



A Soldier of the Great War

By Mark Helprin

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A Soldier of the Great War By Mark Helprin

From acclaimed novelist Mark Helprin, a lush, literary epic about love, beauty, and the world at war

Alessandro Giuliani, the young son of a prosperous Roman lawyer, enjoys an idyllic life full of privilege: he races horses across the country to the sea, he climbs mountains in the Alps, and, while a student of painting at the ancient university in Bologna, he falls in love. Then the Great War intervenes. Half a century later, in August of 1964, Alessandro, a white-haired professor, tall and proud, meets an illiterate young factory worker on the road. As they walk toward Monte Prato, a village seventy kilometers away, the old man—a soldier and a hero who became a prisoner and then a deserter, wandering in the hell that claimed Europe—tells him how he tragically lost one family and gained another. The boy, envying the richness and drama of Alessandro's experiences, realizes that this magnificent tale is not merely a story: it's a recapitulation of his life, his reckoning with mortality, and above all, a love song for his family.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

With energetic, often lyrical prose capable of poetic images of great intensity, coupled with an antic imagination unleashed in scenes of high adventure and bizarre and droll events, Helprin's (*Winter's Tale*) dramatic, sweeping narrative focuses on one man's experiences during a turbulent period of history.

Septuagenarian Alessandro Giuliani, scion of a cultured Roman family, looks back on a life whose direction was irrevocably altered and thereafter shadowed by WW I. Idealistic Alessandro first sees action in the Tyrol (giving Helprin the opportunity to display his knowledge of mountain climbing), is part of a "phantom" unit sent to Sicily to capture deserters, becomes a deserter himself and later a prisoner sentenced to death--in short, undergoes experiences that encapsulate war's many horrors, ironies and tragedies. As counterpoint to brutal battle scenes, there is dark comedy in the character of the demented dwarf Orfeo Quatta, who pursues his awesome responsibilities at the Ministry of War with capricious mania. Helprin uses Giorgioni's painting *La Tempesta* to convey the novel's message: that women, with the promise of love and new life, are civilization's salvation in the aftermath of war. The author himself again demonstrates his ability to create vivid settings: magnificent landscapes teeming with activity and colored by extremes of weather, illuminated with the clarity of a classical painting. While the plot early on sometimes seems padded and digressive, the reader will soon find Alessandro's story a gripping, poignant and universally relevant moral fable. 125,000 first printing; \$100,000 ad/promo; BOMC main selection; paperback rights to Avon; author tour.

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From Library Journal

In summer 1964, a distinguished-looking gentleman in his seventies dismounts on principle from a streetcar that was to carry him from Rome to a distant village, instead accompanying on foot a boy denied a fare. As they walk, he tells the boy the story of his life. A young aesthete from a privileged Roman family, Alessandro Giuliani found his charmed existence shattered by the coming of World War I. The war led to an onerous tour of duty, inadvertent desertion, near-execution, forced labor, service high in the Italian Alps that took advantage of his (and Helprin's) skill at mountain climbing, capture by the enemy, and return home, dispossessed of most of his friends and family. Along the way, he gains, loses, and eventually rediscovers love. This rousing good story of survival is all the more remarkable in the telling. The language is rich without cloying, complex yet luminous in Helprin's best style. In a number of thoughtful philosophical passages as engaging as any adventure story, Alessandro struggles to reconcile his appreciation of beauty and his religious faith with the horror around him. That he finally persuades us to believe in a "God without any hope, in a God of splendor and terror" is testimony to the indomitable human spirit. Highly recommended.

Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 2/15/91.

-Barbara Hoffert, "Library Journal"

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Review

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-Barbara Hoffert (Library Journal)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mia Shaw:

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Ella Carlson:

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