

House of Eight Orchids

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In 1912, John Wade and his brother, William—children of the American consul—were kidnapped off the street in Chungking, China, and raised in the house of Eunuch Chang, the city's master criminal. Twenty-five years later, John is the eunuch's most valuable ward, a trained assassin and swindler, and William has become a talented forger. On the brink of World War II, China is in chaos. When William betrays Eunuch Chang and escapes to central China, a place of ferocious warlords and bandits, John begins a desperate search to save his brother, while Eunuch Chang hunts them both.

House of Eight Orchids Details

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From Reader Review House of Eight Orchids for online ebook

Jerry Jordan says

Two children of the American Consul in Chungking, China are kidnapped by a Eunuch. The Eunuch raises the boys to be instrumental to his crime organization, Interesting so long as one reads the book with one's legs crossed.

J Aislynn d'Merricksson says

This book was reviewed for the San Francisco Book Review

Thayer's House of 8 Orchids was engaging straight from the beginning, with swift pacing and very detailed description that made it feel like being there. I was hooked from the start.

Orchids follows the story of John Yellow Hair, and his brother William. At very young ages, they were kidnapped in China, and raised by Eunuch Chang to serve in criminal enterprises. John grows to become one of Chang's most valued assassins/enforcers, while his brother is a master forger.

All that changes when John is forced to choose between loyalty to his brother or loyalty to his kidnapper. John chooses blood over bond and attempts to help his brother escape, after William tries to flee with a young lady sold into slavery, and is subsequently caught and punished.. On the same day John and William flee, Chungking is attacked by the Japanese, creating chaos, and separating the two brothers.

William and Lily, the girl he was trying to aid, are captured by another criminal, and sold along the Yangtze. John coerces the help of some unusual people (and a creepy gigantic hound) and sets off to find William, and get revenge, all the while trying to avoid those Chang sends after him.

This is a historical thriller, set in late 1930s China. I cannot vouch for full historical accuracy, but there were things I recognised as being so, and there is certainly a feel of authenticity. The bombing aftermath brought the feeling of numbed terror alive. This part was my favourite, in terms of vivid description. Another thing that stuck out to me was Madame Tuon and her feet. I do know footbinding was a custom once practised in China. I cannot at all imagine having my feet bound like that, and needing the assistance of others to walk. I'm now interested in learning more of this odd, archaic custom, how it evolved, and better yet, *why*.

If you enjoy a good thriller, especially of the historic variety, be sure to check out House of 8 Orchids by James Thayer. This book will keep you reading til the midnight hours!

Boundless Book Reviews says

I found House of 8 Orchids to be a quick and smooth read. I enjoyed the back story and introductions of the characters. Thayer has an easy to read writing style and an exception talent for providing imagery. The story describes some vividly disgusting scenes' and should not be read as a bedtime story to your child, but I

highly recommend it to adult readers. Without giving too much away, I loved the way this story ended with completion and satisfaction for the characters, no cliffhanger. I give this book 4 boundless stars, because “I really enjoyed it.”....Beth

<http://www.boundlessbookreviews.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/BBReviews>

Jeff says

I really liked this novel. It features atypical characters in a typical trained killer story. Killer is trained to be ruthless, becomes disillusioned with leaders, betrays and is betrayed, then seeks revenge. Good writing, interesting setting.

Schuyler Wallace says

James Thayer, prolific and respected writer of thirteen thrillers, presents his story of 1920-1930 China and of a eunuch of immense power and wealth. Eunuch Chan becomes prey of a former protégé, an American boy he kidnapped, along with his brother, at 5 years old. After 25 years of loyalty to Chang, the now grown man, a skilled assassin and con man formerly relied upon by the eunuch to handle his most egregious tasks, is searching for his brother, who bolted from Chang's clutches. The right-hand man, John, has become a persistent threat to the eunuch who is determined to kill him first for betraying him.

