

# **An Ice-cream War Study Guide**

**An Ice-cream War by William Boyd (writer)**

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## Plot Summary

The novel *An Ice Cream War* takes place between the years 1914 and 1919. The action takes place mostly in the European colonies of East Africa and England. People of a variety of backgrounds are affected by the largest and most costly of wars in world history up to that time. Some of the characters expect war, and some doubt it will occur. None of the characters have any idea how devastating the war will be to everyone, even those far from the battlefield.

The novel begins in German East Africa in the months prior to the outbreak of war in Europe. Walter Smith owns a farm across the border in British East Africa, and he has traveled to Dar-es-Salaam to purchase coffee seedlings to plant on his farm. Walter is an American who lives in Africa and enjoys a pleasant relationship with his distant neighbors, British and German alike.

Around the same time a young man in his late teens, Felix Cobb, returns home from boarding school for the wedding of his older brother, Gabriel. Gabriel is a professional soldier, a captain in the British Army, but Felix is more of an intellectual currently dabbling in notions of pacifism. Despite their differences, the brothers share a wonderful relationship and have a great deal of affection for each other. Gabriel believes a war between Great Britain and Germany is coming, and he believes it will be a glorious affair with bands and medals. Felix believes the people of the world are having far too much fun to take time for a silly war.

Gabriel's honeymoon is cut short and he is sent to war. His new bride remains home in England where she becomes close friends with Felix. Soon after arriving in Africa Gabriel is severely wounded and has to reside in a German hospital. Felix's friendship with his sister-in-law continues to grow until it is cut short by tragedy. Partly out of guilt and partly out of grief, Felix decides to cast aside his belief in pacifism and join the army in the hope that he can go to East Africa and find Gabriel.

Felix's path to German East Africa is anything but direct, but after much time and many side routes he meets Walter Smith. Walter is seeking the German officer he believes is solely responsible for the destruction of Walter's farm, and Felix is still searching for his brother. Walter and Felix soon discover that their goals have much in common, and they join forces in their search. The meeting of Walter and Felix brings together all of the principle characters that have been separate for much of the novel.

Through the course of the novel some issues are resolved, but few if any are resolved in ways that the characters want or expect. Regardless of the particular beliefs they held concerning armed conflict between nations before the outbreak of war, their beliefs change, and they come to realize that no one anywhere is isolated from or immune to the effects of war.



# Part One, Chapters One through Three

## Part One, Chapters One through Three Summary

An Ice Cream War tells the story of how World War I affects the lives of many characters in both Europe and Africa. The characters include British, German, and American characters who are both men and women. These characters are pulled into a war they do not fully understand and their lives are forever altered.

The novel begins with Walter Smith waking from a dream in the Kaiserhof Hotel in Dar-es-Salaam, German East Africa. Walter's dream makes him remember five years ago and what caused him to come to Africa. Walter had been the manager of an iron foundry in New Jersey. He saw an advertisement for a job as a manager for an African hunting trip for former President Theodore Roosevelt and his son Kermit. Walter got the job, but he made the mistake of mentioning that the Roosevelts left a great deal of wounded animals behind. Walter got fired, but he decided to remain in Africa.

Walter is buying coffee seedlings, and he hopes to grow them on his farm in British East Africa. The atmosphere is celebratory. The naval cruiser *Konigsberg* is in port, a new railway has just opened, and the Dar-es-Salaam Exhibition will soon occur. While waiting for his seedlings to be ready, Walter encounters Erich von Bishop, a half German, half English man who has a farm on the German side of the border. Von Bishop is waiting for a ship carrying his wife back from Europe to arrive. He wants Walter to wait and meet his wife. Walter meets Liesl von Bishop, and the three discover that they will be traveling together back to their farms the next day.

That evening Walter visits a prostitute. After seeing the woman and the run-down condition of the room, Walter decides he cannot go through with the activity and leaves.

In Chapter Two, the Von Bishops and Walter ride on a train. Liesl is incredibly uncomfortable in the heat, and she thinks about how much she dislikes life in Africa. Over a year ago she became ill with a fever. While sick she told her husband that as soon as she recovered enough to travel she planned to go back to Europe to fully recover. She stayed in Germany a year before returning to Africa.

Walter asks if while in Europe Liesl heard anything about a possible war between the British and the Germans. Liesl says she did not. During a stop on the train journey, the three notice a German soldier instructing a group of askaris, or native soldiers.

When they reach their last train stop, Walter's employees are not present to meet him. He says goodbye to the Von Bishops who depart for their farm. When they are away from Walter, Erich tells Liesl that Walter is foolish for thinking he can grow coffee on his farm at Taveta.

In Chapter Three Walter's employees arrive two hours late, and Walter can tell they have been drinking. Soon after leaving town they encounter Wheech-Browning, the



Assistant District Commissioner in Taveta. Walter and Wheech-Browning have polite conversation and then Wheech-Browning says that Walter will have to come by next week to pay customs on the coffee seedlings he has imported.

When Walter arrives on his farm he sees his pregnant wife Matilda reading on the verandah. His three children are in the care of the cook, and when they see Walter they are delighted. One of Walter's sons asks him if there will be a war, and Walter laughs. He says even if war comes it will not affect Africa.

## Part One, Chapters One through Three Analysis

We meet the character Walter Smith, and he seems to be an easy-going man. The fact that he shows concern about the number of animals killed or wounded on the hunting expedition reveals that he is a man who is interested in more than monetary profit. If that were his only interest he could have remained quiet and kept his job.

It is unclear whether Walter actually likes Erich von Bishop or merely finds him a curious and peculiar person. His impression of Liesl is also unclear beyond his appraisal of her physically.

In Chapter Two the point of view shifts to Liesl von Bishop. She characterizes Walter as a "fat American" and she finds virtually every aspect of him and her own husband irritating. Liesl is not at all happy to be back in Africa, and her mood may be the beginning of more serious depression.

When the group sees the native soldiers being trained, it seems that only Walter notices. Combined with his earlier questions about the possibility of war, this may be an element of foreshadowing, though it seems that all of the characters dismiss the significance of a possible war.

In Chapter Three Walter shows genuine affection and care for his wife, especially concerning the feelings of guilt he has in remembering the visit to the prostitute that almost happened. Yet despite these feelings of affection, Walter also feels earnest annoyance at seeing the house in a mess and the children being left in the care of the cook while Matilda reads and ignores everyone around her. As for Matilda herself, she does seem to be oblivious to things around her and much more concerned with her book than her family.

Again we see that while aware of a possible war, the characters, in this case Walter, do not believe it will have much of an impact on their lives in Africa.



# Part One, Chapters Four through Six

## Part One, Chapters Four through Six Summary

The setting changes to Kent, England, and Felix Cobb has just arrived on a train. He notices that no one from his family has come to meet him, but within a short time his older brother Gabriel arrives in a car. Through the conversation between the brothers we learn that Gabriel is about to be married and Felix is supposed to be his best man.

Many relatives from the Cobb's large extended family are staying at Stackpole Manor. Gabriel and Felix decide to go to the river and swim. On their way to the river Gabriel points out the stone cottage his parents have given him and his future bride, Charis. Gabriel worries about the "Anglo-German War" he believes is approaching, but Felix says the idea is absurd. Felix says everyone is far too happy to start a war, and he says he would rather be alive at that moment in history than any other.

After swimming Gabriel tells Felix that he had asked him to be best man at the wedding because he had thought that his closest friend in the army would be unable to attend. Circumstances have changed, and now the friend, Sammy Hinshelwood, can attend, so Gabriel would like for Felix to be an usher instead. Felix pretends not to be disappointed.

In the privacy of his room Felix has a temper tantrum. After he has calmed down a bit, Felix goes to dinner where the entire family is gathered. Felix is smoking a cigarette as he enters the dining hall and most of the family notices; several make comments, questioning whether Felix is old enough to smoke.

Some of the relatives ask Felix about his plans to go to Oxford University rather than go into the army as the rest of his family has done. Felix makes polite and noncommittal answers. When Felix meets Sammy Hinshelwood, Sammy apologizes for the mix-up concerning who was to be best man.

Soon after Felix's father, Major Hamish Cobb, enters the dining hall, Felix greets him, but his father hardly notices. Later when Major Cobb demands to inspect the hands of children before dinner, he includes Felix, and this infuriates Felix. All through dinner Felix feels extreme anger and the many conversations he hears going on around him sound like so much babbling. He hears bits and pieces of each, including a conversation where the men speak of the recent assassination of Archduke Ferdinand.

Just as Felix has had enough and seems ready to confront his father in conversation, the power goes out. Felix volunteers to go and check on the problem. He discovers that the estate gardener and handyman, Cyril, is already working on the generator. While Cyril works on the generator, Felix enjoys their conversation.



In Chapter Five, Felix feels nausea as the wedding is about to begin. He also feels "bitter disappointment" at having been replaced as best man. Still, Felix has managed to fulfill his duties as usher with a polite smile.

On his walk from the church back to Stackpole Manor, Felix thinks about how he still has not met Charis, Gabriel's wife. Once back at Stackpole Manor and talking to the reception guests, one of Felix's relatives tries to talk him out of attending Oxford. Felix adamantly replies that he will never be a soldier. When asked what occupation he plans to pursue, Felix thinks about what answer will upset his relatives the most and he says he is thinking about becoming a journalist.

Felix listens to a conversation where relatives talk about the newlywed's plans to go to France for their Honeymoon. Felix grows weary of the conversation and goes outside to be alone. There he meets Charis for the first time. Charis is polite and says she looks forward to getting to know Felix.

In Chapter Six, Charis is disappointed in the first night of her honeymoon. The couple has encountered delays and lost luggage. Once at the hotel room for the night, Charis expects that the wedding night activity will occur, but Gabriel says they should consider the following day the first day of their honeymoon.

