

A GREAT WAR: SHORT SYNOPSIS

An unbreakable soldier. An unwinnable war. The remarkable journey of a German Jewish soldier who survives the deadliest battles of the Great War, only to learn the devastating truth about its origins

A GREAT WAR: EXTENDED SYNOPSIS

Germany, 1918. Michael Weis, a young corporal, storms into an office, demanding to see the Supreme Commander Cuttner. A clerk calls out to soldiers who are supposed to be guarding the door. There's no reply. He sees blood on Michael's uniform. The Commander is not in. Michael, showing his weapon, says he will wait.

August 1914, Germany preparing for war. Michael and Gisela listen as the charismatic Officer Cuttner speaks fervently in support of the war, referencing Schlieffen's Plan, with a promise of a quick and decisive victory. Michael enlists, asking Gisela if she'll marry him when he returns from war. He asks that she care for his father, an ex-Rabbi who is one of the few voices against the war. Michael is confident that the war will take only a few months and that patriotic Jews that fight for the fatherland will then be fully accepted as German citizens.

Michael is a natural soldier, immediately a leader among his troops, fearless, and over time, seemingly indestructible. As Michael improbably survives a series of increasingly deadly battles, he begins to believe he is destined for an important role in helping his country win the war.

Gisela looks after Michael's aging father who writes futile anti-war tracts. She takes a post-office job with Central Command, where she meets Cuttner who has quickly moved up the ranks at Central Command. This begins a flirtation, where Cuttner exploits her access to censored mail in exchange for access to precious restricted goods which Gisela provides to Michael's father.

In the fourth year of the war. In a series of letters home to his father and to Gisela, we hear Michael's disillusion as the war becomes more and more ghastly and his inexplicable survival has morphed from a blessing to a curse. As the outlook for Germany in the war worsens, Cuttner is promoted to chief commander and immediately orders a last ditch offensive, a repeat of Von Schlieffen's original plan.

Cuttner assigns Michael to deliver the orders. Michael, in his first act of disobedience, reads the orders, quickly realizing that the attack plan is futile, and that the original Schlieffen plan was delusional and fraudulent. Michael deserts his mission and goes back to central command to confront Cuttner. Their final encounter is an explosive collision of the cynical patriotism of militarism with the bitter disillusion of a soldier who has experienced the horror of large-scale annihilation.