

"Papernick's provocative debut novel (after two story collections) explores the motives of religious extremism and how it can attract those in search of identity. When Judge Walter Stone dies in his Brooklyn apartment, his listless son Matthew is forced to confront his checkered legacy—Walter left the bench in disgrace after "jurymandering" a trial in favor of an Israeli man who bashed a Palestinian-born shopkeeper to death; his grandfather Julius was a reputed gangster in the time of Meyer Lansky; and his mother left when Matthew was a child. Feeling adrift, Matthew loses himself inside his father's stacks of books, searching for a connection the two never shared when Walter was alive. His loyalties are soon tested when his father's business partner asks Matthew to release funds earmarked for a museum in his father's name—a museum that the FBI believes will be a front for a terrorist operation in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Drawn into a community of believers with a singular focus, Matthew claims his Jewish heritage for the first time, falling in love in the process. He makes a choice that will set him on the true path and finally gain his late father's acceptance.—

VERDICT This intelligent and timely thriller is told through a Jewish prism, but Papernick's persuasive insights into the nature of fanaticism and its destructive consequences could be applied to any ideology. Highly recommended.—Michael Pucci, South Orange P.L., NJ

