

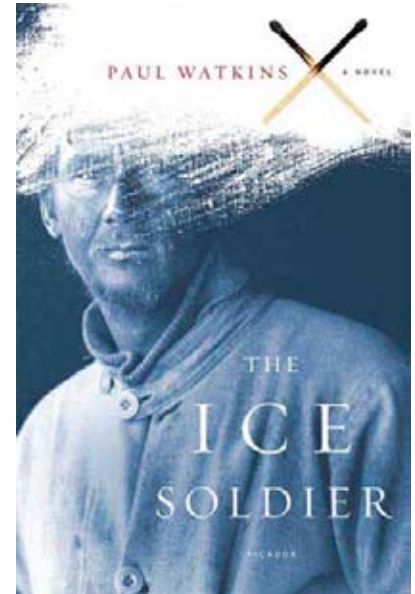


Reading Group Gold

The Ice Soldier

A Novel

by Paul Watkins



ISBN: 978-0-312-42650-7 | 2006

About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Ice Soldier* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Ice Soldier*.

About the Book

After barely surviving his tour as a mountaineer in the Italian Alps of the Second World War, William Bromley settled down and made a quiet life for himself: teaching history at a London boarding school, reading, a few drinks at the pub on Friday nights. That all ends when a soldier from William's mountain regiment reappears, calling in a bargain made during the war. William must return to that perilous ground, reliving the terror of the war and confronting new dangers in "a narrative so strong in imagery and detail that the reader can almost feel the gusts of an Alpine blizzard" (*Library Journal*).

"Nails the dynamics of male-dominated environments and viscerally conveys the perils of mountaineering in staccato prose that would make Hemingway proud." —*Entertainment Weekly*

"One can feel the scratch of the wool and the sting of the ice, taste the bean soup climbers eat and smell the smoke of the fire over which it was warmed. Plants the flag for good, manly storytelling." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Watkins's skill as a writer is indisputable, and as an adventure tale, *The Ice Soldier* offers unexpected pleasures." —*The Christian Science Monitor*

About the Author

Paul Watkins is the author of ten novels and the memoir *Stand Before Your God*. He attended The Dragon School, Eton, and Yale, and currently lives with his family in Princeton, New Jersey, where he teaches at the Peddie School and Lawrenceville Academy.



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Discussion Questions

1. What is *The Ice Soldier* really about? How deceptive is the physical, sensory text? Besides the obvious, what are other meanings of the title? How are other interpretations of the title indicative of the text?
2. Much of the novel is concerned with the readjustment of soldiers to everyday life after a war has ended. Some, like Higgins and Houseman, remain stuck in the past (“They lived like men home on leave, with no thought of preparing for the future because, in their minds, there really was no future.”) How has Bromley attempted to readjust? Is he really any different than Higgins and Houseman? Do you believe that a veteran can completely readjust?
3. What does this novel say about the public’s perception of a war hero and a soldier’s perception of his own heroism? Do you agree with it? What does this theme reveal about public morality and individual morality? Where do the two converge, if at all? Have you ever felt at odds with public, or societal morality? Is one more important than the other?
4. What does the novel say about Bromley’s relationship with nature? How indicative is this of a person’s relationship with nature? Have you experienced nature in a similar way?
5. Is Bromley’s guilt justified? Is it merely self-pity, or is it an expression of powerlessness? Is there a way in which he could have escaped the blame of Sugden, the only other surviving member of his mission? Is Sugden’s blame justified? Does Stanley have to “answer to the ghosts of these men” more? Which of the three men do you empathize with the most or the least? Why?
6. Does the emotional experience of war preclude a non-veteran, or a person who has never served in the military from empathizing with Bromley? Why or why not? Does Stanley’s opinion of Bromley’s actions in the war hold weight? Why or why not, given that Stanley was a conscientious objector?
7. Why is Helen Paradise the only woman in the novel to be described in specific detail? Why is Bromley so willing to sacrifice his friendship with Stanley to win her love? How is Bromley’s desire for Helen tied to his guilt about the war?
8. Consider Salvatore’s speech on page 237. Do you agree with his sentiment? Does Carton’s dying wish exemplify this perception of “man v. nature”? How is this relevant to Bromley’s emotional journey?
9. Why does Bromley agree to carry Carton’s body so quickly? Do Carton and Bromley have anything in common? What is your opinion of Carton? Was he justified in his deception of his audiences and his pallbearers? How would you have felt about the deception had you been in Bromley and Stanley’s places?
10. Many reviewers have described *The Ice Soldier* as extremely masculine, and compared it with Ernest Hemingway’s works. Did you feel the same way about the book? How accurate is the comparison to Hemingway? What is “masculine writing”? Can it be reduced to simple plots, characters and details, or is there something intangible about a story that makes it masculine? What is “feminine writing”?