

Gods and Generals Study Guide

Gods and Generals by Jeffrey Shaara

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Plot Summary

Gods and Generals stands as one of the most enjoyable examples of historical fiction in recent history. The book follows four of the most influential military commanders of the American Civil War. They are Robert E. Lee and Thomas Jonathan Jackson, fighting for the South and Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and Winfield Scott Hancock, fighting for the North. We are introduced to these men in the years just prior to the war and goes until the days just before the decisive Battle of Gettysburg.

As the book begins when we find all of them a bit uncomfortable with life during peace time. However, the peaceful life does not last for long. State's rights, slavery, and the vast cultural gulf between north and south all contribute to the national turmoil, which eventually breaks out in full fledged civil war.

At the start of the war, Lee takes a rather thankless post as commander of Virginia's militia. As his troops are combined with the Confederate army, he finds himself with little to do. Jackson and Hancock are both given brigade commands for their respective armies and Chamberlain becomes a lieutenant colonel in the 20th Main regiment.

The Battle of Bull Run, which is the first battle of the war goes in favor of the south, but the advantage does not last. Before long, the confederate capital of Richmond is threatened by the Union army under McClellan. After the Southern commander is killed the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, confers command of the army to General Lee.

After this there is a series of thrilling confrontations. The southern forces are consistently outnumbered and under supplied, but they defeat the Union Army repeatedly. Lee, with Jackson as his right hand general, wins at the Seven Day's Battle, the Second Battle of Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredricksburg.

While the southern commanders enjoy incredible successes, Hancock is forced to watch his commanding officers bumble and fumble the battles. He is an excellent officer, but not high enough in rank to truly change the course of the war. At Antietam his entire division is put in a useless position and never sees any action. When the army is stuck on the wrong side of a river at Fredricksburg he finds a way across, but cannot convince his commanders to use it.

Chamberlain is the only character with no military experience before the war. He was a professor of "Natural and Revealed Religion" and takes some time getting used to leading his troops. He is put in full command of his regiment during the midst of the battle of Fredricksburg, leading his men to within one hundred yards of the enemy before getting pinned down.

The climax of the book is the Battle of Chancellorsville. The new commander of the Union Army, General Hooker, outflanks the confederates and catches General Lee off guard. With half of his army over a hundred miles away, Jackson is Lee's his only



reliable general. They plan an audacious flanking attack of their own and collapse Hooker's army into a near panicked retreat.

As the fighting at Chancellorsville stretches into the evening, Jackson is accidentally shot and mortally wounded by his own men. In the final days before the imminent battle of Gettysburg, we witness him slowly succumb to his wounds and the infections brought on after amputation. The final chapter of the book shows that Lee decide to invade the north to gamble everything in order to end the war.



Part One, Chapters 1-5

Part One, Chapters 1-5 Summary

God's and Generals is broken up, chapter by chapter, between the perspectives of its four main characters, Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jonathan Jackson, Winfield Scott Hancock, and Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. These four men had a defining impact on the American Civil War and the story follows them from a few years prior to the war until a few days before the decisive Battle of Gettysburg.

In Chapter One, Lee, at this time a colonel in the United States Army, comes home on leave. His father-in-law has died and left him in charge of the family estate of Arlington, just across the Potomac river from Washington DC. He comes back to find his daughter grown up and his wife crippled by arthritis. He reflects on a life of military service and the many years he has spent far from the people he loves.

In Chapter Two, starting in Jackson's classroom at the Virginia Military Academy, we see what an awkward teacher he is. After his students ask him a number of questions he decides to repeat the entire lecture verbatim on the succeeding class, rather than change his wording so they can understand it. He goes to his pastor after school to talk to him about a recent tragedy, the death of his newborn daughter. He follows his pastor's recommendation that he go to his mother's grave to reflect and seek some comfort.

In Chapter Three, after missing a perfect shot to bring down a deer in the snowy woods of Maine, Chamberlain reflects on his life. He considers his decision to become an academic rather than going to West Point and becoming a soldier. He gets a second shot at the deer and his gun clicks, the shot failing to go off.

In Chapter Four, Lee has begun to put things in order around his father-in-law's estate when Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart delivers an urgent request that he report to the Secretary of War. Once in Washington he is ordered to Harper's Ferry Virginia to command a force of marines and militia units to quell an insurrection led by John Brown of Kansas. What is reported to be a massive uprising of hundreds of slaves turns out to be a couple of dozen men who have holed up inside of an armory. It is a hostage situation and Lee carefully weighs his options, giving John Brown and his men a chance to surrender before ordering the marines to storm the building.

In Chapter Five, Jackson hears the news of John Brown's capture and trial. The Virginia Military Academy, staff and students, serve as a protective force to make sure there is no trouble at the execution. As John Brown is hung and Jackson watches from a distance with his cadets and two artillery pieces, he prays for Brown's soul.

Part One, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Much of this introduction is retrospective. The characters spend a great deal of time wondering what might have happened differently in their lives. It is clear that none of them have foreseen the civil war that is coming. They are mostly disappointed with how things have gone and see little hope for a positive change to come. While a war is not a positive thing this book constantly asks the question, "Can war bring out the best in men?"

We are introduced to Jackson's turbulent spiritual journey. His faith is very personal, but he wonders what God demands of him. The death of his daughter seemed like a punishment and he is afraid that if he loves someone too much that God will be offended and punish him further.

His love of Lemons is an historically documented occurrence. There is an interesting moment of foreshadowing when Lee confronts John Brown. One of Lee's great talents as a leader was his ability to appease and cooperate with many different personalities. His expert understanding of a complicated situation and the ease with which garners the respect of the militia leader and the marine lieutenant is a perfect example of his style of command.

Through a remarkable coincidence of history shown through the book we also see the first intersection of Lee and Jackson. Their partnership is an integral part of the book and begins with the John Brown episode.



Part One, Chapters 6-10

Part One, Chapters 6-10 Summary

In Chapter 6, posted in the frontier city of Los Angeles, Captain Hancock is made aware that there is trouble brewing. He is told that if Abraham Lincoln wins the presidential election then civil war is all but certain. The territory of California was only recently taken from Mexico by the U.S. in the Mexican war twenty years earlier. Now the native population of Spaniards and Mexicans are threatening rebellion, taking advantage of the turmoil in the east. As the only soldier in charge of a supply post filled with weapons and supplies enough for a small army, Hancock locks himself in for the night, but receives unexpected help from the the friends he has made in town. As morning arrives, so does a regiment of U.S. infantry to serve as stronger protection for the post.

In Chapter 7, before his leave is over Lee frees many of his father-in-law's slaves and one of them asks that he be allowed to buy his brother. Lee then leaves for San Antonio to retake his post. Once he arrives there is more talk that the south will split from the north if Lincoln is elected. After the election takes place on November 6, 1860 Lee's commander, General Twiggs, brings Lee to a meeting with the Governor of Texas, Sam Houston where it becomes clear that if Texas secedes from the union the army will not resist.

In Chapter 8, the owner and editor of the Los Angeles Star, Mr. Hamilton, invites Hancock to a meeting. Hamilton tells Hancock that Lincoln has won the election. He suggests that California should secede and become its own nation and that Hancock might become an important man in a Californian Republic. Hancock does not approve of the suggestion. He goes back to camp and his old friend Major Armistead sends a message that he would like to be invited to dinner.

In Chapter 9, after Texas votes to secede from the union Lee is recalled from Texas to Washington. Chaos reigns in Texas and all of his belongings are taken by the new militia units forming for the defense of the south. In Washington, General Winfield Scott, is commander of the United States military forces. He offers Lee a position as second in command. Lee asks for time to consider the offer and as he waits southern troops attack Fort Sumter, starting the civil war. Lee resigns from the army on the same day that Virginia Secedes.

In Chapter 10, Jackson meets with his dead wife's father, Dr. Junkin. Junkin is leaving Virginia to go north and wants to say good bye to Jackson, but there are hard words between them since Jackson wishes to fight to protect Virginia and Junkin believes the war is in defiance of God's will. Shortly after, Jackson receives orders to march with the Corps of Cadets to begin forming an army. He prays with his wife and rides off to war.



Part One, Chapters 6-10 Analysis

As the war approaches, the characters are all thrown into the difficult position of understanding why it has come and which side they will be on. Lee, Hancock and Jackson were all soldiers in the Mexican war and have seen combat. None of them want to believe another war is coming.

One of the most important concepts to grasp as you read these chapters, is the relative independence of the American States at this time. Each state considered itself a very separate entity. The characters express an intense loyalty to their state of origin, especially Lee and Jackson, who are both from Virginia. Lee is a loyal soldier of the United States and does not commit any treasonable acts while still in the army, but he refuses to fight against his home state and so retires.

Hancock sees that this conflict has even more facets to it than north and south. California is very far away from Washington and slavery is not an issue there, but it doesn't mean secession is out of the question. The country is diverse and divided by racial, ethnic and even religious differences. The Catholic priests are as much a government to the Mexican population in Los Angeles as the actual government is. We also see that family loyalties extend to those soldiers posted all over the country. The army, along with the country, is splitting apart.

Jackson's religion continues to play a vital role in his story. Dr. Junkin tells him, "God will damn all those who fight to destroy this country." Jackson believes that Virginia is his country and the United States is the aggressor against them, but the statement has power because Jackson wants to do God's will, believes he is God's servant.

