



Incendium

A.D. Swanston

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Summer, 1572 and England is vulnerable. Fear of plague and insurrection taint the air, and heresy, fanaticism and religious unrest seethe beneath the surface of society. Rumour and mistrust lead to imprisonment, torture and sometimes murder. To the young lawyer Christopher Radcliff and his patron and employer, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the prospects for peace are grave - and as Leicester's chief intelligencer, he is charged with investigating both the rumours of rebellion at home and invasion from abroad.

But Radcliff's own life is far from orderly. His relationship with the widow Katherine Allingham is somewhat turbulent and the cut-throat world of court politics leaves no room for indiscretions.

That the queen's own cousin, the Duke of Norfolk, is found guilty of treason, it is a sign of just how deep the dissent goes. Jesuit priests have been sent to England in order to foment revolt but the threat of a Catholic uprising comes not just from within. Across the channel, France is caught up in a frenzy of brutal religious persecution and England's other enemy of old, Spain, is making preparations to invade. England is a powder-keg, just waiting for a spark to ignite it - and then Christopher Radcliff hears word of a plot that could provide that spark. The word is 'incendium' - but what does it mean and who lies behind it? Suddenly Christopher Radcliff is caught up in a race against time...

Incendium Details

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Author : A.D. Swanston

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From Reader Review Incendium for online ebook

AdiTurbo says

Terrible. I was so looking forward to reading it, and it disappointed me to no end. The historical background is sound, but nothing is happening. I'm 10%, and they're still at the office the main character entered on the first page. There is telling, and telling and telling, no kind of action to help us understand who these people are, and what their personalities are like. I hoped for more than this - some emotion, some suspense, maybe some less known historical details, but none of those were there. Quitting out of deep boredom.

Adina says

3.5* rounded up because I want to see more from this series.

Incendium is a historical spy fiction set during the reign of Elisabeth I. Christopher Radcliff, a former law professor is employed by Earl of Leicester, a close adviser to the Queen, as chief intelligencer. His job is to keep the Earl informed regarding potentials plots against the Crown. Dr. Radcliff engages the help of a series of interesting agents who listen around and report if they hear any interesting whispers.

The novel begins with the brutal murder of one of the lawyer's agents and his wife. In the same time, Dr. Radcliff is sent to France by the Earl in order to receive an important message from the English ambassador in Paris, just in time to assist to one of the most horrible mass murders in History, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew Day. The two events slowly, slowly come together and a new plot to kill the Queen has to be discovered and crushed.

The historical information was well presented and engaging, I could immediately see that the author is a historian who knows this period well. I was encouraged by what I read to study more about the historical characters and events. Even though the outcome of the plot is obvious if you know a bit of history, the story still managed to keep me interested and tension was well built.

I have two minor complains. At the beginning I found that it was difficult to keep my attention on what I was reading. I don't know if it was my fault or the writing, but the situation resolved itself shortly. Secondly, the characters could have been better drawn and more interesting. My favorite was the prostitute spy because she was funny, spiritual and smart. The others did not differentiate so well. The Earl was extremely irritating as all the meetings between him and Christopher were more or less about the same thing: Him requesting and threatening his protegee to find a solution fast or else. After hearing the same conversation over and over and over again I was bored and annoyed with the author for making the character so one-dimensional. There is also a love story which felt a bit flat and I would have like to see more passion between the 2.

All in all, an interesting and well written historical mystery novel, in the style of C.J. Sansom. Thanks to Netgalley and Random House UK, Transworld Publishers for providing me with a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Rekha O'Sullivan says

Christopher Radcliffe serves the Earl of Leicester in this Elizabethan historical mystery. Queen Elizabeth has her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, locked up in the Tower and enemies from France and Spain are threatening her Protestant people. With religious tensions reaching their height, friends of Radcliffe's disappear, and then he is summoned by the Earl of Leicester to investigate a possible plot against the Queen.

Radcliffe has his share of personal issues with his lady love refusing to marry him and more than a passing attraction to one of his intelligencers, a Cheapside whore. But the most troubling relationship is his connection to the Earl and a smiling usurper intent on taking his place at the right hand of one of the most powerful men in England.

This is a sensational read. It's fast-paced and surprising, with engaging characters and descriptions that put you right in the middle of a potently drawn Elizabethan London. It's rich and engrossing and I am looking forward to reading more about Christopher Radcliffe's adventures.

