



The Final Solution: A Story of Detection

By Michael Chabon



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In the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, prose magician Michael Chabon conjured up the golden age of comic books -- intertwining history, legend, and storytelling verve. In *The Final Solution*, he has condensed his boundless vision to craft a short, suspenseful tale of compassion and wit that reimagines the classic nineteenth-century detective story.

In deep retirement in the English country-side, an eighty-nine-year-old man, vaguely recollected by locals as a once-famous detective, is more concerned with his beekeeping than with his fellow man. Into his life wanders Linus Steinman, nine years old and mute, who has escaped from Nazi Germany with his sole companion: an African gray parrot. What is the meaning of the mysterious strings of German numbers the bird spews out -- a top-secret SS code? The keys to a series of Swiss bank accounts perhaps? Or something more sinister? Is the solution to this last case -- the real explanation of the mysterious boy and his parrot -- beyond even the reach of the once-famed sleuth?

Subtle revelations lead the reader to a wrenching resolution. This brilliant homage, which won the 2004 Aga Khan Prize for fiction, is the work of a master storyteller at the height of his powers.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Initially published in the *Paris Review* in 2003, Chabon's first significant adult fiction since his Pulitzer-winning *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000) continues his sophisticated, if here somewhat skewed, appropriation of pop artifacts—in this case one of the greatest pop artifacts of all, Sherlock Holmes. As fans of the great detective know, after retirement Holmes moved from London to Sussex, where he spent his days keeping bees. Chabon's story takes place during WWII, when Holmes is 89 and intent on bee-keeping only—until a mysterious boy wanders into town. The boy is remarkable for two reasons: he's clearly intelligent but is mute, and he keeps a parrot that mouths, among other utterances, numbers in German. When the parrot is stolen, local cops turn to Holmes, and he's intrigued enough to dust off his magnifying glass and go to work. The writing here is taut and polished, and Chabon's characters and depictions of English country life are spot on. It's notable, though, that Chabon refers to Holmes never by name but persistently as "the old man"—notable because it's difficult to discern a reason other than self-conscious artistry not to name Holmes; the scenes in the novel that grip the strongest are those that feature Holmes, and more credit is due to Conan Doyle than to Chabon for that. Neither a proper mystery nor particularly fine literature, this haunting novella, for all its strengths, lies uneasily between the two and will fully please few fans of each.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Roused out of retirement, a former detective, now a beekeeper, is identified only as "the old man." The story opens in the summer of 1944 when he sees a boy with a parrot on his shoulder walking along the train tracks. The boy is Linus Steinman, a refugee from Nazi Germany who lives with Mr. and Mrs. Panicker and their grown son in their boardinghouse. Though Linus doesn't speak, his parrot, Bruno, recites strings of numbers in German, as well as bits of poetry and snatches of songs. When a boarder is murdered and Bruno is kidnapped, the local police try to engage the beekeeper in helping them solve the crimes. He agrees to help, but only to find the bird. Thus begins his last case, his "final solution." The double meaning of the title gives subtle layers to the story and reveals the man's deep compassion for Linus. Chabon's writing can be both startlingly clear or laced with intricacies and detours. One chapter is told from the point of view of the parrot. Readers will enjoy the realistic characters and lush descriptions, and, best of all, trying to figure out the mysteries. Even the identity of "the old man" is a mystery until they figure out the clues for themselves—the tweed suit, the pipe, the beekeeping, and the sharp mind that can only belong to one famous sleuth.—*Susanne Bardelson, Kitsap Regional Library, WA*

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

From his editorship of an issue of *McSweeney's* to his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon has mined genre fiction and pop culture in pursuit of literary gold. His newest novella finds him polishing up the detective story as an unnamed Sherlock Holmes comes out of beekeeping retirement to work the case. Reviewers applaud the fresh approach Chabon takes with Holmes' character, eschewing analytic genius for emotional complexity. Critics labeled the title's reference to the Holocaust distasteful, but to be fair, it also ties to *The Final Problem*, the story in which Sherlock Holmes meets his apparent demise. The plot appears compelling enough, but Chabon's literary prose pushes critics to a tipping point; some assert there's more than just a gripping yarn at hand, while others question the combination of detectives, geopolitics, and ten-dollar words.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Louis Venable:

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Curtis Locke:

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Rosalind Bowlin:

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Adam Gutierrez:

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