Clarion Review

General

Chinese Chess: A Novel Threat to America
Joseph Pilarski
iUniverse
978-0-595-48211-5
Two Stars (out of Five)

Joseph Pilarski paints a frightening picture of the future: the world is caught in the grips of a power struggle as Iranian operatives make a bid for copper the last component they need to complete nuclear missiles. Determined to win the game they kidnap and kill then issue an ultimatum and set loose a band of thugs to ensure that the copper ends up in Iran.

Meanwhile Jan Roman retired and living peacefully on the island of Aruba is having frightening and he believes prophetic apocalyptic nightmares. Thinking that what he's seen in his dreams might be helpful to U.S. intelligence he contacts the Pentagon Homeland Security and the White House but gets no response.

Jan feels compelled to write a book about his dream visions and publishes it under a pseudonym hoping that anything remotely realistic might strike a chord and alert the government in time to prevent disaster. Jan's book *Chinese Chess* is published with a twist: the last chapter is excluded; it will be posted on the Internet twelve months from publication. *Chinese Chess* becomes a bestseller and because of its premise the world goes on high alert as government agents across the world search for the author hoping to gain access to information in the last chapter.

The Sentinels members of an undercover group charged with keeping the copper from falling into Iranian clutches protect Jan propelling him off the island when Chavez makes a power play and moves troops onto Aruba—yes Venezuelan president Hugo Chav*ez*. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also features prominently as he prays for the Mahdi to return and restore the world to Islam. (Of course Israel is the first target.) The President of the United States plays a role although he remains nameless.

Unfortunately an imaginative plot fails to fulfill its promise. Chapters are short in some cases only a paragraph. They flash by—each representing a change of setting: Tehran Caracus

Aga Khan Hospital the Coast of Mombassa The Oval Office—and the globetrotting is dizzying. Then there is a multitude of characters who jet or sail to various locations for safety or information gathering. Although each character is introduced with a physical description the names are hard to keep straight—Kaitina M'zee Zvi Syed Mossad to name a few. There are too many places too many characters and too much *telling* without enough *showing*.

Still the book is paced to move quickly. Pilarski balances the inevitable death and violence with sensitive moments: a love story for Jan and poetry—some written by his daughter—provide relief from the grim potential nuclear holocaust that looms. Readers with an affinity for places and names and a willingness to suspend credibility at times will find *Chinese Chess* entertaining even while wishing for deeper more nuanced characters who have more than a walk-on minute before the setting changes.

Ruth Douillette