Kate says

Such a fantastic start to A.D. Swanston's new series! Incendium focuses on the very real danger Elizabeth I faced personally in the wake of France's St Bartholomew's Eve massacre. A brilliant historical thriller.

Lindsey Roberts says

Original Review Here

As soon as I saw Incendium by A.D. Swanston, I wanted it! The cover is beautiful! Never mind `don't-judge-a-book-by-its-cover` – I wanted this book!

It did not let me down.

I haven't read anything set in this era since I was a child and reading The Lady Grace Mysteries. It was refreshing to immerse myself in a different time and Swanston made this time accessible – I picked up on the way of life pretty much straight away!

The plot involves mystery, murder and a man trying to figure it out before it is too late. It is not the most action-packed or mysterious (I figured out who it was about a hundred pages before the character!).

What this book is, however, is steady. It gripped my attention the entire way through and remained a solid read throughout. It didn't matter that I knew who it was – they still had to catch him! The pacing never slipped, the characters were solid and the plot enjoyable from start to finish. Never underestimate a steady book – they seem to be rare these days!

Christopher Radcliff is a thoroughly likeable character. There is a hint of darkness to his background that

gives him depth but his determination shouldn't be underestimated. Christopher is out of his depth for most of the novel but he refuses to give up.

The Earl of Leicester is temperamental – but that only raises the stakes for Christopher. Tomasso is a good friend and Christopher couldn't have done it without him. Ell was fantastic – she relieved the tension and stopped scenes becoming too heavy.

Katherine's character was the problem for me. She demanded so much of Christopher – things that could have them arrested for treason if anyone found out she knew. Yet she still demanded, and never listened to his explanations. The way Katherine was presented made it hard for me to see why Christopher loved her.

I will be recommending this book to as many people as I can. I loved it! It was refreshing, engaging and never faltered from the first page to the last. Despite some predictability, I was still caught unawares at other times and, basically, really enjoyed reading *Incendium*.

A thoroughly good read for sure!

Paromjit says

AD Swanson knows his Elizabethan history as he illustrates in this piece of historical fiction of 1572, the first in the Dr Christopher Radcliff series, set in stinking, poverty ridden, London, although there is a harrowing picture of Paris, with its out of control terror, butchery and massacre of Huguenots. Radcliff is a Law Professor, no longer able to work in Cambridge and now is Robert Dudley's (Earl of Leicester) chief spy and intelligence gatherer of plots and conspiracies aimed at removing Elizabeth, replacing her with Mary, Queen of Scots and restoring Catholicism as the faith of England. We see how close to Elizabeth the conspirators are, as the book opens with the execution of her cousin, the Duke of Norfolk. There is a febrile atmosphere as paranoia reigns supreme, with the threat of a Spanish invasion on the horizon and England is ill equipped to defend itself. Radcliff has agents in the city, who can go where he cannot, in his efforts to keep one step ahead of the plotters. Two of his friends and agents, Nicholas and Sarah Houseman are murdered because of their awareness of the mysterious term, *Incendium*. Their bodies are removed from their home and all their valuables taken.

Radcliff is disturbed by the disappearance of the Housemans, refusing to accept that they have left London. However, it is difficult to get to the bottom of the mystery, and his patron, Leicester is not minded to view this as important, he has far more important matters to deal with, as he talks of a nest of vipers, the wild rumours that abound and a Queen that is struggling to come to terms with the treachery she has faced from her close family circles. Leicester, at the instigation of the Queen, has acquired a young, new and ambitious man, John Berwick, who makes Radcliff uncomfortable and ill at ease as he surmises that Berwick means to usurp his strong position with Leicester. Against his better judgement, Radcliff goes to Paris, only to witness the city tip over into a nightmare as thousands of Protestants are slain after the killing of the Huguenot leader, Admiral Coligny. Radcliff understands that behind these events are powerful forces whose ultimate aim is to destabilise London and assassinate Elizabeth. Radcliff faces setback after setback as his judgement is questioned and he is confined to his house. However, he is not a man to give up as he finds himself in danger and caught up in a desperate fight to ensure that Elizabeth is safe.

