



# The Painted Boy

*Charles de Lint*

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## **The Painted Boy** Charles de Lint

James Li should be in Chicago, finishing high school and working at his family's restaurant. Instead, as a born member of the Yellow Dragon Clan, he is on a quest even he does not understand. Jay's journey takes him to Santo del Vado Viejo in the Arizona desert, a town overrun by gangs, haunted by members of other animal clans, perfumed by delicious food, and set to the beat of Malo Malo, a barrio rock band whose female lead guitarist captures Jay's heart. He must face a series of dangerous, otherworldly-and very human-challenges not just to survive, but to prove his worth to the clan.

## **The Painted Boy Details**

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# From Reader Review The Painted Boy for online ebook

## colleen the convivial curmudgeon says

2.5

Charles de Lint is one of those names that I hear time and time again, often with lots of praise, but I've just never been entirely enthralled with any of his books I've tried to read - and this is no exception.

And it's a shame, because there's a lot of potential for a great story here.

There were things I liked about it. The idea of the story, and the mixture of cultures is really interesting. It was cool to see non-Anglo-Saxon cultures presented for a change in a story set in America, and the way the Medicine and Chinese philosophies and magics were discussed and how they were different and how they overlapped was interesting.

But the characters were fairly one-dimensional and just really unrealistic. Jay was marginally developed, being the main protagonist and all - but all of the others were just who they were on the surface and there's nothing else really there. But there were also kind of annoying. I mean, we'll have them believe that Jay is a dragon, but they won't believe (view spoiler) 'Cause, yeah, that's the unrealistic part of his story...

And that's a big problem with the story in general. And so help me, if someone says, "Oh, yeah, 'cause a story in which a boy is part dragon is *\*so\** realistic," I might have to smack someone. Because that's not the problem, obviously. The problem is that the human characters don't act or sound like real people. Part of it is that there's just too much telling, but the biggest issue is the dialogue. The dialogue is just terrible.

There was a stretch of narration where I was starting to get into the story, and then we got to several pages of dialogue where everything just fell apart.

And, honestly, how does someone who has as many books as de Lint has under his belt end up writing such bad dialogue? The mind boggles, it truly does.

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So, anyway, condensed version:

There are some really good ideas in this story, and the story, itself, is interesting. The magic seems to be explored well - (I don't want to say "developed", since we are using real cultural systems) - but the execution just ended up taking me out of the story more often than not.

3.5 for the story

1.5 for the writing

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**Douglas Smith says**

A wonderful book and a book full of wonder. I always enjoy spending time with de Lint's characters. They are so well drawn, and the characters in this book are no exception--each is unique and deeply human, each with flaws, but flaws that you can forgive, more easily than the characters forgive themselves, which makes them that much more likeable. The mythology in the book is rich and deep. But most of all, the book goes far beyond the good-versus-evil confrontation that the initial setup would lead you to expect. The hero and those around him are forced to deal with the aftermath of that confrontation, and the responsibilities that can come with taking a stand. Highly recommended.

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## **Joy (joyous reads) says**

This book started out great for me; there was just enough mystery within its opening pages that got my attention right away. Unfortunately, books heady with folklore and myths tend to be heavy on the narrative as well and *The Painted Boy* suffered from the same symptoms and quickly lost its initial appeal. I finished the book but it took me quite a bit longer. Sadly, it couldn't maintain the interesting beginning. It lagged and dragged until the seemingly rushed and convenient ending.

*The Painted Boy* is the story of James Li and his quest to find his purpose and stake on life. The dragon that mysteriously appeared on his back when he was eleven years old held the key to his destiny. Some say that the dragon and James Li were one in the same; but he needed to understand just how vast the spectrum of his power was. When he ended up in Santo del Vado Viejo, he was comforted by the fact that for the first time in a long time, he felt like he belonged. Never having any life to speak of when he lived in Chicago, the desert town offered him friends, a job, and talks of destinies and training did not exist.

It didn't take long however, until the violence of living in a barrio, overrun by gangbangers, soon bled into a life he wanted to build for himself. After witnessing a senseless killing of a girl in the hands of a gang banger, the dragon in him woke up, incinerating the murderer and decimating a building in a fit of uncontrollable rage. Suddenly, he didn't have a choice but to continue on with the quest on finding himself and controlling the great power within him before it destroyed everything in its path.