The next morning Charis notices that Gabriel seems more interested in a two-day-old newspaper than the fact that he is on his honeymoon. Gabriel explains that he has not had a chance to see the news during the wedding preparations, and this paper contains news of the impending war. The two decide to go swimming and afterward go to dinner. We also learn of Charis's personal history and how she met Gabriel in India.

After dinner when the two are alone in their hotel room, both act nervous and awkward. Once both are finally in bed and about to have sex for the first time, Charis believes that what has just happened was not what she had read to expect. Gabriel seems to believe that what happened, or what Charis would consider not to have happened, is as it should be, and he goes to sleep. The next night the same thing happens, and Charis wonders if what she read and heard about sex was untrue. It seems to her that the couple is doing little more than hugging before they go to sleep in the same bed.

On the third evening of the honeymoon, Charis is irritated at Gabriel for having drunk so much. He bumps into things once they are in the room alone. However, this night the intimate activity between them is much closer to actual sexual intercourse.

The next morning when Charis joins Gabriel for breakfast she finds him reading a French newspaper. Gabriel is visibly troubled, and when Charis asks why, he says that Austria has just declared war on Serbia, and they must return to England immediately even though there is still ten days left in their honeymoon.



## Part One, Chapters Four through Six Analysis

It is readily apparent that Felix has much admiration and affection for his older brother. Though he claims to be understanding about not being Gabriel's best man at his wedding, Felix is angered and hurt, as he displays in his temper tantrum alone in his room. In his letter to his friend from school, Holland, Felix claims that he has been replaced as best man because his brother did not approve of his speech. This lie is a way for Felix to hide his humiliation, and it is also evidence of something else that is significant about Felix's current stage in life. Felix is caught in an awkward transition between adolescence and adulthood. He feels like an adult, but he is constantly reminded that the adults around him do not yet consider him mature.

Felix is not the only character prone to naivety. Gabriel's reference to rumors of war as an "Anglo-German war" show that he, like most other people alive at the time, has no idea the global impact the coming war will have.

In Chapter Five, Felix continues his self-absorbed thoughts while making a slight effort to behave in a gracious manner. He thinks no one in his family understands him and believes this isolation will only increase now that Gabriel is gone. Felix feels intensely jealous of the woman that has taken away his brother.

A statement that Felix makes at the reception again reveals how unaware most people are of the coming crisis. Felix adamantly states that he will never be a soldier.

In Chapter Six, the point of view changes to that of Charis. Charis's observations of conditions and her confusion about certain marital activities can tell modern readers much about this period in history. Many modern readers will be surprised to learn that the swimwear of the era covered almost the entire body of men and women, and sometimes, as in the case of Gabriel's suit, the swimwear was made of wool.

The swimming scene also presents a powerful image and perhaps a symbol for the future of the characters. While the two are in the water, Gabriel tells Charis that she is on her own and then he leaves her to dive into an oncoming wave. This may be foreshadowing of the war to come. Gabriel is a career soldier, and some day soon he may have to tell his wife that she is on her own while he goes off into the chaos of war.

Another sign of the times that modern readers may find surprising occurs with the couples' failed attempts at consummating the marriage. These two newlyweds have no knowledge of sexual activity and how to go about it.





# Part Two, Chapters One through Three

## Part Two, Chapters One through Three Summary

Part Two opens at Walter Smith's farm, Smithville. Wheech-Browning has arrived. Wheech-Browning has come by the farm several times in an attempt to get Walter to pay for the coffee seedlings he imported, but since the seedlings failed Walter is more determined not to pay. Walter assumes he has come for the same purpose, but Wheech-Browning says he has come to tell Walter that the British have declared war on Germany, and Walter must evacuate his farm. Walter refuses and an angry exchange occurs.

Days pass and Walter sees no evidence of war. In time he forgets about Wheech-Browning's warning and even thinks about what crops he will plant next year. At breakfast one morning one of Walter's employees comes to inform him that askaris, native soldiers, have arrived. The askaris are commanded by Von Bishop, and they begin burning Walter's crops. Von Bishop says he has been ordered to burn crops, but he allows Walter and his family to pack belongings in a buggy and go to the nearest British outpost. Walter is shocked by Von Bishop's friendly business-like demeanor. Before leaving the farm, Walter asks Von Bishop for a written statement saying the farm has been confiscated.

Walter decides to move the family to Nairobi, and he seems certain that all of the confusion will pass within a couple of months.

In Chapter Two, Walter and his family arrive by train in Nairobi. Reverend Norman Espie, Matilda's father, meets them at the station. Walter will send his family to stay with Matilda's father while he stays in Nairobi and tries to find out what he can do about his confiscated farm.

Walter takes a room at the Norfolk Hotel. He finds the bar crowded with men and even sees several Americans he knows. The men have arrived to volunteer to fight for the British, but since nothing has happened in two weeks, they are getting bored. Many men ask him to repeat the story of the Germans taking his farm. The men ask Walter to join one of two volunteer units, but Walter has no intention of taking part in any fighting.

Walter tries to meet with British government officials to find out what can be done about his farm, but no one seems to have any idea. In fact, Walter is the only person anyone knows who has had his farm occupied. Walter decides to check with his insurance company. The insurance company representative, Mr. Essanje, is friendly and says that the confiscation can be considered theft, and the insurance company will reimburse him. First an assessor must visit the farm. Walter offers to take Essanje to Smithville.

In Chapter Three, Walter and Essanje inquire with Wheech-Browning about going to Walter's farm. Wheech-Browning offers to borrow a motorcycle and take them. When



they get within four miles of Walter's farm, they are fired upon. Essanje is hit first in the leg and then in the chest. Walter and Wheech-Browning flee. When they are at a safe distance they check and find that Essanje is dead. Wheech-Browning says the only way Walter can get his farm back is to join the army and fight. Walter agrees.

## Part Two, Chapters One through Three Analysis

The misunderstanding about the purpose of Wheech-Browning's visit results in humor. When Wheech-Browning says, "It's war," Walter thinks Wheech-Browning means that he personally has declared war on Walter for not paying the customs on the imported coffee seedlings.

Walter is steadfast in his belief that the war will pass with little interruption in the lives of those living in Africa. Even when soldiers come and burn his crops he believes that the entire incident will be over within a couple of months. Another trait of Walter's, his mind for business, becomes apparent. When his farm is being taken and his crops are burning, he is calculating how he can turn the situation into a financial profit.

Matilda too seems unaffected. Even in the buggy that carries the family away from their confiscated farm she reads.

In Chapter Two, Walter continues in his determination to believe that the war will pass with little significance to him, and he is determined to stay out of the fight. To most of the characters in British East Africa the war does not yet seem real. The men waiting to volunteer are growing bored and none of the British government officials know what to do about Walter's situation because he is the only person they have met who has had a farm confiscated. Essanje, the insurance assessor, gladly volunteers to go with Walter to German controlled territory as if it is a mere excuse to get out of the office.

In Chapter Three, what starts out as a humorous scene ends in violent tragedy. It also marks the beginning of the war becoming real for Walter and the end of his determination to stay out of the fight.



# Part Two, Chapters Four and Five

## Part Two, Chapters Four and Five Summary

Two months have passed since the previous chapter. Gabriel is aboard a ship sailing with British military forces from India to Africa. He thinks back to all that has occurred since his honeymoon. After ending his honeymoon early, Gabriel and Charis returned to England where Gabriel received orders to return to India and rejoin his unit. The voyage from England to India took twenty-six days and was unpleasant for all of the soldiers. Once in India with his regiment, instead of being sent with the rest of the soldiers to fight in France, Gabriel is attached to the 69th Palamcotta Light Infantry, a poorly trained unit of Indian soldiers that has not been involved in any significant action in a long time. Once aboard the ship that will take his new unit to Africa, Gabriel and his men are stranded at anchor for sixteen days because of some administrative mistake.

Gabriel receives three letters from home. In the letter from his mother, Gabriel learns that his brother Felix has been rejected for military service due to his poor eyesight and Major Cobb refuses to speak to Felix. In the letter from Felix, Gabriel learns that Felix's schoolmate Holland has also been rejected, so the two will attend Oxford together. Gabriel finds he is unable to read the letter from Charis because it makes him miss her too intensely.

During much of the voyage Gabriel spends time visiting with Major Bilderbeck. Bilderbeck is odd and difficult to understand at times, but he seems to like Gabriel. Before reaching Africa, Bilderbeck is assigned to the General's staff, and Bilderbeck tells Gabriel their destination is Tanga in German East Africa.

In Chapter Five, Gabriel and his men board small boats for a beach landing. For some reason, they are kept in the boats for five hours before ever heading toward the beach. Once ashore Gabriel learns that his unit is not supposed to land until the following day. Most of Gabriel's unit is sent back, but Gabriel and seventy-six soldiers already ashore remain. Gabriel goes in search of senior officers in an attempt to learn what he should do. He finds Bilderbeck who tells him that his unit has not even landed in the right location.

Gabriel rejoins his soldiers who are all sleeping and he tells his junior officer, Lieutenant Gleeson, the news. In the morning, they hear the sound of gunfire, and Gabriel thinks the gunfire is too intense for what he had been told would be an unopposed landing. Soon Gabriel and his men see stretchers carrying wounded and dying returning from the front. Gabriel learns that there has been stiff resistance to the British landing.

Again Gabriel goes in search of instructions from senior officers and again he encounters Bilderbeck. Bilderbeck tells him that the British navy gave ample warning to the Germans who have fortified Tanga. Bilderbeck also says that a new attack will commence the following morning.



## Part Two, Chapters Four and Five Analysis

Gabriel feels intense disappointment at not being sent with his regiment to fight in France. He feels like he is missing out on the war by being assigned to lead a group of unmotivated and under-trained Indian soldiers. Even the officers in his regular regiment wonder if they will get to France before the war ends. This is again evidence that no one has any idea of the severity of the war that has recently begun.

