting hurt. Forrest's girlfriend, Jenny Curran, objects when Mike gives Forrest his stage name and costume: "The Dunce." Mike books Forrest against named acts, earning him \$10,000, but increasing tensions with Jenny. Forrest fails in a double-cross of Mike that would have increased their fortune and, left with only \$2,000, finds that Jenny has left him. When, late in the novel, Forrest's shrimp farm turns into an enormous business, Mike and wrestlers The Turd and The Vegetable are among the former acquaintances fallen on bad times whom Forrest hires.



Pres. Richard M. Nixon

Unnamed but skillfully depicted, Nixon is the 36th President of the United States, described by Forrest Gump as "hair all slicked back, puffy little cheeks an a nose look like Pinocchio's." Nixon needs prompting by his aides and overreacts when he hears "take" as "tape" and denounces the "bunch of disloyal Communist swines." Challenged with a simple fact, Nixon fires the questioner, only to learn it is his Vice President, who quickly excuses himself to pee. This motif has been used enough for it to indicate that the unnamed Spiro T. Agnew is not the brightest of men. Nixon is upset that Forrest has saved Chairman Mao's life but glad that the "son of a bitch" has since died. Nixon avoids watching television because of all the bad news, particularly the program "To Tell the Truth." Leading Forrest out of the White House, Nixon offers to sell him one of the 20-30 wrist watches on his arm. Despite it all, Forrest considers Nixon "a nice feller." Later, seeing protesters outside the White House gates, Forrest assumes from the rubber Nixon face masks that the President is a very popular man.

Dr. Quackenbush

The Harvard professor whom Jenny Curran used to date, Quackenbush is excited about teaching a new course, "Role of the Idiot in World Literature." Forrest Gump accepts his invitation to sit in. At the first class, Quackenbush introduces Forrest as an auditor before starting to talk about the history of village idiots, court jesters, and other objects of laughter. Writers depict them as a "device of double entendre," to discover the deeper meaning of foolishness. Quackenbush suggests that they stage Shakespeare's King Lear. Forrest wonders why he is there. During the performance, Forrest accidentally sets the set on fire, causing a panic. He never goes back to class. When, late in the novel, Forrest's shrimp farm turns into an enormous business, Quackenbush is among the former acquaintances fallen on bad times whom Forrest hires.

Rudolph

The Harvard philosophy student with whom Jenny Curran is living when Forrest Gump gets out of the Army and looks her up, Rudolph is "a little guy bout a hundrit pounds or so, an has hair like a dustmop an wears a lot of beads aroun his neck." He meditates like a guru and says little. He "splits" shortly afterward, giving Forrest and Jenny the opportunity to consummate their long-held love.

Big Sam

The leader of the New Guinea cannibals among whom Forrest Gump's NASA space craft makes an emergency landing, Sam (who claims that his real name is impossible to pronounce) learns English at Yale University after being recruited by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to fight the Japanese during World War II. When Sam quotes the Yale football fight song, "Boola-Boola," fellow natives chant and play drums. Sam



notes dryly that Stone Age tribesmen do not take POWs. After discussing Forrest's name and education, Sam suggests that the human astronauts sacrifice their orangutan companion, Sue, and also help the natives learn to produce a cash crop—cotton. Sam, the chess champion at Yale for four years, teaches Forrest to play and grows angry at losing every match. He is on the verge of winning one when Forrest decides that it is time to escape. The astronauts race towards the canoes but are captured and led to the cauldron. Before they can be thrown in, head-hunting pygmies attack and capture Sam and his people. Before being thrown into the cauldron for cooking, Sam advises Forrest to play the harmonica for the pygmies and tells him the move that would have brought him victory. Later in the novel, Forrest uses Sam's unorthodox moves to win a grand master's championship in Los Angeles.

Snake

The quarterback of the University of Alabama football team, Snake twice throws out of bounds to stop the clock, only to realize it is fourth down. This costs the team the Orange Bowl and looks like it will happen again against Mississippi, but he hands off to Curtis, who scores a touchdown. It shows how crafty Coach Bryant is. When, late in the novel, Forrest's shrimp farm turns into an enormous business, Snake is among the former acquaintances fallen on bad times whom Forrest hires. Snake had played for several professional football teams while under the influence of drugs and is a disgruntled assistant coach in Georgia at the time Forrest takes him in.

Mr. Tribble

A grumpy-looking 80-year-old former grand master of chess whom Forrest Gump meets in Nashville, TN at an invitational tournament, Tribble discovers that Forrest is a shrewd player and suggests that he play for money. Tribble bails Forrest out when he is arrested for loitering, buys him breakfast, and convinces him to compete in Los Angeles for a \$10,000 prize. They become partners. Tribble coaches Forrest but finds that he knows every move, so they go site-seeing. Tribble defends Forrest after Forrest's flatulence stuns an opponent, but suggests that they part when the orangutan Sue disrupts the event. When, late in the novel, Forrest's shrimp farm turns into an enormous business, he hires Tribble as financial planner to protect their multi-million dollar earnings from the IRS.

Raquel Welch

A real Hollywood sex symbol, Raquel Welch is depicted as starring in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Forrest Gump, an accidental actor, is made up in a rubber suit to play the creature. Carrying around his idol around excites Forrest, but Welch cannot understand him through the mask and assumes he is ogling her breasts. Her dress is torn off during a take, and she finds herself walking on the Santa Monica Freeway, shifting banana leaves to cover strategic spots. Welch grows indignant over being "butt



neckid" as they enter Hollywood, but turns up her nose at several clothing stores. Finally finding something, she realizes that she has no means of paying and a security detective arrests them. When, late in the novel, Forrest's shrimp farm turns into an enormous business, he hires Welch to do commercials.

Mr. Wilkins

A U.S. State Department official assigned to coach Forrest Gump on how to behave while in China, Wilkins is a prissy "turd" with a thin mustache. He is constantly on Forrest's case about bowing, not adjusting himself in public, and table manners. When Wilkins tells him that by Chinese custom Mao is now responsible to him forever, Forrest cuts the biggest fart of his life, making Wilkins gag and attract attention.



Objects/Places

Bayou La Batre, AL

The home of Forrest Gump's college and Army friend, Bubba, Bayou La Batre is for much of the novel the goal of Forrest's travels, as he wishes to establish the shrimp farming business that had been Bubba's dream before being killed in Vietnam. After many adventures, Forrest and his orangutan friend, Sue, visit Bubba's parents. Forrest characterizes the war as "a bunch of shit," explains Bubba's dream, and is set up in a good spot to begin the business easily and cheaply. He spends a month fixing up the late Tom LeFarge's property, laying mesh nets, seeding the pond with tiny shrimp, and feeding them with cottonseed meal. They go on to set up three more ponds. Forrest hopes that his honest work will win Jenny back.

