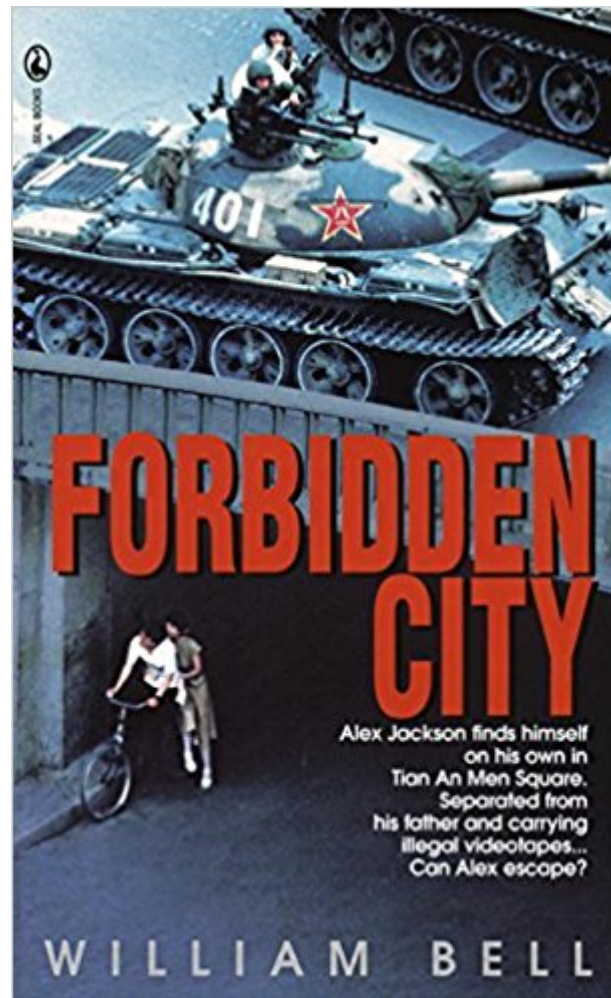




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# Forbidden City: A Novel Of Modern China



## Synopsis

Seventeen-year-old Alex Jackson comes home from school to find that his father, a CBC news cameraman, wants to take him to China's capital, Beijing. Once there, Alex finds himself on his own in Tian An Men Square as desperate students fight the Chinese army for their freedom. Separated from his father and carrying illegal videotapes, Alex must trust the students to help him escape. Closely based on eyewitness accounts of the massacre in Beijing, *Forbidden City* is a powerful and frightening story. From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Despite certain shortcomings, this fictionalized account of the tragedy of Tiananmen Square is as engrossing as it is appalling. When Alex's father, a news cameraman, is assigned to Beijing, Alex leaps at the chance to join him. At loose ends in the alien metropolis, the teenager studies Chinese and explores the city on his bike, filming with a makeshift hidden camera. Not surprisingly, these skills come in handy during both the student protests and the subsequent crackdown. In fact, Alex's avocation, along with his father's profession, seem to have been chosen solely to provide the reader with a bird's-eye view of the events of that brutal spring. Even Alex's obsession with military history seems tacked on in order to facilitate the lumbering symbolism of the novel's conclusion. By contrast, Bell's descriptions of the action in and around the Square are vivid and

