



Fiction

Group 2

Sophie & the Long Lost Secret of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Arrowsmith, Lucia – 10

The primitive paintbrush swept gently across the carvings on the wall. The carvings were intricate and complex and the paint was unique; it could last for, as the inscriber intended, millennia and at least until the future inhabitants of Earth would be ready. Just then, the low rumble of a spacecraft preparing to launch, swept through the cave. It's time to go. The paintbrush fell to the floor with a clatter, the sound echoing off the walls of what later inhabitants of the planet would know as, the Mogao caves.

Sophie sat on the edge of her bed, enjoying a mug of hot cocoa with extra marshmallows, as the rain tapped lightly against her window. Her chestnut brown eyes were covered by long eyelashes. Purple rimmed glasses perched on the end of her nose with her dark hair tied neatly in a bun. She wore a light blue t-shirt and navy denim jeans and a silver necklace handed down to her by her grandmother.

In recent years, the weather had become increasingly unpredictable, due to rapid climate change. On some days, it was so hot you couldn't stay outside for longer than a few minutes before melting; on others, it was so cold you had to wear four layers of clothing before venturing out. As well as the extreme weather, the greenhouse effect had irreparably polluted the Earth's atmosphere, making it difficult to breathe. Consequently, Sophie barely went out anymore. In fact, the situation was so bad that the very existence of humankind was at risk of becoming lost.

Sophie had a special gift. She was only 11 years old but already fluent in more than a dozen languages and had a unique ability to decipher and understand ancient scripts and symbols. Sophie was unlike any normal child. Even the teams of scientists who worked with Sophie struggled to keep up. For this reason she had been invited to help crack ancient codes that had led to some incredible new discoveries.

Sophie had always been happy to help the scientists as she felt satisfied after deciphering an ancient code. She hadn't cracked a code for them in a while. I hope I will be able to decipher something soon, something of great significance, she thought.

Just then, Sophie's phone buzzed and she took it from her pocket. She had been sent some images, along with a message from Dr Li, who she worked with: "Dear Sophie, how are you? We've made a recent discovery at Mogao Grottoes – some highly unusual carvings were found in one of the caves – they look like ancient runes, possibly containing some hidden message. Are you able to decipher what it says from the photos we sent you?"

Sophie looked at the images but they were fuzzy and unclear. She could just make out the carved symbols and shapes which looked different to the normal scripts she was used to decrypting. In fact they looked like nothing she had ever seen before. She quickly typed back a message: "The photos are a bit unclear so I will need to get a closer look. Can you arrange for me to visit the site? Thank you. –Sophie."

Before she knew it, Sophie was packing her bag, preparing to travel to the Mogao Grottoes, located in Dunhuang, China. Of course, Sophie packed her precious magnifying glass. It was hightech and magnified any object so much you could see the most intricate of details. It was a present from the Scientists at Ancient Discovery Lab 256; a thank you for the many discoveries Sophie had helped them make. She also packed her lighting equipment to help her see the runes more clearly.

As she stared out of the airplane window, she recalled her knowledge of the Mogao Grottoes. She remembered reading somewhere that they contained nearly 492 existing cave-temples. She knew the caves were carved by hand over a period spanning 1,000 years, from AD366. Since being discovered, they had been studied extensively. The caves contain Buddha art such as sculptures, architecture and mural paintings. The art and objects found at Mogao reflected the meeting of cultures along the Silk Road and changes in religious beliefs and rituals at the pilgrim site. Dr Li had explained by telephone that the new carvings had been discovered when a freak earthquake, caused by the extreme climate change, revealed a new cave. What did these carvings depict? They were so different from anything else at the site.

Sophie stood outside the opening of the newly discovered cave. She took a deep breath and stepped inside. She lit a torch with a match and the flickering light from the flame danced across the walls of the cave. Sophie's eyes began to adjust to the light and she caught a first glimpse of the unique inscriptions on the wall. Sophie took out her magnifying glass and inspected one of the symbols. Hmm, she thought, these must have been created many centuries ago, yet the unusual, bright paint made them look as if they were left just yesterday. How is that possible?

She took out her lighting equipment and began to set it up across the back of the cave. With the wall now fully illuminated Sophie could see much more clearly. She took a step back and scanned the whole wall, taking in the full picture. It was certainly unique and whilst Sophie had never seen anything like it before, she began to recognise a pattern.

Just then, she gasped. Taking a deep, shaky breath Sophie inspected the wall again, this time more closely. After some time she whispered to herself, "Can this really be possible? Who could have written this?" Finally the true meaning of the message struck her, "Is there a chance this could actually help save the human race?"

Sophie's eyes glistened as she stood gazing at the inscription. Awestruck, she could barely utter a single word. Finally, she smiled to herself and an expression of wonder spread across her face.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Bai, Ethan – 10

Chapter 1. The Raid

366 AD

Yue Zun hiked along the endless expanse of desert dunes along China's Silk Road, falling and struggling to keep his footing. His eyes were as heavy as lead, and he ached from every part of his body. Sandstorms choked him and he coughed and sputtered weakly.

"Too much! Too much! I cannot do it!" His tired mind screamed at him.

He was a respected monk in the capital's main temple. Even though he was in a bad shape right now, Wang knew that he was lucky to be alive. His mind still on how to propagate Buddhism to lands far beyond had led him here.

Suddenly looming shadows enveloped him from behind and was pushed to the ground brutally.

Hot searing pain tore through Yue's leg and screamed with pain and fear. The thugs grabbed his luggage and one of them closed in to finish him off. Yue gathered the last of his strength to crawl away, but his head collided with a rock.

And then, his vision went black.

Chapter 2. Fortune

Yue woke to the sound of murmuring. He opened his eyes and saw a tent. He still felt pain at the back of his head and legs.

"Where is this?" He croaked aloud

A girl answered him, "My name is Ping."

Yue raised his head.

"Don't move, monk " Ping said," You need to rest."

"Thanks, but how did I make it here?" Yue questioned instinctively

"Well, you were lucky that we heard your scream in time. But, you were already injured and unconscious. When the thieves saw us, they fled into the night." Ping answered

"Thanks!" Yue said gratefully, "But do you have my luggage? I have important tools in it."

Ping smiled, turned around, and gave him his luggage bag.

Chapter 3. The Sacred Place

Three Days Later

Yue walked out of the tent with help of Ping and sat down on a rock to meditate.

A glint caught Yue's eye and he looked up. Yue was shocked beyond words. His eyes widened and it was like he was frozen on the spot.

The mountain.

It was glowing !

There were thousands of buddhas appearing in the glow! This was as if the buddhas were traveling to the heavens!

The sight struck Yue astonished. “This is where I need to be.” he thought.

He was going to make grottoes out of this mountain.

Chapter 4. The First Grottoes

The next morning, he took his chisels and carving tools out of his luggage and started to carve out the first grottoes of Dun Huang.

In the following two years, he slowly replicated a thousand buddhas he saw in the grottoes, people in the village heard about him and supported him with food, land, and water. They came to admire his work and kneeled in the grottoes to become Buddhism after seeing the marvelous thousand buddhas.

Word about the thousand buddhas and Yue’s grottoes traveled quickly. Many Buddhists came for pilgrimage. Emperors and priests sent marksmen to carve out even more grottoes, to show their respect to Buddha.

The next thousand years came and by, and hundreds of new grottoes appeared on the hill of Dunhuang. This created a cultural miracle of creative artworks and fantastic sculptures of the buddha.

The Secret of the Library Cave

Singapore International School, Chen, Jasmine – 10

Since the day that I opened my eyes in the hospital, everyone thinks that I'm a nobody. Just like I didn't even exist in this society, or as if I was just an invisible soul trying to ruin everyone and everything. From the first time my cruel father saw me, he said out the five words that drilled into my mind forever.

"What is this hideous creature?" He thundered at the Imperial Doctor, glaring at the pale blue birthmark on my face.

"I told you to bring me my daughter, what is going on in your mind?" Gritting his teeth, my father howled and snatched me away from the doctor's trembling hands.

"But my emperor, this is your daughter," the frightened doctor spluttered, terror-stricken by my father's outrageous attitude. My father curled up his purple lips as his nostrils flared. He stomped back into the palace and tossed me into the basement, where I was locked inside in my entire life because my father strongly believes in fengshui.

I'm the youngest princess in the Zhao's family, yet I get treated as if I was a poor white mouse being used for a laboratory experiment. It is obvious that my gruesome father is Zhao Kuang Yin, the emperor of China's Song Dynasty.

Despite the fact that my father was the emperor, he had done nothing to control and rule the Song Dynasty. Our dynasty is recently facing uncountable invasions from the empires surrounding us. Especially the XiXia empire, it was exceedingly powerful. My father demanded, "Our dynasty will collapse soon. As you all know, I do not want to attack any of the empires right now, since it will spend too much money and energy. We need someone to go to XiXia right now and make a truce with the army leader."

There was a moment of silence. Everyone stared at each other with fear, afraid to say anything or do anything. The wild, savage villagers in XiXia might even drink the blood of us and gobble up our flesh.....

"I'm not going." Whispers and mumbles filled the whole palace hall.

No one would want to sacrifice their life to pay a visit to XiXia. Except for one brave girl, who took a step forward and announced with courage, "I will go." And that girl was me, Zhao Xin.

"You?" It sounded like as if my father forgot I am alive. "You're just a weak, fragile little girl, not even the height of XiXia's camels," His eyeballs almost popped out.

"Well, if you fail to make a truce, then it will be all your fault. You will as well be executed." My father shrugged his shoulders as he ordered thirty other soldiers to go along with me. "Give these precious scriptures and jewelries to the villagers of XiXia, I predict they will be willing to accept the truce. Now go." He stuffed the scriptures and jewelries packed in a cloth bag into one of the soldier's hands, then without saying a single word, he turned around and left.

Travelling from our palace to XiXia by carriage takes a particularly long period of time. My mind began whirling like an out-of-control tornado, since I had completely no clue of how to make a truce with the head of the XiXia army.

The blazing sunlight splashed onto my back like a shimmering waterfall, while I stepped onto the cracked, scorching hot sand. Soft, spooky sounds of phantoms screaming in the parched desert began drifting into my ears. I and the soldiers hurried to the grand palace where the head of the army was in.

I could barely open my eyes when I raised my head and saw the XiXia king's garish dragon robe. "Your Majesty, on behalf of my father, Emperor Zhao, we would like to make a truce for our Song Dynasty and your empire. Wars create catastrophes and disasters between everyone living in our country."

"I heard that your majesty is a loyal Buddhist. Here are the precious scriptures from the Gautama Buddha that we would like to hand out to you as a present." I bowed respectfully towards the king who sat on the royal throne, while the soldiers beside me nodded nervously.

"Invaders, kill all of them!" Instantly, a group of Xixia soldiers surrounded us and attempted to shoot all of the Song Dynasty soldiers with arrows.

"Princess Zhao Xin, you don't have to care about us! If you fail to save the country, you still need to protect these valuable treasures, don't let them land in the wild people's hands!" One of our soldiers cried as he tossed a cloth package filled with treasures towards me. Clenching his bloody shoulders, he slumped onto the ground.

"Run!" I shrieked, as I struggled out from the XiXia soldier's tight grasp.

Where do I go now? I sprinted as quick as I could while racking my brain to decide my hiding spot, within a second, I caught a sight of a colossal, tall maroon architecture. I dashed towards the temple-like architecture through uneven sand slopes and soon arrived in front of the enormous tower. Panting and trying to catch my breath, I swiftly entered this odd place.

Besides that, Mogao Caves contains in total of 492 caves, which I could perhaps find one to use as a temporary hideout. After a short while, I spotted a cozy, safe cave that was overflowing with spectacular Buddha statues, the ideal place to hide. I stumbled in, hugging my knees in the corner of the cave while protecting the cloth package.....

Eight centuries later, on May 26, 1900, while a monk, Wang Yuanlu was cleaning up sand in Mogao Caves, he accidentally discovered a rusty door. The monk gingerly pushed open the door and found a cave which contained fifty thousand valuable scriptures, embroidery, silk paintings, and a pile of dust covered human bones. Nowadays, it is known by people as the Library Cave, which became the most notable cave in Mogao.

Discovery of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Chu, Nicole – 10

Back then, more than a hundred years ago, Wang Yuan Lu and his partners were journeying through the desert on horseback when they heard a creaking noise, followed by a few murmurs carried over by the breeze.

“Who’s there?” he shouted, leaning over his horse.

“Scaredy-cat! It’s just the wind, Wang. Or our caravan or something,” his companions scolded him.

The creaky groaning noise started up again. Wang couldn’t see anyone other than his companions and the horses. He glanced uneasily at the caravan that the horses were pulling. It was brand new. Surely it couldn’t make such a loud noise.

“Boo! I’m a lion! Be scared of me! Well, we’re not going to wait for a wimp who still believes in old fantasy stories. We can pull the caravan without you,” one of his comrades jeered. The others cackled and chattered.

Ignoring the suggestions of what the sound might be, Wang untied his horse from the caravan, wheeled around and rode alone towards the sound. Wait, what was that? A grey plume of smoke rose into the air. “Faster, buddy!” Wang begged his horse.

Wang was riding so fast that he rode past a long stone wall. Backing up, he saw that the smoke was coming from a discarded pile of firewood near the wall. “Oh, shoot,” Wang sighed, disappointed that there were no people in sight. “There must’ve been someone here, though.” He glanced up at the stone wall, and his curiosity got the better of him. “Might as well check this wall out, then.”

Wang jumped off his horse and walked along the wall as the sun was setting. He found a small corridor behind the wall, hidden by an enormous sand dune. It led to a few doors. Cautiously, he opened one and peeked inside. He gasped as he tried to process what he saw.

It was clearly a library. There were chairs and tables and niches full of yellowing scrolls. It would’ve seemed pretty normal, except that they were all moving. Ink bottles danced. Chairs waved their spindly legs. Paintings on the walls and ceiling giggled. “Wow! Incredible!” Wang exclaimed.

Suddenly, everything stopped what they were doing and looked at Wang with hostile stares. One of the scrolls squeaked, “Who are you? What are you doing in the Mogao Caves?”

“They can talk!” Wang sucked in a breath, marveling.

“Hmph!” the indignant scroll snorted. “All scrolls and paintings and floorboards and ink pots and brushes—”

“Okay, we got it,” muttered a painting on the ceiling.

“—and tables and chairs and shelves and statues can talk,” the offended scroll finished in a rapid breath.

Before Wang could reply, a statue rose from her stand and walked to Wang until they were face to face. “Stranger,” she said in a deep gravelly voice, “You must leave.”

“But...but why?” Wang stammered.

“We do not want the humans to know about us. Yes, we can speak. Yes, we can move. Yes, we can think. We have carried this secret since we were made. Imagine the chaos if we revealed this secret to the world.” the statue spoke firmly.

“Yeah! Humans would sell us and make us do tricks or go to war with us or something! Terrible!” A painting from a wall declared as others shushed him.

“Okay, I won’t tell anyone, but can I stay? Just for a night? It’s too late to travel.” Wang pleaded.

The statue sighed. “Yes, you may. In fact, today is our Changing Ceremony. That is when we change leaders. I am the current leader at this moment.”

“But why are you changing leaders?” Wang blurted out.

The statue turned her back to reveal fading paint and cracking clay. “I am breaking down. Soon, I will crumble into a mound of dust. After today I will suffer great pain, and we will change leaders.” The statue sighed again.

Wang turned around and saw that most of the paintings, sculptures and scrolls were in bad condition. Even the tables and chairs were worn out, and some of the brushes were broken. “How can I save you guys?” Wang asked.

The statue smiled sadly. “This is just the way of life. Unfortunately, I have no solution, but thank you anyway. Now, would you like one of us to show you around the other Mogao Caves while we perform our ceremony?”

Wang brightened. “Other caves?” True, he had seen other doors, but he hadn’t bothered to look inside.

“Readling will show you.” The statue beckoned the scroll who had spoken up first.

Exploring the caves, Readling showed Wang many paintings and sculptures from different cultures. He introduced Wang to the Reclining Buddha, who immediately complained about his cramped arm, Lord Shiva, the black-skinned god of destruction, and many detailed pictures of the Nine-colored horse. As scrolls jumped and paintings popped out of their walls, Wang noticed that all of them were slightly damaged, from fading paint to a cracked ear. .

“Guys!” Wang bellowed first thing in the morning. Everything jolted awake. “I think I know how to save you, but you have to help me.”

“How can a scrawny guy like you do that? Even if you can fix stuff, it’s not like you can fix everything in 492 caves!” the God of Wind scoffed.

“I have to tell people about you,” Wang announced. Everyone gasped. “But I won’t reveal that you can walk and talk. When they come, you will have to stay motionless while they fix you.” Everything considered this for a moment. The caves were echoing with agreements as the sun rose.

Now, I’ll tell you what happened next. Dunhuang Academy found many artists to repair the paintings, sculptures, and scrolls before they broke down and were lost forever. When the artists arrived, the objects froze in place so that their secret wouldn’t be revealed. The artists then repaired nearly everything there.

So, there, reader. No one knows if this story is true, but no one knows if it’s fake either, right?

The Start of a New Journey

Singapore International School, Han, Zi Wei Elaine – 11

There was a rush of footsteps as a tall bearded man ran into the house. I was shocked to see Father so happy. His grim face showed no sign of any laughter for as long as I could recall. “I have incredible news!” he said, his voice trembling with joy, “A group of wealthy Indian men has come to the great Silk Road to trade some top-quality spices for tea leaves. It’s a great opportunity for our family to earn money!”

Father is a merchant. He trades goods from the Silk Road. Our family has always been disregarded because of that. Two years ago, my younger brother, Li, died of a high fever. Time passed by very fast and it only felt like yesterday when Li laid on a worn, patched firm bed, his face pale and bony.

Father had never smiled ever since then.

The next day, Father packed most of our spare tea leaves and loaded them on the camels.

“Father,”

“What is it, Son?”

“Can I come?”

Father stared at me, and frowned.” Do you know how dangerous this journey can be?”

“Please, I beg you,” I plead, “My younger brother has died. I’ve failed to protect him with the responsibility of an older brother. I’m almost eighteen. If I fail again to help my father, I’ll fail to be a man.”

Father sighed. “If that is what you want, that is what you deserve to have. I am an old man now.”

That afternoon we were on the road. Mr Chen, Mr Wang, Mr Luo and 50 other men altogether.

The journey wasn’t boring, but it was definitely hard work. Some men frequently asked for breaks but most of their heartfelt requests were either ignored or rejected. Our journey continued on from days to weeks, from weeks to months, nonstop. Just a week ago an unfortunate man died of snake poison. The snake sank its jaws right into his neck and slithered away. I was petrified. To enlighten this journey, the most experienced men told stories about some Xiongnu bandits invading the silk road. They were said to steal all of our food and expenses.

When we finally stopped for dinner, each of us only got a bun. Everyone sat and wolfed them down but I just stared at the white, steamed bread. But at least I had food.

On the day Li died, I had been jealous of him getting food. For months Father spent most of his fortune on doctors in a desperate attempt to cure my little brother.

On the day Li died, his fever was so high that he had only merely enough strength to eat.

On the day Li died, Father could only afford one bowl of plain white congee. And he gave it all to Li.

On the day Li died, he threw up all the food he had eaten. He choked and gasped and almost fainted.

On the day Li died, I called him an ungrateful, selfish brat.

On the day Li died, he looked at me, summoned all his strength and spat out his last five words, barely audible, “I don’t want to die...”

On the day Li died, he ran out of breath. I watched as he slowly passed away.

“I’m afraid,” I whispered, wrapping myself in my arms, closing my eyes shut.

“Why is that so?” asked Father. I could feel him scooting forwards to me.

“I am afraid of...the journey ahead.”

“Or are you just afraid of death?”

I shrugged, kicking a stone in front of my feet. I watched as it rolled away, forming small clouds of sand.

“The most important thing about being a man is not to be afraid of death. To understand that death is fair. It treats everyone equally,” said Father.

“But what about Li?” I blurted.

“Li, on the other hand, is a lucky one,” continued Father, ignoring my shock. “For death is merely the start of a new journey – the journey of the unknown –the journey of life. So there is no need to fear death. There is no need to hide from death. Always respect death as what it is and you will live the happiest life any man can live.”

I nodded. Father had laid back to nap. I sat there, alone, my worries still bubbling in my body. I hated the feeling of death. Of loneliness. Of non-existence. I looked above at the sight of a vast darkness dotted in twinkling stars, surrounding a pale, crystal moon.

Perhaps death might not be so bad after all. Perhaps death might not be so menacing after all. Perhaps death is just a fun adventure, and I shouldn’t be so afraid of it. I have heard some rumours about the afterlife. Perhaps that is true?

I pictured Li sleeping on a comfy firm bed in heaven, in silky pyjamas. What would he be dreaming about? Was he dreaming about me? Was he dreaming about the unknown that lay ahead? Was he somewhere up there, blessing me to have a successful journey?

I didn’t know.

The next morning we had a roll call and continued walking. Father peered a distance away through squinted eyes, and said, "We're almost there. Almost at Dunhuang."

"Are we halfway to India yet?"

"Not yet."

"Are we almost halfway there?"

"Definitely."

"Are you afraid?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"Yes, but I think I can cope with it."

The Elemental Scroll of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Ho, Ella – 10

“Hunter, come on! We are almost at Cave 96 of the Mogao caves!” Heldras yelled as she swam ferociously. The hazy morning sunshine reflected feebly upon the emerald green scales of Hunter, the younger twin dragon. The two twin dragons have been swimming up the Daquan river wearily for 5 weeks all the way from the Atlantic Ocean in search of Cave 96.

Ancient legend foretold that the Elemental Scroll was hidden in Cave 96, and it would grant its finder one magical power. The dragons stared upon the solemn Buddha sculpture towering almost 35 meters at the entrance of the cave, and they knew they were finally there!

Located in Dunhuang in Gangsu province, China, the nearly 500 Mogao caves were also known as the ‘Cave of the Thousand Buddhas’. Dunhuang was a major point of intersection along the Silk Road where many monks, scholars, and merchants traveled. It became a melting pot of many cultures including China, India and Europe. The decorated caves’ walls contained the world’s largest collection of Buddhist art including elaborate wall paintings and Buddhist sculptures.

“Who... Are...You?” bellowed the tall Buddha at the entrance in a deep roar.

Heldras lifted up her head in defiance. “I am Heldras, Champion of the Seas. This is my twin brother, Hunter.”

“What are you here for?” The Buddha asked. “We have many visitors, all of them looking for some treasure. Our Library Cave contains many treasures.”

Hunter hesitated and said, “The Elemental Scroll.”

From a legend that was passed down from generation to generation, the twin dragons have heard that the Elemental Scroll was hidden in the Mogao Caves and possessed mysterious powers. The legend also said a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu first discovered the scroll when he discovered the Library Cave in the 1900s, where thousands of religious and philosophical manuscripts were found.

The Buddha’s eyes narrowed and he said, “I will give you a riddle. You have three guesses. If you can present me with the correct answer, I will tell you where to look for the scroll. If you give me the wrong answer, you have to leave immediately.”

Heldras and Hunter nodded.

‘What has 4 legs in the morning,

2 legs in the afternoon,

And 3 legs at night?’

Heldras and Hunter thought long and hard. “A man!” Hunter shouted, “He crawls as a baby, walks in his prime, and uses a cane when he’s old!”

The Buddha’s eyes widened and he said, “Look for a statue of Hongbian in cave 17. He will know.”

“Thank you.” Hunter bowed.

A slab of rock with golden words engraved on it sat left of a life-sized statue. This was it. Cave 17.

He opened his eyes. “I’ve been expecting you,” he said serenely. “Finish this Rubik’s cube puzzle and you will see the answer inscribed upon it.

Luckily, Heldra has been a champion in Rubik’s cube puzzles and with quick swipes and turns she was able to align the different colors and layers in the correct order.

Written upon the Rubik’s cube, it said, *‘What can run but never walks,*

Has a mouth but never talks,

Has a head but never weeps,

Has a bed but never sleeps?’

Hunter frowned, “River?”

Hongbian’s eyes widened with shock and said, “How did you know?”

Hunter said, “Rivers can run, but they can’t walk. Rivers have a mouth, but they don’t talk. It has a head, but doesn’t cry, and it has a bed, which is the riverbed. But how the first clue is all these actions belong to living things, so it has to be about a body of water because it says it can run.

Hongbian sighed and began, “I was the most powerful monk of all with the Elemental Scroll. It was one of my family heirlooms. The other monks grew jealous of my power and had evil plans to steal my scroll. I hid the scroll in a place where they’ll never find it, because if they found it all hope for this world would be lost. I am giving you the scroll now because you have passed my test and proven you are wise.”

“Where is it?” Hunter asked.

“In the bucket of water behind me.” He replied

Suddenly, Heldras seemed to understand what Hongbian meant. *‘Ad Vitam!(come to life!)’* She uttered a magic chant naturally and water from a bucket sloshed over the two dragons.

Then, it was Hunter who became overwhelmed with a sense of knowing. He whispered, *‘revertere ad pristinam formam! (Return to your original form!)’* The Elemental Scroll appeared in the empty bucket.

Both dragons obtained the magic power of water!

“Use the scroll well,” Hongbian said, “Many have failed in their quests. But before you take your powers, I must warn you. When my ancestors found the Elemental Scroll, they also found another scroll with an evil power at the same time. This evil scroll is called the Scroll of Power. Anyone who had weakness inside of him would turn to the dark side of himself if he touched this scroll. My ancestors tried to neutralize the evil scroll’s powers with the only pure energy that they know of. Do you know what they did?” Hongbian asked.

Heldras gasped, “Do you mean that your ancestors combined the Elemental Scroll and the Scroll of Power?”

“Yes,” Hongbian said, “With every good there is an equal evil. There is a Yin and a Yang to every situation. So, I warn you now to use your newfound powers wisely and not to become corrupted with greed and selfishness.”

“Thank you for your warning,” Hunter said, “We will remember your teachings forever!”

Hunter bowed to Hongbian, and he took off flying into the sky.

Heldras laughed and dove into the warm waters of the Daquan River.

With their newfound powers, the two dragons could not wait to embark on their next adventure

The Mogao Caves

Singapore International School, Ho, Kurtis – 11

The Mogao Caves

“The Mogao Caves is located in Dunhuang, China. It is also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas...”

As the teacher rambled on and on, Liam, sitting in the back row of the classroom, whispered to his friend, Elijah, “This is so boring. I wish we could go to recess already!”

“I know! Why would we need to know this anyway?” Elijah responded.

Liam and Elijah had been friends since first grade, and since then, they were notoriously known for being the worst troublemakers in the entire school.

Oliver, who was a well-behaved student, reminded them, “Be quiet, the teacher’s talking.”

“Okay, whatever you say, four-eyes,” Liam scoffed.

Just then, the school bell rang. Upon hearing that, the teacher said, “Remember class, you have a field trip to the Mogao Caves next week, and write an essay on it the day after! Make sure you study for it because this is worth 40% of your grade for Social Studies!”

“Who cares about Social Studies?” Elijah snorted, then rushed out of the classroom with Liam.

The next week, the class arrived at the Mogao Caves. The teacher then reminded everyone to stick together and not run around. The class, intrigued, looked around the city, then at the massive seven-story building in front of them. However, Liam and Elijah were not interested in their surroundings at all and were chatting about what they did over the weekends. They were so distracted that even when the class left, they didn’t notice.

About a minute later, Liam and Elijah noticed that the class was gone. They were very puzzled at first but soon realized that this was a good chance to do what they wanted. So, they ran towards the right of the building, when the class was actually on the left.

They saw a lot of different other buildings, smaller than the seven-story one. They went into some buildings and saw some Buddhas and paintings on the wall. They mocked the Buddhas about how obnoxious they looked and even posed as them, sitting in a cross-legged position. Some buildings had rooms in them where there was a bench and a toilet. It looked like a prison. When they went to a larger building, there was a buddha that looked different from the others. It resembled Indian culture, while the others resembled Chinese culture. Using the pen in his pocket, Elijah drew a dot on his forehead that looked like the dot on the Buddha’s forehead. Liam and Elijah burst into laughter.

At that moment, Oliver burst inside the building. “What are you two doing here?” he asked, angrily.

“What are YOU doing here?” Elijah responded.

“I realized that you two weren’t with the class, so I rushed over to find you two,” Oliver explained. Then, his voice turned strict. “Why are you goofing around here?”

“Why not?” Liam replied, sarcastically.

At that moment, the whole building shook. The three boys gasped in horror. “What’s happening?” Oliver asked.

Then, the Buddha’s eyes glowed. “HOW DARE YOU MOCK ME LIKE THAT!” it shouted. It was furious at Elijah and Liam.

At that moment, the three boys felt very dizzy. They only saw an endless spiral of purple and black. And then, as quick as a flash, they were teleported to one of the prison-like rooms they saw earlier. Some monks even walked around the rooms. Liam tried to touch one but his hand went through the person. He looked very surprised. They tried to talk to the monks but they didn’t respond. It was like they were ghosts.

“This is one of the rooms the monks lived in when they were building the Buddhas,” Oliver stated. “But what just happened?”

“We were teleported here back in time by the Buddha,” Elijah said. “It was angry at us.”

“Just to make sure, none of this is my fault,” Oliver said.

The trio walked around the building to see the monks working very hard to build the buddhas. They observed every little thing the monks would do to build the buddhas. They also looked at every little detail of the paintings on the walls. Again, they felt dizzy and were teleported to a different building at a different time. They then saw different monks building a different buddha. Afterward, they were teleported many times until they were teleported back to 2022 when they were having the field trip. “We’re back,” Liam said.

“Let’s go back to the class,” Oliver suggested.

The other two boys agreed and the trio ran back to the class, where they went into all the buildings they had been in before and looked at all the Buddhas that they had seen when the Buddha teleported them just then.

The next day, the three boys went back to school. The teacher handed out some paper which the class used to write their essays. Unlike before, Liam and Elijah knew exactly what to write and wrote down everything they saw when the Buddha teleported them, including how the monks made the buddhas and where they lived.

The teacher handed back their essays a week later and Liam and Elijah had surprisingly gotten very good marks! They ended up getting a 96% on Social Studies, an A+. As they looked at their marks, they cheered in delight and looked at each other, then at Oliver. “What a strange and unique experience this was!” they both thought, smiling.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Hui, Ching Ho Des – 10

James stared out of the plane window glumly, thinking of what else he could be doing. He was on a private flight from Hong Kong to Finland to visit his cousin and currently, all he could see was sand, sand, and more sand.

James guessed the plane was somewhere near Dunhuang. He had studied the Mogao Caves before, and guessed he would be getting near it.

James yawned and checked his watch. It was 5 in the afternoon, which meant he had been on the plane for 2 hours.

Suddenly, the plane lurched forward and James was thrown forward. Luckily, he managed to leap aside and avoid crashing into the chair in front of him. James sped towards the control room, trying to find the pilot to help.

As he had expected, the pilot was desperately trying to control the plane, but it was no good. The plane tilted to the left violently, and the pilot landed in the copilot's seat, knocked unconscious. Even worse, he accidentally kicked the "CRASH LANDING" button in the process.

For one heart-stopping moment, the plane paused in the air, and then it hurtled straight down towards the desert. With a final attempt to keep the plane aloft, James yanked the lever to make the plane stop, but it was too late.

The window split open from the force of the landing, and flying shards of glass flew everywhere. One sliced into James' arm, and he felt warm blood soaking his shirt, dripping onto the controls.

James managed not to cry out as he ducked another piece of glass. In a flash, he had already jumped out of the window, just before the plane sank into the sand.

Now what? James' arm was still hurting badly and he wouldn't be able to get anywhere in a hurry. He skimmed over the possibilities. Get the pilot out? No, that would be too dangerous. The plane was already wrecked, and the pilot had been pierced by so many shards of glass. He might've already been dead. Camping here would also be useless – he needed help, now.

In the end, James decided to try to find a way out of the desert. Nearly impossible, but still worth a try. He picked up his backpack and stepped towards the direction which he thought was correct.

After a long while, James' legs began to ache and he couldn't stand it anymore. He took out his foldable tent (He was lucky to have brought that) and set up camp on what looked like the sturdiest place.

He took out his water bottle and had a drink of water. Instantly, he felt cooler and stronger. James' mother had also packed some sandwiches for him, in case he was hungry. He devoured a whole sandwich in two bites and was eager for more, but he reminded himself that he had to save some for later.

James looked up at the darkening sky. It was nearly night and he was tired. James crept back inside his tent, ready for a good night's sleep.

The next morning, James broke camp and continued his journey. After a few hours, James came to a huge pile of sand. It looked strong enough to hold him so, he tried to climb to the top. To his surprise, he succeeded, and he looked around.

In an instant, his sharp eyes caught sight of a lake, a few temples... He had found the Mogao Grottoes! Without thinking, he slid down the pile of sand and sprinted towards the temple.

Even though James wanted to get home immediately, he couldn't resist having a look around the Mogao Caves. There were beautiful artworks, painted sculptures, and even some cultural relics! James was stunned by it.

He seemed to be caught in a portal to the past as he gazed at the ancient paintings and sculptures. This had been here for hundreds of years, but still, it showed how talented the people were, sculpting and drawing such beautiful artworks without any modern materials...

James was snapped back to reality as the sound of a helicopter came from above. He ran out to the road and watched with eagerness as the helicopter landed on the sand. Before the helicopter had landed, however, James had already bolted to where he knew the helicopter would land.

James climbed on the helicopter immediately and sat down. He knew that this helicopter had been sent by a rescue team to save him, although he had already made his way out of the desert himself.

James would finally be going home...home at last.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Jiang, Letian – 10

“A long time ago, there was a mythical creature that lived in the depths of the Mogao Caves: a deer with nine colors. Its fur is snowy white except for the nine patches of fur on its back which are the colors of the rainbow. This magnificent creature is the guardian of the Caves and is rarely seen by the human eye,” I read as I flipped through the book *The Mogao Caves*. Taking a look at the queue, I realized that it was my turn to purchase the ticket. With an apologetic glance at the annoyed people behind me, I shut the book with a snap and got my ticket.

Hi! My name is Charline Wong, an archeology professor who specializes in the relics of the Mogao Caves. Surely everyone has been to, or at least heard of it. This place is literally bursting with ancient paintings and sculptures. A few weeks ago, I journeyed to this wondrous place to see for myself the exquisite paintings which lie hidden in the caverns of stone.

I stepped through the entrance into the Caves. They were so beautiful! The walls of the enormous caverns were adorned with paintings of gods flying in the skies, dressed in all sorts of clothing and painted in various poses. Some were smiling down from the skies, some were flying up to the clouds, and some were sitting cross-legged on lotus flowers and meditating! The animals were the most fascinating of all: birds with human heads and monkey tails, deer galloping in the sky and what seemed like wolves that were as tall as mountains and leaping onto a chariot! All these added to the already deepened impression upon my mind of the plethora of gods, people and animals in the Mogao Caves.

As I examined the stone caverns, I came across lots of strange paintings, interesting sculptures and delicate manuscripts. Finally, being too tired to walk anymore, I leaned on the wall of a cave and rested. Suddenly, I was conscious of a white light. My head began to spin and I felt dizzy. Then, I must have passed out.

I came to my senses at last and found myself lying beside a sparkling river in the clearing of a dark forest. As I rose to my feet, I suddenly heard the sound of hooves. I turned around and stood paralyzed: it was a deer with fur as white as snow, long thin antlers and nine patches of fur in the colors of the rainbow! It was a deer with nine colors! Am I in some strange dream or am I really awake in the paintings of the Caves? The deer turned around and noticed me. To my surprise, it showed no sign of being frightened! Instead, it trotted in my direction.

“You’re finally awake,” said the deer in a high-pitched voice. “Why did you sleep beside a stream?”

“I don’t know. I was looking at a painting in the Mogao Caves and then I’m here,” I replied. “Can you show me the way out of this forest please?”

“Sure,” agreed the deer, “I’ll help you leave the forest myself.” Without another word, it galloped into the forest and beckoned me to follow. So, I started to run after the deer, and we were well on our way.

After some time, we came to the edge of the forest. There was a meadow of grass with a stream flowing cheerfully through it. At once, I was captivated by the beautiful scenery. I should message my friend and tell her about the amazing view here. I pulled out my phone and tried to text her. “Seriously?!” I grumbled in annoyance. “No Wi-Fi!”

“What are you holding in your hand? And what is Wi-Fi?” The deer had a very confused look written all over her face.

“You never saw a phone before?” I exclaimed, “I thought everyone has it.” Then, I realized I was in another world. So, I tried to explain. “If you want to communicate with your friend,” I continued, “you only need to send a message. It’s really convenient.”

“Your world is quite different from mine,” said the deer. “If I want to see my friend, I go to her place, and we talk face-to-face.”

“We used to do that. But when the phone was invented, things changed. I have some good friends. Before we used to meet a lot. Afterwards, we only sent each other messages and we met a lot less.”

“Let me show you our world.” offered the deer. I agreed and climbed onto its back. It leapt up into the sky and began to fly.

We landed near a town and the deer led me in. “What a different town!” I said to myself. The houses are all low and old-fashioned. There are many people on the street gathering together in twos or threes, all chatting merrily. Nowadays, most people stare at their phones from morning to night, and they always say they’re too busy to meet. Those thoughts suddenly reminded me of home and I wanted to go back. “How can I return to my world?” I asked the deer.

“I don’t know,” the deer replied. “Since you know how to come here you must know how to go back, right?”

“I have an idea! Why not take me back to the place you found me?”

The deer agreed and we were back at the river. Once again, my head began to spin and I fainted.

When I came to my senses, I found myself still leaning against the wall, staring at the paintings. It was nearly dusk and I should be leaving. I took one last look at the painting and seemed to see the deer’s eyes winking at me. Then, turning my head, I stepped out of the cave into the orange light of the setting sun.

Together

Singapore International School, Law, Hilda – 11

“This is stupid,” Zhang muttered to himself as he knelt down in front of the grand Buddha statue. After looking around at other people praying and shuffling around with his cushion, he walked impatiently to his father.

“Father, we’ve been praying in the Mogao Grottoes for three days. Can we just get started on our journey?” grumbled Zhang, rolling his eyes.

The still and quiet man peeked one eye, furrowing his eyebrows, “Zhang, don’t be disrespectful to the Buddha. We need all the support we can get for our long and treacherous journey across the desert. Now, go back to your seat!”

Zhang grunted and reluctantly slouched back to his seat. He thought to himself, *I have never been close to my father because he doesn’t love me as much as mother does. My father is so annoying. Why do we need to pray to the Buddha for extra help? Besides, I know how to survive in the wild, and so even though this is my first time traveling the desert, I can make it myself. I don’t need anyone.* While absorbed in his own thoughts, he could see the Buddha frowning at him at the corner of his eye. Startled, he turned his head to the Buddha, only to find out that the Buddha’s eyes were closed like usual, and he was just a statue, sitting delicately cross legged with both hands together in prayer.

Just then, an idea popped into Zhang’s mind, making him forget about what happened a while ago, *I’m tired of waiting here. Why can’t I just go by myself? What can possibly go wrong?”*

When the elders were not looking, Zhang stealthily crept out of the cavern. After a long walk passing through many precious pieces of Buddha art, he finally reached the outside of the grotto. Upon stepping on the smooth desert sand, he could feel the scorching heat chapping his lips and cracking his skin. Zhang gulped. The panoramic view of the desert was stunning. There were piles of large sand dunes that stretched for miles with an occasional plant or two. His lovely camel was still there, however he soon found out that his valuable resources were all more than half-consumed.

“You can do it. There is nothing to worry about,” Zhang nervously reassured himself.

The camel shakily led Zhang across the desert. He felt as if time was moving slower than usual, because after walking for days, he could still see a clear image of the Mogao Grottoes behind him from where he was. Taking a break and gulping the last bit of water, he felt a pile of sand hit his face. Turning back to look, more sand came whooshing onto his face. Soon, there was so much sand in the whirling air that made Zhang’s vision blurred. Suddenly, there was a sharp pang of pain in his chest as Zhang collapsed to the ground. His nose was all clogged with sand and dust, making him unable to breathe. His camel and belongings were lost in the sand.

“Help...,” Zhang’s voice rasping. “It’s a sandstorm,” his voice was barely audible.

Silence.

There was only the sound of vigorous air around him.

As his eyelids began to droop and his vision darkened, he could vaguely hear steps walking towards him. Then, he fell into a very deep sleep.

Zhang found himself awake in a familiar place. As he looked around, he noticed that the walls of intricately painted and sculpted Buddha art were just like the inside of the Mogao Grottoes, except for this grotto was spotless without anybody. After marveling at his surroundings for a while, he got up to explore the grotto.

“Am I alive? Is this Heaven?” Zhang curiously asked.

“You’re in an unconscious state, young man.”

At the back of the room stood the Buddha. His hair was elegantly braided in a bun clipped with a golden pin and his body was draped in a simple orange robe. Zhang gasped in astonishment as he looked up to the Buddha's eyes full of wisdom. As the Buddha stepped forward, he shot a stern look at Zhang.

"Young man, you are lucky. Your father saved your life. Without him, you would have perished in the sandstorm," said the Buddha.

"My father saved me? He was there?"

The Buddha nodded, "Yes, he was frantically trying to save your life. After you blindly wandered out of the Mogao Grottoes, your father and his friends followed, desperately trying to find you through the desert. He knew you would get lost."

With the Buddha's words came the realization that he had been very wrong. "I should have listened to him, respected him. If I did, I wouldn't have ended up like this."

"That is correct. Think about it: If you had listened to your father and traveled across the desert together as a team, there wouldn't be any problems, right? Because you would help each other overcome troubles that you face, and could have survived the sandstorm a while ago," lectured the Buddha.

"Now I know why my father didn't want me to cross the desert alone. He wanted everyone to travel as a team. Thank you, Buddha! Thank you for your guidance!" beamed Zhang.

Before he could say anything else, Zhang's eyes slowly opened as he found himself lying on the desert sand again, gasping for air.

"You're alive, my son! Oh, thank goodness!" cried the happy man.

"I am terribly sorry about what I did. I promise it won't happen again. I love you, father, and I was wrong about you not caring for me. You love me as much as mother does, but just in a harsh and strict way. And that's because you care about my safety," said Zhang with tears forming in his eyes.

"Now that's my son. Let's continue the journey. This time we'll go **together**," smiled Zhang's father.

Saving the Mogao Caves

Singapore International School, Lee, Chun Wei Kyra – 10

Silver stared at the sphere of light, took a deep breath and put her hands on the globe. A power rushed through her as she rose up in the air. Then everything went dark and she saw no more.



“Aaaahhhhaaa.” Silver woke, stretched and remembered her strange dream. Then she brushed that aside and looked at her surroundings.

Where am I? Silver thought. She sat still as last night’s events flooded her thoughts. *Bringing her siblings to the airport... Arrival... Getting the camper van. I am in Dunhuang!*

“Silver.” Silver jumped at the sound of her name and saw a faint spirit.

“What do you want?” Silver demanded.

“Help. The Mogao caves that you planned to visit tomorrow are being destroyed. Historical artifacts are being taken.” The voice of the spirit and its outline was getting fainter now. “Only you can save the Mogao caves.” The spirit raised his voice as he faded away. “Remember! The secret lies in beauty and snow!”

“Wait! What am I supposed to do?!” Silver shouted.

“What’s going on?” Jade and Jimmy, Silver’s siblings sleepily asked. Silver told them what happened. Finally, they reached the decision that they will go to the Mogao caves immediately.



“Hi! I am Kate Snowdrop. Today I am your guide! First, we’ll...”

“The secret lies in beauty and snow... Kate *is* beautiful. And ‘snow?’ ***Snow***drop! Maybe she is the bad person...” Silver muttered to herself.

“Jade! Jimmy!” she called, “Remember the spirit gave me a clue?”

“Yes, the secret lies in beauty and snow.” Jade repeated. “Oh! Kate ***Snow***drop... and Kate *is* pretty. She could be the person destroying Mogao caves!”

“Just to be sure, let’s follow her after the tour.” Jimmy suggested.

“Good idea!” Silver agreed.



After the tour, the siblings tailed Kate. After a while, Kate looked around to check there was no one and then moved a few floorboards. She then disappeared down the hole. The siblings crept closer and heard something that shocked them.

“Thank you, Josh. Now I can take all the treasures in the Mogao caves and sell them for all the money in the world!!!!!!!!!!!!” Then came a series of cackling, and footsteps coming up the stairs. The three siblings ran into another cave just as Kate appeared.

“Did you hear that?”

“It was Kate, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, but how do we stop her?” said Silver grimly.

“Silver.” Silver jumped at the sound of her name.

“Who just called me? Are you the spirit?” Silver asked.

“Your siblings can’t hear nor see me,” sighed the spirit. “Nobody can except for you. You are destined to save the Mogao caves.”

“Why me?” Silver asked.

“Because you have a very special power that can protect artifacts by turning people into statues when they try to steal them. That power can be gotten right here in the Mogao caves.”

“But how do I get it?” Silver asked.

“It is yours to figure out.” And with that, the spirit disappeared.

Silver repeated the conversation to her siblings and they thought for a few hours, but no one came up with anything.

“This is hopeless. Kate must be stealing all the treasures now.” Silver sat down.

Suddenly, the floor started shaking and a pedestal rose up from the ground. *No, two, in fact*, thought Silver as she peered closely at the pedestals.

Congratulations, it was engraved, you have found the clue to unlock a special power. Guess the word and you'll receive the gift of a power stronger than anything you can imagine. But beware: you only have one chance to guess the word, or you will become a statue... Forever. Clue: This is hard.

In the second pedestal were 4 empty holes.

Jimmy wailed in despair, “It could be *anything*!”

Silver thought for a moment and said, “I am pretty sure the word is ‘hard’. She saw some blocks with letters on them and found the four blocks, “HARD”, and fit them into the holes.

The floor shook again and a third pedestal rose. Engraved on it were the words, *you have passed! Put your hands on this orb of light and the power will be granted.*

Just like my dream, Silver shivered. She took a deep breath and put her hands on the orb. A power pulsed through her as she rose in the air. Then, a golden mist enveloped her and threatened to choke her. Suddenly the pressure was gone and she saw the spirit.

“Congratulations! You have received the power. The Maitreya Buddha said that to use it, you need to put your hands to the ground, until the cave glows gold.” the spirit said, then the gold mist disappeared as Silver fell onto the ground. She immediately placed her hands on the floor.

A while later, the cave glowed gold. Silver felt something tugging at her and sensed that it was leading her towards Kate. She told her siblings to follow her and they set off looking for Kate. Finally, they reached and saw Kate in a statue form. Silver shot a beam of light out of her hand at Kate and she turned back into human again.

“Kate, you—” Silver broke off as Kate lunged for the paintings and turned into a statue again. Silver sighed and shot another beam of light at Kate. By then Kate was stunned and wanted to know what was going on.

“What stupid things did you pests do?” Kate hissed.

“If you try to steal anything more from the Mogao caves, you will turn into a statue again, Kate.” Silver said.

“Fine. I’ll turn a goody-goody and do whatever you say. Happy now?”

“Yes. Very much. Now go back to wherever you came from and get out of here!!!!!!”



As the soundtrack and credits came on the television, Ben yelled with delight, “Mommy! I loved the show! I want to watch it again!”

“Alright, Ben. But enough of television today. It’s your bedtime now. Go brush your teeth.”

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Leong, Ryu – 11

The darkness in the cave was illuminated by the glowing fireflies. All was still in the cave and before long the beauty of the silence was broken by the heavy breathing of a figure. As it drew closer to the end of the caves it remarked to itself how beautiful the bloody paintings were despite it being nearly 4000 years old. The figure was Dan Amabilia. As he admired the paintings the rocks over his head cracked but Dan was unaware of the rocks cracking above his head, his focus was his downfall.

Smash! Went the rocks as they made contact with his head. Dan fell to the ground motionless but in his final breath he smiled as the eyes of heaven took him away. At a sudden moment he shot back up with a fright. Confused, he turned back down to where his body was and found it still there. He was dead clearly but not in the way most religions would expect. He felt the walls around him, his sense of touch was completely gone. The ground beneath him quaked furiously and cracked open and a woman-like figure ascended from the cracks in the Earth. "Morta-", it stopped as the figure viewed the expression of Dan. He didn't seem to be in fear, rather his face was glowing a hot pink as he continued to watch hers. "You're beautiful," Dan had those words spill out of his tongue. The figure's face was stitched up and had extremely long hair that stretched to her ankles. She was dressed in a dirty white gown and her face was purple. She stumbled back in surprise before her face turned black as if she was blushing as he studied Dan.

No matter your preference, Dan was kind and handsome and for a second you could say that you loved him. "Mortal I am the god of the afterlife and you will come with me to the afterlife no questions asked?" she said meekly. "S-sure," Dan said. You could easily tell that the two of them wanted to talk and introduce themselves but the situation became rather awkward. A skeletal horse appeared behind her and the two made it through one of the caves walls. There through the wall Dan saw parties and banquets being hosted by many grim reapers for the souls that made it to the afterlife. The two landed in a hotel sort of place but it was still in the caves. Both of them were nervous but eager to meet each other, Honestas showed him to his room in which got a hold of his manners and introduced himself, "I'm Dan, Dan Amabilia. What's your name?" She looked at him with determined eyes. "Honestas." Dan smiled at Honestas as her face continued to glow dark blch there was a bed, a scarf laid out on a large table and a piano that looked like it was a millennia old.

"Can you play the piano?" Dan asked. "Y-yes but it's been a while," she said to him. "Well could you teach me how to play?" She nodded and sat down on the table. She took a deep breath and began playing, as soon as she began the notes she was playing began to become visible as they drifted off into the night sky. She closed her eyes and entered a state of focus and began to play faster. She only stopped when her hands mysteriously detached and leaped into the hands of Dan. He gave them back almost immediately. "Well that's handy," Dan said. Honestas giggled at the pun. "Honestly though I'm surprised you're not scared and in fact well, you know what I mean most people are frightened by my presence and beg me to let them live and I believe that you were just the same as them." When I was still alive my mother would always tell me to never judge a book by its cover, but you, you were breathtakingly beautiful. So much so that I couldn't help but blush." Suddenly, two young girls burst through the door and saw Honestas with Dan. "Oh we're so sorry! Were we interrupting something?" they said in unison while puckering up their lips in Honestas direction. "You rascal-, no you weren't what's happening you two?" Honestas said, flushing a furious shade of black. "Another party is being hosted why don't you come?" I'll go later, let me talk to Dan." The two girls exited the room. "So Dan why were you in the Mogao Caves anyway that place is the key to life and death?" "I was just there on holiday and that spelt my death," he said with almost no attachment to his life. "Well it seems that you really don't care for any person in your life?" asked Honestas. "Not no one, I cared for my mum and dad but nobody beyond that I did not care for anyone, I was a single child and my parents died a long time ago." "Honestas looked over Dan's shoulder." Supposedly the life I lived as a human was rather bad and full of corrupt people who did not care for me." Dan turned to see what Honestas was looking at and instantly was run over with shock. It was the torture dungeon of hell. The screams of tortured souls could still be heard for miles away." Well then it's been rather long since I've attended a party. Why don't we go?" Dan smiled. "Sure!" he responded instantly. Finally the two made off into the streets of the dead hand in hand.

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Li, Hongfei – 10

People today dig for hidden wealth in the cave, seeking for the treasure they had longed for. That traces back to long ago, since 1600 AD. As people now walked through the caves, studied the drawings, the small details can let people know that the treasure were believed to be hidden. We, humans today only care for ourselves. Some people are selfish, some kill animals and some even do illegal things just for themselves.