Cambridge, MA

Home to Harvard University, Cambridge is located across the Charles River from Boston. Jenny Curran lives there with philosophy student and would-be guru Rudolph. She takes in Forrest Gump, who has nowhere else to say, and offers a tour of Cambridge. He buys civilian clothes from a surplus store that make him look like a lumberjack. They run into the married Harvard professor, Dr. Quackenbush, whom she used to date. He is excited about teaching a new course, "Role of the Idiot in World Literature." At his invitation, Forrest sits in and accidentally starts a fire during the staging of King Lear. Forrest and Jenny live together happily for a while before he begins abusing marijuana and Jenny catches him being seduced by fans. Both leave town.

The Cracked Eggs

A Cambridge, MA, based band, The Cracked Eggs is on the point of stardom, according to Mr. Feeblestein, a New York agent, when Forrest Gump joins, playing the harmonica. Jenny Curran is the vocalist, George plays keyboard, and Mose drums. Their nightly venue is the Hodaddy Club. Jenny writes a tender song called "Do It to Me Hard and Fast" that allows Forrest a five-minute harmonica solo. The band visits New York and is invited to make an album. They become popular and with money from Feeblestein buy a big bus to tour. Mose introduces Forrest to marijuana to expand his horizons. After Jenny throws Forrest out and runs away, the band breaks up, its style passé.

Ft. Benning, GA

The U.S. Army basic training center to which Forrest Gump is bussed after being drafted, Ft. Benning has better barracks than the "Ape Dorm" at the University of Alabama, but the plentiful food is terrible. Forrest is comforted that no one seems much



smarter than he. After failing as a rifleman, having never cooked anything, Forrest is put in charge of the kitchen. Challenged with feeding 100 quickly, he mixes every ingredient he can find in a steam boiler, which explodes. Company Commander Lt. Hooper and Sgt. Kranz chase Forrest around the camp and confine him to quarters on weekends until the company ships out to Vietnam.

Indianapolis, IN

Learning from an ex-lover in Chicago that Jenny Curran has gone to Indianapolis to work at Temperer Tire Co. making retreads, Forrest Gump and Dan decide that this would be a nice place to visit. Arriving by bus, they are immediately forbidden to loiter by a policeman and learn that Temperer is located outside of town. They find Jenny during the lunch break and move in with her. While she works, Dan promotes Forrest as an arm-wrestler and they earn good money, until a "professional rassler" promoter convinces them to join that circuit. Dan objects to Forrest being called "The Dunce," but Forrest does not mind. Forrest becomes a top-draw but this causes conflicts with Jenny, who finally leaves town, asking in a note that Forrest not try to find her again.

Los Angeles, CA

The site of an international chess championship in which Mr. Tribble enters Forrest Gump, Los Angeles also allows them to go sightseeing at Disneyland and the movie studios. A Mr. Felder mistakes Forrest for an actor and, hearing that Forrest has done King Lear, proposes to make him a new John Wayne. Tribble hurries Forrest away. The tournament is held in the Beverly Hills Hotel. Forrest beats a variety of opponents in short order.

On his day off before the finals, Forrest goes to the studio, is made up to play The Creature from the Black Lagoon, and meets his idol, Raquel Welch. They do 10-15 takes, and Forrest has to pee, which he does, down his leg, in the lagoon. When Welch smells it and accuses him, Forrest tells the first lie of his life. Her anger makes the next take perfect, particularly when her dress is torn off on a bush. As Forrest in costume wanders the jungle, Sue, an extra on a Tarzan film, swings by on a vine. Sue hugs her former-astronaut friend, helps Welch cover up with banana leaves, and leads them through a hole in the fence—onto the Santa Monica Freeway.

They walk towards the HOLLYWOOD sign to Sunset Blvd., where Welch feels humiliated and violated being "butt neckid." By Wilshire Blvd. they have attracted a large crowd. On Rodeo Dr., Welch turns up her nose at several clothing stores. Finally finding something in Giani's, Welch realizes that she has no means of paying and the salesman is a stickler for policy, even when she exposes her breasts to prove her identity. A security detective arrests them. Back at the chess championship, Forrest is nearly disqualified for flatulence and is on the point of winning when Sue causes chaos. They wisely leave Los Angeles.



Mobile, AL

Forrest Gump's home town, Mobile, is called "candyass" by his roommate at the University of Alabama, Curtis, in comparison to his own hometown, Opp, where they make peanut butter. Mobile is also near Flomaton, where the All State Football Banquet is held. Little is shown of Mobile, but Forrest eventually returns there to check up on his Mama, whose house burns down while he is in Vietnam. He hears that she is in the Little Sisters of the Poor home, but the head sister can only suggest that Forrest ask around in the park, as she has left in the company of some protestant. Forrest finds her working in a dry cleaner and living in a rooming house. He returns for her when his shrimp farm grows big enough to need a book keeper.

New Guinea

An island in the South Pacific near Australia, New Guinea is where a NASA spacecraft makes an emergency landing. It is pictured as jungle inhabited by Stone Age tribesmen, whose leader, Big Sam, Yale-trained to fight the Japanese during World War II, prevents his followers from eating astronauts Forrest Gump and Maj. Janet Fritch. Sam does suggest that they sacrifice the orangutan astronaut Sue and help the natives learn to produce a cash crop—cotton. Over the course of four years, awaiting rescue, Forrest learns chess from Sam, the champion of Yale during his four years. When Forrest sees it is time to escape, the astronauts are captured and about to be cooked in the cauldron, but head-hunting pygmies, who look down on cannibalism, attack and capture Sam and his people. Before being thrown in, Sam advises Forrest to play the harmonica for them and tells him the move that would have brought him victory. When NASA arrives to rescue them, Fritch opts to remain with her native lover, Grurck, and Sue also disappears into the foliage.

Peking, China

Site of the first U.S.-Chinese ping-pong tournament, a major diplomatic break-through after decades of estrangement, Peking (not written Beijing) is to Forrest Gump a nice place after Vietnam, since no one is trying to kill him. The U.S. State Department assigns Mr. Wilkins to coach Forrest on how to behave. When Forrest is honored with a parade in Kumingtan for saving Chairman Mao's life, the two sit together at lunch, and Forrest declares the Vietnam war "a bunch of shit." Photographers capture Mao's delighted reaction. Later, on the street, Forrest shows kindness to a "real Mongolian idiot" and is rewarded with the child's first smile ever. The boy bounces the gifted ping-pong ball and newspapers label the picture, "Young Chinese Displays His Hatred of American Capitalists."



Savannah, GA

The always-rainy city to which Forrest Gump and Sue go when the pressure of economic success grows too great, Savannah is home to the love of Forrest's life, Jenny Curran, her husband Donald, and three-year-old Forrest about whom Forrest had known nothing. Knowing that they are better off without him, Forrest begins travels around the South that end in New Orleans. While in Savannah, Forrest sets himself up as a one-man band.