Swanston has written a historical thriller that captures the atmosphere of a London reeling under the threats that threaten the rule of Queen Elizabeth 1, with real figures from the period such as Sir Francis

Walsingham, the Earl of Leicester, and the Duke of Norfolk prominent in the narrative. The author depicts a insightful picture of the state of affairs at Whitehall Palace, with all its intrigue and deception, and Leicester is not immune to feelings of fear and insecurity which he takes out on Radcliff. Executions are viewed as must see forms of public entertainment and there is the horrifyingly popular practice of bear baiting. This is an entertaining and suspenseful read, although I felt the character of Radcliff needs more development to make him feel like a more authentic character. Nevertheless, this a compelling novel that I particularly recommend to those interested in Elizabethan history. Many thanks to Random House Transworld for an ARC.

Ted Farrell says

This is an excellent story of intrigue and espionage in Elizabethan England. The characters are well drawn and the background, London in the late sixteenth century, is both plausible and interesting. The historical context, the enmity between Catholic France and Spain, on the one hand, and Protestant England, on the other, is recounted almost effortlessly without recourse to long, boring passages. I'd recommended to anyone with an interest in historical fiction.

Jo Barton says

The Incendium Plot is a really sleek thriller which has all the hallmarks of a great whodunit and set, as it is, against a backdrop of the glorious Elizabethan age there is much to enjoy, both in terms of historical background, which is beautifully authentic, and also in the sharpness of the investigative process. Radcliff is a likeable character, methodical, meticulous and with never a clue left uninvestigated, you feel as though you are in safe pair of hand as he moves stealthily through some very dangerous places and mixes with very undesirable characaters.

Historically accurate, as only good research shows, The Incendium Plot has all the necessary ingredients for a rollicking good historical adventure which moves effortlessly between France and England, and as Radcliff and his associates discover more about the darkness which threatens to overwhelm them, so the danger moves ever closer to home. The author writes this type of historical suspense very well and intersperses the story with a wealth of interesting characters, some act as spies and informers, whilst others add a colourful and lively glimpse into life in Elizabeth's England.

This is the first of two thrillers which will feature the adventures with Christopher Radcliff in his intelligencer role. The Incendium Plot certainly gets the stories off to a very good start.

Boar's Head Eastcheap says

This is the first in a new series, and much as I love this period (and am increasingly interested in historical fiction) I'm not convinced I'll follow Christopher Radcliff's adventures. Not, at least, at full price.

To begin with, the book feels bloated: cut 25% and it might have been a reasonably pacy thriller. In fact, had

I not read it over a weekend when I was too ill to leave my bed, I might not have finished it. So many books; so little time, etc

There were also places where I was hyper-aware of the exposition I was being fed, which always annoys me. This was undoubtedly well-researched, but at times, especially towards the beginning, the fruits of that research were being pressed on me too clumsily.

Finally, there's Dr Radcliff himself - simply a character I never warmed to. (view spoiler)

That said, I enjoyed the scope of the book, hopping the Channel to take in the Massacre at Paris. It's an enjoyable enough stroll (too slow-paced to call it a 'romp') through Elizabethan London, and reasonably immersive, but that's about it.

Liesl says

I am notoriously picky when it comes to historical fiction. One of the problems of having studied history is that I both love reading historical fiction and yet also find it incredibly easy to be thrown out of enjoying the story just because of a simple inaccuracy. This is even more applicable when it comes to anything to do with Elizabethan England, aka one of my main specialisms. So A.D.Swanston had a series of significant obstacles to get over for me to even stand a chance of enjoying this book. He more than delivered. There were plenty of nice call-backs to specific historical incidents, with a significant portion of the book being structured around the massacre of Huguenots in Paris. Fairly simple yet comprehensive explanations were provided for those who were less familiar with the period, but these didn't bog the story down in detail.

Onto the story! Appropriately for the period, the story follows the adventures of Christopher Radcliff, head of the Earl of Leicester's intelligence network, as he investigates a Catholic plot. It's the right balance between Christopher trying to solve the mystery with high octane sections of action and Christopher running his intelligence network. So much of his job necessitates talking to people and considering what would most appeal to them to encourage them to divulge information, and I for one enjoyed the Elizabethan Le Carre feel of these sections. Christopher is an engaging character and I'm still intrigued to hear more about his backstory of his life in Cambridge. Plenty of interesting side characters too. I will most definitely be reading the next installment in this series.

Thank you Netgalley for giving me an ARC copy in exchange for an honest review.

Karen ?🌸 says

In London 1572, lawyer Dr Christopher Radcliff is given the task by the Earl of Leicester to find out about a plot to kill Queen Elizabeth and restore the Catholic Queen Mary.

