

### **Excerpt #1 from *The Old Dragon's Head* by Justin Newland**

*This extract is from Chapter 19. It's from the point of view of Luli, a mother and the local seer.*

"Did he?" Luli said, pacing the floor like a tigress. "I think I know what is happening to you."  
"You do? What is it? Tell me," he blurted out.  
"Can you show me your birthmark?" Luli asked.  
"What? Why? I don't understand."  
"You know I am the custodian of gifts and bequests left by my deceased customers – the soul donors. Some leave letters for their soul receiver. I've an inkling one of them is for you."  
"What's that to do with my birthmark?" he asked, unmasking his exasperation.  
"Please," she replied. "Bear with me."  
"All right, it's here," he said, standing and lifting the lower part of his robe. "There, that squidgy mark above my right ankle."  
"Hah! See! It looks like a reptile; a salamander, possibly a dragon. Let me see if I have a match to it," Luli said, searching the rows of boxes.  
"A match? What are you talking about?"  
"I'm the keeper of the Po Office, the house of restless souls," she said, as her hands moved with swift dexterity along the rows of boxes and packets. "When a person dies, their Po or soul leaves their body and searches for another body to enter – the body of a baby about to be born. Along with the soul, the birthmark of the deceased also transfers to the new born. It's the distinguishing mark, the link between the two people, the soul donor and the soul receiver. When the soul donor leaves a gift or envelope for me to pass on to their soul receiver, they draw two things on it: the shape of their birthmark and where it appears on their person."  
"Fascinating," he said. Dong had told him of the Taoist belief in the transmigration of souls. But to actually read correspondence from the donor of his soul, that was extraordinary and the last thing he had expected from this visit.  
"Hah! Here it is!" Luli cried with an air of triumph and held up an envelope. "Yes. There's a match, both in shape and position. This gives me immense satisfaction. I am a connection between two complete strangers whose lives overlapped simply because they shared the same soul and one of them is standing right in front of me. This letter is written by the hand of the person who donated their soul to you."  
"Are you sure?" He could barely believe it. The envelope she handed him felt like the most precious thing he'd ever received. In a way, it was.  
"Yes, I am," Luli encouraged him. "And please, you can open it."  
Hand shaking, he broke the wax seal.  
"Who is it from?" Luli asked.

### **Excerpt #2 from *The Old Dragon's Head* by Justin Newland**

*This extract is from Chapter 40. It's from the point of view of Gang, the County Magistrate, but a secret supporter of the Mongols against his native Chinese.*

The guard slashed again at the air, cried out loud and arched back, as if an invisible giant had plucked him off the wall and jettisoned him backwards with the force of ten horses. Gang watched the guard tumble through the air, twisting and turning, a man unhooked from his element, a fallen being. All the way down, he yelled, one long piercing scream, loud enough to wake the ancestors. His body thumped into the far bank of the moat and laid

prostrate, arms akimbo, eyes staring back up at them.

“See if he’s alive,” Tung snarled.

Gang peered over the battlements, as the soldiers below rushed over the drawbridge to attend the stricken guard. From behind Gang, another guard shouted out in distress. He beat the air with his fists, like he was grappling with Heaven.

Another spectral attack.

“Get away!” the guard screamed. In a terrifying moment, his trousers split from groin to toe, sliced open by an unseen foe wielding an unseen weapon. The injured guard stared at the wound in crazed disbelief. Blood dripped down a deep cut on his thigh, leaving a trail of crimson drops on the pristine stonework.

“Help him!” Tung screamed at the guards. No one moved.

Gang had seen Altan’s supernatural work before, but nothing to match this grade of excellence. A moment later, the invisible entity leapt at the injured guard and must have landed on top of him, because the man was fighting the air like a madman, trying to fend off a ferocious attack. He fell on his back, mauled by some kind of wild animal. The invisible beast tore open the guard’s throat and a spout of crimson blood spurted into the air. The guard twitched a few times and swiftly bled out, a red pool creeping across the stonework like a malevolent intruder.

The other guards stood in a stunned ring around their dead compatriot. A deathly silence hung over the Zhendong Tower. On it was the infamous saying, The First Pass under Heaven. Gang wondered malevolently if they shouldn’t replace it with The First Pass under Hell. Then a third guard drew his sabre and struck out at an unseen attacker, yelling, shaking his fist at the unruly air.

“What are you fighting?” Tung thundered.

“Can’t you see it?” the guard said, beating the wind with his fists.

“No. What is it? Where is it?” Tung bellowed, beside himself with rage.

“A wolf, a Blue Wolf,” the guard yelled, his voice hoarse with fear.

Abandoned by Heaven and all that was holy, the guard dropped his weapon and dashed screaming along the road, looking back in mortal fear at the invisible Blue Wolf pursuing him.