



The Smoke

Tony Broadbent

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It's 1947, and London, having toughed out the War, is being half-crippled by the Peace. It's the coldest winter in living memory, everything from bread to soap to underwear is rationed, and even beer, by official order, is watered down. No wonder the Black Market is thriving. But Jethro doesn't bother complaining much. As a jewel thief, he needs all his wits about him when engaged in redistributing the wealth of the upper classes. And the demands on Jethro's wits only increase when his thieving skills attract some unwelcome interest, first from London's thuggish crime-lords and then from His Majesty's Secret Service, which wants him to pull a little job on the Soviet Embassy. You wouldn't believe what an honest Cockney cat burglar has to do to survive sometimes.

The Smoke Details

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From Reader Review The Smoke for online ebook

Robert Scott says

Finished 11/16/2012. I loved this book. It has highs and lows and the writing is not sophisticated, but it isn't intended to be since the hero (?) Jethro is a Cockney jewel thief. He is a highly thought of "creeper" and is drafted by a high brow thug, the thug's boss, another crime lord and MI5. He has befriended a guitar player and singer while working at the Palladium and Seth twice delivers him from sure death. +

Jonathan Greeley says

Gripping tale set in post-WWII London, mixing the criminal underworld with international espionage. Hard to put down!

Laurie says

My only regret is that these are set too late to introduce Mary Russell to Tony's cat burglar, Jethro.

Paul Collis says

An evocative setting and a charismatic protagonist.

As a Londoner who grew up watching the rebuilding of the city, and playing cops and robbers in its rubble-strewn bomb sites, I found the author's depiction of post-World War II London to be accurate and evocative. If anything had fifty shades of grey it was that drab, foggy, smoky city at that time.

Rationing was still in place years after the war ended, and the black market was supplied by spivs and crooks — simpler, less violent villains than today — trying to outwit coppers who were always unarmed.

The protagonist, a 'cat-burglar' named Jethro, justifies his thieving by robbing only the wealthy and sharing his loot with those less fortunate — including, of course, himself. Jethro is a Cockney, ostensibly someone who is born within the sound of the bells of the church at Bow in the East End. As such, he uses a lot of cockney slang, which was devised so that outsiders (initially the police) wouldn't understand what was being said. Sometimes the use of this patter is extensive, and the author has supplied a glossary which will no doubt be welcomed by many.

Without giving the game away, this book's caper has Jethro unwillingly seconded into the Government's clandestine efforts to stop a foreign plot against the country. I found the story-telling to be solid and entertaining.

And I look forward to reading the sequels. If they live up to their promise I think Mr Broadbent has a franchise on his hands.

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Jethro, cat burglar

SETTING: 1947 London

SERIES: #1 of 3

RATING: 3.25

WHY: Jethro is a master cat burglar who has never been caught by the authorities. He has only one fence, "Buggy Billy" aka Ray Karmin. He's just had a successful "creep" (burglary) at the Embassy. The cops have taken in Ray and now negotiate with Jethro to rob the Embassy again, mostly to spirit away a young woman. It seems like he's in everyone's crosshairs--crime lord Darby Messima wants to use his skills; two other villains have the same in mind. One of his competitors pulls him off the street and tortures him; that scene and his attempted rescue are quite violently drawn. I prefer to see Jethro in action as a cat burglar and find those bits fascinating. When politics comes into the narrative, it slows the action and isn't all that interesting.

Dennis Fischman says

You will enjoy this book if you find yourself fascinated by postwar London, Cockney slang, and the technical aspects of being a cat burglar (or "creeper," as our hero Jethro would say). You will find it off putting if uncritical Cold War attitudes, stereotypical villains and femmes fatales , and descriptions of torture are not your cup of tea. I couldn't put it down, but I will not pick up the next in the series.

Andrea says

Jethro is a cat burglar and jewel thief in 1947 postwar England. He has told everyone he has gone straight and is now working as a stagehand in London's many theaters and music halls. But in reality he is still committing capers against the wealthy in Mayfair, Knightsbridge and Belgravia. The top villains in London don't believe he has gone straight and neither does Messima the local crime boss. And each at one time or another want him to do a little job for him. He finds himself in a tight corner after he burglars the embassy of a Soviet satellite country taking the Ambassador's wife's and daughter's jewels. For he then finds himself under the scrutiny of MI5 when even they ask him to burgle for him and if he doesn't things could go very badly for himself, his friends and family. What ensues is a fast paced game of cat and mouse with gangsters, MI5 and secret agents.

