



This month we are reading Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*. Published in 1974, this novel takes science fiction in a different direction from the traditional military science fiction that preceded it. Clearly, critics and fans alike approved of this new direction as *The Forever War* won all three of Science Fiction's highest honors—the Nebula Award in 1975 and the Hugo and Locus Awards in 1976. While not an anti-war novel, Haldeman grapples with the new issues surrounding war in the Vietnam Era. What if we fight a war we cannot win? What do we do with soldiers when they return home? *The Forever War* explores the idea of women in combat, homosexuality in the military, and PTSD. As Haldeman has said, he wanted to write about the real world of combat that he saw around him when he fought in Vietnam and the changed world he returned to after two years.

The forever war lasts 1, 143 years. We view the war through the eyes of William Mandella who, because of time dilation, serves for the entire war. Haldeman's portrayal of Mandella has earned the praise of critics who note the narrative voice sounds like the voices of the actual soldiers serving in Vietnam. And Haldeman's ability to bridge the centuries in telling Mandella's life story while not losing his audience are a model for future writers.

Haldeman has never really said if *The Forever War* is a fictionalized biography of his experiences. But fans have noted that Mandella is a near anagram of Haldeman. Mandella is a physics student as was Haldeman. And Marygay Potter, the love interest and fellow soldier, has the same name as Haldeman's wife of more than 50 years.

As you read *The Forever War*, pay attention to the narrative voice. Do you think it sounds like a real soldier? How does this enhance the story? Note the ways that Haldeman has changed the traditional military science fiction themes. This is not a book about the individual military triumphs of a hero, but rather the story of real battle, which Haldeman's argues does not fit the old clichés. Do you approve of these changes?

This is in many ways a story of Vietnam, yet we still read it today. What timeless themes do you see in *The Forever War*? How would you describe Mandella's hero's journey? It was jarring to many readers in 1974 to have female characters in a military science fiction novel. Do you find it jarring? If not, what has changed?

As you can see, there is much to say about *The Forever War*. Come prepared for lively discussion with fellow science fiction fans when we meet on Tuesday, October 24 at 6:30. I can't wait!

*Dr. Donna McBride*