

Starship Troopers Study Guide

Starship Troopers by Robert A. Heinlein

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Plot Summary

Starship Troopers tells the story of Juan Rico, a well-to-do youngster who joins the elite Mobile Army at the outbreak of the “Bug War”. He survives boot camp, rises rapidly through the enlisted ranks through heavy attrition, is culled off for Officer Training School, and survives his first experience as a platoon commander. Rico goes on to become a confident commander, passing to younger officers the wisdom he has absorbed from many mentors.

First published in 1959 and set in the distant future when intergalactic space flight and warfare are commonplace, Robert A. Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* is presented as the highly selective reminiscences of Juan Rico who, right out of high school and over his father’s objections, gives up a sure fast track to the top in business to join the elite Mobile Infantry. Rico tells of narrowly surviving the rigors and frustrations of boot camp, almost miraculously surviving a first taste of combat in which over half his comrades perish, and joining one of the Mobile Army’s most elite units as a corporal, having been promoted rather quickly because casualties in the Table of Organization above him are so incredibly heavy.

Humankind, which has colonized the Solar System and expanded to galaxies beyond, has clashed with rival colonizing races, the most menacing being the highly evolved, antlike “Bugs.” Only after Rico signs up and begins boot camp does active warfare break out, ending a long period of peace that people mistake for a permanent state of being. Two-year enlistments, which entitle those who complete them honorably to exercise full citizenship, become open-ended. Human civilization in Rico’s day represents a cleansing and evolution of naïve, overly humanistic 20th century Western societies. At the end of his training, Rico realizes how far he has come, psychologically and physically, since leaving civilian life.

Still, the trained soldier, Cpl. Rico remains painfully modest and brutally frank about his intellectual shortcomings and fails to pick up on his Mobile Infantry superiors’ desire to sign him up for Officers Candidate School. They use an older, less educated comrade to drop the bait that Rico appears not to take, thinking how rank has far more pitfalls than it has privileges. Nevertheless, without explanation, Rico heads off to OCS, where the curriculum provides opportunities to contemplate, in greater detail, the development of the political and military institutions of Rico’s day. Rico is sent as a temporary “third lieutenant” on a “prentice cruise” that will determine whether he receives a permanent commission, is returned to the rank of buck sergeant, or is cashiered out of the Mobile Infantry completely.

First aboard a transport ship en route to a crucial battle with the Bugs and then in nominal command of a platoon on the ground, Rico obsesses about his own greenness, the way his Captain tries to help him figure out how to grow into a true leader. Eventually, though, the Captain quietly colludes with the experienced Platoon Sergeant he assigns to Rico, to leave him with little more than a figurehead role. Still, Rico does his best in a harried situation as Bugs suddenly pour out of their underground nest and



half of Rico's men disappear underground without authorization. Leading a rescue mission, Rico is wounded in an ignoble accident and evacuated to a hospital transport, where he has time to contemplate his shortcomings as a commander. He appears genuinely surprised when he does not wash out of OCS, but graduates and is commissioned. Rico happily returns to his old unit.

The novel ends with a short epilog showing Rico as a mature officer passing on to an anxious, green apprentice some of the wisdom he has absorbed from his many valued mentors. Rico still gets the shakes, however, before every combat drop.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Starship Troopers tells the story of Juan Rico, a well-to-do youngster who joins the elite Mobile Army at the outbreak of the “Bug War”. He survives boot camp, rises rapidly through the enlisted ranks through heavy attrition, is culled off for Officer Training School, and survives his first experience as a platoon commander. Rico goes on to become a confident commander, passing to younger officers the wisdom he has absorbed from many mentors.

In his first drop from the *Rodger Young* as an assistant section leader in the Mobile Infantry (“MI”), Juan (“Johnny”) Rico, has “the shakes.” Acting Platoon Sergeant, Jelal, inspects the troops closely, ordering one man with a cold to fall out, leaving a hole in Rico’s Section 2. Addressing his men as “apes,” Jelal laments the poor quality of recruits, invokes the memory of his popular predecessor, Lt. Raszak, killed during a previous mission, and reminds them of the high cost of training and equipping them. Recruits are to do their job, not seek to be heroes, and come back safely. They will be dropped in two skirmish lines 2,000-yards apart for a “smash-and-destroy” mission, demonstrating their military superiority to the enemy. They are to take no prisoners, kill only when it is unavoidable, meaningfully expend every piece of ammunition, and above all to shine. Jelal yields five minutes to Section 1 leader, Sgt. Migliaccio, who functions as the platoon non-denominational chaplain. Unlike other forces, MI chaplains, cook’s, etc., fight alongside the others. Rico does not join in, but Migliaccio afterwards encourages him to do his job and not try for a medal in his first outing as a non-com.

As the four squads in turn are sealed into individual descent capsules, Rico wonders if those entering the Trojan Horse got the jumps like he, wrapped like a mummy in total darkness during the endless final seconds. As the ship brakes, hitting the men with a bruising force of 8-10 Gs, Rico stops thinking. Most pilots, like Capt. Deladrier, are women because they have faster reactions than men and tolerate G forces better. She fires the tubes like an automatic weapon, each capsule feeding into the chamber and being blasted away with tremendous force. Then – suddenly – there is no sound, pressure, or weight, until they hit the planetary atmosphere. Shells burn away and are sloughed off, both slowing the descent and confusing enemy radar. The third shell opens a series of parachutes before peeling away. Rico stretches and uses infrared “snoopers” to get his bearings. More parachutes and the suit’s jump jets complete a bouncy landing.

Rico lands on the wrong side of the river and a mile out of position. He must keep from getting too excited as he selects choice targets for rockets tipped with “peewee” nuclear warheads, hand flamers, and high-energy (“H.E.”) bombs. Rico hopes to hit the waterworks, which will make the city uninhabitable. Receiving orders to begin bending in the flanks, Rico relays them to his men. With the advantage of surprise now lost and defenders unconcerned about friendly fire accidents, Rico suffers some near misses,



launches his A-rockets, and lands in a large room full of “skinnies,” at whom he lobs a special bomb that counts down in their language to detonation – as a psychological weapon. As Rico reaches the muster point, much of the city is burning, but squad roll calls reveal one man is missing. As assistant action leader, Rico joins Ace in looking for him, even as music signals the retrieval boat’s approach. They find Dizzy Flores too badly wounded to extract from his heavy suit and support him in the return to the retrieval boat. The delay in lifting off would have doomed the platoon had Deladrier not skillfully matched the new orbit. Flores dies on the way up.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 catches the reader’s attention immediately with the drama of an MI raid on the planetary home of a humanoid race called “skinnies.” It introduces a number of characters, including the narrator, a newly advanced non-commissioned officer. Much of the advanced weaponry – partly nuclear – and body armor are pictured in action, leaving details to be filled in later. The phrase “on the bounce” is introduced, which becomes part of nearly every direct order issued throughout the novel. Note Rico’s aversion to an arachnid adversary that will be battled at the end of the novel and his reference to the Trojan Horse. Throughout the novel, it is clear humans in the future retain knowledge of the great events in the military history of all nations.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Rico would never have joined the MI had his high school friend, Carl, less affluent but quite intelligent, not decided to enlist. Rico broaches the idea to his father, who says this is as predictable as all the mistakes he and his wife have allowed their son to learn from. Thankful he got over the temptation to enlist and marry before these could ruin his life, Father does not intend to let Mr. Dubois, the instructor in History and Moral Philosophy, convince his son to waste two years of his life. Instead, he will attend Harvard and the Sorbonne, travel and learn the business, swiftly working his way up from stock clerk to executive to boss. If it was wartime, Father would applaud enlistment; but in peacetime – which now appears to be permanent – “federal service” means becoming a parasite on society. Father reveals his graduation present: a trip to Mars, to get travel out of his system.

During the last meeting of History and Moral Philosophy, an obligatory but ungraded course, Dubois wants to know what his students have learned. A girl with whom Dubois has tangled before quotes her mother: violence never settles anything. Dubois heaps scorn on this silly and immoral idea, and turns to Rico for an explanation of the moral difference between soldier and civilian. When Rico parrots the textbook about civic virtue, Dubois is disappointed. Days after graduation, Rico and Carl celebrate their birthdays, and on Carl's going to the Federal Building. There they meet a classmate, Carmencita Ibañez, who surprises them by announcing she is enlisting, hoping to become a spaceship pilot. Rico surprises himself by announcing this as his goal too. Carl aspires to starside R&D or electronics.

A fleet sergeant in dress uniform, whose right arm and both legs are missing, mans the recruiting station. He encourages Ibañez, but does all he can to discourage the young men, explaining this unique path to full citizenship attracts too many who fail at soldiering. Many hang in and endure dirty, nasty jobs. His own injuries demonstrate the risk. Even more end up in coffins, he warns, so they should try college. They have a 5% chance of getting the placement they want. Rico does not want to wonder his whole life if he is anything more than the boss's son. Ten minutes later, they begin cursory physical examinations during which a doctor tries to talk Rico out of enlisting. Two female clerks are summoned to witness the signing up for two years of federal service in the Terran Federation (more if required). Upon retiring, they have the lifelong duty, obligation, and privilege of voting. They are given a 48-hour leave to think it over with no more penalty than being barred from a second opportunity if they change their minds. During the leave, Rico's father storms at him and then quits speaking to him. His mother takes to her bed. Rico sneaks out to begin his service.

Within two days of testing, Rico knows he will not be a pilot and lists his other preferences, with Infantry at the bottom, just above K-9 Corps, where soldiers are partnered as closely as spouses with “Calebs” (or “neodogs”), artificially mutated



symbiotes derived from dog stock almost as intelligent as human morons. Rico is surprised to learn Dubois speaks well of him and is pleased he is accepted in the infantry. Leaving the building, Rico runs into the recruiting sergeant in civilian dress and sporting lifelike artificial limbs. Fleet Sergeant Ho congratulates Rico on his billeting, because *MI is the Army*; everything else is ancillary. Carl and Ibañez have gotten the billets they want and already shipped out to training. As he packs to leave for basic training, Rico proudly parrots Ho's line to his temporary roommate

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 determines Rico comes from an affluent family. Earth, now called "Terra", has a unified government in which only veterans of federal service enjoy the right to vote. Details of the family conflict that Rico's enlistment stirs up will come out later, with a surprise twist. How the planetary state comes about will be explicated, and the rationale for citizenship debated philosophically in a classroom setting.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Rico undergoes basic training at Camp Arthur Currie in the northern prairies, where a cold climate, new time zone, and tough military discipline make a difficult adjustment. Turning out for calisthenics at dawn, the recruits meet their company commander, broad-shouldered, mean-looking Career Ship's Sergeant Zim. Zim explains the significance of the instructor's baton and makes an example of Jenkins, who sneezes in the ranks. Zim looks over the rest of his charges and declares theatrically they are pitiful, mommy-coddled, sickly monkeys. He asks if anyone believes he can whip him, breaks the arm of the first hulking recruit to step forward, flattens a pair of German recruits who follow, and gets the best of – but does not destroy – the son of his martial arts instructor. Rico dislikes Zim from the start, but admires his style. Food is hot and plentiful, and served with neither the fanciness Rico is used to at home nor the arbitrary discipline used in boarding schools. Jenkins arrives, too tired to eat, and Zim orders him to sick call. Under his breath, Jenkins wonders what kind of mother produced Zim; and an instructor-corporal informs him sergeants reproduce by fission, like all bacteria.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 tells of the iron rod with which boot camp in the MI is run. It introduces battle-wise, tough, demonstrative – and theatrical – Sgt. Zim, who reappears several times in the novel, along with some of the narrator's recruit buddies. The theme of soldiers complaining about sergeants is introduced. Non-coms filling in for commissioned officers in the MI was hinted at in Chapter 1, and is explicitly stated here. This will later be explained.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Two weeks into basic training, the recruits lose their cots and learn to sleep under any conditions. While theoretically they receive eight hours of “sack time” a night, alarms, night duty, field marches, and other whims of superiors often cut into it. Their free time is likewise often filled with chores rather than writing letters, loafing, gossiping, discussing sergeants and mythological females, or making up on lost sleep. Looking back, Rico sees boot camp is not made harder than necessary or as sadistic as recruits feel. It is as planned as surgery; and the instructors are as impersonal as surgeons on purpose: they are weeding the droves of volunteers who cannot be turned into MIs. This saves money and insures no trooper who climbs into a capsule will let anyone down. Dropouts may either remain in another branch of federal service or accept appropriate discharges.