University of Alabama

Located in Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama is famed for its football team, coached by Paul "Bear" Bryant. Although he scores only 70 on two IQ tests, Forrest Gump ends up there in lieu of being drafted. He is put up in shabby "Ape Dorm," rooming with Curtis, another refrigerator-sized mental eggplant. Dorm residents vandalize the place, throwing the toilet out the window, and bringing the campus police to investigate shootings. Forrest is quickly homesick and, after angering Curtis, moves to the basement. The athletic department arranges for "dummos" to take classes in which the teachers give football players a break. Prof. Hooks is amazed at how well Forrest does on an Intermediate Light test. Stern, talkative Mr. Boone requires an autobiography, which takes Forrest all night. The team goes undefeated and plays Nebraska for the National Championship at the Orange Bowl, but loses. Forrest flunks two classes and is immediately drafted.

Vietnam

Forrest Gump is shipped to Vietnam in Feb. 1969, landing at Qui Nhon on the South China Sea coast, and trucked to the Brigade Headquarters and Firebase at Pleiku in the highlands. He enjoys the scenery and finds the people ("gooks") friendly. They live in shanties sadder than anything he has seen in Alabama. Everything is covered with red dust. Everything is peaceful for the "good new years—"Tet." The soldiers are taking their first bath in a week when shells start falling and Forrest first sees the horror of mangled bodies. Sgt. Kranz leads the 150 naked survivors to safety in swampy foxholes, where they spend their first night. The second day, shelling destroys the officers' latrines, covering everyone.

They dig in on the south perimeter just before being flown into the jungle to relieve Charlie Company, which is pinned down. Maj. Balls is battalion executive officer and Lt. Hooper the company commander. The helicopters are fired on before they touch down and one explodes dreadfully in midair. Being large, Forrest is machine gun ammo bearer and agrees to carry other heavy items. At a trench, Forrest is reunited with Bubba, whom he later tries to rescue when he is badly shot in a rice paddy. A badly-placed napalm drop burns many Americans before Forrest gets lucky and is shot superficially in the ass and evacuated to the hospital at Danang for two months. There he meets the philosophical Lt. Dan, becomes an expert ping-pong player, and learns



how to farm shrimp. These combine to form his postwar life. Forrest leaves Vietnam to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for extreme heroism in Washington, DC.

Washington, DC

Forrest Gump visits Washington, DC, several times in the novel. The first time he comes to the White House to receive from Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson the Congressional Medal of Honor. After a private breakfast and a White House tour, photographers capture LBJ and Forrest comparing scars, and the afternoon newspapers print the pictures, with Forrest's face blacked out like in porno pictures.

The second visit is to compete in an Army ping-pong championship hosted at Walter Reed Hospital. There Forrest again sees Lt. Dan from Vietnam, whose encouragement helps Forrest come from behind to win. The victory wins Forrest a berth on the U.S. Ping-Pong team that plays in China. The third time is at the height of the anti-war protests, where GI's in uniform throw their medals on the Capitol steps. Forrest's Medal of Honor is the highest award sacrificed, but he throws it too hard and wounds a Senate employee. He is arrested and sent to St. Elizabeth's Hospital for psychiatric evaluation. There, Drs. Walton, Duke, and Earl determine that Forrest's mind works just like a computer, and Duke accompanies him to Houston, TX, for testing by NASA.

Four years later, having survived cannibals in New Guinea, Forrest visits Richard M. Nixon's White House and causes an uproar when Nixon hears the word "take" as "tape." Later, seeing protesters outside the White House gates, Forrest assumes from the Nixon face masks that the President is a very popular man. Fired by NASA, Forrest runs into a badly-aged Lt. Dan, living as a homeless person.



Themes

Discrimination

Forrest Gump describes a variety of situations involving discrimination on the basis of race, disability, and military status. Early on, Forrest claims not to be prejudiced against blacks. He finds that many are kinder than whites. He says nothing about the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, probably because politics never interests him. This is demonstrated when he meets Lyndon B. Johnson in 1969; he seems unaware that he has been president for some six years and is again surprised years later that the kind Texan has been replaced by Richard Nixon. At any rate, Forrest claims to accept blacks on equal terms but talks about them by innocently parroting the loaded epithets that he hears others use. It becomes most pointed when he plays football for the University of Alabama. The team is obviously all-white and finds it intimidating to face Northern teams that are integrated. Standing 6'6" and weighing 242 lbs., Forrest is easily flattened by the "Nebraska corn jerkoff niggers." It is doubtful if at this point Forrest knows what "jerkoff" means any more than that "nigger" is offensive.

Similarly, in Vietnam, Forrest refers to every Asian as "gook." It is unlikely that he realizes that this is pejorative; it is simply the way one talks in the military. Forrest discriminates between bad gooks—those that try to kill him—and good gooks—the fishmonger who teaches him to farm shrimp and the Red Chinese officials who treat him grandly after he rescues Chairman Mao from drowning. It would not occur to Forrest, however, not to refer to them as gooks.

Having an IQ of about 70, Forrest is intimately acquainted with discrimination on the basis of handicap. He describes living as an idiot as no "box of chocolates" but also not at all hum-drum. He figures that he is a borderline imbecile or a moron and prefers the term "halfwit." He is quick to differentiate himself from "Mongolian idiots," sufferers of Down's Syndrome, whom he unfeelingly describes as "the ones with they eyes too close together what look like Chinamen an drool a lot an play with theyselfs." When he finally meets one in China he is kind. When Forrest describes wasting time being tended in a "special" school with "funny fellers," "retards," and "spasmos," he shows no rancor but regret, and praises Miss Henderson who makes an effort to teach him to read.

Finally, as a decorated veteran of Vietnam, Forrest experiences discrimination against returning warriors. At the San Francisco airport they are pelted with tomatoes and chased. On the plane to Washington, DC, civilians shun them, moving to distant seats. In a Washington bar, a pretty girl asks how many children they have killed today. A good deal later, in Cambridge, MA, college students look at Forrest in his uniform scornfully, and girlfriend Jenny takes him to a second-hand store to buy civilian clothes. Lt. Dan, badly disabled in the war gets insufficient care from the Veteran's Administration. Even his artificial legs are the wrong size. He ends up by choice a street person, an avocation



that endures a special sort of discrimination, for police everywhere that Forrest goes seem most dedicated to keeping derelicts on the move.

War and Peace

Forrest Gump finishes high school (without graduating, of course) in 1968, a year that sees "all sorts of shit fixin to hoppen. " With an IQ of 70, Forrest is ineligible either for college or the Army, but his football skills are so great that the University of Alabama accepts him and uses them until he flunks out. The Army drafts him immediately. At the height of the Vietnam War, when things are going badly against the Americans, every body is needed. When Mama Gump points to Forrest's IQ score, a sergeant asks if she thinks any Einsteins are among the draftees. The novel carefully avoids any discussion of the socioeconomic makeup of the U.S. Army in that war, but from boot camp onward, Forrest feels comfortable among near-peers.

