



## Fortune Cookie

*Bryce Courtenay , Humphrey Bower (Narrator)*

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It's the 1960s and the world of advertising is coming alive and it's an exciting world to be part of. Simon Wong, a Chinese-Australian and promising young advertising executive, is sent to Singapore to establish an office.

## Fortune Cookie Details

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## From Reader Review Fortune Cookie for online ebook

### Julie says

I'm intrigued enough to keep going, but I do find the main character - the narrator - annoying. Courtenay requires that the reader maintains the image of an extremely stocky chinese man, which is fine, but then he has to also continually ram in the fact of his (Simon's) Australian-ness. Fourth Generation. Yup I got it, thanks... Simon's as Aussie as they come, he just doesn't look like it and he just can't help but use every corny Aussie expression that ever was even though he just has to keep explaining them to everyone he speaks to. Again and again and again.

Contrived, cliched, corny and condescending. Completely lacking any wit whatsoever. Tediously repetitive running unfunny "jokes" throughout referring jockstraps and bad breath (to cite just two).

The history lessons (which I actually enjoyed very much and, I think, are pretty much the only time the author spent some actual effort with the writing) contained within the book notwithstanding, it's been written for readers who really hate to think.

He also spends so much time and energy repeating in various ways the notion that he Respects Women Enormously. To such a degree that I actually don't think he does and, having now Googled the question, I find that I may just be correct.

I've read 2 of Courtenays previous novels and April Fools Day(which had me blubbering in all the right places) even though the novels were almost as contrived, cliched etc. as this one. But it's the first time I find myself actively disliking the author.

Am I older and wiser or simply old and bitter?

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### Mona Ingram says

Bryce Courtenay is without a doubt my favourite author but this book was a disappointment. I got tired of hearing about the fact that in spite of the main character being short and stocky he was considered a good lover. Tell us once...perhaps twice, but for goodness sake, don't insult the reader by telling us over and over! I actually found myself skipping over some pages which for me is most unusual. I think in this case Mr. Courtenay committed the dreaded sin against which Elmore Leonard cautions: to leave out the boring parts [sic].

I'm still a Bryce Courtenay fan, and I will read this book again and hopefully enjoy it more the second time. I tend to gobble them up the first read - have read ALL of his books (except The Family Frying Pan, which I can't get) three or four times!

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### Sam Still Reading says

I think I need to start off this review by saying that this novel is quite different from the other books I've read

by Bryce Courtenay (I haven't read all of them though). He is most well-known for his Australian historical books (such as *The Story of Danny Dunn*, *The Potato Factory*) but this book is a departure from those.

Why? For starters, this book is set in the 1960s and very little of the action takes place in Australia. The majority is set in Singapore, just after Lee Kwan Yew came to power with the PAP. The protagonist, Simon Koo is an Australian born Chinese (his family arrived during the gold rush in the 1850s) and he is the most Chinese looking of all of his family (in fact, he is often referred to as looking like a 'Chinese peasant' – well-built and not the prettiest). He speaks little Cantonese and although he harbours dreams of becoming an artist, he works in advertising.

Sent to Singapore as creative director of a new multinational advertising company, Simon finds his path is fraught with obstacles. He needs to learn the Chinese idea of 'face', battle his bosses and try to support his alcoholic half-day colleague, Dansford Drocker. There's a little of the *Mad Men* touch here as advertising campaigns are explained. Fortunately, Simon has a friend and eventually lover in Mercy B. Lord but there are problems in that area too. Where does Mercy B. Lord disappear to on Thursdays? Why is she so secretive?

There's a lot of interesting snippets too about the reform of Singapore as well as Chinese-Australian history. You don't see a lot of the Singapore that exists today apart from The Raffles and Goodwood Park Hotel (which I'm ashamed to say that I haven't yet been into). The characters are fantastic too, from Molly Ong (former Miss Singapore) to Dansford and his wife, Chicken Wing and Willy Wonka. There's also a character called Louie da Fly, a reference to Mortein's own advertising campaign for Louie the Fly which Bryce Courtenay wrote himself.

The ending of this book was fantastic – didn't see that one coming! I read this quickly, it's a book to be devoured in big chunks. As a Singapore lover, I enjoyed the references to the hotels, humidity and food. I'll definitely be looking for the ghosts of Dansford at the Goodwood!

I'd be interested to know if this book will be published in Singapore and what Singaporeans think of it.

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## **Raha says**

The story is easy to read. There are some repetitions here and there, but overall a pleasant novel masterfully portraying the intricacies of dealing with a foreign culture.

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## **Kate says**

Abandoned it about 200 pages in. The narrator's voice didn't capture me the way it did in his novel *The Power of One*, which I liked a lot. And because the narrator summarizes a lot, I found myself craving more scenes, more action, not just his talking at me. Of course if the voice was captivating, I wouldn't have minded.

