



★ **Unholy Land**

Lavie Tidhar

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There are some who know many faces of the divine, but their knowledge is not necessarily desirable. Lavie Tidhar's stunning science fiction adventure, *Unholy Land*, moves between incarnations of Jewish being with alacrity, hunger, and humility.

In literary circles, Lior Tirosh's name only arises here and there. His novels are of the sort that attract interested murmurs but never cacophonies of praise. Elsewhere, though, Tirosh's name comes up in hushed whispers. For those who traverse the lines between realities, Tirosh is a danger.

When his airplane touches down in Palestina—a nation built out of what was Uganda, in a world where Zionism got a head start and the Shoah never was—Tirosh is in a half haze. His outward intention is to visit his dying father. A few phone calls confirm fraying attachments back home—to his concerned publicist, who sometimes thinks he's in Tel Aviv; to his son, Isaac, whom he adores (when he remembers that Isaac exists). In bustling Ararat, where cultures converge, he is called by memories and drawn into confusion.

Palestina, the home of Tirosh's youth, demands his singular attention—particularly after his niece goes missing, a friend drinks poison meant for him, and a bus explodes. He is kidnapped, released, and tracked. Nur, who knows that this reality is one of many (and who has seen Tirosh in others), follows him; so does a state agent, Bloom, who loves the skies over Palestina and who will tell you, in his most soul-trying moments, that he's merely doing his job to protect it.

Political commentary is here, particularly in the Palestinian treatment of African refugees, seen in the world where the travelers and lawman meet. Still, it's the details between realities that captivate: prehistoric creatures on the march; the Holocaust that never was; a variation of Jerusalem scorched into lifeless black glass. People are both violent and hungry for freedom in every possible world. Atrocities are committed and excused. Or goodness rises. Take your pick—a shimmering pool in the heart of a Kenyan volcano makes doing so possible—but know that in choosing one world, you may compromise others.

Unholy Land is a wonder and a revelation—a work of science fiction capable of enthralling audiences across the multiverse.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (October 16, 2018)

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