



The Creeping Shadow

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This is the fourth title in Jonathan Stroud's fabulous series about those intrepid ghost-hunters, **Lockwood & Co.** As before, honest entertainment is the aim here, unburdened by any self-improving agenda. Instead, young Lucy Carlyle, who tells the story, continues to wrestle with her love for Lockwood himself, the dashing young founder of the firm. These feelings while never exactly unrequited provide her with occasional heart-ache in between moments of hectic action often against what seem like impossibly long odds as legions of malevolent ghosts still have to be neutralised.

Her story is set in a version of more or less contemporary London under siege from a continuing outbreak of would-be fatal spirits, with a curfew bell ringing every night warning honest citizens to go home and stay safe. Kate Adams's creepy pencil chapter headings render once innocent places like the old Vauxhall Tube station darkly sinister. There is less humour than before in the text, although Lucy's strange companion, a talking skull carried around in her rucksack, is as wickedly chirpy as ever. But Lucy just about has the upper hand elsewhere, given that in this series only the young have the skills to detect the various ghosts all around them.

This is not a Young Adult novel, though many readers in this category would surely enjoy its nostalgic return to a time when pre-adolescents were still offered a fairly cut-down version of adult life rather than anything like the full Monty. Lucy may feel love for Lockwood, but thoughts or even the existence of sex never get a mention. When dining before a hard night's ghost-hunting, the team drink lemonade by way of preparation. While there are plenty of genuine thrills there is also never any doubt that this little band of heroes will see off the villains in their way, both living and supernatural. The story ends happily with an Enid Blyton-type celebratory meal. But in the final novel in this series, to be published next year, Stroud will have to deal with Lucy's conviction, following a disturbing vision, that she will one day be responsible for Lockwood's demise. Will the prevailing good humour of all these stories finally come to an end? We will see. But for the moment while there are occasional moments of gruesome horror, overall the abiding atmosphere in this beautifully written story is one of enduring positivity as well as continual excitement as Lucy and her friends stay brave heroes in a world where darkness constantly threatens but never quite prevails.

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