

Chapter 2

Eyes of the Dragon

The footsteps grew steadily louder. Leanne rose to her feet, determined to stand and face whoever... or whatever... was approaching.

“What are you doing?” demanded Sol, grabbing her arm. “We have to get out of here, NOW!”

But it was too late. An elderly Chinese woman appeared amidst the antiques. She was short, barely reaching Leanne’s shoulder, and dressed in a beautifully crafted blue robe with gold embroidery.

Surely she could not be the collector?

“Who are *you*?” the woman gasped. She reached for a battered umbrella from a wooden stand and brandished it. “Back thieves!”

“We’re not thieves,” protested Leanne. “We’re...we’re travellers from the future. I know that sounds crazy...” she tailed off.

To her surprise the woman lowered her makeshift weapon. “What have you come for?” she asked, piercing Leanne with her

dark eyes.

Leanne took a breath, wondering what to say next. “We’re trying to stop the evil that’s taken hold of this tower,” she said, matter-of-factly.

“I see,” mumbled the woman, nodding as if she understood completely. “Come with me.” She beckoned to Leanne.

“But my friend,” said Leanne urgently, gesturing at Hamid who lay unconscious on the floor, and at the ivory box in his hand. “He opened that box and... well, it knocked him out somehow.”

“Oh, it’s just a herbal mix I made, to catch thieves in the act. He’ll recover any moment.” Even as she said this, Hamid began to open his eyes.

“What happened?” he said, looking round wildly.

“You’re ok,” Leanne soothed, placing a hand on his shoulder. “But don’t touch anything else,” she warned.

“Come,” said the woman, and Leanne followed her through the rows of antiques while Sol helped Hamid to his feet.

“Sorry we frightened you,” Leanne began.

The woman dismissed Leanne’s concern with a graceful wave of her hand. Her beautiful silk robe rippled with the movement, reminding Leanne of waves on a beach. “My name is Jing Shi,” she said, her voice barely a cracked whisper. “I too am doing what I can to fight against the collector and his evil.”

“You know about the collector?” Leanne asked.

“Yes, child,” sighed the lady, “though I do not know his real identity... nobody does.” She moved further away, stopping at a table adorned with oriental tapestries. Dragons and spirits intricately woven in gold glared out at them.

Checking to make sure that Sol and Hamid could not hear her, she continued, “The collector stole an item of great power from my homeland – an urn that imprisons demons from the earliest days of China. The collector drew immense power from these demons. They extended his life, gave him the ability to cross time and control men’s minds.”

The woman drew back one of the tapestries, revealing a row of jade bottles.

“Over the years the urn decayed and the demons escaped. One of them is a mighty but mystical Dragon. I believe it is living in the basement of the tower, though I have not dared to venture there. I am too old and weak to take on such a battle.”

Jing Shi looked hard at Leanne, her dark eyes shining fiercely. “You, child, must fight this Dragon! Defeat it and you will gain one part of a powerful weapon to end the evil once and for all.” She held up a warning finger. “But beware. The power of the demons corrupts all who come into contact with them. Trust no one!”

She handed Leanne one of the jade bottles. It felt warm in her hand and glowed brightly as she held it.

“Use this against the Dragon,” said the old woman before

cupping Leanne’s hands in her own, the bottle clenched tightly between them. “Trust your own instincts and make your own decisions. Have faith in yourself – I believe you have the courage to save us all.”

Jing Shi drew back immediately as Sol appeared, closely followed by a groggy-looking Hamid. Leanne slipped the jade bottle into her pocket.

“There’s a Shade,” Hamid said urgently. “It’s found us!”

He pointed to the other side of the room where a shadow was growing, elongated fingers probing between the rows of furniture.

Jing Shi removed something from her robes and threw it at the floor. There was a blinding flash and the Shade recoiled, as if stung by the light.

“Run!” she ordered. “I will deal with the darkness.”

Leanne hesitated, but Sol grabbed her arm, pulling her away after Hamid. They flew through the apartment as there was a second explosive flash behind them and a high-pitched squealing sound.

Racing down the twisting corridors outside, they eventually found themselves in an open area... a balcony bathed in unexpected sunlight. They paused for breath.

“Will Jing Shi be okay?” Leanne asked.

