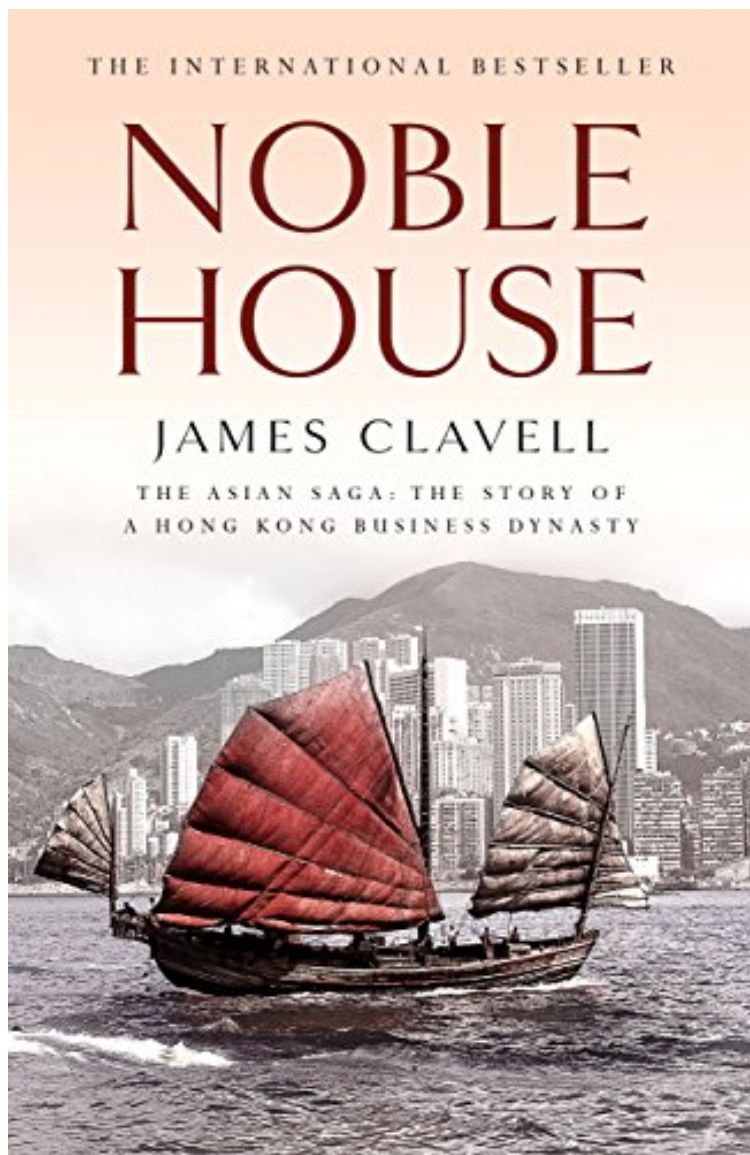


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# Noble House: The Fifth Novel of the Asian Saga



*Par James Clavell*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOver one hundred years have passed since Dirk Struan founded Hong Kong's oldest trading company. But now, the Noble House is in danger. As Hong Kong itself becomes the deadly playground of the CIA, the KGB and the People's Republic of China, rival tai-pans, seeking revenge for blood feuds over a century old, gather for the kill.ExtraitChapter One 8:45 p.m.:The police officer was leaning against one corner of the information counter watching the tall Eurasian without watching him. He wore a light tropical suit and a police tie and white shirt, and it was hot within the brightly lit terminal