The character Bilderbeck is interesting in an odd way. His strange mannerisms, specifically his manner of laughing at things that other people do not find immediately funny, might indicate something of an amoral personality. It seems reasonable then that he is assigned to the General's staff, probably in an intelligence capacity.

In Chapter Five, the seemingly never-ending administrative errors continue. Much like they were held captive for sixteen days on an anchored ship before leaving India, Gabriel and his men are kept waiting in the small boats for five hours. Once they reach the beach they learn that they are not supposed to arrive until the following day, and they have not even been sent to the right location.

Gabriel has to take the initiative in finding answers. If it were not for his knowing Bilderbeck, Gabriel and his soldiers might be left completely in the dark.



## Part Two, Chapters Six and Seven

### Part Two, Chapters Six and Seven Summary

In the morning Gabriel's soldiers join in the attack on Tanga. As they march through dense brush and coconut groves, Gabriel can hear gunfire but cannot see anything because of the dense vegetation. Suddenly Gabriel's Indian soldiers run back from the front in blind panic. Gabriel continues on with Gleeson, and when they reach a clearing, Gabriel believes he sees the air thick with bullets. However, he soon realizes what he sees are not bullets but bees.

Badly stung Gabriel and Gleeson take cover in a ditch. They travel the length of the ditch and meet a group of British soldiers. It seems the group is pinned down by a group of Indian soldiers because the Indian soldiers mistake the white British troops for Germans. Gleeson moves into a house and tries to shout to the Indian troops. Gabriel tries to shoot a German officer. He misses, and the Germans return fire. Gleeson is hit. While Gabriel is inside the house seeing if he can save Gleeson, whose jaw has been destroyed, the other British troops leave. Gabriel retreats alone.

Once back to safety, Gabriel encounters Bilderbeck. Bilderbeck is ordering some Indian soldiers to join the fight. One of the Indian soldiers refuses, and Bilderbeck shoots him in the head. Bilderbeck gives Gabriel directions as to where Gabriel can join the fight. On the way, Gabriel sees some soldiers in the uniform of the Kings African Rifles, the only African troops in the British army. Then Gabriel realizes that the Kings African Rifles are not part of the expeditionary force.

Gabriel tries to flee, but he is overtaken by the African troops and stabbed with bayonets.

In Chapter Seven, Bilderbeck is sent to supervise the removal of the wounded. The British attack on Tanga has been a complete failure with many casualties. The Germans are agreeing to let the wounded leave rather than being taken prisoner on the condition that they will not serve in the military again for the duration of the war. Some of the soldiers are too seriously injured to leave. Bilderbeck goes to the hospital to see those soldiers.

Bilderbeck notices Gabriel's name on the list, and he visits with him in the hospital. Von Bishop escorts Bilderbeck to his boat that will take him back to the British forces anchored offshore.

### Part Two, Chapters Six and Seven Analysis

What seems to be a humorous incident, the mistaking of bees for bullets, is really another horrifying scene of war. Even though the bees are not deadly bullets, they are still dangerous, and the ground is littered with bodies of those shot with real bullets.



Once again, Bilderbeck seems to be the only man with any sort of answers, but his methods of motivating soldiers are every bit as horrifying as the dangers the soldiers face from the enemy.

The scene where Gabriel encounters the African soldiers in the King's African Rifles uniforms is not entirely clear. Perhaps they are askaris on the German side in stolen British uniforms, or perhaps Gabriel makes a mistake in identifying them. As the chapter ends, we do not know if Gabriel survives.

In Chapter Seven, the point of view comes from Von Bishop. Just like the British officers, Von Bishop finds Bilderbeck's mannerisms odd. We do not learn what Bilderbeck speaks to Gabriel about because Von Bishop is not close enough to hear the conversation, but we at least know that Gabriel has survived.



# Part Two, Chapters Eight through Ten

## Part Two, Chapters Eight through Ten Summary

Four and a half months after the close of the previous chapter, Felix wakes in his room at Oxford. Felix has a cold sore that has lingered for two months. The cold sore first appeared around the same time the family received news of Gabriel.

First a telegram informed the family that Gabriel was missing. A later telegram corrected the first but did not give details of Gabriel's condition. The family received a letter from Bilderbeck that explained that Gabriel remained in a German hospital because of severe wounds.

Felix decides to skip his morning appointment, and he goes see his friend Holland. When he arrives at Holland's room, Felix thinks about how he is fascinated by Holland's family. That family socializes with a more artistic and literary crowd. Felix also thinks about how he is in love with Holland's sister, Amory, who is a few years older than Felix.

The two young men often encounter discrimination because they are not in military service. Holland welcomes the opportunities for confrontation, but Felix tries to avoid it. He even goes so far as to wear an eye patch or walk with a limp so people will assume that he is unfit for service or has been wounded in war.

In discussing the upcoming holiday break from school, Holland invites Felix to come to a party that will be given by his sister Amory. Felix is delighted to accept.

In Chapter Nine, after being home for a few hours, Felix goes to Charis's cottage. Charis shows Felix all of the un-mailed letters that were returned with the possessions that Gabriel left onboard the troop ship. The many letters that Gabriel started to write to Charis are unfinished. Most of them have nothing more than "Dear Charis." Felix explains that Gabriel had wanted to write to her, but he simply did not know how because he had never been much of a writer.

The next morning Felix encounters Cyril's son. Felix asks about Cyril and learns that Cyril has been killed in France. Felix stands stunned as the boy walks away. Charis arrives and Felix says he is furious that no one told him about Cyril. He also says he will be glad to go to London and get away from the family. Charis says she had planned a party and asks if Felix could possibly stay instead of going to London. Felix says that is impossible.

In Chapter Ten, Felix and Holland catch a taxi to Amory's apartment. The apartment is crowded with people. When Felix first sees Amory, he thinks for a moment that she is naked but then realizes that she is wearing a form-fitting dress. Amory greets Felix, and it is clear that she does not know him. Even after Holland reminds Amory that she has met him more than once, she still does not remember Felix.



Later Felix overhears Holland and Amory arguing. Amory insists that Holland cannot bring Felix to her party, but Holland says that he cannot ask Felix to go away.

The group goes to a nightclub called the Golden Calf. Felix is very drunk, and once seated, the smell of food makes him ill and he has to rush from the table. He recovers and dances with Amory. While the two sit at a table watching others dance, Felix puts his hand on Amory's knee. She stands and says, "You silly, boring little boy!"

Felix leaves the nightclub and walks. As he is absorbed in his own shame, he does not pay attention to where he is going and gets lost. At a coffee stand Felix encounters a prostitute and follows her to her room. The encounter does not go well.

Felix catches a train back home, and as he walks from the station he decides to stop at Charis's cottage. She lets him in, and tells him that her party went well except for Sammy Hinshelwood getting too drunk and making advances towards her. Felix finds Charis attractive and tells himself to think of Gabriel instead.

## Part Two, Chapters Eight through Ten Analysis

The change in setting back to England also includes a change in the point of view to that of Felix. Now at Oxford, Felix is still struggling to find his place and this is further complicated by the fact that he daily feels uncomfortable and guilty about not being in military service. The different ways Holland and Felix react to prejudice or perceived discrimination says much about their characters. Holland is sure of himself and quite comfortable not taking part in the war. Felix, still an insecure youth, is terribly uncomfortable with any attention drawn to him.

We learn something new and significant about Felix in this chapter. He believes he is in love with Holland's older sister, Amory.

In Chapter Nine, Felix and Charis both have genuine love for Gabriel. Felix still seems to see Charis as the woman who took his brother away, but he manages to be much more civil than before. Gabriel's letter to Felix reveals much about how Gabriel is overly optimistic about the course of the war, and it reveals how little he understands his brother. Gabriel says he believes the war will be over by Christmas, a date that has passed three months prior to Felix receiving the letter, and he says that Felix ought to keep reapplying for military service. Clearly Gabriel knows nothing of Felix's feelings on military and the war.

Felix is disappointed at the news of Cyril's death. He truly liked the man. By contrast to his moment of care for another, Felix refuses to agree to change his plans in order to make his sister-in-law happier. This decision is both selfish and the mark of a youth that does not yet have developed priorities.

In Chapter Ten, Felix is at first enamored with all that he sees. The behavior of the people he meets through Holland is very different from the behavior of the people that associate with his own family. This attraction is short lived. Of all the insults that Amory





could have directed at Felix, the words "little boy" must have stung worse than any other. The experience with the prostitute further increases Felix's sense of humiliation and ineptitude. As distasteful as he finds home, he returns because there no one knows of his recent humiliation.

The meeting between Charis and Felix at the end of the chapter marks an abrupt shift in the way Felix perceives Charis. No longer does he see her merely as the woman that took away his brother. He sees her as a beautiful woman.



# Part Two, Chapters Eleven and Twelve

## Part Two, Chapters Eleven and Twelve Summary

Almost three months later, Gabriel has been moved from Tanga to a hospital at a prisoner of war camp at Nanda. He is under the care of Dr. Deppe. Gabriel tries to use crutches to stand, but he is still too unsteady so Liesl and Dr. Deppe help him back to bed.

Liesl has volunteered as a nurse. While working she hears much news of the war. The British sink the cruiser *Konigsberg*, and the Germans are drawing out the African campaign in an attempt to draw British resources away from the war in Europe.

Chapter Twelve begins five months after Chapter Eleven. Walter has joined the East African Mounted Rifles. The British forces are gathering for an attack on the Germans at Taveta. Walter is frustrated by inaction. Since he joined, there has been little or no fighting, and he is no closer to being able to reclaim his farm.

Walter has been summoned to meet with General Tigne because of Walter's knowledge of the area. When he meets the general, Walter immediately notices that the general is extremely intoxicated. The general shares his battle plan with Walter, and then he asks Walter's opinion based on his knowledge of the terrain. Walter says he believes the general's plan cannot succeed, but the general ignores Walter and dismisses him.

