



Tai-Pan (Asian Saga)

By James Clavell

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It is the early 19th century, when European traders and adventurers first began to penetrate the forbidding Chinese mainland. And it is in this exciting time and exotic place that a giant of an Englishman, Dirk Straun, sets out to turn the desolate island of Hong Kong into an impregnable fortress of British power, and to make himself supreme ruler...Tai-Pan!

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Editorial Review

Review

"Unforgettable!"—*Chicago Tribune*

"A fabulous epic of the Far East that will disturb and excite you...a thrilling and enticing tale of adventure and human relationships...dramatic episodes, exotic vignettes and heady descriptive passages." —*Baltimore Sun*

"Clavell is, as always, a matchless tale-spinner."—*Cosmopolitan*

"Every five or six years there appears on the horizon a book so vast in scope, so peopled with bold, colorful characters, it eclipses other efforts.... Such a book is *Tai-Pan*."—*Pittsburgh Press*

"Grand entertainment...packed with action...gaudy and flamboyant with blood and sin, treachery and conspiracy, sex and murder...fresh and vigorous." —*New York Times*

About the Author

James Clavell, who died in 1994, was a screenwriter, director, producer, and novelist born in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Although he wrote the screenplays for a number of acclaimed films, including *The Fly* (1958), *The Great Escape* (1963), and *To Sir With Love* (1967), he is best known for his epic novels in his Asian Saga.

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Chapter One

"A pox on this stinking island," Brock said, staring around the beach and up at the mountains. "The whole of China at our feet and all we takes be this barren, sodding rock."

He was standing on the foreshore with two of his fellow China traders. Scattered about them were other clusters of traders, and officers from the expeditionary force. They were all waiting for the Royal Navy officer to begin the ceremony. An honor guard of twenty marines was drawn up in two neat lines beside the flagpole, the scarlet of their uniforms a sudden splash of color. Near them were the untidy knots of sailors who had just fought the flagpole into the stony soil.

"Eight bells were time to raise the flag," Brock said, his voice rasping with impatience. "It be an hour past. Wot's godrotting delay for?"

"It's bad joss to curse on a Tuesday, Mr. Brock," Jeff Cooper said. He was a lean, hook-nosed American from Boston, his frock coat black and his felt top hat set at a jaunty angle. "Very bad!" Cooper's partner, Wilf Tillman, stiffened slightly, feeling the underlying edge to the younger man's nasal voice. He was thickset and ruddy, and came from Alabama.

"I'll tell thee right smartly, this whole godrotting flyspeck be bad joss!" Brock said. "Joss" was a Chinese word that meant Luck and Fate and God and the Devil combined. "Godrotting bad."

"It better not be, sir," Tillman said. "The future of the China trade's here now—good joss or bad joss."

Brock stared down at him. "Hong Kong's got no future. It's open ports on the China mainland we be needing, and you knowed it, by God!"

"The harbor's the best in these waters," Cooper said. "Plenty of room to careen and refit all our ships. Plenty of room to build our homes and warehouses. And no Chinese interference at long last."

"A colony's got to have arable land and peasants to work the land, Mr. Cooper. An' revenue," Brock said impatiently. "I be walking all over and so have you. Not a crop'll grow here. There be no fields or streams, no grazing land. So no meat and no spuds. Everything we be needing'll have to come by sea. Think of the cost. Why, even the fishing be rotten. An' who's to pay upkeep of Hong Kong, eh? Us and our trade, by God!"

"Oh, that's the sort of colony you want, Mr. Brock?" Cooper said. "I thought the British Empire"—he spat deftly to windward—"had enough of that sort of colony."

Brock's hand strayed near his knife. "Be you spitting to clear yor throat, or spitting on the Empire?" Tyler Brock was nearing fifty, a big, one-eyed man as hard and as permanent as the iron he had been forced to peddle in Liverpool as a youth, and as strong and as dangerous as the fighting merchant ships he had escaped to and at length had come to rule as head of Brock and Sons. His clothes were rich and the knife at his belt was jeweled. His beard was graying like his hair.

"It's a cold day, Mr. Brock," Tillman said quickly, inwardly angry at his young partner's loose tongue. Brock was no man to bait, and they could not afford open enmity with him yet. "Plenty of chill on the wind, eh, Jeff?"

Cooper nodded briefly. But he did not take his eyes off Brock. He had no knife, but there was a derringer in his pocket. He was of a height with Brock but slighter, and unafraid.

"I be givin' thee piece of advice, Mr. Cooper," Brock said. "Best not spit too often after saying 'British Empire.' There be some wot baint be givin' thee benefit of doubt."

"Thank you, Mr. Brock, I'll remember," Cooper replied easily. "And I'll give you some advice: It's bad joss to curse on a Tuesday."

