



War and Turpentine: A novel

Stefan Hertmans

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An international best seller: a vivid, masterly novel about a Flemish man who reconstructs his grandfather's story—his hopes, loves, and art, all disrupted by the First World War—from the unflinching notebooks he filled with pieces of his life.

The life of Urbain Martien—artist, soldier, survivor of World War I—lies contained in two notebooks he left behind when he died in 1981. His grandson, a writer, retells his story, the notebooks giving him the impetus to imagine his way into the locked chambers of Urbain's memory. He vividly recounts a whole life: Urbain as the child of a lowly church painter, retouching his father's work; dodging death in a foundry; fighting in the war that altered the course of history; marrying the sister of the woman he truly loved; haunted by an ever-present reminder of the artist he had hoped to be and the soldier he was forced to become. Wrestling with this story, Urbain's grandson straddles past and present, searching for a way to understand his own part in both. As artfully rendered as a Renaissance fresco, *War and Turpentine* paints an extraordinary portrait of one man's life and reveals how that life echoed down through the generations.

(With black-and-white illustrations throughout.)

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