Walter sees Wheech-Browning about to board the biplane so he can get a look at the German position. The plane is unable to take off and it crashes. The pilot is killed, but Wheech-Browning survives with minor injuries.

## Part Two, Chapters Eleven and Twelve Analysis

Chapter Eleven comes from the point of view of Liesl. She still cannot stand living in Africa, and her decision to volunteer as a nurse is in no way a sign of patriotism. She feels detached from events around her.

In Chapter Twelve the point of view is Walter's. Despite joining the military he is still no closer to being able to reclaim Smithville. He still finds the British way of doing things inefficient. He sees much preparation for battle that seems more ceremony than substance. Walter's meeting Wheech-Browning provides another scene that begins as comedy. For some reason Wheech-Browning considers Walter a dear friend but cannot understand how the topic of the coffee seedlings upsets Walter. Walter is equally to blame in failing to understand that Wheech-Browning is merely performing his job in insisting that Walter pay the customs taxes. The scene ends in another death, and as Wheech-Browning says, it seems that every time the two of them get near a machine someone dies.



## Part Two, Chapter Thirteen

### Part Two, Chapter Thirteen Summary

Charis and Felix are in bed together in a hotel room. While Charis gets out of bed, she thinks about how the affair has been going on for a few weeks. She feels guilt as she inserts a primitive contraceptive device, and she thinks how she and Felix never speak of Gabriel. This thought begins a back-flash to the beginning of the affair.

The previous summer Felix and Charis become friends, and they often talk by the pond. One day Felix kisses Charis. Both are shocked, and Felix immediately apologizes. They get over their embarrassment in the coming days, but the feelings remain and the flirting escalates. One day Felix develops a plan for the two of them to go away and stay at a hotel posing as husband and wife.

After they leave the hotel Felix and Charis go to the train station. They discuss Felix's upcoming holiday break from Oxford. Charis worries about what will happen after the end of the war, but she says nothing to Felix. Felix wants to know if Charis feels guilty. He says he can endure his own guilt, but he worries that he is hurting Charis by causing her to feel guilt.

### Part Two, Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Chapter Thirteen comes from the point of view of Charis. The manner in which the chapter begins is shocking. In fact, it is probably the most shocking moment thus far in the novel and it may be a pivotal moment in the plot.

Charis thinks about the differences between Felix and Gabriel. It is unclear whether she notices the irony in being unsuccessful at sex with the strong soldier Gabriel but being very successful with his brother considered too weak for service. However Charis does notice something significant about the brothers' characters. She believes that in his own way Felix is every bit as strong as Gabriel.

# Part Two, Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

## Part Two, Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen Summary

Three months later Walter is close to his farm, but it is still in German territory. A month earlier the British begin their offensive. After inflicting heavy casualties the Germans pull back. Despite being attached to the headquarters staff as a local expert, no one takes Walter's advice. During the next British offensive, a colonel goes along with Walter. When they near the top of a hill, the colonel ignores Walter's warning to remain behind cover, and the colonel is killed.

Walter takes the colonel's body back to headquarters, and despite orders he leaves for Smithville. He cautiously enters his house and is shocked by the smell. Every surface in the house is covered in human feces. Outside the house Walter meets his employee Saleh. Saleh is terribly upset, and he shows Walter where some soldiers desecrated the grave of Walter's baby daughter. Walter repairs the grave and is able to console Saleh, but then Walter discovers that the Decorticator is missing. Overwhelmed with anger, Walter blames Von Bishop and vows to get revenge.

Three months after the events in Chapter Fourteen, Gabriel uses dirt to keep his leg wound infected in order to remain in the hospital. Earlier a senior officer had instructed Gabriel to try to remain in the hospital as long as possible. The hospital allows Gabriel to overhear conversations and steal supplies for the other prisoners. All of the other prisoners have been removed from the camp and sent to the coast. There is no longer any reason for Gabriel to continue endangering his leg to stay in the hospital, but he does so anyway.

In the evenings, Gabriel sneaks outside Liesl's house and hides in the bushes in order to watch her bathe. One evening while in bed and thinking that his attraction to Liesl is becoming unbearable, Gabriel decides on a plan that will involve collecting intelligence and then escaping.

## Part Two, Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen Analysis

Chapter Fourteen comes from the point of view of Walter. Being so near his farm yet unable to reclaim it is intolerable for Walter. Almost equally frustrating is being assigned as an adviser to a group of British officers that never take his advice even though time and time again his advice proves to be accurate. An important element of Walter's character is revealed when he visits his farm. Walter is a pragmatic man. He had been trained as an engineer, and he is chiefly concerned with tangible, material aspects of life. The desecration of his baby daughter's grave does not bother him much because, as he explains to Saleh, the grave is full of bones, not the daughter herself. However, when Walter sees that his Decorticator, the centerpiece of his farming operation and his greatest source of pride, is missing, he is nearly blinded with anger.



Chapter Fifteen comes from the perspective of Gabriel. Gabriel is supposed to be spying on Germans for military matters, but it seems that all he spies on is Liesl bathing. His plan to gather intelligence and then escape might be well-intended, but it seems more like Gabriel's rationalization for remaining near Liesl a while longer.



# Part Two, Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen

## Part Two, Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen Summary

Charis writes to Gabriel every month even though she has no way of knowing if the letters are getting through, however, she has not written to him in the last six weeks. She is still having an affair with Felix. She has recently been feeling physically ill, and her feelings of guilt have increased. When she does write another letter to Gabriel, she tells him everything about the affair except the name of her lover. She then writes a short letter to Felix, saying she has told Gabriel everything and she has decided to go away. Charis walks out into the night.

In Chapter Seventeen Felix sits down to breakfast and finds his mail. He also finds the letter from Charis. After reading the letter he runs to her cottage where he finds that she is gone but all of her possessions remain. Felix goes to the pond to think, and he notices that a heavy statue is missing. Suddenly Felix throws off his coat and dives into the water. He finds Charis's body with a rope around her neck attached to the statue.

In Chapter Eighteen, Dr. Venables, the Cobb family doctor, invites Felix to have a drink. He tells Felix he has some questions and may have some information to share. Dr. Venables asks Felix if he was having an affair with Charis. Felix says no. Dr. Venables asks if Felix knew of her having an affair, and again Felix answers no. When Felix asks about the information the doctor might share, Dr. Venables says it is not relevant. Before parting, the doctor asks what Felix will do. Felix thinks he knows, but he does not answer.

## Part Two, Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen Analysis

Chapter Sixteen is from the point of view of Charis. After her letter to Gabriel, the most shocking thing in this chapter is that Charis neglects to mention to Felix that she did not tell Gabriel the name of her lover. This omission of vital information is sure to have a profound impact on later events.

Charis has noted that Felix seems completely unaware of her state of depression. Rather than intending to hurt or punish Felix with her curt letter, she probably just wants an end to her feelings of guilt.

Chapter Seventeen is from the perspective of Felix. His quick thinking when he sees the missing statue indicates that perhaps he knew more about Charis's mental state than she acknowledged, even if his knowledge was not on a completely conscious level. In



the previous chapter Charis had thought that her plan was brave, but when we learn of her actions, we cannot help but view them in terms of desperation and cowardice.

In Chapter Eighteen Felix has to tell a series of lies, particularly that he has lost the note from Charis and that all it said was that she planned to go away. When questioned how he knew to look in the pond, he claims he does not know. He attributes it to a feeling. It must be especially painful for Felix to know that Charis chose the location where their romance began for her death.

In this chapter the reader might be more astute than Felix. Dr. Venables wants to know if Charis had been having an affair. First, the reader must wonder why a medical doctor, the doctor surely involved in the inquest, wants to know if Charis had been having a sexual affair. The obvious conclusion is that the doctor already knows that Charis had been sexually involved with someone. Then perhaps if the reader thinks back to elements of previous chapters, certain relevant details will emerge. Charis had been using a rather ineffective means of contraception. She once had to cancel a meeting with Felix because she felt physically ill. Something recent occurred that changed her mind about her earlier statement that Gabriel would never find out about the affair. Perhaps after examine these and other details the reader can draw some conclusions in regard to the information that Dr. Venables does not share with Felix.



# Part Three, Chapters One through Four

## Part Three, Chapters One through Four Summary

Six months have passed since the previous chapter. Felix is on a ship arriving at Dar-es-Salaam. He is now a lieutenant in the British Army. Once ashore he thinks about how he is now closer to Gabriel and how things will soon be resolved. Felix gets conflicting advice on where to go to join his unit. In fact, everyone he speaks to gives a different answer. He boards a train and as he watches scenery out the window, he thinks about the previous six months.

A week after Charis's funeral Felix went to see a relative in the British Army. Felix asked simply for a commission in any unit fighting in East Africa. Two weeks later Felix received orders to report to Officer Training Corps. For three months he worked hard, always thinking of Gabriel.

Felix gets off the train where he thinks he is supposed to, but he notices he is the only person who gets off the train. Felix meets Sergeant Gilzean who tells him they will be traveling 120 miles to a place called Kibongo. Felix finds Gilzean's Scottish accent difficult to understand.

On the way to Kibongo Felix learns that the Germans have been driven back and caught between the British Army and Portuguese East Africa. The rainy season is about to begin. Fighting will stop for the next two or three months. In order to get to their unit, Felix and Gilzean must cross the largest river Felix has ever seen.

In Chapter Two, Felix realizes that it has been raining for the last three months, and the only alarm raised during the entire time involved a nervous sentry accidentally shooting his own officer. The British Army has been unable to get supplies to Felix's unit because of the weather. The men are nearly starving, and some have died from eating poisonous plants. Felix learns that the army has decided to move all units back to the railway station. Felix is so overjoyed that not even Lieutenant Loveday can annoy him this particular day.

In Chapter Three, Gabriel is delighted to see Liesl after she has been gone for three days. To himself he acknowledges that he "missed her intolerably" and that he is in love with her. Gabriel has been taking notes on rumors he hears in the hospital. Recently he heard one wounded high-ranking German officer telling others not to worry because the Germans will soon have "China Show" to help fight the British.