We follow Christopher from London to Paris and back again as he chases down fragments of a plot - the only thing of which he is sure of is that it is named *Incendium*. The Queen and the Earl are unforgiving and so Christopher knows he must succeed, not just to save the Queen, but to also save himself and those close to him from the Tower.

During Elizabethan England, violence was commonplace and this book has a few squirmish scenes, but nothing too graphic. We do get a great sense of the time period though and what we can imagine were the

sights and smells of 16th Century life in a big city. The plot was well paced and the characters developed well. I would recommend this to fans of Historical Fiction who also like a bit of mystery/suspense.

Thanks to the publisher and NetGalley for providing me with an advanced reader copy in exchange for an honest review.

Blodeuedd Finland says

I have said it before, but historical mysteries really fit me. They have to work so hard to find anything, in a good way.

In this one Radcliffe, a lawyer works for the Earl of Leicester. And there is a plot afoot. Does someone want to kill the queen? Who can be trusted? Tensions between Catholics and the rest are rising. France is making moves, Spain is making moves. And Radcliffe is meant to try to figure out what is going on, and then there is the word, Incendium.

Who was behind it. Oh I could not guess hidden players. But I enjoyed reading about it and him finding out more. His hidden agents, the help he got from the woman he loved. It does take more than just one man looking through London.

The book felt light too and I read it fast, I also wanted to know what would happen. Well obviously I knew what would happen, but you know, to all who I had started to like too.

A good mystery, a nice little thriller.

Annet says

The guards came that night. Christopher was roused and told to dress. Where am I to be taken?" he asked, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "The tower," replied one of the guards. "The Earl of Leicester has commanded it." Christopher swore. Had the earl changed his mind again? They travelled by barge to the Tower stairs. Christopher huddled into his cloak against the night cold. To their left, glimmers of light from watchmen's lanterns flickered in the blackness; to their right the marshes and meadows were black as pitch. At night, the river was a strange ghostly place and, especially under London Bridge where the currents sucked and swirled, a place of danger...

Great historical mystery/crime book! Makes me think of C.J. Sansom (Matthew Shardlake) and S.J. Parris (Giordano Bruno). Here's another historical hero to add to the list: academic, lawyer and intelligencer Dr. Christopher Radcliff. Recommended for those who like a good, entertaining history book, atmospheric, entertaining & interesting. It is the first in a new series set during the reign Elizabeth I. Enjoyed it!

This is the story: The England of Elizabeth I is a country on the brink. Fear of plague and invasion is ever-present, the threat of insurrection constant. Heresy and religious unrest simmer beneath the surface. And the execution that summer of the queen's own cousin, Duke of Norfolk, for treason, suggests that the discord and divisions run deep. For lawyer Christopher Radcliff and his patron, Earl of Leicester, the prospects of peace seem at best poor. Radcliff's role is to investigate both treachery at home and the ever-present papist threat

from abroad. And then a whisper reaches him of a new plot against the queen..... Great book!

Jo-anne Atkinson says

London in the mid 1570s and rumour abounds of plots against the Queen with both Catholic nations at their centre. When one of his informants disappeared Radcliff is concerned but his paymaster, the Earl of Leicester, has other plans for him. Radcliff is sent to France to liaise with Sir Francis Walsingham and find out what he can against about a plot named Incendium which will destroy Elizabeth and put her cousin Mary (Queen of Scots) on the throne. In Paris Radcliff is caught up in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre and this affects him deeply. Returning to London he finds that his two lines of enquiry are connected and also that there is a traitor in his circle.

This is the first in a proposed series of books about an Elizabethan intelligence agent, Radcliff, from a writer with a strong track record in writing historical fiction. I did like the fact that the reader is introduced to Radcliff with little backstory and only snippets are given. We are told that Radcliff is afraid of prisons within the first few pages and that he used to be a Cambridge lecturer, later we learn that he spent time in prison and later still we are told the nature of the crime and how he ended up in London. However there is no great detail and this allows Swanston the luxury of being able to explore that in later books. The plot is suitably complex, the sense of time and place excellent with the scenes set in Paris and Amiens particularly well-researched and touching. I look forward to reading the next chapter.

Karen Keane says

Murder, mystery and spies in Elizabethan England, the main players of the time such as the Earl of Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham all have major parts in this book. The protagonist of the book is a lawyer Christopher Radcliff, who has his own group of intelligences all ready to spy for him for money and England. A well wrote and thought out book on the lines of C J Sandom and a really easy, interesting read.
