



The Curse of the Ancient Emerald (Hardy Boys Adventures Book 9)

By Franklin W. Dixon

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Then the boys begin receiving threatening notes in the mail, each one containing a strange riddle. And it looks like the Phantom’s next target could be the valuable Emerald of Astara, the 2,500-year-old crown jewel of the Bayport Historical Museum. Can the Hardys crack the Phantom’s code before he strikes again?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Franklin W. Dixon is the author of the ever-popular Hardy Boys books.

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The Curse of the Ancient Emerald

THE EMERALD OF ASTARA

1

FRANK

AND HERE," SAID THE MUSEUM guide with the little smile that meant he was about to treat us to another terrible joke, "we have the—ha-ha—jewel in the crown of our collection, the Emerald of Astara."

I fought down a groan as he waited expectantly for the class to acknowledge his amazing sense of humor. This guy was terrible.

"Don't give up the day job," called someone from the back of the group.

Our school chaperone, Mr. Sweeney, swiveled around and fixed Neal "Neanderthal" Bunyan with his laser glare.

"Busted," muttered my brother, Joe.

Neanderthal's grin faded under Mr. Sweeney's withering look.

"Sorry, sir," he mumbled.

"The Emerald of Astara," said the tour guide, determined not to be derailed from his lecture, "is over two thousand five hundred years old and can be traced back to ancient Persia—that's modern-day Iran to you."

I whistled appreciatively and leaned in to inspect the egg-size jewel. Hidden lights inside the glass case made the green stone twinkle and glint. It looked like something Indiana Jones would fight to get his hands on.

"The jewel is believed to be cursed—"

"Really?" interrupted Joe. "What kind of curse?"

Joe had been looking pretty bored since the class arrived at the Bayport History Museum for our school trip. But talk of an ancient curse was enough to get him interested.

“It was given to the sultan of Astara as a gift,” said the guide. “He was said to be obsessed with it, never letting the jewel out of his sight. He was found dead only a week later, clutching the jewel to his chest.”

“How did he die?” I asked.

“The curse,” said Joe. “Duh. Aren’t you listening?”

“People don’t die from curses.” I snorted.

“What about Tutankhamen?” remarked Chet Morton, our best friend. “All those people who died after opening King Tut’s tomb?”

“King Tut’s Tomb,” repeated Joe, grinning at Amber Arlington. “Cool name for a band.”

Amber smiled back at Joe, and I fought down a little twinge of jealousy. Amber was new in our class and had taken to hanging out with us in the cafeteria and at our favorite coffee shop, the Meet Locker. She was smart, funny, and incredibly good-looking—the complete package. I’m not usually the type to run off chasing girls—that’s Joe’s thing—but there was something different about Amber.

“Actually,” I said, “the curse of Tutankhamen is an urban legend. Out of the twenty-six people who were there when the tomb was opened, only six died.”

“Six is a lot!” protested Chet.

“Yeah, but they died over the course of a decade. The talk of a curse started when the financier of the dig was bitten by a mosquito. The bite became infected, and he died of blood poisoning.”

“Didn’t Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believe in the curse?” asked Amber.

I knew I was right about her. Looks and brains. “He sure did. Kinda weird, huh? The creator of Sherlock Holmes—the most analytical detective in history—believing in curses and magic. He was a well-known believer in the occult.”

“It’s so cool that you know all that,” said Amber.

I felt heat in my cheeks. “It’s nothing. I just like to read up on history.”

Joe grabbed me by the neck and tried to give me a noogie. “Yeah, my brother the egghead.”

“Joe Hardy!” snapped Mr. Sweeney. “Have you and your brother finished acting like five-year-olds?”

I heard the rest of the class snickering. Amber shook her head in a mock sorrowful motion and wagged her finger at us.

“I apologize for my students,” Mr. Sweeney told the guide. “It seems their parents didn’t teach them about such things as manners. Please continue.”

“Um, thank you,” said the guide. “The emerald was lent to us by the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, but we had to install a state-of-the-art security system before they would even consider letting us have it.

I can't go into too many details, but it really is quite a phenomenal piece of technology."

"I bet Catwoman could steal it," said Joe.

The tour guide smiled. "I think even Selina Kyle would have trouble getting her hands on this prize," he said.

I raised my eyebrows. I was surprised he even knew who Catwoman was.

The guide pointed to the ceiling. "Motion sensors that are sensitive enough to pick up the presence of a mouse. Heat sensors that detect not only a change in temperature, but human pheromones in sweat as well." He smiled at Joe's look of surprise, then pointed to the floor. "Motion sensors in a ten-foot square around the case." He pointed at the wall. "Infrared grid. And no," he said, arching his eyebrows as Joe opened his mouth, "a robber cannot maneuver his or her way around the sensor beams, no matter how acrobatic he or she is. This is a three-dimensional lattice cube. Each beam creates a gap no smaller than a dime, and it completely surrounds the case."

