

Fiction

Group 5



Happier Through Ignorance

American International School, Sundar, Harshini – 16

Bubbles! The spheroidal iridescent figures, ethereal, yet earthly; transparent; yet encapsulating the colours of the rainbow; flimsy, yet flamboyantly flying all around, have always fascinated Yuan. There is something irrefutably interesting about bubbles. Is it the wind that lifts and carries the bubbles or do they have invisible wings to fly? Parks seemed to have them in abundance, thanks to the bubble gun vendor whose business is thriving because of an over-excited group of children. Yuan is unable to keep his excitement at bay, his legs shaking uncontrollably as he watches a little girl blow into her bubble maker. Her small cheeks balloon up with air before she exhales sloppily into the soapy wand, releasing a trail of tiny bubbles. The girl huffs in disappointment as the bubbles crash to the ground immediately. Mirroring her dismay, he observes as the child takes in another big breath of air and blows into the stick in her hands. She fails yet again. Yuan grips the bench underneath him. He shakes his head, his long brown hair falling sloppily all over his face. He looks up, tucks a few strands behind his ear and waits as the girl blows into the bubble maker for the third time. Her perseverance is rewarded. A giant bubble leaves the yellow stick. It successfully lifts off, making him clap in amusement.

Yuan jerks up from where he was sitting and hastily runs to the bubble. Seeing a tall stranger run towards her, the little girl shrieks and runs away. In a few seconds, Yuan gets to the bubble, and lets out a happy giggle. His eyes focus on the sphere, its walls made of a thin soapy liquid. The incredibly fragile figure reflects and refracts the sunlight that hits its surface, and as it floats about, it slowly but steadily starts descending to the ground. Realizing this, Yuan begins to whimper in disbelief, his heart shattering at the thought of this bubble reaching the ground and meeting its end. To stop it, he tentatively puts his cupped hand forward in an attempt to catch the bubble as it falls. However, when the bubble touches his hand, it pops, leaving a small thin circle of soap on Yuan's hand. When he realizes what had happened, he brings his hand up to his face to examine it, staring at the calloused and slightly soapy hand in front of him.

Letting his hands drop down to his side, Yuan looks up in defeat at the sky. Above him, he sees a clear blue sky littered with just a few clouds, and the calm canvas soothes him. He looks back down to the scene at the playground and spots more little kids blowing bubbles near him. His mouth stretches into a big goofy smile, and his eyes search for the little girl he saw earlier. He runs up behind her. As he was a lot taller than the child, Yuan squats down and politely taps her on the shoulder. The little girl whips around, her bangs too long for her face and her smile drops.

“M...more b-bubbles for me?” Yuan asks the girl. When she doesn't respond, he repeats his question.

“More b-bubbles?” he asks, his neck twitching to the side as he stutters. The girl stares at Yuan, closely examining his face and experimentally mirrors his twitch, not to mock but to understand. A woman then calls out a name, and the little girl turns around and runs away, leaving him alone. He reluctantly stands back and jitters uncomfortably, his neck twitching to the side again.

His eyes follow the little girl as she goes to her mother and hides behind her legs.

“Mommy, what’s wrong with that man?” says the little girl to her mom loudly, pointing at him and tugging at her skirt. The mother quickly shushes her but doesn’t answer, continuing to gawk at Yuan, who averts his attention from the two. Discouraged, he runs away. Like a child, his hands animatedly move around him as he sprints and reaches the bench. When he gets there, he touches his heart through his clothes, shrieking out loud when he can feel his pulse. He echoes the rhythm of his heart out loud, so loud that many people in the park take notice.

Yuan is oblivious to all the attention he’s getting. A few people get their smartphones out and start recording him as he loudly mimics the sound of his heart. Once his heart beat slows down, Yuan huffs in disappointment and lets his arms rest. Disheartened, he collapses onto the bench, tipping his head back and closing his eyes. The harsh sunlight stings Yuan’s eyes, so he brings up his hands, cupping them over his eyes, creating a blanket that brings darkness which lets him relax.

He stays seated for hours on end until the harsh sunlight mellows out around him, settling into a more pleasant orange. The temperature has dropped too, and Yuan’s already thick jacket wasn’t enough to combat the cold. Yuan takes his hands away from his eyes. He gives his eyes a few moments to adjust, and when they do, he opens them comically wide and blinks continuously. He then looks around the park, and seeing no one else, he quickly stands up.

Amused at virtually everything, Yuan continues his journey through the park. Suddenly, he spots a map of the park, complete with a ‘You are here’ and a braille version of the plan. The braille map makes him giggle. He warms up his hands by blowing into them before placing them on the braille map and closing his eyes. He feels the plan, allowing his fingers to experience the different textures. He feels the little bumps throughout the surface, each signifying a landmark. He feels until his hands grow numb from the cold, and when it does, he opens his eyes in shock and rubs his hands together frantically to generate some heat.

Before he could walk off, he stops at the notice board next to the map and reads the different papers plastered on. One of them reminds the park goers that pets are not allowed inside the park. Another apprises people that the bathrooms will be closed for a few days for renovation purposes.

But the notice that catches Yuan’s attention is a colourful poster of the Huangshan Mountains. The mysteriously magical mountains in the poster catches Yuan’s attention instantly. The advertisement seems to be showcasing a bungee-jumping hotspot high up the mountains.

“Y-you don’t f-fall, you fly...” Yuan sounds the catchphrase on the poster out loud and immediately, his interest is piqued. Like a child, he jumps up and down frantically, unable to hide his excitement.

Clandestinely, he grabs the poster from the notice board, tearing the edges slightly. Regardless, the words, along with the beautiful picture of the Yellow Mountains, remain. Yuan stares at the piece of paper on his hand and smiles, pure joy taking over his face.

“I-I want to do this,” he says out loud to himself. He looks around the park with a sheepish grin, and when he doesn’t see anyone else, he shouts, much louder this time.

“I’m going to fly!”

That night, Yuan goes home and sees his mother, fast asleep. Taking his chance, he rummages through her room, finding the stash of cash she hides for emergencies. Before

leaving the room, Yuan goes to his mother, gently kissing her forehead. He then leaves their home and heads straight to the subway station where he boards the next train to Huangshan.

Rubbing the sleepiness off his eyes, Yuan looks back at his disappointing 12-hour train journey. The train was way too loud, and he couldn't sleep for as long as he wanted to. Regardless, he was at Huangshan now, and his irritation dissipates. It was quite cold in the city but thankfully Yuan is prepared. He wore a huge parka jacket which easily engulfed his tall figure. Just then, a man approaches Yuan with a friendly smile.

"Welcome to Huangshan, would you like to join us for a one-day group tour? We go on an exciting trail up China's legendary Magic Mountains!"

Yuan's eyes sparkle at the mention of the Magic Mountains, and he digs into one of his pockets to pull up the crumpled piece of paper. Despite ecstatically approaching numerous people on the train ride and showing them the piece of paper, he was greeted with avoidance.

"Will you take me here?" Yuan asks the man, handing him the poster. The man squints his eyes and frowns at him.

"Oh, we can't, unfortunately. But maybe you can come with our hiking group. About half-way through, I can show you the route to get to the bungee-jumping spot?"

Yuan agrees in an instant, nodding enthusiastically. The man hands him the poster and Yuan folds it up in a hurry before putting it into his pocket.

"Great, follow me, I'll help you get set up," he says and beckons towards him. Yuan follows suit, his heart racing. The man leads him to a van and shuffles around the compartments in front of the driver's seat. He then pulls out a bundle of forms from the compartment and turns toward Yuan.

"Found it!" He walks to the seat where Yuan's sitting quietly and sits adjacently.