Rico now appreciates how parade drill, route marches, harassment, and punitive extra duty instill ingenuity and harden recruits physically. After older recruits are tried out, Rico is made a recruit-corporal, which makes him liable to being chewed out, not only for his own mistakes, but for those of his squad. The chevrons inspire him to remain after two days of marching without provisions or bedrolls during which many quit. Cpl. Bronski suggests how Rico and his squad can eat and sleep huddled together like sheep. It is hard for them to “bounce” at dawn as ordered, but the sun warms them as they march, singing cadences old and new. Twelve weeks later, dumped into the Canadian Rockies for survival training, Rico is amazed at how fit he has become and how many there are for a rabbit. Breckenridge and another recruit die, their comrades spend 13 days finding them –for the MI does not abandon its own – and they are buried with full honors as PFCs.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 adds details to how the rigors of boot camp form warriors. Rico shows how his perceptions at the time change with experience and the realization his life depends on his comrades’ training and conditioning. The credo that the MI does not abandon its own recurs at the dramatic end of the novel, when Rico, as an officer-in-training, refuses to flee a hopeless battle situation and rescues his squad.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Combat training under Sgt. Zim and the battalion commander, Capt. Frankel, covers everything from bare-hand fighting to the simulated use of nuclear weapons. Shujumi serves as a martial arts instructor. Knives are Zim's favorite and, as the ranks thin, he proves a patient instructor. When Ted Hendrick questions the value of knives against modern weaponry, Zim demonstrates it. When Hendrick persists, Zim reminds him of H&MP lessons about war being "controlled and purposeful violence," not just killing enemies. Statesmen decide why and how soldiers will fight and generals determine when, where, and how. If Hendrick cannot accept this, he will never be a soldier.

They train with sticks, wire, "obsolete" weapons like bayonets, and modern weapons of mass destruction, learning to service and maintain equipment and to be "on the bounce" for any circumstance. Of necessity, they simulate a lot. They get even less sleep because half the exercises are held at night. One in 500 rounds at random is real but non-explosive, to give trainees added incentive to take cover when ordered. If they do not bounce fast enough, the ration is changed to 1:100 or 1:50. Once someone is creased with bullet, all take it seriously.

Rico comes to his lowest point during this training for three reasons. First, he loses his chevrons when a squad member does something in his absence and is given extra duty for going over Bronski's head to complain to Zim. Second, his mother writes him a letter; and third, he is injured during powered-armor drill and put on light duty, giving him too much time free to think and feel sorry for himself. Thus, he is assigned as Capt. Frankel's orderly when Zim arrives with a developing black eye. Behind him walk a dirty, bloodied, and wild-eyed Hendrick flanked by armed guards. Zim stiffly recites how Hendrick has violated articles 9007 and 9020, has refused administrative discipline, and demands to see the Battalion Commander. During training Hendrick has disobeyed an order to "freeze" – which Rico knows is a terrible infraction. Rico believes Frankel throws the book at Hendrick, but the captain explains the punishment is as light as it is because he does not want to convene a court martial and ruin the company's record.

Hendrick demands to have his side heard; but Frankel explains how each of Zim's actions is not only legal, but necessary. When the sullen boy lets slip he struck Zim after being struck, Frankel tries to silence him, but Hendrick talks on, thinking he will vindicate himself, and then insists on resigning. Frankel asks Zim, whose black eye he has carefully ignored, if the pertinent disciplinary articles have been published in his company, and learns they have – every Sunday before church call. But recruits only joke about finding more than "thirty-one ways to crash land" or to receive a death penalty. Rico now realizes striking Zim is a hanging offense. Frankel summons an officer from headquarters for a trial, orders Rico to sequester witnesses, and invites Hendrick, who still believes he may simply resign, to name witnesses in own his defense.



The taped field court martial is over in minutes. Hendrick admits to having heard it is illegal to assault a superior officer and, offering no mitigating circumstances, is found guilty. He is sentenced to ten lashes and a bad conduct discharge, not hanging, as Rico had feared. That would have required a *general* court martial. Hendrick is swiftly led away. That afternoon, Rico is returned to duty and falls in for parade to witness Hendrick's punishment. He has never seen a flogging before and passes out – along with several dozen comrades.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 focuses on recruit Ted Hendrick, first as a foil for explaining how soldiers carry out the policy set by politicians and generals, and secondly as an example of military justice. The fact that soldiers are expensive to train but expendable has already been established. How Frankel and Zim try to avoid extreme punishment for Hendrick's offense is suggested and will be explained in the next chapter, as the men talk through the distasteful event.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The night after Hendrick is kicked out, Rico reaches his lowest point. He is ready to slink back to his father and admit he has been wrong, before he can make a mistake like Hendrick. From the outer office, after Hendrick is led away, Rico overhears Zim request transfer to a combat unit. He and Frankel agree Hendrick does not deserve ten lashes and Zim is to blame for giving him an opportunity to violate Article 9080. Hendrick fears Zim is slowing down, in which case combat is no place for him. Zim admits to liking Hendrick and the remaining recruits who are eager as puppies and likely to make good soldiers. Frankel adds that Hendrick is stupid, blurting out his admission of striking Zim, and says he should have been drummed out earlier rather than coddled. Both are sorry Hendrick must take the lumps for something that is their fault.

Frankel has Zim think back 12 years to Frankel's basic training and realize he had not committed a 9080 only because then-corporal Zim was too quick. He still recalls Zim's hated order, "Soldier, shut up and soldier!" That is what Zim must do now and believe Hendrick's example will save a comrade from someday hanging for a 9080. Frankel orders Zim to warn his instructors to avoid fraternization and knock out any recruit that looks ready to throw a punch before he can land one – at the risk of being broken for incompetence. As they part, Frankel invites Zim to come to the officer's club to go "waltzing Matilda", or kickboxing, to work out their tensions. Zim leaves without seeing Rico, to whom Frankel rattles off a series of orders and dismisses. Then follows Hendrick's sickening spectacle.

Sleepless that night, Rico thinks about Zim being anything but the smug robot he appears. He cannot conceive how Zim could feel so disgraced that he would run away "for the good of the unit", or that Frankel would agree and rub his nose in it. He has seen a law of nature broken: a sergeant being chewed out rather than chewing. The incident is so unlikely, Rico never mentions it to anyone. Rico is also surprised to realize officers, at least Frankel, work so hard they skip meals and exercise, and that they empathize with recruits whose names they do not even know. He believes he has fundamentally misunderstood the world and wants out of the tough, unintelligible MI before he gets flogged, or worse. No one in his proud, crime-free family has ever been humiliated like that. If he quits, he will not have citizenship, but his father does not regard that as a real honor. Rico realizes he has wanted to commit a 9080 many times but lacks the guts.

Mother's letter confirms his decision to leave. She writes about how badly joining up has wounded his proud father, and promises to intercede for him when his grief becomes bearable. She hopes her son agrees boys never get over needing their mother's lap and asks him to write her care of Aunt Eleanora. Rico sheds the tears his father cannot, falls asleep and is immediately awakened by an alert. Bouncing to the bombing range in full unarmored kit, the regiment is ordered to freeze – and hold it an hour, barely breathing.



Rico knows this is his last order. Zim is unavailable to receive Rico's resignation until after breakfast and a route march. Zim hands out mail during lunch and Rico is surprised to get a letter from Dubois, telling of his delight he is in the MI and assuring him he is now over the "hump" in training. It is man's noblest fate to put his body between loved ones and war's desolation. Asking him to write when he can, the retired lieutenant colonel says, "You've made me proud."

Rico thinks about the amazing letter the whole hike back to camp. He recalls a lecture using kitchen illustrations to destroy the communists' approach to value, while maintaining Marx's definition of value might have saved the planet grief. Value has no absolute value. It is always relative to a particular person. "Market value" is a fiction; and "the best things in life are free" is the utterly false premise that caused the collapse of 20th-century democracies. The best things are beyond money and must be bought by agony, sweat, and devotion. The sound of the regimental band playing takes Rico's mind off Dubois' letter. As they pass and the singing-along fades, Rico realizes he feels good. He has passed his hump and everything seems lighter. He does not go to Zim, but Zim comes to him and asks if his letter had been from Dubois, to whom he sends his respects, and sends Rico off on the bounce.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 begins with a debriefing on the Hendrick affair and provides insight into the dynamics of training young recruits. Rico is at the point of quitting when he receives a letter from his hardly-respected H&MP instructor, whom he re-evaluates instantly in light of his rank in the MI. The simple statement Rico has crossed over the "hump" is enough to make him stay in the service. A Dubois exposition on "value" recalled from high school suggests how the political systems of the 20th century have broken down, leaving the present – still undefined – system. Note 20th-century songs are still sufficiently recalled to be used in polemics.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Rico is fascinated by power suits that magnify vision, hearing, strength, intelligence, firepower, and endurance while lowering vulnerability. It facilitates missions requiring less than the catastrophic destruction of a nation or planet through the kind of face-to-face combat carried on since Sargon the Great, and likely destined to continue forever. Suited up, one looks like a big steel gorilla armed with gorilla-sized weapons. Yet the famed pseudo-musculature is so finely controlled one does not have to control the suit, simply wear it. Through negative feedback and amplification, the suit matches any motion one makes and applies greater force, allowing one to jump over a house and land softly as the jets know to fire when needed. Thus, the mind is free to handle weapons and attend to what is going on around, which is the key to survival.

Various facial muscles are used to switch on and off heads-up visual and radar displays, infrared snoopers, multiple secure audio circuits appropriate to the wearer's rank, and outside microphones that pick up ambient sound. Everything is arranged to leave the trooper free to follow his trade – slaughter. Using these features requires practice, and MIs practice until everything is automatic. They also practice using the time spent in each high bounce to get bearings, pick targets, fire weapons, reload, decide whether to jump again, and to override automatics if necessary. There are three types of suit: marauder, command, and scout. Scouts are fast and long-range but lightly armored. Command are fast and powerful and carry three times the electronic gear as the others. Marauders are for the executioners.

During Rico's first practice session in a suit, he suffers the strained shoulder that leads to office duty. Another time, he is a simulated section leader armed with simulated A-bomb rockets in a simulated night action against a simulated enemy. One of the instructors cuts the power on one of his men, making him a simulated casualty and, following doctrine, Rico orders him picked up and lays down simulated fire to discourage the enemy. Still green, Rico uses, not his radar display, but his eye to aim and bounce smugly away. His power is cut in mid-jump and he lies immobilized by a ton of metal, upset Zim has made him a casualty. Zim comes over to tell him how stupid, clumsy, and careless he has been and asks if Rico would like Dubois to have seen him today. Only when he stands before Frankel does Rico realize he is in trouble. He is sentenced to five lashes at regimental headquarters, but not expelled. The sentence is carried out within 15 minutes; Zim secretly gives him a mouthpiece to bite down on. Rico believes floggings are harder to watch than to take; it hurts worse than anything he has experienced, but the waits between strokes are worse than the strokes themselves. Afterwards, no one treats him differently or mentions the flogging. The doctor patches him up and returns him to duty. Because it is an administrative punishment, there is no permanent black mark on his record.



Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 describes in considerable detail the workings of the MI suit, while having Rico apologize he does not understand the technical aspects well enough to explain. He makes abundantly clear that jumping in one requires none of the driving or flying training; but the electronics require a mental swiftness he is too green to pull off. Without it being spelled out, it appears wiping out his squad in simulation by estimating distances, rather than determining them, earned Rico his light flogging. Thus, the chapter adds detail about how flogging is carried out in the MI, Zim again shows his kind side by providing the mouthpiece, and Frankel vouches for Rico's potential as a soldier.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Beside Hendrick and Rico, floggings are rare, while undesirable discharges are common. The company experiences one hanging, as deserter N. L. Dillinger kills a baby girl, deserts, is convicted by a civilian court, and is turned over to the regiment so it can purify itself of guilt for him having been a member. Dillinger is marched onto the parade grounds in full dress uniform, stripped of every trace of insignia, and is hanged. Most recruits have never seen death, but are less shocked than at a flogging, as they cannot picture themselves kidnapping, ransoming, or murdering.

The regiment observes 30 days of mourning for the victim, and Rico struggles at night to understand how such a pathological personality makes it into the MI. He contemplates whether Dillinger was insane and incurable – in which case, all are better off with him dead, or curable and remorseful to the point of suicide, or a continuing threat to society. Rico recalls discussions in H&MP about the breakup of the North American republic in the 20th century following “The Terror”, when crimes like Dillinger’s are commonplace, just before the war between the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony.