Brock suppressed his temper. Eventually he would crush Cooper and Tillman and their company, the biggest of the American traders. But now he needed them as allies against Dirk and Robb Struan. Brock cursed joss. Joss had made Struan and Company the greatest house in Asia, and so rich and powerful that the other China traders had named it in awe and jealousy The Noble House—noble because it was first in riches, first in largess, first in trade, first in clippers, but mostly because Dirk Struan was Tai-Pan, the Tai-Pan among all the tai-pans of Asia. And joss had cost Brock an eye seventeen years ago, the year that Struan had founded his empire.

It had happened off Chushan Island. Chushan was just south of the huge port of Shanghai, near the mouth of the mighty Yangtse River. Brock had beaten up through the monsoon with a huge cargo of opium—Dirk Struan a few days astern, also carrying opium. Brock had reached Chushan first, sold his cargo and turned around, knowing happily that now Struan would have to go farther north and try a new coast with fresh risks. Brock had sped south for home—Macao—his coffers filled with bullion, the full wind astern. Then a great

storm had suddenly swooped out of the China seas. The Chinese called these storms tai-fung, the Supreme Winds. The traders called them typhoons. They were terror incarnate.

The typhoon had battered Brock's ship mercilessly, and he had been pinned by the falling masts and spars. A shorn halyard, caught by the winds, had flailed him as he lay helpless. His men had cut him loose but not before the broken shackle-ended rope had gouged out his left eye. The ship had been on her beam ends and he helped them cut the rigging and spars adrift, and by some miracle she had righted herself. Then he had poured brandy into the bleeding socket; he could still remember the pain.

And he recalled how he had limped into port long after he had been given up for lost, his fine three-masted clipper no more than a hulk, the seams sprung, masts and guns and rigging gone. And by the time Brock had replaced spars and rigging and masts and cannon and powder and shot and men, and bought another cargo of opium, all the profits of this voyage had vanished.

Struan had run into the same typhoon in a small lorcha—a boat with a Chinese hull, English-rigged and used for coastal smuggling in fine weather. But Struan rode out the storm and, elegant and untouched as usual, had been on the dock to greet Brock, his strange green eyes mocking him.

Dirk and his cursed joss, Brock thought. Joss be letting Dirk build that one stinking lorcha into a fleet of clippers and hundreds of lorchas, into warehouses and bullion to spare. Into godrotting Noble House. Joss pushed Brock and Sons into godrotting second place. Second. And, he thought, joss's given him ear of our godrotting weak-gutted plenipotentiary, the Honorable Godrotting Longstaff, all these years. An' now, together, they've sold us out. "A pox on Hong Kong and a pox on Struan!"

"If it weren't for Struan's plan, you'd never have won your war so easily," Cooper said.

The war had begun at Canton two years before, when the Chinese emperor, determined to bring the Europeans to heel, tried to eliminate the opium smuggling which was essential to British trade. Viceroy Ling had surrounded the foreign settlement at Canton with troops, and demanded every case of opium in Asia to ransom the lives of the defenseless English traders. At length, twenty thousand cases of opium had been given over and destroyed, and the British were allowed to retreat to Macao. But the British could not take lightly either interference with its trade or threats to its nationals. Six months ago the British Expeditionary Force had arrived in the Orient and ostensibly had been placed under the jurisdiction of Longstaff, the Captain Superintendent of Trade.

But it was Struan who conceived the inspired plan to by-pass Canton, where all the trouble had started, and instead send the expeditionary force north to Chushan. To take that island without loss would be simple, Struan had theorized, for the Chinese were unprepared and helpless against any modern European army or fleet. Leaving a small holding force at Chushan and a few ships to blockade the Yangtse, the expeditionary force could sail north to the mouth of the Pei Ho River and threaten Peking, the capital of China, which was only a hundred miles upstream. Struan knew that only so direct a threat would make the emperor immediately sue for peace. A superb conception. And it had worked brilliantly. The expeditionary force had arrived in the Orient last June. By July Chushan had been taken. By August it was moored at the Pei Ho. In two weeks the emperor had sent an official to negotiate peace—the first time in history that any Chinese emperor had officially acknowledged any European nation. And the war had ended with almost no loss to either side.

"Longstaff was very wise to follow the plan," Cooper said.

"Any China trader knowed how to bring the Chinees to their knees," Brock said, his voice rough. He pushed

his top hat farther back on his forehead and eased his eye patch. "But why did Longstaff and Struan agree to negotiate back at Canton, eh? Any fool knowed 'negotiate' to a Chineese means to play for time. We should've stayed north at the Pei Ho till peace were signed. But no, we brung back the fleet and for the last six month we be waiting and waiting for the buggers to set pen to paper." Brock spat. "Stupid, crazy stupid. An' all that waste of time and money for this stinking rock. We should've kept Chushan. Now, there be island worth having." Chushan was twenty miles long and ten wide and its land fertile and rich—a good port and a big city, Tinghai. "Space for a man to breathe in there, right enough. Why, from there three or four frigates can blockade the Yangtse at the drop of a topper. An' who controls that river controls the heart of China. That's where we should settle, by God."

