

The Ambassador

Yehuda Avner

Matt Rees

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An intelligent, fact-paced historical novel moves up the formation of Israel by ten years and reimagines Jewish-Nazi diplomacy during WWII.

Israeli diplomat Yehuda Avner and journalist Matt Rees join forces in a gripping political thriller that reimagines Israel's creation and, by extension, the world around it. Theirs is an intelligently constructed and immersive novel that explores the far-reaching implications of diplomacy.

What if Israel had come into being in time to save Europe's Jews? This question is at the center of *The Ambassador*, whose title character, Dan Lavi, is selected by David Ben-Gurion to represent nascent Israel's interests in Germany. He arrives in 1938, just ahead of *kristallnacht* and the implementation of the Final Solution, and is compelled to work closely with figures like Adolf Eichmann to speed the emigration of Germany's Jews to the Jewish state.

The genius of Avner and Rees's book lies in how little they change: though Lavi is an imagined character, the world of *The Ambassador* hinges upon one different UN decision, one "yes" in place of a historical "no." Israel begins in 1938 instead of 1948. Jews are afforded a national advocate. A late twist involving Churchill, Roosevelt, and Ben-Gurion adds one more element of change, and the reader is reminded of the astounding human costs that follow strategic wartime decisions.

Lavi is a sympathetic and complex character, one who works diplomatically with the leaders of the Reich, despite their open disdain for his heritage and his nation. He strikes a tortured balance between duty to his country and his people and the tugs of conscience that accompany all brushes with overt evil. His wife, Anna, and a gruff Mossad agent become the perturbed "good" angels on his shoulder, constantly voicing dissent over the choices he must make—and at what expense?

A fast pace and intelligent dialogue make the novel continually consumable, even as its philosophical and aesthetic questions percolate. The addition of a brilliant German-Jewish musician, whose genius almost reaches the souls of lead Nazis, pushes questions around the character of culture to the fore. A thrilling conclusion is satisfying at a narrative level, and readers are left with much to ponder.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Fall 2015)

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