building, the air humid and smell-laden, milling noisy Chinese as always. Men, women, children, babes. An abundance of Cantonese, some Asians, a few Europeans. "Superintendent?" One of the information girls was offering him a phone. "It's for you, sir," she said and smiled prettily, white teeth, dark hair, dark sloe eyes, lovely golden skin. "Thanks," he said, noticing that she was Cantonese and new, and did not mind that the reality of her smile was empty, with nothing behind it but a Cantonese obscenity. "Yes?" he said into the phone. "Superintendent Armstrong? This is the tower Yankee 2's just landed. On time." "Still Gate 16?" "Yes. She'll be there in six minutes." "Thanks." Robert Armstrong was a big man and he leaned across the counter and replaced the phone. He noticed her long legs and the curve of her rump in the sleek, just too tight, uniformed chong-sam and he wondered briefly what she would be like in bed. "What's your name?" he asked, knowing that any Chinese hated to be named to any policeman, let alone a European. "Mona Leung, sir." "Thank you, Mona Leung." He nodded to her, kept his pale blue eyes on her and saw a slight shiver of apprehension go through her. This pleased him. Up yours too, he thought, then turned his attention back to his prey. The Eurasian, John Chen, was standing beside one of the exits, alone, and this surprised him. Also that he was nervous. Usually John Chen was unperturbable, but now every few moments he would glance at his watch, then up at the arrivals board, then back to his watch again. Another minute and then we'll begin, Armstrong thought. He began to reach into his pocket for a cigarette, then remembered that he had given up smoking two weeks ago as a birthday present to his wife, so he cursed briefly and stuck his hands deeper into his pockets. Around the information counter harassed passengers and meeters-of-passengers rushed up and pushed and went away and came back again, loudly asking the where and when and how and why and where once more in myriad dialects. Cantonese he understood well. Shanghainese and Mandarin a little. A few Chu Chow expressions and most of their swearwords. A little Taiwanese. He left the counter now, a head taller than most of the crowd, a big, broad-shouldered man with an easy, athletic stride, seventeen years in the Hong Kong Police Force, now head of CID Criminal Investigation Department of Kowloon. "Evening, John," he said. "How're things?" "Oh hi, Robert," John Chen said, instantly on guard, his English American-accented. "Everything's great, thanks. You?" "Fine. Your airport contact mentioned to Immigration that you were meeting a special plane. A charter Yankee 2." "Yes but it's not a charter. It's privately owned. By Lincoln Bartlett the American millionaire." "He's aboard?" Armstrong asked, knowing he was. "Yes." "With an entourage?" "Just his Executive VP and hatchet man." "Mr. Bartlett's a friend?" he asked, knowing he was not. "A guest. We hope to do business with him." "Oh? Well, his plane's just landed. Why don't you come with me? We'll bypass all the red tape for you. It's the least we can do for the Noble House, isn't it?" "Thanks for your trouble." "No trouble." Armstrong led the way through a side door in the Customs barrier. Uniformed police looked up, saluting him instantly and watched John Chen thoughtfully, recognizing him at once. "This Lincoln Bartlett," Armstrong continued with pretended geniality, "doesn't mean anything to me. Should it?" "Not unless you were in business," John Chen said, then rushed on nervously, "He's nicknamed 'Raider' because of his successful raids and takeovers of other companies, most times much bigger than himself. Interesting man; I met him in New York last year. His conglomerate grosses almost half a billion dollars a year. He says he started in '45 with two thousand borrowed dollars. Now he's into petrochemicals, heavy engineering, electronics, missiles lots of U.S. Government work foam, polyurethane foam products, fertilizers she even has one company that makes and sells skis, sports goods. His group's Par-Con Industries. You name it, he has it." "I thought your company owned everything already." John Chen smiled politely. "Not in America," he said, "and it is not my company. I'm just a minor stockholder of Struan's, an employee." "But you're a director and you're the eldest son of Noble House Chen so you'll be next compradore." By historic custom the compradore was a Chinese or Eurasian businessman who acted as the exclusive intermediary between the European trading house and the Chinese. All business went through his hands and a little of everything stuck there. So much wealth and so much power, Armstrong thought, yet with a little luck, we can bring you down like Humpty-Dumpty and Struan's with you. Jesus Christ, he told himself, the anticipation sickly sweet, if that happens the scandal's going to blow Hong Kong apart. "You'll be compradore, like your father and grandfather and great-grandfather before you. Your great-grandfather was the first, wasn't he? Sir Gordon Chen, compradore to the great Dirk Struan who founded the Noble House and damn nearly founded Hong Kong." "No. Dirk's compradore was a man called Chen Sheng. Sir Gordon Chen was compradore to Dirk's son, Culum Struan." "They were half-brothers weren't they?" "So the legend goes." "Ah yes, legends the stuff we feed on. Culum Struan, another legend of Hong Kong. But Sir Gordon, he's a legend too you're lucky." "Lucky? John Chen asked himself bitterly. To be decended from an illegitimate son of a Scots piratean opium runner, a whoring evil genius and murderer if some of the stories are true and a Cantonese singsong