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## Yukiru Kannazuki says

Looking back on a book I've read, I tend to remember most clearly the ways it disappointed me. This has troubled me to some degree because this book in particular deserves a stellar review, with much praise paid to the intricate characters and its wonderfully realized world, praise for Bryce Courtenay's skill with suspense and the seamless way his story progresses. And yet, these achievements are overshadowed in my mind by the feeling that he just gave up while writing the final chapters. (view spoiler) As I sat and listened (my book being read by Humphrey Bower), I had a vision for what the ending *could* have been: somehow, Guanxi, would prove to have poetic justice in store for the Wing brothers whom thought so much of it. But, Bryce Courtenay is a down-to-earth writer. Poetic justice in his stories is often only a character's passing fancy. In his stories reality is often more mundane than fiction.

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## Davytron says

I was recommended Bryce Courtenay by my friends who adore the author. Because of all the praise for Courtenay, I was surprised at how awful this book was. Wow, was this a boring read. I couldn't even finish it. I know rating a book before it is finished isn't really best practice but reading it was basically torture. I'm okay with despising or loving a protagonist, or even sort of liking them or sort of hating them; but not feeling anything about the main character in a novel does not make for an easy read. In fact, I couldn't care less about -any- of the characters in this novel. Courtenay's repetitive writing and lame characters made me thrust this book far away. Perhaps I'll read one of Courtenay's more popular novels next time.

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## Debby says

I am audible book addict, and this is why listening to a good narrator is vital to me. I think the main reason that I listen to Bryce Courtenay's books is that Humphrey Bower remains one of my favorite narrators. He makes the story interesting, just by all his different voices and accents. I wasn't sure if I was going to like this book, but I did. I found the history of Singapore, the Chinese, the reformation to be quite interesting. I got a little tired of hearing Simon referring to himself as ugly (flat-faced, build like a trunk... yadda, yadda, yadda). Okay, I get it. But that was minor. The ending had a great twist or two. I found myself going on a marathon "listen" to get to the end of the story. I thoroughly enjoyed it and now I'm off to find another one of Mr. Courtenay's stories to listen to, bless his soul.

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## VelveetaRanch says

Ah Koo, the lone survivor of his ancient family and great-great-grandfather of the book's protagonist, Simon Koo, flees his home in China during the Taiping Rebellion and begins a new life in the gold fields of 1850's Australia. Through hard work and perseverance, Ah Koo eventually acquires a bit of land (*10 acres of plundered cedar beside a permanently running creek*), a Chinese wife named Little Sparrow (thanks to an arrangement with the headman of his village in China, of whom he requested that *she should be strong and willing to work and must come from a lucky family with a reputation for predominantly male offspring*), and a full set of carpenter's chisels.

Little Sparrow's recurring dream and its subsequent interpretations left me cold and had me wondering if I was going to finish reading this book. Unless it's sci-fi, dream sequences and premonitions or anything not grounded in reality (yeah, I know, it's my reality – your mileage may vary) usually indicate a lazy author who doesn't know how to stay in control of their storyline. So at this point I'm thinking maybe a 2-star rating.

As the story continues Ah Koo and his new bride set about creating the beginnings of what soon becomes a familial dynasty of lawyers, doctors and businessmen.

Fast forward a few generations to the 1960's where Simon, who wants to be his own man and prove himself, is reluctant to go to work for any of the family businesses. Instead, he says goodbye to Australia and his well-to-do family and finds employment in Singapore as an advertising executive for Wing Brothers Advertising, a terrible trio of odd and crooked brothers.

Things pick up as we are introduced to Singapore, the squeeze and the culture of the Orient (where saving face is valued more than money) and meet a cast of interesting new characters.

While Simon is busy learning the ins and outs of Singapore's advertising world and becoming more aware by the day of the Wing Brothers peculiarities, he meets the impeccably beautiful, and seemingly unobtainable, Miss Mercy B. Lord. What a great name for a gorgeous woman, eh? That alone merits a bump up in the ratings—3 stars! Simon is quickly warned by the Wing Brothers, in no uncertain terms, to stay away from Miss Mercy B. Lord, but it's too late. He has already fallen in love with her.

As Simon and Mercy begin to hook up, also very much against the sternly expressed desires of Mercy's fearsome boss, Beatrice Fong, who, evidently, has it within her power to make life miserable for Mercy, things begin to heat up. It turns out that Mercy and Beatrice have a mysterious secret which Mercy is keeping from Simon and the rest of us. It's a secret that could put an end to Simon and Mercy's budding romance, and Mercy puts it to Simon just that way—accept her as she is and ask no questions or she will leave and he will never see her again.