Throughout these chapters the men who have seen war are wary of it, while those who have never seen men die are excited for the chance to fight for their cause. The author will consistently follow the guideline that men who are good at warfare are hesitant to use it as a means.

Part One, Chapters 11-15

Part One, Chapters 11-15 Summary

In Chapter 11, arriving in Richmond, Lee meets with the Governor of Virginia. He is given command of Virginia's provisional army, though it is expected that this force will merge with a larger army made of forces from all of the southern states. It is made clear that the politicians expect Lee to not only establish a line of defense, but to attack the northern forces.

In Chapter 12, we are introduced to Lewis Armistead, an old friend of Hancock's. Together they are informed that the war has begun and their commanding officer, general Johnston is resigning to fight for the confederacy and recommends that others do the same. The list of states seceding continues to grow until Armistead is forced to pick sides and decides he will go south, while Hancock is decidedly for the north. Johnston comes to Los Angeles with the intention of moving there permanently and the three of them discuss what they will do next.

In Chapter 13, one of Lee's tasks as commander of Virginia's forces is assigning new officers for the army. Jackson arrives in his office seeking a new appointment. Lee makes him a Colonel in charge of a brigade near Harper's Ferry, guarding the same arsenal John Brown had fought in.

After this Lee meets his new aide, Lieutenant Walter Taylor.

Once Lee has completed the transition of Virginia's forces into the main confederate army he finds himself with little to do. The President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, comes to Lee to tell him of his new rank as Brigadier General, but Lee is disappointed to be assigned to staff work, organizing the supplies instead of commanding troops in combat.

In Chapter 14, Hancock continues to wait for new orders from Washington now that the war has begun. A party has been planned so that the officers can say farewell before they go their separate ways. The men drink and sing and toast Hancock's wife Mira as an excellent hostess. Having had a good deal to drink, Armistead tells Hancock "If I ever... raise my hand... against you... may God strike me dead." Soon after the party, Hancock receives orders to report to Washington as a supply officer.

In Chapter 15, the first full scale battle of the war has begun and Lee is stuck in Richmond waiting for news. Taylor, his aide requests permission to fight and Lee lets him go to find a post with an infantry unit. After a long day of waiting Lee sees soldiers dismounting from a train. He finds out from one of the troops that Confederate forces have won the Battle of Bull Run and General Jackson was the key player in the battle, his soldiers standing like a "stone wall."



Part One, Chapters 11-15 Analysis

These chapters focus entirely on Hancock and Lee. Both of them find themselves doing a lot of waiting. Lee works hard to get the southern forces ready for combat, but does not get to go himself. Instead he is forced to take up responsibilities he finds tedious. Hancock is far from the center of everything that is happening and it takes weeks for news to get from Washington to California. Also, while Hancock was in the Mexican war he has always been assigned to supply duties instead of to combat. He despises the job, even though he is good at it.

Before the Civil War, America's army was very small. Nearly all of the officers knew each other. Most of them had attended the military academy at West Point together, or fought in the Mexican war together. This made the Civil War a very emotionally charged conflict for these soldiers. They were fighting men they had known and been friends with for most of their lives. The author uses Armistead and Hancock to illustrate this. Their friendship is a fact of history and stories of best friends and even brothers, or fathers and sons fighting against each other in this war are very common.

The party that Mira Hancock throws is an important moment. Even though the war has already begun there is a strange limbo for the men who have retired from the US army, but are not yet officially fighting for the south. There is a code of honor at play here. These men are enemies, but would never think of assassinating each other, or even trying to arrest one another, even though it would help their "cause." They are united by bonds of friendship.

Lee is told by the Governor of Virginia and other politicians to "hit them hard." They are telling him to attack before the army has even been organized and Lee makes it clear later, in his conversation with President Davis that he did not think it wise, or even possible to attack the northern forces until the army was ready. There is always a tension between what politicians want and what generals think is possible.



Part One, Chapters 16-19

Part One, Chapters 16-19 Summary

In Chapter 16, Hancock arrives in Washington a few weeks after the Battle of Bull Run. Even though the southern army won the battle they had not pursued their advantage. General George McClellan, commander of the US army calls Hancock into his office and tells him Lincoln has called for seventy-five thousand troops, then promotes him from Captain to Brigadier General. Both armies, north and south, lack the organization and training to fight the war immediately and so fall and winter pass without another fight.

In Chapter 17, it is now April of 1862. President Davis, the Secretary of War and Lee are all in disagreement with General Johnston, the commander of the Confederate Army. The Union Army has divided into two branches, one attacking from the James River in the east and another attacking over land from the north. Johnston wishes to retreat back to defensive positions around Richmond, while the others wish to defend more of Virginia if possible. Lee sends word to Jackson, who is posted in the Shenandoah Valley to the north of Richmond. Jackson's sixteen thousand men successfully defeat four Union armies totaling seventy thousand men. This delays the Union Army in the north. Johnston, fighting in the east, cuts off all communication to Richmond, but the stragglers coming back from the front line tell the Confederate leaders that things are not going well.

In Chapter 18, as part of the army attacking Richmond from the east, Hancock's brigade unloads outside of Yorktown. They are on enemy ground, supposedly to attack, but end up encamped there for almost a month, besieging the enemy position even though they vastly outnumber the enemy. At long last, in May, an attack is made. Hancock and his men end up far outside of the enemy flank. They cross a creek, using a route that takes them almost behind the enemy army and Hancock believes he can win the battle if reinforced. Just as enemy troops begin to arrive Hancock is given orders to pull back. Despite sending back multiple protests to his commanders he eventually follows the order. Hancock tells his men to "look as panicked as you can." Once across the creek, he uses the crest of a hill to disguise the fact that his men have reformed their line. When the confederates approach his men open fire and completely surprise them, killing hundreds and taking hundreds of prisoners. General McClellan hears about the fight and orders another attack the next day, but the Confederates have already retreated.

In Chapter 19, several more battles have been fought and Lee learns of the losses and retreats at Williamsburg and Seven Pines. Lee goes out to the front lines himself to see what is going on and finds President Davis has done the same. They see that the battle is chaos and General Johnston is not coordinating his troops well. After Johnston is wounded, Davis puts Lee in command of the army.



Part One, Chapters 16-19 Analysis

Lee and Hancock continue to be our main characters for the time being. Though the book is about war, the concentration is on the personalities of the men in charge and not always on the actual combat. This makes Lee and Hancock excellent choices for the protagonists as they interact with the essential leadership of their armies.

Hancock may not be the leader on the Union side, but he is consistently a part of the battles that occur. The Union army commanders are constantly being replaced for reasons of incompetence, but Hancock remains. He has an understanding of combat, an ability to read a battlefield that many of those above him do not possess. We see this for the first time at the Battle of Williamsburg. He realizes that he is in an exposed position and his brigade could be cut off, but he continues moving forward. He also deals well with his superiors, even when he disagrees with them. After receiving orders to withdraw from a strong position, he buys time by sending the courier back, saying the orders were "vague." This kind of maneuvering savvy shows us that he knows his duty, but does not mindlessly follow orders.

The author could not use the commanding generals on the Union side as main characters because they are consistently timid in the face of battle. We are drawn to courage, not hesitation and Hancock is fun to read about because he has that courage, while also being experienced in the ways of war.

General Lee experiences a similar frustration to Hancock's. He has an aggressive, fighting nature and while watching General Johnston retreat and make excuses why his soldiers cannot win his feeling of powerlessness is communicated to the reader. Chapter nineteen ends part one of the book and you can think of part one as a long building up until the moment when Lee is given command of the Army of Northern Virginia. The last words of the chapter are a foreshadowing of what is to come. Lee is comfortable and confident in command and he is "very, very good" at it.



Part Two, Chapters 20-22

Part Two, Chapters 20-22 Summary

In Chapter 20, we are given a brief summary of the battles that occurred after Lee took over. Lee divided the army into two corps, one under Jackson and the other under General James Longstreet. Seven days of fighting and Lee had defeated the army that threatened Richmond from the east. Even though the Confederates were outnumbered Lee had attacked over and over again until General McClellan, leading the Union troops withdraws them back to Washington by sea. McClellan is relieved of command and replaced by General John Pope.

In Chapter 21, the war has been going for over a year and Chamberlain is still a professor at Bowdoin College in Maine. Many of his students are volunteering to fight and he makes a speech to his class telling them that he approves. The leaders of the college hear about his views and recommend he take a two year sabbatical and travel to Europe with his family. He decides instead to go the state capital and ask the governor for a commission in the army. To Chamberlain's surprise he is made second in command of a new regiment, the Twentieth Maine. He returns home and his wife is very unhappy with the news that he is joining the army, but decides not to try and stop him.

In Chapter 22, it has been a month since the Union Army was driven out of Virginia in the east. Lee's cavalry commander, J.E.B. Stuart reports in regarding General Pope's movement to the north. Lee realizes that he has a chance to fight that force while half of the Union Army is still being transported back from the battles along the James River to the east. Lee orders General Jackson to get his troops between the Union army and Washington. This forces Pope to turn around and fight Jackson. They will meet in the middle right on the same ground where the battle of Bull Run was fought.

Lee and Longstreet travel together so they can meet up with Jackson whose force went north by itself. After being delayed by a force of Cavalry under General Buford they find out that Jackson's twenty-two thousand men are under attack by over seventy thousand northern troops. Longstreet and Lee do not arrive in time to fight the first day, but Jackson is dug in for defense and holds off Pope's army. Longstreet's men move in to position undetected and the next day he attacks and completely surprises the Union army. The Second Battle of Bull Run is another big victory for the south, days of rain prevent them from destroying Pope's army and making their victory complete.