"Here are the forms, just fill them out, and you have to pay ¥460 if you want the normal room when we reach the top or ¥560 if you want the deluxe room. It covers the trail, food and the bus rides!" He says, and Yuan's knees start moving up and down from the excitement.

"P...pen?" Yuan stuttered out.

The man raises his eyebrows and eyes him cautiously, reaching to his pocket and taking a pen out. He hands it to Yuan who fumbles it around in his hand. The blue pen then drops onto the form, and he frowns. He picks it up again and positions it onto his right hand. Testing his hold on the pen, Yuan wiggles it around. Once it is stable, he starts filling the form out, voicing out as he writes, sounding each character. The man takes in a second to notice Yuan's eccentricities. He seems to be pretty restless, and his neck twitches a little to the side. There's somewhat of an innocent aura around Yuan, showing his excitement for trivial things without holding back. Of course, he does stutter quite often. The man guesses that Yuan is about thirty years old, a few years give or take. He's quite tall, but the coat he's wearing with the hood up seems to undermine his height.

Yuan takes his time with the form, occasionally glancing at the man only to see him staring at the other. Innocently, Yuan gives a toothy grin to the other, whose response isn't as enthusiastic, but it's a positive response nonetheless.

"D-Done!" Yuan yells out suddenly, scaring the other man who clutches his chest in surprise. Immediately, Yuan takes one of his hands and harshly slaps his own mouth, his eyes comically wide.

"Too l-loud," he says. The man shakes his head to the side.

"No, it's okay, you just caught me off guard," the man says, and Yuan's reaction changes completely, and he goes back to his bubbly self. He takes the form from Yuan's hold and waits as Yuan fishes into his bag for his wallet. He then digs through and he seems to be quite

loaded, his wallet almost overflowing with cash. Yuan takes out a ¥500 bill and hands it to the man.

“This should be enough, right?” Yuan asks. The man, without thinking, shakes his head.

“No, it’s actually ¥500 more,” he says.

“Oh, okay,”

Yuan pulls out another bill from his wallet and hands it to the man. The other regrets this immediately when he sees Yuan give in without any protest. But he takes the cash and safely stores it in his back pocket.

“Great, then...,” the man looks at the form, “Please just stay in this van for a little while, the others taking the hike along with you will join shortly,” he says and starts to shuffle towards the door of the bus. Just then, Yuan grabs his arm and quietly asks.

“Will you come b-back?” Yuan asks. Taken aback, the man clears his throat.

“Yes, I’ll be leading the hike,” Immediately, Yuan’s expression changes again, and he gives a large smile.

“O-Okay!” He says and lets go of the other’s arm.

The man walks out of the bus and leaves Yuan on his own. Yuan makes himself comfortable on the bus, shifting around his seat until he settles in a spot that doesn’t have anything poking at him. Later, he places his face at the window, and his jaw drops at his surroundings. He sees mountains all around him, so tall that he can’t make out where they end from within the bus. Curious as ever, he stands up in his seat and plasters his face against the window, trying to see the tip of the mountain, but lets out a disappointing groan when the added height doesn’t do anything else. As he breathes against the closed window, his breath starts fogging up against it. He grins at that instantly and takes his hands out from his gloves carefully. From there, he picks up the poster from one of his pockets and memorizes the three letters that excite him the most. He exhales more air onto the window and then uses his pointer to write down the words *fly* sloppily. Yuan smiles at himself when it’s done and lets out a content sigh, before sitting back down and letting his head rest on the cold glass. He shivers at first, but his cheeks slowly adjust to the cold, and he falls asleep with a smile on his face.

During the bus ride to the start of the hike, Yuan desperately tries to talk to different groups of people to gain companionship, but they all shun him away without much thought. The man who helped him register, Feng, moves next to Yuan when they get off the bus, and out of empathy or perhaps even guilt tells him that he would be his companion throughout the hike. Yuan lets out the biggest grin he can muster, and jumps up and down in sheer delight.

Throughout the hike, Yuan stays close to Feng. Yuan isn’t extremely talkative, but Feng can tell that he appreciates company, like when he stops and tugs at Feng’s hands when he spots a house among the trees. He tries to communicate, but it often comes out in stutters and Feng has a lot of trouble understanding him. But, he would just nod along and smile, which was more than enough for Yuan.

To Yuan, the Yellow Mountains are the most beautiful things he’s ever seen. They are like waves of a mighty ocean, sandwiched between a clear blue sky and the earth below. Patches of bare rock peaked through the dense forests, trees reaching high. These peaks stretched out as far as the eye could see, blurring into what seemed to be the edge of the world. Some of them were hidden by clouds, adding to the beauty sprinkled with a little mystery.

Weeds grow through the cracks in the trail's concrete stairs, their stems straining forward to get sunlight. A bright red flower catches his attention. Yuan, curious as ever, stops in his tracks, reaching forward to touch the flower. He reaches forward to touch the flower and feels its soft petals on his fingertips. It's unbelievably smooth, almost velvety. He then sees the flower slowly glimmer and his eyes widen. Yuan tugs at Feng next to him, pointing.

“What?” Feng asks.

“S-sparkly” Yuan answers and the other raises his eyebrows and looks at the flower. He tries to see some sort of glitter but finds none. He tells Yuan to continue on with the hike and he reluctantly lets go of the flower and looks ahead.

At one rest-stop, Feng turns to Yuan and gives him the directions to go to the bungee-jumping spot, reminding him to follow the map and look at the directions. After listening carefully, Yuan gives a final grin to Feng before separating from the rest of the group. He trails on, by himself, stepping on each stair with newfound excitement, realizing that soon, he's going to live his dream. It takes a few more hours of hiking. Yuan's legs almost give out, but he persists. The blue sky around him turns into a dull mix of orange and pink, and he stops at a precipice. He looks to his right to see another set of beautiful mountain ranges extending through the horizon. Not far, he sees the bungee-jumping spot, and with a gasp, he realizes that it matches the view from the poster.

He immediately pulls up the crumpled up poster in his pocket, opens it and compares the view. Right in front of him are the exact mountains he had spent hours staring at, standing magnificently. The top of the peak glimmers like a diamond, much like the flower he saw earlier. Yuan shrieks in delight, whilst giggling at his luck. Swiftly, he steps away from the hiking trail, holding on to the trunk of a tree nearby to keep him steady. He voices out the poster again to himself.

“You don't f-fall, you fly” he stutters out. Yuan looks at the poster again and sees the person jumping down the bridge, a harness surrounding their legs and a smile on their face. He then folds up the poster and stores it inside his pocket safely. He takes a deep breath, spreads his arms out like wings, and leaps forward.

Yuan enjoys every moment, until his ignorance blissfully kills.

Tales from the Misty Mountains

ESF South Island School, De Alwis, Kavinda

“Wake up” said a voice. I bolted upright in my bed, beads of sweat lining my forehead. Rays of sun cascaded filled my room with dancing colours, and my ears were caressed by the sound of chirping cicadas. Yet despite my undisturbed serenity, my mind throbbed trying to comprehend the voice in my head. I thought I heard it, no, I’m sure I heard it. The memory of it slowly slipped away the harder I focused on it, as if I were holding sand.

My door was flung open as Nai-Nai heaved in—my timeless peace now long gone.

“Jiang—” she panted. She coughed, trying to catch her breath.

“Yes, Nai-Nai?” I said. I leapt to help her and she clutched my arm, leaning on me; her soft cloth shirt stained brown by years of dry mud and field work.

“Jiang, there is no water.” she gasped. I tried not to laugh.

“Nai-Nai, there was rain just yesterday. I couldn’t sleep because it wouldn’t stop.”