Fortune Cookie was my introduction to Bryce Courtenay. I like the way he writes and I'm looking forward to reading more of his books. I initially rated the book at 3-stars. It wasn't until a few days later that I decided I really liked it and bumped it up to 4-stars. Strange how that happens sometimes.

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## **Librariasaurus says**

This wasn't Courtenay's best work, I actually didn't feel like a lot had happened until the last quarter of the book.

I didn't like Simon overly much and was extremely frustrated by everything tondo with Mercy B Lord's secrecy, though I guess I understand it.

I was a bit taken aback by the narration as well, a very white man producing stereotypical Asian English accents on characters seemed a little on the racist side. Could these not have been done by actual Asian actors? Or did they need to be done at all?

While this hasn't put me off reading Courtenay's writing, I think I'll stick to his older stuff for a while.

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## **Susan says**

As with many of his later books I find I want him to get on with it and not digress so much. I loved his first books and am still hooked after *The Power of One* and *The Potato Factory*, the first of his trilogy. There were many interesting details of Asian cultural ways and thinking in this book but the characters lacked somehow. This said, I am still always waiting for another of his books to appear.

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## **Myriam says**

I loved this book. It was a little slow going but it made it all the better. The characters are lively and engaging. You get caught in the story and find yourself relishing the exotic time travel experience offered. There is a mix of plausible, incredible and totally possible that makes this book stand out...Maybe I am going to be hated when I say this but it's almost the feeling I get when I read a James Bond novel, except that I appreciate it a lot more because I don't spend a quarter of the read scoffing at some of the stuff the main character does.

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## **Richard Mulholland says**

This is a tricky one to review. On one side this was a great story with great characters. On the other hand the Courtenay clearly isn't a fan of brevity. In fact in this book he gave brevity a running kick to the nuts. This book could (should) have been a third shorter. Some of the descriptions were agonising, and yet I finished it in just over a week, so really I must have enjoyed it :)

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## **Matt says**

Courtenay does it again! In this excellent historical novel, we enter the life of an Aussie with strong Chinese family ties, as he moves from his home in Oz to work in an advertising firm being created in Singapore. Courtenay draws on his years of experience in advertising and peppers it with his excellent desire to teach the reader about the history of the region. What seems like a book that takes you down one path leads you to many other outcomes as the forks in the road take you to another dimension entirely.

Courtenay paints some of his usual romantic enticement with the main character and has us begging for the two of them to end up together. While spice up the story with the locals (and the struggles of linguistic discrepancies) and some of the historical goings-on during the time, Courtenay pushes the story forward and leaves the reader in the dust, unless they pick up their jaw and forge ahead. Just when you think you know how it will all end, BAM, the major change leaves you tying up all the loose ends and shaking your head. I had to admit, Courtenay drew me in and left me laughing.

Well done Mr. Courtenay. I have yet to find a book of yours I did not adore!

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## Anian Christoph says

Spoilt, sheltered and bored advertising honcho with artistic pretensions goes to 1960s Singapore to take on an executive role for a company run by three evil Chinese brothers. Despite their evilness our hero is of course a stellar business success, and one who enjoys the most shallow and primitive aspects of Expat debauchery, including regular sex with prostitutes and a culture of constant heavy drinking, without qualms or signs of redemption. He falls in lust with his relocation counsellor, a mysterious oriental beauty with a dark secret and an orphan background. In lifting this secret, the unlikable hero gets his girl, wraps up a sinister drug smuggling plot, wins international art prizes - and helps clean up Singapore. All of this in fulfillment of a prophetic dream one of his own Chinese migrant forebears had in the nineteenth century.

Yup.

Ok, so I read this adventure-cum-romance novel recuperating from an illness. My attention span was more suited to in-flight reading than anything else. If you are in a similar position, you could do worse than this one, especially if you are interested in Australian-Chinese-Singaporean topics and related themes of face, money, drugs and Anglo-Chinese history.

Unfortunately, the book firstly has pretensions of being a Bildungsroman, which it is not by any stretch. It is in fact surprisingly immoral but too shallow and trite to be an "Anti-Bildungsroman". Secondly, the unwieldy story seems to have not been edited at all, except for the opening chapters. It is extremely long in parts, with redundant (and in many instances: verbatim repeated) passages swamping the story from about the halfway-mark, in addition to extremely boring, long-winded and utterly useless reiterations of descriptions that add nothing to the story and frankly read like the droning monologue of a terminally uninteresting and unlikable relative at an endless family gathering. Add some incredible clichés about hard drinking expats, the apologetic undertones when it comes to prostitution (covered up with pseudo-egalitarian rants sprinkled here and there) and a hefty dose of Orientalism with a capital "O", and you have a fair assessment of what's awaiting the innocent reader.

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