

Smokeheads review in *The Times* by Peter Millar, 12.3.11

Smokeheads, a barmaid in a pub in Port Ellen on the remote Scottish island of Islay tells four visiting lads, is the natives' slang for aficionados of their seaweed and peat-reeking whisky, who come from all over the globe to sample it in situ.

Adam, an expert whisky-taster at an expensive Edinburgh tourist shop, has gathered together three old university friends: Ethan, Luke and the stinking rich, coke-snorting hedge fund manager Roddy on a long-weekend malt-tasting junket.

He also wants Roddy to finance the resurrection of a mothballed distillery that, with his experience and knowledge, he might propel into the same league as Laphroaig, Ardbeg and Lagavulin.

On the first distillery visit he renews acquaintance with Molly, an attractive tour guide now divorced, while in the pub Roddy flirts with the above-mentioned barmaid, who turns out to be Molly's sister.

But things on this small island are more intermingled than any of the visitors imagine: the thug who assaults them in the pub turns out to be the policeman who gave them a speeding ticket earlier and also Molly's estranged former husband, Joe.

That is just the beginning of the nightmare. On a fractious drive back from Adam's coveted distillery, drugged-up drunken Roddy drives them over a cliff in a catastrophic crash.

With one dead and another injured they go looking for help, only to find the murderous Joe and a sidekick engaged in the production of illicit moonshine. This is a hugely atmospheric thriller soaked in the spirit of life on the outer fringes of the British Isles: *Local Hero* in reverse, a Scottish *Straw Dogs* laced with whisky and gore. My only disappointment was the lack of a final, bitter twist. But then who puts a slice of lemon in a decent malt? Sip and savour.