girl bought out of a filthy little cathouse that still exists in a filthy little Macao alley? To have almost everyone in Hong Kong know your lineage and to be despised for it by both races? "Not lucky," he said, trying to be outwardly calm. His hair was \_gray-flecked and dark, his face Anglo-Saxon and handsome, though a little slack at the jowls, and his dark eyes only slightly Asian. He was \_forty-two and wore tropicals, impeccably cut as always, with Hermes shoes and Rolex watch. "I don't agree," Armstrong said, meaning it. "To be compradore to Struan's, the Noble House of Asia . . . that's something. Something special." "Yes, that's special." John Chen said it flat. Ever since he could think, he had been bedeviled by his heritage. He could feel eyes watching him, the eldest son, the next in line he could feel the everlasting greed and the envy. It had terrified him continuously, however much he tried to conquer the terror. He had never wanted any of the power or any of the responsibility. Only yesterday he had had another grinding row with his father, worse than ever before. "I don't want any part of Struan's!" he had shouted. "For the hundredth time I want to get the hell out of Hong Kong, I want to go back to the States, I want to lead my own life, as I want, where I want, and how I want!" "For the thousandth time, you'll listen to me. I sent you to Am" "Let me run our American interests, Father. Please. There's more than enough to do! You could let me have a couple of mill" "Ayeeyah you will listen to me! It's here, here in Hong Kong and Asia we make our money! I sent you to school in America to prepare the family for the modern world. You are prepared, it's your duty to the fam" "There's Richard, Father, and young Kevin Richard's ten times the businessman I am and chomping at the bit. What about Uncle Jam" "You'll do as I say! Good God, you know this American Bartlett is vital to us. We need your knowl" "Uncle James or Uncle Thomas. Uncle James'd be the best for you; best for the family and the bes" "You're my eldest son. You're the next head of the family and the next compradore!" "I won't be by God!" "Then you won't get another copper cash!" "And that won't be much of a change! We're all kept on a pittance, whatever outsiders think! What are you worth? How many millions? Fifty? Seventy? A hun" "Unless you apologize at once and finish with all this nonsense, finish with it once and for all, I'll cut you off right now! Right now!" "I apologize for making you angry but I'll never change! Never!" "I'll give you until my birthday. Eight days. Eight days to become a dutiful son. That's my last word.

Unless you become obedient by my birthday I'll chop you and your line off our tree forever! Now get out!" John Chen's stomach twisted uneasily. He hated the interminable quarreling, his father apoplectic with rage, his wife in tears, his children petrified, his stepmother and brothers and cousins all gloating, wanting him gone, all of his sisters, most of his uncles, all their wives. Envy, greed. The hell with it and them, he thought. But Father's right about Bartlett, though not the way he thinks. No. This one is for me. This deal. Just this one then I'll be free forever. They were almost through the long, brightly lit Customs Hall now. "You going racing Saturday?" John Chen asked. "Who isn't!" The week before, to the ecstasy of all, the immensely powerful Turf Club with its exclusive monopoly on horse racing the only legal form of gambling allowed in the Colony had put out a special bulletin: "Though our formal season does not start this year until October 5, with the kind permission of our illustrious Governor, Sir Geoffrey Allison, the Stewards have decided to declare Saturday, August 24 a Very Special Race Day for the enjoyment of all and as a salute to our hardworking population who are bearing the heavy weight of the second worst drought in our history with fortitude. . . ." "I hear you've got Golden Lady running in the fifth," Armstrong said. "The trainer says she's got a chance. Please come by Father's box and have a drink with us. I could use some of your tips. You're a great punter." "Just lucky. But my ten dollars each way hardly compares with your ten thousand." "But that's only when we've one of our horses running. Last season was a disaster. . . . I could use a winner." "So could I." Oh Christ how I need a winner, Armstrong thought. But you, Johnny Chen, it doesn't matter a twopenny tick in hell if you win or lose ten thousand or a hundred thousand. He tried to curb his soaring jealousy. Calm down, he told himself. Crooks're a fact and it's your job to catch them if you can however rich, however powerful and to be content with your rotten pay when every street corner's groaning with free silver. Why envy this bastard he's for the chopper one way or another. "Oh by the way, I sent a constable to your car to take it through the gate. It'll be waiting at the gangway for you and your guests." "Oh, that's great, thanks. Sorry for the trouble." "No trouble. It's a matter of face. Isn't it. I thought it must be pretty special for you to come yourself." Armstrong could not resist another barb. "As I said, nothing's too much trouble for the Noble House." John Chen kept his polite smile but screw you, he thought. We tolerate you because of what you are, a very important cop, filled with envy, heavily in debt, surely corrupt and you know nothing about horses. Screw you in spades. Dew neh loh moh on all your generations, John Chen thought, but he kept the obscenity hidden carefully, for though Armstrong was roundly hated by all Hong Kong yan, John Chen knew from long experience that Armstrong's ruthless, vengeful cunning was worthy of a filthy Manchu. He