After the battle, Lee's horse is spooked and Lee falls off. His hands get stuck in the reins and are badly injured. Working out of the back of a hospital cart, Lee calls his Generals together and tells them they will go north, out of Virginia and invade Maryland.



Part Two, Chapters 20-22 Analysis

We move through a lot of battles very fast in these chapters. Lee is shown at his most aggressive. Above all we see that Lee defeats his opponents psychologically more than militarily. His army is always outnumbered and under supplied, but he wins anyway. McClellan shows himself to be overly cautious and so Lee attacks him over and over again. We are told that Lee's army doesn't win at Frayser's Farm, Gaines Mill, Mechanicsville, or Malvern Hill, which are the four battles that take place to the east of Richmond. But McClellan keeps retreating every time he is attacked. Pope is shown to be arrogant so Lee moves quickly and makes Jackson's corps appear to be an easy target, while also threatening Washington. Pope attacks so recklessly that when Longstreet's corp shows up he gets into place and attacks completely unnoticed.

You also see Lee working brilliantly with his subordinates. He analyzes the character of Jackson and Longstreet and uses their talents accordingly and with obvious success. One of the author's tools is Lee's near perfect ability to judge character. If he makes a judgment call about a person the reader can usually rely on that judgment being correct.

Chamberlain is brought back for the first time since chapter three. He brings the heart and soul of the northern cause into the books. Hancock fights because he is a good and loyal soldier. Chamberlain fights because he believes it is the right thing to do.

He gives two speeches in chapter twenty-one. The first shows the basic Unionist position, that they are fighting the war to keep the country from falling apart and preserving the country is something worth fighting for. The second speech gets more passionate. He believes if the country falls apart then the concepts of the United States and the Constitution and even freedom itself will be threatened.

War as an expression of justice is a major theme for the novel. Men fight to enforce justice and also believe God shows his will and his justice through battle. Even Lee believes God's justice to be expressed in the day to day. When he falls from his horse he thinks to himself "this is punishment...God's way of saying every victory has a price" (pg. 239.)



Part Two, Chapters 23-26

Part Two, Chapters 23-26 Summary

In Chapter 23, arriving at the camp ground where the Twentieth Maine is assembling, Chamberlain is surprised to find his brother has signed up as well. The next day Colonel Ames, arrives and begins training Chamberlain and the regiment. After less than a month the regiment is sent to Washington and then northwest to Maryland as part of the Union army going to fight Lee. During the march we are introduced to Sergeant Kilrain who informs Chamberlain that the men of the regiment have been watching him and are happy about the kind of officer he is becoming.

When battle is joined Chamberlain and his men are held in reserve. He nearly gets killed by some artillery when he goes out on top of an exposed hill, needlessly exposing himself and his men to enemy fire. It is a lesson learned and his men spend the rest of the battle waiting while scattered artillery fire lands around them.

In Chapter 24, after another general is killed Hancock is promoted to command of a division in the middle of the battle. He expects to be ordered to attack, but instead waits and waits, looking at nearly empty confederate lines. McClellan is back in charge of the army and is incredibly cautious so the order to attack never comes and Hancock watches a chance to defeat the confederates slip away.

In Chapter 25, Colonel Ames informs the regiment that McClellan feels they have won a great victory, even though the battle lines are the same as they were when the day started and both sides have taken enormous losses. Chamberlain goes back to the hilltop where he was nearly killed the day before and looks out at lines of dead soldiers that are so perfectly arranged he mistakes them for live ones at first.

The Union and Confederate armies face off for a day without fighting before Lee's army withdraws at night and escapes.

In Chapter 26, after Lee's retreat, McClellan keeps his army on the Antietam battlefield for weeks until a visit from President Lincoln prompts him to follow up his "victory." Even then it is too late because winter weather gives McClellan another excuse to stay put.

McClellan is finally relieved of command by President Lincoln and General Ambrose Burnside is given command in his place. Acting quickly at first, Burnside does not directly pursue Lee, but instead flanks his army and takes a direct route to Richmond. However, they are delayed when they reach the Rappahannock River and have no bridging materials to cross it. Even after weeks of waiting there is still a chance to get across the river when Hancock finds a shallow crossing point less than a mile away. But General Burnside decides against sending any troops over the river until the bridging supplies arrive. Shortly after this Lee's army arrives in force and occupies the hills on the other side of the river.



Part Two, Chapters 23-26 Analysis

Chapter twenty-three is the first glimpse we get of the day to day operations of a civil war army regiment. All of our time as readers has been spent at the brigade level or above and now we get to see some of the more detailed processes like uniforms, early morning bugles, training and the terrible food. It is a good first sample of the day to day for those men who are fighting and dying in the battles that kill so many.

For the first time we are immersed in the northern side of the war. These chapters focus only on Hancock and Chamberlain. We see the incredible frustrations involved in losing over and over again. Even the victory at Antietam feels more like a defeat since so many men died and the fight was so badly managed. McClellan could have sent in his reserve units and overwhelmed Lee's outnumbered forces. Hancock knows they should have won that battle and could do nothing about it. Then again, at Fredricksburg we see the beginnings of disaster. An excellent plan, with every chance to succeed is defeated by a general who can not tell when he has won.

It should be remembered, that as a prequel this book is leading up to the battle of Gettysburg where the north will finally have a real and meaningful victory. The series of defeats they suffer first are supposed to be infuriating as the author stresses that the incompetence of generals cannot truly prevail over the determination of the fighting men.

In Chapter twenty-six we are told that the new Union Army headquarters was once the home of George Washington and use to belong to General Lee's family. This is one of the places in the book where we are reminded of the relatively short time span between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, a mere eighty years. The country is young and the war is almost a family matter in which the grandchildren of the Revolution are finishing a battle the founding fathers left unresolved.



Part Three, Chapters 27-33

Part Three, Chapters 27-33 Summary

In Chapter 27, Lee arrives with Longstreet's corps across the Rappahannock River from the Union army. The southern forces dig in, their artillery overlooking the wide open fields below their position. Jackson sends a note that he will be there with his corps in time to aid in the defense.

In Chapter 28, on the march south to join up with Lee against the Union Forces Jackson receives a letter from his wife, written as though it is from his newborn baby girl. He keeps the good news a secret from his staff. When they reach the hills above Fredricksburg General Stuart sends him a gift, a new uniform.

In Chapter 29, the pontoon bridges arrive very late. Hancock speaks with General Sumner who expresses the concern everyone feels, that General Burnside's stubborn refusal to change his plan will ensure they lose the battle and get a lot of men killed. The Confederate position is strongly defended and the Union troops will have to cross a wide open field where they are completely unprotected, then cross a deep ditch where they will be slowed down and targeted by enemy artillery.

In Chapter 30, it is December 11th and the Union army begins trying to cross the river. General Barksdale commands a brigade defending the town of Fredricksburg itself. His men are holed up in basements and behind barricades in the streets. While firing on the Union Army's engineers as they try to build the bridges they are shelled by Union artillery in return.

In Chapter 31, it takes all day for the pontoon bridge to be built and all the while more confederate troops are digging in on the hills across the river. Barksdale's sharpshooters keep killing the engineers as they try to make their way across and the army's attack is delayed until the next day.

In Chapter 32, with his men digging in all day on December 11th Jackson looks over the position, reassured that Burnside will attack the next morning. He calls all of his forces together, bringing in any units that had been protecting outposts farther off.

In Chapter 33, another day passes and the Union troops still don't attack. They cross the river and wait. Lee meets with his generals and all agree they are in a very strong position before Lee, Longstreet, Jackson and Stuart go out to view the field. Just then the Union army begins its attack. The battle starts to the south where Jackson's men are dug in and he heads off to lead his men. Lee and Longstreet watch in awe at the approach of tens of thousands of men in long, perfect battle lines.



Part Three, Chapters 27-33 Analysis

As the Battle at Fredericksburg approaches, the author drastically slows down the pace of events. Part two contained over half a dozen battles, while Part Three is entirely devoted to this one battle and the events leading up to it. Pay close attention to this dramatic build up. Fredericksburg is a symbol of command incompetence at its worst.

Chapters twenty-eight and thirty-two are our first times following Jackson since the war began. We are reintroduced to his strong faith in a personal God that listens to his prayers. His includes a belief that if he shows how happy he is, is too outwardly joyful then the people he loves will be punished. The author is sympathetic to his intense fear of losing his wife and child in this pregnancy. Jackson's first wife died in childbirth and his first child by his second wife died also. While other characters may be somewhat sarcastic and chuckle under their breath at his views, Jackson's faith is portrayed without irony.

Jackson is also portrayed as intensely humble. The new uniform General Stuart gives him is so fancy that Lee jokes someone might be confused who is in charge of the army. This joke truly worries Jackson, fearing that he has somehow stepped out of line. While it is made clear that Jackson lacks a sense of humor, the author is also pressing home a point. Jackson, despite being the most famous general of the war, prefers to stay out of the spotlight. There is a clear contrast being painted between the northern generals who so often crave attention and approval and the southern generals who do their duty without seeking praise, who actually fear being made to much of. The point is so clearly delineated you could almost call it the moral of the story: Victory comes with humility.



