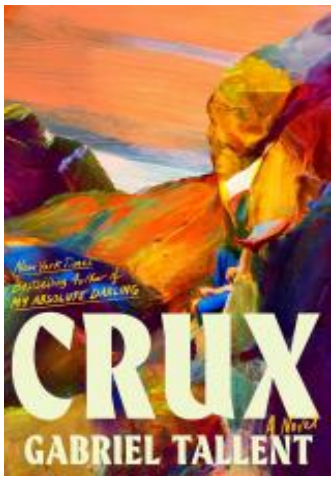
Crux

by Gabriel Tallent



About the Book

In this story of intense friendship and grit, two down-and-out teens escape their lives and chase a different future through rock climbing --- from the *New York Times* bestselling author of MY ABSOLUTE DARLING.

Dan and Tamma are two teenagers in their last year of high school in the southern Mojave Desert. One is a gifted golden child, the other a mouthy burnout. Climbing boulders in trash-strewn parking lots during cold desert nights, they seal their unique bond and dream of a life of adventure.

As the year progresses and adult reality looms, they are rocked by change and pulled apart by irreconcilable obligations. Differences of class, talent and prospects take on new importance; options dwindle, and their decisions grow ever more consequential and perilous. It feels inevitable, finally, that something must give.

With a magnificent gift for nature writing and a joyful appreciation for the redemptive power of friendship, Gabriel Tallent gives readers a rollicking, adrenaline-filled and soul-searching novel about risking everything to change your life.

Discussion Guide

1. The complexities of friendship have always captivated the literary imagination. CRUX joins this legacy by introducing the transcendental, boundary-breaking friendship between Tamma and Dan. How would you characterize their friendship? How do they complement and challenge each other?

2. What role does class play in Tamma?s and Dan?s relationships with each other and with their community? Describe the differences between their family structures and relationships to wealth. How does the pair navigate these differences?

3. Tamma and Dan don?t hail ?from any town,? just ?from out in the desert.? How has growing up in a rural part of the

desert shaped their experiences and identities? How has it affected their relationship to climbing?

4. *Two figures side by side in a vast prospect of desert, the clouds like wasp nests caulked up into the eaves: low, swollen, sashy, striate, and gray; the light, dishwater; the sun, a bed of coals embanked in ash.*

One of CRUX?s defining features is the rich, precise and spectacular quality of the author?s prose. What role does language play in this narrative of friendship and ambition? How do CRUX?s vivid depictions of climbing and the wilderness offer symbolic resonance with the broader trials of life?

5. CRUX plays with themes of fate and determinism, particularly when it comes to one?s family background. For example, unlike Tamma and Dan, Paisley Cuthers has all the time and money necessary to consistently perform at her best. Do our origins determine our potential? Can talent and effort really overcome a lack of support and opportunities?

6. After Tamma?s first competition, Paisley?s mother, Stella, tells Tamma that making it to the top --- whether of the climb or the podium --- will never fulfill her. What, then, does the value of a pursuit derive from, aside from mastery? What does it mean to make climbing, or any passion, your own?

7. CRUX features profound depictions of mental illness, with Dan falling into a prolonged depression. Discuss how Dan?s depression affects his relationships and his ambitions.

8. Dan has a fraught relationship with his mother, Alexandra, who has historically prioritized her ambition over her relationship with her son. What does Dan learn from taking care of Alexandra in her time of need? Why does this period make him newly hopeful about their relationship?

9. What differentiates Dan?s relationship to climbing from Tamma?s, and how do both evolve over the course of the book? Why does Dan become so attached to the idea of sending Figures on a Landscape, despite Tamma?s vocal protests?

10. Dan?s and Tamma?s mothers, Alexandra and Kendra, were once best friends, until a single remark from Kendra cleaved them apart forever. Was Kendra?s declaration in the face of her friend?s success cruel? What motivated it? Was Alexandra?s reaction warranted? What does their dynamic teach us about the nature of human relationships?

11. Despite Tamma?s brash personality, she demonstrates a particular devotion to her very young niece and nephews. What motivates Tamma to step up for her sister?s children in spite of how poorly the rest of her family treats her? How does she grow from her experiences with them?

12. What ultimately keeps Dan from following his dream of climbing? What kind of promise does college represent to him?

13. Discuss Tamma?s self-reflections at the end of the book. What do these closing moments tell us about her values and the way she perceives herself? How have these changed and developed over the course of the book?

Author Bio

Gabriel Tallent is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling novel MY ABSOLUTE DARLING. He was born in New Mexico and raised on the Mendocino coast by two mothers. He received his B.A. from Willamette University in 2010; after graduation, he spent two seasons leading youth trail crews in the backcountry of the Pacific Northwest. Tallent lives in Salt Lake City. His second novel is CRUX.

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