My major problem with this book is the switching styles of narration; diarized entries is something that I haven't been able to enjoy and this book has that along with first and third POVs. There were also several point of views but that didn't bother me as much as the former.

With the lack of lead Asian characters in YA nowadays, reading about James Li was refreshing. But it was a bit disappointing because I read so little about his Oriental heritage. He was a character in a town populated by Mexican-Americans and aside from mentions of his Paupau (grandmother), don't expect much mention of his culture. I was looking forward to reading about that element of his character but sadly, it was pretty much nonexistent.

He was also a bit tame, in my opinion. I mean, the primary reason why I picked this book off my Mt. TBR was that I'd expected a bad-ass, kick-ass, defender of the oppressed, hero. He eventually assumed the character, but it took him awhile. Because this is a stand-alone book and James' wasn't able to understand and harness his powers until close to the end, *The Painted Boy* left me a bit unsatisfied. I'd have loved to read more about this boy and how he'd utilize his powers. The ending was sort of, kind of, open ended but apparently, there'll be no sequel.

There was also an awkward, out-of-place romance that I felt was forced. This book could've gone without it,

in my opinion. There was a first meeting and the matter-of-fact description of how pretty the girl was and then it suddenly went into details about how much James was pining for her. I understand boys will be boys but I expected a slow development of attraction not a whiplash. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't an instant-love syndrome; James's attraction just happened way too fast for me. But in the end, the romance didn't really go anywhere so I guess my point is...well, what the hell is the point?

The best thing about this book is the myth that we're all related to animals somehow. I love how Charles spun it in the most believable way possible. Arizona, once again, proved to be the source of the Earth's teeming life. I've read some books regarding the mystical power of the desert and the land and I'm more convinced of its magic.

**VERDICT:** This book fell a bit flat for me. I'm not that familiar with Charles de Lint's work but I'm willing to read more of him. I think he's got a great talent for story telling based on this book's original plot alone. If you're interested in a novel rich with environmental and social issues, give this book a go.

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## Julia says

Jay is a 17 year old from Chicago who's only ever worked at his parents' Chinese restaurant. He randomly points his finger at a place on a map: Santo del Vado Viejo, AZ and goes there with his grandmother's blessing. She's been training him since he was eleven, when a giant picture of a dragon appeared on his back. Now he speaks any language fluently, animals react strangely to him, and he has no idea why. His grandmother taught him much more of the esoteric rather than realistic: he is of the Yellow Dragon Clan, he knows that, but little else.

As soon as he arrives in Arizona, the Presidio Kings gang and their leader El Tigre are out to get him. But he first meets Rosalie whose uncle was in the gang and left and he has a Mexican restaurant, where Jay gets a job. Rosalie's cousin Anna and her boyfriend Ramon play in a barrio rock band Malo Malo, and Jay starts falling for Anna. Also in Santo del Vado Viejo are Cousins, animal/ human spirits who more concretely teach Jay how to be what he is. And they teach him to access the spirit world.

One of the best parts of any de Lint book is how the characters through fighting the gangs, playing their music, cooking great food, and working together to create community where there was none before. Because of the gangs, poverty and drugs few of Jay's new friends have two parents, or any parents, so this creating of family is especially important.

*"This is like some Chinese version of a spirit quest for you, isn't it? To see if you're actually worth the mantle of your clan.*

What did she expect, that he'd put El Tigre in prison and clean up the barrio? That some kid could accomplish what the police department couldn't, just because he had a dragon on his back and his grandmother told him stories about these heroic men and women who were both human and dragon and went around standing up to injustice?

*The yellow dragons – isn't your whole thing about making places safe, fixing what's wrong?"*(p. 71)

Newford, the southwest, wherever the setting is for de Lint's novels and short stories, I'll be there. And this one may be as good as some of the best of them!

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## Paola says

When I started to read, I was thinking: "Such a stupid story!" but it isn't. I liked it!  
Thanks to the two different narrators, reading, you slowly understand with the main character what he doesn't know about himself and his power, so you learn with him.  
The story looked so real that I could believe there are people like Jay Li.

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## Paige says

Last night when I finished this book, my boyfriend asked how it was and I shrugged and said "it was okay."  
Thus...two stars.

It really wasn't a BAD book, but if I were to ask parallel-universe me (who has read every book ever and, being me, obviously knows my taste) if I should read *The Painted Boy*, she would probably tell me to skip it.

The only interesting characters were Paupau and Maria, and they really just don't have very big roles. :\nEveryone else is really one-dimensional, melodramatic, kind of dim... and what is with the all the "playful" punching all the freakin' time? The dialogue was kind of flat... like another reviewer said, tons of telling, not much showing. The author was unable to elicit any kind of emotion from me. Things that should have been sad just weren't, things that should have been sweet or funny left me scratching my head...

That said, the premise is awesome. I really like the idea behind it all--the dragon clan, the magic, the cousins, Aztlan, etc... I liked that it was set in the desert, I like that it dealt with gang violence... It could have been really awesome but I don't really feel like it delivered. I wish the writing had been, I don't know...better? Because I really liked the story.

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## Alanna M says

I enjoyed the first fifty pages of this and anticipated great things from it. For one: Asian protagonist. Finally. Thank you. Second: the mythology and lore that was showing up really intrigued me. Unfortunately by the end, I had to decide this was not the book for me. I found the pacing slow: it went in fits and bursts of speed that quickly petered out. The characters never really congealed in my mind as full-fledged human beings, they only felt like half-constructed, pale imitations of real people. Particularly Anna: I never understood Jay's infatuation with her, and I nearly laughed out loud when one of the other characters calls her 'empathic' when all I saw was an emotionally immature, temperamental brat. She had her moments, but I certainly didn't see much long-lasting appeal. The most genuine character makes three brief appearances before dying in the last scene, in the second act to make her the most selfless, brave person in the entire series. Frankly, I might have preferred the story if it had been written from her perspective. The characters were just not complicated enough to draw me in, and the pacing of the plot itself left a lot to be desired. I somewhat enjoyed reading it, hence the three stars, but it left a very sour aftertaste in my mouth.

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## **Jassmin says**

It took me some time to finish this book. The first couple of pages were really entertained and it had some mystery, I liked the story and the characters were interesting, but as more as I read it was starting to become boring and nothing really surprise me and engage me, and the characters become weak instead of powerful which I thought it would be the opposite, but anyways it is not a bad book its just that it did not surprising.

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## **Patrick says**

I didn't know anything about this book or the author. After reading a few pages I really liked the opening of the book and I was hoping it would develop into a good story.

I think the plot was original. There are many characters that are interesting at first but eventually they are not engaging, and at times I mixed up the names of some of them.

The supernatural powers seem unbalanced and I didn't feel that the weaknesses and confrontations of the main characters were believable. *The Painted Boy* had some material and potential to become better, but ultimately I felt the good parts weren't tied together in an engaging way so for me it ends up being an OK and decent book but not more.

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## **Ade Couper says**

This was genuinely moving and magical.

Jay Li is a yellow dragon : that is, he's a 17 year-old boy, who happens to be a dragon. He moves from his home in Chicago to a small town in Arizona, which is pretty much overrun by gangs. How does the dragon with Jay react when 1 of his friends is killed...?

Charles de Lint is, for me, the best urban fantasy writer currently working. Not only does he tell an engaging tale- & tell it very well- he makes his characters seem real, 3-dimensional, with flaws & nuances . This is a book about love , about loss, about facing up to your responsibilities , & about the consequences of actions: when Jay becomes the town's protector, what effect does it have on him? How can 1 person become the protector of hundreds and still be able to care for individuals?

Very well-written, with engaging characters. As ever, music plays a big part in de Lint's work, but it is integral to the plot.

If I could give this 6 stars, I would. Read it.

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## **Dianna says**

charles is back!

i've enjoyed charles de lint's urban fantasies for years and when he announced a while back that he would be abandoning his fictional city of newford, home base of most of his fiction for 20 years, i figured he was over. and his next couple of books, while not terrible, were not particularly great either -- it seemed he'd lost his mojo without a place to center his stories.

now with this book, it would seem he has one again -- or, if not a place, at least a good mythological base that could yield any number of stories. this book takes place in a fictional city of the southwest, along the border, an area he has written about before with good effect. this time he brings in a character with a different cultural base, though he doesn't explore it beyond a few stereotypes about the asian grandmother. but i can see him further exploring the other "dragons" and their home bases in future stories, as well as continuing his exploration of regional mythologies.

de lint's books have always been more of a cozy read for me than anything else -- as much as i like them, i wouldn't consider them the highest form of the genre. other writers write better and their stories have greater depth. but when de lint is in his best form, he creates very accessible, homey places tinged with magic that are easy to visit over and over; you feel like you know the place and could get an apartment there. newford was like that. i don't know that santo del vado viejo will get like that; perhaps rather than develop a place, he'll instead develop a farther flung cast of characters and explore their places in turn like i suggested above. but with this book it feels like he's settled onto another story set that he can work with, which i'm relieved to see after the random casting around of his last few books.

i look forward to see what he does with it next.

