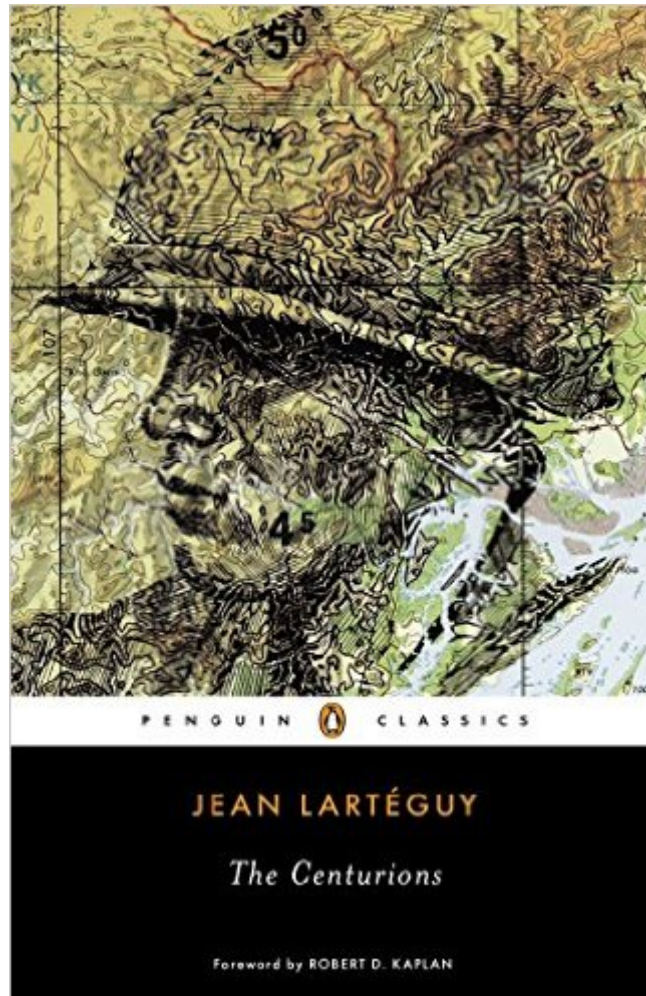


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The Centurions



Synopsis

The military cult classic with resonance to the wars in Iraq and Vietnam "now back in print" When *The Centurions* was first published in 1960, readers were riveted by the thrilling account of soldiers fighting for survival in hostile environments. They were equally transfixed by the chilling moral question the novel posed: how to fight when the æge of heroics is over. • As relevant today as it was half a century ago, *The Centurions* is a gripping military adventure, an extended symposium on waging war in a new global order, and an essential investigation of the ethics of counterinsurgency. Featuring a foreword by renowned military expert Robert D. Kaplan, this important wartime novel will again spark debate about controversial tactics in hot spots around the world. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I am a rare fiction reader, especially historical fiction. I generally prefer the hard facts to the narrative, especially given the propensity of some military fiction writers to either be too clinical or too ideological, but I was turned on to this book after reading "The Insurgents" by Fred Kaplan about David Petraeus. I figured I'd give it a read, and I was immediately hooked. This book does not insult the intelligence: it is thoughtful and often extremely profound in a way very few military books are. A

knowledge of the Fourth Republic, the Wars in Algeria and Indochina, Marxist theory, and French history in general definitely enrich it (I've had to do my share of wikipediaing to understand some of the references), but reading this book you get a very compelling novelization of the uncertain and dubious crossroads of war and politics. The writing style and translation are gripping, but very free-flowing, occasionally allowing the reader to drift into the complexities of the persons holding the guns, planting the bombs, or writing the articles. It is cerebral reading and the characters are rich and appropriately thoughtful. If you're looking for John Wayne and a lot of one-sided heroism under fire (though there is that too) you had best look elsewhere; the characters are extremely compelling and very complex, as they represent a pastiche of French and French colonial society. Their backgrounds thread throughout the narrative, adding significance to what could have otherwise been military tropes. While it can be sometimes idolatrous towards paratroopers (manifesting itself in their sexual power over everyone else's women), the characters are flawed and their motivations are examined to reveal hurt, loss, anger, fear, and longing.

The Centurions traces the epic struggle of a band of French paratroopers from the 1954 French debacle at Dien Bien Phu through their internment as POWs of the Vietminh, then their repatriation back to France, and finally, as the core elements of a patched together unit, the 10th Colonial Parachute Regiment, sent to Algeria to put down the guerrillas fighting for independence. The novel has a large cast of characters (resulting in unsettling jumping from one point of view to another that may bother some readers) representing the different political, ethnic and class distinctions of the men who fought France's wars in the mid 20th century. What they all shared were the bitter experiences of WWII, defeat at Dien Bien Phu, and imprisonment by the Vietminh communists who first exposed them to the methods and doctrines of guerrilla warfare and the geo-political realities of globalism. The main characters are Raspeguy, the Basque colonel who insists his Indo-China comrades accompany him to Algeria; Glatigny, the pious nobleman from a military family, adjusting to war without honor; Esclavier, the book's most compelling character, from a family of leftists who don't understand his passion for war; Dia, the African colonial doctor and unit confessor; Boisfeuras, the cagey intelligence agent, a Frenchman born in Vietnam, raised in China, with no desire to live in France; Mahmoudi, the Muslim Algerian patriot with divided loyalties; Pinieres, the giant lieutenant who represents the new breed of elite professional soldier epitomized by the paratroopers; and Marindelle, the love-sick genius who masters communist propaganda so well that his own government regards him with suspicion. There are more including several female characters who complicate loyalties and stir passions among these jaded men.

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