Joe whistled. "I'm impressed."

"Then my day has not been a total waste," said the guide with a bright, slightly sarcastic smile. "Now, if you all care to follow me, we can take a peek behind the scenes at where we restore some of our damaged works of art."

I fell into step beside Joe.

"She's really something, isn't she?" asked Joe, nodding his head toward Amber, who was a few paces ahead of us.

"Who?" I asked innocently.

Chet squeezed between us and threw his arms over our shoulders. "How long do you think this will take?" he complained. "I'm starving."

"You're always starving," said Joe.

"It's not my fault!" protested Chet. "I have a very fast metabolism."

The tour guide stopped before a door with a sign saying STAFF ONLY. KEEP OUT. He unlocked the door and led us into a narrow corridor. I peered into rooms as we passed them, curious about what was kept back here, but it wasn't very interesting—offices and storerooms, mostly.

The guide finally stopped before a heavy wooden door.

"I must ask you not to touch anything in this room," he said. "The pieces are here for repair, and any disturbances could be catastrophic for the museum."

Mr. Sweeney glared at us to reinforce the words, and the guide opened the door.

The room beyond was huge, illuminated by long strips of lights that hung from steel ceiling beams. There were no windows anywhere, which I assumed was a security thing. Off to our left was a long workbench

where somebody was painstakingly cleaning an old pottery vase using something that smelled of strong chemicals.

“Welcome to the exciting world of art restoration,” announced the guide proudly.

“Riveting, don’t you agree?” whispered Amber to my left.

“Oh, yes,” I said, my face deadpan. “Very.”

Amber snorted with laughter, then blushed bright red and slapped a hand over her mouth.

I grinned at her, then realized we had been left behind. The rest of the tour had moved deeper into the room, stopping before a painting mounted on an easel. A man who looked to be in his fifties was leaning close to the piece, a tiny brush in his hand.

The painting depicted a ruined boat sinking off a rocky coast. The sky was filled with storm clouds, but just to the right the sun was breaking through, pillars of bright light striking the waves. The upper-right portion of the painting, where the sun was visible, was vibrant—obviously where the painting had been restored. But the rest of the picture was dull and muted.

“This is Sun Greets Shipwreck by the brothers Johannes and Friedrich von Esling,” said the guide. “It’s worth over one hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Ramone here has been working on it for two months now.”

“Maybe someone else should take over,” muttered Neanderthal. “They’d be quicker.”

Mr. Ramone turned to stare at us. He was wearing these weird glasses with majorly thick lenses in them, giving him the look of a surprised owl.

“Oh, no,” said the guide. “Mr. Ramone is actually one of the faster restorers. He should be finished with this painting by the end of the year.”

“Nice job if you can get it,” said Neanderthal.

The tour guide glared at Neanderthal, who was snickering with the other jocks. “It takes years for an artist to become qualified as a restorer. It is a complex job that requires natural talent, patience, and a mature mind.”

“That’s three strikes for Neal, then,” Joe murmured into my ear.

I was about to reply when the room was suddenly plunged into darkness.

“Don’t panic,” barked the tour guide. “Just a power surge. The generator will start up—”

He was cut off by a startled cry of pain. I heard a clattering sound, a grunt, and a scuffle, then something breaking.

“What’s happening?” demanded Mr. Sweeney. “Neal, if this is your doing, I’ll put you in detention for a month!”

“It’s not me, sir!” Neal shouted.

“Everyone stand still,” I called out, fishing around in my pocket for my phone. It looked like the rest of the group had the same idea, because a second later the room was filled with the white glow of our screens.

I pointed mine in the direction the noise had come from.

Mr. Ramone, the restorer, was lying unconscious on the floor, a trickle of blood clearly visible on his bald head.

“Someone call an ambulance!” yelled Joe. “Oh. Hang on, I have my own phone.”

He shifted his phone so that he could dial 911. As he did, I noticed something else: The painting that had been resting on the easel was gone!

I whirled around, searching the room. Amber must have seen the same thing, because she took a step away from the rest of the class, peering into the darkness.

“There!” she said.

I looked to where she was pointing and saw a black-clad figure running toward the door. He had a ski mask pulled over his face and wore what looked like night-vision goggles—the kind that army rangers use on evening patrols. He held the painting beneath his arm as he dodged around the workbench and vanished through the door.

“Stop, thief!” I shouted, and sprinted after him.

Users Review

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