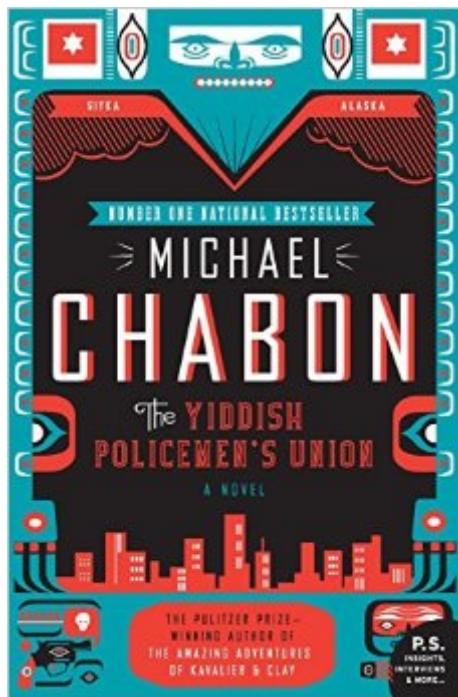


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The Yiddish Policemen's Union: A Novel (P.S.)



Synopsis

The New York Times bestseller, now available in paperbackâ "œan excellent, hyperliterate, genre-pantsing detective novel that deserves every inch of itsâ |blockbuster superfameâ • (New York). For sixty years Jewish refugees and their descendants have prospered in the Federal District of Sitka, a "temporary" safe haven created in the wake of the Holocaust and the shocking 1948 collapse of the fledgling state of Israel. The Jews of the Sitka District have created their own little world in the Alaskan panhandle, a vibrant and complex frontier city that moves to the music of Yiddish. But now the District is set to revert to Alaskan control, and their dream is coming to an end. Homicide detective Meyer Landsman of the District Police has enough problems without worrying about the upcoming Reversion. His life is a shambles, his marriage a wreck, his career a disaster. And in the cheap hotel where Landsman has washed up, someone has just committed a murderâ "right under his nose. When he begins to investigate the killing of his neighbor, a former chess prodigy, word comes down from on high that the case is to be dropped immediately, and Landsman finds himself contending with all the powerful forces of faith, obsession, evil, and salvation that are his heritage. At once a gripping whodunit, a love story, and an exploration of the mysteries of exile and redemption,Â The Yiddish Policemen's UnionÂ is a novel only Michael Chabon could have written.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

said the words out loud those who had assumed Yiddish was a language of the past only, suddenly felt it had been revived. . . . It seemed to be saying 'khbin nisht vos ikh bin amo geven. I am not what I once was. Ober 'khbin nisht geshtorbn. Ikh leb. But I did not die. I live.' Irena Klepfisz. Yiddish is certainly not dead in Michael Chabon's "The Yiddish Policemen's Union". In fact, the primary language of Jews throughout the "Pale of Settlement" (where Jews were allowed to live in Imperial Russia) suffuses this book with the rich aroma of a language whose every word can take on a paragraph or even chapter of meaning in the hands of the right speaker. Chabon is one such speaker (or writer) and "The Yiddish Policemen's Union" is a book that is rich in enjoyment. "The Yiddish Policemen's Union" is an artful blend of genres, a blend of crime fiction and alternate history. I think of it as a blend of Dashiell Hammett's dark crime stories like "Red Harvest" and Philip Roth's alternate-history novel "The Plot Against America". Chabon has created a world in which there is no Israel. Rather, Israel had been crushed in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Since that time the United States, partly as a result of guilt over the Holocaust has created a temporary homeland for displaced European Jews in and around Sitka, Alaska. Yiddish, not Hebrew, is the primary language. As the book opens, close to 60-years after the end of Israel, Sitka is due to revert back to U.S. control and the million or so inhabitants face the prospect of being stateless refugees. The hero, or protagonist, is Detective Meyer Landsman.

I've been reading Chabon since I first picked up "The Mysteries of Pittsburgh" over a decade-and-a-half ago, and it's been fun seeing his writing evolve with each new work. I believe that "Kavalier and Clay" is one of the best American novels of the past ten years, and that's not even because I'm such a comic book fan; it's just an extraordinary novel on many levels. When I heard of the concept of "Yiddish Policemen's Union," I was worried that it sounded a bit too high concept; then I considered that Chabon is such a great writer that I'll forgive him for anything - even his recent "Simpson's" voiceover where he and Jonathan Franzen got into a fistfight. Luckily, no forgiveness needs to be granted (like Chabon couldn't care less anyhow; who am I in the Kakutani-era of literary criticism?) Chabon's newest novel is just further confirmation of his skill. This book is unique as it's not a speculative novel masquerading as Jewish noir, nor is it noir with a glossy veneer: it's everything at once. The questions of Jewish identity and what will happen to the community once the Reversion happens never takes away from the main tale; it's so well tucked in with the main action that Chabon never goes off on a tangent. All the while, Chabon plows ahead with a mystery that will set off chuckles of recognition as he hits and bounces upon every noir convention like a pinball. Informers, grieving mothers, loyal partners, the obligatory moment when

an unconnected crime enters the frame - it's all there, but with its overlay of the Jewish community in the north, it feels fresh. A few reviewers have commented that they missed out on Jewish in-jokes.

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