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# Five Star Billionaire



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn the Man Booker prize-longlisted Five Star Billionaire Tash Aw charts the overlapping lives of migrant Malaysian workers, forging lives for themselves in sprawling Shanghai.Justin from a family of successful property developers. Phoebe has come to China buoyed with hope, but her dreams are shattered within hours as the job she has come for seems never to have existed. Gary is a successful pop artist, but his fans and marketing machine disappear after a bar-room brawl. Yinghui has businesses that are going well but must make decisions about her life. And then there is Walter, the shadowy billionaire, ruthless and manipulative, ultimately alone in the world.In Five Star Billionaire, Tash Aw charts the weave of their journeys in the new China, counterpointing their adventures with the old life they have

left behind in Malaysia. The result is a brilliant examination of the migrations that are shaping the new city experiences all over the world, and their effect on myriad individual lives. Excerpt from *Five Star Billionaire*. Move to Where the Money Is. There was a boy at the counter waiting for his coffee, nodding to the music. Phoebe had noticed him as soon as he walked through the door, his walk so confident, soft yet bouncy. He must have grown up walking on carpet. He ordered two lattes and a green-tea muffin and paid with a silver ICBC card that he slipped out of a wallet covered in gray-and-black chessboard squares. He was only a couple of years younger than Phoebe, maybe twenty-two or twenty-three, but already he had a nice car, a silver-blue hatchback she had seen earlier when she was crossing the street and he nearly ran her over. It was strange how Phoebe noticed such things nowadays, as swift and easy as breathing. She wondered when she had picked up this habit. She had not always been like this. Outside, the branches of the plane trees strained the bright mid-autumn sunlight, their shadows casting a pretty pattern on the pavement.

There was a light wind too, which made the leaves dance. You like this music, huh? Phoebe said as she reached across him for some packets of sugar. His coffees arrived. Its bossa nova, he said, as if it were an explanation, only she didn't understand it. Ei, I also like Spanish music! Huh? he muttered as he balanced his tray. Its Brazilian. He didn't even look at her, though she was glad he didn't, because if he had it would have been a you-are-nothing look, the kind of quick glance she had become used to since arriving in Shanghai, people from high up looking down on her. Brazil and Spain were nearly the same, anyway. They were in a Western-style coffee bar just off Huaihai Lu. The streets were busy; it was a Saturday. But the week no longer divided neatly into weekend and weekday for Phoebe; it had ceased to do so ever since she arrived in Shanghai a few weeks prior to this. Every day tumbled into the next without meaning, as they had done for too long now. She didn't even know what she was doing in this part of town she couldn't afford anything in the shops, and her Italian coffee cost more than the shirt she was wearing. It was a big mistake to have come

here. Her plan was so stupid; what did she think she would accomplish? Maybe she would have to reconsider everything. Phoebe Chen Aiping, why are you so afraid all the time? Do not be afraid! Failure is not acceptable! You must raise yourself up and raise up your entire family. She had started to keep a diary. Every day she would write down her darkest fears and craziest ambitions. It was a technique she'd learned from a self-help master one day in Guangzhou as she waited in a noodle shop, killing time after she had been to the Human Resources Market. A small TV had been set on top of the glass counter next to jars of White Rabbit sweets, but at first she did not pay attention; she thought it was only the news. Then she realized that it was a DVD of an inspirational life teacher, a woman who talked about how she had turned her life around and now wanted to show the rest of us how we, too, could transform our lowly invisible existence into a life of eternal happiness and success. Phoebe liked the way the woman looked straight at her, holding her gaze so steadily that Phoebe felt embarrassed, shamed by her own failure, the complete lack of even the tiniest achievement in her life. The woman had shimmering lacquered hair that was classy but not old-fashioned. She showed how a mature woman, too, could look beautiful and successful even when no longer in her first springtime, as she put it herself, laughing. She had so many wise things to say, so many clever sayings and details on how to be successful. If only Phoebe