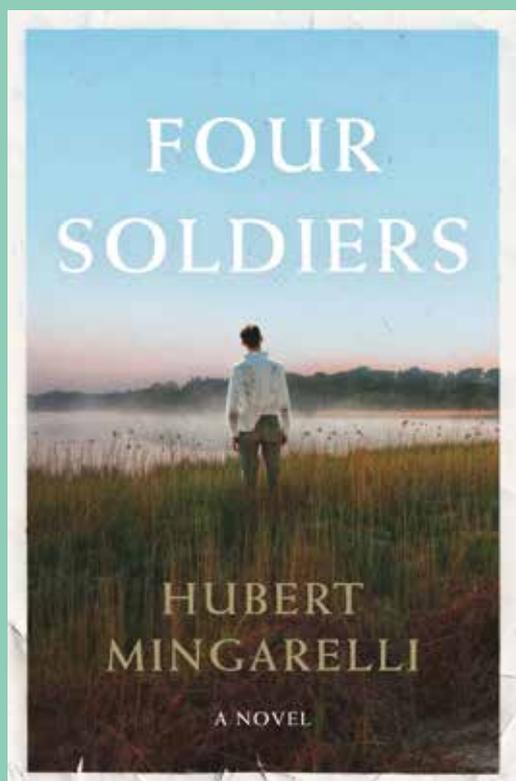


Reader's Guide



Other books by Hubert Mingarelli
A Meal in Winter (2014)

Four Soldiers Hubert Mingarelli

Translated by Sam Taylor

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About the author	Hubert Mingarelli was born in Mont-Saint-Martin in Lorraine, France, in January 1956. He is the author of numerous novels, short-story collections and fiction for young adults. In 2003, <i>Four Soldiers</i> won the Prix Médicis. His novel <i>A Meal in Winter</i> was also shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize. He lives in Grenoble.
About the translator	Sam Taylor was born in Nottinghamshire, England, in August 1970. He is a translator, novelist and journalist, and began his career as a journalist with <i>The Observer</i> . His translated works include Laurent Binet's award-winning novel <i>HHHH</i> , Leïla Slimani's <i>Lullaby</i> , and Maylis de Kerangal's <i>The Heart</i> , for which he won the French-American Translation Prize and the Lewis Galantière Award. His own novels have been translated into ten languages. He lives in Texas.
About the book	A narrator remembers the harsh winter of 1919, fighting in the Russian Civil War on the Romanian front. Following orders to set up camp in a forest, he and his three closest friends from the battalion discover a pond which becomes a secret place for the four young men to smoke, rest, wash and talk. <i>Four Soldiers</i> is about those precious months of waiting for spring to come, for their battalion to move on and for the inevitable resumption of war and its horror. It is a short, beautiful novel about friendship and the fragments of happiness that illuminate the darkness.
What the judges thought	'An oblique, deceptively simple evocation of friendship and resilience in the Russian Civil War, which builds to a haunting tribute to lives carelessly cast aside.'
Discussion points	<p>The book is set during the Russian Civil War – what did you learn about the history of this turbulent time?</p> <p>The story is more focused on friendship than fighting. How did you feel about the bonds between the soldiers?</p> <p>Discuss the importance of the secret pond, and what it represents to them</p> <p>The arrival of a new literate recruit means the four soldiers can record their stories – what is the impact of this?</p> <p>Much is made of the impact of waiting, and the tedium of having nothing to do. Did you find the writing style reflected this?</p>
Themed reading	<p><i>Red Cavalry</i> by Isaac Babel Isaac Babel was a journalist with the Soviet First Cavalry Army. This short story collection demonstrates an unflinching portrayal of the havoc of battle, tinged with an unexpected and wry humour. The first major Russian-Jewish writer to write in Russian, he was murdered in Stalin's purges in 1940.</p> <p><i>A Farewell to Arms</i> by Ernest Hemingway In an unforgettable depiction of war, Hemingway recreates the fear, the comradeship, and the courage of the young American volunteers he encountered in the First World War. A fictionalised account of his own experiences as an ambulance driver, it is considered a masterpiece.</p> <p><i>The Things They Carried</i> by Tim O'Brien Writing about his own experiences in the Vietnam War, this collection is a ground-breaking meditation on war, memory, imagination, and the redemptive power of storytelling. But while war is central to the book, it is also about the human heart, and the terrible weight of things we carry through our lives.</p> <p><i>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</i> by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn Discover the importance of a piece of bread, an extra bowl of soup, or the incredible luxury of a book, in a world where survival is all. Bringing into harsh focus the daily struggle for existence in a Soviet gulag, this is a brutal, shattering glimpse of the fate of millions of Russians under Stalin.</p> <p><i>The Naked and the Dead</i> by Norman Mailer Based on Mailer's experience of serving in the Philippines, this is a graphically truthful and shattering portrayal of ordinary men in battle. It tells of the soldiers' struggle to retain a sense of dignity and to find meaning in their lives amidst the horror of warfare.</p>
Useful links	<p>Review of <i>Four Soldiers</i> in <i>The Irish Times</i></p> <p>Review of <i>Four Soldiers</i> in <i>The Herald</i></p> <p>Review of <i>Four Soldiers</i> in <i>Star Tribune</i></p> <p>Extract of <i>A Meal in Winter</i> in <i>Asymptote</i></p> <p>Waterstones Book Club: In conversation with Hubert Mingarelli</p>