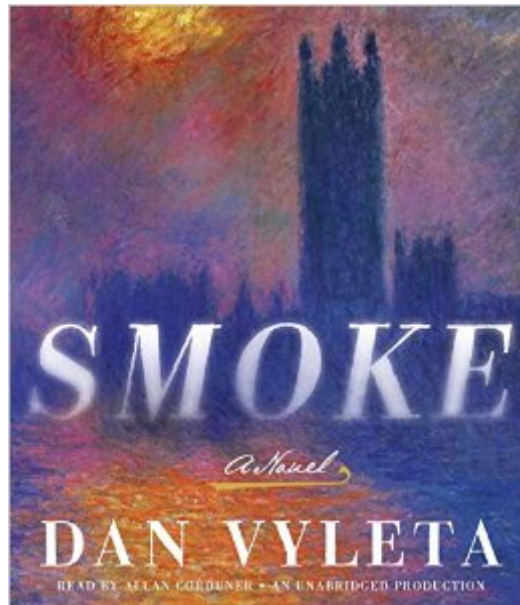


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Smoke: A Novel



Synopsis

Readers of the Harry Potter series and Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell are sure to be mesmerized by Dan Vylet's™s thrilling blend of historical fiction and fantasy, as three young friends scratch the surface of the grown-up world to discover startling wonders—and dangerous secrets. "Dan Vylet writes with intricacy and imagination and skillful pacing; never once would I have considered putting his book down." In the manner of both a Dickens novel and the best young adult adventure stories (the Harry Potter series among them). . .his ending, which I wouldn't dare reveal here, is a real firecracker." Jennifer Senior, *The New York Times* "Welcome to a Victorian England unlike any other you have experienced before. Here, wicked thoughts (both harmless and hate-filled) appear in the air as telltale wisps of Smoke. Young Thomas Argyle, a son of aristocracy, has been sent to an elite boarding school. Here he will be purged of Wickedness, for the wealthy do not Smoke. When he resists a sadistic headboy's temptations to Smoke, a much larger struggle beyond the school walls is revealed. Shortly thereafter, on a trip to London, Thomas and his best friend witness events that make them begin to question everything they have been taught about Smoke. And thus the adventure begins... You will travel by coach to a grand estate where secrets lurk in attic rooms and hidden laboratories; where young love blossoms; and where a tumultuous relationship between a mother and her children is the crucible in which powerful passions are kindled, and dangerous deeds must be snuffed out in a desperate race against time. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars See all reviews (88 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Although I've never been a fan of sword and sorcery fantasy fiction, I do enjoy the sub-genre of urban fantasy – stories that take place on a recognizable Earth but with fantastical elements. Recent favorites include Lev Grossman's amazing Magicians trilogy and Natasha Pulley's Victorian-era fantasia, The Watchmaker of Filigree Street. While Dan Vyleta's Smoke is darker (and more edge-of-your-seat suspenseful) than those books, I'd say it definitely falls under the same umbrella. It takes place in an alternative reality England during the early part of the Twentieth Century. The smoke of the title is a substance emitted by the human body when experiencing heightened emotions, like lust or rage. Even a surfeit of joy can cause one to smoke. And it's believed to be an outward manifestation of sin. Those born rich and privileged spend their formative years learning to control it while the poor and working class live in overcrowded London, under a literal smog of their own smoke and soot. A very literal version of Edward George Bulwer-Lytton's "great unwashed." Furthermore, breathing in the smoke of others incites destructive emotions as well, so the underclass are doomed to an inescapable cycle of rage, lust and a kind of criminal madness. The central theme is not only quite obvious, but timely, in this age when the world's wealthiest 1% controls the fate of the rest of us. But, as universal as it is, it's also a specifically English story, particularly in its indictment of the English class system with its stiff upper lip snobbery and the chilling legacy of colonialism. The opening chapters take place in an elite boy's school where the scions of the country's great families are primed to assume their roles as England's next generation of leaders.

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