had a pen and paper, she would have written down every single one, because now she cannot remember much except the feeling of courage that the woman had given her, words about not being afraid of being on one's own, far from home. It was as if the woman had looked into Phoebe's head and listened to all the anxieties that were spinning around inside, as if she had been next to Phoebe as she lay awake at night wondering how she was going to face the next day. Phoebe felt a release, like someone lifting a great mountain of rocks from her shoulders, someone saying, You are not alone, I understand your troubles, I understand your loneliness, I am also like you. And Phoebe thought, The moment I have some money, the first thing I am going to buy is your book. I would not even buy an LV handbag or a new HTC smartphone; I am going to buy your words of wisdom and study them the way some people study the Bible. The book was called *Secrets of a Five Star Billionaire*. This is something Phoebe would never forget. One tip that did stick in her mind was the diary, which the woman did not call a diary but a *Journal of Your Secret Self*, in which you write down all your black terrors, everything that makes you fearful and weak, alongside everything you dream of. It was important to have more positive dreams than burdensome fears. Once you write something in this book, it cannot harm you anymore, because the fears are conquered by the dreams on the opposite page. So, when you are successful, you can read this journal one last time before you discard it forever, and you will smile to see how afraid and underdeveloped you were, because you have come so far. Then you will throw this book away into the Huangpu River and your past self will disappear, leaving only the glorious reborn product of your dreams. She started the journal six

months ago, but still her dreams had not canceled out her fears. It would happen soon. She knew it would. I must not let this city crush me down. Phoebe looked around the caf. The chairs were mustard-yellow and gray, the walls unpainted concrete, as if the work had not yet been finished, but she knew that it was meant to look like this; it was considered fashionable. On the terrace outside, there were foreigners sitting with their faces turned to the sun they did not mind their skin turning to leather. Someone got up to leave and suddenly there was a table free next to the Brazilian music lover. He was with a girl. Maybe it was his sister and not a girlfriend. Phoebe sat down next to them and turned her body away slightly to show she was not interested in what they were doing. But in the reflection in the window the sun was shining brightly that day; it was almost Mid-autumn Festival, and the weather was clear, golden, perfect for dreaming. Phoebe could see them quite clearly. The girl was bathed in crystal light as if on a stage, and the boy was cut in half by a slanting line of darkness. Every time he leaned forward, he came into the light. His skin was like candle wax. As the girl bent over her magazine, Phoebe could see that she was definitely a girlfriend, not a sister. Her hair fell over her face, so Phoebe could not tell if she was pretty, but she sat the way a pretty person would. Her dress was a big black shirt with loads of words printed all over it like graffiti, no-meaning sentences such as peace \$\$\$ paris, and honestly it looked horrible and made her body look formless as a ghost, but it was expensive, anyone could see that. The handbag on the floor was made of leather that looked soft enough to melt into the ground. It spread out at the girls feet like an exotic pet, and Phoebe wanted to stroke its crosshatch pattern to see what it felt like. The boy leaned forward, and in the mirrored reflection he caught Phoebe's eye. He said something to his girlfriend in Shanghainese, which Phoebe couldn't understand, and the girl looked up at Phoebe with a sideways glance. It was something that Shanghainese girls had perfected, this method of looking at you side-on without ever turning their faces to you. It meant that they could show off their fine cheekbones and appear uninterested at the same time, and it made you feel that you were not important at all to them, not worthy even of a proper stare. Phoebe looked away at once. Her cheeks felt hot. Do not let other people step on you. Sometimes Shanghai bore down on her with the weight of ten skyscrapers. The people were so haughty; their dialect was harsh to her ears. If someone talked to her in their language, she would feel attacked just by the sound of it. She had come here full of hope, but on some nights, even after she had deposited all her loathing and terror into her secret journal, she still felt that she was tumbling down, down, and there was no way up. It had