

Secrets of the Rabbi's Mafia: A Jake Cooper Novel

Irv Segal

My Identifiers (Mar 17, 2023)

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The mystery novel Secrets of the Rabbi's Mafia is compelling in highlighting the dangers of religious extremism and unquestioning obedience to authority.

In Irv Segal's mystery novel *Secrets of the Rabbi's Mafia*, deep grudges lead to kidnapping, murder, and the revelation of long-buried secrets.

After leaving his ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, Jake is eager to fit into mainstream society. He meets Mindy, who is reassessing her own relationship with Judaism while navigating a contentious divorce and a custody battle with her abusive husband, Sender. Jake, despite his growing attraction to Mindy, tries to stay out of her personal affairs. But when Mindy is accused of murdering Sender, Jake overcomes his reservations and takes action to help her—uncovering a dangerous conspiracy and putting his own life in jeopardy in the process.

This intriguing mystery novel includes ample opportunities for tension. It deals with several dark subjects, including kidnapping and sexual abuse. Jake's conversation with a woman who lost her husband and son under suspicious circumstances results in a heartbreaking glimpse into the trauma and damage that abuse can leave behind, even years after the fact.

Further, both Jake and Mindy wrestle with staying true to their Jewish values while breaking free of the Orthodox traditions they were raised in. Indeed, the story's main revelations are about the dark side of living in closed-off religious communities. Jake is able to use his intimate knowledge of one such community to effect justice, resulting in a satisfying sense that no one but he could have solved the case. And lighter moments temper the book's progression, as when Jake joins the scramble to buy supplies for Sukkot.

Still, several of Jake's key relationships are underdeveloped, including the relationship between him and Mindy. They have few interactions not directly related to the mystery of her husband's death, even though their romance is what is said to have spurred Jake into action. The needs of Mindy's children also have propulsive results, though their personalities are not established on their own merit. Elsewhere, a minor character perpetuates the ableist assumption that wheelchair users who can walk are faking their disability, leading to discomfort; other characters' actions are underexplained, as with a killer who has intimate knowledge of their victim but does not realize a crucial detail about them.

Set in the 1990s, *Secrets of the Rabbi's Mafia* is a mystery novel that highlights the dangers of religious extremism and unquestioning obedience to authority.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (April 24, 2023)

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