What we have here is a terrifically atmospheric caper novel which showcases with depictive descriptions, post-war London. Jethro is a down to earth, intelligent, wise cracking, caring and capable cat burglar who is brought to life with Tony Broadbent's skillful writing. And a wonderful supporting cast of characters makes for some terrific reading. The smoke is an enjoyable caper novel which in some spots moved a little slowly but the terrific post-war London details and the loveable character of Jethro more than made up for any slowdown in the plot.

Lance Charnes says

The Smoke, Tony Broadbent's maiden effort, can boast an uncommon setting – postwar Austerity Britain – and an equally unusual lead character. Unfortunately, it doesn't pay off as well as I'd hoped.

Jethro isn't yet another DCI-with-a-troubled-life; he's a cat burglar. He thinks he has all the fiddles sussed in 1947 London and is doing well for himself. Then he decides to burgle the Soviet Embassy and everything comes apart in a storm of spies, MI5 agents and rival bands of gangsters, all of whom want a piece of him (sometimes literally).

An educated Cockney who spent WWII having merchant ships sunk from under him, Jethro's voice is generally breezy and he's an easy character to get along with. Whether he's working his night job or his cover job (as a stagehand), he gives us enough detail to see what he's doing but not so much that we're reading a how-to manual. The settings are sketched just enough to build our own picture of the scene, although some familiarity with London and postwar British society wouldn't go amiss here. The black fogs, queues, lingering damage from the Blitz and the daily grind of rationing all make their appearances.

I really wanted to like this book more than I did. I've enjoyed Alan Furst's and Philip Kerr's forays into interwar and immediate postwar Europe, watched every episode of *Foyle's War* and *The Hour*, and have been waiting for a British crime novel set in just this timeframe that doesn't involve manor houses. So what went wrong here?

For one thing, the story takes its own time, which is code for "deliberate," which is code for "slow." Jethro has a lot of downtime between scrapes with the Old Bill or one mob or another; sometimes he ruminates on the state of things, sometimes he just fiddles about. We get more of Jethro's philosophy than we need under the circumstances. His new friend Seth hangs about for no apparent reason other than he's convenient to have on hand. Jethro goes all moony over a young lady he meets on business in a truly over-the-top way that doesn't seem grounded in his character as presented up to that point. But the deus ex machina ending – straight out of a Bulldog Drummond novel – knocks a full star off my rating. Its resolution comes from out of the blue, another example of a development that's less "what a great twist!" than "WTF??"

The Smoke, suitably tightened up and with some of the more troublesome plot issues fixed, has all the makings of a *Masterpiece Mystery* two-parter. If that sounds like a good time to you, go for it – just don't expect to read it quickly.

Rebecca Huston says

A very good mystery/thriller set in post-WWII London, with an unusual protagonist -- a cat burglar -- and very well written with an eye to detail. It's not for the squeamish, however, but if you want a very smart mystery that doesn't talk down to the reader, or relies on cliches, this is one you'll enjoy. There is a sequel, *Spectres in the Smoke* as well.

To read the more complete review, please go here:
http://www.epinions.com/content_40915...

Stephen Russell says

A book from Seattle Mysteries. I like this publisher.

Jeremy Lyon says

An entertaining mystery/caper/crime novel that takes place in a rarely visited setting: London immediately after WWII. A tad heavy-handed, occasionally predictable, but it kept me turning the pages. Jethro, the narrator and main character, is a cat thief that gets unintentionally involved in the emerging espionage war between the West and the Soviets. Don't read it for the plot: read it for Jethro's smart ass commentary and introduction to the London criminal underground of the late 1940s.

Ian says

Surname-less cat burglar Jethro gets in over his head by swiping the wrong person's stuff in the course of a "creep" at an unspecified Eastern European embassy and soon finds himself at odds with both Eastern Bloc and British intelligence, a rival cat burglar, and various factions of postwar London's criminal underworld. While the plot is hardly original and the ending is weak the book really shines in its depiction of its setting: a London that's still adjusting to a peacetime scarcely less austere and depressing than the war that preceded it. And Jethro, through whose eyes we see it, is an able guide to "the Smoke": a charismatic Cockney antihero whom I could easily see being played onscreen by Michael Caine in his younger days. This novel is its author's first and it appears that he has at least two sequels planned, so I imagine any weaknesses of this book may be ironed out in the future.

