[The Lord of Opium](http://www.teenreads.com/reviews/the-lord-of-opium)

by [Nancy Farmer](http://www.teenreads.com/authors/nancy-farmer)

El Patron is dead. Long live El Patron!

At the conclusion of Nancy Farmer’s award winning THE HOUSE OF THE SCORPION, Matt found himself as the new heir to El Patron’s kingdom: a strip of land between Mexico and the United States called Opium, the drug capital of the world. Matt was formerly an outcast in Opium as he was nothing more than a clone grown from a strip of the original El Patron’s skin, grown to provide major organs to El Patron should he need them. However, Matt escaped with the help of some caring individuals, El Patron died, and now Matt is left to rule and pick up the pieces of a crumbling kingdom.

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At first, Matt isn’t sure what to do with his newfound power. The adults around him tell him he needs to quickly assume command and deal with all of the problems the original El patron left behind. Matt would rather spend time with his friends and his love interest, Maria, even though they aren’t allowed in Opium. One thing does catch Matt’s eye, though, and he decides that this is where he will focus his efforts: the eejits. Eejits are humans embedded with microchips that render them docile workers and slaves. Most eejits work in the opium fields harvesting the drug and live under terrible conditions. Matt is immediately compassionate towards them, but it soon becomes apparent that all the doctors in the world may be able to do nothing to return them back to ordinary humans.

In the meantime, Matt discovers seemingly a whole different world in the country of Opium that he never knew existed. The original El Patron was more interested in snuffing out his enemies and having total control over what goes in and out of his country that he left most of what was actually in Opium unmolested. Matt discovers an abundant wildlife and fresh, clean water whereas the rest of the world currently suffers from ecological disaster. Matt also learns about a large biosphere that contains rooms filled with the different landscapes and climates from around the world. Could this biosphere, located within the dangerous country of Opium, be the answer to saving the world?

Matt may never know, as not everyone in Opium is thrilled that he’s taken El Patron’s place as supreme ruler. In a land of eejits who are forced to follow and obey orders, Matt still isn’t sure whom to trust. El Patron hid a lot of secrets from everyone, and Matt has only just begun to uncover them, whether he’s ready or not.

Nancy Farmer brings back the acclaimed characters and world in THE LORD OF OPIUM that made THE HOUSE OF THE SCORPION such a success. Matt, still very much the clone, struggles throughout to be himself even as he hears El Patron in his mind at every twist and turn. The miserable existence of the multi-faceted eejits is explored more in depth in this novel, and you can’t help but wonder if mind control isn’t too far off in the future. Greed and power corrupt absolutely in THE LORD OF OPIUM, but if you’re looking in the right places, you just might find a little bit of hope in the uncertain future.

Reviewed by [Benjamin Boche](http://www.teenreads.com/reviews/the-lord-of-opium) on May 23, 2013



[Angry Management](http://www.teenreads.com/reviews/angry-management)

by [Chris Crutcher](http://www.teenreads.com/authors/chris-crutcher)

ANGRY MANAGEMENT contains new stories with characters from previous Chris Crutcher books. Crutcher explains in his foreword that he has been “…asked over and over again whether or not there will be a sequel to STAYING FAT FOR SARAH BYRNES or WHALE TALK…” He goes on to explain that he doesn’t “…generally get the notion to write a sequel to a novel that I’ve already taken two years to write. But during those two years I always fall in love with my characters, and I loved revisiting some of them in this other, shorter form.” Crutcher presents a tribute to his characters and his fans in this new book.

Sarah Byrnes was physically abused by her father at a young age when he pressed her face against a burning stove. Then Sarah’s mother abandoned her, leaving behind a girl emotionally and physically scarred. She sought after her mother once for an explanation, but left uncomforted and unfulfilled. Now with the help of Angus Bethune, an overweight and low self-esteem teenager with unconventional parents, Sarah once again seeks to confront her mother and find some closure. Along the way, they establish a stronger bond and perhaps fill an empty spot in each other’s lives. The ending to their story isn’t necessarily perfect, but that doesn’t mean it’s not happy.

Montana West likes to push the envelope in everything she does. Whether it’s fighting with her adoptive parents or writing articles on hot-button issues for the school newspaper, Montana is not afraid to speak her mind. When censorship from the school’s administration rears its ugly head, she takes a break to write an article about the school’s football team, the one topic in which she could care less. However, she doesn’t expect to fall for bad-boy Trey Chase and his irresistible charm. Together they decide to fight back against the censorship of Montana’s legalized marijuana article and run into the last person they thought would stand in their way: the chairman of the school board --- and Montana’s adoptive father. Now Montana must decide where her loyalties lie and what she really believes.

Marcus James has every reason to be angry. He not only happens to be one of the few black students in a prejudiced inland Northwest high school, he is also the only gay black student in a prejudiced inland Northwest high school. Marcus takes everything in stride, though, and is counting down the days until he can escape to college and a brighter future. One day he shows up to class with a pink noose hanging around his neck, and a hate crime is investigated by the administration in a sloppy, administrative way. At a school assembly where Marcus is singled out, an unlikely ally emerges in Matt Miller, state champion wrestler, who stands up against the moronic handling of the situation. Matt refuses to let the hate crime fall by the wayside, and Marcus is simply trying to survive another day. The ultimate outcome is not what either person expects.

While die-hard Crutcher fans may be uneasy about the new settings and storylines for some of his infamous characters, they should be comforted by the fact that he has taken great care to keep everything true to form and style from his original creations. While some of his characters and situations may be shocking, Crutcher doesn’t write these stories for their shock value. Instead, he remains true to sitting back and telling the story and watching what happens next. Crutcher’s protagonists have always seemed very real to me, and although their lives may be a mess sometimes, they always seem to find hope in every situation.

Reviewed by [Benjamin Boche](http://www.teenreads.com/reviews/angry-management) on June 30, 2009