Thayer weaves an interesting story that showcases his clear and thrilling action writing. The author has written many novels noted for their accuracy and authentic backdrop (and, notably, a how-to on writing novels). The activity in “House” that swirls through China's mysterious world is a continuation of his diversified talent

China has always been a country of chaos. Invaders, governmental turmoil, vast wealth in the shadow of immense poverty, overcrowding, warring factions, and conflicting religions have plagued it for thousands of years. Yet the serenity of its people and beauty of its countryside create a curious backdrop to all the disarray that inundates its existence. The author has captured that contradiction in a manner that gives the reader the chance to peer into its churning insides while following a story that is highly intriguing.

Enter the many characters introduced by Thayer who have distinct parts in the drama and are remarkable for their importance to the story. The merciless Eunuch Chan, while hunting both John and his brother, finds his vengeance grow more involved with the ever-expanding characterizations, but he is no less threatening.

I recommend this book as an important read and am going to explore more of James Thayer's work.

Mica says

This book was interesting, fast-paced and brutal. It doesn't shy away from the violence associated with early 1900s gangster culture in China, which can be tough to read/hear on audiobook. In order to focus more on the action, the author tends to jump right in rather than set up the scene, so sometimes it was difficult to follow/ determine where the narrator was and what was going on, or how he arrived there. Ultimately, a mostly enjoyable read but definitely not for the very weak stomached.

Jenh says

Not my typical genre, but the author is my neighbor and we opted to read his most recent book for bookclub. I have to say, I really enjoyed it! The story line was interesting and I was drawn to the characters. The author's portrayal of the environment and time period felt genuine and accurate - it really drew me into the story and details were seamlessly woven into the plot line. It could have fallen into the "slightly predictable" category, but the execution was not. It definitely was a page turner... and I thoroughly enjoyed.

Charles Green says

Back in the late 1990's and early 2000's I read a large number of James Thayer novels. I liked the fact that he tackled varied subject matter, from air crashes (in Terminal Event) to straight-up action thrillers (in White Star) to historical espionage (Five Past Midnight). I also enjoyed his clear no-nonsense writing style, his intelligent plotting and his ability to create interesting and believable characters with some genuine depth. Then, after a novel focused on the unlikely topic of architectural hubris (2002's The Gold Swan) Thayer seemed to disappear, and I assumed that he had retired as a writer. Now however, he's back after over a decade with The House of the Eight Orchids and what a very welcome return it is too.

In some ways it represents a return to his roots as a writer, as he eschews the contemporary settings of his later novels and produces another historical adventure set during a turbulent and unpredictable time. However, unlike his earliest works set during or immediately after World War II, such as The Hess Cross and The Stettin Secret, The House of the Eight Orchids is set on the Yangtze River in China during the period prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, when Japan was occupying Manchuria and fighting the Nationalist Chinese Forces of Chang Kai Shek.

Here the reader is introduced to John and William Wade, two American brothers kidnapped as children from the streets of Chungking (Chongqing) and raised as respectively an enforcer/assassin and a forger by local organized crime boss Eunuch Chang, owner of the eponymous house. The story that unfolds follows what happens when John and William break from their kidnapper/master/father figure and are forced to go on the run through a land that is becoming increasingly lawless and chaotic.

It makes for a tale that is by turns tragic, suspenseful, entertaining, humorous, exciting and informative, and often several of these things at the same time. Told entirely from a first person perspective, with John Wade as narrator and lead protagonist, it becomes a combination of a literary chase-movie and travelogue through a

long-lost, exotic and hugely unpredictable world.

To go into too much detail regarding the story would spoil a plot that unfolds in surprisingly unpredictable ways. Whilst Thayer does bow to some conventions of the genre, for example by shoe-horning in the inevitable attractive and available woman for William to encounter, much what occurs tends to buck convention, with individual characters meeting often surprising fates or behaving in fashions one would not expect. As a result what should be a straight forward tale of pursuit, evasion and revenge becomes something far more interesting and entertaining.

It certainly had me gripped, both by the story and the vivid evocation of a time and place long since lost. I can only hope that this isn't a one-off return to fiction for James Thayer and there are similarly entertaining works to come in the near future.

Excellent.

Note: This is a review of a pre-publication copy of *House Of Eight Orchids* received via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

Albert says

House of Eight Orchids by James Thayer is an adventure tale with suspense and intrigue that unfortunately never rises to the level of its potential or the depth of its characters. Its most potent flaw is in its inherent racism. What could have been a tale of one man's journey back to his self becomes a book about American versus Chinese. One good and one evil, you can tell who is good and who is bad simply from the color of their skin.