reached up to the half-coin he wore on a thin leather thong around his neck. His fingers trembled as they touched the metal through his shirt. He shivered involuntarily. "What's the matter?" Armstrong asked. "Nothing. Nothing at all." Get hold of yourself, John Chen thought. Now they were through the Customs Hall and into the Immigration area, the night dark outside. Lines of anxious, unsettled, tired people waited in front of the neat, small desks of the cold-faced, uniformed Immigration officers. These men saluted Armstrong. John Chen felt their searching eyes. As always, his stomach turned queasy under their scrutiny even though he was safe from their probing questions. He held a proper British passport, not just a second-class Hong Kong passport, also an American Green Card the Alien Card that most priceless of possessions that gave him free access to work and play and live in the U.S.A., all the privileges of a born American except the right to vote. Who needs to vote, he thought, and stared back at one of the men, trying to feel brave, but still feeling naked under the man's gaze. "Superintendent?" One of the officers was holding up a phone. "It's for you, sir." He watched Armstrong walk back to take the call and he wondered what it would be like to be a policeman with so much opportunity for so much graft, and, for the millionth time, what it would be like to be all British or all Chinese, and not a Eurasian despised by both. He watched Armstrong listening intently, then heard him say above the hubbub, "No, just stall. I'll deal with it personally. Thanks, Tom." Armstrong came back. "Sorry," he said, then headed past the Immigration cordon, up a small corridor and into the VIP Lounge. It was neat and expansive, with bar facilities and a good view of the airport and the city and the bay. The lounge was empty except for two Immigration and Customs officers and one of Armstrong's men waiting beside Gate 16a glass door that let out onto the floodlit tarmac. They could see the 707 coming onto her parking marks. "Evening, Sergeant Lee," Armstrong said. "All set?" "Yes sir. Yankee 2's just shutting down her engines." Sergeant Lee saluted again and opened the gate for them. Armstrong glanced at John Chen, knowing the neck of the trap was almost closed. "After you." "Thanks." John Chen walked out onto the tarmac. Yankee 2 towered over them, its dying jets now a muted growl. A ground crew was easing the tall, motor-driven gangway into place. Through the small cockpit windows they could see the dimly lit pilots. To one side, in the shadows, was John Chen's dark blue Silver Cloud Rolls, the uniformed Chinese chauffeur standing beside the door, a policeman nearby. The main cabin door of the aircraft swung open and a uniformed steward came out to greet the two airport officials who were waiting on the platform. He handed one of the officials a pouch with the airplane's documents and arrival manifests, and they began to chat affably. Then they all stopped. Deferentially. And saluted politely. The girl was tall, smart, exquisite and American. Armstrong whistled quietly. "Ayeeyah!" "Bartlett's got taste," John Chen muttered, his heart quickening. They watched her come down the stairs, both men lost in masculine musings. "You think she's a model?" "She moves like one. A movie star, maybe?" From the Trade Paperback edition. *Revue de presse* "The last time I was so taken with a spellbinding safari was when I read *Gone With The Wind*." *Los Angeles Times*. Clavells biggest triumph yet storytelling done with dash and panache... a rousing read. *Washington Post* Fiction for addicts extravagantly romantica book that you can get lost in for weeks staggering complexity not only is it as long as life, its also as rich with possibilities. *New York Times* Tremendous entertainment a seamless marvel of pure storytelling. *Cleveland Plain Dealer* A mesmerizer spellbinding. *Los Angeles Times* Breathtaking only terms like colossal, gigantic, titanic, incredible, unbelievable, gargantuan, are properly descriptive. Clavell has made himself the king of super-adventure thrillers. *Chicago Tribune*

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