been a mistake to gamble as she did. She was not from any part of China but from a country thousands of miles to the south, and in that country she had grown up in a small town in the far northeast. It is a region that is poor and remote, so she is used to people thinking of her as inferior, even in her own country. In her small town, the way of life had not changed very much for fifty years and would probably never change. Visitors from the capital city used to call it charming, but they didn't have to live there. It was not a place for dreams and ambition, and so Phoebe did not dream. She did what all the other young boys and girls did when they left school at sixteen: They traveled across the mountain range that cut the country in two to find work on the west coast, moving slowly southward until they reached the capital city. Here are some of the jobs her friends took the year they left home: Trainee waiter. Assistant fake-watch stallholder. Karaoke hostess. Assembly-line worker in a semiconductor factory. Bar girl. Shampoo girl. Water-cooler deliveryman. Seafood-restaurant cleaner. (Phoebe's first job was among those listed above, but she would rather not say which one.) Five years in these kinds of jobs they passed so slowly. Then she had some luck. There was a girl who disappeared. Everyone thought she was in trouble, she had been hanging out with a gangster, the kind of big-city boy you couldn't tell your small-town parents about, and everyone thought it wouldn't be long before she was into drugs or prostitution; they were sure of it because she had turned up with a big jade bracelet and a black eye one day. But from nowhere Phoebe received an email from this girl. She wasn't in trouble; she was in China. She had just decided that enough was enough and left one morning without telling her boyfriend. She had saved enough money to go to Hong Kong, where she was a karaoke hostess for a while she was not ashamed to say it, because everyone does it, but it was not for long and now she was working in Shenzhen. She was a restaurant manager, a classy international place, not some dump, you know, and she was in charge of a staff of sixteen. She even had her own apartment (photo attached small but bright and modern, with a vase of plastic roses on a glass table). Thing is, she had met a businessman from Beijing who was going to marry her and take her up north, and she wanted to make sure everything was okay at the restaurant before she left. They always needed a good waitstaff at New World Restaurant. Just come! Don't worry about visas. We can fix that. There were two smiley faces and a winky one at the end of the email. Those days were so exciting, when they emailed each other several times a day. What clothes shall I bring? What is the winter weather like? What kind of shoes do I need for

my uniform? Each email that arrived from China made Phoebe feel that she was one step closer to lifting herself up in the world and becoming someone successful. It made the hair salon where she was working at the time seem so small the clients were small people who did not realize how small they were. When they said to her, Hey, Phoebe, you are not concentrating, she just laughed inside, because she knew that very soon she would be the one giving them orders and leaving them tips. She was going to experience adventures and see things that none of them could even dream about. It took her a few weeks to get enough money together for the ticket to Hong Kong plus a bit extra to get her to Shenzhen, but from then on it was clear sailing, because she had a job lined up and she would stay with her friend for the first couple of months until she found her own place. She didn't need all that much money; she would start making plenty once she got there, her friend assured her. From then on, anything was possible. She could start her own business doing whatever she wanted some former waitresses at the restaurant were already going around in chauffeur-driven cars just a year after they quit their jobs. New China was amazing, she would see for herself. No one asks too many questions; no one cares where you are from. All that counts is your ability. If you can do a job, you're hired. People say that it is hard to leave your life behind and that when the time comes for you to do so you will feel reluctance and longing for your home. But these are people with nice lives to leave behind. For others it is different. Leaving is a relief. The emails continued, full of !!! marks as usual, but they were less frequent, and finally, at the Internet caf near East Tsim Sha Tsui station, while waiting for the train to Shenzhen, Phoebe logged on for the first time in four days to find not a single email from her friend. Not even a short message that said, hurry, too excited, followed