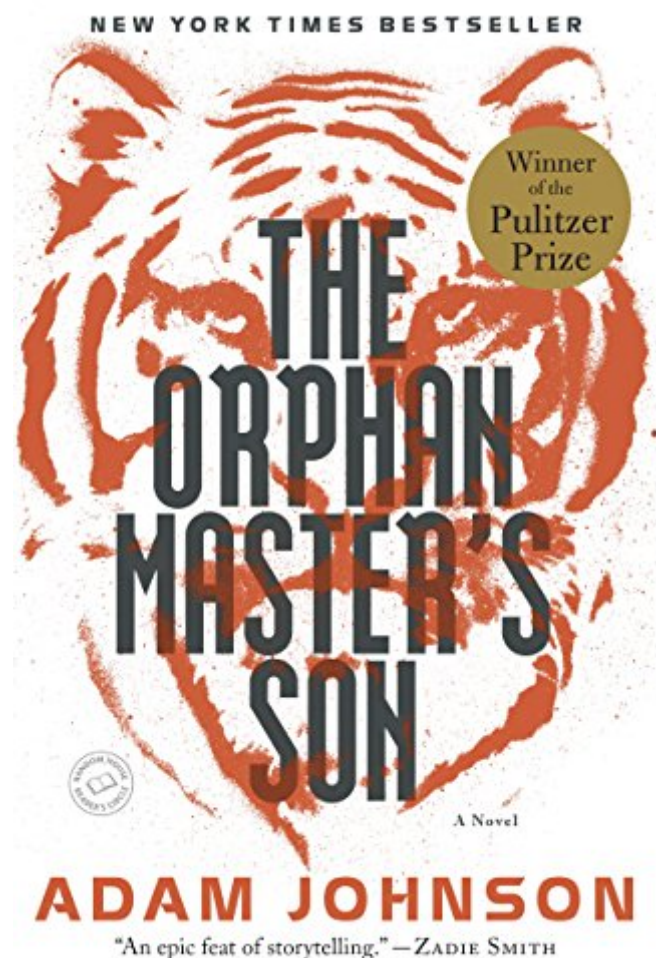




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The Orphan Master's Son: A Novel (Pulitzer Prize For Fiction)



Synopsis

The Pulitzer Prize-winning, New York Times bestselling novel of North Korea: an epic journey into the heart of the world's most mysterious dictatorship. Imagine Charles Dickens paying a visit to Pyongyang, and you see the canvas on which [Adam] Johnson is painting here. "The Washington Post Pak Jun Do is the haunted son of a lost mother "a singer stolen to Pyongyang "and an influential father who runs a work camp for orphans. Superiors in the North Korean state soon recognize the boy's loyalty and keen instincts. Considering himself a humble citizen of the greatest nation in the world, Jun Do rises in the ranks. He becomes a professional kidnapper who must navigate the shifting rules, arbitrary violence, and baffling demands of his overlords in order to stay alive. Driven to the absolute limit of what any human being could endure, he boldly takes on the treacherous role of rival to Kim Jong Il in an attempt to save the woman he loves, Sun Moon, a legendary actress so pure, she didn't know what starving people looked like. Part breathless thriller, part story of innocence lost, part story of romantic love, *The Orphan Master's Son* is also a riveting portrait of a world heretofore hidden from view: a North Korea rife with hunger, corruption, and casual cruelty but also camaraderie, stolen moments of beauty, and love. FINALIST FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD • WINNER OF THE DAYTON LITERARY PEACE PRIZE Named ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR by more than a dozen publications, including *The Washington Post* • *Entertainment Weekly* • *The Wall Street Journal* • *Los Angeles Times* • *San Francisco Chronicle* Praise for *The Orphan Master's Son* "An exquisitely crafted novel that carries the reader on an adventuresome journey into the depths of totalitarian North Korea and into the most intimate spaces of the human heart. "Pulitzer Prize citation "Mr. Johnson has written a daring and remarkable novel, a novel that not only opens a frightening window on the mysterious kingdom of North Korea, but one that also excavates the very meaning of love and sacrifice. "Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* "Rich with a sense of discovery . . . *The Orphan Master's Son* has an early lead on novel of [the year]. "The Daily Beast "This is a novel worth getting excited about. "The Washington Post "A ripping piece of fiction that is also an astute commentary on the nature of freedom, sacrifice, and glory. "Elle

Book Information

File Size: 4388 KB

Print Length: 465 pages

Publisher: Random House; 1 edition (January 10, 2012)

Publication Date: January 10, 2012

Language: English

ASIN: B004X6PRO6

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #7,436 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #56 in Kindle Store > Whispersync for Voice > Education & Reference #86 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Thrillers & Suspense > Crime > Kidnapping #89 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Thrillers

