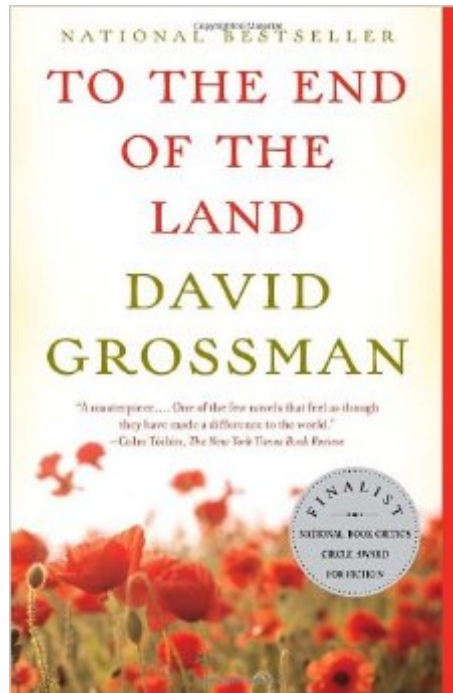


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To The End Of The Land (Vintage International)



Synopsis

ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR: The Christian Science Monitor, The Economist, The New Republic, The New Yorker, The Washington Post, and The Pittsburgh Post GazetteÂ A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOKÂ Just before his release from service in the Israeli army, Ora's son Ofer is sent back to the front for a major offensive. In a fit of preemptive grief and magical thinking, so that no bad news can reach her, Ora sets out on an epic hike in the Galilee. She is joined by an unlikely companionâ Avram, a former friend and lover with a troubled pastâ and as they sleep out in the hills, Ora begins to conjure her son. Ofer's story, as told by Ora, becomes a surprising balm both for her and for Avramâ and a mother's powerful meditation on war and family.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

David Grossman's new book, in hebrew titled Isha Borachat M'besora, translates literally as "A Woman Escaping From a Message." In Israel, the connotation of the word besora (message) acutely depicts the nightmare that the book's protagonist, Ora, is trying to escape: soldiers knocking at her door at 3 a.m. with the besora that her son has been killed in war. The catalyst for Oras journey - outlined in many other reviews here, is her attempt to escape her greatest fear, what she describes as the "nationalization" of her family--that Israel is coming to claim her son's life. Ofer was hers for twenty years, and now Ora must pay her dues. Israel is a country that historically has

dictated the nationalization of private emotions. It is a country where the culture of remembrance unifies and takes ownership over the dead. We - Israelis - mourn the loss of "our" fallen, and say kaddish (a prayer for the dead) for "our" sons. Society becomes a grieving "family," known in Hebrew as Mishpachat Hashchol. Publicly expressed grief becomes the language of the masses and the soundtrack of the nation. Very few books in Israeli literature have so bravely dealt with the looming fear of death that surrounds Israeli society. Grossman does this so vehemently that it is hard to separate his bravery as an author from his bravery as a father who lost a son in the Second Lebanon War while writing this book. His message is unequivocal: the cost of living in Israel is that society is slowly losing its sense of normality. Grossman spared no detail or emotion when he wrote this book. He did not leave one wound untouched or one fear forgotten. He evokes sadness in the reader, because the novel forces one to realize, at times, how abnormal life can be in Israel.

Ora, an Israeli mother, planned a Galilee backpacking trip with her youngest son, Ofer, to celebrate the end of his army conscription. But, like a fist through her soul, he signed up for a major offensive, another twenty-eight days. Barely holding her sanity together--her husband, Ilan, has trekked off to Bolivia with her oldest son, Adam--she flees from her fear of the "notifiers" (the government officials who deliver grave news) and leaves, anyway, sans cell phone and contact access. Ora pleads with her reclusive old friend and former lover, Avram, erstwhile best friend to Ilan, to accompany her to the Galilee. She believes that, with Avram, they can form a thread that ties them to the land, to nature, to safety, to Ofer, and weave a tapestry that protects him from peril. With Avram, she can magically keep Ofer alive. No one else can extinguish bad thoughts and assist her to defy fate."...she was always easy with Avram, letting him see all of her, almost from the first moment she met him, because she had a feeling, a conviction that there was something inside her, or someone, perhaps an Ora more loyal to her own essence, more precise and less vague, and Avram seemed to have a way to reach her." Years ago, Avram and Ilan were soldiers together, and the story explains how Avram lost his artistic spirit and love of words and suffered permanent damage and a death of the soul. As they hike, climb and acclimate to the wild terrain, Ora recapitulates the story of her family--the details of raising her sons and her forsaken marriage to Ilan. The germination and withering of the friendship between Ora, Avram, and Ilan is recounted in flashbacks and threaded into her story as a wife and mother.

This magnificent novel, if there is any justice in the world, should earn David Grossman a Nobel Prize for Literature. Of course, there being no justice in the world, the Swedish academicians may

be reluctant to honor an Israeli. They would be wrong not to do so because this is a book that does full justice to the pain of being an Israeli-and yet is universal in its appeal. The three central characters are Ora and her two lovers, Avram and Ilan. The book begins during their feverish meeting as teenagers during the 1967 war but mostly it takes place in 1973 and in the present. Ora's younger son Ofer was about to complete his compulsory military service but suddenly on his last day he volunteers to sign up for an extra month so he can take part in a major military operation. Ora is certain he will die -- and she conceives the idea of hiking a trail from the north of Israel -- the 'end of the land' -- back to her home in Jerusalem. She has a mystical belief that if she is not home when the soldiers come to inform her of her son's death, he will not have died. As long as she keeps moving, he will be safe. Has there ever been in literature a more poignant depiction of a mother's fear while her son goes to war? I don't think so. Ora drags along on her trek an old friend and lover, Avram. First depicted as a brilliant, intellectual youth with literary ambitions, full of life and love of life, Avram has been a shell of himself for the past 30 years. He was captured by the Egyptians during the Yom Kippur War and brutally tortured. Now, horribly traumatized, he is barely existing. The third leg of this three-legged stool is Ilan, the weakest of the protagonists.

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