

Opening extract from *Mysterious Traveller*

by Mal Peet and Elspeth Graham



There were five riders but six camels, travelling fast. Desperately fast. They were being chased, hunted. But because of the fading light and the dust thrown up by the camels' feet they could not tell how close their pursuers were.

The camel without the rider was called Jin-Jin. He was fierce and quick-tempered and very intelligent, which was why he carried the travellers' most precious item of baggage. It was hidden in a woven basket, and Jin-Jin carried it as carefully as he could.

The riders were slithering down into a low and rocky valley when Jin-Jin sensed a new danger. A danger far greater than the men following them. His clever nostrils read it in the air, and he roared a warning, digging his huge feet into the ground.

The rider leading him turned in his saddle and swore angrily. "On, Jin-Jin! On! *On!*" Then his face changed because he saw what Jin-Jin had read on the wind. Behind them, the evening sky was now a boiling wall of sand and dust like a tidal wave.

A desert storm-

There was no time to find shelter. The storm hurtled into the valley and struck the travellers like an enormous fist, blinding them. The howling, whirling brown air blotted out the sun and the rocks and everything except itself.

The riders and their camels vanished into it.