

## *Interior Chinatown*, Charles Yu

*Interior Chinatown*, Charles Yu (2020, Pantheon Book(Penguin Random House))

It's a great pity about this novel, because until approximately half way through it well justifies its National Book Award. But at that point Yu loses confidence in us, his readers, and has his characters give us page after page of speeches laying out the discrimination suffered by Chinese immigrants and their American children that he's already presented so forcefully in the first part of the book.

The premise is that Americans in general see Chinese Americans only as nameless alien stereotypes. The narrator lives in a decaying building of tiny apartments rented to Chinese Americans, most of whom work in the restaurant on the ground floor and serve as extras in a TV detective series being filmed in the building's courtyard. The real lives of the characters are presented through TV scripts, their hopes centered on getting a TV bit-part or a kung-fu role. The slowly-revealed story of the narrator's educated parents doomed to this desperate life is moving, and the TV detectives are well-parodied. But then, sadly, we find ourselves in a stuffy courtroom for what seems like ages on end.