“No, Jiang, there is no water.” she said again. Her voice was laced with despair.

“The well?”

“Gone.”

“Nai-Nai, there must be—”

“No!” she said. I could tell she was beginning to get frustrated. I wondered if perhaps her memory was starting to fade. “Jiang, there is nothing. Go, check the fields.”

Skeptical, I stepped towards the door, and when I opened the door, I stopped in my tracks. My mouth fell, agape in utter and complete shock.

The rice fields, just yesterday lush emerald blades in a blanket of rolling green, were now dead. There was no other way to put it. It was as if the green pigment had been sucked out of it, leaving behind dull jaundice shells. I walked closer to the field in disbelief, the scorched earth crunching beneath my bare feet. I pulled a remnant of a stalk from the field.

I shivered uncontrollably, on the verge of tears. I racked my mind for something, anything that could explain this. A drought, perhaps? Yes, a drought. The stalk fell from my shaking hands as I stood up and raced to the well. It must be full right? The well stood parallel to the house, and never ran out of water. Not during drought, not during summer, not ever. Nai-Nai must have made a mistake. She’s getting old and she’s forgetting things. There must be water in the well, I told myself.

I lowered the bucket desperately. The bucket clinked as it hit the stone walls of the well in a rocky descent. I kept lowering it, waiting for the eventual splash as the bucket reached the water. I lowered it, further and further, deeper and deeper. By now, tears were streaming down my face; the bucket plunging down an endless pit. The rope toughened and Nai-Nai took my hands as I collapsed in a sobbing fit.

“Nai-Nai, we don’t have food. That rice was going to feed us this winter.” Words tumbled out of me in an incomprehensible jumble as Nai-Nai held me, stroking my head. “How will we feed ourselves, Nai-Nai? How will we—”

“Jiang, you have to go up to the mountains.” she said, firmly. My tears stopped, as if someone had just turned off a faucet in my body. I looked up at her, confused.

“What?”

“The river down by the pear tree. Follow it upstream to the mountains.”

“Nai-Nai, we—”

“Jiang!” she shouted. I had never seen her angry. Tears speckled the corner of her eyes as she spoke. “The river comes from the mountain, and the mountain never runs dry.”

“Nai-Nai, the well never runs dry but—”

“Jiang, listen! The mountains never run dry. No matter what. And besides, we have no other choice.”

And so, that very afternoon, I set out by myself, with only a backpack with two plums. I bid a short farewell to Nai-Nai, and began my journey.

I walked through the fields, down the road and past a tree stump where I’d play with my dolls as a child. In no time, I had made it to the pear tree. During this time of year, there would be pears littered among the teeming leaves, and squirrels scurrying up and down the tree, but now, there was nothing except a yellowing carcass of what used to be a tree. The land itself was infected by a cancerous rot.

Just around the same pear tree would be the twisting river filled with catfish and laughing children, but I knew from the moment I came within vision of the tree that the river was dry. A deafening silence replaced the once gushing waters. I prayed that somehow, the river would be miraculously full, just coincidentally quiet, and instead I stared at the harrowing reality: bone-dry. Not a single droplet remained. Not a single living thing in sight. Not even a breeze to comfort my sinking soul. Just the sight of a trench in the slaughtering sun.

Upstream, I reminded myself. I traced my way up the dry river, watching my step as I did. My lips cracked and chafed, and my voice became hoarse like that of a river toad, and yet I kept walking. Left foot forward, right foot forward. Left foot, right foot. Left, right.

I had trekked for so long, with no sight of the mountains, that I had stopped looking up in search of them. The soft grass that chattered in the wind and lined the river was now a wasteland and stank of death, and so I averted my eyes, and stared at my feet, kicking up dust and rocks as I did, but when I felt a drop of water land on my head, I was forced to look up, and there it was.

The mountains.

A collection of massive stone giants towering into the sky, wisps of mist curling around its peaks, concealing it with layers upon layers of heavy smog. Sun glinted off the mountains and into the fog, creating rainbow glimmers that disappeared as quickly as they shone.

The sight was ethereal. Moss clung to the side of the jagged mountainside for dear life, and yet I smiled at the sight of the challenge that stood before me. Clouds meant water, water from which the river had drawn its source from, and water from where the drop that had landed on my scalp not more than a few minutes ago had come from. Clouds meant life.

I looked at the mountains as a whole, trying to gain some sort of perspective on how to even start climbing. The source of the river just ended at the foot of the mountain, disappearing into the stone. I peered at the mountain again, trying to look for an easier climb rather than trying to scale the vertical side of the mountain, and then it caught my eye.

It wasn’t much. It wasn’t much at all. It was just a tiny shadow, created by the tiniest of imperfections, but it was enough. Not a field’s length away from where the river lay a staircase. Barely noticeable, but there all the same. Cut into the mountain flawlessly, so that when the sun lit up the mountainside, it blended in as if there were nothing there.

I started my ascent into the mountains, one step at a time, and in no time, give or take a few falls, and a couple of much needed rests, I made it deep into the mountains, immersed in the mist.

I reached a clearing at the top of the steps, the end of the stairway marked by a massive crimson red shrine gate. I took that as a good omen as Nai-Nai always said the gods would look out for me if I stayed close to where they rest.

I took a deep breath and walked through. The sweet scent of lichen and dew embraced me, and I opened my eyes to this untouched paradise, and then started laughing. Uncontrollably laughing. A pond lay at the edge of the clearing, and I dunked my head straight in and drank. I inhaled as much as I could, drinking straight from the murky water, and sat back.

“Water. How precious.” I thought to myself. “And fleeting.”

I looked around the clearing. It was embedded in the mountains, surrounded by cliffs, and forests of bamboo that were blanketed by the mist. I turned my attention back to the pond, and noticed two delicate lilies floating on the water, one twice the size of the other, but both a shade of dark periwinkle. It reminded me of Nai-Nai and I, two lonesome flowers, thriving.

“Hahaha!”

I stood up abruptly, listening attentively.

“Hahahaha! Stop it!”

I could hear it again, I swear. I began to stumble through the bamboo forest, searching for the laughter that taunted me. I was convinced I was close.

“Haha! You can’t catch me!”

So very close. Whoever was laughing was just beyond my reach. I pulled past the last bamboo shoot, ready to grab whatever was babbling at me, and, for the second time that day, was awestruck. I was speechless in the face of the scene that stood before me.

A village lay resting on the intersection of two mountains, a small path leading through to wherever. Sunlight streamed through the path, illuminating the village in an airy golden bath. A cluster of white houses with curved wooden roofs dotted the face of the mountain wall, and small children, source of the irritating laughter, giggled, shrieked and ran around terrorising each other to their heart’s content.

To my left, a mother washed clothes, her hair pulled tightly into a bun. To my right, some young girls around my age were talking to each other, smirking. All of them seemed to wear white silk that draped off them like pure white water running off their skin. I didn’t know what to make of such a heavenly scene.

“Are you looking for something?” said a voice. I gazed in front of me with glossy eyes and saw an old man with a beard and stick, staring straight at me.

“I—uh, yes. There was a—um, river. It came from this mountain and I—” I mumbled, distracted by a child running past my feet, snorting. I snapped back my attention to the man. “Sorry, but there’s no water down in the valley, and I was wondering if there was water somewhere here? Maybe the river got blocked, or a dam broke?”

“There is no river nor dam here. But would you like to eat, young one?” said the man. I nodded.

The man brought me inside his home, a palace compared to the wooden shack I lived in. He brought me steaming rice and a plate of roasted pork, each grain of rice a glistening white pearl and the meat still shimmering from the oil. I began to eat, sinking my teeth into the crispy pork, and bit back a moan from the juices that came forth.