Customer Reviews

The Orphan Master's Son is a hard book to read because of its graphic descriptions of the tortures Jun Do, the protagonist, receives at the hands of the North Korean government employees. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. There is no happiness. There is not a single bright moment in the book because of the omnipresence of the DPRK's constant lurking in the background. There is no one to trust, no one to hang one's hopes on. It is a sad, depressing novel, and I have to wonder how much of it is TRUTH. Because I only know what newspaper reports say about the people and the government of N. Korea, I am glad I read The Orphan Master's Son because Adam Johnson does make me wonder about the horrors (cutting off tattoos without anesthesia) and the secrets (kidnapping foreigners) and the public attention speakers spreading propaganda (the imminent war with America). It is not a book to be read lightly; it's scary. With the nuclear threat actually being posed by the Kim regime, it might be a good idea for everyone to read this novel. "Forewarned is forearmed."

I'm sorry but I am having a terrible time getting through this book and am about to bail out on it. The story line is haphazard and difficult to follow. At this point in the book I am thoroughly lost and have been sticking because sometimes a book will have a difficult patch and you get through it, but I've kept going and there's no end in sight. Disappointing because I want to read as many Pulitzer prize winners as I can, and I was also really interested in learning more about North Korea. If I bail out

and stop reading then this will be my review. If I keep going to the end I will come back and update my review.

Most of us have no direct knowledge of events that occur in North Korea. So any window is worthy of attention. Although this book is a fictional account, it incorporates many of the practices that have been hinted at in news reports while it parodies life, both in North Korea and here in North America. The author achieves a balance between suspense, horror, romance and comedy which I have rarely seen. I couldn't put it down, even though it gave me nightmares. One of the reasons that I enjoyed it so much was that rather than just shocking me with the extreme conditions, he demonstrated profound sympathy for the citizens who tried so gamely to avoid the many ways they could be denounced. It's a definite high recommendation from this reader.

This is a fascinating and horrifying story of North Korean life. The author picks a narrator to walk you through two very distinct stories of one man. The first part is as an orphan that does not think he is an orphan. His journey at sea and finally into the work camp, is an exercise in delusion. The camp ends the first part of the book and begins the second half of the book, where he kills a prominent military figure and assumes his life merely by putting on his uniform and walking into his life. The author took great pains to research North Korean society including numerous interviews with defectors. He was even allowed into the country on a supervised tour to set the book locations in his mind. It is appalling the lack of concern for the individual in this country. The "great leader" is the only person in North Korea to be considered. Human life and survival is almost impossible and everyone walks a fine line between life and death. Nothing is as it seems. Americans are portrayed as monsters as is our way of life. To me, this was a real horror story a good deal of the time as this poor man strived to attain some tiny bit of happiness, which is just not in the cards. Hard to read but fascinating, too. I can understand why it won the Pulitzer prize.

The Orphan Master's Son is a story about stories--in this case the stories the people of modern North Korea must make themselves believe in order to survive, stories that the government propagates about the Dear Leader, about how lucky citizens are to live in the glorious DPRK, about the sad state of life in America, even stories about individual citizens. One character says, "Where we are from...stories are factual....For us, the story is more important than the person. If a man and his story are in conflict, it is the man who must change." We get to know this closed-off, dystopian society through the story of the life of Pak Jun Do (John Doe), a kind of North Korean Everyman. In

somewhat Forrest Gump style, he variously becomes a tunnel fighter under the DMZ, a government kidnapper of foreigners, an English-language government listener on board a fishing boat, a member of a diplomatic mission to Texas, a miner as a prisoner in a prison camp, an impersonator of a famous General, and a love rival of the Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il. It is through his eyes and the eyes of his government interrogator that we see North Korea, as it is imagined (backed by research) by the author. Even if the novel were not set in a country that is of particular interest to the U.S. right now, it would be riveting because Johnson is an extraordinary storyteller. In fact, if it had been set in an entirely imaginary place I might have enjoyed it more, because I kept being distracted from the story and its implications by wondering how close the details of life were to fact. I am not so naive that I don't realize that America propagates its own stories about the glorious life in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave and about the sad state of life in other nations which don't choose to follow our example. Still, I agree with this book's continuation of the above quote: "But in America, people's stories change all the time. In America, it is the man who matters." Johnson has given us a compulsively readable and suspenseful story filled with adventure, terrible scenes of torture, and touching scenes of love and sacrifice. In tone it is somewhat satirical (especially in its depiction of the Dear Leader). He won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize.

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