So, to humans today, they would think, “Why can’t we search for hidden wealth when we can actually be so selfish!” That made a lot of sense. Just imagine particular people you see today. Them, being brought away by polices, people hunting for animals and killing them. That is incredibly selfish and egotistical! Well, there is always a history behind it...

This cave is always quiet as usual, as this mysterious cave was being filled with busy pilgrims, and this scene all started with a monk. This monk thought of having a thousand radiant buddhas on the cliff surface.

“Pilgrims! Please get working. We still have to move on the sculptures. Now, carve out the story of...” The monk ordered. Although these pilgrims think that this master can be pretty demanding sometimes, but they still follow their master as they also wanted to help their master with his big dream. This monk had such a huge dream that he would not give up on his chance to make it real. He would never give up on it, no matter how difficult it is and how long it would take, he would still do it.

The pilgrims continued to stay with their master and supported each other. They began to make more historical sights together and created over 20 historical sights! They got many achievements, such as they transformed a simple room into a gallery of Buddha’s stories and a plain old field into a learning center where courses on Buddha were taken.

This cave dates back long ago and was once a religious attraction, and even now, caravans applying the route from east to west will still stop at this mysterious cave. No one will know exactly how this cave was, but at least they can study the cave from the informational paintings drawn long ago. This fascinating cave traces back to long ago.....

Buddhist pilgrims began to carve this special and fascinating cave, forming rock cliffs. They decorated the walls of the cave, filled with historical Buddhist art, Buddhist sutras, and illustrating stories of the Buddha. Thousands of Buddha sculptures were lined up in different positions. They are truly magical and full of history, which tells everyone a story through a sculpture. Everyone knew something about this cave, that this cave will be inspiring and attractive to people who longed to study the amazing lives of Buddha.

Just then, a tired pilgrim stood up in front of the monk and said, “Master, this is incredibly hard. We pilgrims dug hard and even my arm hurts now. I am willing to help, master, but I am also worried . What if after all this hard work, our cave is still not noticed? That will be a waste of hard work.”

The monk stayed silent and finally said, “Have you ever wondered, how we can pass the stories of Buddha from generation to generation? Imagine people one hundred years later, looking at these stories ,being inspired and learning something new.” The pilgrim stood and looked into his master’s eyes.

“Well, okay. ”The pilgrim murmured as he continued. Hours and hours passed, and finally, night came. The pilgrims found an empty spot and made themselves comfortable. They knew they had to rest well. They all knew that they always need a good sleep as they knew there must be something difficult prepared for them the next day.

As these days passed by, every day was the same. They followed their master's orders, worked hard and took a bit of rest at night. All of a sudden on a sunny day, the great monk gathered all the pilgrims together. He was smiling, and the pilgrims had never seen their fellow master that happy and excited.

"My fellow friends, we have made it. We are close to creating our very own 'Buddhist' cave. I thank all the hard work you made and everyone who contributed. I hope in the future, our cave can be found and let people learn the stories of Buddha. This is something unforgettable and everyone should learn. "The monk announced with pride. The significant monk and his pilgrims all cheered at once.

With the encouragement from their master, the pilgrims began to work harder and harder, and some even worked at night. The monk saw it and knew that this cave would inspire and let more people learn about the exciting lives of Buddha. He thank all the pilgrims in his heart and he promised he would respect every one of them. Sadly, despite the hard work of the pilgrims, after so many years of hard work, their cave wasn't noticed. Every single day they hoped, but nothing was there. They believed their cave was forgotten. There was a reason to it, but not because of lacking hard work. The real reason behind it is that the silk road became abandoned, with the cave entrances choked with sand. That made the pilgrims work even harder, doing more and more work. Finally, after some time, their cave began to be recognized as a religious site and was found because of its great collections of documents in history.

Years and years passed, as a plain dusty old cave turned into a colorful and historical cave. This cave now became a historical sight of China, bringing interesting Buddha stories to us. The monk and his pilgrims were right. Hard work would get paid off and their cave had become a success and now brought many stories to children and people today.

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Lin, Amanda – 10

“The sandstorm is ahead!” Father declared. “Remember to hold tight on the rope, and keep your face covered.” Mother readjusted my buff, giving Father a reassuring nod as she leaped onto her camel.

“Yuezun’s buff is ready. Let’s go.” Mother said.

On a snap of the reins, the camels descended closer towards the howling haboob, smearing sand across my face. It was as if one was tying a knot in my stomach that ached excruciatingly. A spasm of pain hitting my eardrums as the roaring increased, sand shoved into my face repeatedly.

A rush of wind smacked my stomach, as I plummeted towards the sand.

“Mother!” I screamed, my vision of the camels dissipating into mist. I felt light breathing. It wasn’t coming from me, that was definite. My nostrils flared with shock as my eyes snapped open promptly, revealing a monk dressed in a garishly colored orange robe. “What are you doing here? A child of your age shouldn’t be wandering around deserts.” The monk said placidly.

I rubbed my eyes, clearing my vision to inspect the peculiar monk. “Who are you?” I whispered, sound barely escaping my mouth.

“I’m a monk from India, coming to spread Buddhism to China. I’m heading to a meditation cave near the town of Dunhuang, the supposing must-stop location for merchants and traders.” The monk explained quite matter-of-factly. “In the cave are thousands of buddhas on the walls, sharing stories people would never have imagined.”

“Ah.” I mouthed, brushing sand off my clothes. “My parents are merchants. If that town is a must-stop for trading, then my parents will be there. Would you mind taking me there?”

The monk’s lips twitched into a strange smile. “Of course. We are all the children of Buddha, aren’t we? Let’s take shelter in the cave for the night, then go to the town in the morning.”

We trudged through the sand with nothing in sight. He stopped in front of a massive stone wall that domed over our heads, with measly rocks rolling down.

The Indian monk squatted down as he picked up a sharp rock, humming. Truth be told, I had no idea what he was doing. But the monk concentrated as he threw the rock towards the wall, causing a small rockslide that created a cave in the wall.

As I bent down to reach for a rock in attempt to help, yellow flashes cut through my eyes, throwing me backwards. I groaned, the agony spreading. Orange orbs floated along a yellow background, each standing next to a hole. I rubbed my eyes, attempting to see clearly.

Monks carved their caves into the cliff, rocks tumbling down. “My eyes are tricking me,” I muttered. The monks remained, after twenty tries of clearing my vision.

The Indian monk I just saw minutes ago stalked towards me with a curt smile, looking much older from when he found me. “Would you like a tour?”

As we travelled through the caves, the monk shared with me tales of suffering and enlightenment. “My favorite story,” The monk had told me, “The Five Hundred Bandits. They were punished for their horrible deeds by getting their eyeballs dug out.” He shuddered. “But consequences are consequences. They were set off into the wilderness, crying and screaming for help. But only Buddha heard their pleas. He used a magical powder to let them regain

their eyesight and he taught them the karma of good and bad deeds. After years of repenting and training, the bandits reached enlightenment and became the five hundred arhats.

“You know, the Buddha was once human. He also had weaknesses just like the bandits. Before his enlightenment, he lived a life of riches as a prince. But he recognized that humans are addicted to the vanities of the material world, causing our souls to be trapped in an endless cycle of birth, aging, sickness and death. He spent the rest of his life searching, discovering, practicing and preaching the Truth. He believed all souls are equal and all of humanity can reach enlightenment and find eternal peace. But Buddha can’t do it alone. He needs you and I to help him spread the Truth for generations to come.”

A small smile crept across my face. I didn’t understand what the Truth means. But the Buddha seems wise and kind. He also felt familiar, a human. His goal of sharing eternal happiness with everyone seems like a noble pursuit and, from that moment, I knew I wanted to help Buddha spread the Truth.

When the Indian monk and I entered around the 200th cave, I noticed a hint of mystery appear on his face. “Watch.” As the Indian monk strolled through the sand and settled in front of a large platform, thousands of shimmering gold stars erupted, swirling until it formed a Buddha statue, about 100 feet tall. I gasped, observing the miracle happen.

Was the Indian monk the Buddha? Was he trying to tell me something?

The Indian monk exhaled contently while he stood up from the platform and walked away from it. As soon as he left, the Buddha statue vanished into thin air, as if it wasn’t there at first.

“Let me take you to the most mysterious cave of all.” The Indian monk said softly, pointing at the endless hallway that led to a cave of darkness. I made out streaks of riches, but they were faint due to the absence of light.

The monk’s face changed completely when we reached the cave. Just as I was about to enter, a glistening Buddha replaced the monk. “Trust.” A voice echoed.

I gaped, my eyes snapping open. “You’re awake.” Mother said. “You fell down during the sandstorm and knocked unconscious for the last few minutes. We were so worried.”

“It was a dream? I didn’t believe it. Perhaps the Buddha was sending me a message. There was something special about the caves in my dream, and I was never going to rest until I found it.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Lo Ka Wai Jaymee – 10

Coldness gripped me tight, forcing me to choke. I wrapped my cloak tighter around myself as the cold continued to creep up on me. The sky seemed to stretch on to infinity, with the stars glinting, and the pale crescent moon, piercing the darkness like a blade. All I had was the glow of the stars to guide me through. Last chance, and I had nothing to lose.

My whole life had been consumed by the studies of a mysterious place filled with hidden treasures, gold and jewels and riches galore. I thought back to those days, where I had no one to guide me, no one to help me, and I felt that familiar pang of loneliness. It was like a sinking feeling in my stomach, I had wallowed in it for far too long, and now it was a feeling that trapped me. Trapped me in a box which forced me to show them. Show them that I wasn't that useless person, that weak person that they thought I was. I had decided. Now was the time. I slid my gloved hand under my cloak, and brought out a little black mask. It completely hid my face from view. Excellent.

Again, I lay there under the starry night sky, as I had done months ago. I smiled. For the first time ever, I had smiled. The stars seemed to flash grins at me from all over the dark sky. I fished the key out of my pocket. Good, it was still there. I smiled grimly. I was going to need it. I flipped through the maps I had brought, my eyes flitting around as I scanned the pages. There were places I had marked. Places I needed to find. Yet I hadn't found anything. I had come out all empty handed. I was starting to feel that desperation, clawing at me from inside. I was starting to make mistakes. Mistakes that could cost me my life. There was now just one place left on the list. It would most likely be a useless search, but I wasn't about to give up. Not yet. I sighed as I continued to trudge through the dark and lonely winter night. There were still miles left to walk. My feet ached from all the walking and I resisted the urge to turn around and head home. Sweat dripped down my back as the morning sun cast long shadows on the ground. The slanting rays of the rising sun gave a warm orange tinge to the sky. By mid-afternoon, my face was on fire, and the sky was ablaze with the intense fire of the sun. Even in this supposed time of darkness, the light had still managed to shine through.

Soon, I was standing far away from where I had begun. The site I was to excavate was only a little farther from here. All of a sudden, I heard a low rumbling noise. I cautiously stepped back as huge chunks of rock the size of elephants crashed down from the mountains. The rocks gave way and tumbled down onto the ground, landing heavily, sending vibrations throughout the land. The ground under my feet shook as I took another step backwards. The monstrous rocks continued to plummet down, sending bits of sand and grit flying through the air. Rocks dangerously close to me started to give way, forcing me to run for shelter. I tripped over a small rock and rolled down into a ditch. I turned around and started running as fast as I could. I was kicking up dirt as I ran. I shielded my ears from the thunderous thudding of the stones and winced as the rocks rained down everywhere. Before I knew it, I had reached the end of the ditch. I crawled out and cursed inwardly as I realised that I was far from my destination. My ears throbbed as I heard my heart thumping in my chest. I turned around and saw something. No, it couldn't be. I glanced at my map and back again. I had found the legendary Mogao Grottoes.

I stepped into the cave and peered around in awe. Sculptures as tall as me stood proudly, guarding the grotto. So, this was it. The Mogao Caves. They had been discovered by a Daoist monk, Wang Yuanlu in the 1900s. The grotto was completely dark. I fished my torch out of my pocket and switched it on. It illuminated only part of the cave. I gazed around, awestruck, then I smiled. Of course. Why hadn't I seen it? Keys were for locks, right? I thought back to that time my cousin had told me about these caves.

"There is a secret room," he had told me mysteriously, "only one person has ever found the key. Many believe that the room is a historical treasure trove, with multiple ancient relics and historical artifacts. No one knows for sure though."

Wang Yuanlu had discovered the "Library Cave", which contained thousands of manuscripts dating back thousands of years. He was also the "Guardian of the Mogao Caves". Who else would have discovered it, but him? I crept in quietly. The shadows spilled over me and concealed me from prying eyes. My only light source started to dim. No

worries. I had almost finished my job. There was a little box in the room, just as I thought there would be. I slid the key in and turned it. Just then, a voice rang out from the darkness.

“Who’s there?”

My hand quivered slightly as I dropped the torch. It shattered on the ground. Great. Now whoever was there would know they weren’t alone.

The figure stepped out of the darkness, revealing himself. He had a crooked smile and a scar running down his cheek.

“Agent Taylor, and your name is?”

“I have no name.” I said, “I’m no one.” Then I ran for it, treasure in hand.

The Guardian

Singapore International School, Lye, Yuxin – 10

The overcast sky thundered across the desert. I stood there, watching the sky being slaughtered, becoming blood red, as clouds of dense dust took over. Deafening sounds coming out of the Mogao Grottoes formed a tornado that grabbed everything in sight, including me. A complete darkness engulfed me like a blanket.

Nothing was visible, except a monk chanting in the distance. The man who had appeared in my dreams countless times, I was convinced that he could help unravel my tangled past. I struggled to move closer but to no avail.

The vision quickly faded away when a phone call interrupted. It was CK, my assistant.

“Tracy, you need to come right now!” CK was appalled. “The Mogao manuscripts had been stolen.”

Hong Kong, 1984

At my office overlooking Victoria Harbour, I leaned back on the swivel chair. “Where’s the real entertainment?” CK murmured as he kept switching channels on the television, finally settling on BBC News. The historic Sino-British Joint Declaration had just been signed, committing Britain to return Hong Kong to China. But my mind was on something else, as I gazed out of the window.

“Aren’t you glad the journalists had other priorities today?” a voice startled me. “Dave Morris, Interpol.” The detective came up close and displayed his credentials.

“Thanks for stopping by,” I shook his hands. “Tracy Wang, Head of Kirsten Auction House, Asia.”

I was about to continue when CK interrupted, “I’m CK, by the way. My initials, in case you are wondering.” I rolled my eyes.

“Let’s cut to the chase,” Detective Morris said and inserted a cassette tape into the VCR player. “Apologies for the commercial break, CK.”

“The video recording showed three masked men breaking into your vault and laying hands on the scriptures,” Detective Morris pointed at the playback. “We’ve been tracking them for a while, this brazen international crime syndicate.”

“Look, Tracy!” CK exclaimed. A monk in maroon robe fought with the men but was outnumbered. CK let out a gasp when one of the masked men took out a pistol and fired at the monk. The recording ended abruptly when the surveillance camera was smashed.

I was stunned. Wasn’t this the monk from my dreams? But how could it be?

“A monk, an archaeologist, man of mystery, or you may call him Professor Yue,” Detective Morris said as he noticed my astonishment. “Not sure how he’s connected to this but we know he has booked a flight and is on the way to Gansu.”

Thirty thousand feet above ground.

“This better be worth it ‘cause we spent a bomb chartering this flight,” CK quipped and handed me a cocktail on the plane. “But how would you know he’ll be at the Mogao Grottoes?”

“A hunch.”

Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang

It was not until a day later that we reached, after hours of traveling on a windowless jeep and enduring the harsh desert winds. What greeted us was a spectacular stretch of caves by the cliff above the Dachuan river. I had read so much about the Mogao Grottoes, but was still in awe seeing it for the first time.

We joined a guided tour with other tourists but I felt constantly being watched and followed. Perhaps I was getting paranoid. I whispered to CK to disappear into the crowd and take cover. We waited patiently for nightfall. Cave 17 – the Library Cave, my instincts told me, would reveal the answers I sought.

It was a moonless night as we sneaked past the night guards into Cave 17. CK turned on a torch to find Yue sitting in meditation beside the statue of a Buddhist monk. The light was dim, I could barely see the mural behind.

My heart missed a beat, “Who...who are you?”

“Life comes full circle, Miss Wang,” said Yue “Your great grandfather, Wang Yuanlu, he stood where you stand.”

“He wasn’t who you thought he was,” I asserted. “He didn’t sell those treasures out of greed!” I could have overreacted, but over three generations, my family had suffered so much that I could no longer tolerate being maligned again.

“The truth is the truth, even if no one believes it. A lie is still a lie, even if everyone believes it.” Yue smiled. “Yuanlu did what he thought was right.”

There was a moment of silence as I pondered.

“There is a reason you are here tonight, the seed planted when your great grandfather first rediscovered the caves.”

Yue tried to stand but fell back weakly. “Tracy, my...my time is up.”

I rushed forward. “You’ve been hurt, let me help.” Blood oozed out of the gunshot wound on Yue’s left chest.

“Indeed, I need your help, but with the Mogao treasures, and these...” Yue removed the string of beads from his neck and placed them in my hands.

A bright light gleamed upon us, making me squint. I looked around and saw Yue in a shimmering kasaya, painting on cave walls, with dozens of manuscripts piled at the side. Other monks chiselled away at a Buddha statue. Celestial maidens were singing and dancing on the murals, almost coming to life.

“They are yours to protect now.” Yue turned to me, then closed his eyes.

My surroundings darkened. “Don’t go!” I pressed on his wound with my scarf.

Yue breathed his last breath.

CK tapped me on the shoulder and signalled me to leave soon. There were still numerous unanswered questions, about Yue, about my great grandfather. But strangely, they did not seem to matter anymore.

Instead, I felt a profound sense of relief. It was hard letting go for the past shaped who I was. And the future? I hold the key to my future, however uncertain it may be.

The grottoes, murals, sculptures, manuscripts, a thousand years of heritage.

“He leaves with us.” I wore the beads around my neck, determined to carry on the legacy.

Journey to the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Ooi, Shi Qi – 10

“The Mogao Grottos report is due next week. Class dismissed!”

The dismissal bell rang. Ms Peters swept out of the classroom, and students made their way to dismissal. Jennie tied her black hair into a ponytail and started walking home.

When she arrived home, her parents and little sister Garcia greeted her warmly. Garcia had the same rosy cheeks and black hair as Jennie, and was practicing to be a “fairy” by reciting enchantments from a book of “spells”. Jennie knew it wasn’t real, but she always played along.

Jennie started researching on her laptop about Mogao Grottos to start her report and drafted it in her notebook. Garcia pulled out a chair and sat next to her.

“I found a new spell! When it’s recited, it will bring us to a place, according to a piece of writing that the enchanter is holding. I’ll use your notebook to try it out!” Garcia jumped up and down while screeching excitedly and took Jennie’s notebook.

“Abracadabra, wizzy—monsoon! O’magic spell, transport to the world of text! Three, two, one!”

Jennie’s notebook glowed. A beam of light shot out of it, and swallowed Jennie and Garcia as they fell through it. They didn’t know what was happening. Were they alive? Would they stop falling?

“AAH!” they yelled as they hit the ground. The sisters got up to their feet. All they saw was a desert oasis stretching miles beyond them.

“Where are we?” Jennie exclaimed in both amazement and confusion.

“It transported us into the place you were writing in your notebook.”

“I know! We are at the Mogao Grottos— from the past!”

The sisters roamed around, looking to see whether there was any way to go back home or if anyone else could help. After a while, they saw many markets bustling with noise, set up next to caravans with many traders that were dressed in ancient Chinese clothing. They were trading silk of various colours that shone like gems under the scorching sun. Jennie and Garcia saw others trading precious metals and spices. Nearby, they found people gathering together, working busily by a big structure. They approached one of them.

“Um, we are lost, and we were wondering if you could let us stay with you until we find our way home?” Jennie asked half-timidly and nudged her sister.

He scratched his head and blinked twice at Jennie and Garcia, staring at the two weirdly dressed girls from head to toe. They thought he didn’t understand what they were saying, but he slowly nodded. Then he told Jennie and Garcia something in a language that sounded like Chinese.

“I think he means we will have to help him. In exchange, he will let us stay with his crew and give us some food.”

After watching how the men worked on the Buddha figures, each time making a slightly different figure than that of the previous times, Jennie and Garcia followed along and set to work. They gathered wooden planks and tried to create shapes similar to how the men made. Afterwards, they smeared mud until it covered the whole structure in thick layers, and waited for the mud to dry up. At last, they carved small exquisite details of the face, body parts and clothing of the buddha. Once they were done constructing, some men moved them to the big structure and put them inside. Some continued making those figures while others worked on building the structure. Jennie also noticed some men painting on the walls of the structure and writing manuscripts.

Jennie and Garcia continued making figures. After a while, one of the men clapped his hands and all of the other men stopped working and followed him. He gave everyone some food. The sisters joined and stayed in the dormitory that night.

Jennie was awakened by shuffling and sniffing sounds. She turned over and saw her sister sobbing, while a stream of tears poured down her face. Jennie immediately asked Garcia what was wrong.

“Jennie. Will we forever be stuck in this place? Can we ever get out of here? We may die! What will Dad and Mom do when they realize we are not at home and entered this place? Please, can you think of a way to leave?” Garcia sniffled into her sister’s arm.

Jennie was also desperate to leave the place. She couldn’t bear to see her sister cry like this. She racked her brains for a solution, thinking harder than she had ever before, to find a way to leave the place.

“GOT IT!” Jennie suddenly shrieked loudly, shocking Garcia and waking a few men. They frowned and went to sleep again.

“We’re going to help them work tomorrow morning, then we can take one of those planks of wood and cover it with mud. When that dries, we can carve something on it! Not the buddha, of course, but write a story about our 21st-century home! Then you can say the enchantment that brought us here and we shall be home.” Jennie whispered, trying to keep her voice down.

“Wow! That’s a great plan! We’ll do it tomorrow!” Garcia replied, excited but tired.

The next day, the men woke up and set off to work. The man they met at first brought Jennie and Garcia to the caves and pointed at the other men. They had to paint the caves. Jennie and Garcia took references from other paintings and painted similar buddhist art and ornamental designs. When afternoon came, the sisters were assigned to make figures of buddhas. Jennie and Garcia took a wooden plank and smeared it with mud. When it dried, Jennie wrote a story by carving words on it, describing the 21st-century world and her home. Garcia recited the spell.

“Abracadabra, wizzy-monsoon! O’magic spell, transport to the world of text! Three, two, one!”

The wooden plank started to glow. A beam of light shot out, and Jennie and Garcia fell through it once again....

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Shen, Zhi Yu Olive – 10

“Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick tock”

“Exams are so difficult. How I wish I could just be free and do my own thing. Even just sitting and doing nothing is better than this” Alisa thought, slumping on her table, looking at her poorly done math paper. She quickly glanced in her best friend's direction to see what she was doing. Rose was carefully checking her test paper for mistakes. After repeating the process at least thrice she then thought

“I wonder how Alisa is doing. I hope she at least finished the paper, otherwise she would have to repeat this grade!” Recess came shortly after and Rose immediately went to sit on a bench as she wanted to start reading a new book that her mom just bought. She quickly flipped through it and thought she should introduce the series to Alisa. As she walked home with Alisa she said

“Today I read a book called Mogao Grottoes and I think you would really like it.”

“Why?” asked Alisa, eyeing Rose suspiciously.

Rose continued “Because it is like an adventure story but it is educational too. It starts like this. Legend says that deep down in the Grottos hide many gold statues, fascinating murals and more. Although the Grottos are open to the public, only those who have a pure heart can see it's true beauty.”

“It's possible that I would like it. Is there a map?” Alisa asked.

Rose replied: “I don't know. I only read the first chapter.” Upon arriving home, Rose went to her room and she reached for a notebook and pencil and began scribbling notes. “Who knows when they will be useful,” she thought. After finishing the book, she said

“It looks like there is no map after all.” But as she picked the book up, a large piece of paper fell out and landed on the floor.

“Could this be?” Rose pondered, reaching for her phone.

“We should go visit the Grottos! I mean you have a map of it don't you?” Alisa shouted with glee.

“Yes I do,” Rose said. “But I am only going on one condition. We are fully prepared.” She pulled a backpack out of her closet and began typing Mogao Grottoes on her computer. “So we'll need a warm jacket, loose clothing, sunscreen, my notebook...” Alisa smiled and hung up. She quickly messaged Rose to send her the list of things that they would need. But she never expected that she would be sent a list 15 cm long!

While they boarded the boat Rose thought “I never really thought that we would actually go on a real adventure. I hope I thought of everything we need.”

“Honk honk.” The sound of the boat about to leave interrupted her thoughts. A while later, she heard the captain announcing

“All passengers, we have arrived at our destination. Please get off the boat.”

“It sure is hot here. What is the thick coat for?” Alisa asked, fanning herself at the same time.

Rose sighed “Alisa, you have to pay attention in class! Deserts are hot during the day but the temperature drops at night!” The two walked towards the train station, where they would ride the train to the Grottos.

“I'm so excited! Do you think we could discover some stolen goods? Or some cash or relics?” Alisa began talking non-stop, and Rose sighed

“You watch way too many adventure movies Alisa. We are just here to visit and learn about it. If you are not tired read this book about Mogao Grottoes. It's interesting.” Alisa picked up the book and flipped through the pages. “You were right! I love it. Are there any more books like these?”

Rose replied smiling "There are other books in the series. By the way, my mum signed us up for a tourist group so we can safely go inside and not get lost. Believe me, it is huge. "

Alisa replied "Great! My mum just gave me a 2 hr lecture of what I can do and what I can't. It was long." Rose said " Look there!" Alisa quickly turned to the direction Rose was staring at.

"Awesome! That is magnificent!" She exclaimed.

Rose stuttered in awe, "According to the book, Mogao Grottoes has 735 caves in total! But only 492 caves have things in them so we will be passing some empty caves." Suddenly, they both heard their names, and they looked around to see a tour guide waving at them. They ran over and after checking the number of people, the guide declared it was time to go in.

"Rose? Is it just me or do those 3 people by the corner look odd?" Alisa asked quietly. Rose turned around to see 2 men and a woman wearing black. They all cackled discreetly occasionally. Under her breath, she replied "They definitely look a little out of place." It was then Rose noticed that these people had fancy watches, bags and shoes. The woman was even wearing 2 silver bangles and star earrings.

She thought "Who would wear these in a dark cave?"

Then the guide announced loudly "Here in cave 45 are the most magnificent artwork of the grottos. 7 statues lay here and all gaze down at you with compassion as you worship them. We are giving you a chance to try it yourself for a couple of minutes. Please do not touch the statues. Here is a guidebook that briefs about the different statues and the cave." As Alisa knelt down to worship the statues, she noticed something odd. One of the statues was looking diagonal, not down.

"Well that's weird." She thought. "The guide said that all statues look down, not diagonally." Just then her phone pinged. She turned her head to see Rose typing on her phone. The message said

"Look in the direction the statue is looking at. There is a wooden latch up there. Do you see it?" Alisa nodded.

Mystery at the Xi Jin Tombs

Singapore International School, Shi, Sophia – 11

The pale arachnid (order scorpiones, family buthidae, a.k.a Chinese desert armour–tail scorpion) glowed a lovely iridescent turquoise under the harsh lucency of my UV light. It was fast approaching midnight and eerily quiet; the vast plain of white sand was washed to a pale silver by the gentle shimmer of the moon. I tracked a previously undocumented scorpion from the Mogao grottoes to the empty hinterland of the Gobi desert. Dunhuang teemed with ancient caves and tombs adorned with Buddhist statues, murals and frescos; all remnants of a frontier garrison that signalled the last place to refuel before 500 miles of unrelenting sand with the temperature set by a schizophrenic thermostat.

The scorpion darted. My prayers to the ancestral Gods ratcheted in desperation with every footstep.

“I’m not lost. NOT LOST. I’m temporarily misplaced.”

An unhelpful giggling voice kept reminding me that Uncle Ben disappeared around here, somewhere, nearly thirty years ago. Family–lore had it that he left and took all our luck with him and was living a life of celestial bliss, because since that time nothing went right. And it was all his fault.

The scorpion scuttled purposefully. There must be a nest, I thought with an unwarranted zap of optimism. The twinkling blue–green exoskeleton moved behind a rock.

THUNK

I fell feet–first down a hole.

My eyes adjusted to the murky darkness and my ears adjusted to...the sound of screaming. A translucent figure hovered an inch above my nose, bellowing his lungs out. He hopped up and down, waved his arms in front of my face, all the while screeching like a banshee. At some point there was an interlude, which gave my brain the opportunity it was waiting for to regain some semblance of function. In any case, all I could dredge up was croaky yelp which felt somewhat inadequate considering the circumstances. The apparition, whoever, whatever it was, widened his eyes to the size of saucers and dove into the nearest wall.

“Aaaaaarrrrrrhhhhhhhh...you can see me?”

“Aaaaaarrrrhhhh...yes”

“Yes! He can see me. That’s never happened before!” The ghost re–emerged, his expression suddenly full of glee. And hope.

“Can you read this inscription? Read aloud and I’m through to the afterlife!” He bounced to the vicinity of a mural and gestured wildly at a line of text.

My attention attuned to my surroundings – the small enclosed space, slightly domed ceiling, the multi–layered brick entrance, the faded frescos and texts that lined the walls and a curious relief of a flying fish which told me exactly where I was – I had fallen through a hole in the ceiling of the Xijin Tomb. The ancient tomb was constructed during the Western Jin dynasty and immediately recognisable by its unique brick construction, which was held together without cement, relying entirely on the expert placement of the bricks. The walls were covered in comely depictions of Feitian (astral nymphs circa C14th) with flowing robes and intricate musical instruments. The ceiling was decked with statuary mythical beasts and above the entrance was the mystifying fish with wings and legs.

It had begun to bother me that this see–through individual looked oddly familiar. The back half of his head was a bit squashed and he seemed to be missing a few teeth but as I scrutinised him, foreboding slithered down my spine.

“How did you end up here Uncle Ben?” Whenever some disaster befell the family, someone would shoot dark looks at a sepia family portrait where the grinning features of this ghostly presence was faithfully replicated.

The ghost jumped in surprise. He drifted closer. “You know me? Uncle? Oh...Ohhh...You must be little An’s son.”

I kept quiet.

“This tomb was supposed to make me rich beyond imagination! I dug a hole, a random hole. You know what the guides...the experts, the archaeologists...have been saying for the last 30 years?” The ghost muttered with a sneer. “The tomb robber was exceptionally skilled. They said. It was a work of precision and superior planning. They said.”

The ghost leapt in front of my face and screeched, “It wasn’t skill! It wasn’t planned! It was sheer blind luck!”

There went all our luck, I thought accusingly, with a well-practiced dark look.

“Little good it did me. I fell through the hole, landed over there – on my head – got bitten by a scorpion and expired very painfully. My body’s over there under that brick-fall which blocked off a whole tomb section and managed to look exactly like every other wall.”

We both turned to look at the remarkably unremarkable wall.

“Pleeease help me. Celestial musicians my foot! Heavenly dancers my elbow! If I have to put up with any more of their wretched tinkering and twirling, I’ll gnaw my own eardrums.”

He looked pathetically miserable. I heard myself ask, “Which inscription is it?”

On a prominent wall was a painting of four Feitian holding aloft a scroll of writing above a door.

“That’s Ugly, Nasty, Fatty and Horrible,” he introduced insultingly. The Feitians looked luminously beautiful.

I deduced that the text was from the Buddhist heart sutra written in Sanskrit and was quite beyond my meagre linguistic ability.

I opened my phone.

“Hey, I’m Siri! How can I help?”

“Siri, can you read this?”

“Of course. Do you want me to translate it, sing it or arrange it into a crossword?” I detected more than a hint of smugness in the response.

“No, just read it please in the original.”

As the words echoed between the walls, the door mural dissolved into a sinkhole and sucked the ghost into its centre with a disconcerting slurping sound.

“Thankeeee...Byeeeee!” And he was gone.

I heaved myself back out of the hole in the ceiling. There was an imperceptible constriction, like a sigh of karmic reset, as I re-emerged into the still desert air.

In the distance was the flicker of headlights from an approaching car and a reassuring clink alerted me to several specimen bottles of scorpions in my pocket.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Sit, Chee Wei – 11

Xin Yi was shaking in excitement. She packed her bag absent-mindedly, thinking about the destination that awaited her, the legendary Mogao Grottoes. Lately, Ms Chen had been teaching them about the Mogao Grottoes. The school had decided to bring them on a trip to the Mogao Grottoes, which were quite near them as they lived in the Gansu Province.

She couldn't imagine stepping into this historical place where important people might have been. She was a lover of Chinese history. Every lesson, she would take so many notes that she wrote almost every sentence her teacher said. No one was really her friend, the only friends she had were the kids who struggled with history and wanted to use her notes. She was fascinated by the Silk Road, and the idea of going there almost made her hyper. She had known about the Mogao Grottoes a few weeks ago and since then pleaded with her unwilling parents every day and all day as long as she saw them.

The day had finally come, and she and her classmates boarded the bus. As the bus sped along the highway, Xin Yi felt tired and fell asleep. She was awoken by a rustling sound. As she slowly glanced around, she saw that the bus had reached their destination. She jumped ten feet high realizing everyone was already getting ready to leave. She did everything in a hustle and got in line.

The sun blazed down at them, forcing them to strain their eyes. Slush, slush. They trudged toward the grottoes. Their sneakers sunk into the sand that was so soft it could have been silk. After walking for what seemed like forever, they finally reached the welcoming shade.

No one even bothered to sit down, too excited to prepare for their travel to the past. They strolled through oceans of Buddhist paintings. A painting of a young woman playing a harp expressively caught Xin Yi's attention and she halted there. The rest of the group took no interest in this painting and followed the teacher, leaving Xin Yi behind, in the complex designed cave.

Xin Yi finally discovered the silence of the cave, with occasional wailing whispers of wind complaining about the unforgiving climate. Xin Yi glanced around, only to realize there was no sign of life at all. The bus had left the desert and would pick them up sooner, at dawn. Her heart raced like a horse galloping. Her vocal cords seemed to have broken. Her throat dried in an instance. She was lost. There was no map nearby, and even if there was, Ms Chen and the class would probably still be exploring the cave with the rest of the group. She decided she might as well wait on the highest level as the class would have been there by now. The next thing she knew, she was racing up the stairs. Another part of her brain thought, "I shouldn't risk it, from what I learnt, I should just wait at the entrance!" But another argued, "I came here to explore the cave, not sit at the entrance and wait for everyone to come back and miss the fun!" She had a dilemma.

Either she stayed, or she went. Being extremely fond of heritage sites, she recklessly chose to go. She hiked to the second floor and heard some distant sounds that were carried by the afternoon breeze. She looked at her watch. Twenty minutes to three. She had about two hours to explore and then gather at the entrance. She was yet to calm down. She had known deserts to have kidnappers and bandits. Her wandering into the unknown architect was making things worse.

After finishing looking at everything on the second floor, it seemed there were only so few paintings yet so much. She glanced at her watch again, it was already five forty-five. Her eyes bulged out of her sockets and she flew down the stairs, just in time for the gathering of the class.

“Oh hey! I thought you were kidnapped or something?” Clyde commented, in a mocking tone.

“Dear, we are so glad to have you back!” Ms Chen exclaimed.

Brr. The bus showed up in the distance and they began their journey through the tough, harsh sand. Xin Yi was so glad to feel the cool air in the air-conditioned bus. She thanked God and everyone she could think of that she didn't stay for any minute longer. If not, she would be there, chasing the bus, with difficulty from the sand, and shouting for it to stop. She might have starved to death. That night, she stared at the ceiling of her room, unable to sleep, thinking of what the next trip may bring her. Reflecting on her recklessness, she paused to think. Next time, she was sure to keep up with the group. She grinned and closed her eyes as she fell into the sweetest sleep of her life.

Morgan's Final Piece

Singapore International School, Soon, Sonya – 10

Long time ago, in 100 A.D., there was a planet called “Mogs Grot”, and the aliens there were weird, but they were all born with an extraordinary understanding of building monuments. But if everybody there was so smart, how would they know the difference between smart and dumb? Well, there was Morgan and George there to fix that. The two siblings were part of the royal family of Mogs Grot, and both shared their dream of becoming builders. They both dreamed of their final pieces of monuments being showcased on their favourite planet. They were both the smartest people on the planet and were both cheerful, but there was only one thing that separated them both – their favourite planet. That meant that they had to go their separate ways when it was time to build their final piece of monument.

Fast forward to 200 A.D., and both kids are taking off to go to their favoured planet for their final pieces of monuments. George was thrilled to go to Saturn, as he had planned to build his final piece in a place where you could see all of Saturn’s rings at night. Everyone wished him good luck, as he stepped into his spaceship, and took off. Morgan was already packed up and holding her suitcases, facing her spaceship confidently.

Morgan grabbed all her suitcases and farewell presents and loaded them into the spaceship. As she waved goodbye, the doors closed and the spaceship took off.

“Finally free,” Morgan thought. “Free to do whatever I want.”

When Morgan landed, she immediately jumped out of her spaceship, and felt the soft, green grass and instantly fell in love with it. She jumped back up and remembered that she had to find a spot to put her final piece. She traveled for six whole months. Morgan had traveled underwater, abandoned towns, fields, and finally, she had found it. A mountain side. A place where anything can be covered in the growth of the forest trees over hundreds of years, leaving anything hidden. She had pictured it, in her mind, and everything seemed perfect. For a few minutes, everything seemed quiet. Calm.

Morgan started to carve out the cave with her new shiny metal scraper, and could already start to feel tired.

“I need to do this. I can’t let everyone down. It’ll take time, but at least it will be worth it, as I will make a mark in history forever, and people all across the galaxy will remember me.” she thought.

Every room was filled with memories of her life, precious moments that she cherished. When she carved, she put the same effort into each statue for each of the rooms she had built. Every time she started carving a new room, she had stopped to think about each memory, just so that she could relive it. As time went in, it became easier to recall these memories as the past started flowing back to her. As she started to make progress, she wanted to attribute it to someone she really admired. She carved out a large person, closing her eyes and sitting down. It was one of the people in her dream world.

She was called “The Buddha”. She was a very wise woman in her dream that always believed in her and inspired her to build when she was feeling low. She thought of her every now and then, and eventually started to grow in confidence, and that confidence led her to success.

Two hundred years later, she had managed to finish her cave. She went out of the cave to step out and admire it. She looked at the big buddha in front and smiled. She called it “Mogao Grottoes”, after the wise woman to add another attribute to her home planet.

She thought “Every time someone would come to visit this cave, they would see all the precious moments of my life and the galaxy will remember me.”

And after thinking that, she walked away into the dark forest.

It's the year 1842, archaeologists have uncovered a secret cavern hidden in a mountainside surrounded by a lush forest. After digging a hole in one of the walls, they discovered a maze of rooms all filled with thousands of buddhas, with each of the buddhas having its very own hole. Therefore, the Cave was given the name "Thousand Buddha Grottoes" and after finding out more about the cave, they discovered the original name was called "Mogao Grottoes".

Until now, nobody knows where Morgan has been to. But for all we know, she could still be in the forest somewhere!

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Tsang, Jordan – 10

In the cold winters of Northwest China, ruthless Emperor Zhang sits on his throne inside his castle. Once a humble man born in poverty, he has become filled with greed. The Emperor was a powerful, but foolish man. Despite drowning in his fortune, he wanted more. Zhang heard the rumours of the Mogao Grottoes, and he imagined that there would be massive rooms filled with sleeping buddhas covered in gold inside a gargantuan temple. The self-indulgent tyrant commanded his faithful soldiers to seek the Mogao Grottoes and seize the vast fortune inside.

The Emperor's Lieutenant, Wang, had figured out his plan. He pleaded with Emperor Zhang and warned him of traps and ferocious beasts that awaited inside the cave. Risking his and the soldiers' lives would be foolish. Emperor Zhang stated that he needed to do what he must to protect his country. Lieutenant Wang could see right through Emperor Zhang and knew he was lying. He returned to his bunker and asked his soldiers—at-arms Han and Huang to help him with his mission. He and His friends were extremely skilled at sword fighting. They prepared as they set out for their cold journey through the mountains and forests up ahead. They packed their supplies and set out in the dark, riding their horses.

The men donned thick and furry coats and leather boots. They went into the dark forest covered with the white snow of winter. As they travelled, they knew that this would be the right thing and it would be worth sacrificing themselves. They found rest near a cave and set up camp. Inside the cave, they lit a fire for their lives depended on it. They used their bags as a pillow, their coats and jackets as a blanket and planned to stay there for the night as they knew that there was a journey up ahead. Lieutenant Wang had a dream. He dreamt of the Mogao Grottoes. Inside the Mogao Grottoes there were carvings of Buddha with loyal servants standing beside. He woke up at sunrise to find that the fire had already been extinguished. Meanwhile, the Emperor had realised that the three soldiers were unaccounted for. Zhang declared mutiny on them, so he sent 100,000 soldiers to find the Mogao Grottoes as well as to capture the three travellers.

The friends had travelled for a long time. Knowing the imminent danger, the three had to move eastward to find the Mogao Grottoes. They found a place to stay in the woods. Soldier Huang was sent to find food.

No one expected what was going to happen next. While Huang set off into the darkness, something noticed him. It was an ambush. He couldn't see anything. He thought his life was over. But no, it was something far worse. Huang had been kidnapped. Huang was sent to a concentration camp. Emperor Zhang soon came. If Huang did give the information, his life would be spared.

He told the Emperor, "I will never betray my friends.

With one word, the Emperor replied, "pathetic." There was a loud bang. Han and Wang raised their crossbows and shot the two guards. The Emperor told two soldiers to come and watch Soldier Huang. Huang found a sword in the cage and fought the soldiers and got the key. Huang started to fight. Soldier Han shouted, " Nice one Huang!" The Emperor came and shot an arrow in soldier Huang's neck. They had to retreat. However, the soldiers were following them.

Lieutenant Wang and Soldier Han got rid of the soldiers in the woods. They found the Danhe River nearby and brought the dead body of Soldier Huang to the river and buried him in the sand nearby.

They found a nearby small hill. They planned to go up the small hill to see if they could see the Mogao Grottoes. They went up the small hill and saw something red sticking out of the hill they were on. They were very curious so they decided to check it out.

They figured out it was the Mogao Grottoes so they went inside. They could see a Buddha drawing staring at them. There was a table in front of the buddha and there was food, fruits and wine. When they explored the Mogao Grottoes, they saw Buddhas doing something different in each room. There were also many buddha carvings on the walls. But to their surprise, there wasn't any money or gold inside; just ancient artifacts and buddhas! Lieutenant

Wang and Soldier Han got out of the Mogao Grottoes and waited outside. They saw a cloud of dust heading their way and heard horses stampeding. They didn't care though as they had to confront the Emperor. The Emperor got off his horse.

Lieutenant Wang then shouted, " There isn't any gold inside, you have been blinded by your greed. Look how many lives you lost!"

The Emperor went inside the Mogao Grottoes and all of the rooms. He found nothing. That proved Lieutenant Wang was correct.

Emperor Zhang said, " What have I done? I have been too greedy. You believed there was always good in me; you were right."

The Emperor and his soldiers went back to the palace with Lieutenant Wang and Soldier Han. When they got back to the palace the Emperor made a public speech to apologise to his citizens of China to seek their forgiveness. He also announced that the Mogao Grottoes would officially be a landmark open to all visitors. The Emperor also gave each person in China money as a token of gratitude and to also show how sorry he is. Henceforth, the Mogao Grottoes has been open to all visitors and The Emperor has never been blinded by greed and power ever again.

The Discovery: The True Meaning of Hope Revealed in Mogao Caves

Singapore International School, Wang, Elaine – 11

“Could you please spare me money?”

“Sorry, I don’t have any money on me,” said the passer-by, as they blended back into the crowd once again.

Kai shook his head, feeling defeated; his knees were tired and numb and the lines between the objects he saw became more faded and blurred. His mind had held on to images of the crowd, everyone with different faces and statures, but there was only one similar feature that he could spot: Even if they said sorry, Kai knew that they didn’t care. Their eyes had been filled with an unsympathetic indifference, not with a single ounce of pity spared at the sight of his struggles. Kai had begun to realise the true extent of the cruelty of reality; since then, his begging to the villagers had slowly evolved into prayers to god.

Suddenly, Kai glimpsed a man in the corner of his eyes. He had been proudly flaunting his magnificent ancient art pieces while being surrounded by a large crowd, shoving piles of money in his face as offerings. However, his clothes still seemed to be ragged and dirty. Kai suddenly had the urge to get up and shoved through the large crowd; with a sudden tug, he had successfully gotten the man’s attention.

“Where did you get that?”

“Kid, you should get a job first. This type of stuff isn’t for teens who can’t even handle stuff in the village.”

“Please, I need this.” Kai pleaded in tired desperation. The man’s eyes suddenly turned sympathetic, brimming with uncontained pity for the poor boy before him.

“I completed a quest. Go to the Mogao Grottoes, and don’t tell anybody. ”

Kai left with nothing on his hands, as he went to go get the treasures. He stood in front of the village sign one last time, took a deep breath, and stepped out.

He was relentless, walking through the rocks and sand with bare feet and still managed to get going. Even with no water, he was still able to keep going, even if his stomach had ached and his feet were badly bruised, and it finally was after two whole days of his persevering walking that he finally saw the cave. His lifeless eyes had suddenly brightened up as he started running towards the cave. The mysterious cave had the number 190 on it, and his eyes had rested in satisfaction when he saw the opening of it when suddenly, he saw it. In front of the entrance, many footprints had been there already. His eyes shifted to the right as he saw a blurry and what seemed to be a never-ending trail. As he looked back and forth, he finally set his mind to conclude that even though cave 190 was more easy to access, it was more likely that cave 275 would contain his questions and more riches. Grimacing, he stepped forward onto the blurry road.

Cave 275. The last out of the trail. The faint footsteps that Kai had been following had made a U-turn and led back home, but Kai refused to give up as easily. He stepped curiously into Cave 249 and suddenly froze in amazement.

The cave was small, but it told a lot. It shined with a golden aura, and it was as if Kai was inside another magnificent world, and its interior contained many majestic ancient artifacts. In the middle, there was a colossal Buddha statue, and beside it were paintings representing many stories that told the different traits of Buddha, and on the sides were many esthetical paintings stuck on the walls, and were a variety of scrolls placed on the tables in front of the paintings. Suddenly, a scroll caught the eye of Kai. It was a painting that drew two vivid pictures, with each image revealing a different story. Large letters with fine black ink wrote “Four Encounters”. In realization, Kai strolled quietly in front of the ginormous statue and kneeled respectfully to Buddha, before the collapse of the cave 275.

“Hello?”

Sarah, an archaeologist who had just immigrated from England, had come searching for the artefacts of different Mogao caves and has been the first person who set foot in here in 4 years since the cave had been demolished due to the heavy winds and shifting sands.

Suddenly, she felt a movement in the stones underneath the ground close to her. As her eyes widened in surprise, she quickly dug the sand away to find a man that had been perfectly unimpacted from the cave.

The Four encounters. Prince Siddhartha encounters an old man, a sick person, a corpse, and a mendicant monk. The two pictures in the scroll are simply written to represent them all, and it is the first and last scene. The first three encounters are when Prince Siddhartha becomes aware that life causes suffering, while the last sets out a path for liberation.

As Kai returned to the village, he searched for the spot. There sat a boy, nine years old, holding his hand out for any little bit of change. Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks. 11 years ago, Kai had been like him...

"Spare change, please. Spare change, please," whispered Kai, with tears streaming down his cheeks. He had been nine years old again, still traumatized by the death of his parents and learning about the world's cruelty. As everyone continued to walk past and ignore him, he felt his hope being eaten out bit by bit.

"Spare change, please. Spare change, please."

Returning to his senses, Kai looked at the kid with his eyes glimmering with hope again. He cautiously approached the kid, reached for his bag, and took out one of the ancient treasures Sarah had given to him. The Four encounters, in large words, were written on it.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Wang, Julian – 10

Cautiously, I stepped into the portal, not knowing where or when it was going to take me. I had no idea what was lurking inside or what would happen, but curiosity got the best of me.

Biggest mistake of my life.

But let's take a step back before the portal...

It is the year 2021 and humans are suffering from the COVID pandemic. I am an Infectious Disease Specialist, tirelessly working trying to find a cure. Today I decided to take a break and visit a temple in the Mogao Grottoes of North-west China. Pre-pandemic, this place was thronging with pilgrims and tourists from all around the world. Now, it's like a deserted ghost town. The temple was absolutely beautiful on the outside, but even more gorgeous on the inside. There were jewels encrusted in the design of the walls and windows, and the ceiling was painted with majestic dragons and shining warriors. It was certainly a feast for the eyes – I have not encountered such grandeur before! I walked to the topmost floor of the temple and found many antiques including china, porcelain vases, furniture, numerous sculptures of Buddha and many other priceless artifacts.

There was a particular sculpture of a gold Buddha that really piqued my interest. It had a looming presence which made me feel fear and respect at the same time. And there was a peculiar tiny pocket attached to the middle of its chest. For reasons unknown, my heart started palpitating as I walked towards the magnificent Buddha statue. I peeked inside the pocket and muttered to myself, "A key. What is so special about that?" I had thought it would be a piece of precious jewellery hidden in the pocket. Maybe it was a key someone misplaced? But somehow I had a feeling it wasn't. The key wasn't any ordinary key. It had an intricate design and was unusually heavy. The fabric of the pocket was very foreign too, nothing like I've ever seen. It seemed rather ancient and strange altogether, but nonetheless, it was still just a key. I breathed heavily. On one hand, I wanted to put it back inside the Buddha's pocket, but on the other hand, I wanted to examine it a little more. As it turned out, I didn't have to decide anymore because suddenly, the statue of Buddha started to glow in a bright yellow hue....

It shined with the power of all the stars in the universe, and it hummed, and it kept humming louder and louder each time. I was in a state of paralysis due to shock. I tried to run away from it but it was as if invisible vines were coming out from the ground and strangling and pulling my legs.

Something was happening right in front of my eyes.

Something indescribable and intense.

It was magical.

I tried to convince myself that my eyes were playing tricks on me. But no they weren't. Was I dreaming? I blinked hard. Twice. But it was still the same surreal scene unfolding before me. After a few agonising seconds, the statue stopped glowing. I was no longer being pulled. A secret, locked door suddenly appeared out of thin air.

It was only then I realized that the key is to be used to open the door.

My heart skipped a beat and my hand trembled nervously as I inserted the key into the keyhole. A portal was unlocked. It glowed dark purple and then started spinning extremely quickly like a tornado. Curiosity has made me step into the unknown. I just had to explore it. I just HAD to.

Within seconds, my whole body was being stretched, atom by atom, like I was being spaghettified while being sucked into a black hole. I was breathless, and couldn't think nor scream in this nightmarish horror. After what felt like an eternity, I felt like I was being pieced back together, like I was spewed out of a white hole and being unspaghettified. The entire process was extremely nauseating and weird. So weird. Shortly after, I fainted.

When I finally regained consciousness, I found myself lying on a cold, filthy floor in a pitch dark room. For a moment I thought I just woke up from a traumatising nightmare, but it didn't take long for me to realise the reality of the portal. I sniffed the air and coughed. The room was extremely dusty and had a musty smell. I heard someone

speaking outside. I gasped, “Where am I?” I asked a strange-looking man nervously, “What year is it?” He stared at me as if I were crazy, and then answered, “1340, ain’t it?”

“1340”, I repeated, “1340. Oh no. No, no, no, no, no.”, I whispered softly. This couldn’t be happening. It just couldn’t.

But it was.

“The portal has to be here somewhere,” I tried convincing myself. “If it isn’t, I will be stuck in the year 1340 from now on.”