“What does it matter if your river runs dry?” said the man, as he served himself.

“Because the fields depend on it, I think.” I said, mouth full.

“Is it harvesting season about now?” he asked. A child ran in and sat down next to the old man, his grandson I’d assume.

“I—I think so? I’m not really sure. I can’t seem to remember.”

“Well, you must have anyone with you in the fields, no? Maybe they know why the river ran dry.”

“No, I don’t think so. Maybe... actually. I—I’m not sure.” I said. The child shuffled closer to me.

“Some people say there’s a god who lives in a cave at the peak.” whispered the child, grinning. I nearly choked.

“A god?” I asked. She nodded, as if telling me a deep secret.

“Maybe he can solve your problems?”

“What problems?”

“Your fields, right?” said the child. I nodded, vaguely recalling some kind of field. A corn field, perhaps?

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Mei!” she chirped.

“Well, Mei, do you want to take me to see this god?” I asked. Mei’s face turned a bright red and she shook her head furiously.

“You have to go there yourself, otherwise the god won’t talk to you.” Mei explained.

“I see.” I said, finishing my last bite. “Thank you so much for the food, Gong-Gong.”

“Of course, Jiang.” he said. I wondered why he’d called me Jiang. It was a little strange.

“Mei, do you want to show me which direction the god lives in?” I asked.

“Right there!” said Mei. She pointed at the narrow mountain pass.

“Thank you, Mei!” I said. I opened my bag and gave her one of my plums, and she beamed from ear to ear, running back to her mother with her new prize.

Walking through the mountain pass felt like walking into another world. Visibly, nothing changed much, but as I walked through the other side of the pass, I felt like it was suddenly winter. There was an eerie silence, and pine trees loomed over me in a sprawling thicket. Petals danced in the wind, as if they had a mind of their own. Crater-like walls surrounded the entirety of the area in an almost perfect circle.

“A cave at the peak.” I chanted to myself. “A cave at the peak.”

I tiptoed along the edge of the forest, squinting for a cave. I stumbled across a mountain pass once, and I could hear conversation from the other side but I thought nothing of it.

I ambled into the forest, tapping each tree as I walked by. I came out the other side, all the while chanting ‘A cave at the peak’. I scanned the mountains and exclaimed as I spotted the cave: a gaping hole half-way up the side of the mountain wall. It was the only place on-top of the mountain that was void of any mist, and instead was a thick murky soup of black.

I scrambled up the side of the mountain, ignoring the cuts and bruises I started to get from climbing so quickly. I felt no pain, no remorse. Only drive. I made it to the cave, my mind as foggy as the mist below me. I sauntered into the cave confidently, blood dripping down my legs, and ventured in so deep the outside light was barely visible.

“Child, why have you come here?” boomed a voice. I dropped my backpack in shock, and two plums rolled out. The voice sounded familiar, like the sound of someone she had known a long long time ago.

“I need your help.” I said. The shadows around me shifted and churned.

“With what?” it said. I paused. I didn’t know. I truly did not know.

“I—I’m not sure. I just need your help.” I said. I began to agonise, trying to remember *anything* about why I was in that cave.

“That tends to happen to people who stumble through these parts.” said the voice. The shadows began to transmogrify into an alarming wall of royal-blue scales.

“What tends to happen?” I asked.

“Never mind, child.” the voice said. The scales coiled and twisted, parting to make way for a head that made me feel as insignificant as a beetle.

“Where am I?” I asked, not scared, but intrigued by the face. It looked too human to be reptilian, too reptilian to be human. Just the front tooth of the elongated head was the size of my body. Its eyes were beyond my comprehension, and I stared into the amber spirals, lost in its glare.

“You are nowhere, child.” said the head. The head readjusted itself, revealing its neck and body that twisted upon itself, like a snake.

“I should be somewhere then. Take me home.” I demanded. Two large flaps protruded from its back, horned at the tip and webbed like bats.

“The mountains are your home, now.” said the voice, almost sorrowfully.

“The mountains...” I repeated, my speech drifting off. I wandered out of the cave in a haze, fear painted across my face because I did not know.

I did not know who I was.

A Game of Prophecies

St. Paul's Convent School, Wan, Jasmine - 16

Xia Feng

“Your smile should be sweet and genuine. You look as though you’ve eaten a sour pear.”

Xia Feng’s mother scolded.

Xia Feng’s face hurt from all the smiling. The time had come for the Emperor to choose yet another bride, and her family hoped that Feng could get into the Emperor’s good graces. It was a pity to the Xia’s however, that Feng was not fit for life in a palace.

Traditional Chinese culture wanted Feng to be three things – obedient, quiet and beautiful. Feng was none of these things. Every night, she slipped out of bed to practice sword fighting in her backyard. To her family’s dismay, Feng was loud and brash. She spoke her mind, and she didn’t care about looking pretty, or cooking or cleaning.

Just then, the temple bells started to ring. Feng’s mother frowned.

“We’ll practice later. Let’s see what message the Seer delivers first.”

Feng rolled her eyes. The village seer was an old man with a long, white scraggly beard. Although he was blind, he claimed to have the power of ‘invisible sight’ and was able to predict the future by giving prophecies. The villagers trusted him wholeheartedly, but Feng thought that the seer was crazy. In her opinion, prophecies and predictions were useless. They led to nothing but trouble.

Wen Ping

“Oi! Ping! Why are you dawdling? Get to work!”

Ping flinched at the sound of his brother’s voice. He hurriedly stuffed his book back down into the hole where it was buried. Brushing aside crops, he arranged mud on top of the hole so it looked nice and normal. Definitely not where a book was hidden.

Rustling noises came from behind him. Ping quickly sat on top of the hole, hiding the book. Just in time too, as a scarred face poked into the tiny alcove of wheat.

“Why are you sitting on the ground? You want Ba to hit you? If he finds out you’re not doing any work, you’ll get into trouble!”

Ping scrambled for an excuse.

“I was working! I was – um – checking the quality of the soil-“ Ping trailed off, once again regretting his choice of opening his mouth to speak.

His brother’s face softened.

“Were you reading again?”

Ping gulped.

“Look. This time I won’t tell Ba. But the wheat isn’t going to sit there and reap itself. Pick up your sickle, harvest the grains, and maybe if you have time you can read.”

It was unfortunate that Ping did not belong in a family of scholars. No, his family had been farmers for generations. Yet, Ping was everything a farmer’s son was not. Instead of being rough and manly, Ping preferred sitting by his mother’s side and listening to her stories of Huangshan – the Magical Mountains, and the creatures that resided there.

As Ping reluctantly hacked at wheat, the temple bells began to ring. Muttering a prayer, he joyfully tossed his sickle aside. Hopefully the village seer could distract his father long enough for him to run back to the field to continue reading his book.

Xia Feng

“Today, as the sun started to rise, the spirits came to me.”

Feng groaned audibly. Just how much longer was this going to take? The seer rambled on about how the gods had given him a message in the form of a prophecy to deliver. Yet, still no one had heard the actual prophecy. Even the villagers beside her were growing restless, chatting among themselves.

“Just say it already, old man!” a shout came from the crowd.

The seer held up a finger. “Patience.”

The crowd’s rumbling swelled.

Then the seer snapped his fingers.

“The prophecy is complete.” His voice lowered, and the villagers surged forward to hear what he was saying.

“Wind and Tranquility, two young adventurers

Will climb the Mountains of the Yellow Emperor

If they fail to slay the beast

Destruction will be brought upon all at the very least.”

A gloomy silence had settled over the crowd. After all, it wasn’t every day the seer proclaimed destruction towards the whole village.