Forrest paints the Army as loud and disorganized. He describes graphically the first deaths he sees when the Tet truce is broken and the conditions the GI's endure putting together a new, safe camp. Forrest mentions that his C-rations are dated 1951. Just when the GI's have dug livable foxholes they are flown by helicopter into battle. Forrest observes wryly the difference in the reality that one sees from that which one reads about in Stars and Stripes. He enters into no controversy over whether this official publication of the Department of Defense is, as claimed, uncensored. Forrest describes the tactics of both sides in a jungle firefight, from which he heroically carries out the only other survivor on the U.S. side, badly injured. He next describes walking through a paddy on patrol and being ambushed. Again Forrest races into action, disobeying orders to rescue his friend Bubba, only to have him die in his arms. Forrest describes his own relatively minor wound and the accidental dropping of napalm on friendly troops. Napalm is one of the more controversial weapons used in Vietnam.

The scene shifts to the hospital in Danang, where the badly wounded cry for their mamas day and night. The man in the bed next to Forrest, Lt. Dan, has been badly burned when a shell explodes inside his tank. He is philosophical about everything. Dan becomes the center of the anti-Vietnam theme. He is evacuated to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC, ahead of Forrest's arriving in the capital to accept the Congressional Medal of Honor. When they meet a bit later, Dan is horribly scarred but claims to be fine. Forrest twice is put in the position of being a heroic spokesman for the government and both times ad libs that the war is "a bunch of shit." Soon he is a civilian again.

Forrest takes part in the great antiwar demonstrations in Washington, DC, joining fellow veterans in throwing back the medals they have earned in combat. When he next sees his old friend, Dan is homeless, half-bald, unshaven, eyes bloodshot, and missing most of his teeth. He sits on sidewalk grates for warmth beneath garbage bags that keep out the driving rain, wheeling himself around on a handmade wood cart. He reveals that after being discharged from the Army, he returns to Connecticut to teach, but is offered only math. His wife divorces him on grounds of "incompatibility." He gives up on life



when his wrong-sized artificial legs are stolen and he is fired for drinking on the job. He gives most of his disability pension to fellow bums, while waiting to die. He still wears his medals, under his jacket, to fill the hole where his spirit or soul used to be. He now calls "natural laws" and the "scheme of things" "philosophic bullshit." Forrest sums up the Vietnam War: "It is a sad an sorry spectacle when a no-legged man have got to pee in his hat an then dump it over into the toilet."

Popular Culture

Forrest Gump both depicts and refers to the popular culture of the 1960s and 1970s. It appears as though, in Alabama at least, football is the most popular form of entertainment, at both the high school and college levels. Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant is legend at the University of Alabama.

Music plays a vital role. The love of Forrest's life, Jenny Curran, majors in music and drama at the University of Alabama and plays in a folk band, primarily the repertoire of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul, and Mary. When Forrest attends a concert and joins in on harmonica, Jenny invites him to become a member. When Forrest next sees her, years later, Jenny is singing with "The Cracked Eggs" band in Cambridge, MA. He scarcely recognizes her with "hair down to her ass," sunglasses indoors, blue jeans and a shirt "with so many spangles on it she look like a telephone switchboard." She sings and dances so wildly that Forrest cannot understand the words. Again she invites him to join the band and writes a tender song called "Do It to Me Hard and Fast" that allows Forrest a five-minute harmonica solo. The band visits New York and is invited to make an album, grows popular, tours, and breaks up when its style grows passé. Asked to demonstrate his musical abilities as an idiot savant, Forrest disappoints medical students by playing "Puff the Magic Dragon" rather than Liszt or Beethoven. In New Guinea, claiming to be an American musician gets Forrest, literally, out of hot water, and the novel ends with Forrest in New Orleans playing as a one-man band such material as "The Night They Drove Ole Dixie Down," a reversion to the folk music of his youth.

There are several references to television programs. Pres. Johnson sees a resemblance between Forrest and the character Jethro in "The Beverly Hillbillies." This is in itself a commentary on the Texan's tastes. By contrast, Nixon avoids television, particularly the innocuous game show "To Tell the Truth," simply because of its title. This is a commentary on the unfolding Watergate scandal. In the jungles of New Guinea, Forrest makes a truly obscure reference to "Ramar of the Jungle," an early-1950s television series.

Finally, there are the movies. In conjunction with a chess tournament in Los Angeles, Forrest visits a movie studio, is taken for an actor and, on a return visit, is hastily stuffed into a rubber suit to portray The Creature from the Black Lagoon, amazingly with his idol, Raquel Welch, whom he has longed to meet. She turns out to be a typical self-absorbed star and in a rubber mask Forrest has even more difficulty than normal convincing her that he is not staring at her breasts. Much is made of Welch's self-absorption and impatience with the little people around her. Forrest's former astronaut



pal, Sue, an orangutan, happens to be working as an extra on a Tarzan film, and helps them to escape to safety—onto the berm of the busy Santa Monica Freeway. The trio walks to Hollywood. Welch is indignant over being "butt neckid." Having earlier complained at being ogled, the star exposes her world-famous breasts to prove her identity, but in Hollywood this happens to often and she fails to impress those who arrest her.



Style

Point of View

Author Winston Groom precedes his novel *Forrest Gump* with a quotation from the 17th-century English writer John Dryden: "There is a pleasure sure in being mad / which none but madmen know." Groom proceeds to let Forrest tell in his own words about a life that is "no box of chocolates," but "pretty interestin" nonetheless. Forrest opens by stating that his IQ is 70, which is borderline imbecile/moron, but he prefers the term "halfwit." He immediately tells an anecdote that shows he knows when he is being cheated and that he should react more "normally," but instead he walks away, feeling all the more like an idiot.

Early on, Forrest talks about idiots in literature, which seems out of character until he tells how he has come to study the subject and reveals that he is, in fact, an idiot savant, "A person who cannot tie a necktie, who can barely lace up his shoes, who has the mental capacity of perhaps a six- to ten-year old, and—in this case—the body of, well, an Adonis," in the words of Dr. Mills, the psychiatrist who puts Forrest uncomfortably on display to medical students. Forrest wanders naively through life but is able to master in short order the equations of Einstein, musical instruments, ping-pong, and chess. Even after he knows the technical term for his condition, he takes it in stride and simply makes the best of it when put in an appropriate situation.

As a narrator, Forrest is inevitably naïve but rarely in awe. He is saved from "special school" by his size and speed. He admits to being too stupid to play football but becomes a star in high school and one year of college. His IQ is too low for the Army, but he is drafted and sent to Vietnam. A sergeant notes that there are no Einsteins among the draftees, and Forrest sees Army life as truly stupid. Winning the Congressional Medal of Honor, Forrest enters the media limelight and several times innocently declares the Vietnam War "a bunch of shit."