Part Three, Chapters 34-38

Part Three, Chapters 34-38 Summary

In Chapter 34, Jackson meets up with his subordinate A.P. Hill and is told there is a small gap in their lines, but it doesn't matter. It is supposedly a swampy wasteland. Unfortunately the swamp is frozen at this time in the winter. As the Union attack progresses Jackson sees the problem and directs his reserves to plug the gap at the last minute. The fight is intense, but the Confederates drive the enemy away. General Burnside does not continue the attack on that flank and orders troops further north to advance.

In Chapter 35, Hancock lines his troops up outside of Fredericksburg, preparing for a full assault against the stone wall that runs along the base of the confederate position. Another division, commanded by General French, moves out first and he watches them get torn up by enemy artillery. As he orders his own men forward they are slowed by fences and a canal, taking heavy losses. He reaches the crest of the hill, only a few yards from the stone wall the confederates are defending and believes his men are with him, but looks around and realizes they are all dead, wounded, or hugging the ground in terror.

In Chapter 36, this is the first battle the twentieth Maine has ever been in. They charge over the same ground Hancock's men crossed just a few hours ago. During the fighting, Colonel Ames is called away to take command of another brigade, leaving Chamberlain in charge of the regiment. He leads the men in a desperate charge.

We next see Chamberlain after night has fallen. He is trapped in a small depression in the earth, just below the crest of the hill. He is taking cover with what is left of the regiment, behind the dead bodies of those who had attacked earlier. He yells his brother's name, terrified Tom might be dead, but gets a reassuring yell back. Once morning arrives he is able to crawl back down the hill with Sergeant Kilrain. Reaching his commanding officers he is told that the attack is over and to lead his men down off of the hill.

In Chapter 37, as Lee and Longstreet discuss the battle and if another attack will come. The northern troops seem to be digging in outside of Fredericksburg.

However, the next day the Union Army has retreated completely back across the river, digging in for winter camp on hills on the other side. Lee goes into the town itself and sees for himself that, in their fury, the Federal soldiers ransacked the town before they left.

In Chapter 38, out of the five thousand men Hancock led into the battle, over two thousand of them are killed or wounded. He looks over the battlefield, furious with what



has happens. He approaches a man who turns out to be a reporter and is given a chance to read his latest column.

Part Three, Chapters 34-38 Analysis

The Battle of Fredericksburg is a bloody and horrific disaster for the north. They lose thousands of men needlessly. Even the lowest ranking soldiers understand that the battle was a mistake.

Chamberlain continues to be used by the author as the reader's analyst of "why?" He wants to understand why he is fighting and why the war matters. During the battle of Fredericksburg that job gets much harder. He finds himself unable to concentrate on those questions. All he can do is fight, roaring along with his men and firing his pistol blindly at the enemy somewhere out in the smoke. We are shown the strange split between what a man thinks and how a man will act in an extreme situation. The brain shuts off and the body reacts.

When the day is done we are taken through the long night after the battle. Keep in mind that all the battlefields look like this after every fight, this is just the time that the author chooses to describe it. There are wounded men screaming and moaning. People recognize dead men as old friends. Chamberlain has a moment of panic when he doesn't know if his brother is alive or dead. And all of it is combined with the intense doubt of, why did this happen? Why did so many have to die?

Until this time in the war, most of the battles had been fought relatively far from towns and cities. Over all, personal property had been protected and private citizens left alone. In Chapter 37, after the battle, when the Union troops destroy private property and leave "the street covered with the contents of the houses...mirrors, smashed from their frames, paintings ripped and torn...broken furniture, pieces of porcelain, grand vases and small pitchers," complete destruction across the whole city of Fredericksburg, it is considered an outrage. The author reminds us that war was once fought in a manner that gentleman considered "civilized." Even though men died by the thousands, it was only supposed to be soldiers who suffered and military property destroyed. There was a distinction made between your enemy's army and your enemy's people. As the civil war progressed, this distinction became more and more indistinct.



Part Four, Chapters 39-43

Part Four, Chapters 39-43 Summary

In Chapter 39, after the failure at Fredricksburg General Burnside tries to redeem himself by making a move to the north. Chamberlain watches his men and the rest of the army get bogged down in the deep mud of Virginia as the attack fails before it begins. Chamberlain's brother is promoted to lieutenant and General Burnside is replaced by General Joseph Hooker to command the Union Army.

In Chapter 40, with the war at a standstill in Virginia, Lee is ordered by President Davis to send troops south to defend Georgia and the Carolinas. He calls on Longstreet to go south with two of his divisions. This divides the army, leaving barely more than half to face the army across the river.

Lee suffers a minor heart attack and passes out. When he awakes the doctor instructs him to rest as long as possible, but duty calls and he is back up and moving within days.

In Chapter 41, after a long winter and the beginning of Spring we find Jackson keeping his headquarters in the home of John Corbin not far from Fredricksburg. He has befriended the family that lives there, especially five-year-old Jane, the youngest daughter.

Word comes that the Union forces under Hooker are on the move and the Confederates begin to break camp. As they are preparing to leave Jackson is brought word that Jane has died of scarlet fever.

In Chapter 42, the entire regiment has been put under quarantine after they are given a bad batch of small pox vaccine. The men are too sick to make the march with the rest of the army and so will stay near Fredricksburg. Chamberlain is officially promoted from lieutenant colonel to colonel and given command of the Twentieth Maine now that Colonel Ames has been promoted as well.

In Chapter 43, Hooker has divided his army into two large pieces. One section is in Fredricksburg, right in front of Lee. The other, much larger piece has moved quickly enough to get across the river and behind Lee's army several miles to the west. If they keep going Lee will be trapped between the two pieces and outnumbered by more than two to one.

Hancock is cautious in his optimism, but is still surprised when Hooker orders the army to stop moving and assemble itself in the midst of a thick, indefensible forest. Hooker ends up stopping the army to celebrate and dares God himself to stop him from annihilating Lee's army. Instead of crushing Lee where he is they will wait at Chancellorsville for Lee to come to them.



Part Four, Chapters 39-43 Analysis

This section sets up the climax of the book and for chapters 39-42 there is a very distinct sense of waiting. It is winter and the roads bog everyone down in mud, but the stalemate is the result of more than just weather. Lee's army has just won a victory but there is nothing more he can do. His army cannot attack the Army of the Potomac for the same reasons they should not have attacked him. They would have to get across a big river and then up a well defended line of hills.

We are also given a wider picture of the war. Even though Lee's army has been consistently victorious the rest of the war is not going as well. The conflict is being fought across the whole of the south and the need to send Longstreet and his troops to other parts of the country tells us how bad things are getting. The stalemate outside of Fredericksburg combined with the losses the Confederacy is facing elsewhere reminds us that Lee is not entirely in control of the war. No matter how many times he wins he can't end the war without a new strategy.

As Hooker pulls his troops away from Fredericksburg and begins his attack on the rear of Lee's army, it is considered a huge accomplishment by everyone who is a part of it. Even Lee and Jackson are impressed once they are told of the move. This is the first time that the Army of the Potomac has accomplished complete surprise.

Pay attention to the roles of fate and divine providence in the coming chapters. For one thing, when Jane Corbin dies, Jackson's worries about being punished for his happiness seem a lot less paranoid. Also when Hooker dares God to keep him from destroying the Confederate army, the sense of foreboding is eerily tangible.



Part Four, Chapter 44-47

Part Four, Chapter 44-47 Summary

In Chapter 44, General Stuart sends word that the Union army is crossing the river at fords to the west. Lee assesses the situation and determines they must attack. He takes most of the men he has left towards Chancellorsville, leaving one division to defend the hills overlooking Fredricksburg. When Stuart arrives back at camp he also informs Lee that the Federal cavalry forces have separated from the main army and left Hooker without a reliable scouting force.

In Chapter 45, the Union army finally make a move against the Confederates, trying to make there way out of the thick tangled forests around Chancellorsville. Just as they begin to believe they will run into nothing more than skirmishers and surprise their opponents they find the main body of Lee's army.

The attack begins well and they force back the lines of defense that they meet. Without any apparent reason the entire army is given orders to pull back and create a defensive line around Chancellorsville once more. As his men dig trenches Hancock goes to headquarters where it becomes clear that Hooker has lost his nerve.

In Chapter 46, neither Jackson nor Lee understands why the Union Army has stopped in its tracks. They have a late night meeting where Stuart informs them that to the west the Federal troops are not digging in. They find a guide to show them which roads lead out that direction. They split the army again, making three pieces total. There are about six thousand men near Fredricksburg. Lee is in command of twelve thousand men facing the Union Army directly and Jackson will march thirty thousand men for twelve miles in order to get around behind the Union army to the west. Jackson's men march at dawn.

In Chapter 47, General Oliver Howard commands the eleventh corps of the Union army. Believing they are far out of the way he does not order his men to dig trenches for defense. They receive word that the confederates are retreating. He then disregards another report that the enemy troops have turned and are to the west of him.

Part Four, Chapter 44-47 Analysis

There is a darker tone to the chapters surrounding the Battle of Chancellorsville. Many of the meetings occur at night or in the midst of thick dark forests and all of the generals on both sides are confused and stunned by the events going on. For the first time in the book Lee is truly caught off guard and is scrambling to get his troops in place before they are destroyed by the Union Army.