In Chapter Four, three months have passed since the last chapter. The largest battle in Africa during World War I has occurred, and there were heavy British casualties. Felix's unit did not take part in the fighting.

One day Felix sees some British prisoners of war that have been rescued. He decides to go to headquarters and see if he can find any information on Gabriel. At the





Intelligence Office, Felix meets Walter who is seeking information on Von Bishop. Both men meet with Wheech-Browning. While neither Walter nor Felix find the information they seek, Wheech-Browning tells them of a recent attempt to send a zeppelin to help the German forces. The Germans called it "China Show."

## Part Three, Chapters One through Four Analysis

Despite his earlier adamant claims that he would never become a soldier, Felix has indeed become a soldier. Felix expects some sort of resolution, and it is unclear what he believes his presence in Africa will do to resolve earlier tragedies.

After so much tragedy, along comes a comic element in the form of Felix's inability to understand Gilzean.

In Chapter Two, after three months at Kibongo with no supplies and no conflict with German soldiers, Felix has come to think of his fellow British officers as the enemy. It is interesting that he finds the pretentious Lieutenant Loveday and his "schoolboy French" so annoying when back in England his best friend, Holland, was constantly touting his intellectual superiority.

Chapter Three comes from the point of view of Gabriel. Even without him saying it, it is clear that he has fallen in love with Liesl. When he says he has been happy at the hospital, that is evidence that the emotional reaction to being in love is powerful indeed. It has countered all the other discomforts Gabriel has felt. Despite being in love and seeming to want to stay near Liesl, Gabriel has continued to gather information. He hears the words "China Show" and knows it is a significant bit of information, but he has no idea what it means.

Chapter Four comes from the perspective of Felix. Despite a war going on around them, both Walter and Felix are on missions of an entirely personal nature. Walter wants revenge, and Felix wants somehow to redeem himself for betraying his brother and causing Charis's death.

The news of Bilderbeck's death seems more interesting to the reader than the characters involved. In life he seemed mysterious. In death he is a complete enigma.



## Part Three, Chapters Five through Seven

### Part Three, Chapters Five through Seven Summary

As Gabriel talks to Liesl he realizes that he has been a prisoner for three years. He hears the news that the Germans are retreating, and the British are advancing. Gabriel also notices that Liesl seems to be showing more concern for him.

Gabriel waits in his usual location in the bushes outside Liesl's house. He knows he will not see her bathing tonight because the house is full of German officers and their wives, but he hopes to at least see her. A branch breaks, and the noise alerts the Germans. A German officer and two askaris approach Gabriel and he faints.

Gabriel is confined in a dark wood shed. Von Bishop questions Gabriel and wants to know what he knows about "China Show." Gabriel says he has heard the name but he has no idea what it means. Gabriel is kept in the shed all the next day. Liesl comes to visit Gabriel that night, and they talk through a crack in the wall. Liesl agrees to bring Gabriel supplies so he can escape the following night.

In Chapter Six, Von Bishop sees that Gabriel has dug out from under the shed and escaped. Von Bishop is ordered to take some native soldiers and find and capture Gabriel. He says goodbye to Liesl and tells her he has been ordered to find Gabriel, and she acts uninterested.

In Chapter Seven, Gabriel finds that despite his injuries and limp he is able to cover ground faster than he expected. He plans to walk north until dark, spend the night, and then walk east until he meets the British forces. He expects to be safely behind British lines within a day or two.

### Part Three, Chapters Five through Seven Analysis

Chapter Five comes from the point of view of Gabriel. It seems that he has made up his mind to escape. When he goes to look for Liesl, he thinks he is doing it so he can see her at least one more time. Clearly he does not expect to see her again. When Liesl asks him why he came to see her and asks if it was "because of the end of the war" she reveals that she knows he has feelings for her, but it is not clear if she realizes that those feelings are of a romantic nature.

Chapter Six is from the perspective of Von Bishop. It seems he would much rather let Gabriel go than pursue him with a group of native soldiers whom he cannot communicate with. It is interesting that Von Bishop no longer finds his wife attractive, while another man, Gabriel, risks his health just to be near her.

In Chapter Seven, again from Gabriel's point of view, he has to keep up his current progress and then his long years of confinement will be over. His attempt to keep a journal end the same way his attempt to write letters to Charis concluded.



## Part Three, Chapters Eight through Ten

### Part Three, Chapters Eight through Ten Summary

Felix's unit marches toward the front, and they hear an explosion. Many assume it is artillery, but Lieutenant Loveday has stepped on a mine and been blown apart. Felix is unmoved by the sight except for wondering what in French Loveday might have said.

Wheech-Browning arrives and says he has received a telephone call from Walter pertaining to Gabriel. Felix departs with Wheech-Browning. On the way, Wheech-Browning explains that when the British captured Nanda many of the British prisoners of war said that Gabriel had escaped two days prior. He also tells Felix that the British uncovered a German plan code named "China Show" that involved sending a zeppelin to Africa. Once they arrive in Nanda, Walter informs them that Von Bishop is pursuing Gabriel. The three set off in pursuit of Von Bishop.

In Chapter Nine, Von Bishop and his men see a fire in the distance. They creep toward the fire but accidentally make a noise. When they reach the fire they find Gabriel has fled. They hear a noise in the distance, and Von Bishop yells for the native soldiers to find Gabriel. The native soldiers return with Gabriel's severed head.

In Chapter Ten, Felix, Wheech-Browning, and Walter find Gabriel's campsite. Nearby they see where something has been buried. About a half-mile away birds are circling. When the men investigate, they find a headless body. Felix says the body is too thin and frail to be Gabriel. Walter goes back to where they had seen something buried. He digs up a head, and Felix recognizes his brother.

### Part Three, Chapters Eight through Ten Analysis

Chapter Eight comes from the point of view of Felix. Felix's lack of emotional response to Lieutenant Loveday being blown apart might seem shocking at first, until we remember that by this point in the novel Felix has seen a great deal of death, and he spent miserable months stranded near a river while finding Loveday to be an extremely annoying person. Perhaps it says something about the callous nature of the audience, us readers, but most of us have to admit that we do find Felix's musing on what in French Loveday might have said funny.

Felix, now so close to finding his brother, still remembers events in England that sent him on his quest. Felix asks Liesl if Gabriel ever received a letter from England, and Liesl says no, she is sure he did not. Felix at this moment must feel like everything will soon be resolved happily.

In Chapter Nine, the perspective is from Von Bishop. During the day while he pursues Gabriel, he is impressed that Gabriel is doing so well in eluding his pursuers. While the native soldiers are searching for Gabriel in the dark, Von Bishop feels empathy for



Gabriel and thinks how awful it must be to be alone and pursued. Minutes later the native soldiers return with proof they killed Gabriel, and Von Bishop is dumbfounded by what he sees as an absurd tragedy.

In Chapter Ten, the point of view is from Walter. After seeing what has happened to Gabriel, Felix has only one question that Walter can answer. Felix wants to know the name of the German officer they have pursued, and Walter tells him it is Von Bishop.



# Part Four, Chapters One through Three

## Part Four, Chapters One through Three Summary

Six months after the previous chapter, Felix plays cards with Aristedes. Aristedes is a captain in the Portuguese Army, and Felix thinks Aristedes has told him that he is dying of syphilis. Felix cannot be certain because he does not speak Portuguese, and Aristedes does not speak English. After they are finished playing cards, Aristedes looks at his pornographic pictures, and Felix thinks about what has brought him to serve in Portuguese East Africa. The British are pursuing the remnants of the German forces, and while Felix expected to be part of the fighting, he has been assigned to organize supplies and serve as a liaison with Portuguese forces.

Wheech-Browning arrives in a truck loaded with small artillery pieces. British intelligence believes that the Germans might be headed toward Felix's location and they want Felix to train the Portuguese troops in the use of the artillery. Felix gives a demonstration, but the round does not land where Felix had expected. In order to check the sights for accuracy, Felix decides to pace the distance to the target. Once Felix reaches the target, he hears someone fire a round. He tries to run, but an explosion knocks him to the ground. Wheech-Browning runs over in a panic and apologizes. He says he sneezed and accidentally fired the weapon.

Chapter Two occurs six months later. Von Bishop is with the German forces that have fled back north and are now in Rhodesia. Though they have outrun the British, many German soldiers are dying from Spanish influenza. Dr. Deppe is with the troops, but Von Bishop regards the doctor as a complete incompetent. He notes how the doctor has changed the name of the illness the men suffer and die from several times, and Von Bishop thinks it is the doctor's incompetence that has left the ringing in his ear from the explosion that occurred long ago. Von Bishop is still haunted by what happened to Gabriel. He intended to have the native soldiers executed, but they fled. A British soldier arrives on a motorcycle. Von Bishop informs the soldier that he is territory occupied by the German Army, and when the soldier asks if he should consider himself a prisoner, Von Bishop responds that he is indeed a prisoner. The soldier explains that he has brought news that the war is over. He shows Von Bishop a document from the British Prime Minister that says that all fighting has stopped and that a treaty had been signed two days ago. Von Bishop feels so relieved he feels weak. He informs the British soldier that he is not a prisoner.

In Chapter Three, Felix recovers in a hospital. He has received a letter from his mother. The letter informs him that Felix's mother has heard about his injuries. She also says that Felix's father, Major Cobb, has been placed in a mental asylum. Holland left England to join the revolution in Russia. Felix's mother does not know that Gabriel is dead, and she says she looks forward to both of them returning home. Despite receiving the rare letter from home, something else holds Felix's attention. Felix has read a newspaper article with the names of the German officers who recently surrendered. He



finds Von Bishop's name and the information that Von Bishop will go to Dar-es-Salaam. Felix had been scheduled to return to England in three weeks and to spend those weeks at Walter's farm. The news of Von Bishop changes Felix's plans.