Then the whispers began. Who were the two adventurers?

The village seer cleared his throat. No one paid him any attention. He then raised his voice,

“Quiet!”

The crowd’s excited whispers gradually faded, and he spoke.

“After detailed analyzation, I have come to believe that ‘wind’ and ‘tranquility’ are two metaphors that can be translated into the names of our two heroes.”

He paused for dramatic effect, and continued.

“Therefore, I have concluded, ‘wind’ is Feng. Xia Feng, daughter of scholar Xia Ming. And tranquility, is Ping. Wen Ping, son of farmer Wen Nu.”

Wen Ping

Why did he always get the worst luck?

After the village seer had brazenly announced the heroes, he disappeared back into the temple without a word, leaving the villagers mingling outside.

Ping was worried about the third line of the prophecy – If they fail to slay the beast. What beast? The prophecy was irritatingly vague, and Ping didn’t want to kill anything.

He knew all the Confucian classics by heart. He could recite poems by Li Bai. He was

able to compose poetry. What he didn't know was how to walk up into the Huangshan Mountains and slay a beast.

His father was too excited to listen to Ping's concerns, heartily slapping Ping on the back.

"I knew you were special, my boy! The gods have smiled down upon us. After you go on this quest, slay the beast and save the village, you'll become a hero! This would be good for our farming business. Who knows? You might even become rich!"

As his family busily contemplated reward money, Ping felt someone staring at him.

Whipping his head around, he saw Xia Feng. She had cocked her head and was looking at him, seemingly assessing his every move.

He gave her a tentative smile. She did not return it.

Feeling embarrassed, he walked back home with his family, thinking about how he was going to survive the quest.

Xia Feng

It was early in the morning. The rooster hadn't crowed, and the sun hadn't risen.

Yet, here she was, hacking away at shrubs with her sword.

Wen Ping was behind her, clutching his satchel glancing around nervously, as if the beast was going to appear any second.

Yesterday, they had started to climb up the mountain. The village seer had told them to find a mystic poet on the tallest peak, who would lead them towards the beast. So now, they were trying to find the poet, but so far there was no one on the mountain except for themselves.

Feng had originally felt good about the quest, except for one factor: Ping didn't seem to know how to fight. She had rummaged through his satchel whilst he was sleeping last night, and it contained food, which was useful, and the Classics of Poetry, which was not. There was no sign of any weapon or fighting tool.

"Where did you get that sword?" Ping broke the silence by asking.

She shrugged. "It was my grandfather's. I inherited it."

Ping shot her an accusing look.

"Women aren't allowed to inherit anything. You stole it?"

Feng arched an eyebrow. "You won't be complaining when the beast jumps out of the bushes to eat you."

Ping opened his mouth, and shut it.

Good. The less talking, the quicker they could reach the summit and find this poet.

Wen Ping

They had been climbing for five hours now.

As they neared the summit, the air around them thinned, and Ping found it hard to breathe.

"Breathe with your mouth, not your nose. It saves oxygen." Feng's voice came from in front of him.

Ping quickly switched his breathing technique, and his vision cleared.

"Thanks." He mumbled.

They had reached the top of the Huangshan Mountains. Ping looked around him, and gave a sharp intake of breath.

Afternoon sun struck the tree tops, and leaves glistened with sunlight. They were so high up the mountain, underneath them was a sea of fluffy clouds. Amidst the rocks and crevices, surrounding peaks seemed to bloom like lotus flowers, piercing the sky.

Feng was silent too, gazing at the scenery around them.

“It’s like a kingdom in the clouds.” She whispered, her voice hoarse.

Ping nodded. His mother had described to him before how majestic Huangshan was, but no story could compare to what he was seeing now.

“That’s all well and good, but would you two children please move? You’re blocking my way.”

Ping gave a yelp, and spun around.

The famous poet Li Bai stared back at them, and sighed.

“Let me guess – you two need my help in killing a beast in order to save your village from total destruction?”

He looked at their expressions, and sighed.

“Just great. You’d better come in.”

Xia Feng

She couldn’t believe it. Li Bai was the mystic poet they had to find?

Apparently, Ping couldn’t believe it either, because he was practically hyperventilating.

“Master Li, Master Li! You’re my hero! I’ve read all of your poems – I can’t believe I’m seeing you in person! This is a dream come true!”

Feng couldn’t care less about Li Bai’s poems. Ping and her didn’t have time. They’d already spent too much time on Huangshan. They had to find that beast before it was too late.

“Master Li. My name is Xia Feng, and he is Wen Ping. We would like to humbly seek your advice on where the beast is.”

Li Bai seemed to look at her for the first time.

“Ah, yes.”

He didn’t speak for a while. Feng tapped her foot impatiently.

Li Bai closed his eyes in deep thinking. Just when Feng thought that he had fallen asleep, he snapped his eyes open.

“I will help you. But there are conditions.”

Feng smiled. Finally.

“Name them.”

“I will ask three questions. If your answer is to my liking, I will tell you where the beast is. If you cannot answer them, well, your village gets destroyed, and you can get out of my house.”

Feng’s heart sank. She had hoped it would be a sword fight, or a sparring session. She hated questions and riddles with their twisted meanings.

Ping however, looked pleased. She hoped that Ping would be able to solve Li Bai’s questions.

Otherwise, they would fail.

Wen Ping

“My first question is a riddle. I pass before the sun, yet I make no shadow. What am I?”

Ping frowned. This was a tough one. He racked his head trying to think it through. Birds passed before the sun, but they made shadows on the ground...

Feng laughed. “I know this one! My father asked me this before. The answer is my name. Wind.”

And she was right. The answer fit! Ping grinned as Li Bai inclined his head, signaling that they were correct.

“My second question is, what is always in front of you but you cannot see it?”

Ping thought in vain. Next to him, Feng was also furrowing her brow. What could they not see, yet was right before their eyes?

He remembered how his father always scolded him, “Why won’t you work harder in the fields and lead the next generation of farmers? You cannot survive the future by simply becoming a scholar!” Ping silently thanked his father.

“Master Li, is the answer the future?”

Li Bai looked surprised. “That is correct.”

Feng jumped up and down with glee. However, their momentary joy did not last long.

“My last question: what is the heaviest weight to carry?”

Feng slumped down. “A house? A cow? Answers are limitless!”

Ping shook his head, thinking. The heaviest weight to carry... how many times had Ping felt the weight of guilt when his father scolded him? When he couldn’t be the son his family wanted? Every time his father burnt his books, or his brother yelled at him, he felt a heavy weight pressing down onto his shoulders.

He turned to Li Bai and said,

“Guilt. Guilt is the heaviest weight to carry.”

Li Bai nodded, pleased with his answer.

“I have to admit, I am surprised by your intellect. The beast you seek to slay is the Great Dragon. Walk east from here to find her. You will know when you are close. Good luck.”

Xia Feng

The smell of rotting carcasses was hard to miss.

After Ping and her had left Li Bai’s home, the tension between them had dissipated almost completely. She and Ping traded stories about their lives, laughing and chatting to one another as they hiked through Huangshan.

The friendly atmosphere dissolved when Ping spotted a skull lying on the ground and screamed.

Feng’s hand quickly flew to her sword.

“Ping, you idiot” she hissed. “We’re obviously nearing the dragon’s hideout. If you don’t keep quiet the dragon’s going to hear us!”

“Sorry!” Ping whispered loudly. He then stepped on a twig, and a creaking sound filled the area.

Feng’s sword was already in her hand. She glanced quickly to her left and right, but there was no sign of the dragon.

“The dragon’s not here. Maybe we should continue to walk south” she broke off as Ping made a weird noise.

“What’s wrong? The dragon’s not here.”

