

The background of the cover is a blue-tinted illustration of a man in a flat cap and a brown jacket running through a city street. In the background, there are buildings and a horse-drawn carriage.

DEBORAH HOPKINSON

The
MUDDLED
MISADVENTURES
of a
PICKPOCKET

A BANDIT'S
TALE

While firmly in the spirit of a picaresque novel, this story of a poor Italian lad washed up on the shores of America never quite breaks free of the feeling that it's only in the spirit of such a story and not taking on unexpected life of its own. Rocco is eleven and sold off to a man once he disgraces his family back in their small village in Italy. (No bonus points for guessing Rocco behaved honorably and his family was wrong.) He's sold into slavery, essentially, begging for pennies on a street corner for a cruel, Fagin-like boss. Rocco has adventures and stumbles across everyone from a young girl passionate about defending horses from abuse (she would doubtless oppose carriages in Central Park today) to a journalist and photographer named Jacob Riis who wants to use the new-fangled photography equipment to shine a light on the slums of New York. It's all rooted in reality and the actual period photographs of Riis add to the fun. The amusing chapter headings are in the right spirit and the story takes some left turns to keep you awake. Harmless fun, but a pastiche as opposed to the lived-in thrill of Andrew Garfield's best. -- Michael Giltz