For most of the novel, Forrest goes where destiny takes him. He has only two real goals: to love Jenny Curran, his only first-grade friend and the love of his life, and to make good on his promise to Bubba to farm shrimp successfully. He sticks with these doggedly. The relationship with Jenny allows him to examine his own stubbornness, while the promise to Bubba shows his determination, resourcefulness, and loyalty. He tells the Jenny story with subdued sorrow and the shrimping story without bragging. Things simply fall into place. The entire novel, for all of its remarkable events, is marked by the flattened emotionality of its sole narrator.

Setting

Forrest Gump is set in the 1960s and 1970s in a broad variety of places, none of which is portrayed in any detail. They are merely backdrops for the current action. The only



thing they have in common is that the police are fast to chase away derelicts. The narrator, Forrest Gump, a man in his thirties with an IQ of 70, placing him in the imbecile/moron range, is born and raised in Mobile, AL, by a sheltering, widowed Mama. His size and speed get him out of "special school" to play high school and college football, with special academic considerations. The University of Alabama is in Tuscaloosa, but little of the campus is seen, and the same can be said of the Orange Bowl in Miami, FL. Event rather than locale drive the story. After flunking out of college, Forrest is drafted into the U.S. Army and completes boot camp at Ft. Benning, GA. He makes general comments about Army life and relates how he blows up the kitchen and is chased around camp by his sergeant, but offers no detail about the camp.

Forrest is a bit more specific about Vietnam. He lands in Feb. 1969, at Qui Nhon on the South China Sea coast, and is trucked to the Brigade Headquarters and Firebase at Pleiku in the highlands. He enjoys the scenery and finds the people friendly but worse impoverished than folks in Alabama. Everything is covered with red dust but peaceful as the Vietnamese prepare to celebrate New Years—"Tet." Forrest describes the horror of mangled bodies and evacuation to swampy foxholes, a shelling that destroys the officers' latrines (his letter home to girlfriend Jenny makes this sound, unintentionally, like the GI's are being tormented by their capitalist overlords), the building of better quarters, and removal to the jungle fighting. He describes several firefights and the ambush that claims his friend Bubba's life. Recovering in the hospital at Danang from a minor wound, Forrest meets critically wounded Lt. Dan, who teaches him his "seize the day" philosophy and reappears several times later in the novel.

Forrest next goes to Washington, DC, to receive his Congressional Medal of Honor, joins the U.S. Ping-Pong Team competing in Peking, China, is discharged from the Army and finds Jenny in Cambridge, MA (Harvard), losing her when she misconstrues a situation. He heads back to Washington, where he sees her on television, protesting the war. At the demonstration, Forrest is arrested for assault and locked up in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for psychiatric evaluation. The doctors discover that he has a computer-like mind and send him to Houston, TX, to train for the first U.S. mission to Mars. The flight is aborted and he spends years in the jungles of New Guinea among cannibals. Rescued, he returns to Washington for a second White House visit.

Finding Lt. Dan crippled, homeless, and bitter, Forrest takes him in search of Jenny. She is in Indianapolis, IN. While living with her, Forrest becomes a "professional rassler," does well, makes money, but again loses Jenny. Her note asks him not to look for her again. Indianapolis and surrounding towns where wrestling matches are held are not depicted in any detail. Left alone, Forrest takes a bus home, but at a stop in Nashville, TN, teams up with a former grandmaster of chess to compete in a tournament in Los Angeles, CA. There Forrest finds himself inserted into a movie and wandering with his New Guinea pal, Sue the male orangutan, and a nearly naked Rachel Welch. Forrest is on the brink of winning the tournament when chaos breaks out and he heads home to Mobile.

In the final chapters, Forrest and Sue go to Bubba's home, Bayou La Batre, AL, to set up a shrimp farm. They start small but within years have a multi-million dollar enterprise,



consisting of three corporations and employing many of the people Forrest has met along his life's way. It gets too big for Forrest, and he heads to Savannah, GA, where he runs into Jenny and her son, Forrest, named after his biological father. Knowing that they are better off with him, Forrest wanders the South with Sue before settling in New Orleans, LA, to watch the "fruitcakes."

Language and Meaning

Author Winston Groom writes *Forrest Gump* entirely in the narrator's Alabama accent. Forrest opens his story about a life that is "no box of chocolates," but "pretty interestin" nonetheless, by stating that his IQ is 70, which is borderline imbecile/moron, but he prefers the term "halfwit." He immediately tells an anecdote that shows he knows when he is being cheated and that he should react more "normally," but instead he walks away, feeling all the more like an idiot. Throughout the novel he demonstrates his ability to see reality and accept everything that comes his way as inevitable. He narrates with a flattened emotionality that is broken only by the most wrenching events—the death of his friend Bubba and the loss of his girlfriend Jenny. Both narrative portions and dialog are filtered into his dialect, so characters have no distinctive voice.

A good way into the novel Forrest reveals that he is an "idiot savant," able to master in short order the equations of Einstein, musical instruments, ping-pong, and chess. Thus in appropriate situations he rattles off technical terms in music ("chromatic stop" and runs on C major) and classical chess gambits. On three occasions, when asked his views on the Vietnam War, he denounces it undiplomatically but forthrightly. President Lyndon B. Johnson likens him to Jethro in the television program "The Beverly Hillbillies." The novel is rich in references to the popular culture of the 1960s. A regular motif has Forrest complaining into microphones that he has to pee. A political manager spins this into a campaign slogan when Forrest briefly runs for the U.S. Senate, claiming it means getting relief from all that burdens the country in the early 1970s.

Forrest's dialect is marked by frequent contractions (e.g., "sposed" for "supposed," "proibly" for "probably") with only rare use of the apostrophe to indicate this, "-ing" regularly elided to "-in," final dentals dropped ("fin" for "find," "jus" for "just"), the shortening of auxiliary verb structures, and phonetic spellings. He uses few idioms, which makes reading far easier for non-Southerners, compared with stories told in true dialect (viz., Robert Lewis Stevenson). The style is readily comprehended and helps endear the narrator to the reader by its honest simplicity.

Structure

Forrest Gump consists of twenty-six numbered but untitled chapters of irregular length. Longer ones depicting multiple scenes use a centered trio of asterisks to show the break in sequence. There is no higher-level division of the story.

The narrator, Forrest Gump, a man in his thirties with an IQ of 70, placing him in the imbecile/moron range, is born and raised in Mobile, AL, by a sheltering, widowed Mama.



From the start he maintains that idiots like him often understand more than others give credit for. He claims at the outset that his story is about a life that is "no box of chocolates," but "pretty interestin" nonetheless. That optimism carries through the narrative with few exceptions.

