

The Plot Against America by Philip Roth.  
Jonathan Cape 2004.

In his latest novel Philip Roth creates a nightmare scenario in which America elects, in its 1940 Presidential election, not the two time President Franklin D Roosevelt but rather the aviation hero Charles A. Lindbergh. Unlike his predecessor Lindbergh is not just an isolationist but a Nazi sympathiser on close personal terms with leading members of the Nazi regime.

The Plot Against America portrays a very different history from the one we know, but it is equally compelling and chilling. Roth's main protagonists are his own family and their neighbours in Newark, and the story details the impact upon them as individuals and as a group of the election of Lindbergh and the policies that he pursues.

Roth's alter ego narrates the story, and the pictures of his parents, his brother Sandy and cousin Alvin, and his flamboyant aunt Evelyn are vivid, plausible and engaging in differing degrees. The terror engendered by growing insecurity and inherent anti-Semitism seen through Philip's eyes is all the more terrible for the fact that it completely countermands the picture we have of America as a country where Jews have always been free from persecution.

This is certainly one of Roth's best books yet and holds the reader in an iron grip from the first to the last page.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh