



# War and Turpentine: A novel

*Stefan Hertmans*

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**War and Turpentine: A novel** Stefan Hertmans

**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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