Dubois had talked about the need for swift corporal punishment in raising children (and puppies), something well meaning but misguided, “pre-scientific pseudo-professional” social workers and child psychologists had fuzzy-headedly opposed. A progression of mild scoldings, suspended sentences and, ultimately, boring confinement until their 18th birthday created a hardened criminal class. This is because moral sense – an elaboration of the survival instinct – is not inborn, but rather must be cultivated. Modern-day morality is based on duty rather than such supposed natural rights as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. These come at a cost. “Juvenile delinquents”, a misnomer, result when adults fail in their duty to teach adult virtues. Rico wonders how Dubois would class Dillinger, but falls asleep happy Dillinger will kill no more little girls.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 uses the hanging of an MI recruit to focus on how 20th century North American society falls apart, allowing young hoodlums their “rights” rather than demanding they learn and carry out their duties to self, family, and society. Using the context of Dubois’ high school class allows systematic philosophizing that would otherwise have been difficult. The students take for granted being treated like puppies in learning right from wrong. They cannot picture themselves having to be flogged for antisocial behavior such as rocked the earlier permissive society. “Danny Deever” is a poem by Rudyard Kipling about a British soldier hanged before his regiment in India. Rico uses it as a verb, so the literary source may be unknown in his day; but the effects on the troops watching the execution in formation – horror – is the same.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Camp Spooky Smith in the Canadian Rockies is like Camp Currie, but more rugged and more compact, Third Regiment having shaken out 98% of its recruits. Fifty-man “H Company,” with Zim as commander is organized as a single platoon; and trainees receive much personal attention. Frankel takes an active part in training and knows every fact about each man. He is milder than Zim, makes everything look easy, and achieves the same results. Suit practice on vertical granite walls is difficult and dangerous. So is climbing the old-fashioned way, which they also practice.

At Camp Smith, trainees are eligible for Sunday liberty in town, a major psychological boost they are careful not to forfeit by bad behavior. Shuttles run to Vancouver every Sunday morning and return in the evening. Setting foot there on his first leave with Pat Leivy and “Kitten” Smith, Rico realizes he is no longer a civilian. They shun the city’s social center for MIs, and Rico gawks at the buildings, people, and particularly the gracefully walking girls, realizing how he has taken them for granted his whole life. A policeman breaks the reverie, suggesting they visit the center and stay out of trouble. Leivy is a Seattle native, however, and suggests they take a shuttle to his hometown. There, in a shady bar-restaurant, some merchant marine sailors, always at odds with the MI, taunt the trio and follow them when they leave to avoid trouble. The four who attack are swiftly subdued by the MIs, whose martial arts training is now reflexive.

The eight companies at Camp Spooky start practice drops one platoon at a time in rotation, north of Walla Walla, in the mountains, in the Arctic, in the Australian desert, and on the face of the Moon. Attrition continues from casualties, deaths, and refusing to enter the capsule (even after several drops). Rico never refuses to enter the capsule, but always has the shakes. One is not considered a “cap trooper” until he drops. Starting with 2,009 men, the regiment graduates 187. They hear a speech, receive a certificate, pass in review one last time, and disband. The company colors are stored until not needed to train a new batch of civilians into an outfit rather than a mob. “TP” replaces “RP” before their serial numbers. It is the biggest day Rico ever has.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 briefly depicts advanced training at a camp in the rugged Rocky Mountains and ends with Rico realizing he has left out all his good boot camp adventure stories, a few of which he mentions in passing. Most of the chapter talks about the importance of leaves and uses one to show how the recruits have changed psychologically and physically. Civilians now look curious to them, and would-be assailants are at high risk attacking them. Rico continues emphasizing the high rate of attrition, pointing up how elite a force the MI is.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Historians debate whether to call the conflict that arises after Rico finishes basic training “Third (or Fourth) Space War” or the “First Interstellar War”. Either way, Rico joins Company K, Third Regiment, First MI Division “Willie’s Wildcats” and ships out in the *Valley Forge*; but soldiers call it the “Bug War.” “Operation Bughouse,” the First Battle of Klendathu, is ordered as retribution for the destruction of Buenos Aires, as politicians give up the idea defensive action can suffice against a race of arthropods that look like giant spiders. “Bugs” are divided into castes: workers that cannot fight; smart, skilled, aggressive soldiers that cannot surrender and are hard to kill; the “brains”; and the queen.

En route to the planned seizure and occupation, MI troops are strapped unconscious in their bunks. On arrival, Rico is assigned as an extra to PFC Dutch Bamburger, who warns him to stick close but out of his way. The drop should have been called “Operation Madhouse,” because everything goes wrong. Fifty ships are supposed to come out of Cherenkov drive in perfect formation and drop their MI capsules, but only some are away before *Valley Forge* and *Ypres* collide and perish. Arachnophobic Rico spends a nightmarish 18 hours with Bamburger, as reinforcements are dropped off-target and the MI goal of establishing and holding a beachhead for fresh troops falls apart. Ammunition and fuel are running short when Bamburger is killed, and Rico is taken aboard the *Voortrek* in shock.

The surviving Wildcats, 20%, are farmed out to other outfits, and Rico joins the *Rodger Young*. After their first jump with the Raszak’s Roughnecks, Rico and Jenkins are treated as full-fledged members. Raszak is always referred to in the third person as “The Lieutenant.” On board, he is a father to his men, albeit distant; but during a jump, he watches over each of them. Jelal mothers them closely but does not spoil them, maintaining discipline through his non-coms. MI and Navy men stay to themselves on board.

The *Rodger Young* is a mixed ship with the women living forward of bulkhead 30 and the men aft. The only door is guarded day and night. Male officers are required to take their meals in the mixed mess, but do not tarry, as both Raszak and Deladrier want – and get – a taut ship. Rico’s daily shipside job is servicing the electronic equipment. Drops are infrequent, but when they occur, each is different, to keep the enemy from detecting patterns it can exploit. The Terran Federation can no longer mount a large battle, so raids occur at the squad level. Life on the *Rodger Young* is the best time in Rico’s life.

The worst period of Rico’s life begins when Aunt Eleanor’s bitter three-line letter catches up with him, saying his mother is dead in Buenos Aires. Rico believes his father must also be dead, for he would not allow Mother to take a long trip alone. Raszak asks if



Rico would like leave during the next patrol to mourn, but he asks to wait until the whole unit gets R&R. He is now glad he does, for during that patrol Rasczak is killed helping two wounded men back to pick-up. The unit is left headless. Jelal declines the captain's invitation to take Rasczak's seat at her table, becomes stricter with the men, and invokes Rasczak's views to end discussion. Jelal leaves the team organization intact, making Rico an acting corporal and largely ornamental assistant section leader. He behaves as though Rasczak were simply out of sight. This saves the unit.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 explains the background of Chapter 1's battle – an action taken up again in Chapter 11. It adds detail about humankind's chief enemy, the "Bugs," and states the current war is the result of a Bug attack on Buenos Aires. Recall earlier comments on how politicians decide when war is necessary and generals decide how to wage it when reading this chapter. Note also how blasé Rico is about the attack, until he learns his mother (and probably his father) have perished in it. Rico will take part in a second attack on Klendathu at the end of the novel. In the discussion of Lt. Rasczak, note the cleverly mixed religious metaphor, combining the Muslim confession of faith and the Roman Catholic dogma of papal infallibility. Humans in the novel's era appear beyond taking confessional offense as readily as those in the 20th and 21st centuries.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Returning from the raid on the Skinnies, Rico is sad about Flores' death, but happy to be back aboard. A Navy gunner making small talk says how easy the MI have it – 30 minutes of combat in 30 days. Rico sees the MI as aviators in earlier mechanized wars: few encounters, lots of training. Their next drop is against a distant Bug colony. Rico receives his corporal's stripes provisionally, but with casualty rates so high, he assumes he will keep them. The gunner is not right about "loafing" between drops. Rico is responsible for checking, servicing, and repairing 53 suits between drops, plus weapons and special equipment. Sometimes he has to bring a new suit from cold to hot, a 26-hour task. The Roughnecks work hard but also have fun.

After being bumped to assistant section leader over three corporals with seniority, Rico knows he must ensure his orders will be obeyed should the sergeant die and command fall to him. Rico insists Ace fight it out with him in a long and brutal bathroom fight if Ace cannot simply submit. Rico is beaten, but Ace insists he punch him so he can claim to have learned his lesson and promise to cause no trouble.

This is the period when the Skinnies tell the Bugs how to locate Terra, the Bugs destroy Buenos Aires, the Terran Federation builds up forces, and Terra wins over the Skinnies as de facto allies by the powerful but non-lethal show of force in which Flores dies. MIs are told no more than what they need tactically, so if captured they have nothing for the enemy to squeeze out. They do not need explanations for motivation, because *esprit de corps* in the all-volunteer force is high. They do not know they are losing the war.

Laying tens of thousands of eggs and holding them in reserve to hatch whenever fallen warriors need instant replacement, the Bugs do not need a year like the MI to train soldiers and mesh them into a fighting unit. Thus losing one MI while killing 1,000 Bugs is a net victory for the Bugs. Humans learn with every skirmish, first to distinguish workers from warriors and to waste no ammunition on the former. They concentrate on finding Bugs lairs, which they bomb with a gas disabling Bugs alone. No one yet knows if they are penetrating deeply enough to kill queens; but the Bugs clearly do not like this tactic, which has cleared them off of Sheol.

The Roughnecks return to Sanctuary for more capsules at the time of Jelal's commissioning. Having had their unanimous request to rename the unit "Jelly's Jaguars" turned down, the men begin ten days' R&R. Sanctuary's location is kept top secret, as a last defense for humanity, should Terra and Luna be overrun. The planet is quite earthlike but retarded genetically by lack of the natural radiation that causes mutations. Native fauna and flora are easily pushed aside by terrestrial imports. This makes farming easy for colonists; but it also means they will fall behind earth-bound humanity evolutionarily. Some may seek to solve this by dosing themselves with X-rays or nuclear fallout, but one expert claims humans are too self-centered to worry about



distant offspring. Rico knows the planet makes for decent R&R, with the civilian population respecting the uniform and half of them being female. This can only be fully appreciated after a long flight. Rico contemplates retiring here some day. The barracks are comfortable, the chow line is always open, and there is no reveille or taps. Rico makes up for lost sleep.

Ace invites Rico out on the town and offers to pay when Rico declines, after going broke on last night's date with a slender redhead with expensive tastes. Over drinks, Ace asks if Rico has ever thought about becoming an officer. He has the IQ and education, is just stupid, eager, and sincere enough for men to follow into battle, and no one is being let out after two years any more. Rico goes for a walk to think about his motives for enlisting and about the disadvantages of higher rank. Rico's walk takes him unintentionally by the candidates' school. He watches a company of cadets drilling and being chewed out by sergeants. Shaking his head, Rico returns to the barracks, finds Jelal, announces he wants to go career, and is sworn in using papers Jelal has ready to sign.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 covers many topics at a staccato pace. Detail is added about the war and the Bugs; Sanctuary is described as an idyllic second earth for R&R – and perhaps retirement. However the main purpose of the chapter (and the R&R) is to allow Rico's reconciled rival, Ace, to bring up signing on for a career in the military and applying to Officer Candidate School. The latter looks too much like boot camp for Rico, but he talks himself into the former, an action already anticipated by his commander. There is no suggestion whether Lt. Jelal is behind the two men's going out on the town. Note the racial slur against the Chinese in comparing their attitude toward soldiers' expendability to the Bugs in their war against the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance, and the delicacy with which Rico discusses women in flight and on Sanctuary.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Before being detached from the *Rodger Young* to attend OCS, Rico receives the late Padre's chevrons and wears them proudly in the Fleet landing field terminal, where he meets his father, Emilio Rico. Sadly, they must be ships passing in the night, but the son hopes to return to the Roughnecks as an officer. The proud father forbids him to talk about flunking out of OCS – the first time he has told a sergeant to shut up. Rico will ask Ace to look out for his father who, with casualties high in less than a year of service, is a corporal. The son is sure the paternalistic army had spotted Father as non-com material before he even finished basic training at the new Camp San Martín. He requests the *Rodger Young* but gets McSlattery's Volunteers, makes several drops including Sheol where the unit is decimated, and is sent here.

Joining up shortly after Buenos Aires is not to avenge his wife but out of envy for his son who is doing what he should. The story is cut short by an announcement his boat is loading. Rico reports to the Commandant's office, receives his room assignment, a checklist, and an order to cut off his chevrons (but save them in case he washes out). Rico is now a "mister" and addressed as "sir."

OCS is like Basic cubed, with books added. Mornings, they are treated like privates, and afternoons as gentlemen in classrooms, learning to keep track of 50 men, to nurse, love, lead, and save– but never baby. Evenings and Sundays, cadets study until their eyes burn and listen to subliminal learning tapes as they sleep briefly. There is no psychological "hump" to get over, just a constant fear of flunking out. Math particularly worries Rico, but his roommate, Angel, tutors him. Except for the combat instructors, most of the instructors are disabled veterans who have chosen not to retire on full-pay pension.