by lots of smileys. When at last she got to Shenzhen, it took her some time to locate the restaurant. The sign was proud and shiny. new world international restaurant, it read above twin pillars of twisted gold dragons Phoebe recognized it from the photos her friend had sent her. The menu was still in a glass case outside, a sure sign of a classy joint. But as she approached, Phoebe's heart began to experience a dark fluttering in her rib cage, the way she imagined bat wings would feel against her cheek. It was a sensation that would stay with her for the rest of her time in China. The glass doors were open, but the restaurant was dim even though it was the middle of the afternoon. When she stepped inside, she saw an empty space without any chairs and tables. Part of the floor had been ripped up, and on the concrete she could see messy patches of glue where the carpets had once been laid. There was a bar decorated with scenes of Chinese legends carved in bronze, cranes flying over mountains and lakes. Some workmen were shifting machinery and tools at the far end of the restaurant, and when Phoebe called out to them they seemed confused. The restaurant had closed down a few days ago; soon it would be a hot-pot chain. The people who worked there? Probably just got jobs somewhere else. No one stays in a job for long in Shenzhen, anyway. She thought, This is not a good situation. She tried calling her friend's mobile phone number, but it was dead. This number is out of use, the voice told her, over and over again. Each time she dialed, it was the same. This number is out of use. She checked how much money she had and began to look for a cheap guesthouse. The streets were clean but full of people. Everyone looked as though they were hurrying to an appointment; everyone had someplace to go. Amid the mass of people that swarmed around her like a thick, muddy river, she started to notice a certain kind of person, and soon they were the only people she really saw. Young single women. They were everywhere, rushing for the bus or marching steadfastly with steely looks on their faces, or going from shop to shop handing out their CVs, their entire lives on one sheet of paper. They were all restless, they were all moving, they were all looking for work, floating everywhere, casting out their lives to whoever would take them. So this is how it happens. This is how I become like them, Phoebe thought. In the space of a few hours she had passed from one world to another. One moment she was almost an assistant manager in an international classy restaurant; next moment she was a migrant worker. Her new life had materialized out of thin air like a trick of fate: unattached, searching, alone. Some people say that when you find other people who are just like you, who share your position in life, you feel happier, less alone, but Phoebe did not think this was true. Knowing that she was the same as millions of other girls made her feel lonelier than ever. She found a standard room in a place that called itself a hotel, but it was so low-class that it felt like a hostel. The door wouldn't lock, so she slept with her handbag tucked into her belly, curving into a tight C shape. Those first few months in Shenzhen passed very quickly. During this time Phoebe did a number of jobs that she would rather not talk about right now. Maybe someday, but not now. You can rely only on yourself. There are no true friends in this world. If you place your trust in others, you will open yourself to danger and hurtfulness. She took the bus to Guangzhou and got a job at a factory for the Guangdong Bigfaith Quality Garment Company, which made fashion clothes for Western brands not the expensive labels that Phoebe had heard of but lesser ones

that sold shiny colorful clothes. The other girls, though, told Phoebe that the clothes were sold in trendy shops, even though they were low cost. Apparently, in the West, even rich people bought cheap clothes. Personally, Phoebe did not want any of the skirts or jackets or blouses that were made at the factory; they looked unclassy even to her. Her job was to match up the orders to the delivery notes and make sure that everything tallied. It was not a difficult job, but still she cried every night. The hours were long and at night she had to endure being in a dorm with the other girls, so many other girls. She hated seeing their underwear strung up on washing lines in every room, even in the corridors, drying in the damp air. Everywhere you went in the dormitory block, all you saw were lines of damp underwear, and the whole place smelled of detergent and sweat. All day and night there was arguing and crying. She hated this, especially the nighttime sobbing. It was as if everyone thought that when it was dark no one could hear them