

Noble House

James Clavell

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The setting is Hong Kong, 1963. The action spans scarcely more than a week, but these are days of high adventure: from kidnapping and murder to financial double-dealing and natural catastrophes—fire, flood, landslide. Yet they are days filled as well with all the mystery and romance of Hong Kong—the heart of Asia—rich in every trade...money, flesh, opium, power.

From the Paperback edition.

Noble House Details


Date : Published (first published April 1981)

ISBN :

Author : James Clavell

Format : Kindle Edition 1154 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Cultural, China

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From Reader Review Noble House for online ebook

Craig says

In many ways, this is my favorite Clavell novel. I'm kind of a big sucker for it.

It's a huge, vastly sweeping epic contained entirely within a single week in Hong Kong. It's a blockbuster of a novel in every sense, bringing equal amounts of entertainment and intellectual provocation.

There's something else going on in this novel which gives it added joy for those who have devoured the rest of the Asian saga -- in *Noble House*, Clavell begins to tie together the characters from all his other novels. The story focuses on the descendants of the characters in *Tai-Pan*, while descendants of the characters of *Shogun* also make appearances. And Peter Marlowe, who is Clavell's stand in for himself from *King Rat*, runs throughout the novel as a fairly important subplot, as an author who has recently achieved literary success with a novel about Changi, and is now researching a novel about Hong Kong (a delightful piece of hyper-fiction, which makes the reader all the more aware that this fictionalized world is based on real people -- the Struans of this world being based on the real life Jardines).

Heber says

A fascinating saga written with tremendous talent. Very interesting page turner and one of the best books I have ever read. Clavell includes a bank run, a bear raid, international intrigue, relationship/sexual tension, smuggling operations, natural disasters, multi-generational rivalry, blood oaths, espionage and dramatic natural disasters in an extremely action packed period of little more than one week. A long book (as are all my favorites) but a very interesting read and one which I highly recommend!

Since I am reviewing the audible.com version I must also comment on the talent of one of the most talented readers on audible, John Lee. I have listened to many previous books by John Lee, and I have always enjoyed them. However, I have never listened to a book that allowed John to display his talent as well as this one. Lee did an excellent job at all the different accents, the different personalities and the distinct situations.

I recommend Clavell's "Noble House" yet in particular I recommend John Lee's rendition of this great asian saga.

CD says

Popular fiction bordering on great. As with many of James Clavell's works they could easily be viewed as dated rather than a period work or 'historical fiction'.

This view of mine is based on how Clavell relates the contemporaneous social and political views of the time

in his works. Whether he was writing for the ages is doubtful, but the plot and story is timeless. Greed and intrigue and power are always sound subjects on which to build a tale.

Dated or not I've got to read this and several of the authors works again for probably the first time in twenty or more years.

Michael Nash says

Ding-dong the witch is dead!. 6 months and 1400 pages later, I have finally finished this massive door stopper of a novel, and the best I can say about it is that its better than Gai-jin, the massive tome about Struan's in 1870s Japan which also took me most of a year to get through. I've been reading a book of Clavell's Asian Saga per year since college, a privileged position on my reading list accorded to him because I so enjoyed Shogun, Tai-pan and King Rat.

The plot of this novel moves at a snail's pace for 1100 pages, and only picks up after that, at which point you've been reading for months and still have an equivalent of a reasonably sized novel to go. The plot meanders through about 20 sub-plots only half of which get resolved to any satisfaction, and some of which get resolved by deus ex machina in a highly unsatisfactory way. As always, the magic of Clavell is in bringing a time and place to life, as he brought to life 1500s Japan and 1840s Hong Kong. He does that here as well, but the problem is that 1960s Hong Kong is too familiar to be interesting.

I will say there are interesting bits. The politics are fascinating, with the main character arguing emphatically that the US and Britain should help out the PRC on the grounds that they are thorns in the sides of the USSR which is the real threat. This to the point of selling materials to China to create nuclear weapons and helping the Thread of the Silkworm guy to defect in order to secure the Bank of China's aid during a monetary crisis. The gender politics are a fascinating mix of Randian ideas of self-sufficiency and a kind of parochial British love of the nuclear family. The action is also fascinating, since all of it takes place in scenes of tense negotiation in board rooms and pool halls and race tracks, rather than in any kind of violence.

