

The Lockpicker

Leonard Chang

Black Heron Press (May 18, 2017)

Softcover \$16.95 (365pp)

978-1-936364-18-3

Intricate details make this heist-centered crime story literary and memorable.

Leonard Chang's novel *The Lockpicker* is a bit of a hybrid—a pulp crime novel that also becomes a story about the effects of a violent upbringing on an adult's choices. Entertaining and with a well-paced literary style, this simple crime story becomes something more memorable.

Jake Ahn is a professional jewel thief who has to flee his home in Seattle after a robbery goes bad. His partner tries to burn him, and he leaves that new partner for dead in a dumpster. Without anywhere else to go, Jake pays a surprise visit to his brother Eugene in San Francisco. Eugene has his own problems—a work life that's falling apart, serious financial woes, and a marriage in peril.

While staying at Eugene's apartment, Jake has to deal with selling the stolen jewels he brought with him, while using his lock-picking skills to plan additional heists. At the same time, he develops complicated feelings for his attractive sister-in-law and has to deal with how the physical abuse he and his brother suffered as children shaped their relationship. Unbeknownst to him, he's also the target of his former partner, who survived and is bent on getting revenge against Jake—if he can find him—and is brutally interrogating possible contacts along the way.

The story uses its time line well, interspersing Jake's stay in San Francisco with scenes from the house robbery that got him into that predicament, the parallel story of his former partner's process to track him down, and flashbacks to scenes from Jake and Eugene's childhood. All these plot points work up to a seemingly inevitable conclusion, but there are enough interesting details and snappy dialogue along the way to make the journey there work.

The book uses a great deal of detail in describing how Jake picks locks, how he learns to crack safes, and how he tries to figure out which jewelers and pawn shops might be willing to purchase clearly stolen merchandise. That attention to detail pays off, and helps make *The Lockpicker* a solid genre novel.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May/June 2017)

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