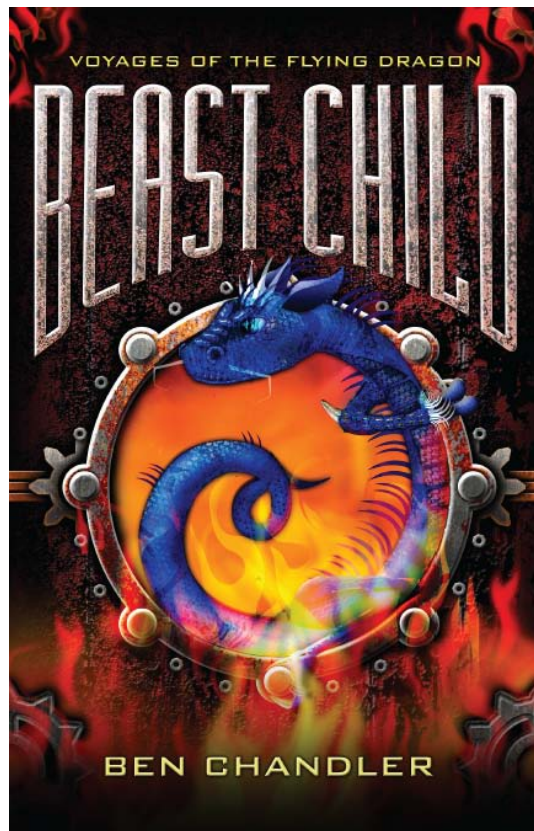


VOYAGES OF THE FLYING DRAGON BOOK 2:

# BEAST CHILD

Ben Chandler



## TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

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Suitable for ages 12+

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# INTRODUCTION

Set in a world of encroaching wastelands, this Japanese-inspired fantasy series stars twins with hidden abilities – and an airship powered by animals with special powers.

Beginning with *Quillblade*, the adventure continues in the second book of the Voyages of the Flying Dragon, *Beast Child*. An epic battle against formidable foes is coming ever closer for Lenis and Missy – will they choose the right path?

## SYNOPSIS

### Book One

In the first book of the series, *Quillblade*, Lenis Clemens and his twin sister, Missy, are slaves aboard the *Hiryū*, the most powerful airship in the world. Lenis has empathic abilities that enable him to care for Bestia, the strange creatures used to power machines, and Missy is a telepath, able to guide the ship into busy airship ports.

The day of the airship's maiden voyage, the *Hiryū*'s new captain, Mayonaka Shishi, decides to steal the airship, and Lenis and Missy find themselves caught up in a seemingly aimless quest to find what their new captain calls 'the Way'.

As their voyage progresses, the twins learn more about the corrupted Wasteland Demons that terrorise humanity, and about the Totem who had once kept them at bay. The captain's true purpose is to find a way of stopping the Demons once and for all. When Lenis reveals that he has been dreaming of the Totem Apsilla – the Blue Dragon of the East – who begs him to protect her daughter, the captain decides to help the twins find Apsilla's daughter.

Along the way they encounter powerful Demons, a corrupted Totem who steals Missy's soul, and bad weather that threatens to sink the airship, plunging them into Demon-ravaged seas. Separated from his sister, Lenis struggles to find his place among the crew, while Missy searches for a cure to the disease devouring the Totem who claimed her soul.

Will they find Apsilla's egg in time, or will their enemies find them first?

### Book Two

Lenis and Missy Clemens have found their freedom aboard the airship *Hiryū*, but are they ready for the responsibilities that come with determining your own fate?

Hard on the trail of the mercenary Karasu, the man who holds the keys to unlocking Suiteki's power, the twins face the realities of their own growing abilities. When the crew of the *Hiryū* discover that the village of Fronge has been attacked, they intervene to help the villagers. But to save the people of Fronge, Missy once again needs to attempt to summon the Lord of Storms and use the power of the *Quillblade*.

Meanwhile, the opportunity to steal the Stones of Ebb and Flow from Karasu's ship is too good to resist, and Lenis and Missy sneak aboard using Atrum's powers of invisibility. But when Lenis is stuck on the ship when it takes to the skies, the twins are separated. Missy uses her powers to read the villagers' minds and find out where Karasu was heading – with the unexpected result that the villagers think she is Magni, a goddess.

A village girl, Heidi, offers to show them the hidden way to the Sea God's temple. But Heidi has another agenda. She wants Missy to continue to act as Magni, so that Missy can help her seek revenge for the attack on Fronge. Should Missy do as Heidi suggests? Missy has to decide which is more important – the safety of an entire nation or her own sense of right and wrong.

In the temple, they find Lenis – and another boy, who is trapped in an ice column. When the boy awakes, they learn that he is Kanu, a boy from an ancient race called the Titans. He tells the twins that he has pledged to serve the entity he calls Mashu – and he recognises the twins as being that entity. Now the twins must decide what to do with this knowledge, and how to treat Kanu.

However, the revelations they learn in the hidden town of Haven threaten the *Hiryū*'s quest. One among the crew is a traitor – but who is it, and why? With a Demon attack imminent, there is no time to think about it and everyone must fight for their lives. Will they be able to continue their quest?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Chandler has had many jobs over the years, such as pizza-maker, barista, and ill-fated door-to-door alarm system salesman, but nothing makes him happier than reading, writing, teaching and learning. It's probably a good thing that he decided to be an academic. Ben teaches (sporadically) at both Adelaide and Flinders Universities in topics as diverse as Fiction for Young Readers, Travel Writing, and Broadcast TV & Radio. He has published academic work on popular culture, video game narrative theory, Japanese heroism, anime and manga, and creative writing pedagogy, but his overriding passion is heroism.

Ben has spent most of the past decade studying and writing about heroes and inventing his own. He has a keen interest in heroic literature from around the world, including myths, legends, fairy tales, comic books, video games, cartoons, and fantasy novels, but he has a special fondness for those coming out of Japan. This passion for all things Japanese led him to his doctoral work – a comparative study of Western and Japanese heroism, which he completed in 2008. An early draft of *Quillblade* formed the creative portion of his PhD thesis.

When Ben isn't 'working', which does include watching cartoons, playing video games and reading comic books, no matter what his mother might think, Ben likes to bake. This pastime has resulted in the greatest brownies the world has ever known.

# THEMES

Some of the most important themes of the series are:

- **The importance of family**, whether it's the family you're born into (Lenis and Missy's bond) or the family you find yourself a part of (the entire crew).
- It is everyone's **responsibility** to ensure we live in a safe world and a healthy environment, as demonstrated by the Wasteland sickness and the crew's efforts to find a cure for it.
- The **benefits and dangers of power** – the benefit of being able to protect your loved ones and the dangers that the abuse of power can lead to, as demonstrated by Missy's use of the Quillblade. Also, why and how some people have power over the lives of others and whether or not this is a good or bad thing. In *Beast Child*, Missy particularly must grapple with the question of power and its use when she must decide whether to pretend to be a goddess in order to convince people to take action against the demons.
- **Slavery versus free will**. Lenis and Missy start out as slaves, with no choices but also no direction. Even though at the end of the first novel the twins are 'free', the captain still has power over them. He does not abuse that power, but instead uses it to help guide the twins. *Beast Child* considers what the twins do with their freedom once they have it and the choices (and mistakes) they make afterwards. *Beast Child* also looks at the question of slavery from a different angle, when it is revealed that the ancient boy, Kanu, has pledged to serve the entity 'Mashu'. Since Kanu believes that Lenis and Missy are that entity, it means that he pledges his service to them, and he is in effect their slave, ready to do their bidding. The twins must work out how to resolve this situation, as freedom is an important concept to them.

# THE FANTASY WORLD

The Voyages of the Flying Dragon series is set in a fantasy world full of fantastic creatures, Demons, gods and god-like beings, many of whom are inspired by real-world mythologies. Far from being idyllic, this world is plagued by rampant corruption. This corruption takes many forms – spiritual, physical and political – and is symbolised by the Wastelands that have infested the oceans and large tracts of land.

## THE CREW

Each member of the crew was inspired by a certain heroic archetype, either from the Japanese heroic tradition or the Western.

- The lost soul **Gawayn**, for example, is based on the figure of the **Arthurian knight**, torn between his duty to his monarch and his Lady Love. The tension between these loyalties tears his fragile psyche, and he finds himself on an impossible quest, the purpose of which grows more uncertain as he continues his aimless wandering.
- **Captain Shishi**, on the other hand, is inspired by his namesake – the **shishi**. These were a group of samurai active during the Meiji restoration (an actual historical event in Japan on which the Divine Restoration in *Quillblade* was based) who were labeled ‘*shishi*’ (literally – ‘lion’) for their fierce bravery and loyalty. They were known to be men of action, driven to wild and reckless acts of rebellion and violence without any thoughts of the consequences. They didn't think about tomorrow, only what they could do today. They were much romanticised and admired by the people of Japan, and much feared.
- **Lenis and Missy** are both **child heroes**. They must battle powerful adversaries, both human and monstrous, in their efforts to overcome the rampant corruption spreading throughout their world. Although they rely on the adults around them to protect and teach them, ultimately it falls to them to find the strength to change the world.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

**Book One (many of these questions are also relevant to the reading of Book Two)**

- **Heroism.** Each one of the *Hiryū*'s crewmembers is (or was once) a hero, but they are each very different. What about these characters makes them heroes? How are they different from one another? How are they the same? Can each be said to be a hero? What exactly does it take to be a hero?
- **Mythology.** Many of the fantastic creatures in *Quillblade* are based on figures from real-world mythologies. One such character is Raikō the Thunder Bird. If you can, trace the origins of the Lord of Storms. What sorts of mythological creatures or gods does he resemble, and from how many different cultures?
- **The Bestia.** The Bestia are essential to the operation of the *Hiryū*. Try to imagine a world just like ours, but without electricity or computers. Instead, we have Bestia! What would your Bestia do for you? What would they look like? Keep in mind Bestia generate *elemental* power. They can do things with fire, light, air, water, earth or darkness. Lenis has the power to draw out a Bestia's hidden potential. How would you take care of your Bestia? Would you bring him or her to school? Draw a picture of your Bestia and write a story about what you would do together.

- **Slavery vs freedom.** At the start of *Quillblade* Lenis and Missy are slaves, but by the end they've gained their freedom. To what extent are they passive characters? To what extent are they active? And are they ever truly free?
- **Power and parallels to Japan.** In Shinzō, power is shared between the Emperor and the Warlord. It is the Warlord's responsibility to protect Shinzō from the Wasteland Demons, but over the years he has taken on more and more of the governing of Shinzō. This led to the Divine Restoration Movement, as a group of rebels wanted to return full power to the Emperor. To date, this conflict has not been settled. A very similar thing happened in Japan in the 1850s, when the Warlord of Japan effectively ruled the country with an iron fist and the Emperor was little more than a figurehead. The Meiji Restoration was all about overthrowing the Shogun (or Warlord) and returning the Emperor to power. Shinzō may not have settled the issue yet, but Japan did. What happened in Japan during the Meiji Restoration, and how was it similar to what is currently happening in Shinzō?

In what other ways does Shinzō resemble Japan in its history and culture? You might like to research Japanese demon folklore and types, such as *oni*.

Study the map in the book, and references to other countries in the text – what other countries and cultures from our world might have influenced countries in the world of *Quillblade*? For instance, do you think 'Pure Land', settled by Puritans, has parallels to the USA? Might Tien Ti resemble China? Might Ost, Kyst and Heiligland have parallels in some European traditions?

- **The Quillblade.** Is the Quillblade good or evil, or does it have the potential for both? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of not feeling your own emotions? What other books have you read that feature objects imbued with power? Is this another feature of fantasy books?
- **The World Tree.** There are numerous mythologies surrounding the World Tree – research some of the origins of the World Tree myths. How has the author of *Quillblade* changed the myths to suit the story? Does the withered, dying state of the World Tree in this book have any messages for our contemporary society?
- **The Wastelands.** What do you think caused the Wastelands, and how can they be stopped?
- **Twins.** The concept of twins is another fantasy and mythological archetype – a concept that occurs again and again. Some examples of twins from myth include: Apollo and Artemis from Greek mythology; Romulus and Remus in Roman mythology; the concept of yin and yang in Chinese philosophy. Do you think Lenis and Missy could be one soul split in two, 'a single bud on [the World] tree' (p. 255), as Ishullanu tells Lenis? What is the evidence for this?
- **Family.** Do you have to be related to someone for them to be part of your family? Can family have a deeper meaning? Consider Namei's statement: 'Yes, Lenis, don't you understand? We aren't just a crew anymore. We're a family ... We've already been through so much. A family isn't just about blood, it's about spirit, and our spirits are one now. So don't be afraid, I'll always be here to take care of you, to help you. We all will.' (p. 211-212). If this is so, who else might be in your own extended 'family' – the people who would support you and take care of you when you need it?

As a contrast, compare Namei's statement above about family with the hierarchical family structures that govern some people's actions in the book – for instance, on p. 8 Lady Chi says, 'It is no secret that the Warlord wishes to forge an alliance with your father. Negotiating that alliance is a part of my duties. As the heir to the Mayonaka clan, your appointment as captain will help cement relations between your clan and the Shōgo.' Captain Shishi replies, 'Given my reputation, I would have thought my younger brother would be a more stable choice.' How much do family relationships influence character's actions in the book? Has Shishi done the right thing in following his own path rather than following his family's wishes for him? How important are family duty and responsibility in our own lives?

- **'What wisdom forbids, necessity dictates.'** This phrase becomes a motif in the book (see pages 65, 77, 332). What does it mean?
- **The villain.** Fantasy books usually have a villain, but who is it in *Quillblade*? Is it the Warlord, or is he the victim because they have stolen his property? Is it Ishullanu? Is it Butin? Perhaps choosing a villain for this series is more difficult than it seems!
- **The quest or the journey.** Discuss the journey of the *Hiryū* and its crew, and how the book uses the fantasy trope of 'the quest' or 'the journey'. Who is on a quest in this book? Do they achieve their goals? Is there a process of learning along the way that will be important to the end result?

## Book Two

- **Slavery vs freedom.** Can Lenis and Missy be considered 'free' now, or are they in some ways as bound as they were when they were slaves?

Is Kanu a slave? How do the twins feel about this, given their own journey from slavery to freedom? Do you think they should offer Kanu his freedom?

At the end of the book, why does Kanu choose to serve Lenis when he's given the choice to do whatever he wants? How do the twins feel about his decision? Why does Kanu choose Lenis over Missy?

- **Deception and its relationship to power.** Is it right to mislead people in an attempt to protect them? Missy chooses this option when she pretends to be a goddess in order to convince the Heiliglanders to join their cause and fight the demons. Could she have convinced them if she hadn't done this? How will they feel if they find out the truth? Will they continue to follow her orders?
- **How we define ourselves.** Given that Missy holds the Quillblade, which grants her access to the power of the Lightning Totem, to what extent is she lying when she claims to be the Lightning Wielder herself? In pretending to be Magni, do you think she might turn into Magni? What effect might this have on Missy's sense of who she is as a person?
- **The warrior path.** At the start of the book, Lenis is trying to learn how to fight. What do you think motivates him to do so? Does his decision to follow this path have anything to do with Shujinko? Has Lenis learned anything about fighting by the end of the book? Where do you think Lenis's true strengths lie?

Is strength and violence the only way Lenis can prove himself? Do you think he needs to prove himself to anyone? If so, to whom? The captain? Yami? Shujinko? Himself?

- **Different types of society.** Compare the society of the Heiliglanders against the Shinzōn people in book one. What is different between the two? What do they have in common? What clues do we have that the Heiliglanders are a warrior people? For instance, consider the form their gods take.
- **Mythology.** If Shinzō is based on Japan and Japanese mythology, what mythology is Heiligland based on? Research Norse and Germanic gods and mythology. Can you find any parallels to Heiligland?
- **Dealing with trauma.** Missy places a psychic block in Heidi's mind so that Heidi can't remember what happened when her village was attacked. Did Missy make the right decision in doing this? Is it better to forget traumatic events and move on, or should we try to deal with them? Research post-traumatic stress disorder and discuss what responses people can have to trauma.
- **Villains.** The villain in *Beast Child*, Karasu, is very human, whereas Butin and Ishullanu, who we met in book one, are not. What motivates Karasu's villainy? Compared with some of the Demons in the series, to what extent is Akushin Karasu a monster? What might lead a man to commit such heinous acts as he does? Is he just evil, or might there be something else going on?
- **Betrayal and hidden motives.** Is Kenji Jackson a villain? He works as an agent for both the Puritan Ruling Council and the Brotherhood of the Cunning Fox. Can he do both and still believe in the *Hiryū's* quest? What do you think – can the twins trust him?
- **Gods and mythology.** In *Beast Child*, Magni is the Heiliglander Thunder Goddess and Lightning Wielder. But did you know that Magni is a real character from Norse mythology? In the Norse version, Magni is a male deity and has a famous father, who also has some connection to lightning and thunder – can you find out who Magni's father is and to which divine pantheon he belongs?