The high point of Rico's cadet course comes when Carmencita Ibañez, now a Navy ensign and pilot-under-instruction, walks through the mess hall, asks the duty officer for Rico by name, and obtains for him an unprecedented three-hour pass. They pass a glorious evening (worth flunking two classes next day), dimmed somewhat by knowing Carl has been killed by the Bugs on Pluto. Rico is startled to see Ibañez's hair cropped attractively short.

A course in H&MP, dealing with *why* one fights wars, is included in the curriculum; and the instructor's opinion determines whether one is commissioned or expelled from the military. That instructor, the blind Maj. Reid, gives no pep talk, as expected, on the day the Bugs destroy San Francisco and the San Joaquin Valley. But he discusses events since the 1987 war and particularly how the Treaty of New Delhi, ignoring prisoners of war, shapes "The Disorders." Reid is dissatisfied with his "victim's" summary of who makes up the ca. 65,000 POWs, and turns to Rico to ask whether 1,000 – or even just one – unreleased POW are grounds for a war that will kill millions. Goaded into giving



the MI answer, Rico is assigned to provide written proof in symbolic logic by the next day.

Reid moves on to the evolution of, and moral justification for, the present political organization. No one can describe accurately how the Federation comes about; it simply grows, filling the vacuum left by the collapse of 20th century national governments. Defeated veterans and ex-POWs, unemployed, bitter, and trusting only one another, band together as vigilantes to stop rioting and looting, first in Aberdeen, Scotland. What begins as an emergency measure becomes constitutional practice within a generation or two. When Reid assigns Sally Solomon a 3,000-word essay on why, practically, voting is limited to discharged veterans, Solomon suggests veterans are “picked” and “smarter.” Reid objects, citing the “Revolt of the Scientists,” an attempted *coup d'état* prior to the Treaty of New Delhi, in which the intellectual elite seeks to rule, but, lacking social responsibility, fail. Reid dismisses Solomon's guesses that service men are disciplined, and proclaims it a trick question; the current system is continued because it works satisfactorily.

Historically, humans have always tried to establish stable and benevolent governments through absolute monarchs (leaving the question up to God), wise, popularly appointed monarchs (like Bernadette of Sweden), or the antlike communism in Plato's *Republic*, and the “unlimited democracies.” All have excluded major portions of their population by age. The “divine right of the common man” leads to folly. All systems have worked, but none well. All are regarded as tyrannical by some. They either collapse or are overthrown. Under the current system many complain, but none rebel; personal freedom is the greatest in history; laws are few; taxes are low; living standards are high and crime low. The difference is obvious: every voter and office holder has demonstrated through voluntary and difficult service he places the welfare of the group over his own personal advantage. Continued success is never a matter of chance. To vote is to wield authority, to exert raw and naked force.

Reid asks Rico the converse of authority, to which he answers “responsibility.” Reid approves: authority and responsibility always balance. Irresponsible authority sows disaster, as in the unlimited democracies. The current system is superficially little different, but it insures voters, proven by a (usually) short period of intense service, risking their very lives, accept the ultimate social responsibility. When maximum responsibility and ultimate authority equate, all is perfect. All are to write mathematical proof of why no one has revolted against this system. Responding to a question, Reid rejects the idea of a universal conscript army, asking the cadet to bring in the report on brainwashed prisoners in the Korean War. Virtue must be developed from within, not forced upon anyone. Time is up and class is dismissed.

Once, when Rico suggests the Crusades are different from most wars, Reid requires him to prove war and moral perfection derive from the same genetic inheritance. He argues moral behavior and population growth both derive from the instinct to survive above the individual level, and population pressure is the cause of war. Check of proof comes if relieving population pressure through a moral code that limits population to available resources can abolish war.



Without debating planned parenthood, Rico argues any population that limits breeding gets crowded out by rival populations that move in and engulf them. Even if humans were to balance birth and death rates on their own planets, Bugs would exterminate them and history forget them. Both races are tough, smart, and want the same real estate. Population expands at an astounding compound-interest rate. Man is a wild animal with the will to survive all competition. At any rate, the MI is there to bounce, any time humanity needs its protection.

Toward the end of OCS, each cadet ships out a “prentice cruise” under an experienced combat commander. Rico stands with cadets Hassan and Byrd in the Holy of Holies, the office of the famed, unassuming, paraplegic commandant, Col. Nielssen. He has a permanent rank of fleet general, but has accepted the lower rank until retirement to permit him to be Commandant. Over coffee, Nielssen gives them their orders and temporary commissions, explaining that as “temporary third lieutenants,” they continue under instruction, can be busted at any time by their supervisors, but are within the line of command. They must be ready in an instant to give men the right orders in a calm, unworried tone. Rico wishes he were back in the drop room with few chevrons. Unfortunately, military science knows other way of separating real officers from glib cadets than through a Moment of Truth. To prevent the tragedy of troopers dying under an incompetent, only well-trained, blooded troopers are accepted to OCS. The tough program has already shaken out the less-than-competent. The coming cruise will test the one thing that cannot be tested in school – the vocation of combat command.

When the cadets claim they are ready to take the oath, Nielssen frowns. They are half-baked not-yet-officers, potential Frankenstein-like monsters, who ought not to assume they are ready for command. He asks Rico if he has considered what it would feel like to be court-martialed for losing a regiment. Startled, Rico admits he has not. He knows punishment for officers is much worse than for enlisted, often calling for the death penalty. Nielssen asks Hassan the largest number of command levels ever knocked out in a single battle, and provides several examples to the unsure cadet. The answer the colonel wants dates to the Napoleonic wars, when a “temporary third lieutenant” finds four levels above him wiped out, carries his wounded commander to safety, and is justly cashiered for deserting his post in the presence of an enemy. Nielssen offers a scenario in which they could inherit command of a regiment during a drop and have to issue orders fast because the Bugs will not wait. Rico quotes the book and is told that will get him killed. He should, however, go down swinging, shouting orders, sensible or not.

With that understood, Nielssen swears them in, lounges back, and looks almost human. He explains the tough talk is intended to make them worry about this in advance and plan their steps to minimize the risk to their troops. There should be no suicidal reach for glory, although they must be willing to give their lives if necessary. They are to seek their older, experienced leading sergeant’s advice, but not necessarily accept it fully. Whatever they do, they must snap out orders decisively. Never forget sergeants are the glue holding officers and men together, especially in the MI.

Nielssen pulls out a small box containing the pips worn by previous third lieutenants. He pins on Hassan the pips worn by Capt. Terence O’Kelly, orders him to wear them



gallantly, and bring them back. Hassan has 28 minutes to get to his airboat. Byrd receives the pips worn by five decorated officers, whom he is to look up in Memorial Hall en route to his airboat. Finally, he turns to Rico and frowns. He has a letter from Col. Dubois asking him to give Rico his old pips, but they never came back from an earlier mission. He hands him a set worn five times, the last four by men who failed commission. Will Rico break the taboo and turn them into good-luck pips? Nielssen had been the first to wear them. Feeling ten feet tall, Rico is quickly deflated, being ordered to take along his math books, so he can be tutored.

Rico is assigned to the *Tours*, while Byrdie heads for the *Moskva*. Byrd tells him Hassan has three subjects he must study during the tour. A college graduate at 18, Byrd has been serving as a part-time faculty member in math, and Rico sees him as a potential general. Byrdie tells Rico Hassan is already a first lieutenant (field promotion). If he flunks out he will be a rank ahead, but limited in his ability to rise further by his limited education. Going to OCS to fill in skills makes sense. Byrdie's permanent rank is PFC, so he dares not flunk out. They part, never to see one another again. Byrdie is killed weeks later in battle.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Dedicated ostensibly to describing Rico's experiences at Officer Candidate School, chapter 12 uses classroom discussions to describe how the current political situation came about and defines more closely the conditions of full citizenship. It also discusses in detail the nature of the MI command structure, which is continuous with the Western military tradition back to at least the Napoleonic wars. Dubois returns, both in Rico's memories of high school and as the guardian angel to look after his career. "Evangeline," the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem, is alluded to so fleetingly that one wonders about the high level of literary knowledge Heinlein expects of his young readers in the late 1950s. The same may be said of his allusions to history.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Carrying six-platoons, *Tours* is roomy. Yet it can speedily deliver men anywhere in Federation space and much of Bug space. The MI prefers corvettes to the massive transports the Navy favors. *Tours* is a mixed (and sexually-segregated) ship, with 15 naval officers (eight female). The MI has eight officers, including Rico. The Skipper is president of the mess, and MI Capt. Blackstone is vice-president. Meals are formal, with seating by declining rank down each side of the table; thus, lowly Rico finds himself beside Capt. Jorgenson, whom he is expected to seat. When she rises, the meal is over, but Blackstone obtains an exemption for his men. Jorgenson personally supervises Rico's math homework every day.

Blackstone wears two hats, commanding the six MI platoons aboard the *Tours* and his own Company D, "Blackies' Blackguards." The MI has the lowest percentage of officers (3%) of any army in history and a 100% "divisional wedge" (whereas 20th-century wars required 70,000 men to enable 10,000 to fight). Admittedly, the Navy must carry them to battle and some civilians must supply and service them; but every MI is a free man, and their common self-respect creates *esprit de corps*. Sergeants command many platoons, and many officers "wear more than one hat." All MI officers are combat officers and suffer high casualty rates. The MI never commissions a man simply to fill a vacancy, and each boot regiment is expected to supply its own share of officers. *Tours* needs 13 officers but has only six – plus Rico.

When 1st Lt. "Quick" Silva is hospitalized, Rico is allowed to drop as leader of the first platoon, but Blackstone and his fleet sergeant actually run things. Rico prefers this to inheriting command catastrophically and takes his job seriously. However Blackstone tells him he is ruining morale by spending too much time in trooper territory. He should stay in his stateroom, let the sergeant run things and practice acting relaxed; because fear and tension are contagious. Asked what he believes his platoon needs, Rico recommends Brumby be promoted to sergeant or transferred, and is sure Silva wants this. Blackwell is pleased Rico has figured out the weak spot in his team, but disappointed it takes so much effort. Rico is to work out with his platoon sergeant filling in the table of organization behind Brumby. Rico is also allowed to return to his old specialization, ordnance and armor, to make sure all the suits are ready on time. Adding this to his math studies, platoon routine, and the extra "George" work that befalls the junior most officer, Rico has a busy two weeks. He calculates he has 26.5 hours of tasks a day and foregoes sleep. Blackstone sets him straight: Rico must exercise and sleep before the mission. His OCS grade depends on this.

They rendezvous for "Operation Royalty" off cold, barren little Planet P, already secured by other MI divisions. Staff believes P is an incomplete Bug advance base the Navy wants simply to blast, but Psychological Warfare Corps aims to capture brain Bugs, to



use in learning what motivates Bugs to fight and what might make them stop fighting, and to use in exchange for the thousands of human POWs believed held on Klendathu.

Folklore, religion, and literature agree the price of helping a fellow human in need is always paramount, but no Bug has ever been seen aiding a wounded comrade. A final goal is to learn how to best the Bugs underground, as humans are now able both in space and on the surface of planets. They will try a new technique, peeling the planet like an onion until every Bug has been dug out. The Navy uses radioactivity to cut off rear guard action by the Bugs.

Blackies' Blackguards are a contingency force to relieve or protect other units. There is no true "front", just areas of responsibility. Rico's platoon is assigned Square Black One, a 680 square mile (40 X 17) zone. Rico orders a standard square deployment, and then jumps forward to talk with the leader of the Cherub platoon they are relieving. Rico is dismayed at the new tactical doctrine of not sealing and poisoning Bugs' tunnels. Rather, 70%-90% of them will be allowed to come up and be killed for a week or two, until they are convinced the humans cannot be driven away. At that point, the MI begins unpeeling Planet P, killing surviving warriors on the way down to capturing the royalty they believe to be too bloated to run away.

Rico intends "accidentally" to plug a few Bug holes so his men can better cover the rest. Blackstone advises him all four Cherub officers are dead and the situation is whatever he sees on the ground. Bouncing off, Rico hears a calm report about an immense new crater, and, worrying his voice is too shrill, orders new Sgts. Cunha's and Brumby's squads equalized at 17 miles per man. Learning the crater is "hot," Rico orders a ground listening post, knowing the Bugs will send troops through holes radioactive enough to kill unprotected MIs. When the platoon sergeant suggests a sensible alternative troop allocation, Rico wonders if he has a private circuit to Blackstone, who might relieve him of command at any moment. Rico cannot allow himself to dwell on his puppet-like condition and gives specific orders about watching the crater and patrolling rapidly for additional holes.