Sol smiled. “I have a feeling she knows what she’s doing. She always was a formidable woman!”

“You know her?” Leanne asked, surprised.

“Uh, well,” mumbled Sol, “not really... I remember her a bit from when I was a boy. And of course I have her picture.”

Leanne remembered the strange picture gallery on the walls of Sol’s flat and shivered slightly.

“Look at all this, Leanne,” said Hamid distracting her. She joined him, gazing round at their new surroundings in wonder. The sun was high in the sky and there was the feeling of a cold and clear winter’s day. The balcony was on the twentieth floor of the tower, overlooking rows of terraced houses which had been replaced by modern apartments and flyovers in their time.

“I’d say we’ve travelled back over fifty years,” said Sol, answering the question that was in Leanne’s mind.

“It’s all so different,” said Hamid as they turned to look back down the corridor they’d come from. The apartment doors looked freshly painted and there was no litter, no trace of graffiti anywhere. “Maybe we should just stay here,” he joked, nudging Leanne.

“Don’t be fooled,” Sol said grimly. “The evil has already begun to take hold. It’s vital we stop it before the tower is destroyed! Which reminds me...” He removed an object from his tweed jacket – a silver pocket watch. “This watch shows us the time back home,” he explained. “So we can keep on track.”

“It’s almost midnight,” said Leanne.

“Six hours until dawn,” Sol confirmed. “If we let the tower be demolished the evil will be set free forever. I fear it will spread far and wide.”

“This is getting ridiculous,” huffed Hamid. “We’re trapped in this tower, although we’ve managed to travel through time and now we’re expected to battle some mysterious ‘evil’! I should never have listened to you, Leanne – I could be fast asleep at home right now.”

“If you were,” said Sol, turning to glare at the boy. “Then you’d be in grave danger, just as your friends... your family... everyone back home is. If the evil is released from the tower, no one will be safe. The future of the whole human race will be changed forever!”

“And what are *we* supposed to do about that?” cried Hamid. “We’re just two kids... and an old man who’s never even *tried* fighting this evil before! All you seem to do is hide or run away from it.”

“Stop arguing,” snapped Leanne. “We’re here now and we have a job to do. According to Jing Shi there’s a Dragon demon living in the basement! If we destroy it, we’ll be one step closer to ending all this and getting back home.”

Before Hamid and Sol could question her, Leanne stomped off towards the nearest lift entrance.

Hamid appeared at her side. “This must be a bad dream, a really bad dream,” he mumbled to himself as they stepped into the lift, followed by Sol. “I’m going to pinch myself and wake up any

minute now.”

Leanne reached out and pinched his arm. He gave a yelp of pain.

“Did you wake up?” she asked.

“No.”

“Then let’s get on with this!”

As the lift descended with surprising speed, Hamid flashed Leanne a worried look. “You were kidding about the dragon, right? I mean, whoever heard of a—”

“I don’t know,” Leanne interrupted. “But I guess we’re about to find out.”

The lift juddered to a halt and the doors slid open onto darkness. Sol leaned close to Leanne and whispered, “Be cautious. I’ve a feeling we’re not alone down here.”

She nodded, sensing it as well. Somewhere in the darkness of the basement a light was flickering and she heard muffled voices.

Sol led the way out of the lift, Leanne following close behind. Her eyes adjusted to the darkness quickly, making out thick concrete pillars holding up the foundations of the tower. It made her think of the explosives that would be strapped to these very pillars in her own time... ready to detonate at dawn, unleashing the evil on the world.

That’s not going to happen, she told herself.

They moved between the pillars towards the orange glow at

the far side of the basement. As they closed in, she made out the shapes of eight men silhouetted against the light. They were standing before a giant metal furnace. The door was open wide, revealing a raging fire within.

Taking cover behind a pillar, Leanne watched the men moving in the intense light and heat of the fire. They were dressed identically in jeans and black leather jackets with the word *Dragons* scrawled crudely on the back. Their hair was slicked down against their skulls, reminding Leanne of black and white pictures she’d seen of motorcycle gangs in the fifties.

Suddenly a low rumble emanated from the depths of the furnace. Leanne felt it vibrating through her bones. In the fire she saw a pair of blazing red eyes appear.

The Dragon!

“Hail the Dragon Master,” cried one of the men as they all sank to their knees and bowed before the fire.

“THE COLLECTOR HAS WARNED ME OF STRANGERS FROM ANOTHER TIME,” boomed a voice that seemed to belong to the Dragon. “BRING THEM TO ME.”

“Of course, master,” said one of the men. “We will search for them at once.”

“NO NEED,” The Dragon hissed. “THEY ARE HERE! IN THE SHADOWS!”

As the gang members turned, the fire flared casting light into

every corner. Exposed, Leanne started to flee, but the men were fast and knew the basement well. They surrounded them, grabbing Sol and Hamid roughly. The tallest man pulled Leanne's arms behind her back.

"Let me go!" she protested, struggling against his grip. The man ignored her, dragging her towards the heat of the furnace. At that moment, the huge, scaly body of the Dragon, sleek and trailing fire, burst from the flames. The man pushed Leanne to her knees, keeping a hand on her shoulder as he bowed low again. Hamid knelt to the right of her, his face etched with terror.

Leanne turned to the Dragon, staring into its eyes as she slid her hand inside her pocket, feeling the warmth of the small jade bottle within. The Dragon's face resembled the giant paper dragons she had seen in the Chinese New Year parade. But its manic red eyes were full of malice. They burned into her, studying her with apparent interest.

"WHAT IS YOUR NAME GIRL?" it asked.

"I'm Leanne Ross," she said with as much confidence as she could muster. "Nice to meet you."

"THE COLLECTOR FEARS YOU... I CAN'T IMAGINE WHY!"

"Perhaps because he knows I'm going to defeat you," Leanne countered.

"I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU TRY!" said the Dragon, its fiery tongue flicking between its teeth.

"Be careful what you wish for," said Leanne, pulling the jade bottle from her pocket.

The Dragon's eyes widened as she tossed it into the monster's jaws. There was a shattering sound, followed by a green flash and a blast that lifted Leanne clean off her feet and threw her against the wall. The Dragon writhed in pain, its fire turning into green crystal... and then it shattered, casting fragments of jade across the floor.

Leanne staggered to her feet, seeing the gang members unconscious on the floor around her. "Hamid? Sol?" she cried.

"Over here," said Hamid, supporting Sol as they limped towards her. "That was amazing!"

"Thanks," she grinned looking round at the remains of the Dragon. She saw something glowing amongst them. Reaching down, she picked up a piece of polished grey stone half the size of her palm. It looked like a third of a circle, smooth and perfectly formed in her hand. Sol approached and looked down at the object.

"The first piece of the power amulet of Shang!" he cried.

"What's that?" asked Hamid.

"Well," said Sol, a smile lighting his eyes, "We can use the amulet, to drive the demons back into the urn." Then the smile faded. "Of course we'll need to find the other two pieces first!"

"Well we've made a start," said Leanne, holding out the object to him, but Sol leaped back.

“No!” he said with unexpected force. “Don’t give it to me!” Then, in a softer tone, he continued. “You defeated the Dragon, Leanne. It’s your prize, not mine.”

Nodding, Leanne slipped the stone into her pocket, suddenly aware of a movement to her left. A Shade was closing in on one of the gang members. Suddenly the man opened his eyes and let out a scream as the Shade moved in.

“We’ve got to help him,” Leanne cried as she looked on, horrified. Then something else caught her eye. Another Shade was heading towards her fallen backpack! She watched helplessly as the long shadow fingers reached inside and withdrew the portal key. With a wave of its arm, the Shade cast a shimmering portal against the wall and started towards it.

“We mustn’t lose that key!” cried Sol. “It’s our only way home!”

And now you decide... What happens next?

A) Leanne insists that they stay and help the gang members. They’ll find another way to chase the Shade

B) Sol drags Leanne and Hamid into the portal after the Shade.

C) Sol leaps into the portal after the Shade, and Leanne and Hamid are left behind.

Go to fictionexpress.co.uk and vote!

Text copyright © Andrew G Taylor 2016. The right of Andrew G Taylor 2016 to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her. Please note, this PDF is licensed under the Terms of Use which can be found on the Fiction Express for Schools website www.fictionexpress.co.uk