And I will say that I enjoyed the last 300 pages or so when the pace picked up and stuff started being tied together. But none of that makes up for a plot that is too long and convoluted, and which takes 1000 pages to get moving.

Debbie says

The summer of 1990, I worked on a project in Phoenix, AZ. For 6 or 8 weeks, I flew every Sunday afternoon from Dallas to Phoenix and flew home Friday night. I was the only project team member in Phoenix, and my personality is not the kind to go out exploring on my own. So a summer of plane flights and evenings alone were the perfect time to read this book. I had a wonderful hotel room with a balcony facing northwest and almost every evening I would return to the hotel and sit out on the balcony and read this book until the sun went down.

I loved the book and the escape it gave me from my loneliness that summer!!

Andy says

The follow up to Tai-pan. Clavell famously visited Hong Kong and ingratiated himself with the high society of the island. He based his story around many real events, which he garnered from those very same socialites. The building that tumbled down the mountain side during inclement weather was owned by my old landlord, Oscar Wong. He used to tell me of the day James Clavell came to interview him about that night. An epic battle between the Jardine's, Swire and the new Chinese Hong's who started to rise in the early seventies. A great read, especially for those that live or have lived in Hong Kong.

Alejandro says

Business is war!

This is the fourth novel of the "Asian Saga" by James Clavell.

TV MINISERIES V. NOVEL: DAWN OF HONG KONG

I loved the TV miniseries adaptation of *Noble House*, starring Pierce Brosnan, Deborah Raffin, John Rhys-Davies and Ben Masters. In fact, I can say that it's my favorite TV miniseries. I have it on DVD and crossing fingers that they'd release it on bluray anytime soon.

So, it was logical that I'd want to read the original novel...

...boy! I didn't think that it was so thick!

And a huge bummer for me, taking in account the TV miniseries adaptation, it was that the main characters of Ian Dunross and Casey Tcholak don't have a romance, besides the age difference between literary character, Dunross instead of being a widower, he is happily married and even having children.

Also, there are **A LOT** of sub-plots that after a while become quite tricky of following.

However, it's still a pretty good written work, so I don't see any reason to give it less stars than the maximum possible.

A VERY LONG WEEK

It's 1963 and it's quite amusing that such thick book and so much plots and sub-plots, and all that fits in just one week, in the time of the novel, that since it's carefully indicated on each chapter, you can't deny that it was just one week...

...but a very loooooong one!

Full of banking raids, international espionage involving China, Russia and Great Britain, underworld

machinations, stock market frenzy, rainstorms, landslides, boats on fire, racing horses,...

...and a very important half coin.

All in just one long week.

TAI-PAN IS THE WORD

Ian Dunross Struan, Tai-Pan of Struan's, Noble House of whole Hong Kong.

Never gets old, never gets tired of mentioning.

Smart, resourceful and a gentleman.

Tai-Pan is a Chinese term for "supreme leader", so you can say that each CEO of each company based on Hong Kong can be referred as "Tai-Pan"....

...aaaaaaaah!

BUT there is only **ONE** true Tai-Pan in Hong Kong and is whoever is in command of Struan's, the Noble House, the most prestigious trade company in the city.

And Ian Dunross is the current Tai-Pan (tenth in the book, twelfth in the TV miniseries) and since he needed to make Struan's public on the market, now he's dealing with a risk of losing control of the company.

Especially since Struan's, like any successful company, it has an archenemy company which is Rothwell-Gornt, managed by Quillan Gornt, and not only that, since the bitter enmity runs deep back in the past of Ian's and Quillan's families since the days of *Tai-Pan* novel.

And as if there wasn't enough business struggle set on the battleground...

...Par-Con, an American company comes in the middle, with CEO Lincoln Bartlett (huge fan of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*) and his vice-president Casey Tcholak (cunning woman who knows how to use all her personal resources to get what she wants).

