

THE YIDDISH POLICEMEN'S UNION, LIMITED EDITION



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- Published on: 1656
- Binding: Hardcover

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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Enjoyable and entertaining on many levels

By palmetto

This book was extremely clever. There were many parts I enjoyed reading aloud with my husband, it was so good. The author made a creative use of the old traditional hard-bitten detective genre, but with tons of irony thrown in. I think it would make a good movie, but Hollywood would probably ruin it by not using the book's witty dialog for the script, but dumbing it down. Also they might be afraid of getting flack from some people who think there are elements in it that don't treat Judaism (e.g., the man who sets up the boundaries around the town, and the rabbis) with sufficiently sober reverence.

The basic idea of how this Jewish entity in Alaska came about was introduced slowly bit by bit. I recommend reading the appendices first, where the author describes how he came to write it.

The use of language is very creative. The plot becomes more and more intricate but remains intriguing. Not to spoil the plot, it does help if you know a little about the whole notion of a Jewish Messiah.

I liked it so much I am re-reading it now that I know how it all develops.

There are some extremely memorable characters. All in all, I found it a thoroughly enjoyable book, even though I usually dislike detective or mystery novels. I am looking forward to reading more of his books.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

This is an amazing book. It draws you in with its fantastic ...

By Amazon Customer

This is an amazing book. It draws you in with its fantastic alternate-history premise: what if the Jews had never found a homeland in Israel, and instead had been allowed to find refuge from the Holocaust in Sitka, Alaska, where the lingua franca is Yiddish instead of Hebrew and the culture is decidedly "Old World?"

The book centers around Meyer Landsman, a jaded police detective investigating a mysterious murder. The plot is interesting and satisfying, but what ultimately made me love this book were its unabashed Jewishness that showed up in the very language- the metaphors, the descriptions- and Chabon's unexpectedly poignant commentary on the isolation and exile that comes with being a Jew.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

The Last Days

By Roger Brunyate

This is the third Chabon book that I have read (after THE FINAL SOLUTION and THE MYSTERIES OF PITTSBURGH) and it is unquestionably the best -- imaginative, audacious, thought-provoking, and humane. As I gather he did with KAVALIER & CLAY, Chabon takes a genre of popular fiction, in this case the

police story, and transforms it into a vehicle capable of carrying significant insights into the human condition, and particularly the complex crosscurrents of Jewish identity. For some reason this fascinates me, and I have read a good deal of post-Holocaust fiction, but I felt that I understood more about Jewish life in America, especially among the orthodox, from reading this book than from any other author since Chaim Potok (e.g. *THE CHOSEN* or *MY NAME IS ASHER LEV*).

Chabon creates an alternative historical reality on the basis of three plausible assumptions. The first is that, in the years before the War, America created a home for a limited number of Jewish refugees in Sitka, on the South-East coast of Alaska; (this plan was actually floated, but never brought to a vote). Second, that the new state of Israel was overrun by its enemies shortly after its founding, causing a massive exodus of people to be accommodated in this small area, giving rise to a large city built up over islands and a narrow strip of land. The third assumption is that these refugees were not accepted as American immigrants, but as temporary nationals of the new entity, leased for a period of sixty years. So while Jewish Sitka is a self-governing city-state, with Yiddish its official language, and with its own police force, this authority is precarious. For one thing, different sects have taken over different parts of the city, effectively maintaining their own law, even sometimes in opposition to the official law. For another, the sixty-year lease is about to expire, and the action of the book takes place in the last weeks before Reversion, when Jews who have not made other arrangements will be forced out again in yet another Exodus.

One such unprepared unfortunate is our protagonist, an alcoholic homicide detective named Meyer Landsman. One of the other residents in the fleabag hotel where he lives is found murdered, with a chess game set out on a board beside him. Even though his superiors tell him to drop the case, Landsman persists in his attempts to discover who the victim really was, and who killed him. This thread sews the plot together and leads to some surprising places. Ultimately, however, it is not the whodunnit element that is important; we discover the answer, but that is a minor detail in the almost apocalyptic drama of fear and destiny that is revealed in the shadow of the last days of the Jewish people in Sitka. But while specifically Jewish in context, I find the book also is full of insight into the fundamentalist mindset generally, and it is very much a reflection of forces in American politics of our own time.

Chabon is equally successful on the intimate level. We come to know a lot about Myer Landsman: the suicide of his chess grandmaster father, the death of his sister in a flying accident, and his separation from his wife Bina after the abortion of their unborn child. This last relationship is further complicated when Bina turns up as Meyer's new boss, but the unraveling of the case also has the effect of bringing the past and present together, in ways that are ultimately deeply satisfying, and give the book human warmth as a ballast to its flights of brilliance. If you come to the novel as a Gentile (and perhaps even as a Jew), you will be plunged into a world that seems hermetic, claustrophobic, extremely strange. When you finish it, you will understand where the strangeness comes from. More, you will be left with a small group of human beings whom you have come to know as intimately as if they were your own family or neighbors.

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