A second round will go more slowly and tightly. As a secondary objective, they will watch for live wounded Cherubs, but check no one until the Bug situation is clarified. There is none of the chatter Rico expects to hear on the open channel, just the breathing and sparse orders of a platoon tuned like a violin. It seems not to need Rico, and he wonders if the Roughnecks have an opening for a buck sergeant.

Although most of Square Black One is flat and barren, Rico's troops are spread too thin to detect every Bug coming up between fast-sweep patrols, and they dare use only short-range selective weapons, lest they hit a comrade. Bouncing back to the hot crater, Rico coordinates his watch with adjacent platoons. When he reports his plan to investigate for holes, Blackstone orders him to stay out and shut up. So for the next nine tedious hours, Rico does what he can to keep the men alert, including a bonus for the first verified hole.



A special unit arrives, consisting of Maj. Landry, two armored officers and a youthful and bored-looking “special talent” in unmarked fatigues and an oxygen mask. Never having seen a talent at work, Rico is curious – and shocked to see him remove his breathing mask. The talent strolls around, lost in thought, and insists Rico’s men stop jumping around so he can concentrate. Rico gives the order to freeze. This is repeated in a dozen spots in Rico’s area before the special unit departs, leaving behind a subterranean map.

A vast “Bug boulevard” slants from 1,000 to 450 feet down and in several spots joins a network coming within 100 feet of the surface. The engineer recommends Rico station listeners at these points, and Blackstone dictates changes to Rico’s assignments, in order better to cover the area. He warns the Bugs can burrow fast and advises Rico to pay special attention to listening post outside the area of the tunnels and report any noise to him at once. The revised plan calls for combat engineers to cork the main tunnel near the surface in several locations to cut off a large settlement from the main street.

The Bugs will then either break through to the surface and join a pitched battle, or the MI will go down after them, section-by-section. Rico understands only that he must rearrange his listening posts and have half his platoon sleep before the big Bug hunt. Rico allocates half a squad per listening post and gives the odd-numbered troopers the post-hypnotic command to sleep, while rejecting his platoon sergeant’s suggestion that he also nap. Blackstone puts Rico to sleep and wakes him up, leaving him feeling foolish and angry at being treated like a figurehead. The sergeant informs Rico he has already slept, and stiffly advises him Blackstone invariably has a reason for anything he does. The sergeant further states he has never known Blackstone to withhold information and values his hunches. Rico agrees and resumes his patrol.

At a forward post, Rico observes the Bugs’ chittering, but not the hissing, crackling noise of digging through rock. He determines heavy loads are passing along Bug boulevard every minute at 110 mph. Moving on, Rico hears “frying bacon,” wakes the troopers, and sends an urgent message to Blackstone on the officer’s frequency. Blackstone is – surprisingly – elated rather than concerned, ordering Rico to determine where the Bugs will break out and then avoid that spot. Exasperatedly, he explains the brass wants the Bugs to emerge in numbers too large for Rico to handle. The general has a brigade of heavy weapons waiting in orbit. Blackstone seems surprised when Rico suggests the sounds may mean they are driving a new horizontal tunnel just below the surface, and orders him to report if the center of noise moves. Rico is ordered to hunt Bugs – and not medals – anywhere except near Easter Ten. Rico informs the sergeant and tells him to have each man check that his suit is freshly charged. This has already been done.

Rico, who has been feeling he has left something undone, realizes he is ten miles from his platoon with a party of three men in marauder suits that cannot keep up with his command suit should they be forced to flee the Bugs. Rico sends them back to the platoon and asks for one man in a fast scout suit, Hughes. Together they patrol rapidly for 37 minutes before reports come in of Bugs swarming all around. Rico is ordering his



sergeant to fire when the ground opens beneath him. Rico lands upright and unhurt, 10-15 feet below the surface, and is instantly carried back into daylight by a surge of living monsters. He flames them while reporting his situation. Blackstone orders him to escape and, as he prepares to jump, Rico realizes this is a feint by worker Bugs; had they been warriors, he would be dead. He reports the diversion, and jumps high to survey the situation.

Rico tries to report a brilliant flash to his left, but Blackstone does not acknowledge. The sergeant's beacon also blinks out. Picking up Brumby and Cunha's signals, Rico demands where the platoon sergeant is. Told he is exploring a hole, Rico heads there, but learns Brumby's section has followed the platoon sergeant – without orders. Warrior Bugs begin to appear as shock waves hit from the engineers' "corks" 30 miles away. A call-off reveals many missing MIs. Rico and Cunha inspect three holes, the last of which has swallowed Rico's men. With neither Bug nor human in sight, Rico puts Cunha in charge and jumps in, quickly lest his nerve slip. Cunha rallies the men, comfortingly, behind him.

Two stand guard at the hole to cover the rear while the rest scramble down a low tunnel, hindered by their armor. At the first cross tunnel, Rico debates which underground warfare doctrine to follow. Having too few men to guard every intersection, he keeps everyone together, lest anyone fall captive. The platoon sergeant calmly reports he is lost, not wounded, pinned down by lots of Bugs. He also reports that he has not met up with Brumby's section. He recommends Rico and the others return to the surface, but Rico orders him sharply to recount his turns and provide a vernier reading he can check on his map. Rico then dictates the turns he should make to reach a safe point to which he will return after finding Brumby, disoriented after a fight. Rico holds off on getting casualty reports. Just past where the Bugs had hit Brumby, Rico finds them suddenly all around, too close to use flamers or bombs. They fight hand-and-foot for a minute, losing only four men, including Brumby, who has followed the sounds with reinforcements. Rico's consolidated force finds the beleaguered platoon sergeant, using a captured brain Bug as a shield, and the humans easily slaughter the enemy.

Repulsed by this creature, saddened by his losses, and exultant in the victory, Rico hears close-up the "frying bacon," just as the roof falls in on him. He awakens in a temporary sickbay and has a month to piece together details before reaching Sanctuary. The bottom line is his platoon sergeant – Zim – seizes an opportunity to accomplish the mission goal. No queens are captured and only six other brains, which are turned over to Psych Warfare. None lives to be exchanged. Zim gets the field commission Rico is not offered and would not have accepted. Rico mulls over how he messed up as a platoon leader and is certain he will soon be a buck sergeant again, whether Blackstone is dead or alive. Nevertheless, he studies his math, using borrowed books, to occupy his time. Back at OCS, Rico finds he has been given the benefit of the doubt. Eventually graduating, Rico realizes all his "luck" has been the people he has known. His first assignment is under Lt. Jelal, an important drop from the *Rodger Young*.



Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 examines Rico's "prentice cruise", first conditions aboard ship, reinforcing material introduced in Chapter 10 (particularly the matter of women serving as inspiration for the MI troopers), and then as the narrator first experiences battle as an officer. Rico is more self-critical than usual in this chapter, showing how, slowly, he is losing his greenness, with repeated suggestions he would just as soon flunk out of OCS and revert to being a sergeant. Toward the end of the chapter, Rico mentions how his luck in life has been the people he has known, including several mentors, the last being Lt. Blackstone, with one of the earliest, Zim, reappearing as his platoon sergeant, his name coyly held back throughout the action.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Rico is mentor to an awfully young, harmless-looking 3rd Lt., Jimmy Bearpaw, passing on his own pearls of wisdom before a pre-drop inspection. They are hitting Klendathu, intent on freeing the POWs. As the Padre takes over, Rico feels the shakes. His platoon sergeant, Emilio Rico, comforts him, reminding him it is just like a drill. They hug before being sealed into capsules, and “Rico’s Roughnecks” report they are ready for drop. The captain switches on some music while they wait.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The two-page final chapter swiftly sketches Rico as a maturing officer with his father at his side as platoon sergeant, helping him overcome the pre-drop shakes that still afflict him. Note how Rico has internalized his mentors’ wisdom and now dispenses it.



Characters

Juan Rico (“Johnny”)

The narrator of *Starship Troopers*, Juan Rico, is a well-to-do native of the Philippines. His father rejects the idea of wasting two years of his life in the service, rather than swiftly ascending in the family business to succeed him. Accompanying his high school friend, Carl, to the Federal Building on Carl’s 18th birthday, Rico surprises himself by enlisting, hoping to become a spaceship pilot despite poor grades in math. He is placed instead in the Mobile Infantry (“MI”) on his high school teacher’s recommendation, and quickly takes to the premise MI is the Army. Basic training is cruel and arbitrary, but produces the kind of warrior one wants to fight beside. Rico nearly resigns several times, but gets over the psychological “hump”.

He is assigned to Company K, Third Regiment, First MI Division – “Willie’s Wildcats” – aboard the *Valley Forge*, early in the “Bug War” and completes his first combat drop. Rico survives the disastrous “Operation Bug,” but the *Valley Forge* is destroyed. He joins the *Rodger Young* and is named assistant section leader of Section 2. Between drops, shipboard life is the best time in Rico’s life. On R&R at Sanctuary Base, Rico decides to sign up as a career soldier and has planted in him the idea of applying to Officer Candidate School. Waiting to ship out, Sgt. Rico meets his father Emilio, a corporal newly assigned to the *Rodger Young*. At OCS, Rico requires tutoring in math, but makes his way through the program to the final phase, a “prentice cruise” aboard the *Tours*. Rico is assigned as a temporary third lieutenant to Capt. Blackstone, who will decide whether he is permanently commissioned or cashiered.

Rico is very green and slow to learn, allowing himself to be mired in details and tasks rather than concentrating on sleep and exercise to be ready for battle. Rico’s would-be leader, Lt. Silva, is hospitalized just before “Operation Royalty,” so Rico leads First Platoon into battle, overseen closely by Blackstone and Platoon Sergeant Zim. Looking back, Rico is hard on himself in the chaotic battle, which for him ends ignobly when the roof of a Bug tunnel collapses on his head. Zim, however, has captured one of seven brain Bugs, so the unit is honored. Rico goes on to be commissioned and lead a drop onto the Bugs’ home planet to free the POWs.

Cpl. Ace

Ace is a career Corporal, who would have been promoted rather than Rico if he had been willing to leave his squad. Ace clearly resents taking orders from the younger Rico in their first action together, but admires his courage under fire. They face one another in a brutal, drawn-out bathroom fight, which Ace wins but then “throws” so Rico can claim to have bested him, and Ace can vow to cause no trouble. Later, during R&R on Sanctuary, Ace invites Rico for an afternoon on the town, even paying his way. Over drinks, Ace suggests Rico sign up for a career in the military and that he consider



applying for Officer Candidate School. Ace insists he is too old and uneducated for OCS, but hopes to retire as a sergeant some day.

Cadet Angel

Rico's roommate in Officer Candidate School, Angel, a colonial from Hesperus, sits up nights tutoring Rico in math, his weakest subject.

PFC Dutch Bamburger

An infantryman aboard the *Valley Forge* to whom Rico is assigned as an extra before "Operation Bug," Bamburger warns him to stick close but stay out of his way. Rico obeys, learning to distinguish harmless worker Bugs from warriors and, thus, conserve ammunition. Expected reinforcements are misdropped, Rico and Bamburger come under attack, race toward the pick-up point, destroying targets. As ammunition and fuel run short, a Bug pops out and drops Bamburger. Rico tries to remove him from his suit, but Bamburger's head falls off. Rico bounces away, failing, because he is green, to collect Bamburger's ammunition.

Capt. Blackstone ("Blackie")

The leader of "Blackies' Blackguards" (Company D), Blackstone doubles as commander of all six MI platoons aboard the *Tours*. During a combat mission to Planet P, Blackstone is to evaluate the narrator's fitness to receive a permanent commission. He observes Rico is scattered, tense, and indecisive, and tries to help him prioritize both before the mission (by sleeping and exercising), and on the ground on Planet P during "Operation Royalty," generally allowing him to ask questions and give opinions before correcting him. Rico resents that Blackstone is actually running his platoon (directly and through Platoon Sergeant Zim), leaving him a mere figurehead. In the end, Blackstone cuts Rico some slack on the final fitness report to OCS, and Rico receives his commission.

PFC Breckenridge

A 210-lb. Southern-accented recruit who foolishly steps forward in boot camp to challenge the Career Ship's Sergeant, Breckenridge receives a broken arm. Breckenridge has an excellent voice, which covers Sgt. Zim's lusty but off-tune singing of cadences during marches. Breckenridge dies during rigorous survival training in the Canadian Rockies and is buried with full honors as a PFC – the first in Rico's squad to attain that rank.



Cpl. Bronski

Cpl Bronski is Sgt. Zim's assistant at Camp Arthur Currie, to whom Rico turns for advice, finding him easier to deal with than other instructors. Bronski grinningly helps Rico think for himself and learn to lead his squad in discovering essential survival techniques. After Hendrick's flogging, Bronski is warned to avoid fraternization with the trainees.

