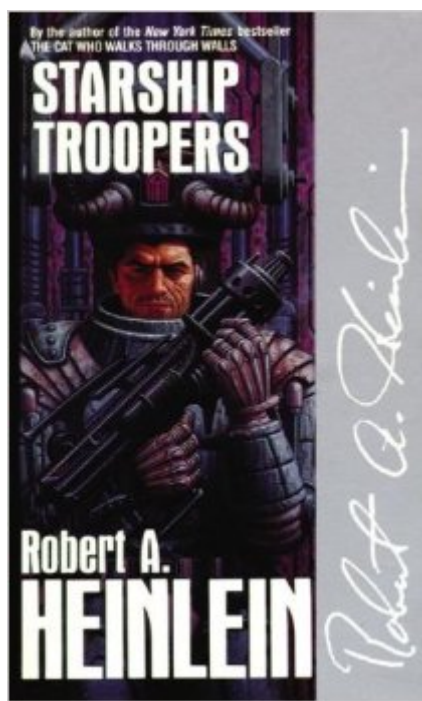


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Starship Troopers



Synopsis

In one of Heinlein's most controversial best-sellers, a recruit in a future world is sent through the toughest boot camp in the Universe to join the Terran Mobile Infantry in battle against mankind's most alarming enemy. Juan Rico signed up with the Federal Reserve on a lark, but despite the hardships and rigorous training, he finds himself determined to make it as a cap trooper. In boot camp he learns how to become a soldier, but it is in war that he will learn why. Many consider this Hugo Award-winning book to be Heinlein's best. Forget the battle scenes and the high-tech weapons; this is Heinlein in his element, talking people and politics.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For me, Starship Troopers is all the proof you need in order to name Robert Heinlein science fiction's greatest writer. I am getting in the bad habit of naming specific Heinlein books to be his very best, only to find that the next novel I pick up is even better than the last one. This particular novel is fascinating on a number of levels. There is nothing really special about Johnnie Rico; he's a normal lad who decides to join the military, ostensibly at the time in order to gain citizenship. In this future Terran confederation, only those who serve in the military are awarded citizenship and granted the privilege to vote. The government actually discourages volunteers and makes boot camp so difficult that only men with proper soldier qualities get through it. On the broadest level, we see Rico's progression from harrowed recruit to active service in the Mobile Infantry to combat against the Klendathu. I have no military background at all, but I found Heinlein's descriptions of military life and actual combat to be detailed and thrilling. We watch Johnnie Rico become a soldier. Along the way,

he figures out why he actually did volunteer, developing a whole new outlook on duty and responsibility. I don't want to delve too deeply into the politics of this novel. Some have pinned a fascist connotation on it, but I try to examine this future society philosophically. Only those who serve in the military can vote, but the vast majority of people choose not to serve and live happy lives as civilians, so I don't see anything fascist about this society. What intrigues me most, and it is this that sets this book apart from the vast majority of science fiction, is Heinlein's thought-provoking ideas about ethics, morality, duty, responsibility, etc. Mr.

The screen version of this classic SF novel is less an adaptation than a counterargument. In a way that's appropriate; Heinlein was certainly trying (or at least expecting) to generate loads of controversy with this work. But if you're about to read *Starship Troopers* for the first time, it's only fair to warn you that *whatever* you think of the film, you'll be disappointed if you expect the book to resemble it very much. (Director Paul Verhoeven and screenwriter Ed Neumeier took incredible liberties with, and sometimes even directly contradicted, the book on which their film is 'based'. It's a fine film on its own terms and I think it's been unjustly maligned. But it's not this novel; it's the next round in an ongoing dispute with this novel. And whatever else the movie has going for it, its *military* action is incompetent to the point of silliness.) I've been reading Heinlein for nearly forty years now. I don't think this is one of his best three or four novels, and it's never going to be one of my personal favorites either. Nevertheless, it *is* a genuinely great work of SF and raises issues that genuinely deserve to be raised. Whether you buy Heinlein's own *answers* is a different matter. The 'arguments' presented by the characters in the novel are mostly aimed at straw men. ('My mother says violence never settles anything', indeed.) This is perhaps forgivable since so much of Heinlein's positive case is so good. But I'm not persuaded that the society he imagines in this novel would be as functional as he seems to think. At any rate, its essential socio-political point -- that authority and responsibility are a coordinated yin-yang pair and an imbalance between them puts the world out of whack -- is extremely well taken. (It applies more broadly, too.

Yes, yes...everybody knows by now that the movie is in no way similar to the book. In fact, I'm surprised the Heinlein estate (he's dead, right??) allowed the name to be applied to the movie. The movie is an awkward action-adventure gore fest; the book is a (at times) delicate portrait of the transformation of young, spoiled and dull Everyman, Juan Rico, to an exuberant and accomplished warrior. This novel is usually portrayed as an anti-war treatise. However, that's not how I saw it. It is a treatise, for sure, but one that concerns itself with government's purpose in regard to the

individual. Heinlein paints a strangely subtle portrait of modern democracy, with fascinating embellishments. By doing so, he spurs thought from his reader concerning the duties inherent in living in a democracy. The most intriguing question he asks is, do modern citizens of democracies have any right to them if they choose not to participate? To what degree is this participation in a democracy necessary? Is it true that "the best things in life are free"? What is moral in a just society? What is most striking about this fictional society is that it is a limited democracy, modeled after Classical society, perhaps. Only those who enroll in and complete a "Term of Federal Service" (and all residents in the world culture may attempt it, though few succeed) are allowed citizenship and the right to decide the future of the society. The rationale of this is that only in the stress of Federal Service can a person learn the community virtue of placing the needs of the society above the needs of oneself. Although this idea may be impossible to speculate on, it is worthy of thought from all members of democratic societies.

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