

## CHAPTER ONE

# A DARK AND SHADOWY DEAL

— 6000 MILES FROM CITYVILLE —



The open-air ballroom was heaving. On the roof of the luxurious Golden Pagoda Hotel, glamorous couples pranced around the dance floor in the hot, sticky, jasmine-scented night air.

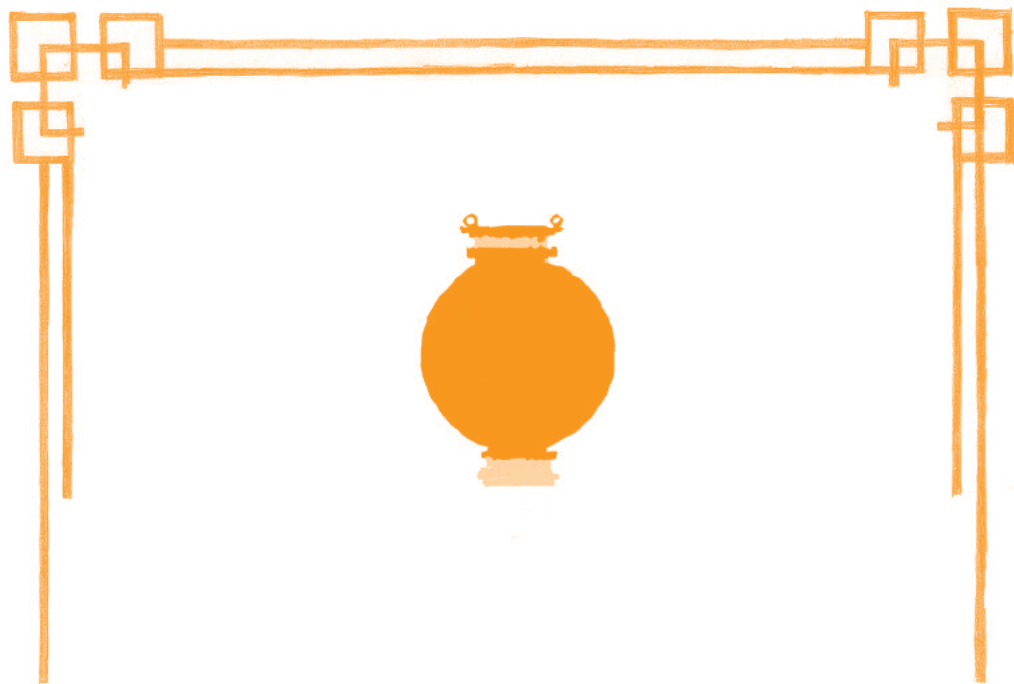
Framed by a pair of spangly curtains, a live band were on the stage. They honked and parped their way through a medley of jazzy hits. Immaculately dressed waiters fluttered about like hummingbirds, topping up glasses with fizzy Champagne. Corks popped, bamboo swayed and hoots of laughter filled the air.

Everyone was having a wonderful time.

Well, almost everyone.

In a dark and shadowy corner, a dark and shadowy deal was being done.

A small, scrawny man with a face like a cross-eyed rat was sitting at a table. Beads of sweat ran down his nose. Two enormous men sat opposite him, their faces disappearing off into



the gloom. Between them was a very glamorous lady, tiny compared to her bodyguards and dressed elegantly in a black frock. A small silver brooch by her shoulder – a circle containing an eye – twinkled in the candlelight. When she spoke she smiled, but it didn't quite reach her eyes.

“Do you have it?” she hissed in a dangerous sort of voice.

The ratty man nodded. He was so nervous, the ends of his wispy moustache wobbled about like worried whiskers. Carefully, he lifted a bundle of rags on to the table and started to unravel it. The lady's eyes glinted greedily when the object inside was revealed. She nodded to the giant bodyguard on her left. He extended a hand the size of a tea tray and took

the treasure with one swipe, placing it delicately into a padded briefcase and clicking it decisively shut.

Meanwhile, the other bodyguard had taken out a huge pile of money from inside his jacket and placed it on the table.

The ratty man didn't wait to be told to take the cash. With shaking hands, he grabbed the money and shoved it frantically down the front of his trousers. Then he gave a curt nod, weaved his way through the crowded dance floor and slid down the back stairs into the night.

He did not look back.

The lady in black watched him



leave, like a cat watching a mouse. Then she gathered her fur stole about her shoulders, stood up and stalked across the crowded room, followed by her bodyguards.

What she and her assistants didn't know was that two beady eyes were watching her make her escape. The beady eyes belonged to the conductor of the band, peering out over the top of his music stand. He had been watching them VERY carefully.

Now, let's just stop and have a good look at this man...

Let's really squint at him...

Hang on!

I... I think that small and rather round little man might not actually be

a man at all!

I think he might be a... a...  
penguin!

A PENGUIN IN DISGUISE!

Yes, he's squeezed into a smart white dinner jacket with a jazzy bow tie and he has neatly shingled hair (it's a wig, I'm sure of it!). But beneath all that, he is *definitely* a penguin! The beak, despite the fake moustache stuck to the end of it, is a dead giveaway.

It's Mr Penguin!

Let's see what  
he's up to...



Mr Penguin watched the lady and her bodyguards snake across the dance floor.

He narrowed his eyes.

Judging the moment just right, he raised his baton, and at a flick of his flipper, the band started to play again. Drums rolled, trumpets parped and an elderly woman with an enormous tuba on her lap (and a pigeon on her head) puffed out her cheeks and blew. Hard.

A rather large spider flew from the tuba. His thick monobrow furrowed with concentration, he whistled through the warm night air, swinging a lasso made from a strand of shimmering web



above his head.

“Go get them, Colin!” Mr Penguin cried.

As he flew, the spider nodded in a business-like fashion and took out a notepad from under his bow tie. He wrote a message on it with a thick marker pen.



*I'M ON IT,  
MR PENGUIN.*

It said:

I'M ON IT, MR PENGUIN.

Then he stashed the pad away neatly before landing with a dramatic roll right in front of the glamorous lady in the black dress.

She gasped. And so did everyone else.

The band stopped playing. The

dancers all stopped prancing and stared. The only sound was of moths' wings flapping around the lanterns.

The lady narrowed her eyes and scowled. One of her bodyguards lifted his enormous foot to stamp on Colin the spider.

But little did they know that Colin was a kung fu master. And he was more than ready for them...