Sgt. Brumbie

A corporal in "Blackies' Blackguards" (Company D), recommended by the last platoon leader for advancement to sergeant, Brumbie becomes one of the earliest tests of narrator Juan Rico's leadership as a probationary officer. Capt. Blackstone withholds his predecessor's assessment, and makes Rico identify the need either to promote the man or transfer him to another unit, lest his state of limbo affect morale. The promotion goes through, and Brumbie leads a section that follows Platoon Sergeant Zim underground without orders. The Bugs kill Brumbie when he follows the sounds of battle to Rico's side.

Cadet Byrd ("Byrdie")

The canary-like cadet who tutors Rico in math during Officer Candidate School, Byrd graduates college at age 18 and enlists in the Mobile Army, rising only to the rank of PFC, however. Byrd receives from OCS Commandant Col. Nielssen the third-lieutenant pips worn by five decorated officers, whose records of gallantry he is to look up in Memorial Hall en route to his assignment aboard the *Moskva*. Rico sees Byrd as a potential general—far above anything to which Rico aspires – but two weeks after they part, Byrdie is commissioned and quickly killed in battle.

Cadet Hassan ("The Assassin")

The oldest cadet in Rico's Officers Candidate School class, Hassan is already a first lieutenant through field promotion, attending OCS to absorb the skills needed for higher rank. During the "prentice cruise," OCS Commandant Col. Nielssen assigns Hassan the pips worn by Capt. Terence O'Kelly, orders him to wear them gallantly, and bring them back. Hassan's fate is not disclosed.

Carl

Rico's best friend in high school, Carl is less affluent than Rico; but he is intelligent, and Rico readily follows his suggestions, like enlisting in the Mobile Infantry as soon as they turn 18. Carl predicts Rico's father will object to the plan as, it turns out, his own father does. Nevertheless, they go to the Federal Building on Carl's 18th birthday, with Carl



aiming to be assigned to starside R&D or electronics. Carl receives this billet and ships out ahead of Rico. Carl is killed when the Bugs raid a research station on Pluto.

Sgt. Cunha

First Squad leader under Rico during “Operation Royalty,” Cunha is left in charge as Rico rushes underground to find Sgt. Brumbie’s Second Squad that, without orders, has gone in search of Platoon Sergeant Zim. Cunha rallies the men behind Rico and a decimated force eventually emerges with one brain Bug as a prisoner.

Capt. Yvette Deladrier

The skipper of spaceship troop carrier *Rodger Young*, Deladrier uses extraordinary skill in changing orbit to affect the rescue of “Raszak’s Roughnecks” after a battle with the Skinnies. PFC Archie Campbell, the platoon metal smith makes a model of the ship for her, which the squad presents at a special dinner.

N. L. Dillinger

Rico’s fellow recruit, Dillinger deserts from boot camp and, while away, kills a baby girl, Barbara Anne Enthwaite. A civilian tribunal convicts him, but turns him over to the Army so the regiment can purify itself of guilt. Dillinger is marched onto the parade grounds in full dress, stripped of every trace of insignia, and hanged.

Lt-Col. Jean V. Dubois

A wounded Mobile Infantry veteran who teaches obligatory History and Moral Philosophy in the narrator’s high school, Dubois is seen – rightly – by Rico’s father as an activist recruiter for the armed forces; but Rico regards him as snooty, prissy, and condescending. Students assume “Old Sour Mouth” had risen no higher than corporal before losing his hand and landing a soft job teaching a course everyone must audit. Rico learns Dubois’ branch and high rank from a letter Dubois holds off writing until he realizes Rico is over the “hump” in basic training. The letter inspires Rico not to resign, as he intends. Dubois’ favorable recommendation for service in the MI had helped determine where he would serve after enlisting. Dubois is author Heinlein’s mouthpiece for many social and political issues, like juvenile delinquency. Dubois writes the Officer Candidate School commandant to ask if Rico can be assigned the pips he had worn on his “prentice cruise,” but they were lost when a later cadet died wearing them.

Capt. Ian Frankel

The commander of Second Battalion, Third Regiment at Camp Arthur Curie, Frankel tries to avoid a field court martial when recruit T. C. Hendrick strikes Sgt. Zim during



training exercises. After assigning punishment to the sullen man and explaining to him why he is being punished – hoping this will help make a soldier of him yet – Frankel cannot keep Hendrick from blurting out he struck a superior. This admission gives Frankel no option but to summon a court, which in turn has no choice but pronounce a sentence of flogging and dishonorable discharge. Frankel at least averts the death sentence by keeping the matter away from a general court martial. He and Zim, under whom Frankel had taken basic training long ago, feel terrible about the young man being punished for their mistake in allowing him an opportunity to break a fundamental rule.

Theodore C. Hendrick (“Ted”)

A member of Juan Rico’s boot camp training squad, Hendrick is a clumsy, inept know-it-all, but determined to stick out boot camp because MI service and full citizenship are key to his goal of entering public office. During training he questions Sgt. Zim on the rationale for learning hand-to-hand combat in an era of nuclear weapons, and is told if he needs a reason to obey orders from politicians and generals he is better off a civilian. Later, during an exercise, Hendrick moves during a “freeze” order, is reprimanded, attacks Zim, and refuses administrative discipline in favor of a hearing before the Battalion Commander, Capt. Frankel. This forces Zim to bring formal charges. Both Zim and Frankel try to focus on the disobeyed order, but the headstrong recruit mentions striking Zim and a field court martial becomes unavoidable. Hendrick is convicted, flogged, and given a dishonorable discharge – ending all chances for his chosen career.

Fleet Sergeant Ho

A veteran Mobile Infantryman who loses an arm and two legs in combat, Ho works hard to convince potential enlistees not to, but roundly congratulates Rico on his billeting, because MI *is* the Army; everything else is ancillary.

Ens. Carmencita Ibañez

Rico’s high school classmate whom he has dated, but not regularly, and whom his mother considers a “good influence,” Ibañez enlists on her 18th birthday, hoping to become a spaceship pilot. Small, neat, athletic, gifted in mathematics, she stands a good chance of reaching her goal, and does indeed become a cadet midshipman (probationary) and is shipped out to training ahead of Rico. They meet again when Rico is in Officer Training School and Ibañez is a pilot-under-instruction on the Corvette Transport *Mannerheim*. His whole class ogles her as she walks through the mess hall in Navy dress whites and asks the duty officer for Rico by name. She obtains for him an unprecedented three-hour pass.



Sgt. / Lt. Jelal (“Jelly”)

Lt. Jelal is the Career Ship’s Sergeant aboard the *Rodger Young*, who takes over command of Rico’s platoon after Lt. Raszak is killed during a mission. Jelal is a swarthy little Finno-Turk from Iskander, not badly disposed for a sergeant off-duty, but tough and demanding on duty, particularly before a drop. While Raszak is alive, Jelal plays mother to the troops to the Lieutenant’s distant father. After commanding several drops, Jelal is commissioned a brevet lieutenant and required to eat at the officers’ mess, but spends his time among his men. He rejects the men’s unanimous request to change their name to “Jelly’s Jaguars.”

Al Jenkins

A recruit who completes basic training at Camp Arthur Currie with narrator Juan Rico, Jenkins sneezes in ranks the first morning and is made an example of by company commander Sgt. Zim – because a sneeze could get one killed on night patrol. Jenkins, “Kitten” Smith and Rico are assigned together to Company K, Third Regiment, First MI Division – “Willie’s Wildcats” – aboard the *Valley Forge* early in the “Bug War” and are hazed by veterans until they complete their first combat drop. During the drop in which Rico first serves as assistant section leader, Jenkins has a slight temperature and is excluded from the mission. Along with Migliaccio, Jenkins dies covering a pick-up.

Sgt. Johnson

Rico’s direct superior aboard the *Rodger Young* after receiving his corporal’s chevrons, Johnson is also the company cook and a fine trumpet player.

Cadet Pat Leivy

Rico’s fellow trainee in Officers Training School, Leivy talks Rico and “Kitten” Smith to accompany him to his hometown, Seattle. They are attacked by some drunken merchant marines outside a bar and discover their training has been quite thorough. Leivy, Smith, and Rico are assigned together to Company K, Third Regiment, First MI Division – “Willie’s Wildcats” – aboard the *Valley Forge* early in the “Bug War” and are hazed by veterans until they complete their first combat drop.

Sgt. Migliaccio

The section leader of Section 1 aboard the *Rodger Young*, Migliaccio also functions as the platoon non-denominational chaplain and Rico’s supervisor in maintaining electronic equipment. With Jenkins, Migliaccio dies covering a pick-up and Rico inherits his sergeant’s stripes in an honorary promotion, part of his send-off to O.C.S.



Col. Nielssen

A famed but unassuming Mobile Infantry Fleet General, Nielssen has accepted the lower rank (and pay grade) of Colonel until retirement. This permits him to serve as Commandant of Officer Candidate School. Toward the end of the OCS program, as cadets ship out to serve under an experienced combat commander for a “prentice cruise,” Nielssen hands them their orders and temporary commissions after explaining—yet again – the nature of their temporary assignment and the awesome responsibility of stepping into command, should their superiors die in combat. This is what separates officers from cadets. Unable to give Rico the third lieutenant’s pips Col. Dubois had worn on his “prentice cruise” because a later cadet died wearing them, Nielssen gives him his own “unlucky” pips, and asks him to return them with the bad luck removed.

Lt. Rasczak

Rico’s platoon leader, killed on a mission before the novel begins, Rasczak has great expectations for the platoon still nicknamed “Rasczak’s Raiders”. After his death, these expectations are evoked by his successor, Sgt. Jelal, to inspire the men before drops. Always referred to in the third person as “The Lieutenant,” Rasczak is a father to his men, albeit distant. When they drop, he drops with them, monitoring each man’s situation. He dies rescuing two wounded men.

Maj. Reid

A blind veteran teaching History and Moral Philosophy in Officers Candidate School, Reid demands students do more than quote the textbook or offer opinions. He wants precise, scientific proof in written form from the “victims” he selects to answer questions in class. His opinion determines if one is to be commissioned. A down check can result in expulsion from the military.

Cpl. / Sgt. Emilio Rico

Juan Rico’s father, Emilio Rico, is a rich Filipino who, early in life, is tempted to enlist in the military and marry. Yet at his son’s 18th birthday Emilio claims he is glad to have come to his senses. Emilio Rico offers his son a post-graduation trip to Mars before embarking on the life he has planned for him, culminating in his taking on the prospering family business. However, after Juan enlists in the Mobile Army, the father cannot, or will not, speak to him. Emilio Rico’s business deals with military contracts; so he knows war is coming months before the announcement. The pressure of having a son in uniform while he, himself, is safe leads Emilio to see a hypnotherapist. He cannot accompany his wife to Buenos Aires at the time it is attacked by the Bugs, and thus he survives. Freed to do what he wishes, which is to prove he is not just a producing-consuming economic animal, but a man – Emilio Rico turns the business over to an old associate, andjoins the M.I. He completes basic training at Camp San Martín and



requests assignment to the *Rodger Young*, but instead gets McSlattery's Volunteers. Emilio makes several drops with them, including Sheol, where the unit is decimated. He survives and is finally sent to the *Rodger Young*, just as his son is leaving for OCS. Years later, Emilio Rico, promoted to Platoon Sergeant, assists his son as part of "Rico's Roughnecks."

Shujumi

Rico's fellow recruit, Shujumi, is the son of the black belt martial artist who trains Sgt. Zim. While Zim defeats him physically, Shujumi wins Zim's respect on the first day of boot camp. During combat training Shujumi serves as an instructor.

"Kitten" Smith

Smith is Rico's fellow trainee who gets his nickname from a drill corporal, who disgustedly claims a kitten would have hit him harder during hand-to-hand drills. Rico and Smith accompany Pat Leivy on leave to Vancouver and continue on to Leivy's hometown, Seattle. They are attacked by some drunken merchant marines outside a bar and discover their training has been quite thorough. Smith, Al Jenkins, and Rico are assigned together to Company K, Third Regiment, First MI Division – "Willie's Wildcats" – aboard the *Valley Forge* early in the "Bug War" and are hazed by veterans until they complete their first combat drop. Smith dies when the *Valley Forge* collides with *Ypres* during that drop.

