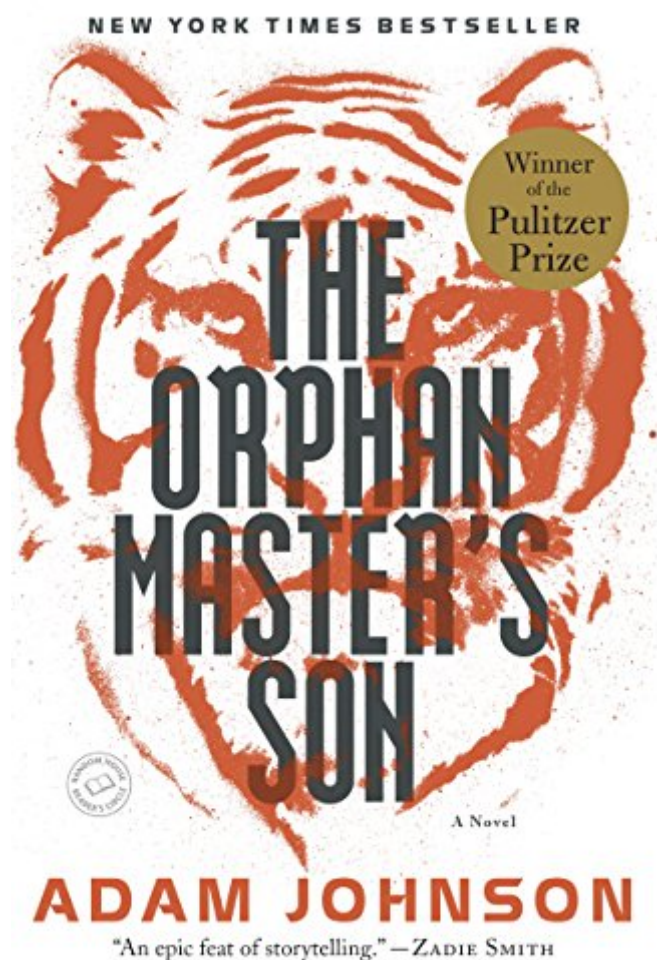


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The Orphan Master's Son: A Novel (Pulitzer Prize For Fiction)



Synopsis

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR FICTION An epic novel and a thrilling literary discovery, *The Orphan Master's Son* follows a young man's journey through the icy waters, dark tunnels, and eerie spy chambers of the world's most mysterious dictatorship, North Korea.

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Pak Jun Do is the haunted son of a lost mother—a singer—stolen—to Pyongyang—and an influential father who runs Long Tomorrows, a work camp for orphans. There the boy is given his first taste of power, picking which orphans eat first and which will be lent out for manual labor. Recognized for his loyalty and keen instincts, Jun Do comes to the attention of superiors in the state, rises in the ranks, and starts on a road from which there will be no return. Considering himself a humble citizen of the greatest nation in the world, Jun Do becomes a professional kidnapper who must navigate the shifting rules, arbitrary violence, and baffling demands of his Korean 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. A towering literary achievement, *The Orphan Master's Son* ushers Adam Johnson into the small group of today's greatest writers. 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.ââ "Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times Ââ Rich with a sense of discovery . . .
Â The Orphan Masterâs Son has an early lead on novel of [the year].ââ "The Daily Beast Â
â This is a novel worth getting excited about.ââ "The Washington Post Ââ [A] ripping piece of
fiction that is also an astute commentary on the nature of freedom, sacrifice, and
glory.ââ ElleFrom the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

If you were taking one of those free association tests and the tester asked your response to "North Korea," what words and pictures would come to your mind? For most, I suspect it's nameless, faceless workers wearing identical clothing, haircuts and Party badges, living in primitive conditions under the most paranoid, repressive regime imaginable, where the only citizen allowed to be an individual is that short man with the odd jumpsuits and pompadour; i.e., the "Dear Leader," Kim Jong Il. [This review was written before Kim Jong Il's death.]Adam Johnson shows that there's a lot of life and humanity, and even humor, behind those conceptions of rigid uniformity, especially in his protagonist, Pak Jun Do. When Jun Do meets some Americans (through an amazing series of events), they mis-hear his name as John Doe. That's a revealing mistake. In North America, we use "John Doe" to represent a male character whose identity we don't know. Sometimes we use the

name to mean an Everyman. Both are appropriate for Jun Do, who was raised in an orphanage as the son of its master. He doesn't know what happened to his mother and his father is unknowable. His name isn't even his; like all residents of the orphanage, he's been assigned the name of one of Korea's political martyrs. Jun Do's life, threading through this book, is one of astonishing hardship, pain and endurance. He is a soldier, an intelligence officer on board a fishing boat, a prisoner in a work camp and a torture facility, member of a diplomatic mission, and a man who manages to find love and freedom in a most unlikely way. Through the story of his life, the story of contemporary life in North Korea is revealed in all its black-is-white totalitarian craziness.

The Orphan Master's Son by Adam Johnson is set in modern day North Korea. North Korea epitomizes Orwellian horror. This is a country where you can be condemned for no more reason than that the poster of Kim Jong Il on your wall has a torn corner, where children spy on their parents and starvation is a way of life. In Korea, the story about a person is what is important, not the person. If the story changes, then the person had better change himself to fit. Every day there are public service announcements telling the stories of the heroes and enemies of the state. The protagonist, Jun Do, is named for one of the "heroes of the revolution", a man who committed suicide to prove himself worthy of the revolution. Jun Do's father, the orphan master, never openly acknowledges his son as such and "proves" his love by being more cruel to him than to the orphans in his care. An orphan's lot in North Korea is grim beyond Dickens' tales of early industrial England. Their lives are brutal, short and exploited. Our protagonist becomes a tunnel soldier, trained in zero light taekwondo. He is then conscripted into becoming a kidnapper working in Japan to provide selected individuals to serve Pyongyang's desires. He is successful as a kidnapper and is rewarded by being trained to become an English translator, doing radio surveillance on board a fishing vessel where the sailors all have their wives' pictures tattooed on their chests. He is selected to accompany a State visit to the USA. The visit is something of a humiliation for North Korea and Jun Do is sent off to prison where he kills and takes the place of one of the heroes of modern North Korea, Commander Ga, and falls in love with Ga's wife, Son Moon, a famous movie star.

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