## Part Four, Chapters One through Three Analysis

Felix thinks that communicating with Aristedes, a man who speaks no English at all, is still easier than understanding Gilzean. In addition to extreme boredom, Felix still feels a dangerous hatred for Von Bishop. Felix's association with Wheech-Browning has not been beneficial. First Wheech-Browning gets Felix assigned to a boring post, and then Wheech-Browning reappears and nearly kills Felix.

Chapter Two comes from the perspective of Von Bishop. He is still haunted by guilt over what happened to Gabriel. He has not forgotten, and he wonders what he could have done to cause such a horrible misunderstanding.

In Chapter Three, it seems that Felix had been right all along, and his father had been going insane. At this moment, though, what holds Felix's interest is the news of Von Bishop. There can be little doubt what Felix intends. With the war over and Felix determined to shoot in anger, it can only mean that he intends to murder Von Bishop.



# Part Four, Chapters Four, Five and Epilogue

## Part Four, Chapters Four, Five and Epilogue Summary

As Von Bishop arrives in Dar-es-Salaam he worries about meeting Liesl after not seeing her for a year, and he worries about how he will explain what happened to Gabriel. Liesl meets him and then takes him back to their house. Liesl asks what happened to Gabriel and Von Bishop says he found him dead. Liesl says that the day before she saw one of the men that set off in pursuit of Von Bishop.

In Chapter Five, Felix watches Von Bishop's house. He has a pistol. As he stands in the dark wondering if he has enough nerve to go through with his plan, Felix decides he will give Von Bishop the opportunity to speak. He will see if Von Bishop can offer anything in his defense. Felix also thinks about the steps he took to get from the hospital to Dar-es-Salaam. He told the British military that he wanted to investigate a possible war atrocity, and he told them all the details except Von Bishop's name. As he approaches the house, Felix thinks he ought to disguise his face because Von Bishop's wife could be a witness. He curses himself for not having a handkerchief, and then decides to use his jacket to cover his face. Felix climbs through a window and finds Von Bishop in bed. Felix repeatedly tells Von Bishop to wake, but Von Bishop does not move. Liesl enters the room and says that he is dead. He died from Spanish influenza. Liesl assumes that Felix has come for news of Gabriel, and she tells Felix that Gabriel is dead. Felix realizes that Liesl does not know the nature of Gabriel's death, and he decides not to inform her.

In the Epilogue, a month after the events in Chapter Five, Walter and his wife have come to the port at Mombasa to see Felix off on his voyage back to England. Felix tells them the story of what happened at Von Bishop's house and how he decided not to tell Liesl what really happened to Gabriel. Walter is still thinking about his missing farm machinery and wondering if Liesl provided any clues. The two men talk about their association with Wheech-Browning and how Walter warned Felix that the man was a traveling disaster. Walter says he hopes Felix can come and visit again, and he hopes Felix does not need another war as a reason to return to Africa. Felix looks forward to a quiet peaceful journey home.

## Part Four, Chapters Four, Five and Epilogue Analysis

Von Bishop sees all the British troops and flags, and he realizes that German East Africa no longer exists. His decision not to report Gabriel's manner of death and his later decision not to tell Liesl has more to do with protecting others than saving himself. The men responsible for the atrocity have disappeared, and knowledge of Gabriel's gruesome death could only cause pain to those who knew him.





In Chapter Five, Felix is outside Liesl's house at night just like his brother had been many times before, but Felix's motive is murder. In a final absurdity of the war, Felix finds the man he believes responsible for Gabriel's death has died peacefully in bed. Felix has still never fired a shot in anger. Felix has never really had any control over events, but in the end he does see that he has control over one thing. He cannot get revenge, but he can stop one more person from needlessly suffering, so he decides not to tell Liesl how Gabriel died.

In the Epilogue, Walter is still obsessed with his Decorticator. In a book so full of tragic uncertainties, it comes as a comfort that at least one thing does not change.



# Characters

## Felix Cobb

Felix Cobb ages throughout the novel, and he matures fast in a few short years due to a series of life altering events. The Felix Cobb at the beginning of the novel is not the same Felix at the end. In the beginning of the novel Felix is a youth attempting to negotiate a difficult and awkward transition from adolescence to adulthood. By the end of the novel Felix is battle-scarred and world-weary.

In the earlier parts of the novel set in England, Felix in many ways exhibits the stereotypical behavior of a teenager. He treats his younger nephew harshly in an effort to distance himself from the children, and when he enters the dining hall he carefully poses himself with one hand in a pocket and the other holding a cigarette at a planned and specified height. Felix is self-conscious and self-absorbed, full of teenage angst. However, Felix is not so self-absorbed that he cannot see and appreciate the merits of all of those around him. Felix's appreciation of Cyril, the handyman, shows that Felix is capable of independent evaluation of others. That appreciation is one inconsistent instance, as revealed when Felix selfishly fails to take his sister-in-law's needs into account before his trip to London.

This is not at all like the Felix that emerges from the chaos of the war in Africa. By the time Felix boards a ship to take him back to England, he has seen years of gruesome death, some even involving loved ones. Felix himself has also been forever physically altered or damaged. Through the course of the novel, Felix Cobb can be thought of as two characters in one.

## Gabriel Cobb

Gabriel Cobb is Felix's brother, and in many ways he is Felix's opposite. Gabriel is big and strong, while Felix is smaller and initially considered unfit for military service. Gabriel is a career soldier and he believes in the ideas of gallantry and honor in war. He seems to eagerly await the outbreak of war even though it interrupts his honeymoon. His ideas about war soon change after arriving in Africa where he is nearly killed.

Though older and stronger than his brother Felix, Gabriel is every bit as naïve when it comes to sexual relationships. On his honeymoon he has no idea what to do on the wedding night, and when he is in Africa and meets a German nurse, he develops a passion and love for her that in some ways is very "boy-like," particularly his habit of hiding in the bushes to watch the woman bathe at night.

During his struggle to regain his health after his nearly fatal injuries, Gabriel is tested in many ways. His fidelity to his wife is tested, and he prevails only because he is not presented with an adequate opportunity. His loyalty to his country is tested when he is



asked to perform in a spying capacity, a job he has never been trained for. Many times Gabriel would rather forget the war and devote all of his attention to his German nurse.

## Charis Lavery Cobb

Charis is the bride of Gabriel. From the time before her wedding we know something of her life. Charis was born in India. She does not remember her mother who died when Charis was a child. From India Charis was sent back to England to live with an aunt and attend boarding school until she was eighteen and returned to India. Charis found the rules of the English society in India uncomfortable and she never really felt accepted. She did, however, meet Gabriel in India and considers herself fortunate.

Charis undoubtedly loves her husband, but she finds much of his behavior in their first few days of married life difficult to understand or outright annoying. It is unclear if this is simply due to a necessary period of adjustment for the young couple or if it indicates a difference in their personalities that cannot be resolved. When war breaks out and Gabriel is called to service overseas, Charis is left alone again and goes to live in a cottage at the Cobb family estate. She gets to know Felix, a person she thought little of upon first meeting.

As her friendship with Felix intensifies, Charis is plagued with guilt over loyalty to her husband. On the one hand she sees nothing harmful in her relationship with Felix because she sees them as two very different people and because she believes Gabriel will never discover the nature of her friendship with his brother. As time goes by and Charis finds herself in a difficult situation, she commits a final act that deeply affects Felix. What this act says about Charis's character, whether it is an indication of an inherent weakness or the act of a woman who believes she is sparing others, is open to multiple interpretations.

## Walter Smith

Walter Smith is one of the more colorful and interesting characters of the novel. He is an engineer by profession. He came to Africa years earlier. At the time he managed a metal foundry in the United States, and he longed for adventure. He answered an advertisement for a manager for an African hunting expedition. He discovered that the expedition was for former United States President Theodore Roosevelt and his son, Kermit. Walter found Kermit difficult to get along with and when Walter commented that the Roosevelts left many wounded animals in their destructive wake, Kermit fired Walter. Walter decided to remain in Africa.

At the time of the opening of the novel, Walter owns a farm in British East Africa. He has tried a variety of crops and intends to continue his experiments, but he has found his greatest success in growing and processing sisal. Walter's greatest source of pride is his sisal processing machine, the Decorticator. In fact, Walter's obsession with this machine drives part of the plot of the novel. Walter's profession of engineer is significant to how the story is presented. In the chapters that come from Walter's point of view, we



see the environment from a man who is pragmatic and views the world in terms of how things function in relation to desired goals.

This trait of Walter's is also humorous at times. In a darkly humorous way, Walter turns the war into a personal vendetta where he pursues the man he believes is responsible for damage to his farm. It does not matter that in war larger forces exert control over people. Walter is completely linear in his thinking that Erich von Bishop is entirely to blame for the current situation.

## **Erich von Bishop**

Erich von Bishop is a farmer in German East Africa. He once served in a German militia unit and performed bravely and was granted the title "von." Von Bishop is half English, half German, but all of his loyalties are to Germany. For the most part he is an agreeable and likable man, but due to the war and his dedication to duty as a soldier he finds himself in situations where he is personally blamed for things well beyond his control. Von Bishop is blamed for one horrific tragedy that, and he is plagued with guilt, though it is uncertain even to most readers what level of responsibility he bears.

## **Liesl von Bishop**

Liesl von Bishop is the wife of Erich. She absolutely detests living in Africa. To her, Africa presents nothing but a series of miseries. She has an incredibly fair complexion that is not at all suitable for the African sun, and her tendency to gain more weight than her frame should support makes the African heat unbearable. After the outbreak of war, she volunteers as a nurse and meets one of the primary English characters.

## **Wheech-Browning**

This man is a walking disaster and if his presence did not involve so many fatalities, he would be an outrageously comic figure. Wheech-Browning considers Walter one of his dearest friends, but Walter detests the man. Felix knows the man for a brief while, and the association nearly kills Felix.

