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Clarion Review ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Hiding in America

Pierce Kelley
AuthorHouse (Sep 1, 2017)
Hardcover $1.00 (250pp)
978-1-5462-2024-4

Mekhaeil is on a journey of self-discovery more than on a run from terrorists, and even more than that, he's on a journey to the truth of the nature of God.

Egyptian teenager and Coptic Christian Mekhaeil Zacharias gets a full dose of western culture in Pierce Kelley's *Hiding in America*. In this third book in a planned five-book series, the reluctant young hero finds himself in New York City.

Only a couple months have passed since the events of the first and second books. In *Massacre at Sirte*, Mekhaeil was the only person spared from a terrorist event in Libya. In the second book, *Hunted*, Mekhaeil was whisked away to a farm in India. Now that his release has made him a celebrity of sorts, he's on the move again, shepherded by intelligence agents who believe ISIS will try to find and kill him. He's headed for the anonymity of one of the world's biggest cities, the Big Apple. There, fairly wide-eyed at America's ambiance, Mekhaeil quickly settles into a janitorial job that has been arranged for him.

Kelley campaigns against religious intolerance in this series; he advances his agenda in *Hiding in America*, letting the protagonist's perspective reflect the melting pot we live in. Mekhaeil has been instructed to pose as a Jewish boy named Sanford Schwartz, slightly older than his real age of sixteen. His beautiful coworker, Sophia, who is more amazing than any girl he met back home in Egypt, serves as one aspect of the melting pot: Though she's also a refugee of sorts, she's a Sunni Muslim opposed to the acts of ISIS; she is so enthralled by American culture that she's determined to stay. And Mekhaeil, of course, is very enthralled by her. Sophia serves as his guide in more ways than one, leading him to a danger that's more subtle than ISIS's threats.

Hiding in America is a breather from the immediate terror looming over Mekhaeil's head in *Hunted*. Mekhaeil is not simply running away from terrorists; rather, he is journeying toward self-discovery as he seeks the true nature of God. Overall, Kelley's series delves heavily into the religious beliefs of various cultures, but in this particular book, the truth that rises from those beliefs is more greatly emphasized and valued.

Kelley's straightforward, pleasant text makes for easy reading. The series would be particularly good for younger audiences, not only because of the style of prose, but also because of the theme of a kid discovering the world around him and trying to figure out his purpose.

At the beginning of the book, Kelley presents a key question: Would we believe differently if we were born in a different place? Mekhaeil's trek toward the truth answers that question in a satisfying and thought-provoking way.

BILLIE RAE BATES (July 11, 2018)

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