Being an Infectious Disease Specialist, I recalled the Black Death. It was a truly terrible disease, carried by rats, and it killed about a third of the human population from the years 1346 – 1353. I do not want to be part of this horror in human history.

But years passed. After searching desperately for the portal for a few years without even coming remotely close to finding it, I realised it was futile effort and resigned myself to this ill-fate. I would have to remain in the year 1345 from now on.

Then again, perhaps there was a silver lining after all. I could warn the world about the Black Death. Perhaps I could use my 21st century knowledge to find a cure for the plague. Maybe even a vaccine too. I could help the suffering and prevent millions of people from dying.

But then I thought, for everything I do, there is a consequence. Wouldn’t I also disrupt the space-time continuum?

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Wu, Xin Ru Audrey – 10

Ryu was shocked. One second ago she had been looking at her phone and the next she was in this locked off section of The Library Cave and she had no idea where she was. She could see the exit, but something tempted her to go forwards...into the dark unknown.

So forward it is.

She turned her flashlight on and heard a groan. She saw fire sparks from the path that loomed in front of her. She ran ahead, making her footsteps as quiet as possible and saw a beauty of a beast lying in front of her. It had gleaming white scales and blue shimmering blue hair.

“Um, excuse me? I'm trying to read!” The dragon exclaimed.

Ryu let out a silent scream. “Who are you and what is your name!”

The dragon let out an exasperated sigh. “Child, if you have to know, my name is Ziyou and I am one of the last dragons.

“Well, please kindly explain to me why you are in a cut off section of the Library Cave!”

“Would you be so kind as to ask me if I'm ok? I just saved your disgrace of a life by cutting off this section from mortals like you! You haven't even asked me whether my wings were ok from you stepping on them!”

“Fine! Are you alright!”

“No, child. I have waited here for hundreds and thousands of years to meet you and you had to be so rude!”

“I'm sorry.” Ryu lowered her head. She couldn't control being in a bad mood.

“Anyways, I need you to ride on my back.” Ziyou shook her head

Ryu gulped and conditionally, Ziyou stood up and shook her gorgeous mane. Ryu now realized under the flashlight of her phone that she had stood on a part of the dragon's wing. Ziyou folded her wings and Ryu fell on Ziyou's back, and they took off from a huge hole from the side of the cliff.

She could see the sapphire jewel of the Dachuan River and after that the whole town of DunHuang. She felt Ziyou land and as she did, Ryu realized that she was in the sky. As in literally in the sky. She was on a fluffy cloud, sitting with Ziyou

“Beautiful, isn't it? I haven't been out of my cave since 1939.”

“Why World War 2?”

“Because it was originally started by dragons. At the near end of 1938, a dragon called Lei went crazy and no one knew why and he became a corrupt dragon. So now, I have to take you to where Shangdi is so you can start your journey to save Lei – and I shall accompany you.”

“What! Won't people be worried from seeing a so-called dragon flying around the sky? And besides, I am not dying at the age of 14!”

“You would do well not to do so. Dragons cannot be seen because of their scales—unless they are seen by you. Alas, I have told you enough information already. Wait until you see Shangdi. He or she shapeshifts according to the person he is talking to and their taste.”

After that, it was pindrop silence until they saw the huge red, golden gates to the dragon world.

“Isn't that Japanese?”

“Dragons are linked to both Japan and China.”

The cloud started heading up and as it did so, Ryu could see thousands of nymphs and dragons with warriors riding on their backs greeting Ziyou. They reached the very top and overhead loomed the mighty being of Shangdi.

“I see you have brought the child.I assume she has agreed to—”

“Yes.I am totally agreeing to this near death mission to save a dragon!”

Shangdi merely raised an eyebrow.

“Hello,child.I see you are...upset about this...kidnapping as you think of it.Do not worry.It will only take a week to train you.”

“No one said I needed to train!”

“You do.And you’ll be doing it with me.”

“Is there wifi?”

“Of course.We’re not savages.”

After her comforting nap that reminded her so much of home,she got up to take a bite of food with Ziyu and Shangdi.

“How do you like it here?”Ziyu started nervously.

“Well,The evening night sky is beautiful.”

“I could teach you about it,if you would like!”Shangdi exclaimed.He had morphed into a young teenage girl.

And so the training began.

Ryu was shaken awake by Shangdi at 12:00a.m in the morning.

“Awake for lessons,Shangdi?”

“You can call me Alaya.That’s my real name – for now.”

Alaya handed Ryu a bunch of books and started bringing Ryu to the rooftop.To be honest,Ryu didn’t know if she would come back alive,but she was determined to have an adventure of a lifetime.

The Race to Bring Back Peace: A Journey to the Mogao Caves

Singapore International School, Yan, Joanna – 10

Legend has it that in a faraway land, a noble monk named Yuezun once had an unexplainable vision. He was doing his usual worship at the temple, when suddenly a flash of red smoke struck before his eyes and in front of him were a thousand radiant buddhas standing with great significance. At first it was all in a haze, but the smoke grew thinner, and the radiant light grew stronger and brighter until all he could see was a thousand streaks of light that shined like the brightest sunbeams in the morning. After that, Yuezun came home and started to excavate the caves where he believed the buddhas lived. It took him 10 years, and he finally discovered the caves which grew into thousands of them over time, just like the a thousand buddhas he once saw.

Eventually, some of the caves were demolished by the unforgiving climate and destroyed by the shifting sands of the desert. However, the legend of the A Thousand Buddhas' Caves lives on for millions of years, and it's still being passed on today...

The mellow sun rises over the sands of the desert oasis town of Dunhuang. It was dawn, and the sun had just peeked through the mountains, releasing its warm rays onto the ground, as if covering it with a quilt. The merchants who were stirred awake early in the morning by the gentle warmth of the sun, were busy getting prepared for the trading of the day. Embroidered carpets, satiny silk, gleaming jewels, juicy grapes, tangy wines... There was almost everything you could possibly dream of. After preparation and preparation, the merchants were finally ready. They wore headcloths and a long silk fabric that both acted like a shield from the scorching sun and a protection to keep the sands and wind away. Despite wearing special clothing, they were already used to the flaming sun, nor did they pay much attention to the boiling temperatures.

When they arrived at the market, they were all in awe and astonishment that they gaped their mouths like goldfish. The market was crowded with eager customers, and piled with shops that would entrance anyone who stares at it like the witch who casted a spell on Hansel and Gretel when they got engrossed by all the gooey candies, fluffy marshmallows, and chocolate-coated sugar rooftops. Merchants and shop owners called out for all sorts of things, ranging from fresh eggs to apples, and shimmering diamonds to embroidered carpets. The merchants just walked along the stone-paved streets of the market until they found a place to sit and spread out their carpet.

Suddenly, the porcelain vase on the merchants' carpet was gently shaking as if it was scared and started to quiver. Then the glass cups and bowls began to shake too, followed by all the other things in the market. "What is happening? What is happening?" A faint woman's voice could be heard in the distance. Footsteps of frantic customers trying to find the exit were also within earshot, and all at once, the whole ground was shaking violently, as if it was trying to swallow the entire market in one gulp. "Oh on. Here it comes again. Earthquake..." The eldest merchant, John muttered to himself. Instinctively, he grabbed hold of the carpet, and shouted at the top of his lungs, "EVERYONE GET OUT OF HERE! EARTHQUAKE HAS STRUCK! EVERYONE OUT IMMEDIATELY!"

When everyone was out, John frantically walked around and asked if there was anything he could do to reduce the harms the earthquake would bring. Some just shook their heads in grief, while others simply shrugged and sighed, but one man had a peculiar idea. "Legend has it that in a faraway place, stands the great Mogao Caves where the A Thousand Buddhas live. They were known to be able to control the universe and how it works, maybe they can help." John immediately asked with big beads of sweat on his forehead, "Then where exactly are the Mogao Caves?" The man sighed. "No one knows, but it's somewhere here in Dunhuang." John raised his hand and called out to everyone, "Who volunteers to join me in search for the Mogao Caves?" Instantly, almost everyone raised their hands and volunteered to participate in the fight to bring back peace to this town.

John and the other volunteers traveled for three days and three nights, but there was still no sign of the caves. Others all tried to convince him to give up, but John's persistence was too hard to break, it was a stone that would never crash even if you threw it down a mountain. On the fourth day, they were running out of food and it was

difficult to search for a single drop of water in the midst of the desert. Some gave up and traveled back, while some others got terribly sick and had to be sent home. In the end, John was only left with four other volunteers.

Even though there were challenges and difficulties, the sixth day began perfectly. The sun was smiling brightly in the sky, stretching out its long arms of warmth. John and the others woke up early in the morning, and started their work again. While they were riding on their camels, Benjamin, a bright and adventurous young man said casually, "They say when you are in bad luck for a long time, you'll soon be in very good luck. Look at today's weather! I bet today's the day our luck's gonna change." The others all smile, even John. It was always nice having someone who would cheer you up even in the hardest of times like a lanternfly bringing light to the plain darkness of the night.

As they walked, they found themselves wandering into a cave temple, a temple that looked like 7 houses stacked on top of each other. The start of the adventure had just begun!

An Adventure to Maogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Chen, Zhixuan – 10

Long time ago, there was a fifteen-year old girl called Emma lived in a desert village with her good friend Kelly. Kelly and she were scholars. Emma had long hair and big eyes. She was also thin. She was always helpful and brave but the main problem of her body was her left foot. The wound of the foot was untreated.

One day, Emma heard someone said, “I want to go to Mogao Caves! It is said that the secret of the rise and fall of Buddhism is hidden there.” Emma was curious so she wanted to go to Mogao Caves too.

The second day, she asked Kelly go to Mogao Caves with her. “Yes, ok. I am ready to go there already.” Kelly said. On the way to Mogao Caves, they encountered the sandstorm for many times but they did not give up and kept going with the fierce wind.

When they arrived Mogao Caves, it was night time already. Still they wanted to visit the caves. Unfortunately, there was a security guard outside the entrance of the cave. When they approached it, the guard said, “You cannot go inside! It is night now.” “Please! We want to go in to the Mogao Caves to do some research on the mysteries of the wise!” Emma said. “Umm...Let me think about it. Ok, you can enter the Caves but I will follow you.” said the security guard. Then, they went in to the Mogao Caves excitedly.

When they got in to the Mogao Caves, a white dragon appeared in front of them and howled, “If you gladly promised to serve me, I will give you a pass. Otherwise, you must leave me alone now!” “If you let me get through, I will give you some great wild honey from England.” said Kelly. When Kelly gladly served under the dragon, Emma was recording the features of the white dragon.” We can leave now.” Emma said. “I have drawn the Dragon down on the paper. We discovered a new creature in this world.” On the second day, when they decided to stay in the Mogao Caves and continued their research in the hope that they would find out more about the mythical creature but they didn’t see the Dragon since then. Eventually they became famous because they discovered the secrets of Buddhism as well.

An Unforgettable Experience

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Chow, Sze Wai Hannah – 10

Once upon a time, James and his friend Mark wanted to explore the Mogao Caves. James lived in Dunhuang near Mogao Caves with his family. He was brave, kind, honest and shy. His job was an explorer. He was good at observation and investigation. He wore a hat and bringing a pair of binoculars. His flaw was meeting strangers. His main problems in his life were a lack of self-confidence and poor social skills.

He had a friend called Mark who was a traveller. Mark was good at taking photos and making videos. Marks's flaw was that he was unrealistic and he didn't have a good relationship with his family members and he had unstable income.

James met Mark when he was travelling in Dunhuang. They became good friends. They decided to explore Mogao Caves together. When they reached Mogao Caves, the cave was nearly closed. They entered the Caves as soon as possible and watched a Buddha wall painting attentively. Suddenly, the Buddha in the painting began to move and talked to them. The Buddha said, "I was trapped in this mural painting for many years. Could you do me a favour?" James and Mark were astonished by the Buddha. They said, "What could I do for you?" Suddenly, the Buddha sucked James and Mark in the mural painting and tried to hurt them.

They tried to escape from the panting. Finally, they used all their efforts to break away from the painting. Luckily, they returned to Mogao Caves safely. After this strange incident, James became braver and stronger. He invited Mark to explore more Mogao Caves next time.

The Adventure of Coco and Yoyo

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Feng, Yun Kei Maggie – 9

Coco and Yoyo were two businesswomen. They said that their cultural relics in Mogao Caves belonged to them, and they wanted to sell them all! The white dragon said, 'What? I will go there now.' Then, Coco and Yoyo opened the secret room door, and ran into the shuttle.

One minute later, they arrived at their destination, the white dragon flew over and said, 'What are going to do?' He felt panicked, 'Umm, Dragon, can you transform? Do you have any functions? Coco asked. 'Sure! What's wrong?' 'Can you turn me into a rich man first?' Then, you change some fake gold coins for us. After that, we hide the rope and walk into the caves. Yoyo, you go and catch them!'

Then, Coco and Yoyo swagger into the caves. They told the merchants that I was going to buy the entire Mogao Caves. Then, they took out a bunch of fake gold coins and gave it to the merchant. Coco said to the merchant, 'Come closer. I have a secret to tell you.' And yoyo secretly took out the prepared rope, and when the merchant came near, he tied up the merchant.

Finally, Coco took those businessmen to the police. She walked into the caves and she murmured, 'These cultural relics and murals are amazing and spectacular!'

Incredible Adventure to Mogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Fong, Yuen – 10

Long long ago, there was a man called Paul who lived in Hong Kong with his old dog, Ben. He liked drinking tomato soup and he was very afraid of snakes. He was good at hunting, He used to hunt a lot of animals.

He was a photographer. He wanted to be the best photographer in the world but he had a lot of difficulties. He had really bad eyesight but he didn't give up. So, he decided to go to the Mogao Caves because the view there was beautiful. Then he could sell the photos for a living.

The next day, Paul went to Mogao Caves. When he arrived the caves, there was a guard sitting in front of the cave. Paul asked, 'Can I go into the cave?' The guard said, 'No, it is closed today.' Paul said, 'I just want to take photos of Mogao Cave, Can you allow me to enter the cave, please?' But the guard refused so Paul was disappointed and left the cave. Suddenly, he saw a gold dragon sitting on the grass. Its legs were hurt. Paul dressed the wounds and gave it some food. The dragon said, 'Thank you for your help. How can I repay you for your kindness?' Paul asked, 'Can you help me scare the guard away? ' The dragon promised to do so.

Then, the dragon did as it was told and made the guard run away. Then Paul walked into one of the biggest Mogao Caves and took a lot of beautiful photos. He was immediately amazed as there were a lot of gold nuggets near the murals on the walls. He was very excited.

Finally, Paul became a rich man and the most famous photographer in the world.

Magic Friendship

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Ho, Wing Laam – 10

‘Then what should I do?’ Nina said nervously. ‘emmm.....there is still a way.’ said the doctor. ‘What is it?’ Nina replied excitedly. ‘Because your mum’s illness is too serious.....you need to go to the Moago Caves to find the rare material.’ said the doctor. ‘Then how can I get there?’ asked Nina. ‘The Mogao Caves are on the cliff at the eastern foot of Mingsha Mountain in Moago Town.’ replied the doctor. ‘Ok! Thanks!’ Nina said happily.

Then, Nina left home. ‘The doctor gave me a map. Moago Caves is very near my village!’ Nina saw a carriage. She asked, ‘Excuse me, can you help me get to the Moago Caves?’ ‘I only can get to under the mountain.....’ replied the man. ‘It’s Ok.’ said Nina.

When Nina went to the Moago Caves, someone followed her. ‘I heard that she will go to the Moago Caves and find a rare material! I just need to follow her and wait for her to find the rare material and I will steal it! ha ha ha.....’ ‘The map said I need to go straight ahead.....It was easier than I thought!’ But the road is too long, Nina felt so tired so she rested under the tree. Nina felt very tired so she fell asleep. The girl found out that Nina fell asleep. She tried to find something in Nina’s backpack. ‘Maybe she has money in her backpack!’ said the girl. But suddenly Nina woke up. Nina said, ‘Who.....who are.....you?’ The girl said, ‘My.....my name is Anna. I.....saw your things on the ground.’ ‘Oh! thank you very much!’ ‘Ah.....No need to thank me.’ said Anna. ‘Are you going to Moago Caves too?’ asked Nina. ‘Yes.....’ replied Anna. ‘Then.....we can be friends!’ Nina said it excitedly. ‘Friends?’ Anna thought.

When they reached the Moago Caves, a man stopped them. ‘The caves are closed, if you want to take photos please come back here tomorrow!’ said the man. ‘We are not here to take photos! We.....’ said Nina. ‘I said please come tomorrow!’ Nina wanted to argue with the man but Anna stopped her. ‘We left some important things inside the cave, can you let us in?’ said Anna. ‘emmm.....Then that’s ok!’ said the man. When the girls went into the caves, Nina said, ‘You lied just now?’

Anna said, ‘It’s ok to lie in an emergency!’ Nina said, ‘You’re right.....’ ‘Suddenly, Nina

Said, ‘I found the rare material!’ Anna said, ‘Quick!’ When they got the rare material, Nina said, ‘Ah.....’ ‘What’s wrong?’ asked Anna. ‘My heart feels so hurt.....’ ‘Suddenly a sound said, ‘I have two options for you. one is money. The other one is your friend. What will you choose?’ Anna without hesitation said, ‘I will choose my friend!’ After saying this, Anna took the rare material and said, ‘Eat this.’ But Nina said, ‘No, I can’t eat this.....’ ‘Why?’ asked Anna. ‘My mum has an illness, she needs this’ ‘Then let me cut it.....’ ‘No! you can’t. If you cut it, the effect will be lost!’ ‘What should I do?’ Suddenly, Nina said, ‘Why you are crying?’ ‘You said you are hurt and.....’ A sound said, ‘You are not greedy anymore so the Moago Caves helped you.’

Finally, Nina and Anna are best friends.

The Treasure in Mogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Hung, Tsz Ching – 9

Five hundred years ago, an explorer Tim and his assistant Mary received a message about treasure in Mogao Caves. They lived far away from Mogao Caves. They bought some tools and started their adventure.

When they were going to Mogao Caves, they saw a huge sandstorm coming. They ran very fast and wanted to get rid of the sandstorm. They saw a shadow in the sandstorm. Tim asked the shadow, 'What is your name? Why do you come here?' The shadow answered, 'I am Ben. I want to find the treasures in Mogao Caves.' They found the treasure with Ben together.

They finally arrived at the Caves and saw a guard there. He didn't let anyone go inside. Ben said, 'I have a good idea!' Ben made the clothes like the guard's. He wore the clothes and shifted duty with the guard. The guard left. Then, they entered the Mogao Caves.

When they went inside, the door automatically closed and they were very afraid. Many boxes were opening and a lot of zombies jumped out and chased them. Ben saw some mystery patterns in the ceiling. He solved the patterns by using the corresponding words of the floor, Ben stepped on the words and the second door opened!

When they went into the third door, the door didn't close. The locust didn't move. They saw a big Buddha. As they were thinking 'Why doesn't the locust move?' A big rock suddenly fell from above. Tim caught the rock at once. Mary and Ben also held on the rock. Ben saw a big hole on the wall. They wanted to throw the rock out. But when they went near the hole, the hole disappeared. They stepped back and threw the rock out. A box of treasure flew inside. They wanted to open it. The box couldn't be opened. It needed a password. The password was some words. All of a sudden, Ben remembered the words on the floor. It could be the password to open the box. They could be success and there would be treasure inside.

Ben didn't want to share the treasure with them. He took the treasure and said to them, 'The treasure is mine.' The locusts attacked Ben. He ran to the door and killed all the zombies. The door could not be opened. Although Ben was very intelligent, he had no idea for what is happening. Tim and Mary gradually caught him up. The door needed the power of unity. When they went out of Mogao Caves, Tim and Mary were very angry. They asked Ben, 'Why did you betray us?' Ben also said sorry to them. So they forgave him. They shared the treasure with him. In the end, they lived happily afterwards.

The Lost Wisdom in the Mogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Hung, Yee Lam – 10

Once there was a legendary book named Universal Wisdom hidden in the Mogao Caves. The Universal Wisdom was recorded more than five thousand years of global intelligence. Once you had this book, you would be able to resolve all problems.

The story started with two people who loved environmental protection. They were Pucci and Pinky. Pucci was good at speaking many languages and painting. She was also an archaeologist. Pinky was an experienced traveller, who was good at science and problem solving. One day, they came to understand that they must seek immediate solutions for problems leading to the rapid depletion of the Earth's ozone layer. Hence, they went to the largest library to find the answer.

At the deep corner of the library, a shabby and dusty manuscript caught their attention. Then, they opened the manuscript, which mentioned the legendary book 'Universal Wisdom' that gave all solutions for the Earth. Rumours said that it was preserved in Mogao Caves. After considerable discussions, they decided to pack up and started their adventure mission.

Pucci and Pinky travelled across the Gobi Desert to the Mogao Caves. Suddenly, a huge sandstorm swept across the desert. The sky became gloomy and terrifying. They could not see anything and completely lost their direction. The sandstorm lasted for a long time, which made them very frightened. All of a sudden, they saw a golden flash in the dark. The flash was getting closer and closer. In an instant, they saw a colourful shining deer with seven colours all over it. Pucci asked surprisingly, 'How come the deer can walk around in the sandstorm?' The Rainbow Deer looked at Pucci and Pinky and nodded. Then it headed back into the dark desert. Pinky shouted hurriedly, 'Let's follow the Rainbow Deer. It may lead us out of the desolate desert.' After a while, Pucci and Pinky saw more light in the far distance near a mountain. When they were closer to the light, they recognized that the light came from a temple on the cliff. Pinky exclaimed excitedly, 'They must be Mogao Caves!' Thereafter, Pucci rushed and explained to the Rainbow Deer the reason for coming to the Mogao Caves. The Rainbow Deer led them up the cliff. Pinky noticed that each cave had a number on its doorway. Finally, the Rainbow Deer stopped in front of the cave numbered 322 and nodded again to guide Pucci and Pinky into the cave.

The square-shaped cave was not so big but full of murals on the walls and roof. The walls were fully covered with intricate paintings of different Buddhas. When they looked around the cave, there seemed to be thousands and thousands of pairs of eyes staring at them curiously. Although Pucci was scared, she still tried to explain their intention to borrow the Universal Wisdom to save the Earth in detail. It looked like the biggest Buddha instructed the Rainbow Deer leading Pucci and Pinky to another cave. Next, they moved to a cave numbered 285. In the Cave, they noticed a green parrot. Unexpectedly, the Rainbow Deer brought them into one of the murals. Before Pucci and Pinky realized it, they found themselves were taken into the mural. They started to get anxious. The green parrot was walking toward them, and they also figured out the green parrot's beak was missing. Then Pucci took out her paint brush from her backpack and drew a beak for the green parrot. After that, the green parrot began to move and speak. Pucci smiled, 'At last, someone can talk to us.' She kept communicating with the parrot about the Universal Wisdom in different languages. The parrot replied patiently, 'The Universal Wisdom is possibly in the cave #17, which is a library cave that contains more than 30000 manuscripts. You will be able to find it there. Good Luck!' At the same time, a lot of damaged figures in the murals surrounded Pucci and Pinky. They queued up excitedly for Pucci and Pinky to repaint their missing body parts. Eventually, Pucci and Pinky finished all the paintings. All the figures danced with joy. Therefore, they moved forward to the cave #17 without further delay.

When they reached the cave #17, they found the Rainbow Deer had disappeared. The time was running short, Pucci and Pinky entered the cave by themselves. As they stepped into the caves, there were a large number of manuscripts piled up approximately three meters high in the dim room. It would take years to search the Universal Wisdom from more than 30000 manuscripts. Just when they felt so hopeless, the Rainbow Deer led numerous repainted figures to help Pucci and Pinky. Incredibly, they shuttled and wandered between those 30000 manuscripts swiftly and cautiously instead of opening each of them. In less than a week, with their help, Pucci and Pinky finally found the Universal Wisdom in a stone box located at the bottom of the 30000 plus manuscripts.

Pinky studied engrossedly the Universal Wisdom and ended up finding a solution of resolving the Earth's ozone layer. Pucci and Pinky sincerely appreciated the repainted figures' assistance and polished the Rainbow Deer dusty body with their magic paint brush in return. In the end, they promised to be back to Mogao Caves and repaint the other damaged figures once they completed the mission. On the other hand, they wished to learn more from other caves in order to broaden their knowledge and explore more about the hidden 5000 years history of mysterious Mogao Caves.

The Golden Buddha Statue

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Lam, Ching Yan Tweety – 9

Mogao Caves is a place that has been here for over 1,000 years. Taoist Wan Yuanlu was the one who create it. Inside the cave, there are thousands of glorious Buddha paintings. Some are pretty but some are ugly. Besides Buddha paintings, there are also Buddha sculptures. Some are massive. Some are tiny. And there is a secret one...

Ring, ring, ring! A huge sound rang out in the police station. All the policemen and policewomen stood in the centre. Training time! Alan thought while he ran to the centre. 'Today we will learn about how to shoot people with our guns,' said Sir Peter the leader of all of the police. 'You must find a teammate with you,' asked Sir Peter. Alan immediately found his best friend, Sarah. 'Sarah! Sarah! Let's be teammates!' Alan said with excitement. 'Chill! Calm down! Of course. I would be your teammate, Alan,' answered Sarah kindly.

After everyone found their teammates, they started training. Everyone did very well on their task. Once it was Alan's turn, he kept shooting the wrong spot of the dummy. When the bullets ran out. He only shot it two times. 'Aw come on! I wanted to be a constable!' he said softly. 'That's enough training today,' announced. Sir Peter. 'Alan, come here,' asked Sir Peter. 'What has gotten into you? You did wonderful before!' said Sir Peter angrily. 'I've been searching secrets of the Mogao Caves recently and I wanted to go there for so long!' answered Alan. 'You know the Mogao Caves are dangerous, right? There are mysterious creatures,' said Sir Peter. 'I can't let you go. It's too dangerous for you. You're not highly trained for that yet' 'Fine...' answered Alan. The Mogao Caves...what is that? Another police thought. I should go home and search about it...

At 6 p.m., almost all the police went home except some that needed to work more. Alan invited Sarah to come to his house and they did some research about the Mogao Caves. 'If I want to be a constable, I have to go there!' said Alan confidently to Sarah. 'But didn't Sir Peter say it was dangerous?' asked Sarah. 'It is but if I want to be brave and strong, I have to go there. No matter what will happen!' yelled Alan. 'Ok, we can go. But if we get in danger, it's your fault,' said Sarah. There's another problem, when Sir Peter told Alan not to go in the Mogao Caves, Alan searched more secrets about the Mogao Caves and planned to head there in secret without anyone noticing...he wanted to take a look at the Golden Buddha Statue. It's hidden underground below the Mogao Caves. No one ever found it...

The next day, it was Saturday. Alan and Sarah were planning to go to the Mogao Caves after work, including the mysterious police...On Saturday after work, they all went home and packed all the stuffs they needed and head straight to the Mogao Caves. Alan told Sarah to meet him at the bus station. He also invited a special guest. When they all arrived at the bus station, Sarah saw a teen standing next to Alan. 'Who is she, Alan?' asked Sarah. 'Oh! That's Lucy. She's 14 years old. She's my friend's little sister,' answered Alan. 'Isn't she a bit too young to go on a trip like this?' asked Sarah. 'She has a special power. You'll see later,' said Alan.

When they arrived at the Mogao Caves, it was already 8 p.m. and it was already closed. 'Alan, we should go back. It's already closed,' said Sarah. 'No, it's the perfect time cause no other people will bother us,' said Alan. 'Yeah! I agree,' said Lucy. When they walked in front of the giant door, the entrance of the Mogao Caves, a guard was standing there. The guard said, 'I wasn't expecting visitors at this time? We closed for a long time! Please come back tomorrow if you want to visit.' 'Sir we would like to go in and find secrets about them. People said there's a Golden Buddha somewhere inside. Do you know where is it?' asked Alan kindly. 'NO! There are nothing like that inside! GO AWAY!' said the guard angrily as he was about to go inside. 'Wait!' a voice came. It was Ivan! 'What are you doing here, Ivan?' asked Alan and Sarah shockingly. 'I heard what you and Sir Peter said,' said Ivan 'So I wanted to come but I didn't expect you guys were here too.' Said Ivan. 'The guard didn't let us in but I have an idea!' said Alan 'Guard, if you don't let us in, we will tie you up until we come out.' 'I'd like to see you try,' said the guard. 'Lucy, it's your job,' said Alan. 'On it!' replied Lucy. Lucy tied the guard's body with her long thick hair. 'Woah! So that's Lucy's power!' said Sarah. The guard finally said 'Yes,' and let them in. Lucy released the guard.

In the Mogao Caves, there were a lot of Buddha painting and statues. Some paintings were pretty. Some

were ugly. The Buddha statues were huge! 'Those statues scared me,' Lucy thought as she kept walking. Alan brought a gold detector to detect the golden Buddha statues. He looked through the ground until he heard a beep sound. He took out his shovel and started digging. The detector started beeping louder and louder. They finally found the Golden Buddha statue. 'Woah! It shines so bright!' said the four of them. 'I think we should bring it to the museum!' said Sir Peter. 'Sir Peter?!' The three of them shouted. 'Yup, it's me! I knew you guys would come, so I came too,' said Sir Peter. After they got out of the caves, they went to the museum and placed it into a safe and protected container. Then they all went home and slept. It was the most amazing day of their lives.

An Unforgettable Experience in Mogao

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Lee, Yin Yat – 10

Hello, my name is Aman and I'm ten years old. I like reading a lot. My dad is a policeman, and he likes to read also. We like to go to the bookstore together in our leisure time. Yesterday we planned to go to a bookstore again to spend our weekend afternoon. In the store, I was immediately attracted by a book about Mogao Grottoes at once. Suddenly, I was standing in a mysterious place, there was a woman with a lot of silver earrings and diamond rings which were all expensive! Although I'd never been to this place and met that woman before, I had an odd sense of somewhere in time I entered it. The woman talked to me, 'Long time no see, Rick. I understand you don't know me in this life, but you must go to Mogao Caves. There, you will know everything about me.' After that, my dad woke me up and it was just a dream. I told him about the dream and wished to go to Mogao Grottoes, Dad agreed and he said maybe Grandpa who lived there could help me find out the answer. We would have a Mogao Caves adventure in the coming summer holidays.

One day, when my dad was talking with his colleague about our summer adventure in the canteen, a man who also was a policeman, but my dad did not actually know him "Can we talk?" he said to my dad. His name was Crono, and he dreamed of a strange woman many times recently. In the dream, the women told him that he must go to Mogao Caves because someone will destroy all the caves with a bomb. A boy with his father will help you.

Finally, three of us were here in the Mogao Grottoes. We walked around the caves, and I sensed a man in a cap and with a big bag. Thus, I suggested to Crono that he should follow him. While we were in the center area, the man took out a bomb from his bag. "Freeze! Don't move or I will shoot you!" Crono shouted at the man. The man tried to run away so Crono shot his leg and held him in the ground. We protected Mogao caves, and what the woman said in the dream was all coming true. Crono and I needed to know who the woman was. When My dad brought us to my Grandpa's address, Grandpa was already sitting there and waiting for us. He explained he was the protector of Mogao Caves, and the woman who we saw in our dream was his partner, Prissla. She could go inside the human mind. Grandpa continued that Crono and I were monks in one of the previous incarnations named Rick and Morty. Grandpa and Prissla were old already and needing help this time to stop the bomb to destroy Mogao Caves. That's the reason for my dream and also Crono's dream.

These were amazing and unforgettable experiences that Crono and I had never had. Mogao Grottoes is a place full of historical value. The cave there contains some of the finest examples of Buddhist art spanning a period of 1,000 years. We must cherish and protect this place.

The Journey of the Monk

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Leung, Kathryn – 9

Once upon a time, there was a little boy named Tom. He went to Mogao Grottoes with his parent.

He was excited because he saw many Buddha statues and paintings. The paintings had a lot of unique things. A lot of people were praying to Buddha statues. When he prayed to Buddha, he found a peaceful feeling inside his soul. He liked the place so much that he asked his parents to let him explore more in Mogao Grottoes. The more he explored, the more he found himself belong to this place. He even found mummified monk to be spiritual and respectful.

This was the first time he found something that he should be reverent to this extend. He wanted to become a monk and work there until the end of his life. He told his parents, “I will come back someday.” When he grew up, he went back to Mogao Grottoes and became the next Dalai Lama.

Discovery of Mogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Leung, Shuk Ying – 10

It was a sunny day in Kaka Planet. Bob was in a bad mood because teacher Mary gave them a piece of homework about the secret of Earth. But he knew very little about the Earth. Then he went to the library to search but the library also had very little information.

The librarian's words made him upset, ‘The Earth is far away from the Kaka Planet and the most important thing was that the Earth was a big water ball and the people in Kaka Planet were very afraid of water. We are special robots with half a human body and half a robot body. When we touch water, we will crash. So no one wanted to go to the Earth and did the research about it.’ ‘Oh! That’s a trouble!’ While Bob was thinking about what to do, he saw his classmate Lily also looking up information in the library. She was trying to find some information but failed. She asked Bob for help but Bob said he had the same problem. They felt so bad. Suddenly, Lily told to him, ‘Don’t look so worried. Bob, I have an idea. We can go to the Earth. Two weeks ago, my brother bought a newest spaceship that could drive by itself. I will ask him to borrow it to us.’ ‘That sounds a good idea. Lily.’ Bob nodded.

The next day Lily said happily to Bob at the end of the class, ‘My brother agreed to lend me his spaceship.’ Bob yelled, ‘Great! When are we leaving?’ Lily thought for a while and smiled, ‘What about this Saturday?’ ‘OK!’ Bob nodded.

In Saturday morning, Lily and Bob woke up early and went to the spaceship. What a beautiful spaceship! It liked a giant nice-looking silver plate. They hop up and heard the machine say, ‘Where is the destination?’ ‘Earth!’ Lily called nervously. And then the engine started working and they flew super fast.

Two hours later, Lily saw a blue water ball not far away from them. That’s Earth! She was excited. A few minutes later, they heard a voice, ‘Where to land?’ Lily replied quickly, ‘Don’t land in the sea. Land on the place without water.’ After a few minutes, the spaceship landed on a desert. Bob and Lily looked at the sand outside, confused for a moment, and then got out of the spaceship. That's really a place without water. So hot! Suddenly there’s a sandstorm came, they hurried found a cave to hide.

After they went in, they found that it was not an ordinary cave. They saw a lot of statues and drawings inside. It's amazing! They walked close to see. However, they saw an old man squatting in the corner with a backpack, digging with tools. ‘What is he doing?’ They were really curious so they went to say hello. The old man scared and fell to the ground in shock when he saw them. Lily smiled and introduced themselves, ‘We are from Kaka Planet. This is Bob. I am Lily. Where is it?’ Seeing that they were so friendly, the old man was no longer afraid. He stood up and told to them, ‘This is the Mogao Caves. I am Dr. Lewis, a scientist. Nice to meet you.’ ‘What were you doing just now?’ Bob asked curiously. ‘I am looking for fossils.’ Dr. Lewis replied. ‘That's cool! Dr. Lewis, can you show us the Mogao Caves? We want to know all about it.’ Dr. Lewis shook his head and explained, ‘No, because there’re over 700 statues and drawings, and also more than 1000 caves here and some of them were haven’t dug up yet. So

you can't visit them all in a short time. But I can show you around some caves nearby.' Then, they followed Dr. Lewis and started to visit the Mogao Caves. Suddenly, Lily pointed to the wall and yelled, 'Bob! Look at that picture on the wall, the people on it look like us!' Bob and Dr. Lewis looked closer, also shocked. The little people drawn on the wall, wearing half a mask, led people with no mask to find water, taught them to make fire, helped them to build houses, and finally, the people with half a mask left by a spaceship! Really amazing! That means the people of Kaka Planet used to live on the Earth and helped the people here. 'That's really a cool discovery!' Bob rolled his eyes, put up his hand and took a picture. Then they kept going. Suddenly, the light on Lily's chest were shining, she pressed the button, and then they heard her brother's voice, 'Lily, where are you? It's time to go home!' Lily looked at her watch and realized that it is already night! It's time to leave, or the family would be worried about them. So they thanked Dr. Lewis and said goodbye to him.

Back to Kaka Planet, Bob and Lily wrote the homework together. The homework titled—— 'Discovery of Mogao Caves'. Teacher Mary gave them full marks after reading it. Bob and Lily were so happy!

The Life of the Yinlna

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Wan, Nga Huen – 10

Yinlna was a 25 year old woman. She lived in Hong Kong with her mum and sister . She was kind , helpful and clever. She worked as a Maths teacher at a secondary school. Her goal was to go to Mogao

Caves .It was because she was curious about that had to do with Magao

Caves . She was really good at speaking Japanese , History and Mathematics .Yinlna had a big nose and a small mouth.She was thin and tall .She had a secret . Her secret was that she was a mermaid!

One day, she went to the Mogao Caves . She could see a lot of presents. But sne got lost. She couldn't find a way back. Suddenly, Yinlna saw a green dragon and the green dragon said,“Why do you here?”Yinlan said ,“It is because I want to know about History , I've got lost . Can you take me back? “Yes,I can .But you should give me some food and I will take you back.”the green dragon said.

But Yinlna didn't have food to give to the green dragon . Then , the green dragon said ,“Maybe I should find some food to eat.”Yinlna said, “Where?” the green dragon said ,“It's you!”

Finally, the green dragon ate Yinlna bit by bit. She should never entered this mountain from the beginning.

An Adventurous Experience

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Wong, Tsz Ching Hebe – 9

In the past, there was a 17-year-old scholar. Her name was Offener. Another one was a 32-year-old man, Mr. Ng. Mr.Ng was a security guard. He guarded the Mogao Grottoes every day, protecting the place. The scholar Offener wanted to enter the Mogao Grottoes to obtain some historical relics for research and investigation.

One evening, the scholar, Offener came to Mogao Grottoes and said to the security guard, Mr.Ng, ‘Sir, can you let me go into Mogao Grottoes for investigation.’ Mr. Ng said, ‘It is late now. Please come back tomorrow.’ ‘No, I can't let you go inside.’ Mr. Ng said again. But Offener still didn't give up. She still begged Mr. Ng again and again. ‘Just let me in, please. Can you, please? I will definitely not destroy anything inside.’ Mr. Ng added, ‘After arguing for so long, important historical and cultural heritage...’

Suddenly ,there was a thunder in the sky, and a huge and mighty White dragon King was flying in the sky, Offener and Mr. Ng were shocked. At that moment, Offener took out a magic wand from her pocket and waved it to the White Dragon King. She swung it a few times at White Dragon King while chanting the spell ‘White Dargon King, White Dragon King, I want you to listen to my instructions. When I ride on your back, scare the guard away, and then fly into the Mogao Grottoes. Thousands and zero...’ When her words fell, and the world seemed to follow what Offener said. The White Dragon King immediately let her ride on his back. First, it scared the security guard away and then Offener broke into the Mogao Grottoes.’ The cave allows her to go into the Mogao Grottoes. After they successfully broke into Mogao Grottoes, the White Dragon King and the Offener obtained the treasure of the ancient queens from the Mogao Grottoes and also some dazzling gold.They said, ‘Ha, ha, ha, the cultural relics are in our hands!’ In order to thank the White Dragon King for his assistance , Offener gave the White Dragon King some gold and treasure.

Many years later, Offener relied on the information she collected in the Mogao Grottos to conduct a research. She obtained abundant academic results which was well-known internationally. At that time, the government sent lots of special police officers to besiege her residence, convicting her for violating the historical relics. Offener was in a panic and she felt terrifying. ‘What...what ? I will... I just spend the rest of my life, like this?’ So she hid herself in an emergency rucksack, and then pressed a button with a rocket pattern from the rucksack and with one press, she pierced yunxia flying like a bird far away from the world to live in seclusion...

Mogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Wong, Yuet Ting – 10

Now there are 735 caves in the Mogao Caves! A man called Pakco Wong, an explorer who is full of curiosity, is interested in these caves.

Last month, Pakco was going to visit the Mogao Caves officer, Mr. Wu. When he arrived Mogao Caves, the officer, Mr. Wu asked, 'Who are you? You are not supposed to be here.' Pakco said anxiously, 'Please! I am an explorer. I just want to look at some cultural relics and take some photos.' 'Sorry! I am off duty soon,' said Mr. Wu and now it is nighttime, so please come again tomorrow.' 'Ok.' said Pakco sadly.

He found a magic spring on his way to home. The spring was magical and it was as shiny as a sun. He also found a paper. It said, 'If you drink the water for someone, that person will listen to you, no matter what you want.' 'Um.....if I give it to Mr. Wu, will he let me go into the Mogao Caves?' Pakco thought for a while and said, 'Let's try!'

He went back to Mogao Caves, He saw Mr. Wu packing his bag. Mr. Wu saw Pakco coming so he said, 'Oh! Mr. Explorer, why are you here?' Pakco didn't answer, he smiled and said, 'Mr. Wu, do you want to drink this water?' 'Yes! I'd like to,' said Mr. Wu. But he didn't know it was a magic spring's water that will make him listen to Pakco!

A few minutes later, a magical thing happened! Mr. Wu brought Pakco into the caves. Pakco was happy, it was because he could finish his report!

This story tells us to learn about Pakco because Pakco had a big trouble at first. He couldn't go into the Mogao Caves so he couldn't submit his report on time that made him mad. But he didn't give up. He thought for an idea to solve the problem. So I want you to learn to be patient like Pakco.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Yao, Chun Yu – 9

One day, Max and his little sister Sue went to the library. They read the travelling book about the Mogao Grottoes. This book was very interesting. Suddenly, Max looked at the sky. The sun was about to set. Max said, "Come on, Sue! It's time to go home!" But Sue didn't want to go home and she wanted to continue to read this book. Suddenly, the library was spinning, faster and faster. Max squeezed his eyes shut. He held on his sister. Then everything was still. Max opened his eyes. Sunlight slanted through the window.

At the same time, the library became a cave. "Wh—where are we?" stammered Max. They looked out of the window. The Pteranodon was flying in the sky. "What happened to us?" said Sue. She looked at Max. He looked at her. "I don't know, but the view is like the travelling book about the Mogao Grottoes," said Max.

The Pteranodon stopped under the tree. Sue ran out of the cave and went to the Pteranodon. "Are you crazy? Don't get too close to him, Sue!" Max shouted. But Sue tried to make friend with him. She stroked him. She felt interesting because a thin layer of fuzz covered his skin. Sue said, "Hi" to the Pteranodon. The Pteranodon replied, "Hi". They were very surprised. "My name is Sue. Can we make friends?" asked Sue, "My name is Rocky. Of course, we can make friends," the Pteranodon said. "Do you know where we are, Rocky?" asked Max. "Here is Mogao Grottoes. There are many caves. I live in a cave because each dinosaur lives in a cave," said Rocky.

Rocky let them climb up his back. He flew around in the sky, let them gazed down at the Mogao Grottoes and brought them to his cave. They visited Rocky's cave. Suddenly Sue disappeared. "Sue, come back!" Max shouted. "Max! Come here!" Sue called. She found the cave below filling with nests. Big nests made of mud. And the nests were filled with tiny dinosaurs! They were so cute. She was crouching to stroke one of the nests. She didn't realize that there was a huge dinosaur standing behind her and it gazed down on her. The duck-billed dinosaur wanted to protect her baby, so she waved her arms making her tuba sound. Max and Sue ran away, but the big dinosaur followed them and still bellowing. Luckily, Rocky came here to take them away. "Thanks for saving us," said Sue. "Welcome!" said Rocky. But Max scolded Sue, "You have to use your brain and you can't just go running to a nest of babies. There's always a mother nearby." Sue cried, "Sorry! I just want to go home. How can we go back home?"

Max suggested go back to the amazing cave. It might have a way back to the library. Sue agreed and started going to the cave. A few minutes later, Max looked around. He found that an enormous ugly dinosaur was coming across the plain. He was walking on two big legs. He had a huge head and he was swinging a long and thick tail. Even from far away, Max could see his long, gleaming teeth. "Tyrannosaurus rex!" whispered Max. "Run, Sue! Run!" cried Max, The Tyrannosaurus rex was bellowing at them, and he was standing between them and the cave!

Suddenly, Rocky was gliding overhead, he was coming straight for Max and Sue, and he coasted down to the ground. he stared at them with his eyes and said "Climb on". They just do it. Then they sat down onto the Rocky's back. Rocky moved forward. He spread out his wings and lifted off the ground! Max and Sue looked down. The Tyrannosaurus stared up at them. Rocky fled away, he sailed over the hilltop. It was amazing! Max and Sue felt like a bird.

Then Rocky carried Max and Sue down to the cave. When they came to a stop, Max slid off the Rocky's back and landed on the ground. Then Rocky took off again and glided into the sky. "Bye, Rocky," whispered they. They pray can go home. Suddenly something slammed against the cave. The cave was spinning, faster and faster, then the cave became the library, they felt a bit dizzy, but they tried to stand. They peeked out the library window. Outside they saw the exact same view, "We can go home now." said Sue. The sun was about to set.

They went home. It was amazing! "Nobody believes our story, so let's not tell anyone." said Max. Sue agreed it. They got the funny trip with the dinosaur in the Mogao Grottoes.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Yao, Hei Ting – 10

One day, Alan bought a travelling book in the book shop. This book about the Mogao Grottoes where have known as the “Thousand Buddha Caves,” Mogao Caves was one of the most breathtaking collections of Buddhist paintings and statues in the world. Today, the caves filled with religious scriptures, countless Buddhist murals and artifacts. It was wonderful book.

Alan was reading this book at the home. Suddenly, this book had a white and shine light, he had disappeared and tumbled into this book. “Wh—where am I?” stammered Alan. He looked around, the view like as travelling book about the Mogao Grottoes, there had many caves.

Alan saw an unhappy man who was the souvenirs shop-keeper near the Mogao caves. The shop-keeper and his wife lived in their little souvenirs shop. “Why you look like unhappy?” Alan asked. The shop-keeper replied “For many years, every tourist cross the Mogao Caves had come to the shop to buy some Buddha’s souvenirs, but now, no tourists come and we were very poor.” Then Alan was invited live in the shop by the shop-keeper.

One day, Alan heard the shop-keeper said to his wife, “I have just enough raw materials to make one last Buddha’s souvenir.” He prepared the raw materials on the table for next morning to make it. In the next morning, the shop-keeper looked at the table in surprise. There stood the most beautiful Buddha’s souvenir that he had ever seen. “Look at this tiny Buddha’s souvenir!” said the shop-keeper’s wife. “Who could have made such beautiful Buddha’s souvenir?” The shop-keeper said “I don’t know, may be Alan?” “No, I didn’t do it.” said Alan.

The shop-keeper put the souvenir into his shop window, and this was soon sold. “You have been paid well!” said the shop-keeper’s wife. “Now we have enough money to buy more raw materials for souvenirs.” That night, the shop-keeper left raw materials on the table. The next morning, when the shop-keeper woke up, he found more souvenirs. “We have more souvenirs to sell today!” cried his wife. Every night, the shop-keeper prepared raw materials and left them on the table. And every morning, he found more souvenirs ready for him to sell. Many tourists came from far and wide to buy the beautiful Buddha’s souvenirs.

One day, the shop-keeper said, “We are very luckily, we have had so many souvenirs made for us. But how can we find out who is doing all the work?” “We will stay awake tonight,” said Alan. “Then we will see who is coming to help us.” At midnight, they peeked out the upstairs, they had a great surprise. They saw two tiny elves climb in the window and jump down on the table. The elves used their magic to make many souvenirs. When they had finished making the souvenirs, the elves disappeared out the window.

The shop-keeper’s wife said, “The little elves have made all souvenirs for us! But what can we do for them?” “The elves had very ragged clothes.” said Alan. “Yes, I could make some new clothes for them.” said the shop-keeper’s wife. She stitched all day, and then put the clothes on the table where the elves will see them.

Once again, the shop-keeper, his wife and Alan saw the little elves come in through the window at midnight. The elves ran to the clothes and put them on. They laughed and danced together on the table. Alan ran and close to them. He said “Hi!” The elves replied “Hi!” Alan hope the elves can use their magic to carry him go back his home. The elves said “Please open the travelling book”, Alan pick up and open this book. Alan said “Goodbye! Everyone, I will miss you.” The elves used their magic. Suddenly, this book had a white and shine light, Alan had disappeared and tumbled into this book. Alan came back his home. Then, the elves disappeared out the window and were never seen again.

Ling! Ling! Ling! A big sound from the clock. Then, Alan woke up quickly, he thought “Where am I? Oh, that is my dream, just was amazing dream.

An Amazing Journey

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Yau, Tsz Ying Sophie – 10

Kelvin and Lucas were just come back from an exhibition called “Cave Temples of Dunhuang: Buddhist Art on China’s Silk Road”. They are brotherhood born in a German family. They asked their mum, “Shall we go to the Mogao Grottoes this summer?” Mum didn’t allow them to go because China is too far away from Germany. However, after they showed their mum a video about the history and art of the Mogao Caves, their mum started to change her mind. “As known as the Mogao Grottoes, this UNESCO World Heritage site is one of the great artistic and religious wonders of the world. That’s amazing!” Mum said. With mum’s permission, they started their journey this summer.

After a long flight from Berlin to Shanghai, Kelvin and Lucas took a domestic flight to Dunhuang. It was their first time to take such a long flight!

Lucky that their mum booked a tour guide, named John for them! After a big rest in the hotel, they were full of energy!

In the early morning, John drove about 10 km from the Dunhuang city to visit the newly opened Mogao Grottoes Digital Exhibition Center before went to Mogao Grottoes. They watched two short but well-produced educational documentary movies that introduce the history, arts, and other facts about Mogao Grottoes. After the movies, they took the interzonal bus to Mogao Grottoes.

Mogao Grottoes is famed as the "Louvre of the East", which is outstanding for its exquisite mural paintings and statues. There are about 40 common caves opened to the public. John accompanied them to visit seven of them. After that, Kelvin asked to visit more. John said, “If you want to visit more other caves, there are ten special caves (with extra fees) available for your extensional visiting.” “Oh! That’s great!” Kelvin replied. However Lucas was too tired and he preferred to wait for Kelvin in the exhibition centre.

Then, Kelvin started his visit on his own. “What a special painting! The Buddha looks kind and real! ” Kelvin said. “Oh! HE is smiling to me?” “Hey! Can you see? The Buddha is smiling to me!” Kelvin asked another visitor. However the visitor he asked didn’t understand German and Kelvin couldn’t understand Putonghua as well. Kelvin continued to talk to the Buddha..... “Is this guy crazy? Who is he talking to? Where is he from?” The visitors commented to Kelvin.

Kelvin ignored all the comments and continue taught to the Buddha for fifteen minutes. After that, Kelvin was extremely tired. He suddenly fell down and fall asleep. When he woke up, he saw many people looking at him. “Where am I?” Kelvin asked. Lucky that there is a tour guide understand what Kelvin said. Finally, Kelvin was sent back to the exhibition centre. Although Kelvin tried his best to recall what was happened in the cave, his memory left was talking to the Buddha only. No one knows what were their conversations! They became a secret in the cave!

A 'Tail' of Two One Seven

St. Joseph's Primary School, Choy, Tung Shing – 10

Hello there, my name is Li Hao Ma. Do you know who I am? I am an honorable horse, a muscular brown horse with long slender legs. I am actually one of the many noble horses in one of the thousand (mural) paintings of Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang. Without a doubt, my tail is the most glamorous part of my body, with extended long and sleek hairs on my skirt. Even the Buddhas and characters of the paintings surrounding me said that my tail was as beautiful as a peacock which opened its tail. I am proud and blessed to possess such an enchanting gift.

