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“A fine historical fantasy tale featuring a memorable, tenacious protagonist.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

THE LONG WAY by Michael Corbin Ray & Therese Vannier

Take flight to China’s Opium Wars of the mid-19th century in this epic historical fantasy. Young Orphan Leung Chi-Yen, born into the seedy world of Canton brothels, finds an opportunity to escape her fate during the chaos of British attacks on her country. Along with an unreliable monk from the fallen Temple of Seven Dragons, she journeys to North America at the time of the gold rush, the Indian wars, and the taming of the Wild West. Can she forge a new life for herself in this strange, dangerous world? And what about that mysterious Chinese dragon that has followed her so far from home?

STATS

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SYNOPSIS (SPOILERS!)

Having been sold into service at a very young age, thirteen-year-old Leung Chi-Yen knows no life outside the low-rent brothels of mid-nineteenth century Canton, China. To this point Chi-Yen has managed through cleverness and luck to avoid the harsh fate that she knows awaits her. But recently the brothel customers have begun to notice her—especially the vulgar foreign sailors and soldiers from England and America who have been polluting her country for years with boatloads of addictive opium—and her time is running short.

The outbreak of war, though, gives her an unexpected opportunity to escape, and she takes it. Traveling with the drunken monk Liu Kun and his apprentice Tam Sin-Feng, Chi-Yen makes her way to Hong Kong and then across the Pacific to San Francisco. Disguised as a boy and relying on her wits alone, she not only survives but thrives under difficult circumstances—not the least of which being opposition from the angry, misogynistic Liu Kun. In addition, sinister Englishman Basil Malvenue is on their trail, intent on capturing a priceless relic from Liu Kun's fallen Temple of Seven Dragons.

When this relic, an ancient dragon's egg, hatches in Chi-Yen's hands—the baby dragon flying away within sight of San Francisco—she knows she has a new mission.

Chi-Yen and her companions spend the next year working with other Chinese immigrants in the California gold fields. All the while she secretly searches for her missing dragon, which Sin-Feng and Liu Kun refuse to believe is real. When she finally has proof—a cave of gold—the monk instead uses the wealth to drink heavily with his friends. A riot ensues and all end up in jail. When Chi-Yen learns that Basil Malvenue is on his way to claim them as his own prisoners, she engineers an escape. This leads to a showdown outside the small town of Weaverville—and final proof that the dragon is real.

The remorseful Liu Kun is now a changed man. He spends the next seven years with Chi-Yen and Tam Sin-Feng wandering the Nevada and Utah deserts, teaching them the Way of the Dragon—the Long Way. They learn to fight and to survive, but the modern world is closing in around them. Settlers are filling the desert, the native Indians are being driven out, and at last the Chinese arrive, bearing rocks and beams and tracks of the new transcontinental railroad.

Unfortunately, relentless and unstoppable Basil Malvenue arrives with them. The Englishman kills Liu Kun and captures Chi-Yen and Sin-Feng. His plan is to lure the dragon by torturing the girl. It works, but only to an extent: the dragon destroys the trap, rescues Chi-Yen, and takes her to a secret lair in the Ruby Mountains of Nevada. There he reveals that there are six more dragon eggs, now scattered around the world, some still protected by their warrior monk guardians but others more vulnerable. Chi-Yen's mission has expanded once again.

Meanwhile, Sin-Feng has escaped from his own imprisonment and has begun a search for Chi-Yen and the dragon. He is wounded in the leg and then shot in the shoulder when he is surrounded by Malvenue and a group of bounty hunters. Chi-Yen and the dragon return just in time to rescue him, but the dragon is injured in the fight—a bullet to the horn that is the source of its magic.

Chi-Yen, Sin-Feng, and the dragon flee into the mountains, but soon find themselves trapped when soldiers from nearby Fort Ruby arrive. Against the odds—and over the protestations of Basil Malvenue—Chi-Yen negotiates a peaceful surrender with the infantry captain. But a tragic misunderstanding leads to renewed fighting, during which the dragon gives its own life to save its friends. After cutting off the dragon's head for shipment to Washington, D.C., the soldiers and Malvenue depart.

It is then that Chi-Yen cuts the dead dragon open herself and retrieves a new egg. She gives it to Sin-Feng and tells him to keep it safe. He is to found a new dragon temple that will protect the egg forever.

Sin-Feng begs Chi-Yen to stay, but she will not. There are six more dragon eggs in the world, and Chi-Yen will never live a normal life.

THE LONG WAY PRODUCTION NOTES

Although the story is fantasy, the locations and historical background are very much real. The authors took pains to be as true to the people and reality of the times as possible. This involved a great deal of research across a wide variety of subjects, often from first-hand accounts, including:

- The history and politics of nineteenth-century trade with China
- Opium—how it was produced, imported, sold, and used
- Life in and management of brothels in China
- The layout of Canton in the late 1850s
- Daily life in nineteenth century China
- Construction, sailing, layout, and routes of clipper ships involved in trade with China

- The evolution, use, and availability of guns and weapons to various militaries and civilians during the time period of the story
- The rapid growth of San Francisco during and after the gold rush years
- The life of miners in the gold fields
- The life and treatment of Chinese workers in nineteenth-century America
- The state of settlements and cities in California during the late 1850s
- Immigration routes to California and life on the immigrant trails
- Lifestyles of various Native American peoples, and their treatment by European immigrants
- Settlement patterns in the Nevada and Utah territories
- Timelines and methods of construction of North America's first transcontinental railroad

The authors did their best to filter through the biases of the day to present a balanced view of these subjects, especially in the case of often conflicting reports—and frequent outright racism in the source material. In the end, however, this remains a fantasy novel, which allows for some leeway in the case of any factual errors.

More than facts, though, what matters here are the people—people of all races who struggled, mostly anonymously, to make a better life for themselves. We can say clearly today that many behaved less than admirably, but many were simply doing the best they could do in the face of great odds. We hope in some small way that this book celebrates their achievements.