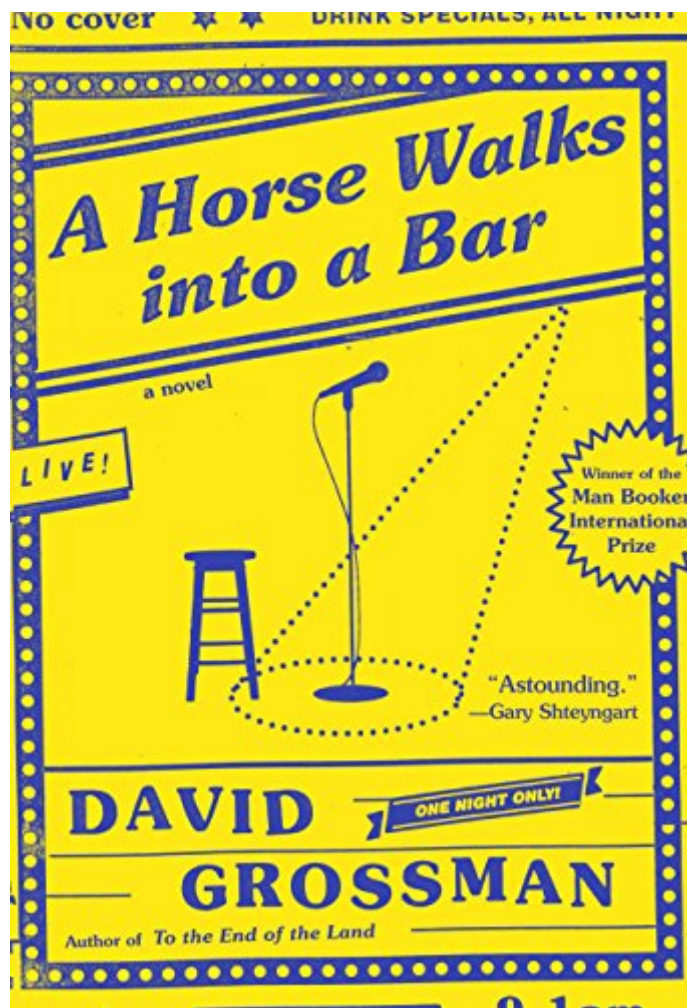


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A Horse Walks Into A Bar: A Novel



Synopsis

****WINNER OF THE 2017 MAN BOOKER INTERNATIONAL PRIZE****The award-winning and internationally acclaimed author of *To the End of the Land* now gives us a searing short novel about the life of a stand-up comic, as revealed in the course of one evening's performance. In the dance between comic and audience, with barbs flying back and forth, a deeper story begins to take shape—one that will alter the lives of many of those in attendance. In a little dive in a small Israeli city, Dov Greenstein, a comedian a bit past his prime, is doing a night of stand-up. In the audience is a district court justice, Avishai Lazar, whom Dov knew as a boy, along with a few others who remember Dov as an awkward, scrawny kid who walked on his hands to confound the neighborhood bullies. Gradually, as it teeters between hilarity and hysteria, Dov's patter becomes a kind of memoir, taking us back into the terrors of his childhood: we meet his beautiful flower of a mother, a Holocaust survivor in need of constant monitoring, and his punishing father, a striver who had little understanding of his creative son. Finally, recalling his week at a military camp for youth where Lazar witnessed what would become the central event of Dov's childhood—Dov describes the indescribable while Lazar wrestles with his own part in the comedian's story of loss and survival. Continuing his investigations into how people confront life's capricious battering, and how art may blossom from it, Grossman delivers a stunning performance in this memorable one-night engagement (jokes in questionable taste included).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A Horse Walks Into a Bar is remarkable. Certainly it's not like any novel I've read before. Dov(eleh) Greenstein is middle-aged, manic and more-than a bit embittered by life. By comparison, Lenny Bruce seems like one of the "take time to smell the flowers" crowd. Dov's standup routine serves as frantic memoir of a childhood raised by (or more accurately, watching over) a Holocaust surviving mother and the cold indifference of a distant father. The audience contains a sprinkling of acquaintances from his life whose presence serves as a springboard to memory. Childhood cruelties, crushes and adolescent torment pile up. Strangers are the butt of crude and often cruel observation--as an id run amok lashes out. The story or standup routine is a novella, fewer than 200 pages but packed with pain and sorrow. It reads as a continuous monologue with narrative interruptions by the childhood friend and others. The method brilliantly captures the atmosphere of a comedy club and the exhaustion a comic would feel as he bares his soul and tears down the props of propriety exposing repressed or painful memories. The interspersed narration anchors the story as a novella. The whole experience is rather like watching a train wreck. It seems indecent to keep staring--you want to look away but can't. A Horse Walks Into A Bar is that riveting.

The main theme - grief and abandonment - is disturbing by definition, but Grossman manages to balance the sadness and pathos with humor, self-awareness/depreciation, forgiveness and grace - which is all any of us can wish for or aspire to from life....In addition to its riveting format, it is rich in universal truths and insights (the tragic basis for comedy) Even when perplexed the reader cannot help but identify with the comic's I need to be seen, understood and redeemedand of course, there is plenty of political polemic going on too - a holocauste victim who epitomizes mercy (she scrubs her hands whenever there is a news report about soldiers killing Palestinians) ... Bullies who torment the weak and non-conforming ... Those who pretend not to notice the suffering of others In short, a thought-provoking, roller coaster ride that is as disturbing as it is exhausting Like a roller coaster, I couldn't wait to get off, but I feel richer from the experience

The novel is a page- turner, sometimes terrifying and sometimes even funny, though that was not

really Grossman's intention. Israelis will recognize the background and references better than others. The translator did an admirable job rendering idiomatic Hebrew - even gutter Hebrew - into its American English equivalents. However, her faulty knowledge of Yiddish, especially standard YIVO transliteration, is apparent.

A very unique way of presenting a controversial subject. Quite hard hitting at times about Arabs in Israel. Sadly presented with an injection of humour from time to time. His writing did deserve recognition especially for his unique way of presenting his subject.

A comedian and a judge walk into a standup routine and we are beguiled by the comedians personal rant for the whole book. It all takes place in a small town in Israel, but stretches us through time and space in his monologue. Excellent story telling.

While this novel continues Grossman's concerns about the future of Israel, the contentious relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, I found the main character so unlikeable, so hyperbolically gross, I found it difficult to get beyond that. I enjoy Grossman's writing and adored "To the End of the Land."

One of the most outstandingly novels that I have ever read. I really could not put the book down. And, when I did finish it, I, then, started it all over again. An incredible story teller, a truly brilliant novel. He's clearly right up there with A.B. Yehoshua. Absolutely an outstanding book!

A good read, but not completely engrossing. I can understand why it would have greater appeal to Israelis and those familiar with Israeli society and culture. I'm certain I missed a lot as someone ignorant of Israeli life.

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