Sgt. / 1st Lt. Charles Zim

Zim is the broad-shouldered, mean-looking, sharply appointed Career Ship's Sergeant whom narrator Juan ("Johnny") Rico first encounters at dawn on his first day of basic training at Camp Arthur Currie. Zim never repeats himself and reserves profanity for extraordinary situations. Looking over his new charges, Zim laments his fate and declares them unworthy even to be called "apes". They are pitiful, mommy-coddled, sickly monkeys. Zim, who years before trained his current commanding officer, Capt. Frankel, tries to minimize an assault by a trainee. Yet the boy stupidly insists on a hearing and admits the infraction. Zim and Frankel feel guilty about the man's flogging and dishonorable discharge. Hence they tighten up discipline among the non-coms to prevent a recurrence. Zim is not allowed to transfer to a combat division at the time. Later, however, during Rico's "prentice cruise" as part of Officer Candidate School, Zim serves as Rico's platoon sergeant and is hailed by Capt. Blackstone as the best in the fleet. As the warrior Bugs break out on Planet P, Zim sees the opportunity to realize the mission objective of capturing a brain Bug. He goes underground alone, without orders. Rico loses many men in rescuing him. Zim is given a battlefield commission as a Brevet Captain (permanent rank: First Lieutenant).



Objects/Places

Bugs

The “Bugs” race of pseudo-arachnids “not really spiders, but intelligent arthropods that happen to look like giant spiders. The Bugs, whose home planet is Klendathu, are organized psychologically and economically, more like ants or termites, in a “dictatorship of the hive.” They are divided into castes. First, there are the Workers. They form the vast majority of the colonies, but cannot fight. Then there are the Warriors. They are smart, skilled and aggressive. Warriors are unable to surrender and are never seen to help a fallen comrade. Humans capture a few by amputating all their legs. Experiments performed on captured Warriors result in chemicals that attack the Bugs™ central nervous system, while not affecting humans. Next, there are the well-hidden “Brains” that centrally control and coordinate the soldiers™ fighting. Ultimately there is the Queen.

During “Operation Royalty,” seven Brain Bugs are captured and delivered to Psych Warfare for “interrogation”, ostensibly aimed at learning what might make Bugs stop fighting. None survive to serve as POW exchanges. The Bugs kill their queen if she is threatened. Like humans, Bugs have colonized many planets. After learning the location of Earth (Terra) from the humans™ other enemies, the Skinnies, they destroy Buenos Aires. This action wakes up the politicians to the need to put the armed forces on a war footing. Historians debate whether to call the conflict the Third Space War, Fourth Space War or First Interstellar War; but soldiers refer to it always as “The Bug War,” several of whose battles the novel depicts.

Camp Arthur Currie

One of two Terran Federation™s Mobile Infantry recruit training camps (the other being in Siberia), Camp Arthur Currie is located in the northern prairies of North America, where the only fixed buildings house equipment. There, recruits like narrator Juan (“Johnny”) Rico live in tents and experience strict, arbitrary discipline to turn them into reflexive, reliable warriors. The dropout rate is purposefully very high. Advanced training, including drops in capsules, is undertaken at Camp Sergeant Spooky Smith near Vancouver and Seattle.

History and Moral Philosophy (H&MP)

This is a required, but ungraded, high school course taught by a seemingly unconcerned disabled veteran, Mr. Dubois. To Ricco, H&MP is an opportunity to enjoy debates; but to his father, it is a thinly veiled attempt at recruiting. Dubois is perennially disappointed that he makes no impression on his students, year after year. H&MP is also a required class in Officers Training School. It is again ungraded; but the instructor™s opinion determines whether one can be commissioned. A down check



can result in expulsion from the military. A blind veteran, Maj. Reid, teaches the class, challenging students to prove their answers scientifically, rather than simply quoting from the textbook.

Klendathu

The home planet of the space aliens who destroy Buenos Aires at the start of the "Bug War," Klendathu is first attacked by the Mobile Infantry in "Operation Bughouse." This is Rico's first taste of real combat. Tipped that thousands of human POWs seized during clashes on various planets are all sent to incarceration on Klendathu, the MI launches a raid on Planet P. MI hopes to capture some Brain Bugs for use in prisoner exchanges; but none of the Bug prisoners survives long enough to be exchanged. At the end of the novel, Rico leads a platoon dropping onto Klendathu for an extended mission to control the planet and release the POWs.

The Mobile Infantry ("MI")

The crack fighting force of the Terran Federation, the MI draws its military traditions from millennia of Western civilization. It teams with the Navy to position strike forces above planets spread over many light years and drop in individual capsules rapidly to the surface with clever diversionary tactics. On the ground, troopers are carefully monitored by their superiors and move under orders to expend their massive armaments "up to and including tactical nuclear weapons" efficiently and thoroughly. At the end of a mission, they gather for retrieval and leave, holding the captured territory to other units. Juan ("Johnny") Rico is a member of the Third ("Pampered Pets") Regiment of the First ("Polaris") M.I. Division. The MI has no "soft jobs." Everyone works at some job between battles; but everyone fights every time. Both the officer-to-enlisted and combatant-to-population ratios are lower than any army in history. There is no compulsion to sign up or not drop out (other than forfeiting citizenship). Everyone in the MI is a free man, and their common self-respect creates *esprit de corps*.

"Operation Royalty"

This is a Mobile Infantry assault on the desolate Planet P intended to capture Brain Bugs and/or Queens. The objectives are to study their psychology and to have hostages the Bugs might exchange for captured MI. Rico takes part in Operation Royalty, heading a platoon under Capt. Blackstone as a temporary third lieutenant. This is part of his Officers Training School program. Rico's platoon sergeant, Zim, captures a live Brain Bug, one of six taken in the bloody campaign. They are turned over to the Psych Warfare people and do not survive to be offered as hostages.



“Raszak”™s Raiders

The nickname for the Mobile Infantry outfit to which Rico is assigned aboard the *Rodger Young*, even after the legendary commander’s demise. Raszak’s successor as company commander, Sgt. Jelal, keeps everything as it had been, pretending the Lieutenant is merely not present and still issuing the orders he passes along. Priding itself on being the best MI unit in existence, the outfit drops into battle from the *Rodger Young*. When Jelal is commissioned, he refuses the men’s unanimous request to rename the outfit “Jelly’s Jaguars,” but years later, with Jelal a paraplegic Captain and Rico a Lieutenant, Raszak’s Raiders becomes “Rico’s Roughnecks.”

The Rodger Young

The Roger Young is the second spaceship troop carrier to which narrator Rico is assigned. Capt. Deladrier commands her, and Sgt. Jelal commands the company.

Skinnies

At first enemies of the Terran Federation, Skinnies are humanoids, 8-9 feet tall, with body temperatures higher than humans. This makes them easy targets for infrared detection. They reveal to the Bugs, a race of pseudo-arachnids whose home planet is Klendathu, the whereabouts of the humans’ home planet. This results in the destruction of Buenos Aires and intensifies the state of war. Raszak’s Raiders attack the Skinnies’ home planet to prove their ability to destroy it, but are ordered not to kill unnecessarily. This convinces the Skinnies to switch sides and become the humans’ de facto allies.

The Terran Federation

The international government that rules Earth (“Terra”) at the undisclosed future time of the novel, the Terran Federation arises from the social chaos of the 20th Century and a war between the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony. The Federation evolves over several generations from the unilateral actions of veterans and former POWs tired of rampant social disorder. They decree only honorably discharged veterans of federal service are eligible for full citizenship, which provides more than adequate numbers for the all-voluntary military. At the time Rico signs up for the Mobile Infantry, the Federation appears to be in a state of perpetual peace. However, while he is in boot camp, Terra moves to a “state of emergency” and then enters what Mobile Infantrymen call “The Bug War” when the Skinnies reveal to the Bugs the location of Terra and Buenos Aires is destroyed. Clearly losing the war, the Federation builds up forces and wins over the hominoid Skinnies as de facto allies.

The Valley Forge

The Valley Forge is first spaceship troop carrier to which Rico is assigned as a member of Company K, Third Regiment, First MI Division "Willie's Wildcats" early in the "Bug War." They take part in the ill-fated "Operation Bughouse," a reprisal attack on the planet Klendathu after the Bugs destroy Buenos Aires. After leaving Cherenkov drive and ejecting her capsules, *Valley Forge* collides with *Ypres* and all hands, including half the Wildcats remaining aboard, are lost.

Themes

Citizenship

Full citizenship in the future age in which *Starship Troopers* is set – meaning the right and obligation to vote and hold public office – is strictly limited to those who have honorably completed a term of service in the armed forces of the Terran Federation. This criterion develops gradually out of a period of social turmoil in which young people are raised, believing they have inalienable rights but no responsibilities. Veterans, including former prisoners of war, respond in various locales by forming vigilante bands that restore order, sometimes resorting to the controlled violence for which they are trained. Over generations, this de facto situation is codified. The new order is not revolutionary in the sense of the American, French, and even Bolshevik experiences. It is evolutionary and largely unopposed, because it works.

Veterans, alone, may be full citizens. This is not because they are inherently wiser or more disciplined. It is because they have proven, by potentially laying their lives on the line, that they are dedicated to preserving the good of society at large. This rule prevails even during times of peace, which early in the novel appears to be firmly established. Because it is the sole path to citizenship, many seek to enlist, but the military at every step does its utmost to dissuade most.

Recruiters explain how easy it is to fail at soldiering, point out they have a mere 5% chance of getting the specialty they want, and use their own often gruesome battle injuries demonstrate the risk. Physicians during the cursory physical examinations try to talk them out of enlisting, and a 48-hour cooling off period after taking the oath is mandatory. There is no penalty in dropping out at any point – beyond giving up any hope of full citizenship. Fully 98% wash out in boot camp, most receiving honorable discharges, but some are dishonorably discharged after being charged with various infractions of military law. Active-duty soldiers may not vote on the grounds that soldiers cannot also affect policy on questions of war and peace.

Women

Starship Troopers presents a very particular view on women. In part, it reflects the time in which the novel is written, the late 1950s, before the modern women's movement gets under way. It shows males treating them with great chivalry and deference. Dating clearly survives into this future age, shown in narrator Rico's recollections of high school and of weekend passes during training. There is no indication that the sexual revolution of 1960s-70s actually happened.

On the other hand, women are encouraged far more than men to enlist in the armed services, which means more of them will enjoy the rights and obligations of full citizenship after two years of service. The Navy particularly appreciates women's



reflexes, which are superior to men's. Women are also better able to withstand high G-forces. This makes them superior space ship pilots; and it appears the majority of all skippers are women. Skippers, of whatever rank, have complete control of their vessels. So even higher-ranking Mobile Infantry commanders must accept a subordinate role.

Many transports are mixed sexually and armed guards are posted continually between male and female parts of the ship. There is no indication in the novel that violations occur. So great is the discipline of those who survive boot camp to become Mobile Infantrymen. The men enjoy looking at women after awakening from long periods of interstellar hibernation and before going to their likely deaths in combat drops; but the author and his spokesman, Juan Rico, allow no sexual innuendo. The troopers also enjoy hearing female voices as they lie sealed in their descent capsules before a drop. It supposedly helps them realize why they are going into battle. The closest the novel comes to a more realistic view of how soldiers view women is when Rico's high school classmate, now a Navy ensign, visits his Officers Candidate School. His fellow cadets ogle her as she sweeps through the mess tent to ask permission to take him to dinner. Rico, too, is clearly aroused, and quickly comes to grips with the fact she has shorn off her luxuriant curls. He accepts a bald woman can still be beautiful.

History

Society, in the future age in which *Starship Troopers* is set, has a high appreciation and keen knowledge of history. This appreciation and knowledge is likely higher than in the 1950's, when the novel is written, and certainly higher than in modern America. High schools, except those in the most remote areas of the earth, must offer a course in History and Moral Philosophy (H&MP). It is not graded; but all must attend. Juan Rico's father sees it as a thinly veiled attempt at recruiting for the military. Much of the material deals with citizenship, which in that era is restricted to those who have been honorably discharged after a minimum two-years in the armed services.

Rico's instructor is Mr. Dubois. He points to specific names and events in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Napoleonic wars, the Bolshevik Revolution, World War II, as well as the great war between the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony in 1985. He lectures about "The Terror" that follows, creating the conditions under which the veterans come to control society. Dubois is perennially disappointed that he makes no impression on his students, year after year, as they merely parrot the textbook. Most, having been brought up after the abandonment of the methods of misguided "pre-scientific pseudo-professional" social workers and child psychologists, appreciate his point of views on corporal punishment. Some recall enough history to be drawn into debating the supposed natural rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

When Rico goes to Officers Candidate School, another course in History and Moral Philosophy is mandatory. It is again ungraded; but the instructor's opinion about a student determines whether he or she can be commissioned. A down check can result in expulsion from the military. A blind veteran, Maj. Reid, teaches the class. He challenges students to prove their answers scientifically, rather than simply quoting from

the textbook. Like Dubois, Reid points to the full range of Western history to help the cadets understand the importance of the path they are taking.