Forrest tells of his boyhood, wasted in a "special school" for the mentally slow, but credits one teacher with taking the time to teach him to read. Football provides his way out of an institutionalized life, and Forrest colorfully describes life on the field and in the locker room at the high school and college level. He describes classes tailored for football players and wonders that his professors do not realize that he is an idiot. He is likewise amazed that the Army does not see this and admits how he blows up the kitchen accidentally.

Forrest is more somber about his experiences in Vietnam, which include seeing comrades killed in the Tet Offensive, including his closest friend, Bubba, who dies in his arms. In the hospital, Forrest meets Lt. Dan, who imparts his "seize the day" philosophy, which guides Forrest through life, while Dan loses it, as seen in later meetings. Forrest wins the Congressional Medal of Honor, and in a series of outlandish circumstances finds himself in the White House, Peking, New Guinea, Harvard, and Los Angeles. Twice he is united with his childhood sweetheart Jenny and twice loses her.

From Vietnam onward, Forrest is determined to farm shrimp in Bubba's home, Bayou La Batre. It has a quixotic air and is often postponed. At long last, Forrest and his orangutan friend Sue set up the business on a small-scale, but it rapidly grows into a multi-million dollar enterprise employing many of the people Forrest has met along the way. It grows to the point that Forrest cannot stand it any longer and steps away to resume wandering and living the simple life. He runs into Jenny and their son, Forrest Jr., but he does not intrude on their lives. He ends up in New Orleans, watching the "fruitcakes" and considering how his life has never been "hum-drum."



Quotes

"LET ME SAY THIS: bein a idiot is no box of chocolates. People laugh, lose patience, treat you shabby. Now they says folks sposed to be kind to the afflicted, but let me tell you—it ain't always that way. Even so, I got no complaints, cause I reckon I done live a pretty interestin life, so to speak.

"I been a idiot since I was born. My IQ is near 70, which qualifies me, so they say. Probly, tho, I'm closer to bein a imbecile or maybe even a moron, but personally, I'd rather think of myself as like a halfwit, or somethin—an not no idiot—cause when people think of a idiot, more'n likely they be thinkin of one of them Mongolian idiots-the ones with they eyes too close together what look like Chinamen an drool a lot an play with theyselfs.

"Now I'm slow—I'll grant you that, but I'm probly a lot brighter than folks think, cause what goes on in my mind is a sight different than what folks see. For instance, I can think things pretty good, but when I got to try sayin or writin them, it kinda come out like jello or somethin. I'll show you what I mean.

"The other day, I'm walkin down the street an this man was out workin in his yard. He'd got hisself a bunch of shrubs to plant an he say to me, "Forrest, you wanna earn some money?" an I says, 'Uh-huh,' an so he sets me to movin dirt. Damn near ten or twelve wheelbarrows of dirt, in the heat of the day, truckin it all over creation. When I'm thru he reach in his pocket for a dollar. What I shoulda done was raised Cain about the low wages, but instead, I took the damn dollar an all I could say was "thanks" or somethin dumb-soundin like that, an I went on down the street, waddin an unwaddin that dollar in my hand, feelin like a idiot.

"You see what I mean?" Chapter 1, pp. 1-2.

"The fact that I were too dumb to play college football did not seem to impress the United States Army none. It were my last year at highschool an in the springtime everbody else graduated. They let me set up on the stage tho, an even give me a black robe to put on, an when it come time, the principal announce they was gonna give me a 'special' diploma. I got up to go to the microphone an the two goons stan up an go with me-I spose so's I don't make no remarks like I did at the All State Football thing. My mama is down in the front row cryin and wringin her hans an I really feel good, like I actually done accomplish somethin.

"But when we git back home, I finally realize why she bawlin an carryin on-they was a letter come from the Army say I got to report to the local daft board or somesuch. I didn't know what the deal was, but my mama did-it was 1968 an they was all sorts of shit fixin to hoppen. " Chapter 2, p. 16.

"They was about a hundrit people in the medical class all wearin green aprons an takin notes. Doctor Mills put me up on the stage in a chair with a pitcher an a glass of water in front of me.

"He's sayin a whole bunch of crap I don't follow, but after a wile I get the feelin he's talkin bout me.

" 'Idiot savant,' he say loudly, an everbody be starin my way.

" 'A person who cannot tie a necktie, who can barely lace up his shoes, who has the



mental capacity of perhaps a six- to ten-yearold, and-in this case-the body of, well, an Adonis.' Doctor Mills be smilin at me in a way I don't like, but I'm stuck, I guess.

" 'But the mind,' he says, 'the mind of the idiot savant has rare pockets of brilliance, so that Forrest here can solve advanced mathematical equations that would stump any of you, and he can pick up complex musical themes with the ease of Liszt or Beethoven. Idiot savant,' he says again, sweepin his han in my direction.

"I ain't sure what I'm sposed to do, but he had said for me to play somethin, so I pull out the harmonica an start playin 'Puff, the Magic Dragon.' Everbody settin there watchin me like I'm a bug or somethin, an when the song's over they still jus settin there lookin at me-don't even clap or nothin. I figgered they don't like it, so I stood up an said, 'Thanks,' an I lef. Shit on them people." Chapter 4, p. 34.

"I'm settin there watchin it, so nervous I didn't know what to do, when all of a sudden the first sergeant come bustin thru the door.

" 'What in hell is goin on here?' he axed. 'Where is these men's food?'

" 'It is almost ready, Sergeant,' I say, an jus about then, the boiler commenced to rumble an shake. Steam begun to come out of the sides an one of the legs on the boiler tore loose from the floor.

" 'What is that?' the sergeant axed. 'Is you cookin somethin in that boiler!'

" 'That is the supper,' I says, an the sergeant got this real amazed look on his face, an a secont later, he got a real frightened look, like you might get jus before an automobile wreck, an then the boiler blew up.

"I am not exactly sure what happened nex. I do remember that it blowed the roof off the mess hall an blowed all the winders out an the doors too.

"It blowed the dishwasher guy right thru a wall, an the guy what was stackin plates jus took off up in the air, sort of like Rocket Man.

"Sergeant an me, we is miraculously spared somehow, like they say will happen when you are so close to a han grenade that you aren't hurt by it. But somehow it blowed both our clothes off, cept for the big chef's hat I was wearin at the time. An it blowed stew all over us, so's we looked like-well, I don't know what we looked like-but man, it was strange.

"Incredibly, it didn't do nothin to all them guys settin out there in the mess hall neither. Jus lef em settin at they tables, covered with stew, actin kinda shell-shocked or somethin-but it sure did shut their asses up about when they food is gonna be ready.

"Suddenly the company commander come runnin into the buildin.

" 'What was that!' he shouted. 'What happen?' He look at the two of us, an then holler, 'Sergeant Kranz, is that you?'