Even though Hancock is looking at the battle from the side that appears to be winning there is a sense of foreboding. In every battle so far Lee has defeated his opponent by



outwitting the commanding general. Now we are told that when Hooker "learned we had run into opposition, he stopped believing in his own plan. He just ran out of nerve" (pg. 408.) We know from chapter 44 that Lee is unsure of how he will keep his army from being destroyed. Now just his reputation has all but defeated the commanding general of the Union Army and we are left knowing that bad things will likely follow for the north. The sense of foreboding gets even more intense in chapter 47 as we watch Howard's troops hoot and holler and climb trees to watch the Confederate troops "retreat."

In Chapter 46, we are witness to one of the most famous meetings of generals in history. It could be said that this is the most important moment in the book. Extremely outnumbered, it makes far more sense for Lee to order a retreat and get his army in a better defensive position around Richmond. Instead, General Stuart does what he does best, provide Lee and Jackson with better information than the Union generals have. Jackson does what he does best, move his troops quickly and quietly into the perfect position to destroy his enemy. Lee is also at his best, correctly reading his enemy and wisely trusting his friends to get the job done despite all odds.



Part Four, Chpaters 48-51

Part Four, Chpaters 48-51 Summary

In Chapter 48, after a tense march around the Union lines Jackson forms up his troops and they charge into the flank of the enemy. The Union troops in front of them immediately begin to retreat. One division after another of federal troops attempt to hold back his attack and fail. He glimpses General Howard through the smoke, trying to rally his men.

In Chapter 49, Hancock wonders why the confederates in front of him are attacking with such a small force. They approach his line and then fall back quickly, over and over again. He gets a report that the confederates are retreating, but it doesn't make sense. He goes back to headquarters to warn them that he believes Lee is up to something. As he arrives the waves of men retreating from Jackson's attack begin to swarm into headquarters.

In Chapter 50, the only thing that can stop Jackson's attack is nightfall. It is getting too dark to fight, but Jackson orders his last division into the battle. While looking for a way to cut the Union army off and keep them from escaping across the Rappahannock River Jackson is accidentally shot in the shoulder and hand by a group of his own men. Jackson's second in command, A.P. Hill, is also wounded and J.E.B. Stuart is sent for to take charge instead.

In Chapter 51, Stuart takes over the attack for Jackson. He is informed that Jackson has had his arm amputated and the Confederate army is scattered throughout the surrounding wilderness.

The next morning they continue the attack through the woods. The Union troops have stopped running and dug in on a hill called Hazel Grove in between Stuart's men and Lee's half of the army. They attack the hill and take it. Then they place artillery pieces that have an unobstructed view of Chancellorsville and open fire.

Part Four, Chpaters 48-51 Analysis

When Jackson sends his men forward in Chapter 48, it is as though a dam breaks. The victory is not numeric. Even though Howard's men do not dig in for defense, they have enough men to at least try to defeat Jackson's men. The reason that Jackson's troops wins almost without a fight is purely psychological. They northern troops thought they were safe. They thought they had one. The ridiculous arrogance of the commanders who believe Jackson and Lee would walk away from a fight with their tails between their legs has infected the men. This means when they are suddenly attacked from a completely unexpected angle they run away as fast as their legs can carry them. Some of the Union soldiers actually run all the way through their own army until they meet Lee's troops on the other side, literally retreating into the arms of their enemies.



You have to feel sorry for Hancock in chapter 49. He is shocked at how completely the army is collapsing and angry with himself for not seeing Lee and Jackson's trap for what it was.

The beginning of Chapter 50 is almost confusing. We know Jackson has won and the Union army is running. We also know that the Union troops still outnumber his and so it is amazing that he continues the attack with so much fire. He orders his subordinate generals to throw in everything they have, throwing caution to the winds in order to completely destroy the enemy. Jackson is not content with a victory he wants it to be over. That eagerness will be his undoing. He goes too far forward, so much so that when his own men come up on him in the dark they think he and his staff must be union cavalry troops. His getting shot could be said to be his own fault.

in Chapter 51, as Stuart takes over the fight in Jackson's place he does a good job, but the battle does not have the same overwhelming rush to it that it did at the beginning. The sense that it is a bloody, chaotic brawl is enhanced by Stuart's frustration at how slowly infantry troops move. He is used to men on horseback covering great distances in many directions. Infantry, trying to struggle up hills and through forests can only move so fast.



Part Four, Chapter 52-55

Part Four, Chapter 52-55 Summary

In Chapter 52, as his men make a strong defense Hancock is told that General Hooker has been wounded. The entire Union army is ordered to pull back and Hancock's men are instructed to act as the rear guard. As he coordinates the retreat, giving orders to his commanders his horse is killed. The retreat is orderly and Hancock reflects on the fact that his men did not lose the battle, the generals did.

In Chapter 53, the Union forces still in Fredricksburg finally attack and drive Lee's small force there off of the hills. Lee sends two more divisions that direction to stop them. The rest of his army must reform, the units scattered all over the thick woods around Chancellorsville. Lee orders his generals to prepare an attack in the morning, believing he can destroy the Union army once and for all while they try to cross the river. When they do attack in the morning it is too late and the enemy has escaped.

In Chapter 54, the hand and shoulder that were wounded seem to be healing nicely. Jackson drifts in and out of consciousness, dreaming of battles. His wife and daughter come to visit him. Something goes wrong, but before he dies Jackson's wife puts his baby in his arms and he is coherent long enough to recognize her. After he dies his wife tells the Reverend Lacy this event has shaken her faith in God. Jackson's men give a rebel yell after hearing of his death.

In Chapter 55, Lee weeps after learning about Jackson's death. When Longstreet and his men return from other missions in the south Lee tells him of a new plan to invade Maryland and Pennsylvania, hoping to threaten Washington D.C. and end the war. Lee reorganizes the army into three corps instead of two because Jackson is not there to command his half. They march north, not sure where the Union army is and not knowing they will soon have a three day battle in Gettysburg.

Part Four, Chapter 52-55 Analysis

Chancellorsville is an incredibly unlikely victory for the south. At one point Lee informs his generals "we are attempting to contain an army that outnumbers us by three to one" (Ch. 53, pg. 470.)

Jackson's death is handled in a way that is unusual in this novel for two reasons. First, Jackson has a series of dream sequences, that might also be described as hallucinations. These sequences are put in italics. The crack in his ceiling begins to twist and turn like a giant snake in his mind. He starts ordering troops around and screaming at generals who aren't there. Eventually, as he dies, the dream sequence takes over completely. Second, it is the first time where significant focus veers away from the main character. For almost six pages of the chapter we follow Jackson's wife Anna, either as

he lies ill, or after he has died. Ordinarily this kind of focus shift only comes with a new chapter.

The final chapter of the book acts as a kind of summation of the lessons Lee has learned from the war so far. He continues to defeat his opponents, but it hasn't ended the war. Only another invasion of the north that truly threatens Washington D.C. can end it.



Characters

Robert E. Lee

Robert E. Lee is the character with the most chapters devoted to him and the book begins and ends with him. Lee has spent his entire adult life in the army. He graduated from the military academy at West Point and then fought in the Mexican War, becoming well known to the commander of the US forces there, Winfield Scott.

Before the war, Lee is conflicted. As a loyal soldier he sincerely hopes that a war will not come, or if there is a war that his home state of Virginia will not be a part of it. He is asked by Winfield Scott to be second in command of the United States forces but declines when the war begins. Virginia secedes and Lee takes command of the state's military.

Lee becomes increasingly frustrated with how the war is being handled but is unable to do anything until General Johnston is wounded at the battle of Fair Oaks. Lee is thrilled to be given command of the Confederate army. Even though Lee is a thoughtful man and an excellent administrator, he has an aggressive nature in combat. He orders the Army of Northern Virginia to attack four times in seven days and drives the opposing army, under the command of General George McClellan, away from Richmond.

Lee is a brilliant commander who can correctly analyze the men he commands and successfully predict the enemy commanders he faces. When General McClellan is cautious and fearful Lee attacks with full force. When General Pope is arrogant and overconfident, Lee leads him into a trap at the Second Battle of Bull Run. When Hooker seems to have outmaneuvered him, Lee takes a huge gamble and outmaneuvers Hooker.

When Jackson dies after the Battle of Chancellorsville, it is a severe personal blow to Lee. From the very beginning of the war, he has relied on Jackson to fulfill his orders with brilliant effectiveness. His death and the death of so many men convince Lee that only an invasion of the United States can bring an end to the war.

Thomas Jonathan 'Stonewall' Jackson

Thomas Jonathan 'Stonewall' Jackson had a poor upbringing in rural Virginia. He graduates from West Point Military Academy before fighting in the Mexican war. While in Mexico, he seeks meaning and purpose in the church and even considers converting to Catholicism. After being promoted three times during the war, from lieutenant to major, he leaves the army to become an instructor at the Virginia Military Institute.

Jackson is not a great professor and his family life has seen a great deal of tragedy. His mother died when he was very young and his first wife died in childbirth. Having



remarried, he believes that God is punishing him for his happiness by letting his one month old daughter die.