Ping’s face had turned stark white, and he made a gagging noise.

Feng sighed and turned around.

And came face to face with the Great Dragon.

Wen Ping

Ping was sure the gods were mocking them.

Firstly, Feng and him braved the dangers of sleeping on narrow paths where a tree could fall on them any second. After being scratched by twigs and branches, he then almost died by not being able to adjust to the high altitude on the peak. The only silver lining was getting to meet Li Bai, and after that they were now pitched against a dragon, facing certain death. Again.

It was unfair that the dragon was so beautiful. She had an overwhelmingly massive presence, yet her gracefulness was equally evident. Her body was emerald green, flaked with crystal scales of luster that shone with radiance.

The dragon looked up at him, and snorted. Little puffs of air came out from her nostrils, and Ping couldn’t help but smile.

In front of him, Feng had brandished her sword.

“Ping, run. I’ll handle this.”

Ping gulped.

“Feng, wait. What if we don’t have to kill the dragon?”

“Are you crazy? If the dragon doesn’t die, the villagers die!” Seeing Ping’s stricken face, her face softened.

“Look, I know that you don’t want the dragon to die. But we don’t have any choice.

Now, on the count of three—“

“Can’t we just find a solution that doesn’t involve dying on both sides?” Ping interrupted.

He shakily walked over to the dragon. Heavens, it was even larger up close. Reaching out a trembling hand, he placed it on top of the dragon’s snout.

“See? She’s friendly and harmless. Feng, I don’t think she would attack our village.”

Feng’s face was a stony mask. The dragon ambled closer to her and pushed her nose into Feng’s face.

“Gah! Get off me! Ugh, fine. I won’t kill you. But Ping, how are we going to tell the village?”

Ping wasn’t sure yet. “We’ll cross the bridge if we come to it.”

He looked deep into the dragon’s eyes.

“Do you promise not to destroy our village?”

The dragon cocked her head, as if she seemingly understood. Then she gave a large snort.

Feng laughed. “I’m assuming that means yes.”

The dragon’s eyes glinted as she looked at them. Then, her jade colored wings unfolded, incomparably beautiful to any jewel on earth. She gave one last snort of goodbye, and then took flight.

Ping covered his eyes as leaves and twigs swirled around them. When he opened his eyes, the Great Dragon was just a speck in the golden clouds.

Xia Feng

Feng had been too enthralled by the dragon to notice the changing scenery.

As the dragon took flight, Ping had closed his eyes, but she strained hers open, hoping to catch every vision of the Great Dragon and commit it to memory.

After the magnificence of the dragon, Feng didn't think she could take in any more beauty, yet Huangshan's sunset proved her wrong.

The sky had turned a burst of crimson. The clouds dipped all around them, rosy with hues of gold. Just towards the west, she could see the sun, a blazing orb setting just between two peaks of the Mountains.

Next to her, Ping lamented.

"When I first came on this quest, I just wanted to leave. Now, all I want to do is stay here forever."

"You could always ask Li Bai to adopt you. I'm sure he'd be willing to oblige."

Ping lightly punched her in the shoulder.

"In all honesty, I don't think I can return to life as a farmer's son after this."

Feng understood. There was so much in the world to explore. She didn't want to go back to her village and experience the same routine over and over again.

But her family needed their daughter, and Ping's family needed their son.

She nudged Ping.

"Who knows? Maybe the village seer would give us another quest."

Ping's expression was unreadable.

"But what if he doesn't?"

Feng wasn't sure either. She took one last look at the sunset.

"We'll cross the bridge if we come to it."

The two then began their slow descent back down the mountain, expressions of reluctance and wistfulness painted on their faces.

Unbeknownst to them, a certain poet was watching the two from his alcove, and whispered,

*"Go forth children, and live your lives,
Drifting like clouds, the wanderer's mind
Appreciate the sunset, heart of your old friend,
Until Huangshan hears and beckons you again."*

Fiction

Group 7



A Mountain Letter To My Uncle

Hong Kong Red Cross John F. Kennedy Centre, De Groot, Leonardo – 15

Dear Uncle,

A few months ago, the Geography teacher said that we all needed to pack up and get ready to go for a hike in China's 'Magical Mountains'. We were all excited but, I was the most excited. After school, I ran home and started packing because we were going in just 3 days. I could not wait to go! During the 3 days, I still went to school and hoped that it would end faster so I could pack and get the plane ticket to China.

Finally, the day came that we all went to China. During the afternoon we all went to the airport and got on the plane. When we got off, the teacher told us to get our luggage and we took a tour bus out to the city. After, we checked into the hotel and had a shower. It was nice. Then I started to find food since I was hungry but I could not. So I waited and asked my classmates if I could eat some of their snacks?

'Snacks!,' they all said. 'Of course, you can. We don't like eating but you do, so enjoy the food.'

The next day we all went to a mountain and the teacher said this is one of the magical mountains but I did not think so since I couldn't see anything magical. All I saw was rocks and sky with clouds. Then the teachers started telling a story from ancient China about two people that wrote poems. They were Du Fu and Li Bai.

After a while, we walked up to a village and the villagers greeted us then started to tell a story about the strange activities in the mountains nearby.

'It is like this every day. At least one of the mountains will get bigger or suddenly become smaller. It is quite strange don't you think?' they asked.

We all agreed that it was quite strange. One of the students said he wanted something to eat so the villagers asked, 'Would all of you visitors like something to eat? If you would, we have prepared food for lunch already.'

'We all would like something to eat' we said. 'Can we pay you for it?'

'Of course! You can if you want to.'

We stayed the night and in the morning we all saw the mountains had switched places again. It was strange, so we left, to get closer to the mountains. After, we went for lunch. It was dim sum. Next we all went to thank the villagers but when we got there, the village was gone.

I asked the teacher, 'Where is the village?'

The teacher did not respond and then I saw that they had all turned to stone. I did not expect this. Well, now I was alone and I needed to get home.

Suddenly two people appeared behind me and they introduced themselves as Du Fu and Li Bai. They told me how to reverse this problem. It was hard they said. First I would need to win in a poem contest. Next I must make the best tea they had ever tasted. Then I must make a house before dawn. That is all I needed to do, but time was not on my side so I needed to rush.

When I was done, it was not quite dawn so finally, I won the contest and everyone went back to normal. They had no clue that they had been rocks moments ago. I tried to tell them that I had met Du Fu and Li Bai, but when I tried to find them they were gone.

We all went to the hotel and got our things and went to the airport to leave China and return to Hong Kong. Everyone was happy to get back home and see their families. Only I know the truth and I will never tell them now. This is all that I remember.

I hope I can see you in person soon uncle.

Your loving nephew,
Leo

The Yellow Emperor

Korean International School Springboard, Ching, Jonathan – 15

Thousands of years ago, China was divided into many tribes and each tribe was fighting against each other to be the winner and rule all of China. The first Emperor of China was Qin Shi Huang (Huang), the Dragon Emperor. He was a leader of a tribe and helped other weaker tribes because he was kind and caring. He finally went to Heaven because he helped China to become a united country and made the lives of Chinese people better.

He had to face a lot of challenges to achieve this. Chi O, a bad leader of a tribe in China, used his superpowers for cruel actions fought against Huang, the Yellow Emperor, in nine battles. Huang lost all the battles and went to have a break in the mountains because he felt anxious and frustrated. Suddenly, a Goddess appeared and taught Huang tricks to fight this bad Chi O.

Later on, Huang fought with the nasty Chi O. During the battle, Chi O created a fog to block Huang's soldiers, but Huang created a magical chariot that pointed to the South. Huang's soldiers escaped from Chi O's fog and continued with the battle. Huang summoned a dragon and Chi O summoned a storm to extinguish the dragon's fire. Luckily, Huang had the help of the Goddess of Drought to dry up the storm and helped Huang to win the battle.