Although I have many friends inside the cave of this famous desert, my life is indeed not too interesting at all. The biggest obstacle is that all my friends, including myself, are static. When there is sunlight reflected from the sand, you can feel the place is gradually heating up but we cannot move away. I can only occasionally hear the sound of the wind, lifting the surface of the sand and blowing them in every imaginable direction. My comrade next to me refers this as a sandstorm. When it is dark, I shiver and I feel cold and lonely. Sometimes I see little white round things falling from the sky and that is perhaps the coldest time of the year. It appears every year according to the seasonal cycle. I sincerely wish I could move like a real horse, so I could gallop around to understand what is happening outside. Apparently, all I can see are the things within a semicircle at a distance from my perspective – the entrance of Cave 217.

I see some creatures with wings and tails entering from the semicircle flying beside me. I wish I could fly like them! I can also see other yellowish brown coloured creatures carrying hills on their respective backs. Some hills are higher than the others and I think they are called camels. The hills are indeed humps which can store lots of water so they will not get thirsty trotting under the extreme heat in the desert. I can easily distinguish the difference between a one-humped dromedary camel and the two-humped Bactrian camel, with the latter becoming rare and endangered species now.

My friend told me I was born during the Tang Dynasty, which was more than 1000 years ago. During different periods, people's clothes became more varied when visiting our cave. From the traditional round collar robe formal dressing in early years, to casual colourful shirts and blue jeans recently. Visitors also possessed different colours of hair, eyes, and skin too. They talked in different languages but one thing in common was most of them were pointing at my long tail. I know they all agreed my tail was the most beautiful part of my body.

But one day, some strangers came to our cave and they woke me up at dawn. I was curious and woke my neighbors up. 'Wake up, dudes! Some people are visiting us again after an uncountable season cycles!' They started to murmur and from their tone, I suspected they were trying to hurt us.

I started to tremble in fear and all of a sudden, I heard, 'Look out, Hao Ma!'

'What happened?' I asked.

My neighbor screamed, 'Someone is putting a tape on your tail!'

'Well, I did feel an itch just now.' I told him.

My neighbor then howled, 'No, I am afraid you are going to die!'

I started to become extremely terrified so I roared loudly, 'Help us!!' Obviously no one could hear us, and the gang around me did something on me which made me felt very uncomfortable. My friends were devastated, looking at the direction of my tail rather unpleasantly. My treasured gift has disappeared! The tape was gone too.

I heard an uproar from my friends, 'Don't care about your tail as they are now putting tape on your body! You are going to disappear in no time!'

Before I was forced to wave my last goodbye to my dearest friends, all of a sudden my memories returned completely and I started to remember the day when I was first created inside this Cave 217. It was indeed a fulfilling journey filled with joy and excitement at this religious and cultural crossroads on the [Silk Road](#). Knowing the clock is ticking for me, I calmly looked at all the stupendous wall paintings in front of me and started to appreciate the Buddhist art spanning a period of over 1000 years. I started to realize the reason why there were so many local and overseas visitors and explorers came all the way from far just to appreciate our greatly preserved caves sites. Also the importance of the history of Dunhuang became such an important gateway to the West being a major centre of commerce along the Silk Road. I started to blame myself for not cherishing all the precious moments I spent in this mystical cave site after all these years.

With my final drop of tears running down my eyes, something really fortunate occurred. A number of security guards came in and caught the bunch of raiders. I was thrilled to know my life was not being terminated in the end with my body still existed entirely... with the exception of my stylish tail. Anyhow, may all the blessings shower upon each of my companions in this lovely cave as we all survived a frightened incident.

I heard the unlawful invaders were rightfully prosecuted. Lately, I thought I was aging rapidly with my eyes deteriorating as I started to see my friends in fading lighter colours. Anyhow, I still regard myself as one of the most beautiful horses in Mogao Grottoes.

Now, whenever the visitors point at me and whisper, 'Why doesn't this horse have a tail?' I smile with pride.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

St. Joseph's Primary School, Tse, Chun Kiu – 11

Once upon a time, a famous Buddhist monk, Xuan Zang, brought back a Buddhist sutra from India to China. The scroll was passed down for many generations. It was finally in the hands of Hao Ting's master, Wun Yang. Buddhism had been flourishing in China since the Sui Dynasty and continued in Tang Dynasty. However, Emperor Wu Zong of the Tang Dynasty was strongly against Buddhism and destroyed many temples and monasteries, including Hao Ting's.

"Take this scroll to the Mogao Grottoes and keep it safe there. This magical amulet will guide you. Good luck, little monk," Wun Yang spoke with a rueful smile. He handed Hao Ting a magical amulet in the shape of an eye and an ancient tattered scroll. These were Wun Yang's last words before a band of elite warriors sent by Emperor Wu Zong raided their temple. They were after the Buddha scrolls. Hao Ting slipped away with a heavy heart, grasping onto the Shaolin staff. Sounds of pots shattering and tables overturned amidst screams and cries rang out from behind. He leapt onto a horse and sped away, leaving behind a trail of dust. Hao Ting didn't dare to look back because he knew his master, his only family, was gone forever.

With tears burning his eyes, Hao Ting recounted the memory of what brought him on this impossible quest. He pulled himself together and surveyed his surroundings. He realised he was in a desert. It had been twelve days since he left his home but it seemed like an eternity. It was pitch-black at night. Hao Ting prepared to sleep with the starry sky as his blanket and the sandy dune as his mattress. However, screams from the temple echoed in his head. He shut his eyes as if he were squeezing the memory out of his head. He decided to meditate. "A calm mind is the ultimate weapon against the challenges you are facing," his master used to say. After meditating, he was quickly overtaken by exhaustion and fell into a deep slumber.

An old man was in a dark cave. He had preserved the cave for his whole lifetime. He was weary but continued organising the shelves for safekeeping the antique Buddha scrolls. They were some of the oldest Buddhism literature. He coughed violently. He knew his time was nearly up. He had to find a successor. Then, the old man turned and stared at Hao Ting's eyes.

Hao Ting's eyes flew open and he sat bolt upright. "Who was the man?" He wondered, frowning. He decided to put the dream at the back of his head. He glanced at his pouch and breathed a great sigh of relief when he felt the scroll, still intact. He looked at his resources and gulped. He had run out of food! So, he rode on his camel (for which he traded his horse) to search for food in this barren land. Eventually, his thirst and hunger were so unbearable that he fell off his camel and soon, he blacked out.

When he woke up groggily, a few kind-hearted merchants stared at him with concern. He tried to stand up but stumbled. "Are you alright?" one of them asked. "Food." Hao Ting croaked feebly. A merchant offered him some slices of bread and dates with alacrity to continue the journey.

On his way, his amulet glowed an unusual shade of crimson red. It buzzed a warning in his head. "Behind you!" He was startled. He turned around and came face to face with a band of Emperor Wu Zong's warriors, those responsible for killing his master.

"Just give us the scroll and you won't be hurt." One soldier ordered.

"No!" Hao Ting shouted, tightly gripping his pouch.

"Very well. Then we'll take it from you the hard way," the leader at the front proclaimed with a tiny hint of disappointment. At his command, twenty soldiers charged towards Hao Ting. He seethed and remembered his master's sayings, "A blood debt doesn't have to be paid in blood." Killing was against the teaching of the Buddha. Yet he needed to defend himself.

Hao Ting did a backflip, grabbed his Shaolin staff in mid-air, and landed on his feet. His movements were so swift that the soldiers were caught off guard. His amulet glowed with a bright yellow aura of power surrounding it. His amulet excreted a shield that knocked down five warriors. He advanced and blocked his enemies' attacks. His

amulet blasted orbs of light at the soldiers, knocking them back and blinding them. He flipped around dodging swords, spears and weapons while disarming several soldiers and knocking some out cold with his staff.

Then, he felt something pierce his gut. The wound wasn't deep, but Hao Ting lost his balance, clutching his stomach. The leader strode towards him and snarled, "Just give us the scroll." "No." Hao Ting growled. He called on the amulet's power and a clone of himself spouted in front of the leader and distracted the gang. It occupied them long enough for Hao Ting to jump on his camel. He fled, leaving the soldiers in the dust.

Days passed and his wound healed. Hao Ting finally arrived at the Mogao Caves. An old man was expecting him. He was the man in his dreams. Awed and speechless, Hao Ting bowed with his utmost respect as the elder welcomed him warmly and ushered him inside one of the caves. The place was bizarrely astonishing. Small caves dug out in the rocky mountain and complex staircases led to different grottoes. The murals were exquisite, and the designs delicate. The ceilings were painted with fairies. There were several majestic buddha statues adorned the caves. The old man smiled and said, "Welcome, my successor. You are the twenty-seventh guardian of the Mogao Grottoes. It's now your turn to serve and safeguard the Buddhas' literature and artifacts."

Without fear or hesitation, Hao Ting replied, "Yes."

The Tales of The Time-travelling Scholar

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Chan, Maris – 11

Billy is an archaeologist who was working with a few other scholars in a university. They had to go to different histological sites around the world to study newly found artefacts and to look for anything interesting.

Last year, they received an invitation from a professor at the University of History to help them to solve a mysterious picture at the Mogao Grottoes.

When Billy and his team arrived, they were greeted with a Chinese tower that looked like a temple born from a cave. Inside the tower were a lot of tunnels, and each of them was filled with extraordinary artwork and colourful pictures.

While exploring, Billy found a painting of a person that looked like himself. He was chasing someone holding a book. He felt stunned and decided to go closer for a better examination. Next to his painting was a picture of a woman slowly turning into a child. Billy became extra curious and looked around. He saw a tunnel filled with more paintings on all sides of the walls, leading to an endless dark space. At the end of the tunnel, there was a twinkling spark. He felt a tingle of excitement and slowly shuffled forward.

When Billy reached the end of the tunnel, he found himself standing in a room that looked pretty similar to the one he was in before.

"I might have U-turned," he thought, so he went to look for the other scholars but failed to find any. He wandered the temple to analyse the place itself.

While passing through a room, Billy saw a few children sitting in a circle while listening to what looked like a bald instructor. These children had an orange cloth wrapped around them as clothing, like it was their uniform.

"What are you guys doing?" Billy asked in confusion.

The monk answered, "Who are you? We are clearly having a lesson."

Billy then realised that they were monks. Suddenly, he found out that he had travelled to the past, even though the surroundings didn't seem any different.

While there, Billy decided to ask a few questions about the temple, and took notes at the same time. While Billy was interviewing the monks, someone holding a book rushed past, while another exhausted monk was chasing after him. Billy asked what happened.

"That... That is... is a special book that we are going to sacrifice to the Buddhas. I'm too tired to catch him. Can you help me?" The monk asked eagerly.

Billy agreed to help. He ran, passing by a number of tunnels and interesting Hems. The thief kept turning, like he was very familiar with this place. After a long time, the thief finally ran into a dead end.

Billy finally caught the thief, but he got lost. Billy then turned to the thief and threatened him to lead the way out. The thief furiously said, "I had a perfect plan and you ruined it! Why would I bother helping you?" And he ran away to the other direction and disappeared.

Billy did not know what to do, but had to keep searching around, until the bald monk from before came by and said, "I heard that you caught the thief. You are very brave. How may we repay you?"

"How about you show me the way to the tunnel where the monks were having a lesson," Billy said. The monk led him the way.

"It was a pleasure working with you. Now I have to go," Billy said at the entrance of the room while giving the book to the monks.

"Wait!" said the bald monk. "As a sign of thank you, how about we paint a picture of you?"

He and some other monks painted a picture of Billy chasing the thief holding the book.

Billy travelled through the tunnel, slowly walking through all the familiar paintings and reaching the present. The other scholars saw him and all of them surrounded him immediately.

"Where have you been? We've been searching for you for a long time," says Henry, a scholar.

"Look guys! I found this book that's from... 670 A.D." suddenly shouted another scholar.

They all looked at it. It was the same book as the one that the thief stole. With this book, Billy was even happier that he helped the monks so they could discover the item. After the group left the mythical Mogao Caves, Billy told the other scholars his unbelievable experience.

His friends spread his story and in just a week, the whole city of Historie has already heard of “The tales of the time—travelling scholar.” Billy’s story will forever become legend.

Aperta and the Mogao Grottoes

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Chow, Jasmine – 11

Chapter 1: the portrait

This afternoon, Aperta was waiting for Chase as usual. The doorbell rang and he sprinted towards it. He opened the door to find Chase with his classmate Shirley.

“I hope you don’t mind, but Shirley wanted to come,” said Chase.

Aperta noticed Shirley blush. They went into Aperta's room, sat down and began investigating a book on the Mogao Grottoes Aperta found.

“Look! That’s my grandfather!” cried Aperta.

He was tall and skinny and loved to read. Aperta was also very close to his grandfather, who was one of the archaeologists who discovered the obscure Mogao Grottoes. Unfortunately, he died last year without a trace. This was the catalyst starting Aperta’s research.

They read for hours but couldn’t find anything that could help lead them to his grandfather’s disappearance.

Chase then went to the kitchen to have a drink of water. He must have been really exhausted from reading and researching because he leant on the painting and fell asleep. Just then, he heard a clicking sound and the drawing fell.

He immediately woke up and looked at the portrait carefully. There was an old journal hidden behind the canvas.

Chase took another look at the figure and quickly recognized the man as Aperta’s grandfather. He took the journal and gave it to Aperta who was in shock.

“HOW DID I NEVER SEE THAT?”

Chapter 2: the journal

Aperta put aside all the questions in his head and began reading. It was the journal of his grandfather when he discovered the Mogao Grottoes.

It read:

Dear Aperta,

I hope you find this journal before you move house. First, you need to know that I am the leader of the archaeologists who discovered the Mogao Grottoes. I found that some of the archaeologists wanted to steal the treasures and sell them. So, I left the most precious treasure inside and put an enchanted spell to guard the gate.

“MAGIC?”

I want you to retrieve the treasure, however, I put a monster in that cave just to be sure evildoers cannot take the treasures and use them for their own good.

“MONSTER?”

Be careful. Attached are the instructions and a map to the treasures. Good luck.

Love,
Mogao Parsley.

“I can’t believe magic and monsters actually exist!” exclaimed Shirley.

“I’m not excited about the monster though...” Chase said in an unsure voice.

“Excited or not, we’ll leave during Summer holiday next week!” cried Aperta.

Chapter 3: the Mogao Grottoes

The week was unusually long. They asked their parents if they could go, but Chase's parents were quite concerned about the dangerous trip. They were later persuaded when Chase promised he would be careful.

They arrived two weeks later, in the Gansu Province of China. The entrance to the Mogao Grottoes was a beautiful temple, with lots of colourful traditional Chinese statues. But according to the map they found, there was a hidden hole for archaeologists to go through to the Mogao Grottoes directly. Surprisingly, they found the three-decade old hole still intact, and, with a compass, an underground radio and courage, they went through.

Once they reached the end, they stepped gingerly on the muddy ground. After all, Aperta's grandfather did warn them about a monster. As soon as the trio went through the hole, they saw a few dead bodies that resembled mice lying on the ground. They immediately felt agitated as their bodies tensed, and, fearing anything they might encounter, stepped cautiously on the filthy floor.

As they walked further, Aperta sensed something move. He felt a gentle breeze down his spine, making his bones quiver.
He whispered, "Guys, be careful."

The monster must've heard him because she roared and came out of the shadows.

Chapter 4: the Sphinx and the Riddle

The monster had a body like a lioness, wings which resembled an eagle and a head similar to a beautiful woman. The trio knew who she was. She was the legendary Sphinx.

"I assume you are Aperta Parsley. Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes."

He was too shocked to talk.

"Your grandfather told me to guard this gate from evildoers. Therefore, I must challenge you with a riddle: What came first? The Chicken or the Egg?"

Aperta couldn't think of anything, nor did Chase, but Shirley answered with pride:

"I believe a circle has no starting point."

Aperta and Chase looked at each other and stared at Shirley.

"Well answered," said the Sphinx and gestured towards a gate.

"My master feared evildoers might still answer correctly. So, he set a spell on this gate, which guards the treasure. You have five minutes, or a boulder will roll down and crush you all. Good luck."

Chapter 5: the treasure

Aperta thought harder than he ever had as the boulder came closer. What could open the gate? He began looking over the memories in his head. He came across this particular memory, where he was talking to his grandfather in his gigantic library.

"Aperta, you might think your name is weird, but you have to know that your name has a really special meaning. Aperta means "open" in Latin. Remember that. It'll come in handy."

Aperta awoke from his recollection and shouted, "APERTA!"

The Sphinx said a mysterious spell and the boulder that was less than a metre away quickly stopped rolling. The golden gates guarding the treasure flew open. Inside was a fabulous golden room, with beautifully painted walls of many colours and centuries-old ceramic cups and plates on the ground, surrounding a dazzling table. On the stand was the long lost jewel – the Jade of the He Family. It shone brighter than anything in the room.

Chapter 6: back home

The trio gave the jade to the authorities and went back home. The grottoes were cleaned, re-constructed and renovated into a museum, and the Sphinx who helped the trio became the guide of the museum. They instantly became “heroes” and made heaps of headlines. On the aeroplane, Aperta said, “That was the best trip ever.” And the trio smiled at each other, knowing that the long lost treasure of the Mogao Grottoes won’t ever be lost again.

Tales of the Mogao Cave

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Chui, Cedar – 10

‘The Mogao Caves were caves filled with treasure and gold, including world monuments. “It is a nice place” said Janice’s mom. “Wow!” said Janice, who eyes blinked with fascination. ‘I wish I could go there!’ ‘Sorry, Janice’, her mother snapped, “You’re too young to explore. Now go to sleep!”. Janice grumbled and slammed the door behind her. She thought ‘Mom is so wrong. I am going to explore it secretly then!’ Crawling into her bed, she drifted off into an uneasy sleep.

She woke up at the crack of dawn. After she packed everything she and Zoe needed, she waved goodbye to her house and rushed below Zoey’s window and asked her if she wanted to go to the caves with her.

“No, why?” said Zoe, only half awake. “Because I want to find out more about the secrets of the Caves.” Said Janice. “Sounds nice, but I’m not in” Zoe replied, “it’s dangerous.” “Besides, I am here trying to catch some z’s.” “Now get out of my window before I tell on you.” ‘Oh, come on!’ scoffed Janice, losing her patience. “It’s the school holidays, what’s wrong with some exploring?” “Fine,” sighed Zoey but before she could utter another word Janice flung her down the corridor and pushed her out the door. As they ran through the streets, the exciting adventure to the caves was about to begin!

The journey to the Mogao Caves was well... challenging. They crossed through many obstacles and after some hardship, they finally arrived. They found an opening and hurried inside. Their first impression of the cave was that it was hollow and monstrous. Janice lit a candle and gathering together their courage, started exploring the cave.

“Shall-w-e-leave?” said Zoey, “I feel s-o-s-scar-ed!” “Shut up and listen!” hissed Janice, “We are going to find the treasure until our feet are sore! Do you...” “I want my mommy!” Cried Zoe. “Shut up and keep going” Said Janice.

They walked for hours and hours, on a path that seemed endless. When they were about to give up, Zoey’s foot seemed to kick something hard. It was shimmering.

“What is it?” Janice asked, confused. She bent over to take a closer look. Janice froze and suddenly she lunged towards the thing like a crazy animal and shouted “GOLD! WE FOUND TREASURE! YAY!”

Zoey thought Janice was pulling her leg. Finding a dusty oil lamp, she lit it and stared in shock. The cave was full to the brim with gold, diamonds, and exclusive objects. The girls were stunned. They had never seen anything like this before. They were overjoyed and collected plenty of treasure.

Leaving with their pockets full, they suddenly heard loud footsteps. Intrigued, they went back inside the cave. There was someone approaching them – a monk! He looked shabby and Zoey was so mortified, she nearly fainted. Janice shouted, “What do you want?” in a loud voice.

“I have been waiting for you for a million years, travelers,” the monk said robotically. “OK, but who are you?” asked Janice, who was going crazy. “I am a monk from China, the one who discovered this cave. I have waited for a million years” said the monk. “I will lead you to a place where stories are told about here. Follow me, strangers.”

Zoey and Janice followed the monk, looking around curiously. The caves were indeed magical. There were paintings of ancient China, artefacts, and plenty of treasure. When they were busy looking at a display of wine goblets from the Ming dynasty, the monk stopped. He said, “We have arrived in the room of stories where mythical legends can be found.”

Janice and Zoey entered the room, too stunned to move. The whole room was filled with scrolls. Some were posted on the wall while some were neatly rolled. Curious, Zoey opened a legend. “The legend of the diamond boy” it read.

Zoey asked Janice “How many legends are there?” Janice answered “Here, there are 65 thousand legends: When you touch the legend’s pictures, the things will come to life.” The monk said “Read whatever you want. But be careful!” Then the monk went to the corner to relax while the two girls were diving in for some legends. They ripped open legends like ‘The vases of Qing’ and ‘Yellow Danger’ but none of them were intriguing.

When they were about to leave, they found two dusty scrolls, abandoned on the floor with blood stains on them. Both looked dangerous. One was 'The White Dragon' and the other one was 'The White Snake'. Both opened on their own. Burning with curiosity, they touched the pictures of the legends.

The pictures sprang to life, featuring a scary dragon and a fearsome snake. "Ahh!!" they shrieked, as the dragon and the snake lunged towards them. The monk still stood, motionless. The two of them ran away, yelping their heads off. The snake and dragon still showed no fear as they followed. Quickly, Janice took out a sharp dagger and Zoey took out a kitchen knife.

"A kitchen knife?" Zoey fumed. "What did you even pack for me?" "Shut it, and just follow my lead" said Janice.

Quickly, they launched into action. Janice cut off the snake's head, while Zoey kicked the dragon's body. Soon after some violence, the two creatures vanished like a bad dream. Both girls high fived each other.

The monk looked amazed, and said "You defeated them, so you must know what the moral is." Janice replied, with confidence, "Friendship and Bravery!"

"Yes," said the monk, "and you shall receive rewards. Here I give you two shimmering diamonds." They were thrilled and stuffed them in their treasure bags.

It was time to leave. Before the two girls left, the Monk called out, "See you travelers." The girls waved back with a twinkle in their eyes, as they rushed back to their homes where their parents awaited, as they planned what to do with their lovely loot.

The Unknown Cave in Dunhuang

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Kwan, Lauren – 10

A story about a special cave found at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China has been spreading. In the 1900s, local and international scholar-explorers rediscovered the Mogao Caves. One 'scholar-explorer' named Lauren Kwan travelled from Hong Kong to China and decided to rediscover the caves for herself. Here is Lauren's expedition, 'The tale of Mogao Caves'.

Lauren Kwan was at home, eating fruits for breakfast with her friends Sofia (an explorer), Willa (an inventor with two brothers) and Emma (a discoverer). Lauren said firmly, "we will discover 'the Mogao Caves'." Her friends she was talking to were from the Explorer's Society.

Inside Lauren's colossal house were copious sheets of paper stuck to every wall with pages of draft inventions from Willa, passages of discoveries by Emma and records of famous explorations she had with Sofia. Pinned on top of these draft works were freshly cut newspaper clippings about known explorers from the recent past about their findings from the Mogao Caves. There were recorded myths about the cave too.

Willa's two brothers invented their first plane and found fame for it. They borrowed an improved version of a four seater plane from Willa's family to fly into Dunhuang, Gansu province, China from Hong Kong.

Flying and landing was quite challenging against the wind and dust of the Gobi Desert. At last, with a thud and a puff of dust from the breaking of the plane wheels, they safely landed as close to the cave opening as possible.

The caves were massive like a giant and it made them feel like ants. The caves got darker as they entered but they could just about see there were many other openings that led to other caves inside. Some were dim but some were brightly lit from the above natural openings. As the first cave was quite dark, the group joined together to form a chain, arms stretched out onto each other's shoulder with Emma in front and Lauren covering the back. Emma had to reach her hand out in front to feel the sides of the cave in order to find their way around. She suddenly felt a rock that stuck out of the wall, and as she grabbed hold of it, the rock pressed further into the cave like a button and the rocks split open leading to another cave. There were loud noises on the other side that sounded like many people chanting a prayer. Lauren had discovered the 'Mogao Cave' also known as the 'Thousand Buddha Grottoes' or 'Caves of the Thousand Buddha's'.

They stepped into that cave and saw something odd. Suddenly, the lights were off and they could barely hear someone with a creepy, dark toned voice saying "guò lái ba!" (Come here in Putonghua). Lauren could feel a cold shiver down her spine, she looked behind her to see if the others were here but they were gone! She was all alone! She took a nervous gulp and took her explorers' torch out to double-check if she was sure they really weren't following her, but nope, they weren't here. Lauren thought "Not again!" Many things happened similar to this before (since she has been an explorer for a very long time). "Help! Lauren, help, arghh!" Someone shouted as the echo faded away, Lauren could remember that voice, it sounded familiar, it sounded like Sofia! Lauren closed her eyes calmly and the voice she just heard repeated again and again in her mind. "Be brave, calmly, do not fear!" She spoke to herself confidently. She gently walked and noticed there was a Buddha holding a talking book. "Tài hǎole! Hěn gāoxìng jiàn dào nǐ!" (Too good! Glad to see you! In Putonghua). Lauren was speechless, she was just going to say something when a gust of wind blew her up in the air and she got sucked in something, she got sucked in the talking magical book!

Lauren could hear a gentle woman saying "Welcome young girl, welcome to the Cave of History!" "Cave of History? Why am I here?" Lauren shouted worriedly and vehemently, it was like she had gone mad! "Pardon? Oops, sorry, welcome to the Cave of History!" The gentle woman replied faintly. "Arghh! Help! Arghhh!" Lauren felt like she was spinning rapidly, she was extremely dizzy. At that moment, her vision was all gone, and all she could see was darkness. "Hello?" Someone asked. Lauren could hear someone talking to her as quiet as a king ghost friend. "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!" Lauren woke up frightened. "Who am I? Who are you? Where am I?" Lauren managed to sit up and asked while scratching her head. "Um... Lauren?" That 'someone' asked curiously, "you are Lauren and I

am Sofia! Me, Willa and Emma also just arrived here a minute ago, a gentle woman told us this is the Cave of History.” Then, a ‘pop’ sound was heard and Lauren was back to normal again. This place was quiet and nobody was here. When they looked around, they saw terrifying skeletons of dead people covered in sand and dust, with a sign covered with sand and you could just about see: The Cave of History, Mogao Caves. A large rock in the cave shut like a door with an emphatic “bang!” A gust of wind blew in when the rock shut and once they entered the cave, they saw a lengthy wall with sacred colourful artwork and literature. Suddenly, they heard somebody say “the sacred floor will soon collapse, after its collapse, walk on it within 10 seconds or else the floor will turn into hot lava!” Lauren immediately ran across the sacred floor following the instructions. All the others in the group followed Lauren. Phew! All saved! Then, they saw some sculptures such as the famous Flying Horse of Gansu and the Diamond Sutra (the oldest dated, printed book in the world). Inside that book, it wrote: Hi, I am Historia Mogao, this book is named after me as I am the owner of this book

And the other pages were blank. Many words had worn off. Sofia felt discombobulated. Lauren took out her pen and wrote “Hi, I am an explorer from the 2000s. There is a tunnel leading us here to ‘the Cave of History’, the tunnel is the talking magical book that sucked us in”.

Then Lauren and the others got sucked back through the magical book and arrived back at home. The magical book was still in Lauren’s hands. As she was looking at it, she realised ‘The tale of Mogao Caves’ taught her to be brave and face any difficulties.

Secrets of the Mogao Caves

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Lee, Tsz Yau – 11

The scholars arrived at the Mogao Cave. Looking inside, they saw the oldest printed book ever. They thought it was interesting and the lumped places on the cover felt quite odd. They gingerly slid the book into a protective sleeve and set off.

The scholars hopped one by one into a muddy green truck with a giant wheel sticking out its back and drove off into the dusty mist of fog.

They arrived at their laboratory and with eager, shaking hands, brought their prize to the light.

They gently placed the book onto a protective layer of plastic. The thick and dark brown cover was covered with filthy dirt and grime. As they dusted it off, it uncovered some odd markings engraved on it. The markings looked like a creature with tiny arms and legs, but no fingers. There were also curly and wiggly lines everywhere, as if it was showing some kind of pattern or representing a sign.

As they continued to flip open the book, it revealed rusty pages covered with even more curly lines written in fine black ink, which oddly enough, looks like bananas. They saw some paintings, all with colours of yellow, blue, and green. They thought it was odd because of how all the paintings were all the three colours and those three colours only.

They couldn't make head or tail out of the patterns so they decided to scan it using the Language Machine. The machine could define every language ever discovered up to that moment.

The machine took a while, but it didn't take long for the scholars to be intrigued by the results.

The result printed out from the machine showed 'Detected language: Wiggly Banen Lones' which means 'Wiggly Banana Lines' in English.

Once they saw the results, everyone was so shocked that they almost fell off their feet. The language was so rare that not many people even know about it.

The Translation Machine needed several days to translate the whole book into English, so the scholars went back to the Mogao Cave. They took pictures of the paintings on the walls, which were in the same three colours as those pictures in the book.

When they arrived back at the laboratory, they printed out the pictures of the paintings. Then the machine finished translating, so they set the pictures aside on a table.

One of the scholars took the translated result and read '400 years ago, in the year 200, there was a monkey who owned all the bananas in the world. Every monkey believed it was the god and worshiped him. The Monkey God loved bananas so much that he decided to have a writing using bananas in different forms, for example, peeled bananas, half-peeled bananas, rotten bananas and raw bananas. The other monkeys thought it was a great idea and soon incorporated the writing system into their everyday lives. The Monkey God also appreciated nature very much, so his favourite colours were yellow, representing the Sun, blue, representing the sky, and green, representing the land. Thus, these were the colours of glory.'

Another scholar took the second piece of translated result with curiosity and read aloud 'As the time passed, only two monkeys survived, but they slowly evolved into pilgrims. They decided to stay at the cave and they made art regarding their past, to worship their god.'

It was very astonishing what information their brains had just digested.

One said 'That's why we've never seen paintings like those, because the only two that survived only stayed in the Mogao Cave!' Another said 'Wait, look! The cover of the book says 'Bible!', that explains everything! It matches with the pictures, too!' pointing at the pictures on the table beside them.

But that was only the first few pages of the Bible.

They continued to flip the Bible, but every other page of it was as blank, there weren't even smudges of ink. Until they reached the very last page. They couldn't believe what they just saw.

It was English.

It wrote 'If you believed our story of the Monkey King, you're wrong.'

The scholars didn't understand what it meant at first, but after a bit of thinking, they made a prediction. It was all just a distraction, there never was a Monkey King, they made it up. This means, back at the monkey times, they already spoke English, and were already civilised enough to foul the future. They thought.

But that wasn't all, they also saw some letters forming words 'https://thetruth.com'

They knew what they had to do, although still not believing it. They switched on the computer in front of them, opened Google and typed in the words. Then something on the screen popped up that amused them immensely..

They were logged into a website.

No one said a word while they were exploring it. It was as silent as space. The website seemed very modern, seeing that they didn't even know how to do some of the skills.

A scholar sarcastically said, 'Of course, why didn't we see it? Of course some random monkeys from like 1000 years ago knew English and made a website. Yeah, that's something you'd realise everyday.'

After looking at the website, they were sure that their prediction was certainly correct, as it explained the same things they had thought.

The scholars thought they had enough excitement today. They decided they wanted to share this with everyone.

They sent everything to professional writers and asked them to write a book about the amazing discovery of what they had just discovered.

One year later, the writers published the book. Once it was published, everyone bought the books as quickly as they could, afraid of it being sold out.

The scholars were so proud to have the honour to discover this that they threw a party to celebrate the next day. But the party didn't last long, as they needed to go back to study what other fascinating history lies hidden in the Mogao Cave.

Adventure at the Magoa Grottoes

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Lin, Miche – 10

The Mogao Grottoes is a junction of caves found in Dunhuang district. Many caves lie under the soil awaiting their inevitable discovery. Our job as scientists are to take notes of discoveries and report back to our boss.

One such cave has been found by us. Inside was a lot of carvings of an ancient language, simple weapons and even ancient art! We were surprised, as most caves have been dug up. As we explored the cave, we found many skeletons, ancient clothing and a lot of materials! We then found a room with a campfire, a 'strange' one too! It acted like a sort of mirror but it reflected our ancestors and their camp, it was like a portal to the ancient world! As we were just about to extinguish it, a voice called "stop! If you extinguish that fire, the human race will end!" We looked back in shock, seeing an old monk whose clothes had holes in them, "What are you talking about? It's just a campfire!" I replied as my voice trembled. The old monk told us "That fire is lit to honour our ancestors! If you extinguish that fire, our ancestors' history and everything they did will be removed, and since we are their descendants, we will be removed from history too! Every race has one whether they know it or not. "He then told us the fire's meaning and the 'strange power' it has. He then showed us the underground base of the native monks, but when we headed to the camp, we saw a large horde of creatures led by the "Demon King". He said we should take the axes and bows and defend the camp at all costs.

As the monster horde approached, we spotted various mythological creatures, such as dragons, minotaur's, griffins, werewolves and pegasus! The old monk tasked us to find and extinguish the "fire of creatures", so we advanced to extinguish said fire. After slaying wave after wave of creatures, we reached the last dragon. Once it was dead, I looked back, seeing that only a few monks were injured in the battle and no injury was fatal, giving us all courage to finally defeat the Demon King. We then set off and we reached the fire, but it was guarded by the Demon King! Of course they would guard it! He started attacking us and it threw punches here and there! In a moment of desperation, I threw the axe at its eye, and when he let loose his grip on me, I ran for the fire. The Demon King swiftly attempted to punch me, but I extinguished the fire just in time, and the Demon King's fist stopped right in front of my eyes, then the Demon King along with all other mythological creatures vanished into thin air! When we went back to the camp, the old monk had some bad news for us. "You actually went into a portal into our world when you first entered the cave, and you left yours. Since this is a one-way rift you entered, you can only go back, meaning when you leave, you will never see us again. Farewell. "We exchanged some little souvenirs and soon left their world.

We returned to the lab with all the art and other things, all of us smiled and looked back at the base one last time. Our boss was very proud of our discovery and promoted some of us to a different lab. Everything we found was sent to the 'The National Museum of China". We bid farewell to each other and parted ways.

But, it's not over yet. I tried to find footage of this happening to send it to the news station nearby, but I realised the Demon King smashed my helmet with the sport camera still on it! Luckily, I could salvage all the footage. But, since we had to go into a different world, the camera couldn't get enough data to keep up and had a corrupted video and audio. When I went to show my boss, he told me to go to the news station, just like I was going to do anyways. The news station unfortunately rejected me, so I decided to write my own book with everything inside! I'm glad the book did well! There's one thing for sure, and that's to never judge a book by its cover, who knows what awaits the other side!

The Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Wong, Candice – 11

Today, professor Loepi taught me something fascinating, The Tales of the Mogao Grottoes! It was about a monk who found a mysterious cave and his adventures to explore inside. Others had tried to go into it but couldn't find anything interesting. It looked very exciting and made me want to go there too.

After school, the first thing to do was my homework. I had not been putting effort into it since my obsession with the Mogao Grottoes started. After finishing my homework, I decided to go to the Mogao Grottoes during my holiday. It's gonna be thrilling!

Grandma suddenly came into my room, and she wanted to tell me something. "I will not stop you, but make sure you don't risk your life. Here's a map found in your great-great-great grandfather's room. Take good care of this." I felt shocked that my great-great-great grandfather had gone to the Mogao Grottoes before but he went too far and was cursed by the patron saints. I am still curious about the tales, but I don't wanna end up like him.

My grandma called me after packing, she gave me a magical necklace and said only the ones wearing this can access the cave. I thanked her and decided not to tell my mum about this. I told her I was only going to summer camp.

The day has come, I ate breakfast quickly and ran to the door. Grandma was there waiting. She said if you see the Crystal Parrot, begin to climb. We hugged each other and said goodbye. I felt sorry that I wanted to go there but to have her worried about me... but I will succeed. That's how I started my crazy adventure to the Mogao Grottoes!

At the station, I first bought some snacks from the kiosk. Then the train arrived. When I purchased the train tickets, I found that it was very expensive. I used most of my savings to buy the ticket. Luckily, grandma had given me some money.

Finally, I got into the train. It was beautifully decorated and was not full. I read about the cave and prepared for my journey. Of course, I took a rest so I'm in good condition to have any challenges ahead. Nevertheless, it was a 5 hours train journey to the Mogao Grottoes. When I woke up, I was very hungry and decided to have some food in the canteen. However, there were not many food choices from the menu but the food was tasty. I started to prepare for off-boarding.

Finally, I'm here. THIS IS TOO FAR OUT OF MY IMAGINATION! It's dirty, dank and creepy! But I can't regret it, I need to solve the mystery.

First, I need to go to Yogan forest and pass through it. The necklace said the Yogan is a kind of bird with crystals. I was amazed by its talking powers. I passed through obstacles and made it. That's it! I suddenly remembered, the Yogan means the Crystal Parrot! And it also means start to climb! I climbed up a tree as fast as I could and waited. In 20 seconds a bunch of lions were passing the forest! It really helped!

I didn't stop but continued my adventure. According to the map given by my grandmother, I should come across "NAUGHTY MONKEYS." However, I didn't even see any monkeys ahead. Suddenly, I remembered they wouldn't come out if I didn't "SHOUT."

I tried to shout "OOH OOH AH AH!?" Then, tens of monkeys from the woods were rushing towards us. I had no choice but to run. In a sudden, the monkeys stopped. Luckily, I got into a cave and entered it. Two patron saints were standing in front of me and I politely asked if I could go in. One of them said "YOU MAY ENTER". I carefully stepped in.

I found a big, locked door in front of me. There was a hole on the door and likely it should be the way to open it. However, where was the key? I started to get frustrated but the necklace talked to me again, "the stones." Oh, there were lots of stones on the ground and the key should be one of them. I checked carefully and found there were

symbols on each one. Some of the symbols were trees, some of them were animals. I recalled that I met lions and monkeys before. These should be the answers. I checked again on the rocks and finally found one with a lion and monkey on it. These must be the keys. I put this stone into the hole of the door immediately and the door opened slowly. There was a big time capsule in front of me. It has my great-great-grandfather's name marked on it. I opened the capsule at once and my great-great-grandfather woke up. I told him I was here to bring him home. But the necklace told me when I exit, you must be careful. I carried him out quickly and ran as fast as I could back to the Yogan forest. I wondered if the patron saints could survive, so I brought them out. To thank me, they gave me a ticket back to Caple Town. I thanked them and got on the last train of the day.

I brought my great-great-great grandfather to the nearest hospital and called my family. I was so happy to have him back. It was a wonderful and unbelievable event. I did a "Mission impossible" and was a hero to my family. What an adventure!

Mysteries of the Mogao Caves

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Wong, Kaitlyn – 11

Legends say that many centuries ago, when Tang Sanzhang and Sun Wukong went on their journey to the West, they also discovered the Great Scroll of Cures that contained the secrets to heal all diseases in the world, as well as the medicine to reverse aging. Cho's father was an archaeologist. He believed in this legend and has been studying all the evidence of the scroll, but nobody believed him except for Cho. One day, Cho's father decided to go to the Mogao Grottoes to find the scroll and prove everyone wrong. But he has not come back for a very long time.

Cho decided to go find her father. By the time she reached the cave, it was already twilight. Just as she was about to enter the yawning chasm, he felt someone grab her shoulder. She jumped, holding out her spear. But it was just a young, village boy.

He raised his hands in surrender and said, "Woah, calm down. I'm just asking to help."

Cho looked at the boy suspiciously and asked, "Who are you? Why do you want to help me?"

"I'm Yang, I live in the village down this hill. I've been in the Grottoes so I wanted to see what's going on" the boy replied.

Cho eyed him and agreed. They stepped into the cave, looking for clues. The walls were covered in paintings of Buddhas, there were symbols and geometric patterns carved on the ceiling. After a while, Cho found a scrap of cloth and walked over to pick it up. Suddenly, she felt the tile beneath her move, the ground rumbled and the floor dropped down into a pit. All of a sudden, they hit the floor with a loud thud. Cho looked around. This cavern wasn't very different to the ones from above.

Cho called to Yang, "Do you know where we are? Is there a way out?" but Yang was just as clueless as she was.

"I don't know, I've never been here," Yang shrugged.

"Well, let's see if there's an exit," Cho offered.

They ran around the cavern trying to find an exit. However, they soon realized there was no way out. Suddenly, Cho noticed a carving among the paintings. There were no other carvings. She pressed on it and like a miracle, part of the wall closed into the ground, showing a long hallway. There were statues of Buddhas along the walls. Cho got excited and rushed forward, but crashed to a stop as an arrow shot from a Buddha's mouth.

Yang grabbed her hand and yelled, "On the count of three we run. One, two, three!"

They sprinted across, with the arrows following behind, missing them by a few inches.

The next cavern was lined with faceless statues. Behind the statues were paintings of gods gathered around a Buddha. There were muscular gods wearing long flowing capes, gods with silky long cloths draped over their shoulders and all kinds of mythical creatures. Cho caught a glimpse of something moving in the back of the cavern. She widened her eyes in terror for all the statues had come alive and were charging towards them. Out of nowhere, a statue lunged at Yang, suffocating him. Suddenly, before Cho even processed what she would do, she swung her spear around, breaking most of the statues. Then she grabbed Yang by his arm and ran towards the door.

This cavern was a hundred feet high, with paintings of Buddhas everywhere they looked. There were scrolls scattered all across the floor. Cho gasped, this was the library her father told her about. She noticed her father laying in the middle of the room.

She rushed over and cried desperately, "Oh please, don't be dead!"

Her father opened his eyes and said, “Thank the gods! You're here!”

Then he pulled her into a hug. He explained that the statues were guarding the Great Scroll of Cures.

Yang asked, “How are we going to get out?” I tried opening this stone door but it won't budge.”

Cho took the scroll from her father and placed it onto the ground. Magically, the doors opened.

Seeing this, Cho's father said with uncertainty “Well, it's been a great experience, and since this is the only way out, I should just leave the scrolls here for another person to find.”

So finally, they left the cave, leaving the scroll back in the Mogao Caves where it belonged.

The Mogao Grottoes Code

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Lam, Choi Sum – 10

One gorgeous afternoon, I went to Grandfather's place. He was strolling around his room leisurely. After I settled down, he beckoned me over.

"Mike, do you know that when I was young, I suffered from a disease similar to the COVID we have now? At that time, more than half of the villagers were desperately sick. Some had a severe headache, some recorded high fever, some kept coughing and sneezing. The scariest thing was that it was highly contagious threatening to our health," he said while feeling out of sorts.

He continued, "However, something weird was going on. A few months later, a monk was passing by and he could not bear any more. Out of his great empathy, he left some incredibly precious Chinese medicine and urged us to take them as soon as possible."

"Take it or not take it, that's the question," I murmured.

Grandfather's eyes were dancing, "Yes, we took the medicine bravely and surprisingly, we all recovered speedy."

"I was wondering if the Chinese medicine would be an effective treatment to the COVID," he changed into a joyful tone and painted the town red.

Noticing me nodding my head, he took an old picture out of his drawer and continued enthusiastically, "The monk once gave me this picture and said that we could find the ingredients of that medicine in the cave. Make use of it when necessary. Meanwhile, he was worried the precious medicine would be abused by somebody, so he embedded the secret code," he pointed at it with his fingers. It was a faded picture of a monk standing in front of some murals.

"Sadly, I forgot where the cave was."

"Grandfather, when there's will, there's a way. Let me have a try and find it out for you. The cave and the code." I was in seventh heaven and squealed in delight.

Just then, I spotted my best friend, James, walking in the threshold. I was waving my hand, and a few seconds later, he was beside me. I decided to tell him what Grandfather just said and showed him the picture.

"Oh! What a coincidence! My uncle was a senior researcher at the Dunhuang Academy. He inspired me a lot about the characteristics of Dunhuang, for example the monks, murals and sculptures. By the murals, I believed the cave might be in Dunhuang. Let me check and confirm with my uncle tonight!"

"Thanks, James," I replied.

The next day, James was full of joys of spring yelled to me, "Yes, Mike, my uncle said that it was one of the Dunhuang caves from his previous experience. He even recognized that it was the Mogao Grotto No. 61!"

I could not wait but dashed to report it to Grandfather. He was over the moon. We went the extra mile and started reading more information about Dunhuang.

But there was a dilemma. How could I physically visit Dunhuang during the pandemic? If I could not go there, I could not resolve the secret code. Struggling. It troubled me for a very long period of time. This time, James supplied a wonderful suggestion. He remembered that we visited an exhibition about Dunhuang several years ago. And there was a virtual reality section. By using a VR application, we could simulate a three-dimensional environment and virtually visiting the Mogao Grottoes.

He suggested, "Why didn't we make use of VR again?" I thought this idea was marvellous and put it into action.

Taking glimpses of the VR, I felt like personally visiting Dunhuang. As it was an oasis located at a religious and cultural crossroad on the Silk Road, there were wall paintings, silk paintings, woodblock paintings, sculptures and finest examples of Buddhist art spanning a period of 1000 years ago. In general, figures of donors appeared at the bottom. Buddhas of many sizes, shapes and types could be found in the middle. Last but not least, flying apsaras were

depicted in the ceiling of above the buddhas. The Mogao Grottoes were decorated so neatly with numerous colours, as if they were so real. Extremely impressive!

When I was staring at the flying apsaras, I found out that on one hand, some were flower-sprinkling, flower-presenting; on the other hand, some were dancing and playing music. But why was each of them holding a bouquet of flowers and pointing to the next apsara? Looking cautiously again, I recognised there was a line of tiny words on the flowers. Following carefully the fingers of the apsaras, I managed to dig out the wordings. However, they were meaningless to me. Or they were secret coding?!

It read “toor daowogidni”.

“Did I somehow find something wrong in the middle?” I asked James, who was also wearing the VR application. After a couple more times and efforts, we still got the same wordings.

Scratching my head, I tried to check the buddhas and figures of donator, but there was still no ordinary outcome. I had a heavy heart and was low in spirits.

Just as I was about to give up, I recalled my motto, when there’s a will, there’s a way. Something flashed in my mind – REVERSE!

Immediately, I reversed the wordings.

Yes, “Indigowoad Root”! After looking up in the Internet, James and I learnt that it was a kind of Chinese medicine curing people with bacteria and virus. Happy as Larry, I invited Grandfather over and reported to him our great exploration.

Grandfather suggested us sending the information to Scientist Tu Youyou, who was the winner of the Nobel Prize in Medicine, and her research team of the Medical School for further experiments.

“It was important to keep and review our heritage of Mogao Grottoes,” said Grandfather. “They were treasure to our wellbeing.” James and I smiled. We were very joyful to know that we could help the world with such an extraordinary way!

The Last Paradise

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Mak, Audrey See Kan – 11

Over the centuries since the monk found the Mogao Cave at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China, thousands of people came, creating sculptures, drawing, and literature. Little did they know, by building and drawing all these murals and sculptures, they had actually captured the souls of Buddha, flying Apsaras, and other characters from the legends in the walls of the caves. When the caves were forgotten, there trapped the souls of the millions of gods, goddesses, and the legendary creatures as well.

“I’m so bored! How long do we have to wait for somebody to come?” raged one of the flying Apsaras, Tian.

“Tian, we cannot rage so easily. We must be patient and wait ‘til the kind-hearted and faithful remember us and come to us,” said Gautama, raising his hands with his eyes closed. “I feel that someone is getting near now. Everyone, stay in your own paintings, murals, or sculptures.”

All the creatures returned to their ‘homes’, some of them crawled, while others flew. The Gautama Buddha was the Buddha human beings praised and was well respected even in the community of the legendary fairies and gods. He was known for his patience and deep thinking in the community and was so powerful that the other creatures crowned him as their lord.

“Dig, my men! Dig!” shouted a voice outside the cave. “The treasure is just steps away!”

This sent uneasiness across the cave. The silence and calmness that the fairies and gods just managed to reign was immediately broken. “Gautama, my Lord, I do not mean to interfere with your plans, but don’t you think that this is getting out of hand? I mean, who knows what they’ll do to us next!” protested Tian.

“Let’s have hope, Tian. Now, if we don’t stop arguing, the people outside will hear us,” said Gautama, smiling.

The digging continued. Every dig made by the people outside was a threat to the creatures inside the cave. They became more and more impatient. They looked at Gautama for help, but to their surprise, Gautama did not move an inch. He stayed where he was and continued smiling pleasantly.

“One last dig, my men!” the leader shouted. “On the count of three...”

“I don’t have hope in these people!” mumbled Tian.

“Two...”

“One, dig!”

A huge wave of a mixture of sand and mustered smell gushed out from the cave. Followed by the wave was a flock of a few Apsaras, led by Tian. The men outside the cave coughed hard and closed their eyes which were filled with sand and dirt. The workers waited for the sand and dirt to precipitate and slowly stepped into the cave. The murals, walls, books, and sculptures were so beautiful, that the sight cleansed their eyes. Their eyes filled with tears of happiness and joy as they triumphed across the room.

“This is absolutely amazing!” screamed one of the workers.

“In all my life, I have never seen anything like this paradise!” said another quietly.

“This is not just normal treasures! It is treasures that can bring us wealth for life! We should let people come in and look at all these wonderful creations. We can earn lots of money from people all around the world!” suggested the leader.

“All right, boys, let’s take a lunch break for now, before we plan for our great fortune ahead!” demanded the leader of the gang. The other diggers joined in joyous cheers and rushed out of the cave.

The grotto returned to complete silence, a long silence before anyone could react and speak again. The remaining creatures gradually woke up from their shocking state and all turned to look at Gautama who was lying on a bench in one of his paintings. “They don’t seem friendly, do they?” one of them muttered.

Gautama nodded and flew out of the painting. He created a transparent wall at the cave entrance that blocked anyone from outside from viewing and hearing them. All the other creatures flew out from their paintings and sculptures and gathered in the grotto hall.

“Well, their plan would drive a lot of tourists to our place, and not pilgrims. These people will leave destructive marks on the paintings and sculptures, instead of creating new ones to praise and worship us. This will draw more attention to the world that will just try to find values in stealing the artwork here. These are not the kind-hearted and faithful people we have been waiting for. After all these years, we end up in the hands of the bad and greedy,” said Gautama.

After a pause, Gautama continued, “we need a plan, anyone?”

“We could bewitch them. I mean... maybe one of us is able to do it.”

“We could kill them.”

Gautama raised a hand, and everyone stopped discussing.

“Yes, they are bad people, but we are gods. We should not hurt human beings no matter how bad they are. Maybe it is time to leave the grotto now. Maybe we should go and find a new hide-away. I am sure there must be one last paradise somewhere in this world. Any disagreements?” Gautama suggested.

All the creatures looked at each other. They did not dare to object. They knew they had nothing to counter-propose either. They followed Gautama and left the cave one by one. Although they were forced to live in this rusty cave for years, they still enjoyed the time spent together here. With one last farewell, they left.

Years later, the Mogao Caves were opened to the public. However, little did these visitors know, the paintings, sculptures, and murals that lie peacefully in the caves were the homes of the spirits of these mythical creatures. Little did they know, the amazing paintings, sculptures, and murals that they are seeing now are actually empty-spirited.

Where have all the Apsaras gone then? Well, in a paradise hidden far, far away.

Dune after endless dune, mountain after endless mountain...

The vastness of the Gobi Desert was immeasurable, even infinite. Ancient secrets were buried beneath the thick layer of powdery yellow sand, waiting to be uncovered...

It was undeniably an odd sight.