## **Philip Holland**

Holland is Felix's best friend. He is an intellectual and quite talented in many ways, but he has perhaps the most disagreeable personality of any character in the novel. He uses his brilliant intellect and solid education to go about acting as if he is superior to everyone else. While he claims to be interested chiefly in substance—and believes his brilliance gives him more knowledge about everything than any other person—he puts a great deal of time and energy into image. Felix's affinity for Holland is most likely because Holland embodies everything his own family would disapprove of.



## **Theodore Roosevelt**

This former U.S. president takes a hunting trip to Africa and hires Walter Smith as a manager of the expedition.

## **Kermit Roosevelt**

This son of a former U.S. president does not like Walter Smith and fires Walter when he complains about the number of wounded animals the hunting party leaves behind.

## **Saleh**

This man is an employee of Walter Smith. He stays behind on Walter's farm when Walter's family is forced to evacuate due to German occupation of the farm.

## **Matilda Smith**

This woman is the wife of Walter Smith. She rarely gets excited about anything and stays engrossed in reading her books regardless of what goes on around her.

## **Sammy Hinshelwood**

This man is a fellow soldier and friend of Gabriel Cobb. He serves as best man at Gabriel and Charis's wedding.

## **Major Hamish Cobb**

This man is a retired army officer and father of Gabriel and Felix. He does not get along with Felix, and Felix is convinced that his father is going insane.

## **Cyril**

This man is the gardener and handyman on the Cobb estate. He joins the army soon after the start of the war and is killed in France.

## **Dr. Venables**

This is the Cobb family doctor. He enjoys a good relationship with Felix.



## **Reverend Norman Espie**

This is the father-in-law of Walter Smith. He is a missionary in East Africa.

## **Gulam Hoosam Essanje**

This man is the representative of Walter's insurance company. He accompanies Walter to assess damages on Walter's farm and he is shot by German soldiers.

## **Major Bilderbeck**

This enigmatic character befriends Gabriel aboard a troop transport ship. In the early days of the attack on German East Africa, he seems to be the only person who has any idea what is going on.

## **General Tigne**

This general in the British army is intoxicated when he summons Walter and asks about local terrain and conditions.

## **Dr. Deppe**

This doctor at the German hospital and prisoner of war camp saves Gabriel and other British soldiers. He intends to publish a paper describing his methods after the war.

## **Amory Holland**

This older sister of Felix's friend Holland is an art student. Felix is infatuated with her until she insults him in a particularly humiliating way.

## **Sergeant Gilzean**

This Scottish soldier speaks in an accent so pronounced that no other character can understand him.

## **Lieutenant Loveday**

This young soldier annoys Felix during the time they are stranded from the other British forces. He has the habit of using French expressions.



## Capitao Aristedes Pinto

This captain in the Portuguese Army shares a room with Felix. He claims to be dying of syphilis and has a large collection of pornography.



# Objects/Places

## German East Africa

This German colony covered an area that is now part of Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanganyika.

## Dar-es-Salaam

This port city in German East Africa is the setting for the opening of the novel.

## Kaiserhof Hotel

This is the finest hotel in Dar-es-Salaam. Walter stays here at the opening of the novel.

## Konigsberg

This German naval cruiser is at Dar-es-Salaam at the opening of the novel. It is later sunk by the British Navy.

## Mount Kilimanjaro

This high volcanic mountain serves as an important landmark in East Africa. Walter's farm is in the foothills of this mountain.

## British East Africa

This colony in Africa was situated in what is now Kenya.

## Askari

These African soldiers serve in the European colonial militaries.

## Taveta

This is the nearest town to Walter's farm in British East Africa. It is one of the first locations the German forces occupy.





## **Nairobi**

This is the closest large town to Walter's farm and it is a center for British colonial government activity.

## **Sisal**

This plant can be processed into fiber useful for making rope.

## **Finnegan and Zabriskie Sisal**

This is the name for a sisal processing machine. It is a source of pride to the point of obsession for Walter.

## **Stackpole Manor**

This is the Cobb family estate in Kent, England.

## **Hotel d' Angleterre**

This is the hotel in France where Gabriel and Charis stay during their honeymoon.

## **Smithville**

This is the name of Walter's farm in British East Africa.

## **Norfolk Hotel**

This is the name of the hotel where Walter stays in Nairobi.

## **Mombasa**

This port city in East Africa is where Felix boards the ship that will take him back to England.

## **69th Palamcotta Light Infantry**

Gabriel is assigned to this unit of Indian soldiers. This unit is poorly trained and has not been involved in combat in many years.



## **Tanga**

This town in German East Africa is the location of a British attack and defeat.

## **Nanda**

This town in German East Africa is the location of the hospital and prisoner of war camp where Gabriel is held.

## **Kibongo**

This small village near a river is where Felix's unit is stranded during a three-month rainy season.

## **Portuguese East Africa**

This Portuguese colony occupied what is now Mozambique.

## **China Show**

This is the code name for a German military operation that involves flying a zeppelin from Europe to East Africa.

## **Kings African Rifles**

This is a group of African soldiers in the service of the British Army. Gabriel mistakes some African soldiers in the service of the Germans for this group, and he is nearly killed.

## **Golden Calf**

This is the nightclub where Felix makes advances toward Amory and is insulted and humiliated.

## **Spanish influenza**

This pandemic began in 1918 and killed between fifty million and a hundred million people worldwide. It killed many of the German soldiers who had survived years of being pursued by the British.



# Themes

## Coming of Age Amid a Sea of Death

While *An Ice Cream War* is primarily the story of war, it is also the story of one character's transition from adolescence to adulthood. When we first meet Felix, he is a teenage youth full of angst and resentment toward those who do not see him as an adult. At home his relatives see him smoking and laugh about it as if it is an act, much like a younger child playing dress-up in adult clothes. In fairness to those adults, much of what Felix does is posing, a dramatic attempt to draw attention to himself despite being painfully self-conscious.

Felix's first attempt at what he thinks is adult behavior, his advances first toward his best friend's sister and then the following encounter with the prostitute, go horribly wrong. Felix finds himself humiliated and insulted with the worst label possible: "little boy." Felix's next foray into the adult world happens more gradually. He develops a genuine friendship with his brother's sister and then that relationship encounters tragedy. From there Felix enters the war.

While serving in Africa, the young man who only months earlier had been a boy at Oxford experiences things few can imagine and fewer still have seen. The trifling things that once preoccupied Felix's mind have been long forgotten when he sees men suffer from starvation or be blown apart by explosives. By the closing chapter of the novel the character Felix Cobb is an entirely different person from the boy introduced at the beginning of the novel.

## Fidelity vs. Need

Several of the character in the novel have their feelings of loyalty and obligation tested. In the case of the characters of Felix, Charis, and Gabriel, their obligation to remain loyal and trustworthy is pitted against a longing and need for companionship. This need is not the compulsion of lust that so often causes people to break vows of loyalty.

Certainly Felix feels physically attracted to Charis and he is at a time in his life when those feelings run highest. However, his attraction to Charis does not become overpowering until he has built a friendship and genuine level of respect for her as a person. Also, Felix is at a particularly vulnerable time in his life. He feels like no one understands or cares about him, and he feels like he has lost a brother he dearly loves. These two simultaneous emotions produce a painful sense of longing and loneliness. Charis fills that void.

Charis too feels isolated and unloved. Even before meeting Gabriel she does not have many family members. Only one distant aunt comes to her wedding. Soon after joining a new family, her husband is taken away by circumstances that seem far away and



incomprehensible to Charis. She cannot bond with the rest of the family, but Felix seems to truly understand and care about her.

After being separated from the ones he loves and nearly killed, Gabriel encounters Liesl. While he does not act on his feelings the way that Felix and Charis do, there is little doubt that Gabriel would gladly join Liesl in physical intimacy if given the opportunity. It seems that for all three of these characters need is more powerful than obligation.

## The Horrors of War

Many of the characters seem almost childlike in their expectations of war. In the weeks and months preceding the outbreak of conflict, those in Europe and in Africa seem to think it will be a far away affair that will have no direct impact on their way of life. Even those that are aware that they will participate in the war seem to expect some kind of short-lived conflict full of gallantry and medals and no real carnage.

When these characters experience the resulting death, they are shocked into a state of disbelief. It is as if for the first time they are faced with the reality that in war people die and violent death is a gruesome spectacle. When Walter sees Mr. Essanje shot, he seems surprised that in a state of war enemy troops would actually fire on people from the opposing side entering their territory. Gabriel is dumbfounded when he sees what happens to Gleeson. Just moments before Gabriel had attempted to shoot a German officer, and in reaction the German troops fire on the British. Gabriel sees his fellow officer, Gleeson, who had been alive seconds earlier, with his jaw gone and the internal parts of his head exposed. It seems as if Gabriel is shocked because he expects that when a person is shot they go immediately into a peaceful sleep.

The one principal character who displays little reaction to seeing another person physically torn apart is Felix. However, by the time Felix sees Loveday blown apart and Felix has his callous thought about what in French Loveday might say, Felix has already seen countless dead from starvation and, of course, Charis's suicide. To the characters besides Felix, it seems a surprise that the most direct result of war is death.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view in *An Ice Cream War* comes from the perspective of several different characters. The narrator is a third person omniscient storyteller who lets us see into the minds of the primary characters. This is not all done at once in single sections, but rather different chapters of the novel are told from the perspective of different characters. Throughout the novel we read the story from the perspective of Walter Smith, Erich von Bishop, Liesl von Bishop, Felix Cobb, Gabriel Cobb, and Charis Cobb.

Rather than make the novel confusing or disjointed, hearing the story from the perspective of multiple characters gives it a richness that could not be achieved otherwise. Often the characters perceive things in different ways and even blame each other for deeds. Had the story been told from the point of a single narrator, we could have seen the story from merely one shallow point of view that did not understand or convey the complexities of the characters' interactions with each other.