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### **Heather says**

I was a little unsure going into this book, as YA isn't my favourite. This story, however, took me right back to *Someplace to be Flying*, one of my favourite books of all time. I didn't find it campy, like some of CdL's other YA and recent releases (I find he tries too hard to incorporate awkward slang and current technology, which distracts from the story and the characters). Instead, it was straight from that place of mystery and magic that captured my heart in the first place.

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### **Julie Czerneda says**

A wonderful story, with original, real characters. The blending of Chinese and Mexican (and American) cultures produced something truly special. Not to mention the dragons. And the landscape? Wow. I've friends in New Mexico who have told me it looks like this -- now I really have to see for myself, after reading this book.

Highly recommended.

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### **Susan says**

My sister just sent me this book off my Amazon.com wishlist... can't wait to start reading it -- thank goodness I just finished *Discord's Apple* so I'm between books AND I have tomorrow off!!!



Thank goodness for long weekends. I had lots to do but still read my new book! Classic de Lint. Loved it.

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## **Ranting Dragon says**

The Painted Boy is a standalone novel by Charles de Lint, following a young Chinese-American teenager, Jay Li. When he was 11 years old, a painted dragon appeared on his back, signaling that in the future he may wield the power of his inner dragon. When Jay turns 17, he travels from Chicago's Chinatown to Santo del Vado Viejo, Arizona as part of his spiritual journey. Upon arrival, he immediately has to escape angry gang members who believe Jay to be a Triad spy.

Jay does find some friends in town, including Rosalie, who works at the local restaurant, and Anna, who is the guitarist for the local band, Malo Malo. But the gangs have ruined life in Santo del Vado Viejo, and it's up to Jay to cultivate his inner dragon so that he can fulfill his destiny and clean up the town.

### Diverse mythologies and cultures

It isn't every day that I find fantasy books based on Chinese, Native American, and Latino mythologies and cultures. It is even rarer to find a book such as The Painted Boy that identifies strong common ground among these mythologies and cultures. As a Chinese-American who in part grew up in a largely Latino neighborhood (though the gangs were not nearly as out of control as in The Painted Boy), I appreciated this point of view. As for the Chinese cultural part, Jay's strained relationship with his Paupau (grandmother) portrays familial and generational tensions quite realistically. As for the Chinese mythology part, I've always been partial to tales where animals become humans, as in Legend of the White Snake or the myth of the huli jing. The Painted Boy delivers on these grounds.

### An origin story

Jay spends the majority of the book learning to wield his powers, which, while entirely understandable and plausible, would have been more satisfying if this were the first book in a series. As a standalone book, I was disappointed to only get a glimpse of what Jay is capable of. The Painted Boy is not a superhero story, and a "let me use my superpowers a ton" phase would not necessarily be appropriate, but nevertheless I found myself yearning for more.

### Not as engaging as I had hoped

The good guys are all likeable enough, and Jay is unassuming and charming, but overall the characters lack any real depth and none of them ever become fully engaging.

The story itself is extremely straightforward, perhaps predictable (though I don't use the word "predictable" in a pejorative sense). But, in its straightforwardness, the story lacked the substance that I would expect to accompany such rich mythological and cultural material. For example, what ultimately helps Jay control his power is something I found to be somewhat of a cop-out.

The book's messages are also honorable but a bit hollow (don't use your power for bad, don't join a gang, don't judge a book by its cover, go to school, etc.) because, as presented, I'm not certain it would get through to the target audience. It's not this book's job to offer any solutions for gang violence, but the platitudes given in the context of the characters' situations seem so unhelpful as to be depressing. I would, however, still recommend this book to teenagers. If anything, the interracial friendships are encouraging.

Why should you read this book?

Despite my suspicion that *The Painted Boy* aims to do more than tell a story (and fails), it's still a great source for getting a fix of mythologies you may not encounter very frequently in the fantasy genre.

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/the-pain...>

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