

Unassimilated

Michael Benzehabe

Shema Publishing (Aug 16, 2016)

Softcover \$12.92 (302pp)

978-1-5353-5031-0

This book is not just a fast-paced cyber-spy drama. It is also a love story that carries the theme of loyalty to one's ideals, identity, and family.

Unassimilated, by Michael Benzehabe, follows recent immigrant and expert codebreaker Zoe Mousa as she chases her dreams of safety, love, and family through a maze of violence and lies. Weighted with past guilt and a menacing cloud of mental instability, Zoe's struggle to assimilate into American culture is set against a backdrop of international espionage. Themes of identity and acceptance weave through this story of love and lies like well-placed spies.

Zoe Mousa's introduction launches the breakneck plot as she is pitted against Russian spies in an explosive scene. Zoe, a member of the FBI Cyber Division team, is adept at speaking the language of code but lacks fluency in the minutiae of American life. Her struggles range from acclimatizing to the English language to crossing the street. Although she is cut off from the sisters she loves, Zoe is not alone. Not only do her fellow immigrants offer her a hodgepodge community, but she also finds a love she thought was impossible. But is "dull as ditch water" Saul the man of her dreams? Or will his machinations lead Zoe down a deadly path?

Zoe is a sympathetic character. Through her thoughts and reactions, she offers a perspective that is often overlooked: that of the immigrant. The tender language in describing Zoe's relationship with her sisters offers an uplifting contrast to the confusion and violence that Zoe faces daily. Throughout the novel, Zoe attempts to fulfill her dream of becoming an American citizen in order to create a better life for her sisters. Her developing assimilation is illustrated in many ways, such as her growing ease with both the English language and driving her car.

The tone of the book is fast paced and multifaceted. The succinct chapters quickly and coherently jump between multiple story lines, yet keeps pace with each major character. Some tertiary characters tend to be overdeveloped and weigh down the story at times. Despite that, the breadth of unique characters serves to add additional intrigue and tension. The short chapters help to speed the plot and heighten tension as they jump around between characters and scenes. They are often elegantly connected by words or phrases that serve to add continuity and bridge the gaps of what would otherwise be a disjointed story line.

This book is not just a cyber-spy drama. It is also a love story that carries the theme of loyalty to one's ideals, identity, and family. Due to the character-driven narrative and quick pace, this book might appeal to fans of spy novels and crime thrillers.

ROSE GARRETT (September 14, 2016)

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