A prime example of the effectiveness of accessing multiple points of view concerns the tragic death of one of the principle characters. Had the story come from only a single point of view we likely could not see the added tragedy of other characters falsely blaming Von Bishop, who moments before the tragic incident had been empathizing with the victim and seeing him more as a person in need rather than an enemy. Indeed the vivid point of view from multiple characters gives the novel a depth and breadth that could not have been achieved otherwise.

## Setting

Part of what makes *An Ice Cream War* such an enjoyable book, particularly to fans of historical fiction, are the settings of colonial Africa and early twentieth century England. As with most historical fiction, the time of the setting is of equal importance to the location. In the setting of England, and especially in the setting of colonial Africa, we experience a world that no longer exists, a world that is accessible to us only through detailed and vivid accounts like that in this novel.

Early in the book the narrator tells of the multi-day journey Walter must take in order to get from his farm to Dar-es-Salaam. On the trip back to the farm the narrator relays Walter's perceptions of the scenery and events. Walter is a former engineer and a man knowledgeable and interested in the machinery of the day. Through his interest we gain a vision of the contraptions in an age when industrial inventions seemed to be magical.

Other characters also give us a glimpse of the time element of the setting. The newlywed couple allow us to see many of the social mores of the time, and the character Felix, a young and inquisitive intellectual, helps us to see the setting from a wider vantage point, particularly that of the absurdity of war. Since *An Ice Cream War* is



primarily about people, the component of time in the setting is every bit as important as any other.

## Language and Meaning

The narrator and the characters provide rich and vivid descriptions of the multiple settings. At times the depiction of the scenery is almost poetic. However, the language as presented by the narrator is not the only issue surrounding language and meaning.

Actual language is an element of the novel of which even the characters are aware. Since the novel takes place in different locations, locations where languages other than English are spoken, the characters are always aware of the need for a common language. The primary German characters speak English, but even within the English language multiple connotations arise that affect the understanding of the message.

Though the novel is set nearly one hundred years ago, the language is accessible to modern readers. The narrator includes plenty of the peculiar English idioms of the time and place to give a sample of the way people spoke, and the narrator often gives samples of languages other than English. In regard to English in England, both Holland and Felix strive not to use Oxford slang. In Africa the English speakers often speak a peculiar form of "broken" English, complete with non-English words, to their African counterparts.

One issue concerning language is also a source of great humor in the novel. The Scottish sergeant, Gilzean, speaks a language he regards as English but that is incomprehensible to any other character. It is so incomprehensible that when Felix serves with Portuguese soldiers who speak no English at all, he finds them easier to understand than his own Scottish sergeant.

## Structure

The structure of *An Ice Cream War* is linear and chronological. It covers the time period between 1914 and 1919. It is divided into four parts: the months before the outbreak of World War I, the period of war through the end of 1916, the remaining period of war, and the aftermath of the war for the remaining primary characters. Within these parts are multiple chapters that are organized by specific date and location. The date determines the order of the chapter, but the narrator shifts locations at will.

Though it is linear and chronological, the structure is not without gaps. Often the story will end in one point and pick up again six months in the future. Typically we learn what happened in the preceding interval of time through memories of the characters, but we learn only what happened from that character's perspective, not always what happened to other principle characters who may be on an entirely different continent. Even when a mere day elapses between a chapter and the one following it, the shift in location creates a gap that will not be filled until the setting returns to the previous location.



One of the chief benefits of the gaps of time and shifting setting is the element of suspense it creates. Often we go along with a character in one location to a climactic moment and then the setting shifts to another location. It is not until we return to the first location, often several chapters later, that we learn what happened to the character. Generally patience is required to learn the outcome for a single character, but it is a patience that is always rewarded.



## Quotes

It was a long journey back to Walter's farm, which lay near the foot of Kilimanjaro in British East Africa. First there was the coastal steamer from Dar to Tanga, and then a day's journey from Tanga to Moshi on the Northern Railway, followed by a further day's wagon ride across the border to B.E.A. and his won farm near the small town and former mission station of Taveta.

(Part One, Chapter One, p. 19)

He saw that she treated her marriage to his father as a relentless challenge, an unending struggle under adverse conditions to get her own way. At first this manifested itself only in the naming of her children, but lately, as she had come to know her enemy, or as he had grown more senile and eccentric, evidence of her own personality long-suppressed came increasingly to the fore.

(Part One, Chapter Four, p. 54)

"My head aches and a drowsy numbness pains my neck. I am home again. This despicable house is like some vast malodorous carcass dropped in Kent, silvery with putrefaction and occupied by sleek pale complacent maggots, most of whom are wearing military uniforms. My family, God save me from my family."

(Part One, Chapter Four, p. 62)

One or several bullets had removed Gleeson's lower jawbone in its entirety, but somehow his tongue had been untouched. It now lolled, uncontained, at his throat like a thick fleshy cravat, pink and purple. Gleeson's upper lip was drawn back revealing his top row of yellow teeth; his fair mustache was spattered with dried mud and blood.

(Part Two, Chapter Six, pp. 174-175)

He saw the bayonet coming as he spun round. Watched it spear through his tunic. Felt an icy coldness which wasn't really painful travel the length of his coiled intestines. He saw the blade withdraw, with a squirt of his own dark blood, looked up in horrified disbelief as another man stepped into place for his turn, felt his mouth fill with hot, salty blood.

(Part Two, Chapter Six, p.180)

"We are fighting for our golf and our weekends. We went to war to prevent an Austrian and German pacification of Serbia, that's all. The French allied themselves with Russia because they were terrified there would be a revolution and Russia would default on all the money they owe France. Now we're fighting to keep a tyrannical Czar on his throne. Now you tell me. Are those causes worth dying for?"

(Part Two, Chapter Eight, pp. 202-203)

Walter stepped out from the porch into the sun, adjusted his sun-helmet and sighed audibly. The British. He shook his head in a mixture of rage and admiration. A general





who was an alcoholic, an army resembling the tribes of Babel, and everyone milling around on this arid plain without the slightest idea of what they were meant to be doing...

(Part Two, Chapter Twelve, p. 239)

Felix realized, with something of a shock, that during his three-month spell in the "front line" he'd never seen a single enemy soldier. His animosities were all claimed by his colleagues. He found it hard to think about home, about Charis or Gabriel. His ludicrous "quest" had fizzed out in the mud of Kibongo, his high ideals and passionate aspirations replaced by grumbles about the damp and endless speculations about what to eat.

(Part Three, Chapter Two, p. 318)

"This cacklit place," Gilzean growled in hate, not listening. "They poor darkies. A greeshie way to go." He clenched his fists. "I'm a snool, a glakit sumph. Nocht but rain, howdumdied all day o'boot. I've lost my noodle. Camsteerie bloody country." He gave a harsh laugh. "No strut. Any haughmagandie? Never. Dunged into the ground . . . I could greet, I tell you." He flashed a glance of scowling malevolence at Felix. "Aye, those primsie Suthrons—you apart, sir—I'd no tarrow to clack their fuds . . ."

(Part Three, Chapter Two, p. 319)

Felix turned away and looked at the landscape. The road sloped down slightly at this point, affording a panorama of the countryside. The burnt grass plains, the thorn scrub, undulating hills fading out into the evening haze in the south, the lush green of the Rovuma basin away in the distance. No sign of a German anywhere.

(Part Three, Chapter Eight, pp. 354-355)

He looked around for Aristedes, squinting through the gaps in smoke for him, but there was no sign. He tripped over the lip of the fresh crater. The torn earth was warm, like bread that has been pulled from an oven. As if in some kind of a dream he saw what he took to be precious stones or jewels glittering amongst the steaming clods. With difficulty he groped and picked one up. He held it close to his baffled eyes. It was a golden tooth. Aristedes had disappeared.

(Part Four, Chapter One, pp. 382-383)

What kind of war was it where this sort of absurdity could occur? And yet he'd been sick, half-starved, insanely bored, had seen his brother hideously murdered, shared a house with a syphilitic Portuguese who spoke no English, and been almost killed by a bomb fired by his own side.

(Part Four, Chapter Three, p. 393)



## Topics for Discussion

Naivety is usually a characteristic of youth, but in the early chapters of the novel both young and aged alike seem to underestimate the prospects for war and the severe impact it will have on their lives. Discuss a few instances where characters reveal their naivety in regard to the coming war and its global impact.

Felix is soon planning to attend university. Discuss how many of his thoughts and behaviors are those of teenage angst. Felix feels like he is an adult, but do his relatives still view him as a child?

When Gabriel tells Charis that Austria declared war on Serbia and he appears upset, she laughs that he could be upset at "another silly Balkan war." What do we, twenty-first century readers, know that Charis does not? How did the declaration of war by Austria so dramatically affect world history? Use this novel, other historical texts, and your own knowledge of history to develop your answer.

What do you believe Dr. Venables might have told Felix if Felix had answered differently in regard to the doctor's question about Charis having an affair? Support your answer with specific details from the text.

Part of the fun in reading historical fiction is in knowing that much in the setting actually occurred. One of the more outlandish ideas presented in the novel is that of the "China Show." How much of the story as presented in the novel is true? (Hint: try researching "Zeppelin LZ104" or "Zeppelin L.59")

Some might believe that the novel's title, *An Ice-Cream War*, refers to the notion held by many that the conflict would be short and relatively bloodless. Certainly many in Europe expected a short low intensity conflict until the unbelievable numbers of dead kept climbing in the most deadly conflicts the world had yet seen. However, those in Africa away from the European battles persist in their beliefs that the war will be over in a matter of weeks or months. Describe instances where some of the characters in Africa continued to believe that the war was soon to end even after it had been ongoing for years.

Comedy and tragedy, even horror, often mix in this novel. Describe some significant instances where a comic scene is interrupted by tragedy or where humor occurred in the most unexpected of environments.