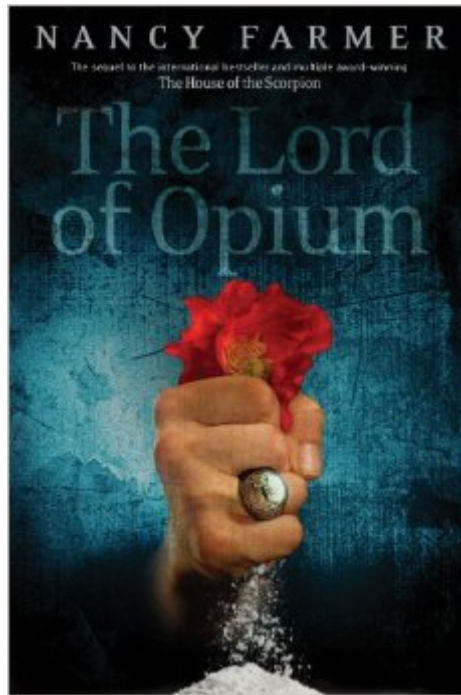


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The Lord Of Opium



Synopsis

As the teenage ruler of his own country, Matt must cope with clones and cartels in this electric blend of horrors and beauty (>), the riveting sequel to the modern classic *House of the Scorpion*, winner of the National Book Award, a Newbery Honor, and a Printz Honor. Matt has always been nothing but a clone "grown from a strip of old El Patron's skin. Now, at age fourteen, he finds himself suddenly thrust into the position of ruling over his own country. The Land of Opium is the largest territory of the Dope Confederacy, which ranges on the map like an intestine from the ruins of San Diego to the ruins of Matamoros. But while Opium thrives, the rest of the world has been devastated by ecological disaster and hidden in Opium is the cure. And that isn't all that awaits within the depths of Opium. Matt is haunted by the ubiquitous army of eejits, zombielike workers harnessed to the old El Patron's sinister system of drug growing "people stripped of the very qualities that once made them human. Matt wants to use his newfound power to help, to stop the suffering, but he can't even find a way to smuggle his childhood love, Maria, across the border and into Opium. Instead, his every move hits a roadblock, some from the enemies that surround him and some from a voice within himself. For who is Matt really, but the clone of an evil, murderous dictator? Is his true destiny already predetermined by his genes?

Book Information

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Action & Adventure > Science Fiction

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

This is a wonderful book, but I can understand why some readers feel it falls short of *The House of Scorpion*. In the first book, Matt's very survival is at stake, and the plot is driven by his discovery of who he is, and there are substantial mysteries that are not revealed until the end of the book. This second book is fundamentally different. Matt is not in particular danger throughout most of this book, and while he does make discoveries about his world, there's no moment of shock when the precariousness of his existence is revealed. Instead, this book revolves around his efforts to fix his native land, a project that turns out to be a lot more complicated than he thought it would be when he first set out to do so. The themes are more political and ethical, and less survival-based, than those in the first novel. For the original fans of the first novel, who are now adults, the increased sophistication and complication of Matt's world will likely parallel the changes that have gone through their lives as they have transitioned from adolescence to adulthood, and it is fair to say that this book continues the "coming of age" theme. However, for the readers who loved the first for its nail-biting story of a harrowing adventure of an underdog, this book will disappoint. For readers who fell in love with the world of Opium and compulsively want to see how Matt manages to (or fails to) fix some of its problems, the book will be every bit as interesting (if not quite as exciting) as the first.

It's been awhile since I read *House of the Scorpions*, but it all came back to me right away when I delved into *The Lord of Opium*. Nancy Farmer continues the story of Matt, the clone of the nearly 150-year-old drug lord, El Patr n. When El Patr n dies, Matt becomes the new lord of Opium. He struggles to undo the regime and rescue the enslaved eejits but he's only 14 and embattled on all sides by a rival drug lord, UN forces led by a fanatic and general anti-clone prejudice. Even Matt's own right-hand man, Cienfuegos, may not be all that he appears to be. There are also a lot of interesting twists about clones, as he appears haunted by the old drug lord's ghostly presence in his mind. Farmer's characters are distinct and life-like. In spite of his heroism Matt is a believable teenager, not a junior super-hero, and he has a teenager's problems. He loves a girl who is far away but he's also confused by his feelings for the beautiful eejit servant girl, who will do whatever he commands. He has trouble, too, in staying friends with the boys from the orphanage now that he's rich and powerful. Matt's world comes to life in every detail--you can practically smell the desert air and hear the hum of the flying machines. But there is nothing stereotypical about this dystopia. Although Opium is a social disaster, it is also an ecological paradise and offers hope to the rest of the planet. In a way, the same is true of Matt. At first he is a despised clone, manufactured rather than born, but with the help of his allies, he becomes a true leader. The novel is poignant, startling

and inspiring. I loved it.

The House of Scorpion (THOS) was a fabulous, break through book, and so it was like opening a bottle of fine wine when I sat down to read this book. The book picks up pretty much where THOS left off--Matt, the new El Patron. Most of the story is consumed with Matt trying to live up to the new responsibilities thrust on him and undo the evil that the old El Patron did. In particular, Matt is determined to cure the eejits and find a way to be with Maria. On the plus side, the writing is excellent and the characters are generally terrific and the overall plot is engaging. Also, some new characters are introduced that are very engaging--eg, Cienfuegos. And, there are some very poignant story arcs. Fans of THOS will want to read this book and they will enjoy it. But...it's not as compelling as THOS. Some of the magic of THOS is still present, but much of it is gone, IMO. That was probably unavoidable...Matt is now lord, not lowly clone, and so we don't have that same dystopian atmosphere as THOS, where Matt struggles to find out if he's human or not in a world where most everyone despises him. Also, one of the most compelling characters in THOS for me was Maria. Sadly, until the last few pages of the book, she mostly just puts in a few cameo appearances in this book. What a waste of a great character. I will say that the ending is nicely done and, like THOS, the curtain comes down on a nice note of hope.

This is a good book that continues the story of "The House of the Scorpion." It manages a smooth transition picking up old themes while adding new characters and problems that must be solved by Matt. There are several twists that you don't see coming, and plenty of difficulties for Matt to reunite with Maria. It brings surprising solutions to obstacles that Matt must overcome to become the Lord of Opium. It remains a thriller with ecological and social issues as a center of conflict. Nancy Farmer wraps it up with nice satisfactory ending. This book does not have the intensity of suspense as the first book, but it is still a good read and ties up several questions from "The House of the Scorpion."

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