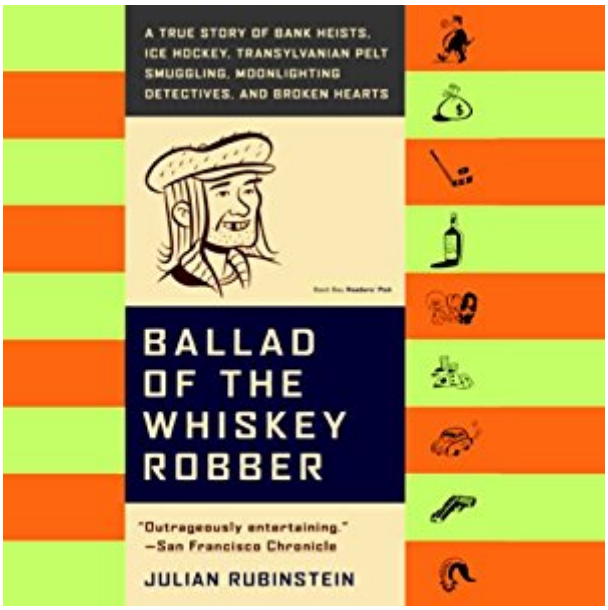
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Ballad Of The Whiskey Robber



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Synopsis

Attila Ambrus was a gentleman thief, a sort of Cary Grant — if only Grant came from Transylvania, was a terrible professional hockey goalkeeper, and preferred women in leopard-skin hot pants. During the 1990s, while playing for the biggest hockey team in Budapest, Ambrus took up bank robbery to make ends meet. His opponents: a police chief who learned how to be a detective via dubbed episodes of Columbo; a deputy so dense he was known only by his Hungarian nickname, Mound of Asshead; and a forensics expert-cum-ballet teacher who wore a top hat and tails on the job. Part Pink Panther, part The Unbearable Lightness of Being, part Slap Shot, this uproariously funny, award-winning book tells the remarkable story of a crime spree that galvanized a forlorn nation and made a nobody into a somebody — a tale so outrageous that it could only be true. --WINNER, Borders 2004 "Original Voices" Non-fiction Book of the Year. --FINALIST, 2005 Edgar Award, Best Fact Crime. --A New York Times "Editors' Choice" --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

I have read this book in 1 day. I grew up in the same area as Attila, was born about 50 KM from his home town of Csikszereda. One thing Julian Rubenstein did so perfectly, that in my humble opinion makes this book a must read for everyone, is he captured the essence of what it means to be Szekely. I am not sure if he meant to do that, but by describing Attila and the way he makes his way in the world is the same faith 650,000 other Szekelys see the world with as well. Its not something

that can be described. Its something that has to be lived - yet Julian was able to describe it. I'm not a writer, as he is, so I won't attempt to, just go read the book. I am not saying what Attila did was right - but at least he always knew the difference between robbing a bank or hurting a person and he never crossed the line. Well... he was also really stupid for what he did because he lost 10+ years of his life in prison, but desperation will do a lot to a man - especially a Szekely who is born with enough pride to fill five other people.But regardless of the subject matter, absolute kudos to Julian for his writing. I hope he writes another book, I would love to read it, he is a terrific storyteller. This is shown in his dedication to the research he did about the subject matter. Finally, someone has not only managed to write a book about Transylvania and specifically about the Szekelyfold that doesn't mention the vampire folklore, but actually he took the time to understand the region and portray us in a positive light instead of one we usually are portrayed in. Backwoods, homeless, useless peasants who don't know how to tie their shoes right. Finally, someone wrote a book in which the Szekelys are portrayed as human beings. That alone makes this, IMHO, a masterpiece. But I could be just a tad biased.

This story is a hilarious comedic romp and adventure. It is especially amazing because the "Whiskey Robber" was a real person and it is a true story! There are some sad aspects in the sense that the reader sees the intimate struggles of people with hardly any money, scarce resources, and a corrupt and inept government and police. But overall the tone of the story is light, humorous, and very entertaining. The whiskey robber himself is brilliant, almost admirable, but foolish at times, too, and the police are comically misled repeatedly. The picture on the cover with the long hair and the missing tooth must be one of the robber's disguises; in his photos he does not look remotely like that. In fact, in reality he is handsome and quite the ladies' man. This story would make an excellent movie - plenty of action, close calls, police chases, and love affairs.

The only negative was the names (being foreign to American ears) at times were hard to keep straight,but the story itself was so interesting you could not put it down.Did not know the story before starting the book it hooked me right away. The hockey angle is what interested me first but robberies and Attilla's style and story was fascinating. You find yourself rooting for "the bad guys" after only a few pages.The background material and the cultural aspects of post Communists Budapest was fascinating too.I recommended it for the story, the culture of the time and of course the hockey. He may have been the worst goalie ever!! LOL

I would have never read this book had my book club not selected it but I loved, loved this true story...so well researched and written. very entertaining...a very male dominated story but all the ladies who read the book were quite endeared by the Whiskey Robber, his life story and exploits. Such an interesting character and story. I was particularly intrigued because it mainly takes place in Budapest and I was raised ethnically Hungarian. A bit of history woven in very well, Communism, post-Communism, the introduction of Capitalism. It's interesting how you begin to cheer Attila Ambrus on. Julian Rubenstein is a masterful writer. Kozenem szepen (thank you very much).

This is an entertaining true story. For me the best aspect is the opportunity to learn about the culture (post Communist Hungary) in which the story takes place. It is like historical fiction in that you learn while being entertained. It also really raised some moral questions worth pondering. Such as, is theft that takes place in a corrupt culture a revolutionary act? It's not Les Miserables, by any means, but I think it's a worthwhile read.I should add that although it is a translation, the prose rises above the bland, soul-less tripe that comprises most current fiction.

I read this book in 2010 while living as an expat in Budapest. Another American put it in my hands and told me: You gotta read this book! Seriously funny, good, and TRUE stuff. Very well written by an American journalist. Gives you a good idea of the last days of communism and first days of democracy in the Eastern bloc, at least in Romania and Hungary. Communism, incidentally, was not practiced the same in all the Eastern bloc countries. Romania was far more oppressive than Hungary, which is why this poor guy--of Hungarian descent and stuck in Romania--hides under the carriage of a train to escape to Hungary. Once in Budapest he becomes a hockey player and then a bank robber. You're not supposed to sympathize with a thief, but in this case you can't help it. He eventually does get caught. I read that he's making pottery in prison now and will be released in 2016. Hollywood should make a movie about this book. Great story! Read it! (Oh, btw, I loved the book so much, I had to buy my own copy.)UPDATE: I just found out that the robber was released in January 2012.

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