



Searching for Wallenberg

Alan Lelchuk

Mandel Vilar Press (Apr 15, 2015)

Hardcover \$26.95 (288pp)

978-1-942134-03-9

Lelchuk's metatextual approach to the mystery of Raoul Wallenberg realistically blends the line of fact and fiction.

The fate of Raoul Wallenberg has remained a mystery for seventy years, and Alan Lelchuk's novel *Searching for Wallenberg* uses a fictional investigation to explore the real question of what happened. This is a thoughtful and compelling novel that blends mystery, history, and speculative elements.

The story's protagonist is Manny Gellerman, a university professor with a longtime interest in the life and disappearance of the Swedish diplomat. During World War II, Wallenberg saved tens of thousands of Jews in Hungary by issuing protective passports and helping the captives escape, but he himself was captured by the Soviets during their counteroffensive and is presumed to have died in a Soviet prison. One of Gellerman's students is working on a thesis about Wallenberg's disappearance. She interviews a woman who claims to be his daughter and has information that might explain what happened.

Gellerman follows up on that lead and winds up in something of a detective story. He takes trips to Hungary to interview the woman and does his own fact finding in Sweden and elsewhere. Along the way, Lelchuk takes a metatextual approach in which Manny writes scenes for his own book that depict key moments in Wallenberg's life, then considers what is or isn't true about his own work and why he's writing it that way. It's a smart device that makes Wallenberg a true character in the story and helps make the various theories about his fate feel real.

Manny tries to remain skeptical throughout his investigation, even as he finds himself attracted to a young woman who might be Wallenberg's granddaughter, and as he struggles to figure out what's real. He is visited by strangers warning him to end his investigation, sources who claim to have information, and even by a vision of Wallenberg himself. The protagonist is a curmudgeon, often reflecting on how little he likes modern technology or the news today, and that helps develop him as someone who devotes his life to resolving the past. *Searching for Wallenberg* is a strong novel that seamlessly blends its real-life mystery with Manny's attempts to make sense of it, and one that will hopefully introduce more readers to an important and often overlooked hero.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Summer 2015)

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