Joyce Lagow says

Jethro is a self-respecting Cockney cat burglar in post-World War II London, minding his own business as he goes about "redistributing the wealth"--robbing the rich to give to the poor, the latter comprising himself, his family and a few friends. After careful planning, Jethro successfully burgles the Embassy of an unnamed foreign power--and in doing so, inadvertently finds himself a reluctant participant in MI5's efforts to thwart Soviet espionage and the rise of Communism in England.[return][return]The opening is hair-raising suspense that also gives the reader an excellent introduction to the science of being a successful cat burglar.

[return][return]The writing style definitely evokes the era. England was suffering under an austerity program where rationing was just as severe as during the war and in some cases more so; as a result, the black market economy thrived. It was also a much more innocent era, in that the world could be viewed successfully as black-and-white, a Good Guys vs the Bad Guys attitude that would be laughable if used to describe today's cynical world. Broadbent, through his characterizations, makes it very believable.[return][return]Since Jethro is the narrator, his language is sprinkled with a fair amount of Cockney slanging rhyme, as well as underworld slang. Broadbent provides a glossary of the more obscure terms, which is both helpful and fun.[return][return]A good look at the lower layers of post World War II London, as ordinary people struggle to get on with lives that have been affected by losses from the war.[return][return]Well written, good

plotting, good characterization and suspenseful throughout. Highly recommended.

Heather says

3.5 stars. In November, my friend and I stumbled across a mystery book store in Seattle. We decided that we needed to (somewhat) randomly select a book to buy. I ended up buying "Shadows in the Smoke," not realizing it was the third book in a series. I started to read it and while I probably could have read it as a stand alone novel, I decided to start at the beginning.

"The Smoke," takes place in London after the end of WWII in a time when food, services and goods are still being rationed. The main character, Jethro, or Jeffro as he is often called by friends, family and other acquaintances, makes his living as a cat burglar/jewel thief.

The book starts with Jethro preparing to pull off a heist at the Embassy. A lot of detail went into explaining his life as a "creeper" and the preparations that went into this heist. I found this part fascinating. When the heist hit a bit of a snag, I found myself wanting to look ahead to see if/how he got out of it! So from that respect, I was sucked in early on.

It turns out there was a lot more going on in the Embassy than just some high profile guests with fancy jewels staying there, and Jethro ends up stealing a couple of black books that bring him and his dear friend and fence, Ray, to the attention of MI5, who then recruit Jethro to do the one thing he as a burglar never does: hit the same place twice.

When not thieving, to look like an honest citizen, Jethro also works as a stagehand at the local theaters, never staying at one for too long before moving on to the next. It's because of this that partway through the book, Jethro started to compare all the characters to actors in plays and movies and all that was going on around him to acts in a play. Being that I'm not well versed in British actors of the 1930's and 1940's these comparisons were lost on me so that did take away from the book.

Despite his profession, Jethro is actually a very likeable main character. He wasn't necessarily complex and certainly didn't struggle with the morality of his actions (much-he didn't steal things that he deemed irreplaceable or of high emotional value like wedding and engagement rings) and he tried to do right by those he most cared about, particularly his sister and her husband.

I did feel this book had too many secondary characters and they were hard to keep track of. I've always thought of London as a beautiful place I'd love to visit someday so I was intrigued by the descriptions of it as a dirty, rundown place everyone can't wait to leave. "The Smoke" is actually London itself. Even though this was an interesting story that I did enjoy, I also found my mind wandering a lot and felt it took forever to read. However, I do look forward to reading the second and third books to see what scrapes Jethro manages to get into-and out of.

Rick Skwiot says

Tony Broadbent's admirable caper novel "The Smoke" convincingly steeps us in the post-war London underworld, with roguish and glib cat burglar Jethro as our guide and narrator. While the episodic plot and

coincidences make the book stagger a bit as it travels through London's streets, markets, pubs and back alleys, Jethro's language, wit, aplomb and criminal ethics carry the day. An accomplished recreation of a drab yet beguiling London and a buoyant working class milieu.