In the middle of the Gobi Desert, near the city of Dunhuang, Gansu Province, an old monk, clad in ragged, worn robes clung onto the back of a flea-bitten, scraggly donkey, who groaned with every step. The monk squinted up at the blazing sun that hung in the sky, mercilessly bathing him in its heat. He was sweating profusely, with enormous pearls rolling down his forehead. His donkey stopped in the middle of the path. Its limbs quivered slightly, before it collapsed to the ground in a heap of skin and bones, unconscious. The monk sighed, and, hoisting the animal's limb body onto his shoulders, continued his lengthy journey.

After trotting along for hours, he stopped. Could his eyes be deceiving him? At the foot of a mountain was a small oasis, more beautiful than any he had ever seen before. He immediately thanked Buddha before rushing towards it, scooping up some of the clear, blue water. The sweet liquid trickled down his throat, and he felt more rejuvenated than ever. He fed some to his donkey, who regained its strength soon after.

Suddenly, the mountain glowed, ablaze with flames. The old monk fell back, startled. Thousands of fiery figures appeared on the mountain's peaks, each in a different position. Some had their hands to their chests, some were touching the earth, some were praying. But all had the same calm, serene expressions on their faces. They were one—the Gautama Buddha. As the sun set, the visions slowly vanished, leaving the monk and his donkey alone in the desert. The monk was stunned. He started rummaging through his satchel, and his hand emerged, holding a small dagger. To honour Gautama Buddha, he carved a shrine into the base of the mountain.

This monk was Lezun. Unbeknownst to him, he had just created the very first of the Mogao Grottoes.

After Lezun had created the very first grotto in 366AD, he was joined by another monk named Faliang, who helped him develop the site. What Lezun originally planned to be a simple place of meditation for hermits had developed into a gathering place for monks from all over China. Monasteries and temples quickly sprang up around the mountains, and by the early 400s AD, a Buddhist community had formed at the foot of the mountain, with seven grottoes in total.

News of this meeting place for monks soon reached the ears of the Wei royals, who commissioned the construction of twenty more caves, with the preceding Zhou, Sui and Tang Dynasties following suit. The grottoes became officially known as Mogao, which meant “none higher” or “peerless”. The caverns certainly lived up to their name, as the construction of the Mogao Grottoes had reached its height in the Tang Dynasty. Many rich patrons donated large sums to the monks, hoping to achieve enlightenment by helping build the temples. With their financial support, the number of caves quickly rose to over a thousand. Unlike the older, more simple shrines, the grottoes constructed in the Tang Dynasty were elaborately decorated with 2,000 sculptures and 45,000 square meters of murals of gods (including the notorious the Monkey King) and monks, and with a more sophisticated architectural design as well. Through visual representation, they were meant to educate illiterates about Buddhist beliefs and stories, including the famous “Five Hundred Bandits” story depicted in Cave 258. The grottoes were no longer exclusive for monks, but a religious centre for the public, as well as the home of 1,400 monks and nuns and countless artists.

Although the Mogao Grottoes were flourishing, Turkish lords had seized land around the western part of the Silk Road, which sealed off Mogao from the rest of the world. As less people came, Dunhuang slowly became depopulated. The site went into decline, and by the Ming Dynasty, the Mogao Grottoes were sadly abandoned.

Lost to the mists of time, the Mogao Grottoes sat, untouched, unknown, for nearly 500 years. However, this would not be its permanent fate: a re-ignited interest in the Silk Road during the late 19th century led to Western explorers discovering an ancient stele that was erected in 1348 to commemorate the sponsors of a temple in Mogao.

A Taoist abbot named Wong Yuanlu had discovered some Mogao temples at the turn of the century and became a self-appointed guardian for them, attempting to raise funds to repair some statues. In 1900, he accidentally stumbled across an old cave, (what would be later known as the Library Grotto,) and discovered an enormous collection of manuscripts, ranging from about history and mathematics to folk songs. However, Yuanlu was ordered to close the caverns under the orders of the governor of Gansu, who was concerned about the cost of transporting the artifacts.

Luckily, Yuanlu's discoveries caught the eye of Hungarian archaeologist Marc Stein, who bargained with the abbot, asking for the manuscripts in exchange for a donation to repair the statues. Wong agreed to this deal, causing foreign explorers to go on expeditions to Mogao for its precious documents. The rest of the ancient texts were sent to Beijing for scholars to study.

Conservation efforts made by the government helped restore the grottoes to its former majesty. The International Dunhuang Project helped do research on the Dunhuang manuscripts and uncover many secrets of ancient China. Nowadays, the Mogao Caves are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as a popular tourist destination. A milestone in art, literature and religion, the Mogao Grottoes have affected the course of history, and will continue to, for evermore.

The Mogao Grottoes,

Peerless, and acclaimed world-wide.

Buddharupas nine xun* high,

Statues tall, they kiss the sky,

Holy days, joyous and blithe.

— Zhao Puchu

*Nine xun is equal to about 3.34 m

My Fairy Tale in Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Au-Yeung, Hau Ying Audrey – 10

Long ago, there was a magical cave in Mogao, China. Explorers discovered that there was something strange in the cave and they were scared about it. So I decided to find out what is in the Mogao Caves.

One day after swimming, I booked a private jet and flew to Mogao. When I got there, I looked in the cave. There was a lot of skeleton bones on the floor and it was... hair-raising! I then realised this should be the lost mystery place I was looking for. Suddenly there was a landslide nearby, and I immediately ran as fast as I could to a safe place! I jumped into a dark hole to escape from the landslide. While I was resting and sitting on a rock, an ant climbed on my feet, then onto my body and shoulder. "Hello, thanks for saving my life! I managed to cling onto your shoe luckily while you were running for your life just now! By the way, what are you doing here?" I froze and wondered, how can that ant talk? I whispered, "Um... I am here to explore!" The ant crawled onto the floor and said, "Oh! An explorer! Come on in and I'll show you around this place!" It led me into a room filled with grey dusty pictures and statues. The pictures were covered in spider webs, and they were all about the daily life of the ant family and the fairy family. The statues showed that the fairies enjoyed a picnic and they looked pleased.

The ant told me that the statues were built by fairies. All the statues were enormous, even bigger than trees. The ant said, "There is a fairy family living in the basement, want to check it out?" I exclaimed, "Of course, I'd love to!" We went to the basement, then I discovered there were little bottles filled with fairies inside them! These bottles were square-shaped and rainbow-coloured. I opened one of the bottles and asked the fairy, "Why are you in a bottle?" "I don't know!", said the fairy. "I'll get you out of here!" I kicked the bottle and freed the fairy, then asked, "Who captured you?" "A few years ago, a witch captured my family and friends from our home, The Fairyland! She wanted us to be her slaves, but we refused. That's why she punished us and put us in the bottle." Wow, a witch captured the fairies. That is unbelievable! That witch is so mean. How could she do something so evil to these lovely fairies? I was determined to save the fairies. I unlocked all the bottles, and all the fairies were so elated to be free! We got to know each other and became friends. We also agreed to go explore this cave together.

The fairies, the ant and myself went back to the cave entrance. We started digging into some sand on the floor to see whether there was hidden treasure down there. Then, the ant saw something next to the skeleton in a shiny golden colour! We all paid attention and looked carefully. It was... a treasure chest! We took it out and opened it. The chest was full of gold coins! We agreed to share them. I planned to donate all the gold coins to people in need. The fairies decided to use them to rebuild the Fairyland and the ant chose to use the coins to buy food for itself.

After that, the sun was setting and the weather was getting frigid. "It's time to go home, goodbye!", I yelled. "We need to go back to The Fairyland too. We miss our family and friends as we've been stuck in this cave for a long time!", said the fairy. The ant walked back into the cave and waved to us. "I will miss you all!" I hopped onto my private jet and flew home.

That night, I had an amazing sleep and dreamed about the fairies and the ant. I had a fantastic adventure in the magical Mogao Caves! When I looked back at this adventure, there were always something unexpected waiting there for us. I would like to go back next time with my family and friends, and introduce my parents to the ant that I met. I'm also going to write a letter to tell the explorers that the Mogao Caves is nothing to be fearful of. Instead, it is a place that is full of excitement!

The Magical Adventure About Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chan, Hui Yin Constance – 9

I was riding my unicorn Nico in the sunny blue sky, suddenly, a strong gust of wind blew us off balance and I fainted. After sometime, I felt something on my face. I woke up and found out Nico was licking my face. I slowly climbed to my feet, looked up and found out I'm in a desert. I saw a temple-shaped structure in a distance. I felt weird and thought someone had played a trick on me! I didn't know where I was but the surrounding looked familiar. I remembered reading a book about Mogao Caves! "Is this the famous Mogao Caves?" I asked myself. "You were going to discover Mogao Caves with me today!" said Nico. Suddenly I wasn't scared anymore. A tour guide was here, it was strange too, that a unicorn knows how to talk! "I think I remember who REDISCOVERED Mogao Caves! The first Western expedition to reach Dunhuang arrived in 1879. More than twenty years later, a Hungarian-born Marc Aurel Stein, a British archaeologist and explorer, learnt of the importance of the caves. Stein reached Dunhuang in 1907. He heard rumours of the walled-in cave and its content!" I exclaimed happily waiting for Nico to praise me.

"Your description is accurate! Do you know where we are now?" "No, I only know we're in Mogao Caves!" I said shyly, "Then let me tell you exactly where we are." Nico said. "You are at Dunhuang, an oasis located at a religious and cultural crossroad on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. The caves are also known as the Dunhuang Caves! However, this term was also used as a collective term to include other Buddhas Cave sites in Western Thousand Buddha's Caves, Eastern Thousand Buddha's Caves, Yulin Caves and Five Temple Caves". Nico explained confidently.

"Nico, you are so smart! Can we be partners so I can learn more?" I asked. "Ok! But I'm getting a bit hungry, can you give me some of your carrots?" "Certainly!" I said.

"I still want to know when Mogao Caves was built." I said. "Mogao Caves are famous for their statues and wall paintings, spanning 1000 years of Buddhist art starting from 366 AD and represent the great achievement of Buddhist art from 4th to the 14th century. Cave 302 of the Sui Dynasty contains one of the oldest and most vivid scenes of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road." I am astonished that Nico was so knowledgeable, was it an expert in history and archaeology? Or it was a genius who knows everything? Regardless, I'm embarrassed that I'm less knowledgeable than a unicorn. "Please tell me more so I can be a famous explorer when I grow up." I said.

"Mogao Caves are also known as Buddha's Cave. It is 28 kilometers south of Dunhuang. There are 750 caves altogether on 5 levels, the biggest cave is 130 feet high!" said Nico. "Wow there are a lot of caves. I don't think I can visit them all in one day!" I said. "But some caves are very small and can accommodate few people at a time." Nico said. "OHHH how poor the homes must have been really small for them!" I said in a fake poor voice. "YEAH, I agree also. Of the most 800 caves chiseled into the cliff face, 492 are decorated with exquisite murals that cover nearly half a million square feet, some 40 times the expanse of the Sistine Chapel. The cave interiors are also adorned with more than 200 sculptures." Nico said. "Weren't they scared living in the caves?" I asked.

"I still have 3 more questions! First, who constructed Mogao Caves? Second, what did the library caves write about? And what is hidden in there?" "These are very good questions Constance! The Mogao Caves are fifteen miles away from Dunhuang's bustling market. It is home to one of the most breathtaking collections of Buddhist paintings and statues in the world. As legend has it, a Buddhist monk name Le Zun was making the long journey to the Western Paradise, he had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light at the site in 366AD, inspiring him to build a cave here. Regarding your second question, the library contains treasure troves of writings which was collected between the 9th and 10th centuries CE by Tang and Song Dynasty Buddhist monks who carved the cave and then filled them with ancient manuscripts on topics ranging from religion and philosophy, history and mathematics! Regarding your last question about what is hidden in Mogao Caves, I suppose it's history. The library cave, Dunhuang manuscripts, art, murals, architecture, sculptures, paintings on silk paper, printed images, textiles and many priceless artifacts." "Thanks Nico for the answer. You are equally useful as Safari." I said. "I am really pleased and I hope I can remember all these fantastic facts when I visit Mogao Caves with my parents next time." I said happily! "I think your family will be so glad to know that!" said Nico.

I suddenly heard someone screamed "Constance, wake up!" I opened my eyes and found out that it was just a dream! I told my mom what I dreamed, and she told me our bus is arriving at Mogao Caves in 15 minutes and

we need to get ready to see some invaluable historical artifacts. I was so glad to know all the facts about Mogao Caves so I could be the tour guide for my parents! I felt so energized and excited.

We finally arrived to the magnificent Mogao Caves! I ran into the first cave and told my parents all about it! My family tried counting how many caves there were but they lost count! At last, I told them how many caves there are and they find out that it was impossible to count without me telling them, but at last they were all still very proud that I knew so much about Mogao Caves! They praised me!

The Dream Quest of Buddhas

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chang, Long Tin Andy – 11

“The Silk Road was used to allow exchange of spice, silk...”

I had endeavored to squeeze facts about the Silk Road into my brain for my Social & Cultural Study examination revision for the 101th time but it was so boring that I kept dozing over, again and again. I had no idea about why even has to be bothered to memorize these “useless” information from decades, if not, ages ago.

“Spice, silk...”

My head dropped again for the 99th time when all of a sudden, my vision got blurred. I rubbed my eyes and when I opened them again, I found myself inside a small cave and I saw a stream of light coming from inside it. I was puzzled but curious, so I decided to start following it.

The more I explored, the more I found this cave special. It was neither dark nor spooky as in my imagination of what a cave would be. I heard small crackling of the dead leaves under my feet and I felt the dryness and chill of the air. The many beautiful paintings all over the cave wall took my breath away. They were not stickmen type of painting, but rather colourful, detailed and elaborate – simply stunning! I was feasting my eyes on the paintings thinking to steal some ideas for my next VA assignment when I suddenly realized that most paintings had one focus in common – Buddha.

I was still following the light, which was coming through a small window right at the top of the entrance of the cave when suddenly I came face to face with a humongous figure of Buddha facing it. The light shone on the face of the Buddha sculpture as if it was a spot-light on stage. I was amazed by the so very clever design of the lighting on Buddha and just stood there staring when I noticed about some luminous lichen that gave the walls an eerie glow. Oh My God! The lichen had slowly turned the cave wall into a screen.

As if to answer my questions on what cave was it and why was it there, a movie began to play. I saw a Buddhist monk who had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light in his dream which inspired him to build a cave here in order to build karmic merit. He was later joined by a second monk and the third, the fourth and so on, all sharing the same excitement to carving different Buddhas by hand to perform their acts of veneration. The site gradually grew. Buddhist monks, local officials, and wealthy families all raced to build different caves and made different paintings and sculptures of Buddhas. They did not just build them, but also worshipped them with their hearts. Word of mouth about the caves spread like fire and people from far and near flooded to pay visits.

One particular cave caught my attention. In there sat a monk on the ground barefoot, facing a Buddha and chanting. He was trying to bury a gilded Buddha charm inside the Buddha he was making. The charm, seemingly made from real gold, sparkled and looked valuable. The Buddha was also very special and instead of standing or sitting, he was lying down in a peaceful manner.

Then, the images on the wall began to fade away and the lichen stopped glowing.

I found myself waking up in my bed with a lot of questions on my mind about my dream and so I googled about Buddhas and caves. My jaw dropped when I saw images about Mogao Grottoes – the caves looked exactly like the ones I saw in my dream!

The Mogao Grottoes, now on UNESCO's world cultural heritage list, were carved into the face of a sandstone cliff at Dunhuang on the edge of the Gobi Desert. I read with interest the amazing figures about it: the caves were carved starting 1,700 years ago from the 4th to the 14th century; the decorated caves' walls and ceilings totaled close to 500,000 square feet; there were 2,000 sculptures and the largest sculpture was over 100 feet tall! In surfing the various websites, I even saw a picture of a lying Buddha in one webpage about Mogao Grottoes which looked very similar to the one in my dream.

The more I learnt about Mogao Grottoes, the more I was interested in knowing more. Besides knowing its history, I also learnt that the site had been swamped by tourists in recent years. The resulting high levels of carbon dioxide and humidity posed great challenges in conserving the caves.

I suddenly had a brainwave on why I had to study Social & Cultural Study – so as to understand the history of mankind, the history of my kind. I also found an urge to master science so that I could make good use of technologies to help conserving Mogao Grottoes better.

I decided that one day, I will go and see for the Buddhas in Mogao Grottoes myself and I hope that I will unveil a secret that there is really a gold charm inside the lying Buddha as shown in my dream. If I study hard enough, I will invent a machine to take out the gold charm, or other hidden treasures, without hurting the Buddha!

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chiang, Ching Alexander – 10

The desert climate was still cold in the early morning when my family and I arrived at the world famous Mogao Caves for sightseeing. I always want to be here because I like history a lot. Also, I want to learn how the ancient monks built this wonderful place thousands of years ago. It is a legend and I truly admire it.

When I first saw the tour guide, I suddenly got an uncomfortable feeling. The tour guide had a huge scar across his face and he didn't look like the image on the website where we hired him.

"Hello, I am your tour guide and my name is Daniel, you can call me Big Dan. I hope you will have a great time," he said with a deep and mysterious voice.

"You are very welcome to come and find me at the hotel but stay out of my room." He also always looked behind us like he thought someone was stalking us. I ignored that and continued our sightseeing because the wall paintings there were too beautiful and the magnificent Buddhist art was stunning.

The next day, our tour guide was limping. I started to feel nervous.

"The first caves were dug out in the stone age by the cavemen," said Big Dan.

"And the "Library Cave" was found last year."

I stared at Big Dan and thought all of his information was impossible and ridiculous. The information was different from the books about the Mogao Caves I borrowed. He even took us to a dead end accidentally when we asked him to take us to the ancient library.

On the third day, Big Dan was missing. My mom was determined. "Nothing can ruin our family vacation! Let's explore the caves ourselves," said my mom.

While my mom was looking at a painting, my brother and I saw something in the corner of a dark room. Suddenly a stinky stench caught my nostrils as I approached, and I found a rotten body lying there. I was terrified and told my parents and they called the ranger there and told him what happened.

After that, my mom got nervous. "Maybe we should go to the ancient library." She thought books could calm her down. When we were at the library, my brother saw a painting on the wall of something like a "PLACE" with a curse that makes anybody start rotting and stop them from leaving if they steal from the "PLACE". I was terrified of that picture but I didn't know where the "PLACE" was in the painting.

That night, my brother and I read all the books about curses shown from paintings and books about solving mysteries on our ebook account. We found out that the "PLACE" was the Mogao Caves... Suddenly, I figured out that the rotten body and the tour guide could be "black archeologists"!

"Black archaeologists steal and smuggle precious historical cultural relics in the black market." I told my brother.

But luckily the curse could be broken by something holy and pure goodness. My brother bought a Buddhist token from a souvenir shop yesterday because he thinks it is a lucky charm. We thought we should give it a shot. The next morning, we went back to the ancient library and put the token on the painting. The painting suddenly changed into a happy place with a lot of monks filled with enlightenment. "I hope the caves will be safe now. After all, preservation is important." I said to my brother.

On the last day, we went to the Gobi Desert. We climbed to the top of a big sand dune and slid down the dune with sleighs. It was scary but fun! After a few rounds, we saw some cute camels and paid the riders to ride on the cute camels. While we were playing, we suddenly felt windy and dusty.

The riders told us to run to nearby shelters. "Run! A sand storm is coming!" We jumped off the camels. We quickly ran into our car but my dad was too panicked.

"I dropped the car keys. I lost them." Dad almost cried.

"Look at the camels! Dad!" said my mom. We saw the camels flee to a nearby tent and we followed them immediately.

The run was about ten minutes but it felt like ten hours to me because it was really hard to run in the sand. My face started to feel pain from the dust. When we finally ran into the tent, we fell onto the carpet floor in exhaustion. After a second, the tent suddenly flew away because of the strong wind. When we thought we were going to die, the sand storm ended and everyone was unharmed except our car which was blown away and crashed into a dune.

I will never forget this trip because of the beautiful paintings and the frightful but exciting journey of this spiritual place. When I grow up, I want to be an adventurer and come back to explore Dunhuang again.

Adventures in Ally's Cave

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chu, Yan Kiu Carina – 9

Boom! Boom! A young and pretty scientist named Ally invented the time machine and traveled randomly back to Dunhuang, Gansu Province in China. When Ally got out of her time machine, there was smoke coming out. Her head was spinning and her hair was as curly as if she had got an electric shock. She looked at her magical, silver watch and said, "Let me see which year it is now!" She switched on her magical watch and her watch said, "Master Ally, you are now in 366, which was one---thousand---six---hundred---and---fifty---five years ago!"

The time machine was damaged and took time to repair. Ally looked around and discovered a lot of caves on the hill inside a golden mountain near a desert. She met a storyteller called Max. Max was a tall young teenager but he had a grey moustache. He told Ally that the place was called Mogao Caves. Max introduced Monk Le to Ally. Monk Le was the first monk to dig caves and make scriptures on the hillside. Monk Le also told other monks that the place was sacred. It had attracted a lot of people to come and make more Buddhist scriptures and sacred arts.

Max, Ally, and Monk Le became friends and they shared a lot of drawing techniques. For example, Ally taught Monk Le how to mix the colour pigments, spread the colour pigments, and make beautiful paintings on the walls. Monk Le told Ally the origin of Buddhism and showed a lot of Buddhist scriptures to her. Max and Ally played hide and seek in the caves and studied a lot of exciting stories inside the caves.

Max, Ally, and Monk Le went on a marvellous adventure together in the desert. That day the sand storm was extremely strong and they could hardly see anything. Then they saw a fire dragon coming out from the sand dune, blasting a lot of hot fireballs at them. It was so hot that they felt as if they were going to melt. They tried to hide near one of the caves. Ally spotted a warrior sword inside the cave and showed it to Max and Monk Le. Max carefully examined the sword and delightfully said, "Look, Ally, do you know what is this? This sword is an ancient magical weapon lost for centuries. You see, the sword has seven colourful gemstones. There is a myth that when you press the button on its blade, it will shoot strong rainbow beams from the gemstones and kill the fire dragon." They took the sword and left the cave. They pressed the button together and smashed the sword with the rainbow beam on the dragon. They defeated the dragon finally! To commemorate their adventure, they named the cave "Ally Cave" and carved the name at the cave entrance.

Ally said to Max and Monk Le, "It is about time for me to return to the future". Monk Le sighed, "Oh no, why do you leave so early?" Max pulled Ally's shirt and said, "I will miss you very much!" Monk Le then asked, "Can I share our story with others and carve it on the walls?" Ally replied, "Of course, I will tell your story to my parents too!" Monk Le and Max bid farewell to Ally and said, "Goodbye, Ally! I hope we can meet again in the future." Next, Max helped Ally to find the spare parts to repair the time machine.

Finally, Ally returned to the present. She told her parents her amazing story with Monk Le and Max but her parents did not believe her. She begged them to go to Gansu Province and look at the stone carvings. In Summer, they went to Dunhuang and visited Mogao Caves. They finally found the "Ally Cave" and they felt incredible! They saw the carvings about their adventures of defeating the fire dragon by the warrior sword. They also found some notes left by Monk Le on the wall saying, "Ally, see you in heaven!"

New Tales of the Magao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Fung, Yan Amber – 9

Sapphire lived in a village nereby the Mogao Caves in China. She loved reading books. One night, she read a book about the legendary Buddha Cave, and soon after that, she fell asleep, she heard a thunderous sound and woke up.

She was in a place where there were thousands of buddhas and soon after, she fell asleep. She was in a place where there were thousands of buddhas surrounding her! How breathtaking the splendid buddhas looked. Around her were loads of magnificent paintings with wondrous colors. It looked like a pyramid that she read about a long time ago! She explored around the gigantic cave and even saw a gorgeous buddha sleeping exactly like how Sapphire does. She stepped backwards, trying to see the entire cave clearly and how colorful it looked, as if this was the place where she used to see a book that looked ideal to her. This miraculous cave looked like it was waiting for Sapphire to see how amazing it is. All of the sudden, Sapphire saw the first clue that this Buddha cave was used by civilizations of ancient China during the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties and is important evidence of the evolution Buddhist art in the Northwest Region of China.

It was obvious by just looking at the red, green and gold clothing on a large buddha surrounded by other handsome and beautiful buddhas. After a while, Sapphire found the buddha in her book she read today. She could right away recognize the buddha's face because she had looked at the picture of the buddha for quite a long time and tried to memorize it. She admired the fantastic look of a part of the cave filled with the charming sights of the buddhas. She heard the door slam, and a shiver ran down her spine. She was an intelligent girl, so she knew that this was just a slam. She nodded her head to tell the buddhas that it was nothing but the wind.

While she walked around, she found the biggest buddha among all other humongous buddhas. This buddha looked like the most well-known one in her village. "Sapphire! I'm waiting for you to wake up!" her mother reminded. Sapphire woke up and was still thinking of the magnificent Buddha Cave, so today in computer class, she typed in "Buddha Cave" and the Magao cave came out. It looked exactly the same as the one in her dream! What a miracle.

The Kingdom of Monks

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, King, Sophie – 11

One grey wind-swept afternoon, a seven year old girl Lilliana or Lilly, was resting on a couch, reading a library book about monks and Mogao Grottoes. It had only been a week since her family moved from their mansion into this plain old country house after her dad got fired from his job.

The house was extremely eerie, with an attic for storage, creaking floorboards, and spiderwebs hanging from the ceiling! Before moving in, the owner had warned them to never, ever open the door next to the guest bathroom. Ever since, Lilly had been secretly wondering what was behind the door. Lilly was alone (her parents were out job hunting while her brothers, Liam and Lucas, aged ten and twelve, were busy preparing lunch), she took the opportunity to investigate. As she nervously approached the door, she paused and took a deep breath before slowly opening it.

To her horror, a giant blue vortex appeared in front of her and she instantly fell inside. “Help!!!” She screamed at the top of her lungs. Liam and Lucas heard her ear-splitting scream, and rushed over to see. They tried to pull her to safety, but only ended up falling into the vortex too!

Down they went, swirling faster and faster. “Thump!” They landed on a large patch of grass. Two odd looking creatures, like old fashioned fairies that were dressed stylishly, suddenly flew past. Lucas waved at them, trying to catch their attention, asked in his sweetest voice, “Um...excuse me.....we come from a far away land; we were brought here by mistake, so...um...we were wondering if you can help us get back home?” Shocked, they asked suspiciously, “What makes you think we would help you when we hardly even know you?” Liam stepped forward awkwardly, then replied, “Please, kind fairies, we can explain. It all started when..” After listening carefully and lots of discussion with each other, they sighed heavily and said, “We would love to help, but unfortunately we don’t know how to send you home. We do know a way though. Here is a map that can guide you to the King of monks.” “Thank you!” they said gratefully before heading off.

After what felt long, they finally reached the maze of manuscripts. It was already night time, which made it extremely hard to see. “Ouch!” Ben yelped in pain. He had accidentally tripped over a torch and a mini mirror! Liam picked up the torch and turned it on. “This must be left accidentally by an adventurer who once ventured into the maze! I wonder if he managed to find his way out?” He shuddered at the thought. “Well, at least we can use this torch to find our way out!” Lilly said as she opened the gate to the maze.

After a while, they stopped at a curb which separated into hundreds of paths. “Which way should we go now?” Lucas asked exasperatedly as he searched for clues with his torch. “Aha!” he cried triumphantly. He found a gilded board with words written in an unknown language: “bUo! TUo gniHgUAl”.

Lilly looked sideways at the board. All of a sudden, Lilly’s face lit up, “That’s English! I bet if we read the board using the mirror, we would ‘crack’ the case!” Lucas took the mirror from Liam and directed it towards the board.

“Laughing...out...loud?” he read.

“But how will this help us know which way to go?” Lucas asked curiously. They racked their brains, hoping to find an answer, when Lucas exclaimed, “That’s it! LOL is short for Laughing Out Loud right? LOL turned upside down is 707! That’s the path to the exit!” At the word 707, gilded arrows appeared on the ground, showing their way out! “We did it!” The threesome exclaimed joyfully after they had exited. Exhausted, they decided to take a rest before travelling to their next destination.

The next morning, they reached the Forest of Buddhas. In they went, when suddenly Lilly spotted a massive row of Buddha statues blocking the path. Even though Lilly was quite sure that they weren’t alive, she still asked quietly, “Excuse me, Mr Buddha, but would it be possible if you move over slightly so we can walk past for just a second?” Not expecting anything to happen, one of the largest Buddhas grabbed her aggressively by the arm and threw her into a hole. “No one can enter this forest without permission!” The Buddhas let out a thunderous bellow in unison.

“What do we do now?” Lucas asked his brother. Liam stared sternly at the Buddhas.“ LAUGHING OUT LOUD!” he yelled.

As if by magic, the Buddhas roared in unity. They had opened up a passageway for them! The two darted towards Lilly, then shook her awake. The threesome scampered out of the forest as fast as they could.

As soon as they had escaped, they noticed a plain desert, with nothing like a cave. They strode around when Lucas accidentally stepped on an invisible button!

All of a sudden, a grotto appeared, and the King of Monks throne of the cave. “How may I help, strangers?” the King of Monks asked solemnly. Lilly explained everything from start to finish as the King listened intensely. “I see. I understand your difficulties and I would be glad to help.” the King replied. To their complete surprise, the King held out a dazzling crystal ball and whispered a spell.

Suddenly, a crystal blue vortex opened in front of them, sucking them in! Before disappearing completely, they quickly thanked the King and waved a final goodbye.

“Poof!” Lilliana was sitting back in her armchair with her library book . She noticed a mysterious note on the table alongside the book. It was the same unknown language in the Maze of Manuscripts! She sprinted to the bathroom and studied the note through the mirror. “Thank you for visiting our land,” it read. The afternoon sun shone brightly on her. It was a wonderful day.

Exploring the Hidden Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, King, Stephie – 11

“Follow me, Boomer!” I said as I was walking to the Mogao Grottoes, with my dog, Boomer trailing behind at a slow pace. For many years, I have been studying the history of the mystical Mogao Grottoes as I am interested in the ancient artwork of the monks. There were many rumours about the Grottoes, and I was sceptical about whether the caves actually existed. Finally, I got the courage to venture into them...

As I arrived at the Grottoes, I suddenly came to a halt. The Grottoes were like a classical Chinese temple, and they looked stunning! I cautiously stepped into the cave and was taken aback by the magnificent artwork and sculptures. The walls of the cave were covered with ornate drawings of fantasised creatures, such as flying apsaras, celestial beings and more, all of which were filled to the brim with a burst of colours. Manuscripts of literature were neatly displayed on wooden tables, and the exquisite sculptures of monks in tunics lined the rustic walls. Beautiful murals were neatly carved into the walls, which gave the room a majestic air.

Meanwhile, Boomer wandered around the Grottoes, sniffing at the manuscripts inquisitively. He had always been fond of art, and found the fragrance of old paper unusual. He was in awe of everything around him, and couldn't help bouncing about enthusiastically, which caused him to bump into things. “Oh, Boomer, isn't this place just amazing?!” I cried out. But, Boomer wasn't listening. Whilst happily strolling around the Grottoes, he had found a wall covered with drawings of dogs, and was rather exhilarated by it. He was eagerly wagging his tail at the wall, just a little too vigorously...

“Click!” The wall suddenly slid aside, revealing a secret passageway. I immediately rushed over to Boomer, and exclaimed with delight, “You clever boy, Boomer! You've found a passageway that perhaps no one has ever found before. Let's explore!” I tentatively stepped in, and found an alleyway of stairs. The wall shut behind us with a thud. Excitement trembled through me as Boomer and I walked further and further down into the cave's hidden compartment. My heart began pounding slightly, and I could feel my legs trembling. “How will we get out?” I thought.

After what seemed like a million years, we entered a spacious room where every inch of space was filled with more art pieces and sculptures of the monks. As I turned to my left, I noticed some odd looking objects that had a furry section on one end and a round tip on the other end. They filled up the jars on the shelves. There were also many platters of see-through containers, with different coloured circles inside of them. I was curious to know what those queer objects were, but had to acknowledge that there was no reasonable possibility of finding out. We were bewildered by the glorious discoveries that we had found in this secret compartment.

“Help.....help.....” Suddenly, we heard a faint sound coming from a corner of the room. We followed the sound and found an old trunk that looked rather decayed. It still had specks of gold on it, and looked like it could have been a treasure chest that had once belonged to the monks. Without hesitation, I opened the box and discovered a large, grey rock, painted with a pair of eyes, a nose and a mouth.

“How did that rock make that sound?” I mumbled to myself.

“Because, I am a magical rock and I would like to thank you sincerely for freeing me,” the rock said earnestly, in a deep but kind voice.

I jumped back, alarmed. “You...you know how to talk?” I asked, startled.

“Yes, of course. I was made by a very young monk, thousands and thousands of years ago. He was the one who painted my face, and I was his companion until he grew up. He has kept me in this trunk for a long time, so I have been stuck here and could not escape. But, oh, how fortunate am I, that you are here, and that you have freed me from my box,” the rock said jovially.

I was astonished, and had many questions to ask him. “Since you have been here ever since the first monks lived here, do you know what this place is?”

“Ah, this is the Magical Cave. It was built by the monks to protect their possessions and is filled with their peculiar inventions. This whole area is stored with many different objects that people don’t use nowadays. Now that I’m free from my prison, let me show you!”

Using his magical powers, he lifted one of the odd looking objects from a jar. “This is a paint brush. The monks made it so that they could use it to paint their artwork and sculptures,” he explained, as he simultaneously lifted the colourful platter that was laying on the shelves. “This is a paint set. It contains different colours in little circular compartments. The monks used this to add dimension and colour to their art pieces to make them look more attractive.”

“Amazing!” I then blurted out, “The monks were quite creative inventors, especially as they were one of the first group of inventors to ever exist in the world. I know this, as I have learnt that from research as a scholar–explorer!”

“Quite so.” The rock agreed warmly. “Would you like to take these inventions back to your world? I am sure your people would enjoy using them.”

“Thank you, Mr Rock!” I cheerfully thanked him. “Is there any way I can repay you for these splendid utilities?”

“Would you please promise me to keep this magical cave a secret?” The rock asked in a low voice. “No one should ever know about this hidden compartment, as it is filled with many precious items.”

“Of course! Your secret is safe with me.” I said.

“Thank you. Now, let me help you get back to your hometown. I hope you will visit me again soon!” The rock said gleefully, and with an instant wave, I found myself still holding the paintbrush and paint set in my hands, back in my warm, cosy flat.

The Time Machine

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lai, Cheuk Hei Curtis – 9

“Yes, Arian! We made time travel possible!” I shouted. Arian was in the garage fixing his dad’s car. I showed him the time machine project that we had been working on for so long and it was done! “It looks like a two-seated B-29 in the 1950s,” he said.

The next day, we fuelled up the tank and hopped into the cockpit of the time machine to test if it could travel back in time. We checked that everything worked fine and then took off excitedly. The plane soared through the sky like an eagle gliding smoothly in the wind. We had set the date to 1912 to see the Titanic. During the time travel, we were flying over important events; our clothes would turn into different types of clothing, representing different time periods in history. We didn’t notice that we had flown over the Titanic, as we were busy navigating. When we noticed the dashboard, we were already in 1678. We realized that there was no way to go back. We decided to take turns to take a nap. When Arian woke me up, we had already landed in a desert where we saw some camels passing by. We came out of the cockpit and walked around the area. A while later, we stumbled across a five-storey temple, and part of it was built inside an enormous cave. The statues gave me the willies – they looked so real!

In one of the caves, we discovered a gold-coloured wooden sword. Next to it, there was a slot that the sword could fit in. We inquisitively pushed the sword in to see what would happen. Immediately, we heard a click and then a door slid open. Inside the room, we found piles of gold laying on the ground. We gasped, as it was our first time seeing so much gold! It was unbelievable!

While we were exploring another cave, we unearthed bundles of scrolls and a large number of paper books. It was a precious library! The vast paintings on the walls and ceilings were magnificent – they must have taken a long time to finish. We cautiously climbed over the scrolls, picked a few up and rolled them open – we found a historical legend. Arian read, “One day, Le Zun, a Buddhist monk, was travelling to the Western Paradise. The weather was as hot as a frying pan. When he went through the Gobi Desert, he had finished all his water. Luckily, he found a small lake two kilometres away from this cave. He scooped up the water and drank it. The water was sweet like honey! Afterwards, he sat down and relaxed. He was admiring the sunset when something hit his eyes. He raised his head and saw the mountain glowing. At the same time, he saw a golden Maitreya Buddha floating in the sky, as well as a thousand beaming buddhas hovering in the sky, surrounded by flying fairies playing heavenly songs. From then on, he decided to stay there to reconstruct his vision through painting and sculpting in this cave.” I continued reading the story, “Years later, Fa Liang, another Buddhist monk, had the same vision. He dug another cave and filled it with paintings and sculptures, like Le Zun.” We realised that through time travel, we visited the renowned Mogao Grottoes on the Silk Road in China.

After this thrilling adventure of exploring the Magao Caves, we both agreed that it was time to go home. We carefully put the scrolls of manuscripts back on their original shelves in the Library Cave. It took us a while to find our time travel machine in the desert. When we found it, we got on it and tested the machine meticulously to make sure that it could still function as expected. We carefully typed “2022” into the dashboard this time, as we did not want a repeat of what happened earlier. Soon, we soared into the sky like a rocket and travelled back home safely. We went to school the next day and shared this adventure with our teachers and classmates. They were all stunned to learn what we had experienced in this adventure!

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lee, Cheuk Yin Koen – 10

“The Magao Grottoes is really a fantastic place, Mom! I have been longing to visit the Magao Grottoes for years. It was built on a cliff of the Mingsha Mountain formed by river erosion in the west. As for its name, it was called Mogao Grottoes, and Mo means desert and also no in Chinese, the Mogao Grottoes refers to the caves in a high place of the desert. So as a whole, it means there is no higher and better cave than the peerless ones.” I kept talking about the Magao Grottoes, hopefully, I could persuade my mom to take me there. Finally, we ended up going to the Magao Grottoes Exhibition held at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum last summer.

We walked around the exhibition and took beautiful pictures. We took a small break and had a healthy but delicious meal before we decided to continue our excursion. We followed the tour guide to a classroom. He taught us that most of the poor caves were terribly damaged due to a lot of human-caused destruction not just from natural weathering. With four hundred and ninety-two caves, only four hundred and two survived. I looked around at all the 3D animations of the ancient architecture, sculptures and murals, which vividly represented the Buddhists with plenty of colours. I felt a bit dizzy in a very crowded place after getting separated from my mom and was left feeling helpless.

I opened my eyes and in the darkness of the animated desert, I vaguely saw a little light flashing in the dust. The light got closer and closer, and finally, I saw a creepy creature moving towards me. It was a camel! A camel told me that fewer and fewer camels were left in the desert. “Many people use me to transport different goods from China to France, Germany and other European countries. I am exhausted from carrying parcels every day on the Silk Road of China. Some of my friends have even died from being overworked and lack of nourishment and water.” The camel wanted me to save him. When I tried to ask how I could do that, he disappeared in a flash.

All of a sudden, the ground started shaking, and the story started to unfold. I was being guided to the caves where ancient paintings came to life! A cactus in the painting suddenly started to move and then it spoke! It told me the extremely hot weather dried them out and some of his friends had even died. He knew the high temperature was caused by the polluted air caused by all the carbon emissions from cars and air-conditioners. The cactus told me that he was the only plant on earth. Without green plants, all the living organisms would die and it was scary to know that the end of the world was approaching.

The cactus had not even finished its conversation when a lovely deer and a black sheep jumped out from behind a 35-meter tall Buddha sculpture. They were skinny and looked like sticks! All the black sheep's wool had been torn from its skin. They had had nothing to eat for three days and were extremely hungry. Surprisingly, the Buddha sculpture rose up to the sky, and a lovely deer jumped into a big hole and guided me to a place beneath the Buddha sculpture which unlocked breath-taking secrets. I saw a nine-storey temple embedded into the cliff. Surprisingly, all the doors closed and I was trapped inside with a big Buddha. The Buddha was so huge that the floor had even cracked open. I was extremely terrified and wanted to escape, but the Buddha had me trapped. He told me that I should stop wasting paper every day because it is killing a lot of trees and soon the forest would be gone. People also do not care about animals enough. He said that it was good to be a vegetarian because not eating meat is not only good for your health but it saves animals too. The Buddha asked me to promise that I would plant more trees to protect the environment before I would be allowed to leave.

The lights suddenly flashed. I opened my eyes and saw my mom watching a dance performance from Chengdu. The journey had been so adventurous and unforgettable. Most importantly, it sparked in me a desire to treasure our cultural heritage and protect all the natural resources in the world. My mom then asked me if I had any ideas on how to preserve the heritage site as many parts of the caves had been damaged by humans.

I hope I can be a scientist in the future and use science and technology to protect cultural relics. I would like to figure out things such as how water affects the caves, and what kinds of changes in the environment can cause the murals to disintegrate. To preserve the Dunhuang Magao Grottoes, technology can be used to create high-definition images so that everyone can have breath-taking virtual tours with minimum disruptions caused to the fragile caves. Heritage

sites reflect a nation's development and wisdom from the past. All people are responsible for ensuring that relics are well-protected. The animals and plants are suffering too and it is up to us to protect them and the environment. I promised Buddha I would try my best to do it. I hope even after 1000 years, the images, colours and all the information in Magao Grottoes can be protected and people can still appreciate their splendour. Most importantly, I hope my mom can take me to the real Mogao Grottes in Dunhuang, China one of these days.

The Adventure Ceila Would Never Forget

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lee, Heidi – 11

Once upon a time, a 16 year old girl named Celia lived in Forever Town that was near the ancient cave. Celia was a very pretty orphan indeed. She had long curly brown hair, eyes like the starry blue sky and perfectly smooth skin. She always wore a white moon clip that shone under the moonlight. Although she was beautiful, she was not as shy and timid as she seemed. In fact, she was the only fearless girl in the town.

The town people followed a certain rule that contained warnings about adventuring outside the town. The elders simply said, "It's beyond dangerous to go outside the town." People had never understood why it was so menacing to go outside, but they assumed that it was because of wild animals lurking around. But there was another rumor – about caves that were hidden somewhere not far in the mountains. You see, this village was once a buzzing city along the Old Silk Road, but no one traveled along it anymore. Over time, the city dwindled into a small town and now, no one ventured out mythical ancient caves.

But did Celia care? No, most certainly not. She had never cared about rules, especially the ones that made no sense. "How could it be dangerous when no one had ever explored it?", she thought to herself.

Finally one fine day, she decided to set off to find the hidden caves of wonder. Despite the town's warnings, Celia set off into the mountains to seek a great adventure. It took her 17 days to travel from the town to the cave, in blistering, burning daylight sun and facing snowy blizzard storms at night with winds that blasted her face

Soon, she arrived at the entrance of the cave. What she saw dazzled her. On one side of the cave was the rocky opening, filled with small gemstones embedded in the rock face. When she stepped inside, a giant Buddha statue stared at her. Art paintings were around the walls, making the room seem more colourful. Celia swore she heard whispers in the air, repeating, "Finally you have come to meet me...". She shuddered but she didn't freeze for long. She tied her hair, and continued to march deeper into the dark opening.

Celia found herself in an ancient library that was filled with tons of books. She looked around, trying to find a book that interested her, when she encountered a strange something floating above the bookshelves. It was pearly white, as if it was snow – a figure that materialized into a short black haired, about 18 year old girl in a gown with a white hairband. She was a ghost!

The ghost soon realised there was a human behind her observing her every move. "Who are you? No – what are you?", Celia finally asked.

"M – me? Are you talking to me?" ,the ghost stuttered.

The ghost seemed more frightened of Celia than Celia was of her.

"Yeah you. What's your name?", Celia asked.

"Alisa... yours?"

"Celia. Hey, how about we sit down – if you can – and introduce ourselves?"

They talked for a long time and soon they felt comfortable with each other. Celia complained about how silly her town was for fearing the unknown caves. Alisa felt the same, thinking it was a shame that the descendants had long forgotten the journey their ancestors had made and the treasures they had created there.

After three weeks of staying in the cave, Celia knew Alisa's backstory a bit more.

It all began when Alisa was once exploring Mogao Caves just like Celia. But a few days later, Alisa found a mysterious button which was tempting to press. After some discussion with herself, she decided to press it. At first

nothing happened but soon enough, the ground began to crumble and Alisa fell into the pit of darkness. After she woke up, she looked at herself just to find a small, transparent hand that's similar to hers before in front of her.

On Celia's last day, Alisa said something Celia couldn't forget.

"Tell your townspeople that, no matter what, adventuring is the most important thing in our lives. Without it, our beautiful grotto would not exist and our art would be lost."

The townspeople learned from Celia that adventuring was not such a bad thing because, after all, without adventuring, the Mogao Caves would never have come to be and the townspeople's ancestors would never have settled in their beautiful mountainside town.

Faliang the Monk

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Li, Olivia Erica – 9

Once upon a time, there was a monk called Faliang. He was very hard working and always finished his tasks ahead of his fellow monks. He was awarded with one week's holiday.

It was a summer night, Faliang fell asleep when he sat under a tree enjoying the sound of the wind and an owl hooting. In the dream, Faliang saw a mustached man dressed in a white robe coming towards him.

“My dear friend, I am Jesus. God has sent me to tell you that you have been chosen to create some sculptures of the ancient Chinese god, the Buddha. You shall create them in a remote place in Dunhuang, where there are more than one hundred caves, spacious enough for you to create as many sculptures as you wish. Now, I need to report to my Father, so goodbye. I shall see you when you are building the sculptures.”

When Faliang woke up, he thought for a while. The dream real so that Faliang believed that was God's special mission assigned to him and decided to follow it and make the dream become true. This would also give him something to do during the holiday week.

It was boiling hot when Faliang set off to find the remote place in Dunhuang. After a few hours, he found a place near an oasis. Faliang also saw there was a long and tall line of caves with rectangular entrances, a few meters from the oasis. In the distance, Faliang saw a mustached man approaching him. When the man got closer, Faliang realized that it was Jesus!

Jesus said, “My dear Faliang, I will help you build the sculptures.”

Faliang gathered some building materials and started building the sculptures. With some help and assistance from Jesus, Faliang finished his masterpiece without too many difficulties.

Suddenly, Faliang and Jesus felt an earthquake coming towards them. Faliang begged Jesus to do something to stop the earthquake so that their work would not be ruined. Unfortunately, Jesus told Faliang that there wasn't anything he could do, because the earthquake was sent by God. Instead, Jesus told Faliang that he should hold on tight to him.

The earthquake was so violent that it seemed the whole world was going to end. Faliang could hear the wild wind blowing but did not dare open his eyes. It seemed like a decade until Faliang heard Jesus say: “It is now over; you can let go of my sleeves now.”

Faliang could not believe what he saw, the caves were all buried in a thick blanket of mud, rocks, and trees. All their hard work was destroyed. “What should we do, Jesus?” Faliang moaned. Jesus said, “Go, call the other monks, and tell them that you need their help, and that it is I, that have sent you.” Faliang ran back to the temple with his shaking legs.

Faliang did not let Jesus wait for too long before he returned with a group of monks. They helped Jesus and Faliang to dig out the cave. They discovered that a whole bunch of the caves and sculptures had broken, collapsed, or cracked.

Faliang noticed that there were not enough sculptures to fulfil God's request. So, he, Jesus and the others gathered some more supplies and started rebuilding the collapsed sculptures. Soon, they finished rebuilding the cracked sculptures and replaced them with new ones. The monks and Jesus added more sculptures than needed and decorated the walls and ceilings with Chinese paintings, ancient legends, and myths of Buddhas. They even added an extra cave, whom Faliang called The Library Cave because the monks stored ancient scrolls, scripts, prophecies, and important information in that cave.

Faliang named the caves “Mogao Caves”. It was amazing work so Faliang thought it would not be fair to hide the caves from the world. He asked Jesus how to make Mogao Caves famous. Jesus suggested that Faliang travel around the world and spread the word so more and more people get to know about Mogao Caves.

Faliang listened to Jesus and delivered the message to the people. Not long after, Faliang succeeded, and the Mogao Caves were famous ever since, so was Faliang.

Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Liu, Caleb – 11

As warm gentle rays stroke my eyelids, I open my eyes almost instantaneously. I stretch out my arms and rise from my simple bed in a grotto cave to the cool morning sun. I reach for my broom and duster, as I have been a faithful yet inconspicuous servant of the Mogao Grottoes for over twenty years.

The Grottoes are a captivating sight, I mean, just to look at the sheer size of the caves is breathtaking! The great sand dunes of Mingsha and Sanwei Mountain are magnificent. The desert climate is either burning hot or freezing cold though it is almost always dry, thus preserving the priceless mural paintings on the cave walls. Endless chambers contain countless Buddha statues. As I sweep, I learn from the fascinating murals. Every picture tells a story: the Nine-Colored Deer which saved the drowning man; the Five Hundred Robbers redeemed to become Five Hundred Buddhists; and Prince Magasattva sacrificing himself to save the seven tiger cubs from their hungry mother, just to name a few.

All these years I have worked faithfully, watching visitors come and go. Monks come to meditate and learn from the Great Books, merchants with camel troops stop by the City of Dunhuang for food and rest, and many travellers come to pray at the Grottoes for protection on their adventurous yet perilous journey on the Silk Road. Royals visit the murals painted by famous artisans in honour of the gods.

I have all but almost forgotten I am a royal myself ... well only almost ... because sometimes I still wonder about my King Father's people of the Kingdom of Youhium since I left twenty years ago. Youhiumians are the most peace-loving people that have ever existed.

Just then, as I was sweeping the dry stone floors, an unexpected visitor galloped in. It was Centaur, my father's faithful messenger.

"My dear, Prince Aaron! I always knew in my heart that you are still alive, though everyone else had given up hope after you vanished so long ago," he said. "You must fight your vile uncle Kieran for the people of Youhium, and... and," he exclaimed as he tried to catch his breath, "to avenge your poor father the Great King William."

"What do you mean? What has happened to my dear father?" I demanded.

"Your uncle tricked you and sent you here on purpose. Do you remember what happened on your eighth birthday?"

Of course I did. How could I forget.

I was born the Great Prince Aaron Bainbridge the 7th of the Youhium Empire. It might sound grand, but I can assure you, you wouldn't want to be me. It is rather stressful to be perfectly behaved at all times, and even worse, if you happen to be the only heir to the Crown, there are always relatives who try to harm or even kill you. That was what happened on my eighth birthday. My father, the King, had put on a big celebration for me and everyone in the capital was invited. My father was known for his generosity and his patience, and his peoples always loved him.

Everyone was thrilled to celebrate, except for my uncle Kieran. Apart from my parents, he was the closest person to me. I remember once passing by his study, and he was taken aback. Seeing no one else was around, he beckoned me to enter. "Here, my dear, Aaron. Your father told me there are people trying to harm you. Drink this potion and you will become immortal. You shall then be teleported to the Mogao Grottoes for your own safety, and you must stay there until I tell you it is safe to come back."

Centaur shook his head in disbelief. "Kieran told your father you ran away, and your poor father soon died after that from grief. Kieran seized the crown, but his evilness could never make him a true Youhiumic monarch. The whole Kingdom suffered. Here is your father's Sword of Fury, it is now yours. Use this deadly weapon to slay powerful and vicious people, such as your uncle." He looked at me in the eye. "Only a true prince can use it. Kieran will be here soon, and the biggest war in Youhiumic history shall begin."

"A troop of soldiers is ready for you at Sanwei mountain," continued Centaur. "Slay Kieran, you true King of Youhium! Win this good fight!" He then immediately disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Clutching a broom in one hand and the Sword in the other, I was too shocked to say anything. The evil Kieran would surely notice Centaur had disappeared with the Sword, and he knew exactly where to find me. Suddenly, I heard Kieran's voice booming and echoing in the Grottoes.

