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Here I Am: A Novel



Synopsis

A monumental new novel from the bestselling author of *Everything Is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* In the book of Genesis, when God calls out, "Abraham!" before ordering him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, Abraham responds, "Here I am." Later, when Isaac calls out, "My father!" before asking him why there is no animal to slaughter, Abraham responds, "Here I am." How do we fulfill our conflicting duties as father, husband, and son; wife and mother; child and adult? Jew and American? How can we claim our own identities when our lives are linked so closely to others? These are the questions at the heart of Jonathan Safran Foer's first novel in eleven years—a work of extraordinary scope and heartbreaking intimacy. Unfolding over four tumultuous weeks in present-day Washington, D.C., *Here I Am* is the story of a fracturing family in a moment of crisis. As Jacob and Julia Bloch and their three sons are forced to confront the distances between the lives they think they want and the lives they are living, a catastrophic earthquake sets in motion a quickly escalating conflict in the Middle East. At stake is the meaning of home—and the fundamental question of how much aliveness one can bear. Showcasing the same high-energy inventiveness, hilarious irreverence, and emotional urgency that readers loved in his earlier work, *Here I Am* is Foer's most searching, hard-hitting, and grandly entertaining novel yet. It not only confirms Foer's stature as a dazzling literary talent but reveals a novelist who has fully come into his own as one of our most important writers.

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Customer Reviews

Thanks to NetGalley and to Penguin Books UK Hamish Hamilton for offering me a free copy of this

book in exchange for an honest review. I had not read any of Jonathan Safran Foer before, so I can't really compare it to his previous work. I've checked comments about the novel, as I felt quite overwhelmed when I finished its reading and I wanted to check if I was the only one. The opinions by people who'd read his previous novels varied widely, although 'ambitious' is one of the words most often used in all the comment, positive and otherwise. Yes, the novel is ambitious. The story is about the disintegration of an upper-middle-class Jewish-American marriage. Jacob, the main character, writes a TV comedy, is married, with three children, a dog, and relatives both in the United States and in Israel. The story is told mostly from his point of view, although there are fragments also told from other characters' viewpoint, like his grandfather, his wife, his oldest son. | Later in the novel there are also inserts that purport to be news articles or news reports about an earthquake that affects most of the Middle-East and has terrible consequences for the region, resulting in what is referred to in the book as 'the destruction of Israel'. The attempts at equating the family's fortunes to that of Israel itself are clear when reading the book, although how successful they are it's open to the individual reader (for me, the situation provides a good way to test the main character's beliefs and is a good way of offering the reader a better understanding of him, but how literally we're supposed to take it is a different matter). This is not an easy book to read, for a variety of reasons.

This is an epic, ambitious, stimulating, layered, witty and insightful book. It's magnificent, truly. And yet. The standards for Jonathan Safran Foer are considerably higher. *Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close* is a constant in my ever-changing top 5 books. And, as expected, *Here I Am* is one of the most interesting books I've read in years. But I still feel compelled to pick it apart. It has everything piled into it, but it's at once too much and not enough, it's painfully sharp but then seems lost in the fog of whatever point it's trying to make, it picks such uncannily familiar emotions from the minutiae of everyday life, but it fails to actually connect with me emotionally. It's beautifully, effortlessly written, but feels in desperate need of a fearless edit. The family at the centre of *Here I Am* are the Blochs. Successful, urbane couple Jacob and Julia - Jacob is a TV writer perpetually in need of reassurance, Julia an architect, but first and foremost a mum, expertly spinning plates and balancing the needs of their three beloved sons Sam, Max and Benjy while dreaming of escape. Jacob's Dad Irv is a controversial political antagonist, his Mum Deborah the calm port in the storm, his grandfather Isaac the holocaust survivor contemplating suicide as his final life goals are completed and Argus the old dog as simultaneously loved and ignored as Isaac. There is also Jacob's visiting Israeli cousin Tamir - at once comic relief and moral centre. But the

family are only half of this book. The title Here I Am refers to the story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac - Abraham replies 'Here I am', and later, when Isaac questions why they have no animal for the sacrifice, calling out "My father," • Abraham repeats the phrase, "Here I Am"™.

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