

Eat Everything Before You Die



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In this vibrant and original novel, Christopher Columbus Wong, an orphan son of a Chinatown bachelor community, is trying to invent a family for himself while all around him American popular culture is reinventing itself with sex, drugs, and rock and roll. As the country's mores shift and change, Christopher recalls his own disputed origins, and finds himself on a wild journey with his gay older brother, Peter, a pan-Pacific chef and public television's 'Peter Pan'; the defrocked, deranged, and eroding ex-director of a Chinatown settlement house, Reverend Ted Candlewick, dismissed for paedophilia; the sharp-eyed, conspiring matriarch Auntie Mary, the bridge between the conflicting values that make up this cultural stew; and the dying Uncle Lincoln, a remnant of the transient bachelor society, and, quite possibly, Christopher's and Peter's father. The unique cast of characters complicating Christopher's quest also includes his ex-wives: Winnie, a Hong Kong immigrant looking for a green card, who leaves him only to become Uncle Lincoln's wife; and Melba, an American orphan of the counterculture, who abandons Christopher when she finds a more authentic Asian from the most recent refugee communities spawned at the end of the Vietnam War. Throughout Christopher's voyage to discover his past, the imaginary China he and his family have envisioned in their American diaspora collides with the reality of China at the end of the millennium. Set against the backdrop of America's wars in Asia and the assimilation of that experience - the refugees, the stereotypes, the food - "Eat Everything Before You Die" is an ironic commentary on the identities the children of Chinese American immigrants concoct from their questionable histories, cultural practices, and survival strategies. Chan's riotous story will appeal to general readers, particularly those interested in the Asian American experience, and will be of strong, enduring interest to students and scholars in Asian American Studies.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Eat Everything Before You Die_ 下载链接1](#)

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