Par-Con is supposedly arranging a business deal to save the Noble House of its cash shortness, but Bartlett and Tcholak are doing business too with Rothwell-Gornt, behind Struan's back, but...

...hardly anything is a secret in Hong Kong, and they're trying to play in an ancient town with its own kind of rules to make business...

...and where everybody wants to be **THE** Tai-Pan.

A HALF COIN FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

Struan's is a very old company, founded in the 1800s, and it wasn't easy to do, so it was needed to ask for favors to make possible the company which eventually would become the Noble House.

Those favors "turned" into four coins, divided in halves, where one half of each of the four coins were kept under the watch of the Tai-Pan in exercise of Struan's, with a unbreakable promise that when any of the other half-coins would be presented, the handler of the half-coin can ask for...

...anything.

Two half-coins were already presented, one is missing, but...

...one was too near of Struan's, supposedly in safe hands, but...

...things in Hong Kong tend to change of hands too fast, and now the current owner knows well the power that the half-coin encloses!

Hilmi Isa says

Noble House merupakan salah satu karya yang ditulis oleh *James Clavell*. Novel ini merupakan salah satu novel daripada siri *The Asian Saga* yang meliputi:

- a) Shogun
- b) Tai-Pan
- c) Gai-Jin
- d) King Rat
- e) Noble House
- f) Whirlwind

Setakat ini, saya hanya membaca *Shogun* dan *Noble House*. Tetapi, seperti *Shogun*, membaca *Noble House* merupakan suatu pengalaman pembacaan yang sangat mengasyikkan dan mengagumkan! Agak sukar untuk mengklasifikasikan genre novel ini. Mungkin boleh saya simpulkan bahawa terdapat pelbagai elemen seperti cinta, pengkhianatan, *thriller*, korporat, *espionage*, dan lain-lain elemen yang berkaitan. Kesemuanya disatukan di dalam sebuah cerita yang dipersembahkan dengan amat baik sekali. Tambahan pula, Clavell merupakan seorang *story-teller* yang sangat bagus. Dialog yang ditulis juga sangat berkesan. Ini ditambah lagi dengan pembentukan dan perkembangan watak-watak yang sangat menarik sekali.

Sebaik-baiknya, sila baca terlebih dahulu novel-novel yang sebelumnya. Walaupun *Noble House* boleh dibaca secara berasingan, namun, untuk pemahaman yang lebih baik, adalah lebih bagus berbuat demikian. Hal ini kerana terdapat perkaitan yang sering kali dibangkitkan di dalam novel ini.

Jim says

Another fantastic part of Clavell's Asian Saga, this continues the story of the Noble House, created by Dirk Struan in Tai-Pan & continued in Gai-Jin. It is set in Hong Kong & takes place over a week or so in 1963.

There are a LOT of words for such a short time period. It's not as tight a story as Tai-Pan, but similar in many other respects.

Tai-Pan took place in 1841, the founding of Hong Kong. It follows the trials & tribulations of Dirk Struan. This book, Noble House, follows the green-eyed devil's true heir through similar tribulations in Hong Kong over a century later. The similarities & differences are fantastic. There are a lot of politics with crafty spies from China, America, England, & Russia. Cut throat business arrangements among these nations & Japan play on a wildly open stock market & banking system which tests Dunross' ability as The Tai-pan of the Noble House. He's just a business man, yet one of the most influential people on the island who carries a number of cares that would break a lesser man.

The blow by blow accounting of the week fits in an incredible amount of action. There's very little rest for anyone as the perfectly drawn characters maneuver for position. Motivations are wonderfully done. There are no angels, but many sympathetic characters, especially Dunross, a main character that is easy to get behind, but even he isn't perfect. The secondary characters are often as fully drawn & full of surprises.

The only complaint I had was that some of the Oriental characters were a bit two dimensional in some attitudes. Not all of them, but the mass were. Clavell does a great job in describing their poverty, drive, priorities, & abilities, though. This leads to some wonderfully comic moments - an old, abandoned amah calculating percentages on her take with the precision & speed of a calculator. It's also sad - people selling their children to feed the rest of the family.

