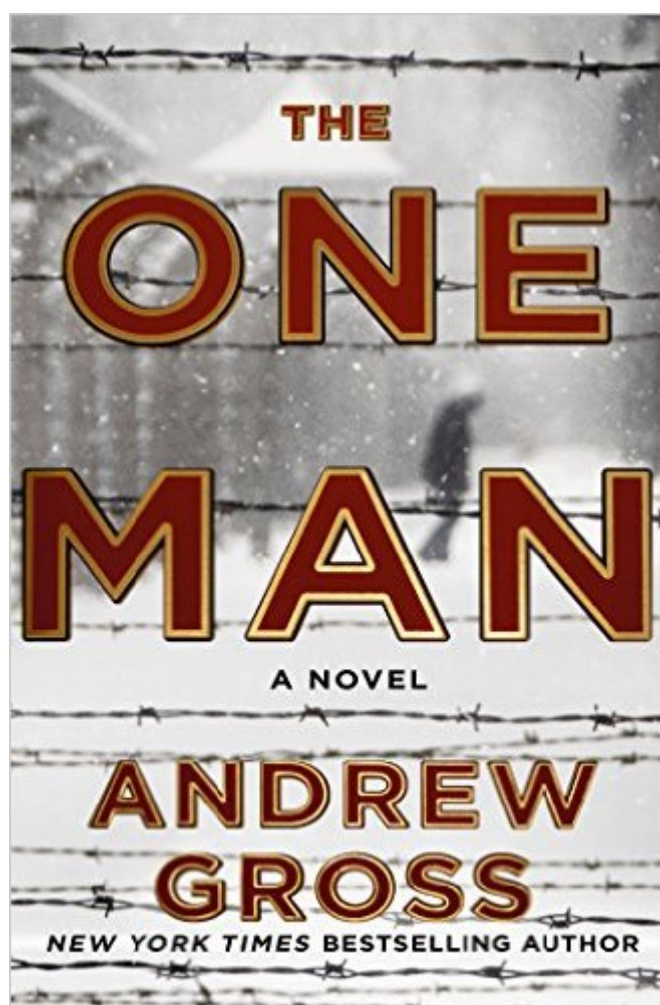


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# The One Man: A Novel



## Synopsis

As moving as it is gripping. A winner on all fronts. •Booklist (starred review)  
Heart-pounding | This is Gross's best work yet, with his heart and soul imprinted on every page. •Kirkus Reviews (starred review)  
Poland, 1944. Alfred Mendl and his family are brought on a crowded train to a Nazi concentration camp after being caught trying to flee Paris with forged papers. His family is torn away from him on arrival, his life's work burned before his eyes. To the guards, he is just another prisoner, but in fact Mendl—a renowned physicist—holds knowledge that only two people in the world possess. And the other is already at work for the Nazi war machine. Four thousand miles away, in Washington, DC, Intelligence lieutenant Nathan Blum routinely decodes messages from occupied Poland. Having escaped the Krakow ghetto as a teenager after the Nazis executed his family, Nathan longs to do more for his new country in the war. But never did he expect the proposal he receives from Wild Bill Donovan, head of the OSS: to sneak into the most guarded place on earth, a living hell, on a mission to find and escape with one man, the one man the Allies believe can ensure them victory in the war. Bursting with compelling characters and tense story lines, this historical thriller from New York Times bestseller Andrew Gross is a deeply affecting, unputdownable series of twists and turns through a landscape at times horrifyingly familiar but still completely new and compelling.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It has been a few books since I have read anything by this author. Yet, Mr. Gross is still one of my favorites to read. In fact, just the other day I was talking books and authors with one of my friends

and I told her to check out this author. This book is a slight departure from the typical books that I have read by Mr. Gross with his mystery/suspense thrillers. I like this side of Mr. Gross. In addition, this book takes place in one of my favorite time periods. Instantly, I was captivated by both Mendl and Nat's stories and how they intertwined with each other. Nat's bravery to risk his life for a man he does not know is inspiring. Mendl also carried strength in the way that he carried himself and the way that he cared for the ours in Auschwitz. Reading this book I was transported back in time and the camp. It was like I could smell death lurking around the prisoners, feel and hear the beatings, and the sirens. If you have never read a book by Mr. Gross, now is the perfect time. *The One Man* is a must, must, treasure of a read!