When the war begins, he is absolutely convinced that the southern states are in the right. He views the federal government as an aggressor against his home that must be stopped. Robert E. Lee assigns him to organize the defense of the arsenal at Harper's Ferry. He is then credited with turning the tide at the Battle of Bull Run and is eventually given command of one half of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Jackson is considered odd by nearly everyone he meets and is a very complicated man. Along with his strange habits of praying under his breath and always keeping lemons with him, he tends to be shy and easily embarrassed in social situations. He has a kind way with children and a tender affection for his wife. All of this sharply contrasts with his behavior in battle where he is fierce and possesses a violent temper. He becomes furious with his own officers if they do not perform as expected.

Over and over again Lee relies on Jackson in battle. His troops consistently win against much greater numbers of enemy troops. They also gain the nick name of 'foot cavalry' because of how quickly Jackson gets them to cover great distances. He becomes a legend in his own time. When he is shot at the Battle of Chancellorsville the entire army mourns him.

On his deathbed, Jackson's dreams drift between battle and his family. In his last moments, he dreams of his mother and the author suggests he has found peace and eternity.

Winfield Scott Hancock

Winfield Scott Hancock is one of the most competent Union commanders of the war and the author chooses him as our eyes and ears in their command structure. He is also a graduate of West Point and fought with the Sixth Infantry in Mexico.

At the start of the novel, his assignment as a quartermaster in Los Angeles is not something Hancock enjoys. He is far from the center of power and slowly begins to hear about the split that has developed between north and south.

Of all the main characters, Hancock is the one with the most personal connection to men on the other side of the war. Many of his friends, including Lewis Armistead, are determined to fight for the south. Hancock's wife hosts a party where those officers going south and those officers staying in the Federal Army are invited to come and call each other "mr" instead of "sir" or "general." It is a moving scene and brings home the personal nature of the Civil War, where men went to battle against their friends.

As the war progresses, Hancock consistently leads his men well. At Williamsburg he tricks his opponent. They think he is retreating, but he turns his men around and they kill or wound hundreds and take even more prisoners. He leads his men into the teeth of



the fight at Fredericksburg and gets his division closer than any other unit that attacks Marye's Heights.

He possesses intuition and the ability to read what his enemies are doing. As the Union army loses battle after battle, Hancock lets us see what could have, or should have been done to win. At Antietam he can see empty trenches in front of him, but is not allowed to attack. At Fredericksburg he finds a way across the Rappahannock River, but cannot convince his superiors to use it. At Chancellorsville he knows that if they just use the massive numerical advantage they possess then the Union army can and should win.

If we only saw Lee and Jackson's perspectives of the war, this novel would almost be an adventure tale. With Hancock's point of view added to the mix, the story is nearly a tragedy.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is the only main character who does not have extensive military experience before the war begins. He had considered going to West Point as his father wanted him to but chose a life in academics instead.

Before the war, we learn of his family life, his lovely wife, and his mother's desire for him to become a preacher but once the war begins we learn his real reason for being a main character: his passion. We get a great deal of input about the reasons for the war from the southern side. Jackson is utterly convinced of the righteousness of his cause and says as much. Hancock hears a lot from his friends Armistead and Albert Sidney Johnston about the reasons for the war. It is Chamberlain, speaking to his class and his fellow professors who eloquently gives us the northern rationale for fighting this war.

When he volunteers to fight, we are given a chance to see the workings of a new regiment being formed. The raw recruits begin without uniforms, weapons, or any semblance of order. They have to be drilled and trained and the officers have to learn how to lead.

Fredericksburg is Chamberlain's first experience with combat and also his first experience as commander of the regiment when his commanding officer is called away. At this point we get a glimpse into his thoughts and a chance to consider what walking into a violent fight in progress must be like. He tries to remember all of his passionate reasons for fighting and finds none of them can give him an emotional bump when bullets are flying around his head.

When the shooting is over on Chamberlain's long night, huddled between dead bodies for warmth and protection, his perspective is our best look at the horrible aftermath of war. Many of the battles in the novel are viewed with a wide angle and only let us see how the generals feel. This is where we watch the soldiers bleed and glimpse the terror that friends are dead and you might be next if you just lift your head an inch too high.



J.E.B. Stuart

Stuart is the commander of Lee's cavalry troops. Before the war he goes with Lee to Harper's Ferry during the insurrection. He delivers a message to John Brown giving him the opportunity to surrender.

During the war, Stuart's horse mounted troops are the eyes and ears of Lee's army. He repeatedly brings Lee vital information that helps him to defeat his northern opponents. Still, Stuart is viewed by the other southern officers as reckless and overly showy. He wears a tall feathered hat and bows deeply, sweeping the ground with the feather when he greets his commanders.

When Jackson is wounded at Chancellorsville, his second in command is also down and sends for Stuart to take over the battle. Stuart finds commanding infantry to be frustrating because they cannot turn and maneuver quickly, but he still leads the men to victory.

We are given a moment of foreshadowing at the very end of the novel when Lee cannot make contact with Stuart. A big reason the confederates will lose the battle of Gettysburg is because Stuart makes a bold, but useless ride around the Union army and does not get Lee the information he desperately needs.

James Longstreet

Longstreet commands the other corps of Lee's army. He is a somber, quiet man and his four children died of a fever shortly after the war began, but he continues fighting even so.

Technically he is Jackson's superior, but he commands about the same number of troops and Lee gives similar value to their advice. He tends to be more cautious than Jackson, but is still an excellent commander. He sees the value of a good defensive position like the one the army holds at Fredericksburg.

Lee sends him further south to deal with Union threats in the Carolinas and so is away at the battle of Chancellorsville.

Mary Anna Morrison Jackson

Mary Anna Morrison Jackson is Stonewall Jackson's second wife. He calls her his 'esposita,' which is garbled Spanish for 'little wife.' She recently gave birth to their first child who then died after only a month. She gives birth to a second child just after the Battle of Fredericksburg. The child is healthy and comes with her to see Jackson after he is shot at Chancellorsville.



Jefferson Davis

Jefferson Davis is elected President of the Confederate States of America after the southern states secede. He has the wisdom to appreciate Lee as an adviser. At the beginning of the war Joseph Johnston is commander of the southern forces in Virginia, but he is secretive and it infuriates Davis who wants to know how the fights are progressing. Davis is so disturbed by the lack of information that he rides out himself to the front lines during the Battle of Fair Oaks. He is close to the battle when he sees the wounded Johnston and hands over command to Lee.

Towards the end of the novel, despite the Confederate victories and Lee's attempts to reassure him, Davis is described as looking tired and haggard from the stress of the presidency.

Mary Custis Lee

Mary Custis Lee is Robert E. Lee's wife. In his long absence, she has grown sickly and has arthritis so painful she spends nearly all of her time in bed. When he sees her after the Seven Days Battles, she is crippled and requires a wheelchair.

Joseph E. Johnston

Joseph E. Johnston is the first Lieutenant General of the Confederate Army. At the beginning of the war he commands the Confederate forces in Virginia, but he is overly cautious and secretive. The Union army under McClellan is able to force him to retreat over and over again. He refuses to send reports to Richmond and it infuriates the Confederate President, Jefferson Davis. After Johnston is wounded Davis uses that as an excuse to replace him with Robert E. Lee.

William Barksdale

William Barksdale is a general in charge of a Brigade of men from Mississippi. His unit occupies the town of Fredericksburg to delay the Union army from getting across the Rappahannock River.

Winfield Scott

Winfield Scott is the Lieutenant General of the United States Army before the war. He was the leader of the U.S. forces in the Mexican war and is a national hero due to his victories there and in the war of 1812. Having commanded Robert E. Lee in Mexico Scott offers Lee a position as his second-in-command when it becomes clear the war is coming. Scott recognizes that he is getting too old to be in charge of another war and wants Lee there to take the reins.



George B. McClellan

George B. McClellan is made Commanding General of the Army of the Potomac after their disastrous defeat at Bull Run. He is an impressive administrator and also has the good sense to make Hancock a combat general instead of a quartermaster. However, he is cautious to the point of being paranoid and constantly makes requests for reinforcements when he already vastly outnumbers his opponents. He nearly captures Richmond until Lee is put in charge of the southern forces and attacks him four times in seven days.

McClellan is well loved by the Union army and even though he is relieved of command after the Seven Days Battles, Lincoln puts him back in command after Pope's defeat at Second Bull Run. Then he is relieved of command again after he fails to pursue Lee's army when he defeats them at Antietam.

Ambrose E. Burnside

Ambrose Burnside is a Major General, who commands the ninth corps of the Union Army until McClellan is relieved of command for the last time. Considered by most to be a good corps commander, he completely chokes under the pressure of full command of the army. He makes a plan that seems like it is about to work and nearly outmaneuvers Lee, but when they need to cross the Rappahannock River the pontoon bridges do not arrive in time. He is completely inflexible and refuses to find another way across the river. When the bridges do arrive, he refuses to deviate from his original plan and sends his men in to attack the now well defended hills on the other side of Fredericksburg. The battle is a disaster and he too is removed from command.

Lewis Armistead

Lewis Armistead is a Major in the United States Army at the beginning of the novel and best friend of Winfield Scott Hancock. He resigns when the war begins and joins the confederate army, eventually becoming a brigadier general.

Mira Hancock

Mira Hancock is Winfield Scott Hancock's beautiful wife. She has had two children, is quite handy with a pistol, plays the piano, and also bakes delicious cookies.

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln is elected President of the United States in 1860. In the south he is widely believed to be dangerous politically. Many of the characters in the book consider his being elected one of the rationales for secession. We never actually see him in the



novel but his influence is very important and he is the one who appoints the commanders of the Union Armies.