These books are listed in published order here on GR now. That's NOT the chronological order, the order I'd highly suggest reading them in.

Sh?gun - Japan 1600, 1100 pages, published 1975

Tai-Pan - Hong Kong 1841, 725 pages, pub 1966

Gai-Jin - Japan 1862-3, 1250 pages, pub 1993

King Rat - WWII Japanese prison camp holding Allied POWs, 350 pages, pub 1962

Noble House - Hong Kong 1963, 1375 pages, pub 1986

Whirlwind - Iran 1979, 1200 pages, pub 1986

If you're tight on time, my suggestion would be to read King Rat or Sh?gun as stand alones. While all the books share some families, the time difference between these 2 minimizes that.

If you can find the time, Tai-Pan, Gai-Jin, & Noble House make a great trilogy. Skipping Gai-Jin wouldn't hurt. It wasn't yet published when I first read the series & I didn't miss it. Unlike the rest, it doesn't have a strong central character to root for, so it's rather jarring in that sense. Definitely read this book after Tai-Pan, though. If you like audio books & can listen to these 3 read by John Lee, you're in for a real treat. He might be the best reader I've ever listened to & I'm quite picky.

I haven't read the final book of the series, Whirlwind. I know it follows the Noble House, especially some plans that Dunross put into motion, but neither the setting nor the size made me want to read it. There is no audio version of it that I can find at this time or I'd give it a try, especially if it was read by John Lee.

Anelia says

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Walter says

This epic saga of a great British mercantile house in Hong Kong in the early 1960s is a 1400 page tome whose plot takes place in the space of one week. The action in the novel is intense. In Noble House, you get the feel of a staunchly capitalistic Hong Kong, a place that makes the setting of "The Jungle" look like a worker's paradise! Clavell's hero, like most of Clavell's heroes, is an alpha male and the absolute monarch of the family business which controls much of Hong Kong's commerce and power.

The problem that I had with Noble House was the tendency of Clavell to minimize his Chinese characters, to glorify the ruthless, and to treat women as tools of the alpha male. This is a common characteristic of Clavell novels, it just happens to be more pronounced in "Noble House". The novel also had, dare I say it, too much action in it. Within this one week period we read about espionage activities of the Soviets and the Communist Chinese, the machinations of Hong Kong, British and American corporations, horrible catastrophes such as bank failures, floods, earthquakes and riots, and plots involving organized crime. That's a pretty heavy week, even for Hong Kong tycoon family. It strains credibility, but then again this is a novel and not a history. Novels are meant to be compelling, and one must admit that Clavell knows how to hold the reader's attention.

If you are interested in the commercial empires of Hong Kong and the Far East, and you are willing to invest the weeks or more that it will take for you to get through this monster, the I would recommend "Noble House." However, let the casual reader beware - this is not for the less than dedicated!

Hasham Rasool says

The Asian Saga: the story of a Hong Kong business dynasty.

Ken Langwell says

If you haven't read James Clavell's Asian Saga you are depriving yourself of an amazing journey that begins in the 15th century in Japan's feudal Shogunate period, capturing your attention and your imagination with "Shogun," and refuses to let go as you move through the series with Tai Pan, Gai Jin, King Rat, Noble House and finally Whirlwind.

Clavell was an incredible story-teller who opens up a world and a culture largely unknown to those of us in the West, and it is a profound loss to the literary world that he passed away before he was able to finish the entire saga. However, don't let that scare you away as I promise you won't be left wanting.

I recognize that this review is supposed to be specific to Nobel House, but every book in the series is a high five-stars, so dive in with Shogun and lose yourself in one of the most amazing stories ever told.

John says

I wish it could go on forever. The audiobook is perfection :-)

Jim says

Not quite as good as Tai-pan, but a continuation of it & anyone who liked the first will like this. Is almost as well done. Set in the 1960's, it's similar in a lot of ways to Tai-Pan. One of the cool things is Clavell writes himself into this book as a reporter, Peter Marlow. It's not a huge part, but fun.