At the age of five and three, John and William Wade are kidnapped off the streets of Chungking, China in 1912. They are the sons of the American Consul and they are taken by the city's master criminal, the Eunuch Chang. The Eunuch raises the boys and soon they are his most trusted disciples. The youngest, William becomes an artist and master counterfeiter. John is trained to become an assassin and together they grow up in Eunuch Chang's House of Eight Orchids.

Twenty-five years have passed and the young men know no other life then the one they live with Eunuch Chang and his criminal gang, The House of Eight Orchids. This all changes when Chang arranges the kidnapping of a young Chinese actress to sell into slavery to a rich businessman. The actress attempts to seduce John into freeing her but his loyalty to the Eunuch is too strong. But the younger William gives in and tries to escape with the young actress. Knowing that the Eunuch Chang will punish his brother, John has no choice but to go after his brother and protect him from the Eunuch's wrath.

John's journey from loyal ward of the crime lord to his own brother's protector is predictable. that is perhaps what is so often failing in this novel. It is predictable. All the bad guys are Chinese. The Eunuch and his gang, the Businessman who looks to use the actress as his sex slave and even her father who tries to swindle John after he saves her. Even the actress herself, who lies and uses any man who can get her what she wants. While John and William have an inherent nobility about them. They begin to question the criminal acts of the Eunuch Chang and even go against him to save the actress. The American Doctor who works selfishly to save the poor Chinese villagers from the abusive and violent Chinese army and gangs of criminals. She of course is American. Then the American gunship and its sailors who take on the Chinese army and Chinese

gangs to help save John and fight against. Chinese bad. American good. Not just American...white American. Its that blatant and that obvious and from an author of Thayer's ability and reputation, it's also insulting.

This was acceptable perhaps forty or fifty years in the past, or so we would like to tell ourselves but if what is happening in modern movie making and other thrillers set in Asia are any indication, nothing has changed. Take the new movie coming out about the Great Wall of China protecting the people from monsters or dragons. A battle that seems to need Matt Damon to fight it. The Great Zoo of China by Matthew Reilly that needs Americans to fight Dragons and the evil Chinese Government.

House of Eight Orchids is a good book that simply does not rise above its self imposed limitations.

zendegy says

I would say a 3.5 for this book. Beautifully written and full of engaging characters, the only real downside is that I kept feeling like there should be more to the story, somehow. Perhaps that is my own fault. Somehow, the level of writing and the quality of the character creation made me expect something deeper and/or more worthy of the convolutions, lengthy travels and many characters. At the end, I felt like there was a lot of unfulfilled potential in this book. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the ride.

Jorge Cruz says

bullshit!

James A Berkenfield says

Great story and characters. Best book I've read in a while. Recommended highly.

Well written story full of action and great characters. Thoroughly enjoyed this unique novel. Finally author who can actually write

Raymond says

This novel is really a wild ride about a kidnapped American boy during the mid 20th Century and it is really fortunate that he was aided in his adventures at the end of his time in China by a huge dog that adopted him!

Larry says

I enjoyed this book. I can't even remember what I was expecting when I bought it – maybe it was just on sale – nevertheless, I was surprised that it was action novel set in 1930's Chungking. It's a straightforward tale that could have been set anywhere – but it's China that makes it very interesting.

The two children of the American Consul are kidnapped by a shadowy eunuch and 'schooled' as thieves and assassins for hire. Over the next 25 years, these gangsters become masters of their 'crafts' until a love interest, a Chinese movie star, enters the scene. From that point on, it's an adventure through central China. The author inserts numerous tidbits of history, culture and the traditions of this time in China. There's the war between China and Japan, as well as the Nationalist versus Communists – and everything from bandits, to opium, strange monks, knife fight and river gunboats.

This would make a good movie. I would have liked to see a young Keanu Reeves in the lead role. The street scenes would have been fun to watch.

Andy says

I tried to like this but there's something wooden about the writing with too many irrelevant repetitive details all the time, and the characters are not very likable.

For a serious novel about the similar history:
