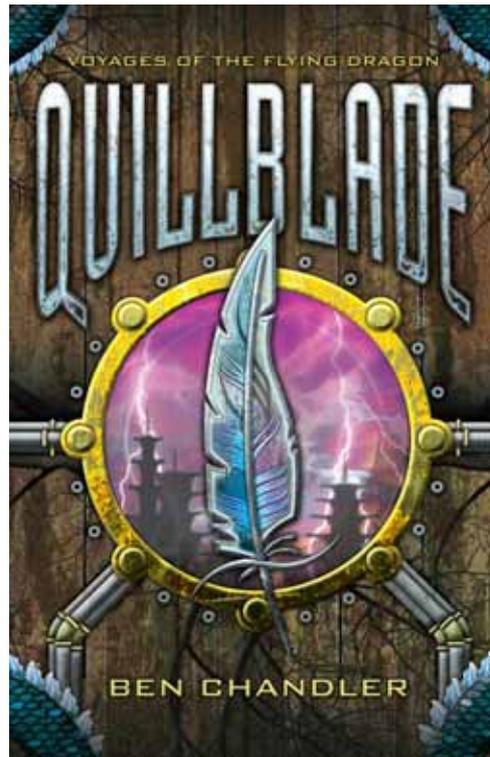


VOYAGES OF THE FLYING DRAGON BOOK 1:

# QUILLBLADE

Ben Chandler



## TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

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Suitable for ages 11+

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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.

A wonderfully moving tale of friendship and finding a family where you never knew it could exist, and a beautifully written adventure with something for everyone. Make sure you don't miss this voyage! *Quillblade* is just the beginning of an epic battle against formidable foes.

# SYNOPSIS

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?

# 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 book 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. For example, Lenis and Missy start out as slaves, with no choices but also no direction. Even though at the end of the 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.

## THE FANTASY WORLD

*Quillblade* 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, the world in *Quillblade* 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

- **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?