Afterwards, Huang became known as the Yellow Emperor and he united China and stopped the tribes' fighting. He wanted all of China to become a peaceful country and all the other tribes respected him because he was a very fair person and made the lives of people better by creating fair rules and laws for all people. One day, a gold dragon appeared and Huang climbed onto it and flew to the sky and he became a God for all his good work to create a united and peaceful China. Therefore, he is known as the first Emperor of a united China.

Mountain Challenge

Korean International School Springboard, Lowther, Jessica – 14

One Wednesday in the afternoon, there was great news that there would be a mountain climbing competition in Antarctica the following Saturday at 6:00am. The person who got to the top of the mountain first would win a free ticket to Australia. The people who saw the news got excited and happy, they couldn't wait to get there on Saturday.

On Saturday, early in the morning three strangers Joy, Magnet and Cotton Candy set out to Antarctica for the competition. When they arrived there they were very excited. They started walking at the Argyle point to the top of the Vinson Massif Mountain. In the beginning, they found it easy and Joy got to the number one checkpoint first. She suddenly heard a squeaking noise from the south side of the road. She followed the direction of the sound because she thought that it was an animal stuck in the brush, however, she saw a red pom pom hat moving and recognized that it was a girl, one of the competitors. She struggled with whether she should help, because she really wanted to win the competition. At last she decided to help her, because she didn't want the girl to die on the mountain. The girl introduced her name to Joy, "I'm Cotton Candy" she said and they became friends. Suddenly there was a big snowstorm falling from the sky. The wind was roaring like a lion, and all the clouds turned into a troop of soldiers throwing gigantic snowballs from the sky. Joy and her new friend were scared to death as the snow grew heavier and heavier.

"Come quickly to the cave" shouted a voice over the noise. They followed the voice and found the cave. They went as fast as lightning into the cave where they met another competitor. Cotton Candy looked at her name tag and saw that her name was called Magnet. Even though she was competing against them, she was happy to see they were safe now. They talked, laughed, told jokes and became friends.

Suddenly, the cave spoke to them in a deep voice saying

"Hello, who are you?"

Joy screamed.

The voice continued "I am a giant stuck in the mountain, can you help me? A witch cursed me 2000 years ago. The witch was jealous because people liked me more than her, because I like helping people."

"How can we help you?" The three friends asked.

"I like seeing people helping each other. Every time when people help each other on this mountain a new flower grows on top of the mountain. I need you to collect three flowers to undo the spell." Now, I see two flowers growing when Joy helped Cotton Candy climb out from the hole and also Magnet saved Joy and Cotton from the snow storm. Thank you for giving me hope. I only need one more flower." Said the giant.

Whilst the giant was talking to them Cotton Candy snook out. She wanted to win the race so she blocked the cave with heavy rocks. She ran to the top of the mountain and when she got there she saw two gorgeous flowers shining under the sun. These flowers reminded her that Joy and Magnet had helped her even though they were competitors. She wept bitterly because she knew she had been very selfish. She decided to go back to the cave to save them. After Cotton Candy saved them, she apologized to them sincerely. Joy and Magnet gave her a hug and forgave her. As they did this the third flower grew out of the soil.

Suddenly, the mountain shook and the spell of the giant broke. He was free to go. The giant carried the three of them to the top of the mountain on a flying carpet. They had won, not alone but together. Most importantly, they learned that as long as they worked together they would be stronger together. The magic of the mountain brought them together as friends.

The Natural Titans: The Monster of the Huangshan Mountains

Korean International School Springboard, Wai, Kaden – 14

Over the past years from 1968 to present time, the Natural Titans were the most powerful creatures of all. They have defeated huge monsters and many other enemies from outer space. No man or monster could defeat these seven titans. The Natural Titans were:

The Lightning Bird - Who has the ability to create storms and lightning.

The Manticore—A lion with wings. Who has the ability to shoot venomous spines and can speak to humans.

The Phoenix—A firebird who can shoot extremely hot fire. Its body is made of hot lava.

The Shadow Dragon—Probably one of the most powerful dragons on earth, who has an increasing number of magical abilities to hide from enemies, hiding away into shadows.

The Minokawa—Another bird but with gold, blue and orange colors. Its eclipse occurs when the Minokawa swallows the sun. It is so big that it lives in outer space and can gulp the sun, the moon and the earth. It also has the ability to control time and space.

The Emerald Dragon—A shiny and durable dragon. When it walks on land, it creates massive green fire.

And finally... the Chinese Yellow Dragon—The only dragon with no wings who has been given many powers in Chinese folklore. They are said to control thunder, floods and rain. It is said to be kind and noble and the leader of the Natural Titans.

These seven creatures give so much to help people and gain their place as the seven titans. No one knows where they hide or live but whenever danger comes to the earth, they will always be there to fight them.

Our story starts in a huge city in China called Shanghai where a teen named Thomas along with his friends, two girls named Baozhai and Changchang and two boys Wang Lei and Bingwen live with their pet a peregrine falcon named Flash.

“Baozhai would you battle 100 ant-sized zombies or the zombie sized ants?” asked Changchang

“I’d have to go with the ant sized zombies.” said Baozhai.

Two minutes later, there was a knock on the door.

“BOO!” said Wang Lei. Baozhai screamed like hell.

“That was not FUNNY!” shouted Changchang.

“Nice mask,” said Bingwen. But just then, they heard a rumbling noise coming from the fjord nearby.

The Natural Titans we’re fighting the Kraken!

The Serpent jumped into the air and splashed onto the water, causing a huge tsunami.

“Hang on guys!” shouted Wang Lei.

The tsunami caused a great deal of damage. The waves whooshed and crashed onto the buildings. Tons of buildings were broken.

“What happened?” asked a man. “Some creatures we’re fighting a serpent.” shouted Baozhai. “I think it was the Natural Titans.”

“Nonsense!” said Changchang. “Remember what our parents said?”

“No,” said Baozhai.

“It’s a myth, you idiot!” shouted Thomas. “If we’re willing to find those creatures, we need to know where they are.”

“Great idea!” yelled Bingwen.

But one of the men shouted, “What are we gonna do here?”

“You guys can start rebuilding,” said Thomas. Half of the team got in the X-Fighter and the other half got in the Mil V-12, the largest and fastest helicopter in the world. Changchang and her friends had a crew of their own. They were friends of Baozhai.

They flew all over the world for two hours trying to find the titans. “You found anything?” said Thomas. “No,” said Bingwen. “It’s been like two hours since we found anything,” said Baozhai.

Just then, they flew through a lightning storm. And they saw the titans flying across a thunderstorm. “I see them! Follow them!” said Wang Lei. The helicopter and the plane flew as fast as they could. They were catching up fast but the Phoenix shot fire at them.

“Look out, Baowei!” said Changchang. They dodged the fire just in time. “Maybe we should hide in the clouds so they can’t find us.” The team continued flying. But then, they flew through a mountain. “Wait, what happened?” said Thomas. “Oh I know what this is! This was their secret base where they could regain their powers inside that mountain. Known as, “Mount Cerberus”. Yelled Wang Lei. They tried flying inside but it was no use. “I remember that in order to get through, we need to label all the powers they use.” said Thomas. They all went down from their vehicles to label each of their powers.” The peregrine falcon helped as well. They each took turns labeling each of their powers until the door opened.

“Piece of cake” said Thomas. So they flew inside. Inside was full of colors. “This is more beautiful than I expected!” Colors beamed with brightness until at last, they made it to the Titans base.

