

Starshine - John Wilcox

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1914. Outnumbered British forces are desperately trying to hold off the oncoming German soldiers in France. Star shells fly high into the night, illuminating the chaos, violence and death taking place in the French trenches below. Like so many other men, Jim Hickman and Bertie Murphy are plunged into this nightmare. As the war progresses, Jim receives honour after honour, whilst Bertie sinks deep into depression. And back home Polly, the girl they both love, must choose between the two men that is, if they ever come back alive. As the trio are trapped in physical and mental torment, a terrible tragedy befalls them. Wilcox perfectly captures the horror and tragedy of the First World War in this vivid and moving novel.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR: I grew up in the thirties with the Great War, as it was called, hanging over the heads of me and of my family like some retrospective thundercloud. My father was the youngest boy in a late-Victorian working-class family of fourteen – seven boys and seven girls. All of the boys went off to fight in the trenches, they were all rifle and bayonet men, not support soldiers, and, miraculously, all of them survived. The reader will understand, then, that the First World War has haunted me, not only as a boy wondering about whether he would have had the courage, like his father and distinguished uncles, to have gone over the top unhesitatingly into the German wire and machine-gun fire, but also as a latter-day novelist, writing about the wars of Empire in the late nineteenth century. I felt unable to write about the Great War earlier for various reasons, but now I am happy to have done so.

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