Style

Point of View

Starship Troopers is narrated in the first person, and generally in the present tense, by a personable narrator, Juan (“Johnny”) Rico. He never formally reveals his own name, any substantial information about his background, or any indication of to whom he is telling his life’s story. Toward the end of the novel, Rico lets slip that his first language is Tagalog, meaning he is from the Philippines. This explains why he finds basic training in the northern prairies of North America such a shock.. Rico suggests his family is affluent by describing relations with a high school friend, not immodestly suggesting he has been a big man on campus during high school, and outlining his father’s plans for his higher education and career.

The novel opens with Rico’s first combat mission as a non-commissioned officer. It then looks back on his enlistment and basic training, before catching up with the opening and effectively establishing dramatic effect. Rico then recalls becoming a candidate for an officer’s commission, which clarifies the vantage point from which he has described everything thus far. Still, Rico leaves open the possibility he will fail in this training and revert to his permanent rank of Sergeant. Barely surviving his first blooding as a Third Lieutenant (a temporary rank assigned to OCS cadets during their field evaluation), Rico earns his commission as a Second Lieutenant and takes command of a platoon. Still, it seems all but the last two chapters of *Starship Troopers* are more the tale of a non-commissioned officer. Throughout the novel Rico shows an awareness of why the Mobile Infantry does what it does, which sometimes stands in sharp contrast with the emotions he is feeling during boot camp and OCS. Rico is candid about what he feels at each stage, admitting fear and discouragement. In the long penultimate chapter about “Operation Royalty,” Rico is particularly hard on how slowly he learns to act like an officer. However in the final chapter (probably years later) Rico is confident, having soaked up all that his mentors have given him and now passing it along.

Setting

Starship Troopers is set at some unspecified time after the 20th Century. Vacation hops to the moon and Mars are commonplace, but so are intergalactic travel and warfare. A truly global, but apparently non-nuclear war, between the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony is fought in 1985. This is the only date mentioned in the novel. Thereafter follow several generations of humans emerging from social chaos, led by honorably discharged veterans and former prisoners of war. Their status as proven defenders of the common wealth leads to the principle that only honorably discharged veterans may vote or hold public office. This creates an incentive to join the all-volunteer army.



Many humans continue to inhabit Earth (called “Terra”), where they have overcome ethnic, racial, and national divisions to form a unified Terran Federation. The Federation employs armed forces, the premier branch being the Mobile Infantry, in defense of the planet and outposts of human civilization elsewhere in the universe. Premier among these is a planet named Sanctuary, orbiting a star somewhere in the universe the size and type of our sun. Sanctuary’s location is a tightly guarded secret, known only to certain star pilots. If competing alien life forms ever succeed in wiping out Terra, humankind needs a hidden place to remain alive. Humans have for “umpteen” generations lived on Sanctuary, introducing fauna and flora that have swept aside the native species.

Less than half the novel takes place on these planets. The rest takes place aboard star ships or on battlefields where humans contend with their non-terrestrial enemies. The first, called “Skinnies,” is humanoid, and the other, “Bugs,” are pseudo-arachnoid. The former switches sides to become de facto allies of the humans, who are close to losing the Bug War at that point. The climax of the novel takes place on a desolate Planet P, where the Mobile Infantry is determined to capture Brain Bugs to learn how to make the enemy stop fighting and/or to use in prisoner exchanges.

Language and Meaning

Starship Troopers is a novel for adolescents. It is narrated in the *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Leave it to Beaver* “awe shucks” jargon, characteristic of the late 1950s. Even in the tightest situations, hardened drill sergeants rarely to curse or swear – and when they do, Rico carefully censors the key words. Recruits, after enduring weeks of boot camp celibacy, and hardened warriors, awakening from incubation on extended cruises across the universe, still talk of women in prim and proper terms. Even facing death, men nevertheless hold women high on a pedestal. Women serve on naval vessels. This is because their reflexes are faster, so they make better pilots, and also because the sight and sound of them raises morale.

Author Robert A. Heinlein hints, however lightly, that the avoidance of foul language may be part of this futuristic human culture’s turning its back on the indulgent attitudes of the 20th century. Such attitudes may have led to the total breakdown and reformation of society. There is, however, no clear statement as in other areas (viz., politics and the criminal code). So it is safer to assume author Heinlein is simply unwilling to break the mores of his era in ways adult novelists are busily doing. At any rate, for readers who do not remember that innocent era, it may be hard to take the story seriously.

Starship Troopers is filled with military jargon and gung-ho enthusiasm. Everything is done “on the bounce”. Many of the technological feats Heinlein foresees in his world of the future exist today under different names; but nothing he describes appears passé. Describing armor suits with enthusiastic detail, he uses the narrator’s technical ignorance as a means of not painting himself into a corner for future generations of readers. The one glaring anomaly today is the unabashed acceptance of nuclear weapons as routine offensive tools. The Navy uses them to obliterate whole planets,



and individual troopers train with them on smaller tactical targets. In 1959, there already existed factions favoring disarmament, but they find no echo in this novel. There are no Geneva Conventions for interstellar warfare and no indication it might be useful, except to obtain the release of prisoners of war. Experience in the 1985 war has shown, however, that prisoner exchanges are rarely fair, equitable or complete. So, at the end of the novel, the Mobile Infantry simply invades to bring the POWs home.

Structure

Starship Troopers consists of fourteen untitled chapters of uneven length. Each is headed by one or more epigraphs, well chosen to reflect the theme or action of the chapter. The lion's share is biblical, while the rest are literary (Kipling), political (Jefferson, Churchill), and military (John Paul Jones, ditties).

The novel opens with the narrator, Juan ("Johnny") Rico, describing a hit-and-run raid on an enemy planet, his first experience as a non-commissioned officer leading Mobile Infantrymen into mortal danger. This sets the tone for the novel. In the next eight chapters Rico talks about how he has come to enlist, offering select impressions of boot camp. Chapter 7 describes the powered suits, and how a mistake during his early days of training in them nearly brought Rico to resign. Chapter 8 uses the hanging of a fellow recruit to focus on how 20th Century North American society falls apart. In Chapter 9, Rico realizes he has left out all his best boot camp adventure stories. He observes how far he has evolved psychologically and physically since leaving civilian life.

Chapter 10 explains the background of the opening battle in Chapter 1, after which chronological action resumes in Chapter 11. The pace turns staccato, as details are piled on about humankind's chief enemy, the "Bugs" and the secret human colony, Sanctuary. There the ideas of Rico signing on for a career in the military and applying to Officer Candidate School are first raised. Chapter 12 is dedicated ostensibly Rico's OCS experiences. Classroom discussions describe how the current political situation and MI command structure have evolved. Chapter 13 examines Rico's "prentice cruise," first aboard ship, and then with Rico first commanding men as an officer. This chapter could easily have been split in two. The two-page final chapter is an epilogue, showing Rico as a mature officer passing on the wisdom of his mentors to a young apprentice.



Quotes

“I always get the shakes before a drop. I’ve had the injections, of course, and hypnotic preparation, and it stands to reason that I can’t really be afraid. The ship’s psychiatrist has checked my brain waves and asked me silly questions while I was asleep and tells me that it isn’t fear, it isn’t anything important – it’s just like the trembling of an eager race horse in the starting gate. “I couldn’t say about that; I’ve never been a race horse. But the fact is: I’m scared silly, every time.” Chapter 1, pg. 5.

““You seemed to be unaware of it,’ he said grimly. ‘Since you do know it, wouldn’t you say that violence had settled their destinies rather thoroughly? However, I was not making fun of you personally; I was heaping scorn on an inexcusably silly idea – a practice I shall always follow. Anyone who clings to the historically untrue – and thoroughly immoral – doctrine that ‘violence never settles anything’ I would advise to conjure up the ghosts of Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington and let them debate it. The ghost of Hitler could referee, and the jury might well be the Dodo, the Great Auk, and the Passenger Pigeon.” Chapter 2, pg. 24.

“He had finished eating and was smoking and picking his teeth, simultaneously; he had evidently been listening. ‘Jenkins –’ ““Uh – sir?’

““Don’t you know about sergeants?’ ““Well ... I’m learning.’ ““They don’t have mothers. Just ask any trained private.’ He blew smoke toward us. ‘They reproduce by fission ... like all bacteria.’” Chapter 3, pg. 43.

“The sheep trick works, too; our whole section, three squads, did it together. I don’t recommend it as a way to sleep; you are either in the outer layer, frozen on one side and trying to work you’re your way inside, or you are inside, fairly warm but with everybody else trying to shove his elbows, feet, and halitosis on you. You migrate from one condition to the other all night long in a sort of a Brownian movement, never quite waking up and never really sound asleep. All this makes a night about a hundred years long.” Chapter 4, pg. 48.

“Frankel looked disgusted. ‘Oh. So you would get yourself killed and perhaps your teammates as well because of a few ants?’ ““Not ‘just a few’ – there were hundreds of ‘em. Stingers.’ ““So? Young man, let me put you straight. Had it been a nest of rattlesnakes you would still have been expected – and required – to freeze.’ Frankel paused. ‘Have you anything at all to say in your own defense?’” Chapter 5, pgs. 56-57.

“But I never thought he would be crazy enough to blurt it out that he’d hung one on you – he’s *stupid*; you should have eased him out of the outfit weeks ago ... instead of nursing him along until he got into trouble. But blurt it out he did, to me, in front of witnesses, forcing me to take official notice of it – and that licked us. No way to get it off the record, no way to avoid a court ... just go through the whole dreary mess and take our medicine, and wind up with one more civilian who’ll be against us for the rest of his days. Because he *has* to be flogged; neither you nor I can take it for him, even though



the fault was ours. Because the regiment has to see what happens when nine-oh-eight-oh is violated. Our fault ... but his lumps.” Chapter 6, pg. 66.

“The noblest fate that a man can endure is to place his own mortal body between his loved home and the war’s desolation. The words are not mine, of course, as you will recognized. Basic truths cannot change and once a man of insight expresses one of them it is never necessary, no matter how much the world changes, to reformulate them. This is an immutable, true everywhere, throughout all time, for all men and all nations.” Chapter 6, pg. 74.

“The secret lies in negative feedback and amplification. “Don’t ask me to sketch the circuitry of a suit; I can’t. But I understand that some very good concert violinists can’t build a violin, either. I can do field maintenance and field repairs and check off the three hundred and forty-seven items from ‘cold’ to ready to wear, and that’s all a dumb M.I. is expected to do.” Chapter 7, pgs. 81-82.

“The basis of all morality is duty, a concept with the same relation to group that self-interest has to individual. Nobody preached duty to these kids in a way they could understand – that is, with a spanking. But the society they were in told them endlessly about their ‘rights.’” Chapter 8, pg. 95.

“But the Lieutenant was always ‘The Lieutenant’ – never ‘Mr. Rasczak,’ nor even ‘Lieutenant Rasczak.’ Simply, ‘The Lieutenant,’ spoken to and of in the third person. There was no god but the Lieutenant and Sergeant Jelal was his prophet. Jelly could say ‘No’ in his own person and it might be subject to further argument, at least from junior sergeants, but if he said, ‘The Lieutenant wouldn’t like it,’ he was speaking *ex cathedra* and the matter was dropped permanently. Nobody ever tried to checkup on whether or not the Lieutenant would or would not like it; the Word had been spoken.” Chapter 10, pg. 112.

“Each one of us was a volunteer to begin with, each for some reason or other – some good, some bad. But now we fought because we were M.I. We were professionals, with *esprit de corps*. We were Rasczak’s Roughnecks, the best unprintable outfit in the whole expurgated M.I.; we climbed into our capsules because Jelly told us it was time to do so and we fought when we got down there because that is what Rasczak’s Roughnecks do. “We certainly didn’t know that we were losing.” Chapter 11, pg. 121.

“One hole had closed; it was a heap of loose rock. The second one did not show Bug activity; I told Cunha to post a lance and a private there with orders to kill single Bugs, close the hole with a bomb if they started to pour out – it’s all very well for the Sky Marshal to sit up there and decide the holes must not be closed, but I had a situation, not a theory.” Chapter 13, pg. 198.



Topics for Discussion

How does the destruction of Buenos Aires shape this novel?

How does the war between the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony shape this novel?

What roles do Rico's father and mother play in the novel?

How is Mr./Col. Dubois central to the novel?

Why does the author include the floggings and hanging in the novel?

Is the portrayal of shipboard life believable decades after the novel is written?

Why is Juan Rico so self-critical throughout the novel? Is he officer material?

Should only honorably discharged military veterans be allowed to vote and hold political office?

Do any of Dubois theories about the depravity of 20th-century culture ring true with you? Which ones? How?