

## SOMEONE TO RUN WITH

By David Grossman

Translated by Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz

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### ABOUT THE BOOK:

This novel is the story of two Israeli teenagers making their way through the Jerusalem underworld. Assaf, a shy sixteen-year-old, is charged with the mission of finding the owner of a lost dog as part of his summer job for the Jerusalem municipality. His quest takes him through the city streets, where he meets a pizza man, a cloistered nun, and an angry policeman. Piecing together the clues he finds along the way, he learns that the dog's owner is a fifteen-year-old girl named Tamar who is in need of serious help. Tamar, we learn, has shaved her head and left her dysfunctional family to become a street musician, all in an effort to rescue her heroin-addicted younger brother. Tamar and Assaf come closer and closer to the objects of their quests as the novel progresses, and find, ultimately, one another.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

David Grossman was born in Jerusalem in 1954. He studied philosophy and drama at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and later worked as an editor and broadcaster at Israel Radio. He is the author of six novels, four works of nonfiction, a play, and several short stories, novellas, and children's books. Grossman, whose books have been translated into over a dozen languages, is the winner of many international prizes and awards, including the Sapir Prize (2001) for *Someone to Run With*.



**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. This story takes place all over the city of Jerusalem. What are some of the landmarks that are featured here? Do you recognize any places from your own travels to Israel? What parts of the city were not known to you previously?
2. Consider, for instance, Assaf's recollection of his family's anxiety during the first Gulf War. How does history shape the characters' experience of present-day realities? Can you think of any other aspects of Israeli history that come through in this book?
3. The nun Theodora tells Assaf that "No such thing as a silly story exists. . . . Every story is connected, somewhere, in the depths, to some greater meaning. Even if it is not revealed to us." Can you interpret Theodora's words as a comment on Grossman's novel as well? How is everything connected in this story? What do you think is the "greater meaning"?
4. At what point in the story did you realize what Tamar was trying to accomplish? When did Assaf realize?
5. Where are the parents in this story? Who functions as parents in their stead?
6. This novel deals with many universal human problems: peer pressure, drug addiction, neglected children, poverty, etc. Could this novel have taken place anywhere in the world? Can you think of any aspects of Israeli society that cannot be universalized?
7. What types of songs does Tamar sing? Is this what you would have expected? What does this tell you about the Israeli cultural scene?
8. When Tamar finds Shai, she comments, "There comes a moment . . . when you take one tiny step off the beaten path and you have to follow one leg with another, and before you know it, you find yourself on an unfamiliar route; every step is a reasonable one to take, more or less; it is born, evolved from the previous one, but suddenly you wake up inside a nightmare" (p. 168). Which other characters might Grossman be referring to here?
9. Rhino describes a childhood spent watching soccer games at the YMCA on Shabbat [Sabbath] mornings (p. 104). What was more sacred to Rhino – Shabbat or soccer? Rhino explains that watching the soccer game was like a drug for him. What does he mean? How was the fact that it was Shabbat significant? Can you think of anything that served as a "drug" for you in this kind of way?



10. Grossman's novel has been described as a fairy tale. Do you agree with this assessment? What are some of the elements in the story that resemble a fairy tale or fable?
11. Grossman's novel reveals the ethnic diversity of Jerusalem today. Who are the different kinds of people you meet in this book? What types of people are the main characters, and what types of people are only in the background?
12. Are there any sectors of the population that are noticeably absent?
13. Dinka leads Assaf to a place that "he assumed...was a deserted Arab village, whose inhabitants had fled during the War of Independence (according to Rhino). Or were cruelly banished (Reli)." What is the difference between Rhino and Reli's accounts? Which do you think Grossman is more likely to support? Where do you stand?
14. Who are the hungry children whom Assaf finds in the deserted village? Where are they from? Would you say that their inclusion in this novel can be viewed as an indictment of Israeli society?
15. When Tamar tells Shai about her planned rescue mission, he tells her, "This is not Entebbe Operation Thunderbolt." What is he referring to? Does Tamar ultimately prove Shai wrong? How does this reflect on Israel's cult of heroism? Do you think it is significant that the character of Tamar is a girl and not a boy?
16. When Pesach and his men surround Assaf and Tamar, one of them says, "The Temple Mount is ours! Now let's take care of Abraham's Tomb." How does his use of this metaphor show the way in which 3000 years of Jewish history and politics influences day-to-day life in modern Israel?