“There they are,” said Thomas. They were regaining their powers and discussing something.

“I heard that the Manticore can talk to humans,” said Thomas.

They crept down to see the Titans but then, the Lighting Bird saw them and shot lightning at them. The Manticore stopped him and he approached them.

“Who are you guys?” he said.

“We just want to tell you that our city was attacked by a giant octopus.” said Wang Lei.

“Did you say “Kraken?” he asked.

Yes,” said Changchang.

The Manticore and the others started discussing the Kraken and their defeat against it.

“We never defeated it after we lost one of our members of the Natural Titans. The Basilisk.” said the Manticore

“What happened?” asked Wang Lei.

“He was eaten by the Kraken.”

The Manticore said, “Back then, we used to have eight members. We were fighting the Kraken who lived in the Magic Mountains. It was one of the biggest mythical creatures we’ve ever fought. The Basilisk had poisonous and powerful teeth. He tried to bite it’s tentacles, but the Kraken grabbed him and threw him in his mouth. He was the bravest mythical creature we’ve ever had on our team. When he was eaten, the Kraken grabbed the Phoenix with its tentacles and tried to drown him. He almost lost his fire powers.

We flew back to the mountain where the Phoenix got its powers back. But we never fought it again.”

“That sounds sad.” Thomas said.

“Yes, that’s why we never fought it again.” said Manticore.

“But we can help you. Our plane and helicopter has rocket launchers and lasers.” said Toby.

“Hmmm.” said the Manticore. He went to the table and discussed with the others. The Titans were talking but the humans couldn’t understand what they were talking about.

“We can’t just leave the Kraken lurking in the Mountains!” said the Minokawa.

“It has placed a curse on the mountains and everywhere around the world. Making every single plant and animal die.” said the Shadow Dragon.

The Yellow Chinese Dragon wasn’t sure after that Basilisk died.

“I am NOT going back to the mountains again. After we lost the Basilisk, I am NOT gonna lose you guys!” said the Chinese Dragon.

The Manticore was mad. He went down and told the humans that he won’t allow them to fight the Kraken.

“Then we’ll just have to fight him ourselves if that’s what the dragon wants.” said Baozhai.

They each got into their plane and helicopter and drove off. They flew to the mountains as fast as they could. But they didn’t know that the Kraken was already creating a massive amount of damage to the world.

“I see the Kraken!” shouted Bingwei. “And I think he’s heading for the Magic Mountains!” yelled Thomas.

“Follow him!” said Wang Lei. They chased the Kraken across the sea. All the way to the Magic Mountains in China. But the mist covered their sight. “Where is he?” said Changchang.

“Guys look out!” said Wang Lei. The Kraken almost crashed them. The Kraken had blue glowing eyes and had the power to control water. The Kraken was about to splash huge tsunamis at them. But, they managed to block them!

They all started fighting the Kraken. The helicopter and the plane started firing missiles and lasers but the Kraken. Dodged them.

“Careful guys. This Kraken is very tricky. They waited for the Kraken to come up but it was nowhere to be seen. But with a rumbling noise, the Kraken popped out and shot boiling water at everyone. Suddenly from nowhere came the seven Natural Titans! The Chinese Dragon almost got shot. But the Phoenix shot fire at the Kraken. “Oh jeez, that’s gonna hurt.” said Thomas. The Kraken dived underwater and heated water in it’s giant stomach. It sprayed water again and it destroyed most of the mountain tops. The Emerald Dragon shot shards at it. And stabbed him in the eye! The Kraken was half blind. The Kraken then shot boiling water again and it hit everyone!

All their fighting effort was wasted. But they had a plan. They’ve all decided to use all their powers against the Kraken! “Everyone use your power together!” said Bingwen. “3, 2, 1, GO!” shouted Changchang. Everyone shot their powers at the Kraken. The Kraken tried defending itself but the powers burned its heart. The Kraken sank to the bottom of the ocean. Four weeks, later everything was back to normal. The Magic Mountains were back to their original shape. “I’m really gonna miss those guys” said Bingwen. “Yeah,” Thomas said. At Mount Cerberus, the Titans flew through the skies. Flying faster than the speed of sound.

The Magical Chinese Unicorn—Qilin

Korean International School Springboard, Yan Tung, So - 16

Once upon a time in China, in a poor village up in the mountains there lived a boy named Hea Chan who was very good with his bow and arrow. He learned to become a hunter to feed his family, because his parents were very poor farmers and there was never enough food for them to eat. They were a big family of seven. One day, Hea Chan went to the forest to hunt some deer. He heard someone talking about the Chinese unicorn dragon called Qilin that lived in the Magic Mountains.

“Hey, have you seen that great scary creature roaming the forest at night? I’ve heard it is ten times as big as a bear and it likes to eat people!”

“Ugh, no way! But if we hunt it down, we could sell its meat for a lot of money, right?”

Hea Chan had heard about the Qilin from legends and bedtime stories. It was a very big creature that likes to eat people. If he could hunt down this Qilin and kill it, his family would never go hungry again! So Hea Chan went to find a map of the Magic Mountains so that he wouldn’t get lost.

In the morning, Hea Chan packed his stuff and went off to find the Qilin. He didn’t tell his parents where he was going as he didn’t want them to worry.

Hea Chan kept walking and walking, and finally he was half way up the Magic Mountains. He was very tired and hungry. Then when he put his hand into his bag to look for the map again, he could not find it. He must have dropped it! Now he was lost. What was he going to do? He kept walking and walking until he saw two men sitting next to a tree with some goats. Hea Chan asked the men, “Do you know the way to the forest of the Magic Mountains? I am lost.” The men asked him, “Why Are you going there? It is a dangerous place, filled with scary creatures.”

“Because I need to hunt down the Qilin.”

“Why do you want to hunt the Qilin dragon?”

“Because I heard that the Qilin is a horrible dragon that eats people. I don’t want him to eat me or any of my family, so I want to kill it first.” Then Hea Chan kept walking, and he walked for hours. And finally he saw the forest up ahead!

Hea Chan kept walking. Suddenly there was a growl behind him, and he froze. He turned around and saw a horrible big brown bear staring at him. Hea Chan screamed.

High up in the mountains, the Qilin heard the scream. It flew straight towards the forest, and the Qilin found Hea Chan running away from the bear, who wanted to eat him for lunch. The Qilin cried, “Run faster!” Hea Chan heard the voice but didn’t know where it came from. Suddenly, he saw it: a white creature that looked half-lion and half-dragon. The Qilin!

To his horror, the Qilin flew towards him, and he was sure that it was going to kill him and eat him for lunch. But instead, the Qilin opened up its mouth and let out a frightening growl, and the bear stopped and fell down, terrified. Then, Hea Chan jumped down a hill and ran like the wind, thinking that he did not want to die. After a few moments, he could hear the Qilin behind him, and Hea Chan screamed and started to cry, for he was sure he was

going to die. Hea Chan tripped and fell over some rocks, and he closed his eyes, expecting the Qilin to attack him.

To his surprise, the Qilin just stood in front of him, and stared quietly. Had he enough to eat? Hea Chan got down on his knees and bowed.

“You are my hero! You saved me! Please, help me and my family! We are starving, and if you can help us, I promise to stay by your side for as long as I live!”

Qilin had never had a human friend before. He liked the idea, so from that day on, Hea Chan stayed by the Qilin as a companion, and Hea Chan’s family never went hungry again because the Qilin made sure they always had enough to eat. Hea Chan learned a lesson—the Qilin was not an evil creature. The ones that were evil were the humans who wanted to kill the Qilin for money. So Hea Chan and the Qilin lived happily ever after.