cry. She had to get away from them, she was not like them, but for now she had no choice. The other hard thing to deal with was the jealousy, the things that were being said about her. (Why did she get such a good job straightaway? Why was she in admin and not on the production line, when she only just entered the company? I hear she hasn't even been out for that long.) Well, Phoebe wanted to explain, first of all it was because she could speak English and Cantonese, the language of all the rich factory owners down here in the south. And, quite simply, it was because she was better than the rest of them. But she knew to keep silent. She was afraid of the large groups of girls who came from the big provinces, especially the Hunanese girls who smuggled things out of the factory to sell outside and threatened to kill anyone who reported them. They liked to fight. Everyone had their own clan for protection: The Sichuan girls looked after one another; even the Anhui girls were numerous enough to have support. Only Phoebe was alone, but she would rise up above them all, because she was smarter. A line stuck in her head, advice given to her by the self-made millionaire. Hide your brightness; remain in the shadows. So she had to endure the jealousy and the detergent and the sweat and the crying. But for how long? Do not let lesser people drag you down. You are a star that shines brightly. She had a picture of a Taiwanese pop star by her bed. It was just a page torn from a magazine, an advertisement for cows milk, but it was a nicer decoration than the strung-up panties that the other girls had. It was a struggle to keep the Scotch tape stuck on the glossy painted walls, because the humidity kept making the top corner fall away. But still she persisted so that she could look at him and dream about a world where there was no sobbing. If she turned her body at an angle, they were the only two in the world. She liked his delicate smile and watery eyes and found even the silly white milk mustache on his lip endearing. When she looked at his face, she felt an eternal hope swell up in her chest. His gentleness made her forget about the harshness of the world and made her believe that she could work hard and show the world her true inner beauty. Maybe she could one day even be his girlfriend. Oh, she knew that it was only a fantasy, but he was so dreamy and reminded her of the boys she had grown up with, whom she would remember forever as teenagers, even though they had now all moved to the cities and were selling fake-leather wallets and probably amphetamines on the side. They had been so happy before, and now they were all growing old so quickly, including Phoebe. But you are so young, little sister. This is what the new manager of her division began saying to her one day. He was a man from Hong Kong, not fat not thin, not ugly not handsome, just a man from Hong Kong. Once a month he would visit the factory and spend four or five days there. Every time he came, he would call her into his office and show her the gifts he had brought for her a bag of the juiciest tangerines, small sugary pineapples from Taiwan, strawberries, some foreign chocolate that tasted bitter and floury delicacies that people bought when they could afford to travel. The hamper of fruit lay on his desk, wrapped in stiff crinkly plastic that made a loud noise when she touched it. She did not know how she was going to carry it all the way back to her dorm, across the huge courtyard and the basketball courts, did not know where she would keep it or how she would explain it to the other girls. The jealousy toward her had not really gone away; the tide had subsided for the moment but was waiting to well up like a tsunami at any moment. She knew that the gift was wrong, that she had not done anything to deserve it, but as she looked at the shiny ripe persimmons, she felt special. Someone had noticed her; someone had thought of her enough to buy her nice things. It had been a long time since anyone had done that, so she accepted the gift. As she carried the basket down the corridor to her dorm, she could feel the other girls' hot stares burning her with their envy. She was sweating and her heart was heavy with guilt, heavier than the basket she was carrying. But as she walked in to the dorm, she found herself talking freely, the words flowing easily from her mouth. Ei, everyone, look what I have! A cousin of mine in Hong Kong got married to a very rich man. I couldn't afford to go to the wedding, so they sent me some tokens of their big celebration. Come, come, let's all share! Hei, you did not tell us you are from Hong Kong. Yes, Phoebe said, from near the border, in the New

Territories.Oooh, the girls said as they reached for the fruit. So I guess its natural that you speak Cantonese!