heartbreaking--there are moments when the searing force of this fragment of recent history shines through the thin characters and eclipses the contrived plot. Ages 12-up. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Grade 6-12-- Alex, 17-year-old war aficionado and son of a Canadian cameraman, accompanies his father to China and becomes enmeshed in the Tiananmen incident of 1989. He gets separated from his father, is befriended by some students, witnesses a good deal of the massacre, and is finally smuggled out by a student who pays for his liberation with her life. This is a blood-and-thunder story, and Bell tells it with gusto. Incidents are piled on one another, background descriptions are very convincing, and at times readers will almost feel they are there. All this amounts to an incredibly compelling novel. Curiously, when the protagonist is not in China, he becomes somewhat one-dimensional. The beginning is a tad contrived to lead to the real meat of the novel, and the ending is pat beyond common decency (in a grand, melodramatic scene, Alex destroys all his war toys back in comfy suburban Toronto). Yet the preponderant part of this novel is marvelously realized, partially from the immediacy of using first-person narration, partially from telling vignettes that really bring the time, place, and situation to life in a most memorable way. There is also a certain ring of truth about some elements of the story that resonates long after putting this novel down. In spite of the flaws, this is an excellent tale, well told, and a historical novel of note. --John Philbrook, San Francisco Public Library Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is an admirable little book, dealing with an iconic building in China, if not a series of buildings, the Forbidden City. The product of the Ming and Qing rulerz and a symbol of China and its recent history (no one building could probably symbolize all of it, given the age of the culture and its continuity). I approached this book with expectations of learning two things, first about Chinese building cocepts and techniques. In this first thing, the book does not provide much to enhance understanding of this particular point. There is a glossary of terms, but really if you are seeking to understand Chinese imperial architecture, this is not the book for you. Despite these shortcomings, the book does succeed very well in discussing the meaning that these series of buildings has had and will likely have as long as there is a China and how this has changed as living memories of the revolution have faded. As is always the case, as China has become less ideological and more reasonable, there is a greater appreciation of the past and more respect for what the Forbidden City means to the population in general. During the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Enlai felt the only thing

that could be done with the building was to close it because tempers ran so high. There are also marvelous stories about the building and its content. I suppose that because I grew up near New Orleans, I have always liked stories about faded glory and decadence of the always reliable upper classes. In the aftermath of the fall of the Q'ing dynasty, both the eunuchs and Pu Yi, the last emperor were apparently competing in some sort of contest of larceny before the entire collection of the Forbidden City could be catalogued and placed in glass cases for the edification of the general public. The eunuchs managed to get out enough to set themselves up in a series of antique stores in the vicinity of the Forbidden City. The former emperor (he was six when he abdicated) managed to get enough out to furnish his shabby court when he was ruler of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo (here, as always, the Japanese helped out). Both sides eyed each as they hid various priceless treasures, the eunuchs burning down an entire building in order to cover up their crimes.. Both the stories and the quest for meaning provide the central strengths of the book.. So if you are looking for something to provide you with insight or are just curious about imperial Chinese history, check out this book. It is worth the effort.

If you want a big, glossy picture book of the Forbidden City don't buy this book. If you want something lovely that you'll keep forever, buy it indeed! This is the "Little Black Book" on the subject of the palace itself and so much more. It's a small, neat, lovely to handle edition whose only colour is in the red endpapers that are exactly the red of the Forbidden City's palace walls. The old, grainy, black and white photographs add to the pleasure and increase the feeling that you are getting something true and genuine instead of just another travel guide. Geremie Barme's text is erudite, as you'd expect from a Professor of Asian History, but it's also deliciously gossipy and has a pace and feeling for detail that is never boring. Professor Barme is especially good on the modern uses the Forbidden City has been put to, and his views on the Communist era are refreshingly balanced, putting Chairman Mao into the "Imperial" context very nicely. I especially loved it because it had a picture of an event I actually attended: the 1976 funeral of Chou En Lai. The shock of seeing it, just as it was, came as a delightful surprise. A lovely book. It feels Chinese.

What a riveting read. I had half a mind to submit a full on book review but unfortunate I do not have the time. This is a book that will not disappoint. Well written from first to last. Enjoy!

Excellent guide to an in depth knowledge of history, art and characters related to this wonder of the world: A must to be read before visiting Beijing

Fantastic novel with a noteworthy ending.

Another great book!!

The book was major disappointment. It has nothing about the architecture, art, or cultural significance of the Forbidden City beyond a listing of the names of the various buildings, and its attempt at history is little more than episodic gossip, which includes a three page review and plot summary of what she admits is a poor 1960s movie.

Very difficult ult to read with all the Chinese names I can't pronounce. I started it and put it down. I'll try again.

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