Oliver O. Howard

General Oliver O. Howard is a Union General. He lost an arm at the battle of Fair Oaks. He commands a division at the Battle of Fredericksburg and then commands the Eleventh Corps at Chancellorsville. Believing his unit to be far away from the battle, he does not order his men to dig trenches or prepare for defense. Hence, they are easily overrun when Jackson makes a surprise attack on his right flank.



Objects/Places

Washington D.C.

Washington D.C. is the capital of the United States. It is located right off of the Potomac River on the Maryland side across from Virginia. It is the main headquarters and base of operations for all Union forces in the novel.

Richmond Virginia

Richmond is the capital city of the state of Virginia. It is also selected to be the capital of the Confederacy shortly after secession. The primary goal of Lee and his army is to defend Richmond.

The Confederate States of America

The Confederate States are those states that seceded from the United States and banded together for mutual defense against the north. They include South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

Harper's Ferry

Harper's Ferry is in northern Virginia and contains an important military arsenal. Before the war, John Brown and his followers attempt to stage a slave uprising from there. It is a consistently vital supply center for the Confederate army.

Bull Run/Manassas

Manassas is a small town in Virginia and Bull Run is a small river that runs through it. It is the location of an important railroad junction and two battles are fought there, both of which are won by the south.

Williamsburg

Williamsburg is a town in southeastern Virginia. During the Peninsula Campaign Hancock leads his brigade in an attack against confederate forces there, but is ordered to retreat by his commander even though his men have the advantage.



Shenandoah Valley

The Shenandoah is a long narrow valley in northeastern Virginia. Jackson uses it as a base of operations. He defeats several Union armies sent there to catch him.

Antietam

Antietam is a creek outside the town of Sharpsburg in Maryland. When the Confederate Army tries to invade Maryland General McClellan attacks them across a series of bridges along this creek. The two armies fight to a standoff but the next day Lee orders a retreat and so the battle is considered a victory for the North.

Fredericksburg

Fredericksburg is a town almost exactly midway between Washington D.C. and Richmond Virginia. The Confederate Army digs in to good defensive positions just west of the town and the Union Army makes a futile attack in one of their most costly and humiliating defeats.

Marye's Heights

Marye's Heights are the line of hills to the west of Fredericksburg, Virginia where the confederates create a nearly impenetrable defensive position.

Chancellorsville

Chancellorsville a town at intersection of roads in northern Virginia. It is located in the middle of a thick, tangled forest. When General Hooker tries to outflank Lee's army at Fredericksburg they are likewise outflanked again by General Jackson. The Union Army loses the battle but Jackson is mortally wounded during the fighting.

The Army of Northern Virginia

The Army of Northern Virginia is the primary Confederate force that defends the confederate capital of Richmond. It is made up of units from all of the southern states and commanded by Robert E. Lee for most of Gods and Generals. Even though it is usually outnumbered and under-supplied it consistently defeats the Union armies that come against it.



The Army of the Potomac

The Army of the Potomac is the primary Union force being sent out by the United States to capture Richmond, or destroy the confederate armies in Virginia. During the course of the book it is commanded by a series of generals during the course of the novel: McDowell, McClellan, Pope, Burnside, and Hooker. It is better supplied and always larger than the confederate armies it faces.

Regiment

Regiments are the smallest tactical unit that the armies are divided into. They are made of approximately 500 to 1000 men. They are named after the state where they were organized then given a number based on how many regiments the state has sent out. Colonel Chamberlain commands a regiment at the Battle of Fredericksburg.

Brigade

Brigades are the second smallest tactical unit in both armies. They have anywhere from two to five regiments in them. General Hancock and General Jackson begin the war as brigade commanders.

Division

Divisions are the third smallest tactical unit in both armies. They usually have three brigades in them. They are referred to numerically based on how many divisions are in a corps. Hancock is promoted to command of a division at the battle of Antietam.

Corps

Corps are ordinarily the largest tactical unit in both armies. The Union army only puts two or three divisions in a corps, but the Confederates puts in five or six. This means the Army of the Potomac is usually made up of six or seven corps, while the Army of Northern Virginia only uses two. General Jackson commands one of the two corps in Lee's army.

The 20th Maine

The 20th Maine Regiment is the regiment that Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain commands at the battle of Fredericksburg.



The Stonewall Brigade

The Stonewall Brigade is the force that Jackson commands during the battle of Bull Run. The unit defends so effectively it is said Jackson "stood his men up like a stone wall" (Chap. 15, pg. 153.) The nickname sticks.



Themes

Divine Will

Jackson, Chamberlain and Lee are all portrayed as religious men in this Novel. This is historically accurate, but the author also uses it as a tool. The title, *Gods and Generals*, is no accident.

Chamberlain speaks to God while laying in the dark on the Fredericksburg battlefield and Lee tends to see God in the big things. He sees a divine hand in his loss at Antietam, saying "it was not the right time. God showed us that" (Chap. 55, pg. 487.) But above all it is Jackson who brings God into the conversation. He does so at every turn, seeing God's will not just in national events, but in his personal life.

Long before the war starts, Jackson has a conversation with his father-in-law about how it is appropriate to pray. Later Jackson prays for his father-in-law when he decides to leave the south. The prayer is a personal appeal and Jackson always speaks to God in a very direct way. Still, Jackson has many questions about how God's will functions. Aside from his worries that God punishes him for being happy there is also a really great conversation between him and his wife Anna. He believes God can still stop the war, but Anna insists that "God does not change our course, that is for us to do." (Chap. 10, pg. 111.) Jackson's take on this through the rest of the book is something of a paradox. He trusts in God but acts with great passion and moves with decisive power, defeating all who stand in his way. In the novel it is up for discussion how God's will influences men of action, whether they are his instrument, or if they define history and then see it through a lens of divine providence.

The author also suggests divine intervention in a narrative way outside the minds of the characters. When Hooker has outmaneuvered Lee's army before the Battle of Chancellorsville he announces to his generals "God Almighty will not be able to prevent the destruction of the rebel army!" (Chap. 43, pg. 392.) This occurs during a Hancock chapter with Hancock being the least religious of the four characters. He himself finds the statement ridiculous and hates the arrogance of it, but the author gives great weight to it, commenting on how the mood in the room changes immediately from rejoicing to concern. It is also noteworthy that after this moment is when Hooker seems to lose his nerve. He has made bold strokes and outmaneuvered Lee. In the next chapter he will begin to make big mistakes and eventually lose a battle he never should have lost. The author seems to be asking us to consider if "God Almighty" took Hooker up on his dare.

Arrogance and Humility

Part of what draws us to our four main characters is their humility. Lee, Jackson, Hancock, Chamberlain all tend to put their cause, their family, their country, or their soldiers ahead of themselves. They think highly of other people and give respect or



praise where praise is due. While they are all nervous about the possibility of failure they are never more concerned about how that failure will affect them than how it might affect others. These four men are not only enjoyable to read about because of this, they also tend to win battles because of it.

You might ask how Jackson could be described as humble. He is incredibly confident in himself and goes off on angry tirades when his orders are not followed. However, he is humble. He listens to authority and does not place his own agenda above that of his commander, General Lee, or even his fellow, Lieutenant General Longstreet. Also he does not consider the fight to be about him or his reputation. He is far more worried about the cause and leading his men to victory.

This humility is in stark contrast to the attitudes of those men who tend to lose battles. General Johnston is so arrogant and stubborn that he will not even communicate with his own generals and so loses one battle after another until Jefferson Davis replaces him with Lee. McClellan is so terrified of failure that all he ever does is fail, but then his arrogance leads him to blame anyone but himself. That arrogance blinds him to the true situation. General Pope lets himself get flanked at Second Bull Run. General Hill leaves a gap in his lines at Fredericksburg. General Hooker boasts wildly at Chancellorsville. Over and over again, the men who are certain they know it all and are positive they cannot fail.

Prequel

The author of this novel, Jeff Shaara, is the son of Michael Shaara who wrote *The Killer Angels*. *The Killer Angels* is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel about the Battle of Gettysburg and Jeff Shaara wrote *Gods and Generals* as a prequel companion to that one. While *Gods and Generals* is certainly enjoyable as a stand-alone book there is an extra payoff for those readers who know what happened at Gettysburg as well. They will already have an idea of who lives and who dies, or who will get promoted. They will already have a deep respect for Lee and Longstreet as commanders, so when Lee is frustrated that he does not have a higher degree of authority we as readers already know that he will eventually get it. Those readers also know that all of these Union failures are eventually leading to a really big victory.

Another example occurs when J.E.B. Stuart arrives on Lee's door step to tell him he has been called to Washington. This is not just a point of plot development but it is a moment of foreshadowing regarding their future relationship.

Chamberlain seems like the odd man out in this novel unless you know more about *Killer Angels*. In that novel, he will lead a heroic and historic defense without which the Union might have lost the war. In *Gods and Generals*, he is simply an inexperienced, low ranking officer who sees one battle. While his story does give us a glimpse into the life of the lower ranking soldiers it is worth asking whether it fits into the narrative as a whole without a knowledge of the hero he will become.



The way the novel follows Jackson is also intriguing. The Killer Angels follows a similar formula for following several different characters, but Jackson has already died before Gettysburg happens, so he is something of a mystery. It could easily be said that the character of Jackson that Shaara develops is his biggest accomplishment in the novel. For the characters of Lee, Hancock and Chamberlain Jeff Shaara already had the voices and concepts his father developed. With Jackson, he had to go into the history books and really create something from scratch.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told through a third-person omniscient point of view. Information the narrator gives us is always reliable and we are often given a glimpse into the thoughts of the characters.