We thought you just learned it to curry favor with the boss!This is how things happen in China, Phoebe thought as she sat watching her new friends share the basket of fruit. Things change so fast. From then on, all the girls knew who she was, and they were nice to her. They took her clothes and washed them for her when she was on a long shift, and some of them began to talk to her about their private liveswhere they were from, their boyfriend problems, their ambitions. One day she was talking to a girl, someone she shared meal breaks with in the canteen sometimes, not really a friend. The girls mobile phone rang, and the girl looked at the screen without answering. Her face twisted into a pained expression and she handed the phone to Phoebe, saying, Its the boy I was telling you about, the one who bullies me. Phoebe took the phone and did not even say hello. This is your ex-girlfriends older cousin-sister, she said. This mobile phone belongs to me now. Your ex has a new boyfriend and he is rich and educated, not a stupid peasant like you, so go away or else I will make trouble for you. I know who you are and which lousy place you work at.Wah, you are amazing, Phoebe! the girl said. Everyone was laughing, and someone even reached out and put her arm around Phoebes shoulders.On her first day off that month, she went with some other girls to the cinema. They stopped at a fast-food place and had bubble milk tea before buying a box of octopus balls, which they ate while strolling through the night market, linking elbows as if they were still in middle school. They turned their noses up at the cheap clothes, far cheaper than the ones they made in the factory, stall after stall of thin spangled nylon. The music on the speakers was loud, thumping in their rib cages and drowning out their heartbeats. It made them feel so alive. The smell of fried food and charcoal grills felt familiar to Phoebeshe did not feel so very far from home after all. They saw posters advertising the latest concert of the Taiwanese singer she liked, and the ticket prices did not look too expensive.Hei, we should all save up some money and go! someone said. Phoebe, you love Gary, dont you? Maybe we can share the cost of your ticket, because you are always cooking for us and sharing your food with us. I hear hes going to sing some Cantonese songs too, since its here in Guangzhou, so you can teach us to sing along!She was happy that they offered, but she knew that these were empty promises and that no one would actually buy her a ticket.She stopped to buy a shiny black top decorated with beads, but the other girls scolded her. Forty kuai! Too expensive. Aiya, new girls are always the same, always spending money on useless things instead of sending it home. Besides, you should be buying nicer clothes, something that suits your slim figure better, not some old-mother style! Phoebe bought it anyway; she didnt care. It had pretty embroidery, a red rose adorned with silver beads that fanned out from each petal.But as swiftly as the bright cool days of autumn give way to the damp chill of winter, life also changes. Phoebe knew this by now. Nothing ever stood still in China; nothing was permanent. A person who is loved cannot expect that love to remain for long. There is no reason for them to keep this love; they do not have a right to be loved.She shared her third basket of fruit and other delicacies with her dorm friends. This time there were bags of dried scallops and a tin of abalone, which none of them had ever tasted before, and they gathered to cook a meal together. It was too luxurious for lowly people like them, one girl remarkedthis meal was all thanks to Phoebe.Really, said another girl, lifting her rice bowl to her mouth, Boss Lin says this kind of thing is not so special in Hong Kong; everyone eats it over there.How would you know? When do you ever talk to Boss Lin?Hmm, its true. I rarely get a chance to speak to him. The only person he speaks to is Phoebe.I wish he didnt, Phoebe joked. He is so boring. Hei, its only because of my stupid job that I have to have contact with him.It seems he takes a special interest in you. He even calls you into his private office.Yes, but only to scold me for tasks I have not done! Come, eat some more!The next month, Mr. Lin summoned Phoebe to see him as soon as he arrived. He shut the door; the blinds were already down as usual. There was no fruit basket this time, only a small box. He opened it and held out a brand-new mobile phone, the type with no buttons on the screen, just a smooth glass surface. It was something a tycoons daughter would have, or a businesswoman. Phoebe didnt even know how to turn it on.But I already have a phone.Its okay, take it. Tell your friends you won it in a competition.She held it in her hands, turning it over and over again. She held it up to her face. It was like a mirror she could see herself in it.You like it? Mr. Lin was standing next to her, though she had not heard him approach her. He put his hand on her buttock, the palm flat, burning through her jeans. Hours later, she would still feel the imprint of his hot hand on her, leaving its mark where it had stayed for less than half a minute, maybe not even that long.In the dorm, someone said, Whats happened to your cousin in Hong Kong? No food hamper this month? I think the cousin must have suddenly died and turned into a ghost!The next day, two Shaanxi girls from the next block were taken away by the police. When Phoebe asked why, one of her dorm mates said it was because they didnt have the right papers. They were illegal, and one of them was underage.But I thought

