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The Last Emperor

Donna Cardon

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Smith, Jeremy. *The Last Emperor*. Illustrated by Anthony Lewis. McGraw Hill, 2003. ISBN 1577685547. \$14.95. 31 pp.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: nonfiction; picture book;

Subject: China -- Kings and rulers -- Biography -- Juvenile literature; Books—Reviews;

This engaging little biography recounts the life of the Chinese child emperor, PuYi. PuYi was born in 1906, destined to be the next emperor. He ascended to the throne when he was only 3. For two years as he reigned as emperor he was surrounded by hundreds of servants that catered to his every whim. Even after he was deposed by the new Republic he was allowed to live in the Palace. His luck changed when the Japanese invaded China and he became their puppet ruler. During WWII PuYi was captured and put in a Russian prison camp. He was released in 1959 and lived the rest of his life as a private citizen.

Smith emphasizes the opulence of PuYi's early life in contrast to his poor state after the Communist Revolution. He includes side boxes on every page that tell interesting facts about 20th century China. Some have fictionalized thoughts of the Emperor or his family and these are clearly marked as such. Smith also includes time lines, maps, a useful glossary and a serviceable index.

Smith's clear writing is engaging and accessible to middle grade readers. Lewis' water-color illustrations are bright and cartoon-like. The architecture and clothing portrayed are reasonably true to the time period. This book is a good choice for reluctant readers. It is also a good introduction to the history of China in the 20th century.