

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*
AUTHOR Michael Chabon
PUBLISHER Harper
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COVER ART Will Staeble

Précis Meyer Landsman is a Jewish policeman in the District of Sitka in Alaska, the place where the Jews who would have settled in Israel after WW2 are since Israel is not held by the Jews. He is down and out and has to investigate a murder in the dumpy hotel he lives in. The murder victim turns out to be extra-ordinary and even after he is told to drop the investigation; he pursues it and unwinds a string of events that have implications around the world.

In the background is the imminent relocation of the Jews as Sitka becomes part of the U.S in a few months and the Native Americans are not likely to want to keep them around. This is a major thread in the story and at the end is not completely wrapped up.

Protagonist Meyer Landsman
Antagonist Alter Litvak

What I liked Chabon's prose is as colorful as any I have ever read. He uses simile like a paintbrush, allowing the reader to easily picture the thing he is describing in detail. The story is humorous and engaging and the characters are well developed and interesting.

What I didn't like The plot was pedestrian, a murder mystery with just a twist or two. The continual Jewish references were a bit much by the end of the book even though I understand - I mean the book is about Israel in Alaska after all. The pace of the novel was a little slow in parts and it could have been about 50 pages shorter. The ending also left me flat as too many loose ends were not cleaned up.

Final Comments I read this book because it is one of the five novels nominated for the 2008 Hugo awards. I question this because while it is an enjoyable book the only thing scifi/fantasy about it is the alternate history angle of the Jews being in Alaska instead of Israel. Yes I know that alternate history is a typical sub genre of scifi and some very good ones have been nominated, possibly even won (I would have to look that up).

My point is that in this book, the alternate history angle has a very minor impact on the story. In my opinion this is a murder mystery and should never have been nominated. That doesn't mean that scifi fans should not read the book, I just think it was not a good choice for a Hugo.

Rating 🍊 🍊 🍊 🍊 🍊