The third person point of view moves its subjective focus between the four main characters, Lee, Jackson, Hancock and Chamberlain. There are three exceptions to this when Barksdale, Howard, and Stuart have chapters dedicated to them. Even though a chapter may follow Robert E. Lee it is important to note that the chapter remains a third person narrative. Lee is given focus, but is still referred to as "he" and not "I". Except for occasional glimpses where we are told he is thinking something we are not seeing the world from inside of Lee's head.

Although each character is different, the narrative style does not change much between each of the characters. The narrators voice remains fairly constant. The novel is fairly evenly divided between exposition and dialogue. Some chapters focus more on what the character is thinking or feeling. The first chapter in which we see Chamberlain is almost entirely exposition. In those chapters where Lee is consulting with his generals more dialogue is used to push forward the plot.

Often a chapter will end with a long couple of paragraphs telling us about another significant event. The event may be the result of what happened in the chapter, or a corresponding part of a large battle at which none of our main characters is present. For instance, in Chapter 26, we see Hancock try to convince the rest of his commanders that they must cross the river at a shallow ford and get into Fredericksburg without waiting for the bridges. When he fails to do this, the short section at the end of the chapter lets us know that the confederate troops have arrived. It is too late for General Burnside's plan to succeed. These short sections pull away from any character in particular and are purely objective and told from the perspective of a third-person omniscient narrator.

Setting

The novel is set in the United States of America in the years between 1858 and 1863. All of the major characters are based on historical figures. All the locations it describes can still be found on a map.

At the beginning of the book, the four main characters are scattered all over the country. Robert E. Lee goes to Texas for a couple of chapters. His outpost in Fort Mason is a dusty and rugged place where the soldiers have been away from home too long.



Winfield Scott Hancock starts out the novel in Los Angeles far to the west in what is now the state of California. At this time it is still only a territory recently taken from Mexico after the U.S. won the Mexican war and LA is only a small town. Most of the population is of Mexican or Spanish decent and most do not speak English. Hancock is actually the only U.S. soldier in the entire area and there is the threat of an uprising until more troops arrive.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is a professor in the state of Maine. Maine is the northern most state in the Union, with cold and snowy winters. Most of the people there, even once the war begins, feel far removed from the conflict.

Thomas Jonathan Jackson is in Virginia. In this southern state there is some hesitation to secede from the Union, but once President Lincoln makes a call for troops, most people there are passionately angry at the idea.

Once the war begins, the focus moves to a fairly localized area in northern Virginia where the eastern theater of the civil war took place. Battles take place at important river crossings or road intersections. The area has a great many hills and forests. The commanders of the armies are always on the look out for "good ground," meaning a series of hills they can more easily defend, or a forested area where they can hide their movements in order to make surprise attacks.

Language and Meaning

Part of the appeal of this book is the way it makes history accessible. Shaara makes the characters very understandable, modernizing their language and keeping away from thick accents. You can imagine Lee and Jackson with their thick southern accents, but Shaara doesn't actually try to imitate the sound in his writing. Shaara does use a thick accent for several minor characters, most notably a Prussian named Heros Von Borcke but it is mostly for comic effect. Von Borcke is much funnier when he calls Jackson "Chackson" and Stuart "Shtuart."

There are limited physical descriptions in the book. Shaara does not describe people from head to toe, but tends to pick one physical characteristic to point out and then use that to remind us of the character's general feel. Stuart has a long feather on his cap, which sweeps the ground when he bows rather than saluting. The gesture quickly encapsulates Stuarts flair for the dramatic and it is these kinds of small personal touches that Shaara makes use of.

He also doesn't spend any extra time describe settings, buildings or nature. He gives us the bare minimum here, just telling us about the things that will matter to the tactical outcome of battles. He tells us there is a canal in the middle of the fields outside of Fredericksburg, not to paint a beautiful picture of fields and streams, but because the Union troops will have to cross the canal while they are getting shot at.



Since the book follows real events, the author may be resting on the assumption that you can look up these men and places in a history book and see what they look like for yourself.

It is important to remember that this is a prequel to the book "The Killer Angels" that describes the Battle of Gettysburg. Much of what is important in Gods And Generals carries greater significance if you are aware of the events that occur in that book and in that battle. This even goes to little moments of character development. When Chamberlain says "Well, I'll be damned" (Chap. 3, pg. 36) it is actually a slight homage to his father's book.

Structure

The novel consists of four parts divided into fifty-five chapters. Each chapter is around eight pages but can occasionally be more than twenty. Each is named after the character that is featured in it. The chapters tend to carry one to two short episodes within the course of the story and rarely deal with more than a few days at a time. Between chapters, or in a short piece of exposition tagged at the end of a chapter, weeks or months may pass by. There is a date stamped at the beginning of each chapter so you can keep track of the time line.

Part One of the book is the longest, containing nineteen chapters. It carries the story from before the war until Robert E. Lee is given command of the Confederate army. This is also the longest period of time covered by any individual part, spanning 1858 through 1861. Here we are introduced to our four main characters and their struggles to find a place in the coming conflict. There is also a sense of anticipation, building up to the moment when Lee takes charge.

Part Two of the novel is only seven chapters long, but it contains the most battles and time moves very swiftly in this section. The Seven Days Battles are described in a single paragraph at the beginning of Chapter 20. Next we witness Lee's victory at the Second Battle of Bull Run. This section sets up our understanding of General Lee as a commander. We are given to understand that he can win against incredible odds and his men love him for it. However, the part ends with him finally losing a battle at Antietam.

Part Three begins just after the Union army has failed to cross the Rappahannock River fast enough. All twelve chapters in this part are dedicated to the Battle of Fredericksburg. Unlike part two where we spend most of the section admiring the genius of Lee, here we are subjected to the infuriating incompetence of the Union army's commanders. Lee and his officers do not make any swift or brilliant moves here, they just show up and let the Union army throw itself into their guns. The battle is horrifyingly bloody and for the first time we get one battle described in detail through the eyes of the losing side.



Part Four also focuses on one battle, but the fight is much more about maneuver and less about soldiers being thrown into a meat grinder of bullets. The Battle of Chancellorsville gives us another chance to admire Lee and Jackson as they make a brilliant gamble. Then we are hit with the sudden tragedy of Jackson's death, combined with Hancock's despair over the handling of the army.

The plot is rather convoluted since it follows multiple characters through five years across an entire continent. You must pay close attention to the ending of each chapter. Those few paragraphs of exposition at the end usually contain vital information to carry you from one character's journey to another.



Quotes

"Never, forever... Never forever..."
Chap. 36, Gods and Generals, pp. 347

"This is not an accident, he thought. We are led by Divine Hands."
Chap. 46, Gods and Generals, pp. 417

"We must kill the brave ones, we must kill them all."
Chap. 48, Gods and Generals, pp. 432

"'It is well this is so terrible,' he said. 'We should grow to fond of it.'"
Chap. 33, Gods and Generals, pp. 324

"You have lost your left arm, I have lost my right..."
Chap. 53, Gods and Generals, pp. 468

"Let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees."
Chap. 54, Gods and Generals, pp. 482

"He waited, wanting to tell them, to give them some of the wisdom that had been taught to him only where the blood flows and men scream, the horrible sounds of raw death."
Chap. 10, Gods and Generals, pp. 110

"But forgive me, Colonel, not meanin' no disrespect', this here is your name on this paper, not God's. If'n we waits for God to set all of us free, we be waitin' for a long time."
Chap. 7, Gods and Generals, pp. 75

"I must do what I am meant to do. I hope you will never know... you will never feel what this has cost me. If I ever... raise my hand... against you... may God strike me dead."
Chap. 14, Gods and Generals, pp. 147

"Yes, sir. It was General Jackson. Saved the day, he did. Drove the bluebellies all the way back to Washington! They's saying' he stood his men up like a stone wall!"
Chap. 15, Gods and Generals, pp. 153

"'It has never been possible for men to show more valor, or generals to manifest less judgement...'
He stopped, looked at Bolander, said, "No, sir. I do not find your words too harsh. Perhaps they are not harsh enough."
Chap. 38, Gods and Generals, pp. 363

"A general cannot cry for his men. They cannot even cry for each other now. This army has cried all its tears."
Chap. 41, Gods and Generals, pp. 383



Topics for Discussion

What were the main causes of division between the northern and southern states as described in the novel?

How did the war in Mexico affect each of the main characters?

Discuss caution on the battlefield. In battle, is caution a virtue? Do bold men always win, or is there a place for holding back?

Discuss arrogance among commanders. Is it essential to have some kind of ego when leading massive numbers of troops? How does the arrogance of McClellan differ from the arrogance of Hooker?

Reread Chamberlain's speeches to his students and his professors. Does he give a truly compelling argument for going to war?

Discuss the freeing of Lee's slaves. What would it be like to free all the slaves at once if they have no where to go and the plantations cannot pay them enough? Would sending all the freed slaves to Liberia ever have been a really good option?

What would a civil war battlefield look like? Take what you've learned from the book and discuss what you know about troops, the weapons, the hospitals, and the food.

Does it really seem necessary for General Lee to invade the North? Can you imagine any alternatives?