It was May 1944 and two escapees from Auschwitz, Rudolph Vrba and Alfred Wetzler brought out documents with names, numbers and the stories of mass liquidation of Jews and others. This information had reached President Roosevelt and his staff, especially William Donovan and Peter Strauss. Donovan was chief spymaster and head of the office of Strategic Services. The news was grim. The camps were expanding and speeding up the pace of exterminations. The US needed to build a weapon of great magnitude. The Germans were already working on one and the US had to build one first. The one man Alfred Mendl, a physicist was in Auschwitz and needed to be brought to the states, to the Manhattan Project to help build the weapon. Peter Strauss knew that they needed to find a man that could break in Auschwitz, find Professor Mendl and in the space of three days get both of them out and back to the states. The man they selected to accomplish this was Nathan Blum an intelligence lieutenant now living in DC. Nathan was Jewish and spoke Polish and German. Nathan had escaped the Krakow ghetto and made his way to the US and enlisted. His whole family had perished in the camps. When asked to sneak into Auschwitz, retrieve the professor and get out in three days he agreed. This book is beautifully written, fast paced, and very suspenseful. Really enjoyed this book and read it in three days. Excellent!!!

*The One Man* tackles a difficult subject - the treatment of German, Polish and other Jews during the Second World War. Using this topic as a lens, it also deals with the development of nuclear weapons. A famous scientist is captured by the Nazis, but they don't know that his research could accelerate their work on the bomb. The Americans discover where he is and create a plan to get him out. This means a Polish immigrant must go back, get into Auschwitz and by some miracle get the physicist out and back to the States. The book deals with the issues of the Holocaust, and plumbs some of the discussions that were happening about the camps and what the Allies should

do to destroy the camps. The book is well-paced and develops the main characters fairly well. It shows the enormous burden placed on the main character, who has to go back to Germany and enter the camp. I found the book to be interesting, well-paced, the characters well-developed. The author even deals with the human side of the Germans who were forced to go along with the Nazis and their final solution plans. A book that requires you to occasionally put aside disbelief but on the whole an excellent read.

World War II ended 70 years ago, and yet the Nazis and the atrocities they committed remain at the forefront of our literary if not social consciousness, with some of the biggest books of recent years focused on that era. I can't say I fully understand the collective fascination with this particularly abhorrent chapter in history (I have a few theories) but I have become an avid consumer of books on the subject, mostly non-fiction but fiction too. I keep trying to make sense of the long-ago horrors that still reverberate in my daily life, so when *The One Man* showed up on my Vine list, I grabbed it. This is a book for readers who like plot and don't mind one-dimensional black or white characters. After a brief prologue, the reader meets Nathan Blum, hears his back story, learns about his mission, and accompanies him to Auschwitz in the middle of 1944. A parallel story line follows Professor Alfred Mendl, inexplicably spared from the gas chambers despite his poor health, and Mendl's protege, the chess player Leo, both among the 300,000 prisoners of Auschwitz. My ARC version checks in at 400+ pages, and I found the first half of the book (Parts One and Two) almost unbearably slow going. The action picks up about halfway through, and the book becomes more palatable. The final chapter bookends the prologue and wraps up the story lines in a tidy if not entirely satisfying way. I had two major issues with the book. First and more significantly, the story relies on improbable coincidences, not on shrewd planning or creative devices. For example, at one point a prisoner -- remember, there are 300,000 of them! -- is granted an audience with the camp's commanding officer, whereupon she divulges a bit of gossip that is accepted without question and results in a near-catastrophe for Nathan, the professor, and friends. Really? If it had been that easy to get an audience with the boss in hopes of swapping information for personal favors, there would have been at least 1,000 prisoners outside the Lagerkommandant's door. The only way I could get through the book was by turning off the part of my brain that kept whining "no way could this have happened." I also have a personal aversion to stories in which the evil guys are always one step ahead of the good guys, somehow outsmarting them at every juncture. Second, and this may be an issue for readers like me who have read extensively about this era, the book covers well-trodden territory, and beyond the veneer of a rescue plot, Gross is primarily repeating stories that have far

more resonance when told in the first person. Primo Levi he is not, and for me, scenes that were supposed to be gripping instead felt pedestrian and hollow. As a corollary to the above, the premise behind the plot is not fully discussed, although the reader is made aware of the mission's significance. The fact that the mission's success could lead to a prickly moral dilemma is never addressed, and the omission bothered me. The writing is smooth and the plotting is brisk, with quick scene changes. But if you're looking for a compelling story, you'll probably find greater satisfaction in some of the non-fiction accounts of that time and place. This list includes a number of intriguing options: <https://www..com/gp/richpub/listmania/fullview/R33P0P5WFWIN5K>

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