" 'Gump—Boiler—Stew!' the sergeant say, an then he kind of git holt of hissef an grapped a meat cleaver off the wall.

" 'Gump—Boiler—Stew!' he scream, an come after me with the cleaver. I done run out the door, an he be chasin me all over the parade grounds, an even thru the Officer's Club an the Motorpool. I outrunned him tho, cause that is my specialty, but let me say this: they ain't no question in my mind that I am up the creek for sure." Chapter 5, pp. 45-47.

"So I drop his ass an kep on goin an sure enough, there is Bubba, who is been hit twice in the chest, an I say, 'Bubba, it gonna be okay, you hear, cause we gotta get that srimp



boat an all,' an I carry him back to where we is set up an layed him on the groun. When I catch my breath, I look down an my shirt all covered with blood an bluish yeller goo from where Bubba is hurt, an Bubba is lookin up at me, an he say, 'Fuck it, Forrest, why this happen?' Well, what in hell am I gonna say?

"Then Bubba axe me, 'Forrest, you play me a song on the harmonica?' So I get it out, an start playin somethin—I don't even know what, an then Bubba say, 'Forrest, would you please play "Way Down Upon the Swanee River"?' an I say, 'Sure, Bubba.' I have to wipe off the mouthpiece, an then I start to play an there is still a terrible lot of shootin goin on, an I know I ought to be with my machine gun, but what the hell, I played that song.

"I hadn't noticed it, but it had quit rainin an the sky done turned a awful pinkish color. It made everbody's face look like death itself, an for some reason, the gooks done quit shootin for a wile, an so had we. I played 'Way Down Upon the Swanee River' over an over again, kneelin nex to Bubba wile the medic give him a shot an tend to him best he could. Bubba done grapped a holt to my leg an his eyes got all cloudy an that terrible pink sky seem to drain all the color in his face.

"He was tryin to say somethin, an so I bent over real close to hear what it was. But I never coud make it out. So I axed the medic, 'You hear what he say?'

"An the medic say, 'Home. He said, home.'

"Bubba, he died, an that's all I got to say bout that. Chapter 6, pp. 60-61.

"The President is a great big ole guy who talk like he is from Texas or somethin an they has assembled a whole bunch of people some of which look like maids an cleanin men an such, but they is all out in this nice rose garden in the bright sunshine.

"An Army guy commence to readin some kind of bullshit an everbody be listenin up keen, cept for me, on account of I is starvin since we has not had our breakfast yet. Finally the Army guy is thru an then the President come up to me an take the medal out of a box an pin it on my chest. Then he shake my han an all these people start takin pichers an clappin an such as that.

"I figger it is over then, an we can get the hell out of there, but the President, he still standin there, lookin at me kind of funny. Finally he say, 'Boy, is that your stomach that is growlin like that?'

"I glance over at Colonel Gooch but he jus roll his eyes up, an so I nod, an say, 'Uh, huh,' an the President say, 'Well, c'mon boy, lets go an git us somethin to eat!'

"I foller him inside an we go into a little roun room an the President tell a guy who is dressed up like a waiter to bring me some breakfast. It jus the two of us in there, an wile we is waitin for the breakfast he start axin me questions, such as do I know why we is fightin the gooks an all, an is they treatin us right in the Army. I jus nod my head an after a wile he stop axin me questions an they is this kind of silence an then he say, 'Do you want to watch some television wile we is waitin for your food?'

"I nod my head again, an the President turn on a tv set behin his desk an we watch 'The Beverly Hillbillies.' The President is most amused an say he watches it ever day an that I sort of remin him of Jethro. After breakfast, the President axe me if I want him to show me aroun the house, an I say, 'Yeah,' an off we go. When we get outside, all them photographer fellers are followin us aroun an then the President decide to set down on a little bench an he say to me, 'Boy, you was wounded, wasn't you?' an I nod, an then he say, 'Well, look at this,' an he pull up his shirt an show me a big ole scar on his



stomach where he has had an operation of some kind, an he axe, 'Where was you wounded?' an so I pull down my pants an show him. Well, all them photographer fellers rush up an start to take pichers, an several folks come runnin over an I am hustled away to where Colonel Gooch is waitin.'" Chapter 8, pp. 76-77.

"When we get home, Jenny begun takin off her clothes. She is down to her underpants, an I am jus settin on the couch tryin not to notice, but she come up an stand in front of me an she say, 'Forrest, I want you to fuck me now.'

"You coulda knocked me over with a feather! I jus set there an gawked up at her. Then she set down nex to me an started foolin with my britches, an nex thing I knowed, she'd got off my shirt an was huggin an kissin me an all. At first, it was jus a little odd, her doin all that. Course I had dreamed bout it all along, but I had not expected it quite this way. But then, well I guess somethin come over me, an it didn't matter what I'd expected, cause we was rollin aroun on the couch an had our clothes nearly off an then Jenny pulled down my undershorts an her eyes get big an she say, 'Whooo-lookit what you got there!' an she grapped me jus like Miz French had that day, but Jenny never say nothin about me keepin my eyes closed, so I didn't.

"Well, we done all sorts of things that afternoon that I never even dreamt of in my wildest imagination. Jenny shown me shit I never could of figgered out on my own—sidewise, crosswise, upside down, bottom-wise, lengthwise, dogwise, standin up, settin down, bendin over, leanin back, inside-out an outside-in—only way we didn't try it was apart! We rolled all over the livin room an into the kitchen-stove in furniture, knocked shit over, pulled down drapes, mussed up the rug an even turned the tv set on by accident. Wound up doin it in the sink, but don't axe me how. When we is finally finished, Jenny jus lie there a wile, an then she look at me an say, 'Goddamn, Forrest, where is you been all my life?'" Chapter 10, pp. 97-98.

"We be gettin real close to the earth now, an the spaceship still swinging under the parachute. There is nothin but jungle an mountains beneath us cept for a little bitty lake that is kind of brown. We can barely make out somethin going on nex to the lake down there. The three of us—me, Sue an Major Fritch—all got our noses pressed to the winder lookin down, an all of a sudden Major Fritch cry out, 'Good God! This ain't Borneo—this is fuckin New Guinea, an all that shit on the groun must be one of them Cargo Cults or somethin!'"

"Sue an me lookin down hard, an there on the groun nex to the lake, lookin back at us, is about a thousan natives, all with they arms raised up towards us. They is wearin little grass skirts an has their hair all flayed out, an some is carryin shields an spears.

"'Damn,' I say, 'what you say they is?'"

"'Cargo Cult,' Major Fritch say. 'In World War II we used to drop packages of candy an stuff like that on these jungle bunnies to keep em on our side, an they ain't never forgot it. Figgered it was God or somebody doin it, an ever since, they is waiting for us to come back. Even built crude runways an all-see down there? They has got a landin zone all marked off with them big roun black markers.'

"'Them things look more like cookin pots to me,' I says.