"You didn't expect me, Aaron, did you?" he snarled cunningly.

"How could you betray my father? He was your brother!" I retorted in tears.

With a loud cry, I leapt into the air with the Sword. A flying horse came up underneath me and carried me to the dunes of Sanwei mountain.

I marched my troops up Mingsha Mountain, with Kieran's troops closely on our tails. We were turning round a sand dune when our hidden troops ambushed them, wiping them out. Kieran was irate and retreated to the banks of the Daquan River, where I lunged at him with the Sword of Fury. He leapt at me but missed, and I immediately sprung back to make my next move. He was losing energy fast, and I finished him with one final blow. My men roared with cheer. "Long live King Aaron!" The sufferings of Youhium had finally come to an end.

I gave one last look at the beautiful Mogao Grottoes before I returned to Youhium triumphantly as King Aaron. Every evening since, I have knelt at my father's grave, as I can feel his presence teaching me how to become a good king. The Golden Era of Youhium is about to begin.

The Adventures of the Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lun, Chi Kwong Max – 10

The monk who found the Mogao Caves was, of course, dead. But before he died, he left a precious treasure behind in the Caves. That was just a legend, and Ben, well, he didn't believe it at all! Ben was a boy who was only ten years old. He was always desperate for thrilling adventures, but never finds them. Until one day, he went exploring in the desert on the silk road in China. He found an enormous cave which was the Mogao Caves! His heart skipped a beat. He thought, if the Mogao Caves exists, there must be treasure!

The cave was an amazing sight. The construction was a magnificent throne with a Buddha Statue sitting on it, with his eyes closed peacefully. All of a sudden, he heard an ominous growl. A monster appeared in the dark shadows, cackling menacingly. It shot out like a bullet behind the throne! It looked like an enormous fuzzy ball with frightening streaks of red and yellow stripes on it. Ben ran as fast as he could, with the monster tailing him at such a close distance that you would think it had a leash and was being pulled by Ben. Ben picked up speed, then made a sudden turn. He thought the monster would crash right into the wall, but it turned as swiftly as him. Thinking like a calculator, Ben thought of another idea. He found a scorpion on the ground, picked it up, and flung it at the monster. As soon as the two jet-black pincers grabbed the brightly colored fur of the monster, the scorpion sank its poisonous tail into it. The monster was defeated!

Ben peeked excitedly into where the monster first appeared, the gap between the Buddha and the throne. At last, there it was! It wasn't a legend after all! Ben took the shiny box of treasure home, full of pride. All he wanted was another adventure just like this one.

New Tales of the Magao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Mak, Wing Hei Renee – 10

During the summer holiday of 2021, there was a family who went on a trip to the Mogao Caves. The daughter, Shannon, was the one who most excited for the trip. Shannon's mother told her about the history of the Mogao Caves and Silk Road before. Her mother wished to bring Shannon to visit one of her friends who worked there for many years. Shannon expected it to be a great adventure.

On the way to the cave, Shannon yelled, "Mogao Caves! Mogao Caves!" Everybody knew she was excited. When her mom took her to the entrance, she quickly ran past everything into the caves. She soon saw a place she loved. There were many seats made out of stones. She sat on a seat and looked around while her parents examined a Buddha statue as still as a log. After a while, Shannon got bored and went to another cave nearby, 'Library Cave', alone. Shannon was amazed when she saw the cave was full of silk sheets, bundles of scrolls and numerous damaged figurines of Buddhas. She took out a silk sheet and started to read it. Suddenly, she saw a flash of lights surrounding the Buddhas in the cave which made her feel dizzy. She was scared and fell to the ground.

Plop! Shannon shivered and sat on the ground, her eyes were closed tight. "Hi! What are you doing here? You must be tired. Do you need water? The well is over there." A girl's soft voice broke the silence. Shannon relaxed and opened her eyes a bit. "What? Well!" Shannon said. "You must be thirsty," the girl smiled at her. Shannon stood and ran outside immediately. She saw a big well and all the things there were different and old fashioned. Shannon was shocked. She went back to the girl in the cave. The girl looked very pretty with dark marble eyes and a black pony tail. Shannon was curious about what she just saw and asked, "Um, I know this is a silly question, but which year is it?" "Never mind, people here always forget it. It is 1987," the girl answered politely.

"What? Impossible! 1987!" she shouted. Then, Shannon said "I came here with my parents. I must go and find them!" The girl took Shannon out and put her on a camel. It was the first time she ever rode a camel, but she was calm as nothing could bother her from wondering why she was in 1987. The camel stopped outside a plain blue tent. The girl led Shannon went inside the tent. Shannon started to explain, "Actually, um, I'm a person from 2021, I travelled here with my parents. But, unbelievably it's become 1987." The girl was stunned after hearing what Shannon said. The girl's parents came and when they saw Shannon, they asked, "What's happening?" Shannon put her finger to her lips. The girl understood at once and told her parents, "Well, Shannon's my friend now. She got lost in Mogao Caves, so I brought her home." Her parents invited Shannon to sleep in their tent.

That night, they ate some steamed stuffed buns and meat for supper. Shannon was tired and quickly fell asleep. The next morning, the girl's parents left so Shannon and the girl went back to the Mogao Caves to find her parents and also any hints to return to 2021. Instead of the Library Cave, the girl brought Shannon to another cave, "Thousand Buddhas Cave". The cave was full of small seated Buddha figures. Buddha paintings were also found on the walls and ceiling. The girl tried to help Shannon by praying to the Buddha. She believed that the Buddha would help people in need. Suddenly, shimmering lights sparkled on all the Buddhas surrounding them. Shannon was not afraid because she had this experience the day before. However, the girl closed her eyes tight just as Shannon did.

Plop! They landed on hard ground. "Ow, it hurts!" the girl shouted. "Time traveled again," Shannon wondered. "Don't tell anyone about it." A monk came to them and asked, "What are you girls doing here?" They saw a tree and replied, "We fell from there," the girl winked at Shannon. "So, do you need help?" the monk asked. Shannon thought twice before answering. "No need, we know the way to go, but thank you anyway." They went back to the Thousand Buddhas Cave and discovered that the Buddha's figures and paintings were well decorated and less damaged. This time, they saw glimpses of light shining on the hand of the golden Buddha figure. Without any fear or thinking too much, Shannon went to touch the Buddha's hand to ask for help. They time-traveled back to 1987 at the same cave.

Shannon seemed to understand the way to travel back to 2021. She cried to the girl, "I guess I should leave now." "Yeah, I guess so. Your parents will miss you. You'll be missed. I'm Alison, tell me your name before you

leave,” the girl said. “My name is Shannon and I’ll miss you too.” They hugged each other tightly. “Goodbye!” With the last shout, Shannon disappeared in the cave after touching the Golden Buddha’s hand.

“Ouch, it really hurts.” Shannon shouted just as Alison did. “Hey, are you Shannon?” Shannon felt that lady’s face was familiar to her except some wrinkles on her forehead. “Oh! You are Alison! You look older!” Shannon was surprised. Shannon’s mother finally found her in the Thousand Buddha Cave. When she saw Shannon talking to Alison, she asked, “Shannon, you know Auntie Alison already? She was my friend when I studied in university.” “I knew her when she was a little girl with a pony tail.” Shannon and Alison giggled. “What a mysterious trip in Mogao Caves!” Shannon thought.

The Spine-Chilling Cave Traps

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Pang, Hei Man – 9

Like all days, Ariana was meant to be practicing her fantastic flute after dinner. She expected that the flute books would be staying in her flute bag unless her nosy brothers purposely took them as drawing books. When she was about to take out her books, she found out that they were missing! She searched the whole house carefully in order not to miss out any minor details. She even searched under the toilet cabinet, the medicine drawer...

Ariana finally found her books under the dusty shoe rack. Peering around, she found a pocket-sized necklace nearby. She put on the necklace and she realized seconds later that she was spinning in a funnel of indigo and rust.

Ariana landed firmly on the ground. She looked at her clothing and knew that she wasn't wearing her pyjamas. She was wearing a thin dress in light magenta with matching socks and also a pair of aquamarine trainers. She also spun around and looked around curiously as if this new place fascinated her. Rubbing her eyes, she saw a pitch-black cave. Beside the cave, she saw a few Chinese characters carved into the rough rock. Ariana thought: Yes, I can translate these characters. Aunt Melissa has taught me Chinese. She scrutinized the characters for a few minutes and it directly translated to 'Mogao Grottoes, Gansu Province'.

She felt some footsteps behind her, so she turned around her to see what it was. She hoped with all her heart that it wasn't poisonous scorpions or slithering snakes. Tensely, she turned around and saw that it was a girl. The girl was tall and willowy. She had such breathtaking beauty that the surrounding area became strangely airless as she pushed some sleek auburn hair down her back. She told Ariana that her name was Katelyn.

Katelyn told Ariana that she was on an important mission to explore the Mogao Caves. After a long discussion, Ariana agreed to accompany Katelyn to explore the caves but Katelyn said that nine years old is too young to explore caves. Although, Katelyn admitted that she was only seventeen. Together, they bravely entered the Mogao Caves.

They were a few meters into the cave when Ariana noticed a book with old-fashioned writing on the cover. Ariana flipped open the pages as gentle as if she was holding a newborn baby. Looking around, found instructions written for visiting the cave. It read: Enter stranger, but don't be afraid. You will learn to explore, but first you play. Katelyn was a few feet deeper into the cave when she whispered, "Come, Ariana. There is the Library Cave with some beautiful murals I am sure that you would approve of." They set foot into the Library Cave when Katelyn stepped on a booby trap! Ariana was a few centimeters from falling into the damp, marshy mud floor littered with dead worms and scorpions. All Ariana could see of Katelyn was her sea blue eyes, frozen with terror and fear. What Katelyn did not realize was there was one slithering scorpion that was still alive and stung her on the ankle. Katelyn let out one last high, shrill cry then she died in agonizing pain.

It was at this moment that Ariana realized that she was alone in this cave. All alone, without Katelyn or any person except herself. Ariana was determined to complete Katelyn's mission, but she was doing the mission in Katelyn's place. Ariana went to the edge of the cave, carefully examining every step. She picked up some of the scrolls and started to read them. She found out that these colossal scrolls were not books; instead they were sacred art and literature. She read about a young girl travelling back in time, bravely rescuing her ancestors. Perhaps her favorite was a story about constellations, forming a pattern with imagination and hope. She mumbled to herself, 'I have no time for these stories, I must find a way to help Katelyn finish her mission'.

Remembering the story Ariana read about constellations and never giving up hope, she walked deeper into the cave. Sweating, she continued to walk as a booby trap was activated! She fell into at least 3 meters of muddy water with biting salmon. As if 300 Great White Sharks were chasing after her, she persevered and quickly swam towards the shore. Soaked, she was about to give up when she saw a small Lapis Lazuli crystal pendant with a note written in Chinese characters. She remembered her Aunt Melissa had taught her Chinese, the note translated to: Well done! You are now a member of the Mogao Caves Explorers! Use this necklace to return home. It will become an ordinary necklace after using the magic.

At last, Ariana returned home. She missed Katelyn and was desperate to see her one last time. One rainy day with an ominous sky with her roof encased in ice, she unconsciously followed her heart that led her to an old cemetery nearby and found a grave with Katelyn's name on it. On the white marble, she saw a message on it. Carved in detail with a silver pen, it read: an evil demon called Death took away a beautiful rose from the gardens. Somewhere, Ariana could hear Katelyn's soft, gentle echo of her laughing about the murals at the Library Cave...

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Saito, Yuli – 10

The sun was beaming on the western China deserts and Ted the traveler was heading towards the Mogao caves, determined to find the most ancient, printed book in the word in the Mogao library. This aforementioned book had been there for hundreds of years and Ted had read somewhere in the past, a monk named Wang had found extraordinary treasures in the Mogao caves.

Legend had it, that Wang took some historical documents and painted scrolls from the caves and traded them with an explorer named Stein and earned good money.

All Ted cared about was money, so despite having to battle through cliffs after cliffs, he didn't give up. He sweated so profusely that he could have filled his water bottle to the brim, but he still used his remaining strength to drag his legs to the Mogao caves.

As he trudged along, he saw a tall building that was so ginormous, that it was distinguished from far away. Ted was incredibly relieved to see the tower, that he sped up his pace eagerly to find treasure that could make him a fortune. The tower got bigger and bigger as he moved closer to the Mogao caves.

Finally, he was at the steps of the caves! He took a deep breath and pushed the cave entrance doors open. His jaw dropped as he discerned the gigantic Buddha statues. There was an unfathomable number of sculptures. Some were inexplicably large and towering, while some were as tiny as a hamster. As Ted tip toed towards the Mogao library, he felt like the statues were staring at him with their cold blank eyes, foreseeing that Ted was about to steal one of the most ancient treasures of the world. Every step he took the creepier the atmosphere felt, it made his hair stand on end.

At last, he found the Mogao library, and it was completely different than what he had expected. There were no shelves, but books stacked messily all around the giant room. There were lots of pictures on the walls, and a picture on the wall was of a huge monstrous tiger attacking human beings while protecting a shabby and tattered book. Ted assumed that the book was the treasure that he had come all the way for. He stared at it longingly and tapping the book as if it would mysteriously appear on his palms. After pressing for ten times, the picture magically turned into a button, and his hand sunk into the rocks!

BOOM! A giant tiger, resembling the picture on the wall dropped from the ceiling, and it was furious for being woken from his nap. It roared loudly and Ted felt as if his ears were about to explode. The tiger was a thousand times more enormous and scarier than its picture. It had fangs sharper than a knife and longer than a meter, its fur was matted with fiery red hair and little spikes poking out at various places of its body. One of the spikes had a book poked through it, and Ted recognized it as the most bygone book for ever written!

Ted hesitated, wondering if he should lunge for the book or save his neck, it was one way or another! The tiger was ready to pounce on him, so doing the most sensitive thing ever, he ducked, crawled into a tiny hole, and used a rock to cover the entrance. Even though the tiger attempted to catch Ted by swiping continuously as small cracks, its paw couldn't reach him, so it stopped.

Ted could finally breathe a sigh of relief. The monstrous tiger was gone. After calming himself down, he finally decided to come out. But once he got out, he wished he hadn't. Along with the tiger, about ten thousand mice and cockroaches charged towards Ted, and the force of so many gross creatures knocked the wind out of him.

Dumbfounded, he leapt to his feet, brushing off cockroaches, and dashed out like a mouse in a cat chase. An ear-splitting roar came from the library and the spiky tiger chased Ted along with the mice and cockroaches. The pack followed him relentlessly, all around the Mogao cave. They arrived at where the tall Buddha statues where Ted was out of strength and breath. He found the largest statue, leaped onto its lap, and climbed as high as he could with his remaining strength. The tiger spotted him and jumped continuously. On the final jump, the tiger was abruptly frozen mid-air!

Ted swiveled around and saw the Buddha staring right back at him! He screamed and jumped with fright.

"Hello Ted." Ted was speechless, it could talk!!!!

The statue continued “I see that you have not achieved your goal of robbing the most precious book in the world. You have had the misfortune to meet the Heeda that protected the treasure for the past thousand years” The Buddha pointed at the tiger. “Despite that you have highly disappointed the ancient gods, we have the power to forgive. So, this time, I shall let you go, but if I ever catch you steal ever again, you won’t live to see another day.”

Ted nodded vigorously and said a feeble thank you as he was lowered down from the statue. His legs felt like led, but he staggered out of the cave.

From that day on, Ted never attempted thievery ever again.

The Adventure of the Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Shea, Jady Xi Min – 11

"We are going to take you to a legendary place today," said dad. "We are going to the Mogao caves in Dunhuang, located in Gansu province." Little did I realise that this was the beginning of an incredible journey.... The moment we went in, we first saw the fantastic clay sculptures of Buddha and the different heavenly deities. We tried to talk to them, but they seemed to be silent and still. As we wandered through the caves, I noticed some eye-catching pictures, so we went on to visit the caves with ancient wall paintings. I was surprised that these murals reflected scenes from different cultures in the past, western, Asian, and more specifically, Chinese. "This must be because people from everywhere visited and created their works here." How amazing, I thought to myself. Then, I came upon a cave, and something caught my attention.

It was a picture of a trader carrying goods on a camel that fascinated me. I was so mesmerised by the scene in the desert that I tried to look closer to explore the details of the journey. Suddenly, there was a flash of light and a mystical power dragged me closer to the mural...

"Swish!" I had fallen on the ground in an unknown place! I found myself in a vast desert. I looked around and there was a trader in a strange costume and a camel beside me. His colourful turban and long pointed boots resembled a costume from a historical play.

"What are you doing?" he said. I stood there, utterly perplexed. He yelled, "Fast, we have to get these goods to the destination tonight!"

I finally understood as I looked at my own clothing, it was that of the Tang Dynasty! I had turned into one of the travelling tradesmen in the picture! "Wait, I don't belong here!! How can I go back to the modern world?" I cried. "There is no time to talk, we have to hurry," said the bewildered tradesman. "My name is Ali from Persia. I only know that our emperor sent us to carry these goods to sell in Dunhuang." OH! It was suddenly dawning on me that I might have time-travelled!

I had no choice but to join the caravan expedition. After walking for a long time, we came through a narrow mountain pass. I saw what appeared to be crouching shadows nearby. The whole thing seemed strange and kind of fishy, so I immediately reported to Ali in a hushed tone, "I think someone is following us and is lurking behind the rocky slopes." I cautiously pointed in the direction of the slopes.

"Oh no! It's the bandits! Help! Help!" Ali shouted. Everyone panicked as the bandits appeared from the hill slopes and approached us, brandishing their crescent-shaped weapons. We were terrified as cold sweat rolled down our spines. Our hearts sank and I had the feeling that we couldn't escape this calamity!

All of a sudden, we saw something gliding down from the mountain. A monk appeared before our eyes, he looked concerned and told us to stand back and stay calm. Then he looked at the bandits solemnly and started to chant. The chant grew louder and louder and finally filled the entire valley with a strong force. At first, we thought he was just an ordinary monk, and his method was unreliable, but later, this method seemed to work after all! The bandits appeared to be frightened. They scattered and escaped back to the distant hills. Ali and I sighed with relief.

After thanking him profusely, we sent the monk on his way. Ali and I simultaneously cheered, "After a fierce struggle among the bandits, we finally overcame them! But" Ali continued, "I think we should take turns to be on the alert."

We continued hurrying to complete our mission. "Fast, we won't be able to sell the items if we don't hurry!" Ali grumbled. In a flash of inspiration, I came up with a fantastic idea, "Why don't we just trade our goods?" I exclaimed. "Yeah! That's a very clever idea!" Ali accepted my suggestion.

We headed towards an inn at the nearest trading post. There, Ali and I took all of our goods out. As a Chinese person, I took out my silk, tea leaves, and chinaware. Ali, on the other hand as a Persian tradesman from Central Asia, took out his grapes, saffron and dried pomegranate seeds.” We excitedly bargained and exchanged our goods.

Meanwhile, an Indian merchant came close. “Can I join your trade too?” he said.

“Sure! What do you have?” I replied. As he was taking some of his literature scrolls out, I was shocked! His scrolls were the most important historic literature from the Tang dynasty. I recognized them as those I saw among the displays in the museum that I had visited! “These were the Buddhist scriptures that monk Xuan Zang got during his journey to the West,” he explained. After our friendly trading, I got some exotic fruits and a set of ancient religious scrolls.

As we were walking back peacefully in the desert, a strong desert storm suddenly appeared. I was utterly scared and had no idea what to do. “Crouch down, cover your face and lay beside your camel!” Ali shouted. Ooosh! A tornado was coming towards us! In a second, all of our belongings were blown away by it. I tried to grab them but found myself drawn into the powerful tornado...

In a flash, an indescribable creature which looked like an emerald dragon appeared, “You have completed your mission, you can go back to your world now.”

“But how?” I wondered. As soon as I thought about it, I could feel my body ascending into mid-air and a secret magnetic power pulling me back to reality!

“Oh boy, you are finally back!” said my mum. I was still confused, and the guard looked shocked. Fortunately, I still had a sacred scroll in my pocket! When I showed my parents the ancient scroll, they both seemed delighted that they had gotten more cultural treasures from the ancient world. But more importantly, I had the most meaningful experience of a lifetime – travelling through time and space, building international friendships at the crossroads of eastern and western cultures, and expanding my historical horizons on the Silk Road.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tang, Pui Yiu Sophie – 10

In the little village of Mogao, something astounding was about to happen. Three young courageous adventurers Aila, Lila and Kwan lived in that tiny village, always ready for thrilling journeys. Unfortunately, in the tiny compound, the most exciting place was a petite cave which they knew inside out. There was nothing to do in the village, and they had always wanted to leave the village to go explore the world. Kwan was reading a new book “Places You Must Explore”, as he flipped the page, he found the jackpot.

There was an article about the Mogao Caves which were rediscovered recently. No one had dared to go in and this was the perfect opportunity to become a famous explorer! Kwan dashed to Aila and Lila to share the exceptional news.

“Oh my gosh! This is going to be phenomenal!” exclaimed Aila.

“But how are we going to sneak out without our parents noticing?” “Don’t worry Aila, I already have a plan.” beamed Kwan.

When the clock struck midnight, Kwan, Aila and Lila were wide awake, they tiptoed silently out the house, careful not to make even a teensy-weensy sound. They gathered at the gate where they could leave the village. They climbed over the gate with ease and began their journey. They hiked along the steep, rocky hills and the curvy, narrow roads. It was a never-ending journey. They were exhausted but they had come too far to give up now. At last, after their fatigued voyage, they finally reached their destination.

“Are you sure this is the place Kwan?” It looks like an ordinary cave; it doesn’t seem like a hazardous place.” blurted Lila.

“This is the place, I am sure.” exclaimed Kwan confidently.

Kwan, Aila and Lila fearlessly strode into the cave. Inside, they found bewitchingly drawn pictures by the ancient people. They walked further and found three different paths. “Which way are we going to go? I think I am going to take the left path.” Lila said. “Aila, you should go to the middle and Kwan can go the right.” “Then that’s settled, good luck!” beamed Aila and Kwan.

On Lila’s path were the most beguiling sculptures and paintings. On the other hand, Aila was in extreme danger. When she stepped on the path, rocks began to collapse and the entrance was blocked. The walls gradually closed in on her. If she didn’t escape soon enough, her life would end. Kwan’s path led to the treasure. When Kwan reached the treasure, he saw a sign, “If you pass the treasure, it will be yours. If you choose to leave, the treasure will be gone”. Just when Kwan was about to get the treasure, he heard the petrified scream of Aila. Without a second thought, he chose Aila over the treasure.

With determination, Lila and Kwan discovered that the only way to save Aila was to break a code. Working as a team, they broke the code and Aila was saved. “What great friends I have!” grinned Aila.

The friends were ready to leave the cave when a voice from behind them cheered, “Congratulations! You have found the real treasure hidden in the cave, friendship! Little boy, your action displayed how much you care about your friend and that’s what friendship’s all about!”

“Now, allow me to reward you with the most precious thing in this cave. This is a pill that will make immortal. The King of Qin Dynasty has spent his whole life searching for this pill, and now it’s going to yours. Have a great day!” and the voice vanished.

Aila, Lila and Kwan were speechless. “Who’s going to eat the pill?” asked Lila. “Let’s not get into a fight, how about we destroy the pill instead, there is no point to live forever without good friends around you, right?” Aila and Kwan agreed. They destroyed the pill and it was forever gone.

When they headed back to the village, it was late in the morning and the news travelled quick in the tiny village. The friends got a warm welcome from the villagers and their parents were extremely proud of them. After hearing their heroic adventure to the cave, the village decided to rename the Mogao Caves as “Friendship Caves.” Aila, Lila and Kwan were ecstatic to know that and couldn’t wait to head on their new exhilarating experiences with each other.

Now, the village can go to the caves to have fun and relax. It became a very significant place for travelers all around the world to explore and find out more about the ancient times. This is all thanks to Aila, Lila and Kwan.

A Historical Encounter on the Silk Road

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tao, Jayden – 11

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A Story in a Story in a Story

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ting, Paige – 11

“Grandma, can you tell us another story?” asks Meg, jumping up from under her blanket.

“Only if you go to bed straight after,” I say to my grandchildren. “Or else your parents will get angry when they come home. And do stop jumping around like that. You’ll hit the ceiling, which is why Will should have taken the top bunk.”

Will also climbs out of his covers and switches his bedside lamp back on as he sits up. I take a seat in the cozy armchair next to the window, the spot where I’ve told them many fairy tales. Meg climbs down the ladder and takes a seat next to Will. And so I begin...

Once there was a girl called Hui who lived in a small town in Gansu. For as long as she could remember, she would follow her older brothers to school. She was too small to be noticed, so she never got caught. Sometimes her brothers teased her when they rode together in the donkey wagon, jabbing at her small body hidden in the hay bale, “Why don’t you just stay home and learn cooking and cleaning like a normal girl?” But mostly they felt curious that a girl would be interested in school.

One day, Hui took her normal spot in the big tree next to the window of the schoolroom, soaking up everything her brothers were learning in the room where girls were not allowed to be. Perched on the tree, she looked out into the horizon beyond the schoolhouse, and saw something in the hazy desert that she’d never seen before. A temple? Why was it merged into a cliff? Hui scampered down onto the gravelly path and suddenly her bare feet felt the hot, golden sand. When she reached the temple, she felt willed to go inside. She found strange statues and questionable paintings, and what seemed like hundreds of Buddhas.

The marble floors were cold against her dirty feet, and a spooky wind rushed through the cavern. The walls were so dusty that everything in the room seemed a little greyer. But Hui was curious so she continued into the cave. As she walked deeper and deeper into dimness, she laid eyes on a magnificent book. She flipped it open and started to read the words printed among many illustrations of brave warriors that curiously looked like women.

“Here is our history book. Once we were ruled by strong empresses who ruled the land and they welcomed all types of people.”

What? A place ruled by women? Hui was certain that her brothers never learned this in school. She knew that she had to get home soon, or her parents would wonder what happened to her, so she quickly read some more.

“Our city fought and won many battles against invaders. However, we fear that men may eventually take over, and if they do, our empire’s history will be erased.”

“Grandma?” Will interrupts, “I think I hear someone knocking at our door.”

I fling open the curtain next to me and see two women standing on the porch, but they are dressed like ancient soldiers. “Well, that must be your parents and they forgot the house key. Go to bed now and I’ll open the door for them,” I lie.

I go outside and quietly close the front door behind me. “We have come from Gansu to find you because you were the one who first found our history book,” one of the soldiers announces.

“The imperial army has won your battle. You asked us to report back to you, and now you shall come with us to be our chieftain,” the other one explains.

At first I'm confused, but then I remember that, before leaving for university 45 years ago, I slipped a note into the secret shrine. It said:

Dear whoever finds this:

I am Hui and I am leaving for university today. I found this cave when I was a child. I've picked a fight with some friends about women's rights, they said I can't study and they were wrong. I need someone to continue fighting for women's rights. Please report back when we win.

~Hui

I quickly go inside the house, scribble something on a notepad, rip out the piece of paper, fold it up and hand it to the soldiers.

"Please give this to your empress," I say, holding out the note, which said:

Dear Empress:

I am Hui and I'm now living peacefully in Canada. I have a son, a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. I'm sorry but I don't want to come back and become one of your chieftains. I'm proud of what you've accomplished and I support women's rights, but I'm too old. Hope you understand.

Best regards, Hui

I watch as the soldiers nod like they understand, and they disappear into the night.

I go back upstairs and tuck the kids in once more. "It wasn't your parents. Anyway, go to bed, and for real this time," I say as I pull the blanket over Will. Meg looks down from the top bunk and says goodnight to us.

"But Grandma?" Will begins. "Is this story real?"

I smile and look away. "Well..."

The Mystery of Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tsoi, Ethan Lai Shun – 11

“Chrip ! Chrip ! Chrip !”, I heard a beautiful sound whispering and calling to me while reading my research materials in the library. I followed the twittering sound and, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a strange glowing and sparkling light that shimmered on the top shelf of the book case. When I walked close to investigate, I discovered that it was a very large book covered with thick dust, so I whipped off the dust with my bare hands. It read, “The Mystery of Mogao Grottoes”. The title glowed and the pages magically turned to a spread page with a massive painting of cave 257 “The Nine-colored Deer”.

There was a faint sound coming from it, which was the same chirping sounds that led me to the book. All of a sudden, a flashing light shone at me, so bright that I shut my eyes firmly. When I opened my eyes, I found that I was high up in a clear blue sky. I was so scared that I was going to fall so I screamed, struggled and flapped my arms. To my surprise, I did not fall at all and I turned into a yellow bird, so I spread my wings and flew into the forest. While I was still tracing the tweeting sound, I saw a little bird badly hurt below the bushes.

“Help! Help! Can somebody help, please?” I yelled desperately. Suddenly, a radiant deer appeared in front of me. She looked so glamorous and glittering with nine different colours gleaming from her coat and a pair of grand white antlers as bright as snow. Just at a glance, she licked and wondrously saved the little bird from danger.

In the meantime, we heard someone crying loudly from the river, “Save me! Save me! Please..., please...” the drowning man yelped in despair. The nine-colored deer leaped into the rapid water immediately to rescue the drowning man on her back. The man was so grateful that he was alive so he knelt down, nodded his head towards the spiritual deer and claimed “Thank you so much for saving my life, you’re such a powerful deer. Please allow me to serve you for the rest of my life.”

“Thanks, but no thanks. Please promise not to disclose my habitat to anyone.” The nine-colored deer said in a gentle voice. The man replied quickly, “I swear to the Gods on heaven and earth that I will not reveal your habitat to anybody or else I will have sores all over my body.” The man left the forest and went back home safely.

At the same time, the queen dreamed of the nine-colored deer that night. When she woke up, she couldn’t forget the beauty of such a creature. She was so determined to get a unique deer skin to make her new coat. Her obsession and greed made her very ill. The vain queen said, “My dear king, please let me have the nine-coloured deer skin to make my new cloak or I will die.” The king loved his queen so much that he offered a great reward to anyone who could find the deer.

The man who had nearly drowned became greedy as he wanted to get the reward so he broke his promise and led the king to hunt the nine-coloured deer with a team of soldiers. When I heard this news in the palace, I was terrified and thought to myself, “Oh! No, I must tell my friend to run away as soon as possible.” I flew as fast as I could and begged my friend “Please hide or run away because the king’s soldiers and the man from the river are coming to kill you.” Unfortunately, the nine-coloured deer was sleeping under a tree while I finished my words, she was already surrounded by all the king’s soldiers!

Under the command of the king, the soldiers shot arrows at the nine-coloured deer and amazingly all of the arrows turned into dust and disappeared! The soldiers were shocked and the nine-coloured deer asked the king softly “Your Majesty, who brought you here?” the king replied “Him” while pointing at the man from the river. “Oh ! This was the man that I saved the other day when he was drowning at the river! He swore that he would never ever disclose my place to anyone, but he betrayed me and brought you here to kill me!” said the nine-coloured deer in a solemn voice.

The king felt extremely sorry for the unfaithfulness of that man, so he banished him. He also instructed his soldiers to step back and set the nine-coloured deer free. The king was moved by the deer’s good-heartedness and kind behaviour and he proclaimed that all people in his kingdom should protect the deer from now on.

In the end, the man from the river got sores throughout his body due to his despicable behaviour. While he was running away, he accidentally sank into a river and passed away. Meanwhile, the queen’s greed drove her mad because she couldn’t get what she wanted.

The little bird and I were glad that our dear friend, the nine-colored deer, was safe and free. We chirped and sang to celebrate such a happy ending. While we were enjoying this peaceful moment, my stomach started to churn as I felt hungry and I heard a sound whispering near my ears, “Ethan, please wake up! It’s time for dinner.” I reluctantly woke up from the piles of books in the library and I realized that I just had a great adventure in my dream. I could not even possibly believe that I just had a dream because it was so real. I had learnt that we should never expect a reward when helping others, more importantly, we should not return kindness with ingratitude. I decided to borrow “The Mystery of Mogao Grottoes” and darted home with my mother for dinner.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tsoi, Wai Ching – 9

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Thousands of years ago, a monk who believed in Buddhas found a spacious and immense cave at an oasis, which is in a desert on the Silk Road of China. When he entered, he immediately felt Buddhas' whispers. He knew that the cave was special and therefore the perfect place to pray.

As time passed, the monk spread the news of The Mogao Cave. Hearing that the cave was a chosen place by the Buddhas, pilgrims travelled from afar to visit the cave. After visiting the cave, they wanted to live there and soon they decided the caves were not just for praying, but also a place to preform stories and paintings. Then, they started digging more caves for a place to live, and spend their time creating sacred art and literature. They loved the place so much that they named the cave "The Mogao Cave."

Three centuries later, new buildings were built so the religious and miraculous story of The Mogao Caves grew less popular every day. The travellers took other paths to other fabulous landmarks instead. At last, the story of The Mogao Caves were forgotten, as if they were sucked into a deep sinkhole.

Due to the occasion, many people didn't know much of the past, nor the reasons to believe in Buddhas. Fortunately, in the 19th century, a group of international and local scholar-explorers found the cave. It was almost crumbling, which was dangerous, but the leader insisted that they should explore the cave as deep as they could.

Inside the cave, there were spectacular, carefully shaped sculptures and colorful paintings all over the place. They were on the walls and some were even on the ceiling! The group continued until they saw a room with similar pictures in an orderly pattern. The leader stepped forward and examined the story behind the pictures. As if he read the team's mind, he started to express the wonderful story.

"A long time ago," the leader said. "There was a young hunter who liked to kill innocent animals. The Buddhas tried to save him because of the goodness of their heart. They would like to help the hunter to go to the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. They summoned a monk to guide the young hunter into a righteous path of life. The monk agreed and set off a journey to find the young hunter. She told him, 'There is a pig den which is not far from here. Follow me!' Instead of bringing the hunter to the pig den, she led him into this very cave."

"The hunter was furious when he found out there wasn't any juicy pork for him to feast on." The leader continued. "He yelled at the monk and refused to go inside. Somehow, the monk persuaded him to take a step inside. When he went in, his emotions weren't hysterical anymore. He felt calm and relaxed. The monk taught him to believe in Buddhas and respect the lives of every living creature. When the hunter passed away, he was blessed."

The entire group closed their eyes and smiled. They wanted to explore some more stories and art, but it was getting late and it was time to leave. They reported to their coach about their new discovery of The Mogao Cave and the lesson of respecting every living creature. In return, you can enjoy your afterlife in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Now in 2022, you could explore Mogao Caves yourself in China. Have fun exploring!

The Bird and Mo–Gao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wang, Maggie – 9

A few thousand years ago, a family of birds lived in the Northwest horizon of China. Their dad was shot by human hunters when the baby bird was just a month old. The Mum cared a lot about the baby. A few months later, it was time for the baby to learn how to fly. He suddenly remembered his dad always telling him” When you learn, you have to listen carefully”

When he was learning to fly, his mother told him” When you jump out of the nest, flap your wings and you will fly very easily!” He was listening very carefully to the instructions and soon, he could already fly. He soared into the sky. It flew and flew and went flying into the desert! The bird was amazed by what he saw. He saw an upside–down nest–like thing. It was so big that even the whole tree they lived in could fit inside. He thought: Is a giant bird living inside? So, he decided to explore. He flew inside and was so shocked that he could barely breathe! He saw all kinds of old Chinese paintings drawn by a kind of living thing called a human! He flew back to his nest, where his mother was waiting for him. He told his mum everything he had seen. His mother sighed and said” There is no such thing as a human painting. It must be the sun playing a trick on your eyes. Or maybe you fell while flying and dreamed all about it.” The bird doubted his mother. Could his mother be right after all?

A few years later, the bird grew bigger and bigger. It was time to have his own family. He said goodbye to his old mother one last time and flew off. He flew and flew, and finally found a family of his own.

One day, his son came back and said:” Mother! Father! You’ll never believe this: I saw a hole filled with human paintings, they were incredible!” His mother said, ”You are telling lies again!” His father just smiled.

Adventures of Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wang, Yuxing – 11

Hey, guys! I am Bunny Mak! As you should know, I am a horrible bandit, I rob people, and I also have a bandit gang! My best friend, Herrick and I like adventure very much, so we keep looking for the ancient treasure land.

It was a sunny afternoon, and I was watching a video about world heritage sites. They mentioned a place I had never heard of before. I searched for this weird place on Google. It said that Mogao Grottoes was in a desert in China. It was founded 1600 years ago, and it was filled with sacred art and scrolls. It also had statues made of gold and precious gems. After I watched the video, I immediately called my gang and made a plan.

We first talked about how we would get there, then I said, "Let's use the teleport lift so we can land right where we want to!" Everybody agreed. Then we packed food, water, lock pickers and hammers. We also took big bags, so that we could carry lots of statues. After that, Herrick, my best friend and accomplice, asked, "What if the police find us?" I replied, "That's why we need to be sneaky!" We wrapped up our preparations, and off we went.

We teleported one by one to Mogao Grottoes. It was a beautiful but strange place. There were towers and a few green trees in an otherwise empty desert. The sun was blazing hot. Our sweat could form a river. We silently sneaked inside and entered cave 937. It was so damp, but luckily there were no people. We were filling our bags, and we didn't even have to sneak around! We used our hammers to chop up gold statues and put what we could in the bags. We dug deeper, and you wouldn't believe what we found there! Gems and hitherto unseen ingots. We dug even deeper. Our greed knew no bounds. Finally, we came upon a big chest. We all tried to open it, but no matter what we did, we just couldn't open it. In the end, we used the lock picker and ta-da! The chest was open, and it was filled with sacred scrolls! We were so excited!

Gold and money make you greedy, and greed makes you do dumb things. We dug deeper and deeper, and suddenly the tunnel we dug collapsed, and we all fell on cave 21. There were crowds of tourists taking photos. Not only were they shocked by our sudden appearance, but we were scared stiff. What an embarrassing moment! We quickly teleported back home before anyone could call the police on us.

When we finally arrived at a safe place, we decided to spend our moolah on snacks and toys. But when we looked in our bags, they were empty! Everything had probably fallen out. This mission was a complete failure! Isn't greed the evildest thing?

Well, what a bummer and the past can't be undone! We don't want to go back and get busted by the police! Don't let greed get the better of you, or you will fail at everything. Even though you can't change the past, you can always change yourself.

Lilo's Wonderful Adventure

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ye, Yangxiao Atticus – 11

Lilo got separated from his classmates on a trip to the infamous historical Mogao Caves. While his classmates left the cave, Lilo decided to take a last look when he tried to follow them he got lost in the cave's maze. He was scared but he remembered someone told him that panic drowns thought, so he calmed himself to think of a solution. It was almost dusk; he knew he must rush. As he walked past darkened rooms, he took out his torch. He was about to turn it on when he heard something in the hallway. Clackity, clack, clack! He froze, the sound grew louder and closer. Lilo turned and said, "Who's there? Show yourself!" No response. "Show yourself!" He tried to stand tall, but his tummy was churning.

Slowly a SKELETON emerged! Lilo suppressed a scream. The skeleton opened his jaw and said, "You sssshall not passsssss." "Why?" asked Lilo. The skeleton smirked and as it was about to say something, a sound behind it shouted, "DITTO! Return!" a Poke ball appeared out of nowhere and the skeleton jumped into the red and white Poke ball not before changing into a whole lot of pink goo and disappearing into the Poke ball. Lilo stared at the red and white Poke ball and was about to pick it up when he tripped on something.

The next thing he knew; he was staring into a monk's eyes! "Ahhh" he screamed.

The monk looked at him curiously, "Where do you come from young man?" Lilo ignored his question and noticed he was in a room with a... bed?

"Where am I?" Lilo asked.

The monk smilingly said, "You are in the meditation chamber of Mogao Caves."

"What time is it?" Lilo enquired.

"It is 8:30 am on 31st of January 1321. We found you unconscious in the middle of the desert so we rescued you," the monk kindly replied.

"Can I see the outside world?" asked Lilo curiously.

He wanted to see what Mogao Caves looked like in the past.

"Alright, come with me," the monk said and they left. What Lilo saw amazed him! Hundreds, maybe thousands of monks, dressed in yellow, holding pickaxes were busily mining the gray rocks. However, some were building or getting wood, and some were making Buddhha sculptures. This must be the entrance of Mogao Caves when it was being constructed ! He thought. He didn't want them to know he was from 2022. So he kept exploring Mogao caves with the monk.

"Wow! It's so cool. I want to explore more!" Lilo said.

"Nah, you better go back. I'm sure your family is worried about you!" the monk replied.

"Well... I guess staying here for a few days won't do any harm, will it" Lilo asked.

"Up to you," the monk replied.

The next day, another monk taught Lilo to make sculptures. Here are the steps. Step 1: take a large piece of wood or stone and draw your sculpture on it Step 2: use a pickaxe or axe to cut or mine out the exact look of sculpture. Step 3: mine or chop off the spare part Step 4: chisel out the face and body of your sculpture Step 5: paint your sculpture and let it dry for a day. Then, you have a complete sculpture!

On day 7, the monk who had rescued Lilo asked him "Where is your home?"

Lilo sighed "I'm from the future."

“I actually knew you were from the future, because the day before you came, I dreamt of you, and when I woke up, I found this dusty map,” said the monk pulling a dusty map from his yellow robes. “The next time you will close your eyes and open it again, you will be back to where you got hit on the head by a cobblestone.”

“Thank you so much” said Lilo. “I hope we can be friends forever.”

“We will be friends forever because I’m going to be in your heart forever. Good luck, Lilo and I wish we will meet again in the future,” the monk said with a sad smile.

A tear rolled down Lilo’s face. “Goodbye” And with that, Lilo closed his eyes.

When he opened his eyes and looked ahead; he was back in the dark scary hallway. The first thing he realized was that the rocks and cracks had disappeared.

Next, he realized that he still had the map from the kind monk; he looked at the rusty map and studied it very closely. The map was pretty simple; it only took him a few minutes to figure out where he was. He stood up and put on his back pack and started walking backwards, soon, he saw the dim sunlight again, his heart is pounding with excitement, his legs started moving faster and faster, and all he thought about was that this crazy adventure soon is going to end soon. Not long, he saw the cave’s entrance. His classmates were waiting for him. “Where have you been Lilo?” Asked Atticus annoyed, “We’ve been waiting for you forever!” “Well, let’s just say that I’ve on a little adventure. “Lilo replied with a deep sigh of relieve. “We better go, it’s getting dark.” And with that, they stepped out into the dim sun’s rays.

As they walked, Lilo looked back at Mogao Caves for the very last time, and by the corner of his eye, he thought he saw a figure, dressed in yellow, holding a shiny blue pickaxe, and waving at him! Lilo waved back to the mysterious figure and shouted “I PROMISE I WILL NEVER EVER FORGET YOU!” “The figure nodded at him and disappeared with a blind flash of white light. “Who are you shouting to Lilo?” asked Atticus confused to his core. “No one.” Said Lilo shrugging his shoulders. “You are so weird Lilo.” Said Atticus. “Agreed” said Andy. And with that, they slowly walked towards the beautiful magnificent setting sun.

New Tales of the Magao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yeung, Tin Yan Selina – 9

My family and I lived in a distant place in Dunhuang, near the Mogao Grottoes.

Every single day at home was nothing but boredom. My family suffered from poverty and me and my sister, Mei Lin, never got an opportunity for education.

Mei was eleven and was rather ambitious. She shines like the sun's rays. However, she can get on thin ice when she's too adventurous.

My sister always pleaded to delve into the Mogao Grottoes. But there was a decree in Lin family which forbid every one of us from going there for centuries.

If Mei groused about the decree, Granny would snap, "Child! That abysmal place is no playground for children! The hollows are sacred and you shan't go there! Understand?" What she declared disappointed Mei, but it didn't cause any difference to me as I didn't have any particular interest in it anyway.

One day, Granny was sick with scarlet fever, so our parents went to fetch a doctor. We were left alone.

Mei was as excited as a puppy with a bone. "This is the perfect time to sneak to the Mogao Grottoes!"

"Remember what Granny said," I mumbled grimly.

"Since you're thirteen, you have the liberty to go anywhere you want," Mei grimaced. "You don't want to miss the Library Cave, do you?"

"Fair enough," I said.

Mei and I strolled down the path as we approached the gate of the Mogao Grottoes. I tried to open the rusty gate, but it was locked.

"It's locked... but I know there's a side entrance," I said. I led Mei into the grounds outside the grottoes, and I caught a glimpse of a young adolescent boy darting into one of the caverns.

"Did you see that?" yelped Mei. "The boy's heading towards the caves! That's the secret entrance!"

"Hush, he'll see us!" I mumbled.

We tracked the boy and we entered one of the grottoes. There were humanlike stone statues and artworks of Buddhist art.

The boy gazed pensively into my eyes. His hair and eyes were as dark as midnight and his skin was pale like ivory. "You two are from the Lin family, aren't you?" his voice was deep and insightful.

"Who are you?" questioned Mei.

"I'm Fung Lin," he said. "I'm part of your family too. Perhaps a first cousin once removed? As much as I know, you mustn't be here."

"Then why are you here?" I asked bashfully.

"You might want to sit down for this," said Fung. We sat on the wooden bench and listened prudently. "A millennia ago, an old man, Wei Lin, owned the Mogao Grottoes. One day, Wei and his family got into a huge argument and Wei got so livid that he cursed and forbid anyone from the Lin family to enter the grottoes. If anyone in the family risked coming here, they would either turn into a stone figure here or be locked up. I must forewarn you, he's still wandering here, being immortal and enjoying his eternal life—"

Our conversation was interrupted by a rumbling growl. "Hurry! That's the growl of Wei Lin! Head towards the Library Cave next room!" cried Fung.

We dashed into the Library Cave. There was a mass of manuscripts ahead of me, in innumerable quantities. They filled so much of the room that I scarcely had space to stand.

Suddenly, I overheard a vicious voice from behind. "Oh yes, I've never seen any visitors since young Fung."

Mei shrieked. "You're Wei Lin?"

"Yes, child, I'm Wei," he smirked. "You are trespassing. And, I shall turn you into a stone!"

"Stone?" Mei asked doubtfully.

At that moment, Wei glared at Mei with malicious black eyes, and she turned into a statue. Still and unmoving.

"You can choose to surrender or turn into a stone figurine like your sister," Wei said to me.

I cried. "Fine! I surrender!"

"Young lady, you're a prisoner now." chuckled Wei.

"Just don't do something ignorant, I'll protect you," Fung murmured into my ear. Wei blocked all the exits of the Library Cave, so Fung and I couldn't escape.

I didn't have much to do inside the Library Cave, just examining the gorgeous manuscripts and figures. When I saw the stone statue of Mei, I began to sob wistfully, "It's too late. We can't do anything."

"Don't be a pessimist! We're about to break the curse!" bellowed Fung.

There was an opal bracelet in his hand. It was a colour of pure white, turquoise and amber. "Where did you get it?" I queried.

"I stole it from Wei," he replied. "It was the origin of the curse. It can do anything you want so that we can escape! To break the curse, we need to burn the opal bracelet."

Fung placed the opal bracelet on the cave wall, and in a miracle, the cave wall opened, and we dashed out of the grottoes and hurried to the remote mountainside. He managed to make a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood several times.

"Do you really want to do this?" I squirmed at the fierce force of fire.

"Yes, as long as we can save Mei," he said confidently. Fung threw the opal bracelet into the flames.

We darted back to the Library Cave at a frantic pace. Mei was there!

"I'm so grateful you saved me!" Mei cried and hugged me.

"I'm so glad you're alive!" I sobbed.

Mei, Fung and I walked into the next room and Wei gave us a last snigger and turned into a deadly stone statue.

"Farewell," Fung sighed. "I mustn't stay here."

"Goodbye!" we said.

When we went home, we told everything to Granny and she was highly delighted to see us and gratified that we had broken the curse.

The Mogao Grottoes taught us not to give up being adventurous and ambitious, even when things are tough, you will always succeed if you try hard enough.

A Vacation to the Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Capelli, Marco – 11

"Kyle. We're about to get off the plane" said his mum. Waiting to get off, a breeze arrived leaving a speck of paint on Kyle's shoe. As they found their guide, it was 5pm. "I'm Mike this is Florence, our children Jess and Kyle" said Mike. "I'm Dylan your guide". After the ride to the hotel, the family went to have dinner, then the family went to hotel...

The next day, they quickly got ready to leave for the Mogao Grottoes. As they headed there, black clouds formed. A breeze flew past, leaving a speck of green paint on Kyle's shoe. They got out of the car and ran to the ticket entrance. "Hello!" said Dylan. "All visits are canceled, sir" responded the woman. "great!" said Mike. "Is there a Grottoes museum?" asked Florence. "Yes!" responded Dylan happily.

Kyle hated museums. His idea "the Internet".

As Dylan blabbed facts Kyle looked around; there were no pictures when they were building the grottos. "I've got a question" said Kyle. "I was wondering... where's the toilet?" he asked. "That way" responded Dylan. When they finally got to the car, Dylan exclaimed "lunchtime". "I'll order you the Dunhuang traditional". After lunch, the family went back to the hotel. But something caught Kyle's eye; another green speck landed on his shoe.

The next day, they headed for the grottos. The driver handed them a note: 'sorry I cannot come today; but they have guides there.' "I don't think the grottoes are real. There're no pictures of when they were made" said Kyle.

When they arrived, Kyle had a stomachache so he stayed in the car. The driver started going slowly forward; Kyle didn't realise until they turned a corner. Kyle tried to go stop him, but he got thrown back. The driver gave him a wicked grin and Kyle lost consciousness.

"Where am I?", questioned Kyle laying in a bed looking around. "You are in the past, the truth is the grottoes were built thousands of years ago by one monk" said a deep voice. "Where is this place?" asked Kyle "this is the past I just told you". "Are you a kidnapper?" said Kyle scared. "No, I am not a kidnapper. Just call me Bob. I'm just trying to show you the truth" said Bob. "I believe you!" for the first time Bob turned around, his eyes were skinny, his face was dark. "Come to the balcony," ordered Bob. As he stepped up onto the balcony. "The legend is the first grotto was chiseled out in 366AD by a monk called Yue Zun. Yue Zun saw the top of a mountain glinting with golden light, as if there were thousands of Buddhas. "We are when it all began, when Yue Zun saw the golden light, look over there". As Kyle turned his head he saw a young monk standing at the foot of a mountain glaring up at what seemed in his eyes a big golden glimmer which he quickly climbed up to and started chiselling that glimmer of beautiful shining light out and making the first ever known grotto. "That's how it began?" asked Kyle amazed; Bob replied with a nod. "I'm ready to go home, with the truth" said Kyle convinced. As Bob looked back into the horizon, Kyle heard a set of footsteps creeping up the stairs, by the time he has turned around... a mischievous and evil looking man was looming over him. Before Kyle could make a sound, the man shoved him into a bag and slowly bobbed down the stairs. Kyle was standing in the middle of three men...

Kyle didn't know who or what was approaching him; one of them said, "WAIT! He's not a dummy!" "What?!" exclaimed another, "Doesn't he know what happened to the last one?" one said.

