



The House of the Scorpion

By Nancy Farmer

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The House of the Scorpion By Nancy Farmer

Series: National Book Award Winner for Young People's Literature, Newbery Honor Book, Printz Honor Book

Matteo Alacrán was not born; he was harvested.

His DNA came from El Patrón, lord of a country called Opium--a strip of poppy fields lying between the United States and what was once called Mexico. Matt's first cell split and divided inside a petri dish. Then he was placed in the womb of a cow, where he continued the miraculous journey from embryo to fetus to baby. He is a boy now, but most consider him a monster--except for El Patrón. El Patrón loves Matt as he loves himself, because Matt is himself.

As Matt struggles to understand his existence, he is threatened by a sinister cast of characters, including El Patrón's power-hungry family, and he is surrounded by a dangerous army of bodyguards. Escape is the only chance Matt has to survive. But escape from the Alacrán Estate is no guarantee of freedom, because Matt is marked by his difference in ways he doesn't even suspect.

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The House of the Scorpion By Nancy Farmer Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #6567 in Books
- Brand: Perfection Learning
- Published on: 2004-05-01
- Released on: 2004-05-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x 1.10" w x 5.50" l, .78 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 400 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Fields of white opium poppies stretch away over the hills, and uniformed workers bend over the rows, harvesting the juice. This is the empire of Matteo Alacran, a feudal drug lord in the country of Opium, which lies between the United States and Aztlan, formerly Mexico. Field work, or any menial tasks, are done by "eejits," humans in whose brains computer chips have been installed to insure docility. Alacran, or El Patron, has lived 140 years with the help of transplants from a series of clones, a common practice among rich men in this world. The intelligence of clones is usually destroyed at birth, but Matt, the latest of Alacran's doubles, has been spared because he belongs to El Patron. He grows up in the family's mansion, alternately caged and despised as an animal and pampered and educated as El Patron's favorite. Gradually he realizes the fate that is in store for him, and with the help of Tam Lin, his bluff and kind Scottish bodyguard, he escapes to Aztlan. There he and other "lost children" are trapped in a more subtle kind of slavery before Matt can return to Opium to take his rightful place and transform his country.

Nancy Farmer, a two-time Newbery honoree, surpasses even her marvelous novel, *The Ear, The Eye and the Arm* in the breathless action and fascinating characters of *The House of the Scorpion*. Readers will be reminded of Orson Scott Card's Ender in Matt's persistence and courage in the face of a world that intends to use him for its own purposes, and of Louis Sachar's *Holes* in the camaraderie of imprisoned boys and the layers of meaning embedded in this irresistibly compelling story. (Ages 12 and older) --Patty Campbell

From Publishers Weekly

Farmer's (A Girl Named Disaster; The Ear, the Eye and the Arm) novel may be futuristic, but it hits close to home, raising questions of what it means to be human, what is the value of life, and what are the responsibilities of a society. Readers will be hooked from the first page, in which a scientist brings to life one of 36 tiny cells, frozen more than 100 years ago. The result is the protagonist at the novel's center, Matt a clone of El Patron, a powerful drug lord, born Matteo Alacran to a poor family in a small village in Mexico. El Patron is ruler of Opium, a country that lies between the United States and Aztlan, formerly Mexico; its vast poppy fields are tended by ejits, human beings who attempted to flee Aztlan, programmed by a computer chip implanted in their brains. With smooth pacing that steadily gathers momentum, Farmer traces Matt's growing awareness of what being a clone of one of the most powerful and feared men on earth entails. Through the kindness of the only two adults who treat Matt like a human Celia, the cook and Matt's guardian in early childhood, and Tam Lin, El Patron's bodyguard Matt experiences firsthand the evils at work in Opium, and the corruptive power of greed ("When he was young, he made a choice, like a tree does when it decides to grow one way or the other... most of his branches are twisted," Tam Lin tells Matt). The author strikes a masterful balance between Matt's idealism and his intelligence. The novel's close may be rushed, and Tam Lin's fate may be confusing to readers, but Farmer grippingly demonstrates that there are no easy answers. The questions she raises will haunt readers long after the final page. Ages 11-14.

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Review

* "An inspiring tale of friendship, survival, hope, and transcendence." (*Kirkus, starred review*)

* "This is a powerful, ultimately hopeful story that builds on today's sociopolitical, ethical, and scientific issues and prognosticates a compelling picture of what the future could bring. All of these serious issues are held together by a remarkable coming-of-age story." (*Booklist, starred review*)

* “Farmer's novel may be futuristic, but it hits close to home, raising questions of what it means to be human, what is the value of life, and what are the responsibilities of a society. Readers will be hooked from the first page.” (*Publishers Weekly, starred review*)

“This is mind-expanding fiction for older teens that also works for adults—think Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Orwell's *1984* or Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*.” (*USA Today*)

“Strong, rough, exciting reading.” (*Chicago Tribune*)

“A story rich in twists and tangles, heroes and heroines, villages and dupes, and often dazzlingly beautiful descriptive prose.” (*The Boston Globe*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jerry Bates:

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Isaiah Owens:

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