"'Yeah, they do, sort of,' Major Fritch say curiously.

"'Ain't this where cannibals come from?' I axed.

"'I reckon we will soon find out,' she say.



"Spaceship is gently swingin towards the lake, an jus afore we hit, they start beatin they drums an movin they mouths up and down. We can't hear nothin on account of bein in the capsule, but our maginations doin just fine." Chapter 13, pp. 125-126.

"Well, when we get to the White House, I'm expectin to see the same ole President what fed me breakfast an let me watch 'The Beverly Hillbillies,' but they is got a new President now-feller with his hair all slicked back, puffy little cheeks an a nose look like Pinocchio's.

"'Tell me now,' this President say, 'did you have an exciting trip?'

"A feller in a suit standin next to the President lean over an whisper somethin to him, an suddenly the President say, 'Oh, ah, accually what I meant was, how great it is that you have escaped from your ordeal in the jungle.'

"The feller in the suit whisper somethin else to the President, an he say to me, 'Er, now what about your companion?'

"'Sue?' I say.

"'Was that her name?' Now he be lookin at a little card in his han. 'Says here it was a Major Janet Fritch, and that even as you were being rescued she was dragged off into the jungle by a cannibal.'

"'Where it say that?' I axed.

"'Right here,' the President say.

"'That's not so,' I says.

"'Are you suggesting I am a liar?' say the President.

"'I'm jus sayin it ain't so,' I says.

"'Now look here,' say the President, 'I am your commander in chief. I am not a crook. I do not lie!'

"'I am very sorry,' I says, 'but it ain't the truth bout Major Fritch. You jus take that off a card, but—'

"'Tape!' the President shout.

"'Huh?' I says.

"'No, no,' says the feller in the suit. 'He said "take"—not "tape," Mister President.'

"'TAPE!' scream the President. 'I told you never to mention that word in my presence again! You are all a bunch of disloyal Communist swines.' The President be poundin hissef on the knee with his fist.

"'None of you understand. I don't know anything bout anything! I never heard of anything! And if I did, I either forgot it, or it is top secret!'

"'But Mister President,' say the feller in the suit, 'he didn't say it. He only said—'

"'Now you are calling me a liar!' he say. 'You're fired!'

"'But you can't fire me,' the feller say. 'I am the Vice President.'" Chapter 16, pp. 147-148.

"I took her an hole her in my arms an we stayed like that for a wile. Dan rolled hissef into the bathroom, say he's got to take a pee. When he's in there, Jenny axe how he gonna do that, an don't he need hep? an I say, 'No, I seen him do it before. He can manage.'

"She shake her head an say, 'This is where the Vietnam War have got us.'

"There ain't much disputin that either. It is a sad an sorry spectacle when a no-legged man have got to pee in his hat an then dump it over into the toilet." Chapter 18, p. 162.



"We get to the apartment an lo an behole, Jenny is gone too. All her things is gone, cept she lef us some clean sheets an towels an some pots an pans an stuff. On the table in the livin room is a note. Dan foun it first, an he read it out loud to me.

" 'Dear Forrest, [it says]

"I am just not able to take this anymore. I have tried to talk to you about my feelings, and you don't seem to care. There is something particularly bad about what you are gonna do tonight, because it isn't honest, and I am afraid I cannot go on with you any longer.

"Maybe it is my fault, partly, because I have gotten to an age where I need to settle down. I think about having a house and a family and goin to church and things like that. I have known you since the first grade, Forrest—nearly thirty years—and have watched you grow up big and strong and fine. And when I finally realized how much I cared for you—when you came up to Boston—I was the happiest girl in the world.

"And then you took to smoking too much dope, and you fooled with those girls down in Provincetown, an even after that, I missed you, and was glad you came to Washington during the peace demonstration to see me.

"But when you got shot up in the spaceship and were lost in the jungle nearly four years, I think maybe I changed. I am not as hopeful as I used to be, and think I would be satisfied with just a simple life somewhere. So, now I must go an find it.

"Something is changed in you, too, dear Forrest. I don't think you can help it exactly, for you were always a 'special' person, but we no longer seem to think the same way. I am in tears as I write this, but we must part now. Please don't try to find me. I wish you well, my darling-good-bye.

"love,

"Jenny

"Dan handed the note to me but I let it drop on the floor an just stood there, realizin for the first time in my life what it is truly like to be a idiot." Chapter 20, pp. 184-185.

"I could feel my heart poundin, an my hans got cold an damp an all I coud think of was goin someplace an curlin up into a ball the way I had that time after Bubba got kilt, an so that's what I did. I foun some shrubs in back of somebody's yard an I crawled under there an jus got myself into a ball. I think I even commenced to suck my thumb, which I ain't done in a long wile since my mama always said it was a sure sign that somebody's a idiot, unless they are a baby. Anyhow, I don't know how long I stayed there. It was most of a day an a haf I guess.

"I didn't feel no blame for Jenny, she done what she had to. After all, I am a idiot, an wile a lot of people say they is married to idiots, they couldn't never imagine what would be in store if they ever married a real one. Mostly, I guess, I am jus feelin sorry for myself, because somehow I had actually got to where I believed that Jenny an me would be together someday. An so when I learnt from her mama that she is married, it was like a part of me has died an will never be again, for gettin married is not like runnin away. Gettin married is a very serious deal. Sometime durin the night I cried, but it did not hep much.

"It was later that afternoon when I crawled out of the shrubs an gone on back to Bayou La Batre. I didn't tell nobody what had happened, cause I figgered it wouldn't of done no good. They was some work I needed to do aroun the ponds, mendin nets an such, an I went on out by myself an done it. By the time I get finished it is dark, an I done made a



decision—I am gonna thow mysef into the srimp bidness an work my ass off. It is all I can do." Chapter 25, p. 223.

Topics for Discussion

Forrest Gump says that the harmonica changes his whole life. Discuss at least three ways in which this is true. What does the harmonica reveal about Forrest's mind?

Forrest Gump says that Lt. Dan's philosophy of "seize the day" changes his outlook on life. Discuss at least two ways in which Forrest seizes the day against odds, and contrast this with Lt. Dan's own abandonment of his philosophy.

How does Forrest Gump interact with U.S. presidents Johnson and Nixon? What political motivation—if any—guides the way in which the author describes the meetings?

Which event more radically alters Forrest Gump's destiny: meeting and losing Bubba or meeting and losing Jenny Curran? Discuss the two relationships.

Is the aborted Mars flight and extended stay in New Guinea an isolated vignette or does it serve to move the entire novel forward?

How does Forrest Gump view his colleagues in football and the Army? Do the experiences improve or worsen his self-image?

Forrest Gump describes his Mama as a "good woman," but speaks fearfully of some of her methods of discipline. Discuss Forrest's pre-high school years and how he appears to cope with his limitations.