"Well? Should we let him go?" he had barely finished before getting slapped on the back of his head, "NO, fishbrain, we won't let him go" responded another "I'm not fishbrain, you're fishbrain" "NO I'm not, you are pigbrain!" As Kyle watched the two men argue like four year olds, he suddenly noticed there was a third man looking at him. The third man shouted, "BOYS!". "I don't think we introduced ourselves very well. I'm DoubleR," he said taking his mask off and revealing an ugly face. "These are Biggy and Smalles"; one was short and fat and the other was tall and thin. "I'm Biggy!" said the short one. "I'm Smalles!" said the tall one, leaving Kyle confused. "Follow Biggy and Smalles" ordered DoubleR. As they arrived... "he's here" said Biggy "Activate the defences," said doubleR with a killer voice. The first crystal was fired. The second and then, the third. "Is that all you got?" taunted Bob. Crystals were being shot from all around "STOP!" pleaded Kyle "It's personal," responded doubleR with a grin. More crystals were being shot and Bob he was everywhere up, down, left, right. Bob put his hands together and a barrier formed around him coming smaller till he was on both knees and then something flashed

in his mind. “DoubleR are you too scared to fight me like a man!” screamed Bob. “Stop the fire” said doubleR. “Are you too weak like when I brought... HER!” screamed Bob. “Enough!” snapped DoubleR charging towards the entrance of the cave and barging out right before lunging himself at Bob who reacted quickly only to be taken down “How dare you talk about HER”. As doubleR got back to his feet and started beating up Bob. He picked him up and flung Bob across the area before following and landing close “When she came, she was healthy with two kids, but when she left she didn’t” said Bob desperately. “Her only love was her babies and she gave them to you, and you showed her the Hades Crystal!”

“That’s how you repaid her? By showing her the Hades Crystal!!!” screamed Bob telling him the truth.

“Ahhhh, memory power!!!” screamed DoubleR.

“She gave you the loves of HER life and you killed her, YOU KILLED HER, RORY!”.

A blue flame appeared in front of Rory “MARY? It’s really you?” asked Rory crying. “Yes it is, Rory. Please stop this madness; I hate looking down upon this, change” pleaded Mary. “I will, I promise!” said a suffering Rory. As the flame disappeared into ashes, Rory’s body flopped onto the floor motionless. Kyle stood up and raced out of the cave; he realised what had happened before he arrived. As they made their way back onto the mountain, the monk had finished chiselling the first grotto. “Time to go home,” said Bob, patting some dust. “We had quite a remarkable journey,” replied Kyle. With that, Bob brought him back to the moment he had left – in the car. Kyle climbed out of the van, still a little shocked and raced towards his family, who were just entering the grottoes. The first grotto visited was the most famous. The grotto showed the monk, the mountain and the light. As everyone cleared out to see the next grotto, Kyle stayed behind, staring at the glimmer of light. Suddenly, it turned to Bob’s face. He smiled back and hurried after his family to enjoy the rest of the trip.

As he sat in his seat, he put his hand in his pocket – he had a crystal! “A holiday to remember,” he told himself.

Mogao Grottoes Legend City

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Chen, Lucas – 9

“Time’s up! Class is nearly over. Jack, stop it! You are being a bit annoying and disrupting the class.”

“Sorry, Mr. Hublen.”

Mr. Hublen is a very serious man with a mantra of safety first. Jack was an absolute nightmare for him because Jack could never concentrate or stay in his seat, so he had to try everything to prevent disaster caused by Jack’s actions.

RING! RING! RING! The bell rings and everyone is reminded that tomorrow is the beginning of a one-week school trip week

“Please get all your things and food; we are visiting the Mogao Grottoes in Gansu, China.” Mr. Hublen said cheerfully. Everyone was excited about getting a change of pace and scenery from the boredom of daily life and school.

The next day!

It has been a long time since getting on the train and the students are getting bored. Jack wishes he was playing with his friends, but they are in another carriage. Their group finally arrives at the hotel which is quite nice. After organizing their stuff, Mr. Hublen puts Jack and Tom in a room.

At midnight!

Jack suddenly wakes up after a strange dream just after midnight. He dreamt that he discovered a cave near their hotel and after looking out the window, there it was!

“I’ve got an idea! I can explore the cave so I’m going to pack my things.

After getting ready, Jack climbs the window and adventures into the cave.

In the cave

Jack spots a book floating in midair on top by magic from 366AD, so Jack grabs it. Right at that moment everything disappears because of a sudden flash. When he opens his eyes, he realizes he has been transported to some old town.

“Oh, this is like in the Mogao Grottoes Museum painting that shows a town that looks just like this!”

Suddenly the book starts glittering and it opens.

“Hello, I’m the Mogao Grottoes book. You will pass through here and you must find a Buddhist monk called Le Zun to complete an epic quest!”

They meet!

It’s a very hard quest and Jack faints from hunger and exhaustion. When he opens his eyes, he is in a real bed.

“Oh my gosh where am I?” Jack questions himself. “I’m...”

“Hello, are you ok?” said the girl.

“Who are you!?” screams Jack.

“Oh me? I forgot to introduce myself. I’m Lucy and you’re in my home. We took you home to rest after finding you on a street corner last night.”

“Thank you so much for your help. I’m Jack from England and I came from 2021.”

Top secret!

“Hey Lucy, can I tell you a secret? This magic book lets me travel and see the map. It says that a scholarly and holy man called Le Zun will pass through here. Everyone here speaks Chinese but luckily, she is the only one in town that speaks English because of her job as the town translator.

Start to go!

The adventuring pair are now ready to go on their journey to find Le Zun. Jack is sweating a lot and they walk for miles over a mountain where they see the vague outline of a man.

A bright golden sunray pierces through the sky and a thousand things that seemed to resemble Buddha appeared before him. Jack realizes that the Buddha and the men must be Le Zun.

Two minutes later

“Le Zun told me that he is going to build the temple right over there.” said Lucy.

While Le Zun and the men build the temple, they continue asking questions and help with the construction. They build at an incredible speed due to their blessed speed and strength from Buddha, but the construction is still incomplete.

One hour later!

“Because the book shows here at the bottom of this page. It says we must complete the quest with Le Zun and when the time is up, the book will start glowing and we must leave. We must...”

The book begins furiously flicking through the pages and turns to another page and the next. They disappear...

The book speaks!

They open the book and on the next page, they're told that they have to stop a certain evil man mentioned on the final pages. The evil, bald man is called Stein and must be stopped at all costs because he was sent there to break the proper timeline. The pair remember a bald man with some troublemakers lazing around the temple construction site who must be there to do evil.

TIME TO STOP HIM!

Jack notices Stein's English accent and he deduces that he must be from London, England as well. Lucy has a great idea because of her local knowledge of the town and connections with the police force as her father is the police commissioner. They communicate with Le Zun and the police to ensure there is enough evidence for his arrest. Jack pretends to be in on the evil plan and Stein is unaware that Lucy is bilingual and is translating for some undercover police. Lucy makes a signal after gathering enough evidence and the police in hiding come out armed with weapons to arrest Stein and his henchmen. The prophecy of the magic book is finally fulfilled and the evil forces have been defeated by Jack and Lucy.

The end!

The book started to shine brightly and showed a key that instructed Jack to return to present day. When he opened his eyes, everything is blurry and in a daze.

“Jack! Where were you? We were so worried about you! Don't you remember my mantra of safety first?” asks a crying Mr. Hublen.

Tom suddenly joins in with relief and excitement.

“Hey Jack, do you know what? History almost changed, come take a look at the different history books.”

Jack just gave a fleeting smile and just before dozing back off after being exhausted on his adventure, he whispers out.

“Always safety first, Mr. Hublen.”

The Mystery of the Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Doo, Ayden – 10

It was a cold, cloudy night; the full moon could not be seen. Mark and Cathy stared into space, as they couldn't even see their own hands. Chilly, black waves of darkness came from all directions, and dread swept through them like a tidal wave. Time flew by, and in the blink of an eye, a rim of pale pink had formed on the eastern horizon. The first rays of morning sunlight were an alarm call for the desert. As the first sounds of the dawn chorus echoed across the land, the eerie, damp gloom of the night was replaced by the soft light of day.

Not very far away, there were some caves. Not any ordinary caves, but enchanted and bewitched caves. The moment that the two set foot inside the grotto, the first thing that met their sight was a vast statue. This figure was completely made out of stone, sitting cross-legged as though meditating. With closed eyes, a dot on his forehead, the Buddha sat on a substantial lotus flower. The large giant seemed to wake up as Mark and Cathy crept by.

As they wandered aimlessly through the passageways, they soon found themselves in a room full of ancient scrolls. They could not resist not stepping forward and opening one of the scrolls to see what interesting writing and pictures it contained. But at that moment, an odd creaking sound was heard. The sound was coming from below them, as if there was an earthquake and the stone that they were standing on was splitting apart. But that was the truth and seconds later, they had fallen deep down. Down and down they went. Down and down and down and down...

when they finally reached the ground, it was pitch black. Nothing could be seen. When their eyes adjusted to the darkness, they could tell that the two of them were inside an underground chamber.

Fortunately, Mark had brought along a torch and some sandwiches. As they snacked on the sandwiches, Mark couldn't help noticing a stack of old crates piled up in one corner. There was something bizarre about these crates. Something that couldn't, be explained.

When they finished eating, the first thing Mark did was to go over to the crates and try to figure out how to open them, while Cathy looked for a secret exit. But all they found was an old scroll that had fallen into the chamber with them.

On the scroll it read:

"Elephant Notify Trapped Room Ancestor,

Nearly Central Egotistical Bear Ensure,

Halves Initials None Doomed Craters,

Read Atmosphere Teleport Everything Should,"

They read it over and over again until Mark found a hidden clue. The word "*initials*" meant the first letter of every word. So, Cathy, word-by-word, noted down the first letter of all the words. The code made "*ENTRANCE BEHIND CRATES*".

This made perfect sense now. The crates... the scroll...

After Mark and Cathy moved the burdensome crates out of the way, they were so tired that they could barely walk, but they kept on moving, dragging three feet behind them, their shoulders stooped and head slumped on their chest. This revealed an immense, colossal door, large enough to fit a giant.

Outside, the wind blew and caressed on their cheeks. Oh, how good it felt to be in nature again

The Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, He, Wesley – 10

The sandstorm was blowing hard over the Gobi Desert. I got separated from my parents on their way to the Mogao Caves. As the sun was setting, I crouched in the sand, gazing up at the sky. In the darkness of the Gobi Desert, I vaguely saw a dim light flickering in the distance. The light got closer and closer and to my astonishment, I saw an ambassador walking towards me. I gaped at his silk clothes and ruby rings. I followed the ambassador without a word, not considering if this was a good choice or not.

After what seemed like an eternity of walking, the ambassador stopped in front of the gloomy entrance. As I peeked inside, I was amused by the intricate and detailed paintings on the cave walls and begged to be let inside. As I crept into the caves, the ambassador explained: “These Mogao caves are known as the ‘Thousand Buddha Caves’ and were created in 366 C.E.

It was damp and gloomy in the cave. Raising my head, I saw an image of multiple glorious golden Buddhas floating in the sky. A thousand beaming Buddhas emerged, surrounded by flying fairies playing heavenly music. I was dumbfounded and intrigued by the glamorous painting and was immediately sucked inside. I was in a lecture hall bigger than ten classrooms and saw hundreds of monks listening to Buddha. I noticed a boy trying to sneak out of class and hurriedly ran to prevent him from doing so.

“Why are you ditching class?” I asked the boy.

“I am tired of the stupid lectures! I want to go out and play!” cried the monk.

Suddenly, everything was a blur and when I opened my eyes, I saw that we had unknowingly teleported to one of my favorite spaces, the Da Vici Centre: a hub of mechanical engineering and creative design for budding inventors in my school. The monk had come too. He was amused by the 3D printing machines and tools. He understood the importance of learning and vanished into thin air...

The Secret Buddha

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Hung, Wei-You Wesley – 9

Liam looked around the room. There were large glass canisters filled with cotton balls and bandages. It was a typical doctor's office and while Liam waited, his stomach was turning into a million knots. He was waiting for his cancer report. His hands felt wet and clammy. He always got this way when he knew something bad was coming.

"Liam, as you know, this is a very rare form of cancer," Dr. Collymore said. Liam knew this wasn't good. "The cancer has already spread to your liver and your kidneys. At this point, surgery and chemotherapy are not options. The cancer is very aggressive. I'm sorry," Dr. Collymore said with sadness in his voice. Liam was still, but his mind was racing. "According to this, our best guess is that you only have one year to live."

He had cancer and the panic he felt was splashed all over his face.

The doctor continued, "I'll give you some advice on how you can be more comfortable before you die."

★ ★ ★

It felt like an eternity in that doctor's office. After he finished talking, Liam dashed home.

"Mom, I, uh, I need to talk to you and dad about something," Liam said, choking up. They already knew that he had cancer, but didn't realize how aggressive it was. He was only eighteen years old. His parents were extremely devastated by the atrocious news. They hugged each other as a way to share the grief.

"Son, life is precious. You've truly taught us that this year. Now, I want you to do something for yourself. Live your life. Do whatever you want in the time you have left. We'll support you no matter what you choose. We love you," and with that, his father collapsed in tears.

"I love you, too," Liam said with gratitude.

Liam returned to his room to look up different treatments for his cancer, but every road he went down ended in disappointment. Eventually, he started reading about alternative treatments that were considered more taboo than modern medicine. He came upon an article about immortality.

"Is this real?" Liam read on in disbelief. He read about the Legend of the Secret Buddha. According to myth, there was a Secret Buddha statue that granted eternal life. If one touched the statue's hands and wished out loud three times, they would be given immortality. The Secret Buddha was said to be hidden in the famous Mogao Grottoes. Right then and there, Liam knew what he wanted to do with what time he had left. He wanted to find the Secret Buddha and live forever.

He told his parents of the legend. At first his parents were skeptical. They weren't so sure of the validity of the legend. But when they saw how much he believed in it, they gave him their blessing on one condition: that they join him.

★ ★ ★

Liam and his parents boarded a plane the next week. On the way, they travelled from cities with lofty skyscrapers to dusty roads in the desert. They finally arrived at their destination: the Mogao Grottoes.

"This place is huge!" Liam's mom was in awe of the magnificent caves. Each chamber seemed to hold new treasures of a time long ago. They spent the afternoon exploring the caves.

That night, Liam had a vivid dream of the Secret Buddha. The Secret Buddha already knew what Liam wanted and was showing Liam something in his hands. Liam looked at the Buddha's hands and saw that he was holding a star in his right hand. Behind the Buddha, he noticed two robust horses.

Suddenly, Liam woke up.

"I think I know what I'm looking for," Liam said to his parents as they were walking through the sandy caves.

!

"How do you know which one is the special one?" Liam's father asked.

"The one we're looking for has a star in his right hand and two horses beside it. That's what I saw in my dreams and I know that it was a sign!" Liam said excitedly.

Even though there were more than 100,000 Buddhas, Liam wasn't giving up so easily. Liam could feel the history of the place. He was surrounded by the knowing stares of each statue, yet the one he wanted was being elusive.

"Can you see if there is a painting with horses on it?" Liam looked around the spacious chamber, trying to spot the horses from his dream.

"Take a look at this one, Liam," Liam's mother was staring at a large canvas with hundreds of animals on it.

"I remember seeing only two horses and no other animals," said Liam.

"How about this one? This painting only has two horses," his father said, standing in front of a beautiful image of two majestic horses. They looked rather realistic, as if they were about to charge forward.

"This looks like the one!" Liam said. He looked right at the two horses and then noticed they were next to the most beautiful statue of Buddha they had seen yet. The Buddha looked down at Liam with kind eyes. Then Liam looked at its hands and saw the star.

"I can't believe we actually found the Secret Buddha! I really hope this works. I love you guys," said Liam as he stepped towards the Buddha. Liam touched the statue's hand and said, "I wish for eternal life," three times.

Suddenly, Liam's feet felt glued to the floor like cement. His feet actually turned into stone and continued up his body. His parents watched in horror as their son slowly turned into a statue. But not a statue of Liam. He turned into another statue of Buddha! He was immortalized and his parents couldn't believe it.

Liam's parents started looking around the room. They noticed that Liam was not the only statue. It was full of other people's wishes for immortality. The room was full of Buddha statues, standing forever.

The Magic of Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Kummer, Hermine – 11

Deep, deep in the blazing— hot desert, which carried on as far as the eye could see, an abundant amount of tourists and people from a variety of numerous countries ,are having a layover to examine the wonder and deep magic hidden in the Mogao grottoes ,which were the most historical and furthermore , the most beautiful places that anyone would want to glimpse at .

Daily, innumerable amounts of tourists traveled all the way from their far away countries, to the far way, in the west end of Gansu Province, southeast of the centre of Dunhuang , just to see the famous grottoes. Although, a short number of months later, the flight all the way to Dunhuang, was canceled. People couldn't visit the magical Mogao grottoes anymore, and stopped visiting them. After six months later ,the grottoes were forgotten about , and as the powerful wind blew ,like tumbleweeds in the wind ,large amounts of dry sand crowded all entrances ,and pathways to the Mogao grottoes ,leaving no entrance for anyone to see them ever again.

Another month passed , and the Mogao Grottoes grew dark and ancient , changing themselves in numerous ways. The intricate and colorful patterns of Chinese paintings and drawings of emperors and many places ,could no longer be seen ,as the colors dried out ,and then there was nothing to see. After that ,alluring palaces and ancient buildings ,which were parts of the Mogao grottoes ,were buried under a blanket as hard as rock! When spring ,summer ,autumn and winter passed by ,new spirits of these no longer flagrant astonishing grottoes ,were awakened by the cold drip of water ,coming down from the ceiling ,which made loud echoing noises ,travel through the Mogao grottoes ,forming an almost see through body of the spirits, which had been paintings on the walls ever since the drawings didn't dry out. Some of them ,were either fat or thin, sometimes pig-headed, or cold— hearted too ,but some were kind and generous ,while others were grumpy but nice. "How are we supposed to get out of here ?" one of the worried spirits began, whose name was Tacky. "Well isn't it obvious to you that we will never get out of here ,since these dumb-minded people ,who have recently forgotten us ,will never get us out of here ,as if we are a garbage thrown away in the greasy trash can!" replied one of the rather cold hearted spirits named icy. "Well ,he does have a point, began tarry. And why would they just cancel all of those stupid flights here ,just to see us ,if they love us ,which they don't?" he questioned. "Stop being so rude you guys ,they will find us ,it's just because they are a bit clumsy ,and because , like tarry said, all the flights to Dunhuang were canceled and so because they were canceled for way too long ,they forgot ,but they will discover us soon or later ,no matter what ,but they love these grottoes ,which do include us." Hearty replied ,who was always friendly and generous ,and as said, he was also a kind-hearted spirit, as most of them say ,he was the nicest of all.

While all these spirits, gathered around ,all worried and feared that they wouldn't be discovered anymore ,they didn't notice ,people searching for places unknown ,who were trying to discover the historical ancient but beautiful grottoes again ,were searching and passing by with spades to search the grounds ,but as the spirits were quiet and couldn't scream for help ,because a human might panic immediately when seeing a living spirit ,besides they did not notice anything and just went on to search somewhere else.

When night grew dark ,the spirits finally declared to figure out a plan to make the humans find them again ,but for this they had to be as quiet as a mouse. A few days later ,they discovered footprints on the rocky surface outside through one little hole (which could possibly only fit a small sandwich). They looked closely, "See! I told you they wouldn't stop to try find us!" Hearty realised , getting a little bit angry at the other spirits. "Well sorry Hearty ,but we need to get going and not answer your stupid questions ,we need to pay attention!!!" Icy began. "Uhhhhh!" Hearty groaned ,getting tired of what everybody is doing. Like a thief in the night, the spirits crept silently through the grottoes, trying to find a bigger way to escape into the moonlight and air outside.

Unfortunately, there was nowhere else to escape, other than the tiny hole that could fit a small sandwich, in which probably nobody could fit through. Later ,they all fell asleep and the sun rose , making sparkles of light filter through

the grottoes' only gap."Help!Help!"all of the spirits screamed , as they heard people outside still checking the area to find and discover them."Yaaaaay!"they cried ,finally being discovered.To their surprise ,they had already dug up another part of the grottoes ,so the spirits , including the rest of the grottoes, could only be next.Once the humans heard this scream ,they immediately started digging through the underground to discover the final part of the Mogao Grottoes. And of course, as Hearty announced earlier, people will never forget them ever again!

A Tunnel To The Lost World

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Low, Avelyn – 10

As I trudged laboriously into the lustreless, crepuscular caves, a colossal pair of peculiar gates made out of pure Stygian revealed itself out of the gloominess. An ebony, menacing shadow was cast over me. I knew I wasn't supposed to go in, but curiosity got better off me. With all the might I can gather, I thrust open the pair of gates. Suddenly, millions of golden illuminations poured into the tenebrous caves. The dazzling gleam blinded my eyes temporarily, causing yellow spots to dance in my eyes. But before I knew it, I started tumbling into a dingy pit that I was pretty sure had no end.

I. I Go from Person to Pancake *RIIIIIIING!*

All of a sudden, I bolted upright from my lumpy mattress with beads of sweat rolling down from my forehead, drenching my clammy t-shirt with moisture.

THUD!

A head-on collision with the floor. Just my luck. With my body spread widely out like a bulky, gargantuan pancake, I tried to stir from this awkward position. Sneers and taunts attacked me viciously from behind. Agonisingly, I tried to settle myself on my uneven mattress before some of my fellow scholars decided it was 'amusing' to try to torment me. The fourth empty cup of herbal tea drained to the dregs lay on my nightstand, my droopy eyelids suggesting the prerequisite of a fifth cup. But before I can make that invigorating cup of herbal tea, my thoughts were suddenly was laced back to my dreams. I had a million questions. Were the gates real? What was the dream trying to tell me? Why did I suddenly fall?

“Yuanlu. YUANLU!”

My intent thoughts came abruptly to a stop.

“What do you want?” I retorted, irritated that Chun Li had intervened.

“You’ve got to hurry up. The breakfast bell had started.”

Breakfast. My stomach growled ferociously at the thought of breakfast. I hastily got dressed and went briskly down to the Mogao cavern’s dining hall.

II. I Receive a Boiling Gift from the Sun

CLINK! CLINK! CLINK!

As the sweltering sun embraced me in a convulsive, titanic clutch (which reminded me strongly of my bulbous Aunt fu’s hug), I tried excavating at a useless piece of grime, which I knew it was futile to keep on attempting. I don’t have a clue why my administrator thought Mogao grottoes to be a idiosyncratic archaeological site, where there were about thousands of other caverns waiting patiently for its concealed secrets to be unraveled and discovered. After all, plenty of pilgrims had traveled years before us to unearth the grottoes’ mystery, yet the cavern was unyielding to spill it out. So why bother?

CRACK!

What was that? Frantically, my head spun around, in search for any movement or activity made by the grotto. Suddenly, another several cracks popped out of nowhere. Panic began to rise in my chest. Although the weather was scorching hot, my body was shivering. Freezing hands were doing the Eensy Weensy spider down my spine. And before I knew it, I was plummeting headfirst into a fathomless abyss.

III. I Enter the Past from the Future

Where am I? I scrutiny my sombre surroundings: a dingy, minuscule chamber, with mountainous piles of boulders in every nook and cranny. All at once, my body turned motionless. Just in the dim light of a broken piece of glass, I could just make out the feeble silhouette of something circular. Something with a tinge of coppery. Something of incalculable value. Circling around me was hundreds and hundreds rolls of manuscript from the year the Qing Dynasty was crowned emperor. My mouth went agape. Just when I thought Mogao caves was nothing but a huge pile of rocks, I found this tiny cavern crammed with pieces of historic parchment that could earn me a million yuan! But this happiness could not last long. All of a sudden, realisation dawned on me: I couldn't get out.

IV. I Nearly Met Mr. Death

Climbing the walls? To steep. Calling for help? Voice too soft. All I could do was to pray that I had the luck of a devil and someone would approach to free me from my prison. Slumping down beside a pile of scrolls, I brought my knees to my chest and buried my head in there. First, this was a fantastic cavern full of surprises. Now, it was my prison, with no way to escape. *What did I get myself into?* Suddenly exasperated at myself, I slammed my fist into the dirt wall.

BEEP!

Out of nowhere, a ligneous door automatically gave away its hiding spot. Smoothly, it slid open to reveal a set of stairs made out of earth. Without hesitation, I bolted up the stairs into nature. The sun was starting to subside down the horizon.

"Yuanlu! We've been looking for you everywhere!" Lulling blurted out.

"You look ravenous! Do you want to grab some food?" Chun Li asked me anxiously. But all I could do was to nod, then collapse into a tangled heap on the dirt. Someday, I would be known as Wang Yuanlu, who discovered the Mogao cave's library chamber.

Riley's Story

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Ortego Lafuente, Irene – 10

Riley was a passionate girl with a whole world of imagination and dreams ahead of her. It all started on one usual day when she was locked up in her room writing away, as she thought that was the only way of expressing her feelings and emotions. She had always pictured herself being a fantasy book writer for little kids. Unfortunately, her mother had never been a fan of her stories and had always thought that her daughter was destined to be a mathematician.

One day, when she was as bored as she had ever been, Riley decided she was going to write a story, but not any story, a story about adventure and history. She knew it would be impossible to go anywhere without her mother's consent, but she was desperate, and had an endless list of places she wanted to go to and write stories about. On the other side of her room, was a large, elevated window that gave sight to her garden. An idea came to her. It was genius. It was perfect. It was thought to be done. As determined as she had ever been, she packed her things, and prepared herself for what she had been waiting her whole life. An adventure. She knew where she was going, she had been waiting to go there her whole life, the Mogao Caves. Her plan was to tell her mother she was going to study science in her room (she said science because she knew that would make her extra happy) and then sneak out of the house through the window in her room, which was perfect because it led straight to the garden. She thought to herself, let the journey begin!

Her first mission was to fool her mother into thinking she was doing her homework. And that was an easy task, as all mother ever wanted was for Riley to do her homework and study. First task, done. The next part was when things started to get interesting, she had to sneak out through her window without being caught by anyone. She cautiously opened the window feeling the autumn breeze on her cheeks. She climbed out and ran towards the gate and hoorayyyy!!! She was out. All of her emotions had summed up and she was about to turn back and stay home, but she thought to herself, I need to do this if I want to become a famous author. And here's where her adventure actually begins...

She was off to the Mogao Caves. Her head was filled with things she could write and what she would see. Once she had finally made it to the caves, she couldn't believe her eyes! They were sky reaching and built in such an intriguing shape. So many stories went through her head, horror stories, fantasy stories, all sorts! When she went inside, she was amazed to see the walls covered in Buddhist art, it was beautiful. It was the perfect chance to write the perfect story. This was her moment! As well as the Buddhist art, she saw tonnes of information describing it: evidence of the evolution of Buddhist art in the northwest region of China. That made the Mogao Caves of unmatched historical value! In a room stood 5 Buddhist statues, the one in the middle of the room seemed like the most important. It was sitting cross legged with its eyes closed. In her notebook she wrote, 'The walls were covered with information, Lily...'. Everything was so colourful, the ceilings had such intricate designs on them and were covered in all sorts of shapes and forms.

After hours and hours of looking around, reading and writing, she decided it was time to go back home thinking it was enough for one day. She had never left a place with such a happy feeling inside her. It had been such a pleasant and perfect visit. Pages and pages were filled in her notebook of 'Lily's adventure at the Mogao Caves'. It was the same walk back home she had taken on her way to the caves, but this time it was starting to get a little bit chilly and she realized she had forgotten to bring a jumper. Relieved, she saw the gate that led to her garden. She sneaked in through the window once again and back into her room. She felt amazing! What an experience she thought. Unpacking all of her things, she realized the book her last story had been written on was open. That wasn't like that when she left! Who read it?

Did Riley's mother read her story?
Did she find out she left?
Had she been spying her all along?

The Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Tai, Liszt – 9

It was dark.

Thunder boomed right next to the house. There were no electric lights in the whole city except one house whose attic's light was blazing.

Very lonely, I was thinking hard about a math question. There was so much homework that I needed to do and work on for hours. On a normal day, I would hear my mother stomping around at eleven o'clock, agonizing over her unfinished writing. But today was different. Wind was howling at the windows, it was horrifying.

Without making a noise, I crept under my bed. The attic door flew open, and out came two men, but it was not exactly two men, it was one man with two heads.

"Where is he!" screamed one of the heads.

I sprang up from under the bed and jumped out of the window to the river. Without turning back, I had dived into the river, and it seemed to wake up my senses. I knew exactly what to do now, I waited and tackled him causing the man causing him to stumble back. After a moment of fighting the man staggered backwards into the darkness.

I wanted to celebrate my victory, but I know they will take revenge, my mother was being captured. I knew it. It was the monster that had just come to capture me.

I chose to go diving in the lake that had before woken my senses, but to my surprise I was caught in a forceful whirlpool causing me to faint.

As I lulled unconsciousness, I dreamt that I was on a beautiful island with an immense feeling of joy. I was invisible, and I could not make any sound. A monster called an Assendo, was talking to a man, Luke. I knew him even though I had never seen this man before.

When I woke up, I suddenly felt calm, A centaur and a boy called Jason were crowded around me. I was sucking something like chocolate pudding.

Like everywhere else, I needed to be careful of what I did, but I didn't have that feeling now. I felt as if I had never been into a real home before. My father never cared about me, but in this place, strangers were welcoming me, teachers were helping us all if we their sons or daughters. Soon I discovered that we were all in danger, and this camp should help us to escape it.

In this camp you learn how to fight this enemy of ours. I am the best at punching and kicking, and usually I won beside the river, as the river could help me. Soon, we ought to leave the camp except for some children who were in real danger, so they continue to live in the camp.

Now I was prepared for the battle to save my mother for, without my mother my life would be doomed. Fortunately, I had made lots of friends in summer, Jason, Clair, Clarisse, and James had all come too, and Jason my best friend.

Today was the day that we would fight the monsters that captured my mother.

In my attic we started a serious discussion about how to invade the Mogao Grottoes. We discovered that each person had a talent: Jason was the best at magic, Clair was best at being quiet, Clarisse could fight like a lion and James could appear and disappear here and there. Jason was very wise with the skills of an architect.

Everybody made suggestions, unfortunately none of them could work, as Grottoes was in the desert.

"So now we have decided that Clair and James will sneak up either side of the tunnel, when they successfully reach the middle, they will raise a white flag to tell us they succeeded. While Jason, and Clarisse and I will appear after. It's a 90 percent chance that we will get my mother back." I concluded after we had finished the discussion. Now we would start working on and exciting the plan.

We were in the back of the Mogao Grottoes now, I squeezed Jason's hand "Don't be afraid,"

It was dark and damp, even a single drop of water alarmed us. Working very hard Jason opened the door that led to the other end of the cave.

The Grottoes were full of Chinese artefacts showing evidence of different types of gods in every country. It was enormous, there was so many doors leading everywhere, corridors with dusty floors, you could catch sand in your nose easily.

We waited impatiently for the sign, after a few minutes, no sign came.

"They are in danger," predicted Jason as he crept towards a big rock that led to one of the other doors.

Now, not only was my mother was imprisoned, James and Clair had been taken too. Crawling as quiet as mice, crossing every room and inspecting thoroughly, we didn't make any progress, but soon we found a trap door in the first room of the Grottoes.

"This is too easy, wait!" Jason yelled as Clarisse charged towards the door, soon she fell on the ground, a wire that was nearly invisible had tripped her, Assendo appeared everywhere, two headed men behind them, I knew I couldn't fight this many alone.

The second thing I knew is that I was charging and sawing, killing huge number of monsters, but there were too many. The last thing I knew was that I was chained on the floor along with my friends, I realized I couldn't get on out of this.

We thought it was hopeless, these chains were full of magic. When you struggled the chain would tighten, all we could do now was wait for death.

Suddenly, a flap of wings gave us hope, our camp was here to help us. The Assendos were very confused as arrows and spears knocked them down to their knees. Fire balls exploded everywhere, and our teacher, Mason, broke all of our chains and now we were free. We flew happily in the air back towards the camp for winter solstice. Since we were separated from my mother's cabin, we would come back for my mother another time, our camp don't have the magic to break it.

Gore in the Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Temucin, Selin – 9

A vast mountainous landscape supported the elegant architecture of the Mogao Grottoes. Maya and Nicolas were on a school trip to explore the beautiful, ancient culture of the caves and the history of its creation. Since they were both bored, the two of them became very close, very fast. The first two days were full of tiring activities such as hiking, mountain climbing and much more. It was only the start of the trip and they both quickly felt exhausted by all of the challenges. All they wanted was silence and to be alone but there was no possible way to get that, unless...

At night, when Maya was snuggling in her bed, a cold breeze flew through her window, so she woke up with a startle. As an hour passed, she could not fall back to sleep, so she decided to wake up Nicolas to go on an adventure in the caves. At first he was confused and attempted to hit her with his pillow, but when he realized it was Maya he started laughing hysterically.

“How on earth did you get in my room?” he asked starting to blush.

“This place is a dump, I used your spare key,” she whispered quietly in his ear. “Hurry, let’s go have some fun of our own.”

They snuck out Nicolas’ room trying to be as quiet as possible so the teachers wouldn’t catch them leaving. Although they were both nervous, but excited for their freedom. After a while, Maya and Nicolas found a comfortable spot in the cave and started getting very tired so they thought of walking and trying to play some games for fun. After running through the spirally cave, they stopped at a long, wonky bridge to take a break, when Nicolas started walking towards her.

“Wow, this is so different to what we have in Spain...” he marveled, starting to get very close.

Maya stepped back, worriedly. “Maybe we should start heading back, I’m pretty sure they’re going to wake up soon.”

He grabbed her hand and she pulled back before anything wrong happened. “Oh come on Maya, it’s just us. I’m not going to do anything.” Again, he reached out, but as he took a step forward, he stumbled on a rock and plummeted head-first over the railing...to his death. Splash! He fell, deep down at the bottom of the ocean, not able to be saved. She could feel tears dropping down her face, it was all her fault.

Maya dashed desperately back into her room, her hands starting to tremble. As the time flew past, she was drowning in her tears, and she felt closer to him. But nothing would bring him back.

The next day, everyone gathered so the teachers could complete a headcount before they started to explore the Grottoes building. As they reached Nicolas’ name, the room went silent. Nicolas wasn’t there. But that wasn’t the worst part.

Half the class was missing.

Encounter

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Wang, Estelle – 8

In a summer holiday, a girl named Rinka went to Dunhuang's Mogao grottoes strolling around the cave. She was amazed by the gorgeous architectures and wall paintings. The cave was very colorful and with lots of fairies like the flying apsaras on the wall. Suddenly, one of the flying apsaras blinked. The wall started to shake, and dust fell.

Rinka rubbed her eyes, it was unbelievable! She was so frightened she tried to scream but she can't give a cry. She tried to run away, but her legs were stuck just like a stone statue. At this time, the flying apsara started to talk: "Hello, Rinka, how are you? I'm Estelle."

"I'm fine, thank you!" Said Rinka in fears.

"Don't be scared!" Said Estelle, the flying apsara. "Long time no see!"

"Wh. wh... What? Are you kidding me?" Rinka cried in a fear and surprise.

"I'm not kidding! When you were 1 year old, you came here once. And you were so cute!" Estelle recalled.

"Really? Are you sure? Is that really true?" Rinka cheered proudly.

"Of course! Your sparkling eyes impressed me a lot! I would like to take you to my world today. Would you come with me?" Estelle invited Rinka happily.

Rinka was so curious about everything that happened in front of her. She wanted to explore more. So, she nodded. Suddenly, a light of flash beamed. Estelle took Rinka back to 2000 years ago. They arrived at the fairy world. It was very massive, spectacular, and beautiful. There was a tremendous, vivid, and twinkling tower. That was Estelle's home. Estelle blinked at Rinka and turned her into a Flying Apsaras. Rinka was happy with her new dressing. But suddenly, the ground trembled violently. The dreadful monster popped and appeared in midtown. He opened his scarlet mouth and roared coarsely. It was like an enormous eye of typhoon, sucking in every fairy except Rinka and Estelle. The fairy world became a mess and in ruins. Rinka and Estelle had to save the captured fairies. They made great efforts to save every fairy from the cage except the eldest one, who was trapped in the bedroom of the monster. Rinka proposed a great plan to rescue the eldest fairies. Half of the fairies went to save the eldest fairy. The other half of the fairies drew away the monster. Estelle turned into a blue butterfly to distract the attention from the monster. The monster followed her and eventually dropped into a massive hold with magic. The hold became a huge web which trapped him tightly. The monster yelled angrily and struggled to remove the web, but it didn't work. He consumed all his efforts and died. All the fairies cheered up because their magic defeated the monster and saved the eldest fairy.

"It was time to go home!" Rinke sighed.

Estelle gave an amulet to Rinka and said, "If you want to see us in the future, just hold this and then you can talk to me!" As soon as she finished, Rinka went back to her life.

Fantasy

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Xue, Rex – 9

‘What is that?’ said Franklin. A creeping sound broke the dead silence in the darkness. Hairs on his back shot up into the air. Cold sweat of nervousness dropped down from his ruby red cheek.

He stood still. Staring at the endless corridor of gloominess.

Drops of water felled on the stone curved floor. He was only accompanied by silence. Franklin fished out the rust old torch. A light shined in the dark. He walked through the corridor of master pieces. Franklin walked and walked, drawing to drawings. He stopped, and stared. What is it? Statues, three mighty handmade statues curved by mud. The smell of burned wood filled his nostrils. Suddenly, a flash of light appeared, it’s the statues”what are you doing here!” said the female statue in a Chinese accent. Franklin nearly yelled out loud, he ran and fell. Landing on his butt. He stared at the statue that had just been turned alive, amazed. It had a gauze on its head. Face as white as Snow White (of course the Snow White in your bed story) and a piece of grass in its shiny hand.

What? I was just a visitor, not a thief or a crazy bank robber! Thought Franklin, I wish it could say something like: oops, I spot the wrong person! Or: Ah, Visitor! Sorry!

“Don’t be afraid, little hero.” murmured the statue (she’s not actually talking because it hadn’t even moved her stone curved mouth.) She floated around the chamber, disgusting damp smell drifted around and made Franklin feel sick, like kind of a seasick, but as the smell disappeared the sickness disappeared as well.

“Who are you?” asked Franklin questioningly, as the sound of water drops echoes in the vast a wonderful “mansion”.

“I am AvalokitesvaraBodhisattva,” answered the statue (dear readers, AvalokitesvaraBodhisattva is not a made up word!) What? A something Safari? thought Franklin.

“But where are you.....” said Franklin. Suddenly, it has vanished in the dark. this statue that had only talked to Franklin no more than eight word in the conversation had disappeared. Franklin continued walking in the dark. Suddenly he spotted something glowing in the dark chamber, his torch had run out of battery. Franklin sped up and wish it would be a nice and full charged torch. But no. It’s a Chinese ancient long knife, not the kind of knife we used in our dinner. A long knife with deadly sharp blade made from iron.

“Whaaaaaa! a mysterious sound echoed in the chamber. What is that? Sounds like a baby crying alone. Franklin followed the noise in small footsteps. Always looking around in the room. OOF! Franklin was pressed on the floor by a monster. It had a human face with terrible beards (maybe it hasn’t look after it,) a body of a male striped tiger with thirteen tail (what terrible Monster!) It was a Chinese enlightened beast from the book Legends of Mountains And Rivers. Franklin’s face was paled. He kicked the monster; the monster roared a loud roar. Franklin reached for the sword on the floor. The horrible monster pushed it sharp claws on Franklin, he dodged, and he jumped. Franklin strikes the monster with the Sword; he missed the target. And he slashed again, the blade of the sword strikes the monster in the eye. It roared painfully, Franklin slashed again, the enlightened beast was finally beaten by this hero. The beast vaporized into ashes. Franklin looked at his arm, it was scratched, and his leg was bit. He walked out the chamber, into the corridors and out of the cave: Mangoes cave. The cave in the burning dessert, and in the station of the great Silk Road. it was already dark outside, cool air blowed on Franklin’s body. He stepped on his bicycle and gone back home.

Franklin opened the door and crept in his room he run and jumped and fell on his bed. Home, sweet home thought Franklin. He fell asleep at once. Even though it was just fantasy.....

“Wake up! Franklin, It’s school today!

The Magical Tour in Dunhuang

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Bonn – 9

Dunhuang is a very valuable and attractive cultural site in the Jiangsu province of China. There exists more than 700 caves holding more than a thousand pieces of Buddhist frescoes, which is actually the largest collection in the world. These frescoes were created between the 4th and the 14th century, showing how people lived in ancient time. From these wall paintings, we can see peoples' luxurious fashion that resembles modern day clothing, like Persian clothes and beautiful handbags. We can probably tell a bit about how our ancestors lived. One impressive piece of work that really fascinates people is the Fresco of Angels that look like girls but are actually boys!

The largest caves is the Mogao. They hold the most frescoes in Dunhuang, and needless to say, attracts a large number of tourists everyday. Visitors are interested in learning about the Buddhist culture.

A few years ago, two families of great friends came to Dunhuang for vacation. They are the Chans and the Zhangs who had a passion for Chinese culture and religions. They unpacked as soon as they arrived at the hotel and dashed out to the site in excitement. Then the moms and dads said, "We are going to have a competition to see who can find the most unusual pieces of frescoes." Cowin and Syleen, the Chan and Zhang kids, immediately jumped up and rushed to find the unique paintings.

They quickly ran in and out of many caves and discovered that some illustrated peoples' daily lives and others were the drawings of gods. The children were fascinated when they saw Fresco of Angels. It was already late at night and they could not stay out too late. So, they returned to the hotel and slept. They slept and snored till 3am.

Suddenly, a bright flash woke the children up. They saw a beautiful angel which was the one in the painting that they came across in the last cave they visited. The children were stunned by what appeared in front of them. The Angel started to talk to them in a mysterious voice, "I would love to bring you two to ancient China!" In just a flash, the children were teleported back to year 705 during the Tang Dynasty. Cowin and Syleen landed in a foreign city. They looked around and saw houses made out of wood and people wearing jewellery and strange clothes covered in patterns. The crowd were playing with weird toys too. Everything was so strange! At one point, they saw two boys waving goodbye to their father. Cowin and Syleen went over to see what was going on and the two boys told them in a sad voice that their merchant father was heading to the Silk Road to sell his goods. They further explained that the Silk Road was a very dangerous route full of pirates and burglars. They were afraid that their father wouldn't come back. Cowin asked what the two brothers would do meanwhile. The brothers said they would continue to paint the family caves. They also invited Cowin and Syleen to join their fresco painting.

At the merchant's cave, Cowin and Syleen started their art works. Secretly, they added to drawings modern day items like handbags, facemasks and a baby stroller. The Dunhuang kids were surprised at what the two kids drew but they loved the unusual objects and joined in to do the paintings.

After everyone was done, suddenly, the Angel appeared again and said, "I will bring the four of you to the Empress's Chamber!" Again, in a bright flash, they were teleported to the palace of the only female emperor in Chinese history, Empress Wu Zitian.

At a glance, the children saw a woman dressed in fine clothes and looked strong, powerful and serious. That was the Empress! Cowin and Syleen were a bit scared and tried to hide themselves behind the merchant brothers. The two merchant brothers laughed and said, "Why do you two look so scared?"

The Empress was actually a very kind person. While Cowin and Syleen were still shivering, the Empress offered them comfort, "Hello Children", in a strong but kind voice, "Welcome to my chamber." The children were very surprised, "Your majesty, aren't you going to send us back home?" The Empress answered, "Of course, but not now. You two should come join my party!" While the two children didn't know how to react appropriately to that, the Angel appeared again and sent all four kids back to the cave again!

The merchant kids were so kind that they taught Cowin and Syleen to craft Buddhist art. However, as much as Cowin and Syleen tried their best to follow the cave kids' instructions, they still didn't do so well and ended up drawing a man angel! They also drew a harp, but the shape and design didn't turn out to be what they expected. Their very pleasant experience meeting the Empress and the merchant kids had Cowin and Syleen thought Dunhuang was a magnificent place.

After all the hard work, the kids would love to take a rest. All of a sudden, the Angel appeared again. In a flash, Cowin and Syleen were sent back to their hotel where they met with their parents. After a night's rest, the dads and

moms brought the kids to the Mogao once more. The last cave they entered was the one where they had done the strange paintings with modern day items. The two kids suggested to their parents that this painting was the most unique work in the caves.

Mogao Grottoes

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chen, Ho Lung Adwin – 11

It was a dry and hot afternoon, as Johnathan Ruben Michaels trudged through the barren dunes, on a course set directly to the Mogao Grottoes. Every step he took caused pain to shoot up his aching legs, but he knew that it was going to be worth it. After all, it wasn't called a gateway to the past for no reason. As he continued to make his way across the sunbaked desert, he finally spotted a patch of green in the distance, with a dark-colored smudge nearby. *That must be the cave* John thought. Within a few hours, all of his studying to become a scholar would finally come to fruition. If he uncovered something special, he would have an opportunity to finally pay for his mom's sickness treatment.

After walking for another hour, his weariness got the better of him, and his legs crumpled. John panted heavily, as he fumbled for his water. He drank a few gulps before shoving it into his backpack, not caring about keeping it tidy. He was less than a kilometer away from the oasis, and he was so ready to slouch down in a tent, away from the sun and not feeling its baking wrath for a few minutes. He heaved himself onto his feet once more and made his way to the oasis, for the final time.

Once he got there, he groped around his backpack until his hands latched onto a piece of smooth, water-resistant cloth. He pulled it out and set it on his lap. He then reached into the backpack and pulled out a series of bendable metal poles, folded them out to their full length and set them on the sand. He then unfurled the cloth and pushed the metal poles through the loops on top of the cloth, making his tent. John dropped his backpack on the bottom of the tent, grabbed his flashlight, chisel, and handgun and left the tent.

An hour later, a Jeep with desert-travel modifications, came next to the cave. “So, you’re finally here, Alfred.” John chuckled, “I was beginning to think you weren’t turning up.”

Alfred jumped out of the Jeep. “Let’s just say my alarm decided not to work.”

“Well, now you’re here, grab your gear and let’s get started.” John replied, with a slightly annoyed tone.

Once Alfred had gathered his gear, the pair descended into the cave. Today the cave was empty, with most of the usual archeologists and scholars away. As they moved further into the cave, ignoring the already discovered mosaics and paintings, Alfred suddenly exclaimed, “GOD, IT’S A SPIDER! AAAAH! HELP!” In Alfred’s panic, he stumbled and crashed into a wall. However, instead of making a thud that a typical solid wall would make, the sound was a hollow “Thump” which echoed for 3 seconds. Alfred, forgetting the spider, felt a smile creep up his face. The once confused John exchanged grins with him, and they got their chisels out, banging and scraping on the rock wall until the stone gave away, revealing a hidden room. Once the hole was big enough for them to crawl through, they clambered into the secret room, not knowing what awaited them.

Sticky with sweat, the two wiggled their way into the chamber, and pulled out their flashlights. On the wall were a set of engravings, written, “ᐅᐃᐃ ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ ᐃᐃ ᐃᐃ ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ, ᐃᐃ ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ”. John realized he had forgotten to bring a camera, so the two left the chamber and sprinted back to grab a camera.

When they got back, the runes seemed to be emanating a faint purple light deep, deep, inside. John and Alfred exchanged suspicious glances, but decided to shrug it off. They took a picture of the runes, and Alfred noticed that there was another set of runes next to that. He shone the torch on it, and captured an image. The second engraving read, “THM NMBRF ZHFN RIEM, FTM BRIO DM WOP+WFNI QP HNMFTIT”. Once the pair was satisfied that there were no more secrets in the chamber, they made their way back to the tent, in hopes of deciphering the mysterious runes.

As they left the cave, they pocketed the pictures and clambered out of the tight fit of rocks. Suddenly, a black puma the size of a lorry pounced at them from behind the cave. John dove the ground, but the beast's claws grazed his hair. Had he not dived, it would have turned him into confetti. The puma spun around to face them once more. However, as the sun peeked over the horizon, the puma gave one large roar and disintegrated.

By the time they finally got back to the tent, they were too tired to exit the tent and explore, so they stayed in entire day, looking at all known runes and ciphers that could have been translated to this. With no luck up to midday, they were weary and discouraged, wondering why they even decided to do this in the first place. As John got ready for another exploration, he crashed into the desk, to which the cipher files all crashed down. John cursed under his breath, as he bent over to pick them up. Anglo-Saxon, Latin, those were files useless for this investigation. He was nearing the bottom of the pile when he found something peculiar. An old file that seemed to have only been opened once, probably by the author. As he compared the cipher to the runes, he realized that they were a perfect match. Excited to finally have a lead, the pair eagerly deciphered it, to which the two engravings combined read, *“The inevitable cannot be stopped, only delayed. The Umbra shall rise and bring the downfall of humanity.”*

It confounded them, with the mention of this “Umbra” entity. Who was it? Why would it obliterate humanity? They had too many unanswered questions, but at the moment it seemed they couldn’t do anything about it. Or so they thought.

The Legend of Mogao

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chen, Yao Hayden – 11

“Finally.” I breathed into the crumbling, stone wall.

I carefully prised the scroll from its resting place and lifted it up, inhaling the scent of a hundred years’ worth of wisdom. Finally. I had been on the lookout for this particular scroll for 5 long years. My name is Jonah Parker. I am a researcher working with C.R.I.S.I.S., an organization dedicated to stopping the climate crisis ravaging the earth, no matter the cost. I sighed. Looking back, 2020 was paradise. Even though we had the coronavirus to worry about, the Earth still stood proud. That all went south when in 2040, the world began to fall apart. Because the leaders of this world were too invested in economics, they failed to notice the planet earth, the very planet they swore to protect, slowly crumbling under their influence. Volcanoes erupted, the ocean boiled, the Arctic melted. The earth turned into a barren wasteland, with all living creatures forced to depend on each other to survive.

Just two months after these disasters occurred, some of the most brilliant minds remaining on earth formed C.R.I.S.I.S., an organization to help prevent any further natural disaster caused by the climate crisis. That’s why I’m here today, in Dunhuang, China, having relocated the ancient Mogao caves. Experts had found evidence of an ancient scroll inside the caves, containing what the ancient monks referred to as “*The scroll to save the earth*”, roughly translated from Chinese. Experts believe that this scroll contained the diary of the legendary monk, To Lao, who saved the earth from a climate crisis like the one faced today. The scroll would surely give insight as to how To Lao solved the climate enigma so many years ago.

I looked around at the ornate carvings on the walls, slowly fading into nothingness. All around me, the paint on the religious statues were peeling. From Buddhas to Monks, they all sat there staring back at me with eyes thousands of years old. Rows of books and scrolls lined the walls, all identical to the scroll I had in my hand now. Everything seemed so...soulless, so cold.

“Parker. Two minutes until extraction.” My earpiece rang. I tenderly grasped the scroll in my hand. Who knew that simply stepping foot in this ancient cave would make me feel so much? “Clang.” I had accidentally dropped the scroll.

Before I could bend down to retrieve it, it suddenly burst into a ball of flames and the words boomed. “*The solution to your problem is for all of you to look inside your hearts, and find it in each other to forgive, live, and laugh, to slowly rebuild your lives.*” The scroll then disappeared into the cool desert night. I lay in shock, not because the scroll suddenly spontaneously combusted, but because I finally understood its purpose. I smiled to myself. Even thousands of years old, the wisdom of the monks still stand. We have to work together, rise up from the depression that consumed us, and finally understand the beauty and nature of life. “Parker. Five seconds.” I stood there, grinning, for finally I understand, the secret to saving the earth has been inside us all along.

I stepped outside the crumbling cave, into the cool, windy desert night, feeling the swirling sands beneath my feet. Empty-handed, I waved at the gargantuan chopper slowly descending onto the desert, making the sand swirl even harder. As I watched the chopper’s blades slowly rotate, I thought: “Shouldn’t I be mad, that I’ve come all this way just to have my treasure at the end of the rainbow vanish?” A little voice in my head answered me in the most truthful and honest tone: “No.” This was all worth it.