"You still have Chushan, Mr. Brock."

"Yus. But it baint deeded in godrotting treaty, so it baint our'n." He stamped his feet against the growing chill wind.

"Perhaps you should mention it to Longstaff," Cooper said. "He's susceptible to advice."

"Not to mine, he baint. As thee rightly knowed. But I'll tell thee, when Parliament hear about the treaty, there be hell to pay, I'll be bound."

Cooper lit a cheroot. "I'm inclined to agree. It is an astonishing piece of paper, Mr. Brock. For this day and age. When every European power is land-_grabbing and power-hungry."

"And I suppose the United States baint?" Brock's face tightened. "Wot about yor Indians? The Louisiana Purchase? Spanish Florida? You be havin' eyes on Mexico and Russian Alaska. The last mails told you be even trying to steal Canada. Eh?"

"Canada's American, not English. We're not going to war over Canada—she'll join us of her own free will," Cooper said, hiding his worry. He tugged at his muttonchop whiskers and pulled his frock coat tighter around his shoulders against the sharpening wind. He knew that war with the British Empire would be disastrous at this time, and would ruin Cooper-Tillman. God damn wars. Even so, he knew that the States would have to go to war over Mexico and Canada unless there was a settlement. Just as Britain had had to go to war with China.

"There won't be a war," Tillman said, trying to quiet Cooper diplomatically. He sighed and wished himself back in Alabama. A man can be a gentleman there, he thought. There you don't have to deal with the damned British every day, or with blasphemous, foulmouthed scum like Brock, or a devil incarnate like Struan—or even with an impetuous young man and senior partner like Jefferson Cooper, who thinks Boston the center of the earth. "And this war's over, for better or worse."

"Mark my words, Mr. Tillman," Brock said. "This godrotting treaty be no good for us'n and no good for they. We've to keep Chushan and open ports on mainland China. We be at war again in a few weeks. In June when the wind be ripe and the weather be ripe, the fleet'll have to sail north to Pei Ho again. An' if we be at war again, how we going to get season's teas and silks, eh? Last year almost no trade because of war—the year before no trade at all an' they stole all our opium to boot. Eight thousand cases from me alone. Two million tael of silver that cost me. Cash."

"That money's not lost," Tillman said. "Longstaff ordered us to give it up. To ransom our lives. He gave us paper on the British Government. And there's a settlement in the treaty. Six million tael of silver to pay for

it."

Brock laughed harshly. "Thee think Parliament be honoring Longstaff's paper? Why, any Government'd be throwed out of office the moment they asked for the brass to pay for opium. An' as to the six million—that be paying for the cost of the war. I knowed Parliament better'n you. Kiss yor half million tael goodbye be my advice to you both. So if we be at war again this year, there be no trade again. An' if we baint trading this year, we be all bankrupt. You, me, every China trader. An' even the godrotting Noble House." He jerked out his watch. The ceremony was to have started an hour ago. Time be running out, he thought. Yus, but not on Brock and Sons, by God. Dirk's had seventeen-year run of good joss, and now be time for change.

Brock reveled in the thought of his second son, Morgan, who capably—and ruthlessly—controlled all their interests in England. He wondered if Morgan had been successful in undermining Struan's influence in Parliament and in banking circles. We be going to wreck thee, Dirk, he thought, and Hong Kong along with thee. "Wot the hell be the delay for?" he said, hastening toward the naval officer who was striding up and down near the marines.

"What's the matter with you, Jeff? You know he's right about Hong Kong," Tillman said. "You ought to know better than to bait him."

Cooper smiled his thin smile. "Brock's so goddam sure of himself. I couldn't help it."

"If Brock's right about the half million tael, we're ruined."

"Yes. But Struan will lose ten times that if there's no payment. He'll get paid, never fear. So we'll get ours." Cooper looked after Brock. "Do you think he knows about our deal with Struan?"

Tillman shrugged. "I don't know. But Brock's right about the treaty. It's stupid. It'll cost us a pretty penny."

For the last three months Cooper-Tillman had been acting as secret agents for The Noble House. British warships had been blockading Canton and the Pearl River, and British traders were forbidden to trade. Longstaff—at Struan's bidding—had put the embargo on as another measure to force the peace treaty, knowing that the Canton warehouses were bulging with teas and silks. But since America had not declared war on China, American ships could go through the blockade freely and thumb their noses at the warships. So Cooper-Tillman had bought four million pounds of tea from Chen-tse Jin Arn—or Jin-qua, as he was nicknamed—the richest of the Chinese merchants, and shipped it to Manila, supposedly for Spanish merchants. The local Spanish official, for a considerable bribe, had issued the necessary import and export licenses, and the tea was transferred—duty free—into Struan's clippers and rushed to England. Payment to Jin-qua was a shipload of opium delivered secretly by Struan somewhere up the coast.

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Users Review

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Lidia Hill:

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Michelle Bachman:

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