you said this kind of thing doesn't really matter, that the employer doesn't ask too many questions, where you're from and all that, Phoebe said. Sure, that's right, her dorm mate replied, smiling. But rules are rules. You can dodge the regulations for so long, but if someone makes a formal report, there's nothing anyone can do. Half the girls here are lying about something, and most of the time it's okay. Even if you don't have a proper hukou or your papers are fake, who cares. Only when you step out of line do others make trouble for you. Those girls were unpopular; they were arrogant and made enemies. They thought they were better than everyone else, so what could they expect? It was just a matter of time. One morning Phoebe came back after a night shift and saw that the poster by her bed had been defaced. The pop singer's moon-bright complexion had been dotted with acne, and now he wore round black glasses and there were thick cat whiskers sprouting from his cheeks. Time was running out for Phoebe. From the first moment she set foot in China, she had felt the days vanishing from her life, vanishing into failure. Like the clock she stared at every day at work, her life was counting down the minutes before she became a non-person whom no one would ever remember. As she sat during lunch break on the low brick wall next to the volleyball court, she knew that she had to act now or she would forever be stepped on everywhere she went. The gray concrete dormitory blocks rose up on all four sides of the yard and blocked out the light. There was Cantonese pop music playing from somewhere, and through an open window she could see a TV playing reruns of the Olympics, Chinese athletes winning medals. She watched the high jump for a while. A lanky blond girl failed twice, flopping down heavily on the bar. One more go and she was out. It didn't really matter, since she wasn't going to win a medal. Then suddenly she did something that made Phoebe shiver with excitement. For her third and final jump, she asked for the bar to be raised higher than anyone had jumped so far, higher than she had probably ever attained in her whole life. She had failed at lower heights, but now she was gunning for something way beyond her capabilities. She was going to jump all the way to the stars, and even if she failed she could only come down as far as the lowly position she already occupied. She stood at the end of the runway, flexing her fingers and shaking her wrists, and then she started running, in big bouncy strides. Phoebe got up and turned away. She didn't want to see what happened; it was not important to her. The only thing that mattered was that the blond girl had gambled. She took her expensive new phone to a Sichuan girl who traded things in the dorm and sold it for a nice sum of cash. She washed her hair and tied it neatly before going to Boss Lin's office. She was wearing her tightest jeans, which she usually reserved for her day off. They were so tight that she could not sit down comfortably without them cutting into the tops of her thighs. Little miss, it's highly irregular for us to hand out salaries before payday, he said, but he was already looking for the number of the accounts department. Come on, it's almost the end of the month, only a week to go. Phoebe twirled her hair and inclined her head the way she had noticed other girls doing when they talked to the handsome security guards. Anyway, she laughed, our relationship is a bit irregular, don't you think? Foshan, Songxia, Dongguan, Wenzhou, she was going to bypass them all. Her bar was going to be raised all the way to the sky. There was only one city she could go to now, the biggest and brightest of them all. *Revue de presse Tash Aw's tale of five migrant workers carving out lives in a modernising Shanghai is the stuff of a hit TV miniseries ... the reading experience it offers is coolly engrossing Adam Mars-Jones, Observer 'A fascinating cast of characters ... a panoramic, expertly detailed painting of contemporary Shanghai' Stephen Amidon, Sunday Times Tash Aw's Five Star Billionaire opens with a bang, not a whimper. Aw is a master storyteller and Five Star Billionaire can be read as The Way We Live Now for our times Aminatta Forna, Guardian [Tash Aw] is unmatched at evoking the smells and sounds of the land and cityscapes, the figures of speech and shifting cultural mores of that finger-like peninsula that pokes into the South China Sea ... Their tales are told chapter by chapter, the characters slowly drawing closer together like flotsam in a vortex, before the stunning finale ... There is wit here, and plenty of acute observation and characterisation. Sholto Byrne, Independent on Sunday Tash Aw's latest book is a new kind of immigrant novel. One that takes place in our increasingly multipolar world and is, in some ways, a challenge to the old narrative Sunday Telegraph The five characters are distinct, and Aw manages to bring them together well ... Aw brilliantly recreates the intonations and vocabulary of someone educated only in Chinese. Independent Tash Aw's gently compelling novel follows several narratives that overlap in unexpected ways ... Aw's style terse but tender, lightly ironic without being snide is fresh, bracing and, above all, compassionate. His characters, though shy and private people, form profound impressions on the reader. One simply cares deeply what happens to them, and this skilled writer never makes that an easy matter to predict Scotsman -- Scotsman*