As I climbed onto the chopper, I could not resist watching the pilot’s face droop as he noticed my empty hands. “What is the meaning of this stunt, Parker?” He spat, his face turning a violent shade of red. I took a deep breath and explained everything to him, watching his mustache twitch in sync with the story I told through my headphones, otherwise drowned out by the roaring sounds of the chopper’s flight.

I’m recording this down about a year after the incident in question and am pleased to report the earth is somewhat recovering. The people of earth, regardless of race or identity all united after my discovery, and slowly, the earth recovered. Trees are flourishing; flowers are blooming. The river began to flow again. Completely abolished is

anything that could be harmful to the environment – electric cars, burning coal, fossil fuels. The people of earth now live as one with nature, slowly evolving a utopia they called New Earth.

All it took was a little... push in the right direction for humans to rise and evolve, to live in harmony without war or contest, all thanks to a little wisdom from the caves of Mogao. As for Mogao, the caves have become a popular tourist attraction, as after all, humans would not exist without the scroll of To Lao, recovered from those very caves. All the sculptures and paintings have been expertly renovated and preserved, and now the caves of Mogao have earned their place as one of the most important landmarks in modern history.

I feel all this couldn't have been possible without the forgiveness, dedication, and resilience of the human spirit itself. All we needed to do was to look inside ourselves and embrace our positive traits, and work with one another to evolve each other into an age of peace – all thanks to the caves of Mogao.

“But the most beautiful things in life are not things, they’re people and places, memories and pictures. They’re feelings and moments, smiles and laughter.”– Anonymous

Mogao Caves and the Importance of Friendship

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Hui, Kaylee – 10

Mogao Caves and the Importance of Friendship

Many people like to visit the Dunhuang province in China for many reasons. But not many people know there is a mysterious cave situated fifteen miles away from the busy cities. According to the legend, a Buddhist monk named Le Zun stopped by this cave to have a rest. While he was having a sip of water, he saw a vision of a Golden Buddha floating in the sky. Then he saw a thousand more Buddhas floating with heavenly fairies. The monk was so amazed that he decided to paint the vision he saw on the cave's walls. Many years later, people from all over the world came and added to the beautiful paintings in the caves.

Devon and Maryam were friends and decided to venture into the caves and discover all their secrets. Devon is a 30-year-old man who has brown hair, black eyes, and is as tall as a baby giraffe. Maryam is a 27-year-old woman who has blonde hair and loves to study ancient arts. Here is how they discovered the caves.

One day, Devon and Maryam wanted to explore the city of Dunhuang. They wanted to find some hidden treasure that they heard about. On the way, they felt tired and wanted to sit down to rest, so they dug a hole and found some shade.

What they saw inside the caves was unbelievable. There were bumpy stone walls and claw marks made by animals long ago. Inside the cracks between the claw marks, spongy mushrooms were growing in it. If you lean closer to the wall, you could hear the wind whistling outside and trees rustling. But what was most striking about this cave was that there were hundreds and hundreds of beautiful paintings on the walls. If you look in the middle, you could see a huge Buddha sitting there, legs crossed, arms folded. Next to it, a dozen smaller Buddhas are sitting down in various positions. When Devon and Maryam looked further, they saw more paintings: a Buddha was playing the lute, some were playing a pipe and a flute, a person was dancing in the middle. All of the paintings were covered by dazzling red, blue, green, and brown. It was almost as if the past was coming to life! Maryam and Devon were addicted to these majestic paintings; they followed the paintings and did not realize they were going a bit too deep into the caves.

A little later, they reached the 387th cave. Maryam looked around and asked, "Where are we?" Devon then turned around to Maryam then turned back at the paintings.

"Hey, Devon! We have way more important things to worry about, please stop getting distracted!" Maryam snapped.

Devon rolled his eyes and said "Oh, come on! Didn't you notice the clues on the paintings?"

Maryam's face softened, "What clues?"

Devon pointed at the Buddha towards their left and there were arrows on the floor leading them out. Maryam studied the Buddha one last time, then followed Devon out of cave #387. As time passed, they finally reached the 100th cave. But this cave's riddle was not so easy. It looked different from the first time they passed this cave. There was some "old" language inscribed on the walls that people used to communicate long ago. The writings looked like small pictures and patterns. Some looked like ocean waves, some looked like bunnies and some looked like a teapot. Luckily, Devon knew how to read it, so he read it out loud for Maryam. It said:

"Go through this maze till the first cave's lies, if you fail, the exit dies."

Maryam was shocked at what she was hearing. She thought: What do you mean "the exit dies?" I hope it doesn't mean if we fail, we stay here forever! I have a family! I have friends out there! What should I do?

"Hey, you okay Maryam?" Devon asked. Maryam jumped, then nodded. Devon stepped on a button, then a box appeared in front of them. It said: Left, up, down, right, down, right, left, up. Maryam and Devon were confused, to remember this clue, Maryam took out her notebook and wrote it down. Devon stood there, thinking of what this clue was about.

“I think it means that we have to follow the words, so first we go left, then we go up, and so on,” Devon said to Maryam.

“No, I think we have to find a pattern in this clue!” Maryam protested.

“What do you mean by a pattern? This clue is easy! Just go left, up, down, right, and so on!” Devon grumbled.

“I said there is a pattern! Stop being so stubborn!” Maryam screamed.

“You’re just wasting my time. You and your stupid ideas can slither under a rock and stop bugging me!” Devon snarled.

Devon grabbed Maryam’s notebook, stuck his nose in the air, and then ran off. “HEY! Give my notebook back!” Maryam shouted after him.

Devon turned back, stuck his tongue, and kept running. Maryam chased after him. Devon thought: Yes, my plan is working, she’s following me. He glanced at the notebook, it said to go right, so he went right.

Soon, Devon made it to the end of the maze. He threw his hands up high and he heard Maryam approaching. Devon expected to hear a scream.

But there was only silence.

“I’m sorry Devon. You were right. I shouldn’t have said you were stubborn. Thanks for getting us out.”

Devon thought that she did nothing wrong, but to not hurt her feelings, he kept silent. After apologizing, Maryam changed the topic, she said “I smell the air from outside! We are nearly there!”

Devon smiled at her “You’re right, I smell it too.”

Hand in hand, they walked to the exit, smiling because they could finally see the light of the sun, hear the rustles of the trees and feel the warm hug of their family.

For a Better World

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Lee, Sze Pui Valarie – 11

500 years ago, a war broke out. There was lots of fighting, shouting, and violence, and a man called Ching couldn't stand it anymore. Ching's family was forced to be in war, helping their country, China. Ching was a peaceful person, and the war was the last thing he wanted. When the war ended, Ching was in a dilemma. On one hand, he loved his family and would love to ascertain his family's safety. On the other hand, he was afraid to go near to where the war once was due to a high probability another war might break out as soon as he arrived.

Once he arrived, his heart started pounding quickly. The land was filled with dead bodies, so many that Ching had to be extra careful about where he was stepping. On every single dead body, there was blood, fresh and creepy. Looking at the bones on the ground, Ching was wondering if his family was killed in the war. Walking around and asking the survivors, Ching had confirmed the death of his family. He sat down and started weeping. Ching felt bad but also wondered whether there was anything he could do to stop any war from happening in the future.

He first talked to a few of his friends, they all agreed on the fact that this aggressive behavior was something they needed to be stopped, but none of them was able to figure out a solution. As such, they decided to ask the wise old man for advice since he usually had the best answers to all sorts of questions.

After the "knock-knock" sound, someone replied almost instantly. "Hello, welcome! Ah, a few young men. How can I help you?" asked a wise friendly old man holding a cane. They told him the whole story and their discussion, and finally, the old man told them in a whisper, "If you go to the Gobi Desert and walk to the end, you will find what you want, your dream, and what you've been hoping for." The friends of Ching eyed him suspiciously; only Ching showed faith in the old man's words. He decided to embark on this journey all on his own. It was certainly an adventure, but the potential results made it worthwhile for him to give it a try.

"I've walked non-stop for 5 days and 4 nights, am I there yet? Or was the wise old man lying?" Ching questioned, clearly exhausted. He lost all his hope, out of water, food... It felt like he was about to die, all the energy drained from him. As his vision started to blur, his legs started to wobble, he fell to the ground and blacked out.

Once he had woken up, Ching told himself that he couldn't give up; he would succeed and achieve his goal. He kept walking along the path. After a short while, Ching smiled as his persistence paid off. He saw the cloudless blue sky and a faint outline of the cliff. At first, he didn't believe his eyes, but after he blinked a few times, the cliff was getting closer, and he knew he was not dreaming. The view he saw was breathtaking, Ching couldn't take his eyes off it. When he stood on the edge of the cliff, he felt like a king that ruled everything he wanted. When Ching saw the river below the cliff, he gulped from the thirst-quenching water from the stream and sat down on the hot silky sand.

"This is such a quiet and peaceful place, just as I wanted!" he mumbled, sitting there, staring at the jewel-blue stream in front of him. The stream was glinting brightly, like the Crown Jewels of the desert. "Spending time doing things you enjoy is important," Ching thought. Just when Ching was enjoying the scenery, a huge sandstorm broke out, followed by an earthquake. Ching could feel the power of nature and how amazing that was. Not knowing when or how it happened, he collapsed on the ground due to his exhaustiveness.

When he woke up, the sun was already high up. Ching decided to explore and investigate the reason that had brought him here. When he walked around the area, he saw weird structures, like caves. Carefully creeping into caves to get inspiration, he read stories off the walls. It made him wonder if these wall drawings were passed down by their ancestors, and if they were, there had to be meanings or messages to be conveyed. There were lots of stories that inspired Ching, but there was one that Ching would never forget. It taught people that fighting with violence and force was not the correct way to get what you want, and he agreed, as he hated wars more than anything. The story was about 500 thieves who bullied women and small children and stole from poor people. When the king knew about this, he was furious and decided to ask his soldiers to stab all 500 of them blind. It was a huge punishment and

all the bad guys felt severe pain in their eyes. A buddha then appeared and decided to give them a second chance. He asked the 500 thieves to repent and promised not to hurt or harm anyone. They kept their promises, changed their mindset and beliefs and they eventually became the 500 buddhas.

It had been a year since Ching arrived at the Mogao Grottoes, the peaceful place Ching loved. The old man did not lie; there were thousands of hidden treasures. During this experience, Ching learned much. He learned not to give up and believe in himself to be capable of anything. He learned to respect others. Indeed, it was what the old man had hoped for – that more people from new generations would understand these morals and kind gestures, for a better world.

One Last Monk

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Leung, Adelaide – 8

Beep! Beep! Beep! An annoying alarm woke Dixie up. “Ugh, I want to sleep more,” said Dixie. Today the summer holidays started, and unfortunately, Dixie had summer homework. She had to write an essay about Mogao Grottoes. Dixie thought for hours and hours on how she should write it, but she had a serious case of writer’s block.

Dixie said, “If only I could go back in time and explore the Mogao Grottoes.”

Suddenly a bright light filled the room, then Dixie and Yuki floated up and went into a bright tunnel. Dixie and Yuki landed somewhere.

Dixie asked, “Yuki, can you track where we are?”

Yuki said, “According to Google Maps, we are right in front of Mogao Grottoes.”

“This is perfect! I can write my essay here!” Dixie exclaimed, “What a coincidence! It’s like someone heard my wish.” Dixie and Yuki looked around and saw a lot of ancient Buddhist art and Buddha statues. She pulled out a notebook and jotted down everything that she saw.

After a while of wandering around, Dixie saw a wooden door and told Yuki, “Let’s go in! I’m interested in what’s in there.”

Inside was an exhibition. A sign on the wall read: Mogao Grottoes is also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Dixie smiled, thinking that they were called these names because there were a lot of Buddha statues.

Then they saw another door and went in too.

Suddenly she bumped into someone. “W–W–WHO ARE YOU?” Dixie screamed. She knew it wasn’t Yuki because he was right behind her. She could also hear him trembling.

Then someone said, “Master — is that you?” Dixie slowly backed away. The lights suddenly flickered on. She saw a Buddhist monk. The Buddhist monk sounded as scared as Dixie. He stammered, “Who—who are you, and what are you doing here? No one stays here anymore.” Dixie whimpered, “How are you still alive?”

The monk sighed and sat down, head in his arms. He told her about the resurrection stone that his master found, and how curiosity got the better of him and he touched it. Now he will be alive forever unless the stone is destroyed. He also mentioned that he locked himself in this room forever as a punishment.

Dixie was fascinated by the story. She asked him what his name was, wanting to know more about him. The monk said, “My name is Anurak.”

Dixie smiled and replied, “My name is Dixie.”

Anurak told Dixie that when his master found out he had touched the stone, he was very mad. This made Anurak extremely ashamed. Now he wanted to die and apologize to his master. So he asked Dixie if she could help him destroy it.

“How am I supposed to destroy it when I don’t know where it is?” Dixie asked.

Anurak said, “I know where it is but it will be a far journey.”

Dixie grinned, “Don’t worry. It will be much faster if we have Yuki. He can activate seats and fly super—fast.”

“Hop in!” Yuki smiled as he transformed. Yuki followed directions from Anurak. When they finally arrived, Dixie asked Anurak, “Um.... what is this place?”

Anurak replied, “Do you know the mountain called Jiuhua Shan? This is Jiuhua Shan mountain.” Dixie smiled at the name. “Oh, I do know that mountain. I went there for a field trip. I didn’t know it existed back then.” Yuki asked, “If you don’t mind me asking, but where is the stone?” Anurak replied, “I hid the stone in a cave. We might have to walk up a bit.” After a while of walking up, Dixie was tired because she wasn’t much of an outdoor person. She asked if they could just ride Yuki. But Yuki said he was too tired to fly, so she just had to walk up. After what felt like an hour to Dixie, they arrived at the cave and there Dixie saw the resurrection stone. She quickly took out her notepad and scribbled down a lot of words. She asked Anurak, “Are you sure about this?” Anurak replied with a nod. Dixie said, “Ok if you say so.” She grabbed her pencil. (She would use that because it was sharp, and she destroyed a lot of stuff with it.) But before she could destroy the stone, Anurak said, “Thank you for helping me with everything, Dixie and you too Yuki.” He gave a smile to Yuki. Then Dixie destroyed the stone and the pieces flew everywhere. Anurak was gone. Dixie felt a bit sad. She thought he was very friendly. But she brightened up a little while later.

Then Dixie suddenly thought of how they were going to go back home. She asked Yuki, “Do you know how we’re going to go back home?” Yuki panicked, “I can’t believe we forgot about going home! This adventure was so intense that we forgot about going home! Maybe we can find some sort of portal to go back home.” Dixie told Yuki, “That kind of stuff only happens in movies.” She leaned on a wall. Then suddenly the wall slid open and there was a portal! Dixie called for Yuki. Yuki turned around and saw the portal too. He asked Dixie, “Do you think this is a portal leading home?” Dixie answered, “There’s only one way to find out.” And she jumped in the portal. Yuki jumped in too. Surprisingly they ended up back in Dixie’s room. Dixie saw Yuki. She asked him, “Did all that stuff happen or was it just a dream?” Yuki told Dixie, “It happened all right, now on the bright side, you know exactly what to write for your essay!”

Suddenly the door flew open. It was Dixie’s mom. She said, “Thank goodness you two are ok! I’ve been looking for you two all day long!” Dixie and Yuki exchanged mischievous smiles. They knew they would have to keep this all a secret.

Grottoes

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Li-Black, Ming Chu Kayla – 11

Prologue:

It was scorching hot in the desert of Gansu. One might even call the feeling “roasted brains”. As far as she knew, everyone who had ventured to these grottoes either disappeared or had gone mad.

“Relax, Pearl. Won’t this be the mysterious and mystical death you imagined?” She tried to shake off the visions of certain death. It was hard in a place so deprived of life and joy. She tried to focus on her grandmother’s words. She was among the only few who had made it back alive without going mad. “Have faith, and don’t lose what shines brightest in the darkest hour.” Just then, she spotted a shape in the distance. Through the heat she could just make out a shape. Was that a cave? Was that water she could hear? She stumbled, and landed face-first in the sand. Would it be so bad just to lie here and await death? “Get yourself together. Where is your survival instinct?” she thought. It was hard to get up, but she managed. Slowly but surely, she trudged toward the shape, hoping to reach it before sundown. It was at this time that her followers had deceased. Some had disappeared mysteriously throughout the course of the night.

Right before sundown, she reached the yawning mouth of the cave entrance. By then she had confirmed that the water was real. She stumbled in, the last trace anyone had seen of her was her large, vividly neon yellow backpack swallowed up by the darkness. This would be her death sentence.

It had been 20 years; Or had it been longer? Pearl La Cue sighed, the ghostly sound echoing across the barren walls. She had come to this desolate place desperate for fame, for money, for riches, but all she had gotten was death. There was nothing in this place, nothing at all. Yet this had somehow killed her. One moment, she was reading an ancient scroll with shining eyes in the dim light. The next she was gone, sucked up into the desolate place. She knew how to get out of here, she really did. But somehow, a force kept her from accessing that knowledge, buried deep in the depths of her brain. All she remembered was the name of the scroll. “*She Who Wields This Cave*” was a tale she’d never forget. It had taught her how to survive this barren world, shy of life and joy. People from all over had come to this infamous destination, all of them trying to absorb the information they had read, like plants reaching for the sun. The force allowed her to keep few memories. The rest, she assumed, were to stop her triggering the “forbidden scroll” as she called it. She had photographic memory, yet that wouldn’t work in the blasted place. She knew what would happen to her. She had seen it, heard it, even felt it.

“Hello?”

“Is anybody there? Is there a way to survive this place? Anybody?”

There was another voice.

Pearl got excited. Is this what emotions feel like? She replied, “Come down... take the scroll.”

“Okay! Is it worth millions of dollars? I wanna get rich!”

“Hmmm..... A greedy girl. No surprise. I need to have a word with you. Come down please.”

She made her voice sound gentle, calm and longing.

A face appeared. “OMIGOSH! YOU ARE SOOOOOOOOOO CUTE! I bet that you could earn me millions by midday! EEEEEEEEE! Now gimme the scroll. NOW.”

“Come closer. Yes, that’s it. Now stay very still.” Pearl chided.

“COME ON, LADY! GIMME THE SCROLL!” She whined.

Pearl would not mind taking her. She grabbed the scroll and jumped into her body, holding the scroll. Wow, was it this easy just to escape.

“HEY! Are you just going to leave me here? TAKE ME WITH YOU!”

“What’s your name?”

“What?”

“What’s your name?”

“It’s Ruby.”

“Well, sorry to inform you that you are now officially a spirit. Trapped here forever. Ta Ta!”

“WAI—”

“Snarf! Umph Sck Sck.”

Pearl shuddered. Ugh, she had heard that noise way too many times before. It was the mark of the devouring of the serpent. “Hmmm, she did say she had a rich daddy... Maybe I’ll go toss him down there and be his heir. I might do that to my future children, ensuring that I can stay alive.” She thought.

SNAP! The scroll rolled shut. Vanilla grew as pale as the plant she was named after. Drake spoke, but even his voice was barely a whisper. “M—m—mu—mummy will feed us?”

“Ohhhh Vanilla! Ohhhh Wylieeeee! Mama’s taking you on a little trip to the desert!” The sound of her heels clicking up the stairs was unmistakable.

Together, Vanilla and Wylie jumped out of the window to find two plane tickets to California—and to their father. Hopefully, there will be shelter from this madwoman.

“Father will fix this.”

Epilogue:

“The children are gone! Oh noo —Snarf! Umph, Sck Sck.”

Those sounds will forever rest in her brain.

Adventure of a Rare Panda

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Liu, Ethan – 10

First constructed in 366AD, The Mogao Grottoes are a collection of 500 temples located in Dunhuang, China. These grottoes were cut into a side of the cliff above the Dachuan River. They host the finest examples of Buddhist art from the 4th to the 14th century. The numerous artworks offer vivid murals, sculptures, and other art forms portraying medieval lives in western China. Conservation of this UNESCO World Heritage site is imperative as tourism and climate change threaten its preservation.

Fudge stared out of the window and saw The Great Wall of China below him. Ah, he thought. Finally, a vacation!

He was looking forward to seeing his family in New York and eating his grandma's homemade fudge. He could almost smell the sweet scent now; it tickled his nose and wrapped around him like a warm hug.

Fudge smiled at the thought and sank into his seat, or seats to be precise, and almost knocked his neighbor off hers. His apology was met with a sneer, something Fudge was used to. Being a rare, giant panda with burgundy and white fur wasn't always easy, even if you were a judge.

'Judge Fudge'; his parents always thought it had a nice ring to it, but everyone still called him Fudge.

It would be a while before they brought lunch around, so he decided to have a nap. Fudge had just closed his eyes when 'BAM'.....

Fudge woke up in an endless desert. The air seemed thick with sand and his eyes were stinging. Fudge coughed into his arm and noticed his fur had turned black and white. Petrified and disoriented, he muttered, "Where am I?"

A stranger's voice came from behind him, "You're in the Gobi Desert". Fudge turned around to see a man who looked like a traveler. Behind him, there was a cluster of sand houses with stone roofs and cacti outside.

"Where are you from?" the traveler asked curiously.

"I was on a plane...next thing I knew, I was here." Fudge said weakly.

"What's a plane?" The traveler asked.

"Pardon?"

"I said what in the Buddha is a plane?", the traveler chuckled. "Never mind. Let's find you a cave to rest. You might have bumped your head!"

The traveler took Fudge to the Mogao Grottoes and shared its history: "These caves have been built by monks over the past six centuries, as a place of sanctuary, to meditate and worship Buddha. This location was chosen when a monk had a vision of golden Buddha lights and believed this spot was sacred. There are already 300 caves and more are coming."

"Six centuries back? Aren't these caves over 1,600 years old?" Fudge asked, confused: "I'm sure that's what my grandma told me."

"It's year 999," said the traveler, puzzled.

Fudge's jaw dropped, "Pardon? I'm from 2022!"

"Oh my!" The traveler replied, astounded. "You must have banged your head. Look me up if you need anything. I'm just a day's hike away. Keep this torch and this map, you'll need them," said the traveler.

Fudge stared up at the huge maze of caves before him. "Er...the map has a hole in it," he asked the traveler, who had disappeared into the hazy air.

A huge bronze statue of a panda welcomed Fudge by the first cave's entrance. The statue glowed in the blazing sun and cast a long, familiar shadow on the golden sand. Behind the entrance was a smaller statue of an albino panda, who was making dim sum. Fudge reached out to eat the delicious-looking food and almost chipped a tooth. "Not a good idea..." he murmured.

Fudge then entered the Panda Cave. A monk was painting a beautiful mural of an embarrassment of pandas collaborating to build caves. The monk smiled at Fudge. "Why were these paintings made?" Fudge asked. "For the love of our religion and mankind," the monk explained. "We wish to share our experiences with future generations." "This is amazing!" exclaimed Fudge. "Such beautiful color combinations of mint, burgundy, and chocolate. By the way, it's pitch-dark here, how do you get the light in?" "We use candles and mirrors to reflect the light into these caves," the monk replied.

Fudge must have hiked miles before he reached the Library Cave, which showcased stacks of books, including art books, literature books, and fudge's favorite, culinary books. These bookshelves resembled lines of massive 1950's computers.

Exhausted, Fudge found a place to rest. Night had already set in. He gazed up and saw a medley of stars glittering in the sky. "That must be the Milky Way!" Fudge exclaimed. He looked out to see a tiger mother and her cubs sleeping soundly under the moonlit blanket; he listened to crickets chirping and the wind whispering gently through the shrubs.

When Fudge awoke, he found himself in the Jade tower. The map showed the tower housed a hidden jewel that offered inner peace. When Fudge stood up, the ground collapsed under his weight. He discovered the jewel along with a scroll in a room plated with gold. Fudge picked the scroll up and blew the dust off it and saw the family crest marked on the back! He had seen that many times at grandma's house. He read the scroll and learned his ancestors sponsored the building of the Mogao Grottoes!

Returning the scroll to a lectern in the center of the room, he found the missing piece to his map. The new treasure guide led him to a secret chamber!

Air whooshed around him; golden smoke filled the room. Fudge was so anxious that he squeezed his torch. A portal appeared before him. Frightened, he retreated and tipped over a palette of burgundy paint. He was then absorbed by the portal and got teleported back to his flight to New York! He tried to dust off the sand from his fur, which had turned burgundy and white! Suddenly, he heard the same deafening sound! Here we go again, Fudge thought.

The Treasure of the Mogao Grottoes

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Shu, Yu Xi – 10

The Banquet
1855, Palace of Versailles

Napoleon III invited Queen Victoria to a lavish banquet in Versailles.^{i ii} During the feast, Napoleon gave a subtle signal to the queen. Seeing the signal, the queen quietly followed the emperor, who led her into a chamber deep inside the palace.

“Your majesty,” Napoleon said, “I’ve heard that a British soldier in your war against China had a special discovery in West China.ⁱⁱⁱ The locals call it the Mogao Grottoes. The soldier found an inscription in one of the caves saying it hides valuable treasures!”

“Oh goody! I also heard. But I also heard that the treasures are locked up by a code sequence, but there is also a curse on it.” She replied.

Napoleon said: “Why not we send our armies to get the treasures? I will declare a war against China, claiming the Chinese had been cruel to the French, but our real reason is for the treasures.”

Just then, lights in the palace suddenly went out. Napoleon III and the queen startled, both quietly thinking, “Is this the treasures’ curse?”

Foreign armies are coming!
1856, Gansu

Huaming was thirsty. He was a ten year old living in a remote village near Mogao Grottoes.

He climbed up a tree in the village to pick some fruits. Then he heard something. He pushed some branches out of his way, and curiously looked on. To his surprise, he saw a huge moving path of blue, red, and gold in the valley below. He looked closer, and realised they were people riding on horses and holding strange things that he had never seen.

“Strangers are invading!” Huaming shouted.

The villagers went to look. An old man said with a worried look, “I remember those people. They are foreign armies!”

Huaming told his friends, “Those soldiers look suspicious. We should go at night to see what they do here.”

Night slowly fell, like a person throwing a massive blanket from above.

The camp of the European army was bright with torches. Huaming and his friends followed the light, and crept down the valley. They hid behind a boulder near the commander’s tent, and peeped through the gap of the tent.

They could see that two people were talking happily over a picture. Huaming immediately recognised it as a picture of the Cave of Lord Dongyang – the prettiest one among the Mogao Grottoes^{iv} where he and his friends played hide-and-seek. The stories of the cave Huaming and his friends heard so many times from old villagers came to him – its treasures and the curse. Huaming knew instinctively the foreign soldiers were after the treasure.

He told his friends in a whisper, and they silently left.

The next morning, a small band of French and British soldiers arrived at Lord Dongyang’s Cave, along with an English master code breaker who had worked with Chinese codes before. They started searching for codes which were sets of oriental symbols.

One by one, the codes were solved. There was only one last sequence left to unlock the treasure! By now, it was night time.

“I’m tired! I want to call it a day!” yawned one soldier. Others echoed him.

“Okay, let’s have an early start tomorrow then. I can’t wait to get my hands on the treasures! And then all of us will be rich!” The code breaker said excitedly.

Saving the Treasures
1856, Gansu

Meanwhile, Huaming and his friends went to find help. They traveled to the nearby monastery, where they became good friends with the monk Boyi. Realising the significance of the information, Boyi decided to go with them immediately to the cave. They waited to get in until the foreign soldiers left. Boyi’s monastery had the scrolls with the keys for the symbols and the meanings for all but the last code sequences. Following the scrolls, they swiftly got to the last code sequence which read as:

Pray in front of the Buddha where the angels fly,

Then go ask the owner,

And he will show you the way.

Not sure what this meant, Huaming stood before the statue of the Buddha sitting in the middle of the far wall, and looked up the graceful Chinese angels (*fēitiān*) flying above the Buddha. Then he remembered the story an old villager told the children that the Lord Dongyang – the patron of the cave – commissioned the flying angels to protect the Buddha. The Lord himself was said to be the first person leading a procession on the east wall to worship the Buddha.

Huaming’s eyes quickly settled on Lord Dongyang’s image. Excitedly, he noticed that Lord Dongyang’s hand pointed to a place in the far wall. With his heart pounding hard, Huaming went to that spot. As he touched it, a trapdoor opened, revealing the treasures.

Knowing the job was not done, he held back his excitement and told his friends, “Let’s take the treasures and leave before they find out!”

They seemed to be too late. The foreign soldiers arrived, with the code breaker.

“You think you are clever, Huh?” the code breaker said. He went up to snatch the treasures. “Thank you! We are now rich!” He roared with laughter as he took them.

The Chinese armies arrived just in time, and shot the foreign soldiers in the cave.

Just at that moment, thunder sounded and lightning cracked. “It is a curse!” The soldiers down in the camp shouted. They hastily retreated to the harbour where their ships were moored, and set sails to France.

“Thank you for saving the treasure. The foreigners almost got it! I will take this to the emperor. I bet he’ll give you a big reward!” A local soldier said.

“Thanks, but I don’t need any reward.” Huaming said.

“Are you sure?” The soldier asked.

“Yes.” said Huaming, and he knew he was right.

The Spirit of the Silk Road

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Tan, Edward – 12

Crunch...

Crunch...

Crunch...

The sand crunching under Yang's boot sounded his predicament. He was separated from his caravan during the sandstorm. Worse still, he lost his cargo in the tempest. All he had was his sand-ridden clothes and an empty water-skin. In the dying light of the day, Yang saw a faint flicker in the distance. Hoping to find shelter, Yang made his way there.

When Yang got close to the source of the light, he was surprised to find it emanating from inside a cave. As a boy, Yang had heard tales about demons that would eat travelers whole. Summoning up his courage, Yang took a step into the unknown. Inside, he realized he was not alone. He could hear faint chanting at the end of the narrow passageway that eventually opened-up into a large chamber.

There he saw a shaved-head man in yellow robes painting celestial beings on a wall. Curious, Yang asked him what he was doing. The man replied he was documenting the wisdom of the different peoples in Dunhuang. He went on to explain the significance of Dunhuang as a gathering place for people from faraway lands. Though it is true that trade brings people here, they also bring their ways – how they see the world and how they live. If not for the Silk Road, would the teachings of Buddha have found its way to the Middle Kingdom? Would we have the indigo from the subcontinent to paint on this wall? Or would we have the cumin spices from Persia that the locals delight on their mutton skewers?

When the man finished his explanation, he invited Yang to rest by the hearth. Tired and weary, Yang soon felt the relief of sleep wash over him.

Chatter...

Chatter...

Chatter...

When Yang woke up, he felt groggy. Looking up, he noticed the yellow-robed man was gone. Furthermore, the whole cave was covered in a thick layer of dust. Yang found this odd since he had only been there for one night. What's more, the mural the yellow-robed man was painting was completed. On the ceiling and every wall were sutras and celestial beings brushed in indigo, ochre, and gold leaf. How could that be, he thought?

Suddenly, Yang heard voices. Fearing the worst, Yang prepared to flee. Cautiously, he peeked outside the entrance and was greeted by the sight of a bustling bazaar. Yang was puzzled, for the bazaar hadn't been there before. Bewildered by the sight, Yang made his way to the nearest merchant to ask if the bazaar had always been here. In reply, the merchant told Yang it had been here since before the rule of Kublai Khan. To Yang, that made no sense. But soon, Yang was able to piece together the astounding information he was given. Somehow, he had slept for over a hundred emperor's reign.

Yang pinched himself, hoping that it was a dream. But it wasn't. Happily, he saw the yellow-robed man at a teahouse. Wanting answers, Yang asked him what was happening. In reply, the man said that what he saw was what he painted on the walls of the grottoes – people from faraway lands bringing their ways. "You smelled their spices and heard their unfamiliar tongues. You see, some things never change", he continued. "Here on the Silk Road, the intermix of cultures will always bring us closer together."

After his explanation, the man offered Yang a cup of tea. When Yang finished drinking it, he suddenly felt light-headed and blacked out.

Clang...

Clang...

Clang...

Yang woke up inside a cave and heard the clanging of iron. It sounded like a battle outside. Fearing the worst, Yang again prepared to flee. However, the racket faded. In the calm, Yang peeked outside. To his surprise he saw many horseless carriages, oxen-less plows ripping the ground, and gigantic claws digging the earth. Puzzled by his surroundings, Yang went searching for the yellow-robed man for answers. But since he was nowhere to be found, Yang asked a nearby man what was happening. The man said they were working on a road that will connect Dunhuang to the far west. Perplexed by what he meant by the far West, Yang asked him if he meant Rome. The man said yes, and then continued by saying the road will go much further than Italy. In fact, it will go all the way to the ocean he called the Atlantic. With this initiative, trade will bring every country closer together.

Yang thought the man was joking, for a project this colossal would take many lifetimes to complete. Sensing Yang's doubt, the man brought him to the main construction site. When Yang saw it, he was amazed by its scale. Hundreds of men shoveling dirt, hammering nails, and heaving iron beams. Astonished, Yang ran down towards the working men to have a closer look. Suddenly, Yang heard someone yell 'Duck!'. The world went black.

Chant...

Chant...

Chant...

Yang woke up again. He was inside the cavern once again. To Yang's surprise the yellow-robed man was also there meditating. It must have been a dream, Yang murmured.

Hearing this, the yellow-robed man snapped to attention and said that it was no dream. What Yang saw, the man explained, was what had always been, what it is, and what it will always be. Sensing that Yang was confused by his explanation, he continued by saying that human connections are eternal, which are the fruits of the Silk Road. The riches and wisdom of all the world's kingdoms travel along it, taking root along the way. After all, it is why the Mogao Grottoes exist – being the benefactor of many thankful traders leaving their mark on the walls of these caves.

The spirit of the Silk Road will endure beyond the rise and fall of dynasties. The future might be unrecognizable, but we can take comfort that our need to connect with one another will always be the same.

Ling Hoong's Adventure

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wan, Kay Li – 10

and Hoong's Adventure

"Class B7, I don't want any of you to get lost," warned Ms. C. The class walked around the museum, admiring the historic artwork displayed on the walls. "Where is the cool artwork we saw in the book?" whispered Ling. "Maybe it's in the next room, or in there," Hoong pointed to the green door. "Hoong, the sign clearly says 'staff only'," Ling said, crossing her arms. "Don't be such a party pooper." Hoong dragged her towards the door. "It's time to go," hollered Ms. C heading for the next room. Hoong put his grubby fingers on the door. It swung open.

The room was dimly lit, inches of thick grimey dust covered the floor, like a blanket, as if no one had been in it for ages. Hoong darted towards a wall. "That's the artwork we've been looking for," exclaimed Hoong. She extended her arm, "Ling you can't touch anything," warned Hoong panicking. Ling ignored Hoong, tracing the artwork with her stubby fingers. Click, suddenly the lights went off.

The room was pitch black. Frightened, Ling grabbed Hoong's arm. Click, the lights came back on. The large painting that had been standing in front of them only moments before had been replaced by ancient hand paintings which covered the walls around them.

Hoong turned around to see Ling's mouth wide open. "Ling, this is..." started Hoong "The grotto," Ling said, shocked. Out of nowhere, the appetizing smell of garlic, ginger, and ancient spices surrounded them. "Ling," exclaimed Hoong, his stomach shouting, "let's go look for food." Not before long, Ling and Hoong were walking around the village just outside the grottoes. Unfamiliar scents wafted around and everyone wore beautiful silk han fu. "What is that?" asked Ling, scrunching up her nose, "Something delicious," Hoong said, rubbing his stomach. Ling and Hoong decided on a small stall in the corner. "We're hungry," Ling said to the stall owner, looking at the food. "Ah, my dear, why don't you try donkey meat and noodles, a famous dish here." "Yes please," Hoong said immediately, holding out a few pennies. The man looked at them frowning, "What is this? You can't buy food with that," the man scolded. Suddenly a man appeared. "I can help," he said slowly, grinning. Ling and Hoong studied the man. He had greasy hair, small cunning eyes, and wore a long black han fu. Hoong looked up at the man with adoring eyes, "Thank you, kind sir!". Ling, on the other hand, slowly retreated, taking big steps backward. The mysterious man immediately shot her a sharp stare. Ling knew there was something unsettling about this man. The man opened his hand to reveal a few rusty copper coins with holes in the center and thrust them at the stall owner. Moments later, piping hot bowls were delivered to the table. "My name is Shu," the man said slyly as Ling and Hoong slurped down their fragrant noodles. For the rest of the day, Shu insisted on showing them around. Before long, they had ended up where they had started, inside the grottoes. Shu pulled them into a dark passage and whispered, "I'm looking for my lost artwork, you two are going to help me find it." "Oh no thank you," said Ling boldly. "This isn't a request," the man sneered back. While dragging the two of them deeper into the cave he began to describe the painting he was looking for. "There are lots of Buddhas on it, the colors are mint green and tomato red, with a silvery outline to finish. It's magnificent, and it's mine," Shu exclaimed, his eyes wide with greed.

Ling and Hoong pretended to search for the painting. When Shu was out of earshot, Ling whispered to Hoong, "The painting Shu is after is the painting we saw at the museum. It's the painting that brought us here!" At this, Hoong's eyes widened, "You're right! So does that mean..." "He isn't the one who drew the painting. He must be trying to steal it!" At that moment, Shu caught up, kicking up dust as he walked. "Hello Children," snarled Shu, "Did you find it yet?" he asked, glaring at them. "N-no..not yet." stuttered both Ling and Hoong. Shu furiously kicked the wall. He dragged them by their collars and marched even deeper into the grottoes, eventually reaching the room Ling and Hoong had first arrived in. He shoved both of them into a room as dark as night and slammed the door behind them. "How are we ever going to get out of here and ensure Shu doesn't steal the painting?" Wailed Ling. "We need to find it first," Hoong suggested. Ling picked up the oil lamp and began wiping thick dust off the walls. Beautiful hand-painted artwork started to show beneath the dust. Silvery waves and cherry red lines along with mint color paint strokes are shown. "This is it," gasped Hoong. "Thanks," grinned Shu. He had appeared out of thin air and marched towards them. His hands shot out to touch the painting on the wall. "NOOO!" hollered Ling and Hoong, rushing to protect the painting. Just as Shu made a grab for the precious artwork, Ling and Hoong suddenly fell onto the floor. "Ow!" Said Ling, "Did Shu get the painting?" asked Hoong "No..it's right here with me," said

Ling confused “Wait..wait isn't this the storeroom? This painting really is a time machine,” Hoong gasped, he noticed a crack of light under the door. “Oh my gosh! Ling, we’ve gotta get out of here before something crazy happens again!” They hung the painting and crept out of the storeroom. “Ling! Hoong! You two are in trouble, where have you been?” Ms. C said worriedly. “We haven't been anywhere at all! Just lost...” Said Hoong grinning at Ling. “In the Mogao Grottoes saving a precious painting from being stolen,” added Ling in a whisper. With that, the two burst into a fit of laughter.

Mogao Mystery

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Ryan – 11

As I took a step forward through the red-pillared passage, underneath an ornately glazed-tiled palace roof, light from outside was suddenly replaced by a shadow, engulfing me in darkness.

Venturing deeper into the narrow corridor, I groped my way through the obliterating blackness, with my hands outstretched in front of me. Inching forward, I had no idea how far, how deep this passage would go, when suddenly...

WHOOSH! I felt my feet give out under me as if a rug was pulled, and my spine crunched against a hard, stone surface, sliding down deeper and deeper as if into oblivion. Hurtling downward through a winding spiral, all my organs froze as I plummeted at tremendous speed into the depths of the unknown void.

After what felt like an eternity, I finally landed on a sandy floor, with a huge puff of dust. Before I could even get to my feet, I was unwelcomely greeted by a thousand gold eyes locking onto me: the horrifying, withered and filthy Buddha sculptures.

My eyes were struck by a blinding light, until I found myself kneeling on a red carpet in a pearly palace, with a thousand eyes locked onto me, again. The man who sent me on this impossible mission was seated on a golden throne in front of me. The murmur of old monks surrounded me, with faint whispers hovering in the air: "impossible quest", "booby traps".

The Great One bellowed, "It is said that you are the best detective and collector." He added, "You must retrieve the immortality potion for me, and I shall reward you with endless treasures, gold and platinum. If you fail, your body shall be cut into a thousand pieces."

"...A thousand pieces". The phrase whirled dizzily through my mind as I wiped the dust from my eyes and found myself back in the subterranean room of 1000 Buddhas. I felt a wave of relief when I felt the pack of matches reserved for emergency situations like this. Striking one, I now saw there were dried blood stains and cobwebbed skeletons lining the floor. Holding my hands over my mouth, I resisted the urge to scream.

Collecting myself, I gingerly managed to step around the skeletal figures on the floor. I felt a warmth coming from the left and decided to edge towards it. Moving through the corridor, the air felt thick, as I took in marvelous pictures on the ceilings and walls: gargantuan gods, fantastic birds, fearsome humans, all arranged in a labyrinth of intricate patterns.

"Hello?" I asked the decayed Buddha statues. My unanswered interrogation echoed through the cavern, crumbling into an echo repeating itself until it faded into the darkness and the distance overhead.

There was only a small window revealing the bright moon outside. Underneath, four lines of words were engraved into the wall.

Before my bed, there's a pool of light.

I wonder if it's frost on the ground.

The last two lines were faded. I realized this wasn't any ordinary writing. This was the poem Quiet Night Thought by Li Bai! I had memorized this since I was young. Slowly pulling the last two lines from my memories, I was seized by amazement!

I find the moon bright,

Then I lower my head in homesickness.

As I gazed at the moon, thinking about the last line, I lowered my head and torch. I used my hands to push away the dust and moss; I had found a secret lever! I used all my strength to push it. A doorway creaked open, revealing another room.

A magnificent purple glow radiated magic in the other room, and it was coming from liquid inside a glass bottle. I had found the legendary immortality potion, and it rested on the palm of a golden Buddha. I knew it could not be so simple, and any sudden movements could trigger traps. Scouring the depths of my mind, I chanced upon a brilliant plan. I held my hands out as I estimated the weight. Then, I took out my bag of sand and quickly replaced the potion with my sandbag. It worked!

As the gleaming, purple and boiling potion shone in my hands, I felt really strong. I could feel a voice emerging from deep within; a dark side of myself pushed me: "Drink the potion! Conquer the world! Betray the Great One!" The voice was deeply overwhelming.

Falling to my knees, I closed my eyes, and tried with all my might to push the devilish thoughts away. For a second, I thought I was saved, and nothing happened. But just then, the pressure plate jolted down and disappeared below. I turned around as the gold Buddha Statue behind glowed, slightly lighting the cave with a dim golden shine.

"I see. You have managed to get through all the traps and the puzzle. That was quite unexpected, but since you have come, I must tell you one thing. Be careful with that potion. There are only two endings." The Buddha statue paused.

"Tell me, what are they?" I demanded.

Silence. A new voice reverberated in my skull as if reading the Buddha's thoughts: "There are those that wield the power for good, and those that will destroy the world, a life unfair to all."

I paused for a moment and fell silent. I believed that the Great One would never torture innocent people, but great power brings great evil. Deep inside, I was greatly attracted to the enormous reward, but I also had a feeling that this potion could bring endless destruction...

It had to be destroyed. I held the bottle up and smashed it on the ground. The purple liquid disintegrated almost immediately after it made contact with the ground, emitting a haze of smoke. I looked back at the Buddha, but the light in its eyes had already faded.

And that was the story of the immortality potion and the Mogao Grottoes.

The Lost Painting

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Zhang, Shiyin – 10

Long long ago, pilgrims and monks started to arrive and live in an oasis that was found in the desert on the Silk Road in China. The pilgrims and monks created art and literature in the oasis. The monks and pilgrims changed the oasis into a beautiful place. Before it was just plain, lots of weeds grew, they were so tall that when you try to go in, the weeds are up to your shoulders! After the monks and pilgrims came, they built hundreds and thousands of statues mainly of Buddha, that is also a reason that The Mogao Cave are also known as the Thousand Buddha Caves.

But as time passed, The Mogao Cave was forgotten. The travelers and people there started going to other places all around. Less and less people stayed at the oasis. Soon, everybody left. Until explorers rediscovered the cave in the 1900s.

This is the story of how the explorer Dave in The Mogao Caves discovered one of the Buddha paintings. Dave is one of the explorers that discovered The Mogao Cave. As he got in the cave with the other explorers, he found some pebbles and rocks and some reddish gray spheres that he can't recognize in front of a stone wall covered in layers and layers of dust.

Dave believed that in the stone walls there must be something. At first Dave thought it might be a vase or an old object until he looked down, and on the floor, he realized the reddish gray spheres were put into a certain order. The ones closer to the stone wall were bigger, the ones more further away were smaller. Dave followed the spheres and it was heading to a small hole that is just enough to go through at the other side of the room. So Dave decided instead of discovering the stone wall, he chose to follow the spheres.

Dave followed the spheres, he got through the hole, the moment he got through, it felt like another world. The ground was filled with grass, the trees were healthy, they were all leafy, flowers bloomed, fruits grew on plants, birds are chirping, the whole place is full of vitality.

As Dave walked forward, he found people living here. Then, as he got in, he found himself in front of Buddha. As Buddha saw Dave, she smiled softly, Buddha started speaking: "I knew the one of you explorers are careful enough to discover this place. I am Buddha. I am here to help you learn more about here." Buddha paused. "But you will have to do something first, and during that time, you will learn more. Before I explain what you need to do, you need to take this." Buddha handed Dave a piece of paper. "This is the map", Buddha continues, "all you need to do is find this painting", Buddha points to the top left corner of the map. "This painting is missing, and some of the villagers got clues. But I am too old to collect their clues, so that is what your going to do. The villagers will not just tell you the clues, they will tell you through something. Soon, you will know some of the most amazing secrets of here, The Mogao Caves."

Dave took the map and left without saying anything. As he look down to the map Buddha has handed him, a riverbank was glowing on the map. Just that moment, Dave knew it! He need to go to the riverbank right now. He headed straight over. There was a old fisherman sitting not far away. Dave walked up to the fisherman and asked politely: "Hi! I am Dave. Buddha has asked me to find her lost painting. Do you have any clues? This riverbank was glowing on the map she gave me."

"Oh yes, I do! You are a smart young man. If Buddha sent you here then I should tell you all I know. What I know is that the painting is at the north. Buddha lost it there and the painting is pocket-sized. To get the next clue, go to that side." The fisherman pointed to his right. "You will see a tree house, the women there would tell you more." Dave immediately rushed to the tree house and saw the women. Dave asked: "I am Dave. Buddha sent me here to find her lost painting, do you have clues?" "Of course I do! And here it is, the painting is on the field that has purple-leaf trees. The painting is behind the seventh tree counting from the river to the other side." Dave thanked her and ran there.

Dave got close, the first row of trees are blue, the second row.....they are purple! Dave then started counting from the riverside. Dave located the seventh tree and got there quickly.

There it is! Dave found it, and started admiring it. Suddenly, Dave realized why Buddha asked him to find it. It is the painting all explorers want to find! On the back it wrote: Dear explorer, this painting is yours now, go share it with the other explorers, but do not tell them where you found it, they will not understand, also this place has disappeared. Buddha.

Just that moment, Dave opened his eyes and he is still in the dusty Mogao Cave, but on his hand he still has the painting.

When he shared it with the other explorers the others were so surprised!

Falling Through The Times

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Hania – 10

The Mogao Grottoes, a tall, big and impressive cave. Thousands of caves all into one mountain, still hundreds of caves to be found. Murals, Buddhas, Manuscripts and more, opening a lost world of secrets and breathtaking views. It's a tunnel of the past and is already full of historical findings, but are there still secrets to find, and new treasures to discover?

"Bye!" Ruby shouted to her mom as she bounded onto the study bus and zoomed away.

Ruby, a 14 year old studious teenager, had joined a study tour from school to visit the Mogao Grottoes. She was a historical fan and had woken up extremely excited to pack her things. She was also very excited to be exploring the caves with her best friend, Rebecca.

"What do you think it will look like?" Ruby and Rebecca chatted animatedly and were so excited that they didn't notice the bus had stopped until gasps rose around them.

Ruby looked up and her jaw dropped. She was astonished at the grotto's beauty. How could such a majestic place be in the middle of the desert? The entrance was tall and large and had 5 and more layers. It was beautiful and impressive in its own unique way. Ruby was so entranced by the appearance of the Mogao Grottoes, it was when Rebecca tapped her on the shoulder that she broke out of her trance and scurried off the bus.

Ms Cassie, the tour guide, led the group to different caves. They went to cave 17, the cave of wonders, where they all crowded around the "Diamond Sutra", the oldest printed book in all the world. They also visited the giant reclining buddha, with its calm and peaceful expression and 14.4 metre long body. Another cave was cave 51, where they admired the beautiful Bodhisattva with her gentle face. But after visiting all these caves, Ruby and Rebecca finally gave up. They were actually dying to see cave 61, also known as Manjusri hall, where the largest and most gorgeous paintings were. So when Ms Cassie turned her back, they wandered off and started searching for cave 61.

"Where do you think it is?" Rebecca asked, scanning a map she had gotten from the entrance.

"I'm not sure... Here it is!" Ruby bounded into an enormous room with a ceiling that went far over their heads. Strangely, the room was empty except for them. Large paintings were displayed around the room and Rebecca and Ruby were too astonished to speak.

"This is amazing!" exclaimed Ruby, jumping up and down with excitement. Rebecca couldn't help but agree. Just as they were snapping pictures of the paintings, disaster struck. Rebecca's foot caught on a rock and fell backwards. She fell onto a painting that swung sideways, revealing a black tunnel! Caught by surprise, Rebecca fell back into the dark tunnel and the painting moved back into its original spot.

"Rebecca!" Ruby shouted, anxiously pushing back the painting.

"I'm alright." Rebecca smiled.

"What is this?" Curiously, Rebecca and Ruby walked into the tunnel, the painting sliding shut behind them. "Is this part of the exhibit?"

"I'm not sure..." Rebecca mumbled. She hated confined spaces like these.

The two friends walked deeper into the tunnel. Rocks were surrounding them and only small slivers of light shone in from the gaps of the rocks. While Rebecca was looking cautiously around, Ruby glimpsed a spark of light at the end.

"Look over there!" Ruby exclaimed, galloping over to the light. A rock was covering the gap and Ruby heaved it away. She could have never expected what she found next.

Ruby was in a secret room! The room was filled with ancient stuff, all from secret movable levers to make them go up and down to different needs. There were many chairs and tables as well as bookshelves and ancient scrolls. There was a hole on the wall that just emerged and dried plants were scattered around the room. Light from the hole

was reflecting on a broken piece of glass, shining it on the plants! A stream of water trickled in from another hole and the friends guessed, from the higher parts of the mountain. Curious and fascinated, Ruby examined the ancient things.

“Rebecca! Come see!” Ruby yelled. Rebecca came running and like Ruby, gaped in shock.

“Maybe this secret room was used for resting. The monks that once lived here must’ve used this place to rest after work!” suggested Rebecca.

“Yeah, you’re right! Maybe the glass shard was used to cook the plants here! Who knew monks from the past would be so eco-friendly!” Ruby exclaimed.

The two friends continued inspecting their historical findings for a bit while longer before Rebecca broke the silence.

“I really think we should get going now. Ms Cassie might be worried about us and I don’t feel really secure here.”

“You’re right,” Taking one last glimpse of the secret room, Ruby nodded and pushed the rock back in place.

Excited and amazed, Rebecca and Ruby ran back through the secret tunnel to the painting. They pushed open the painting silently and slipped out. They were now back in Manjusri hall.

“I think we accidentally found a secret room!” gasped Ruby, shaking with anticipation at the experience they went through.

“I can’t believe it!” Rebecca shook her head in disbelief. “Do you think we ought to tell everyone about it?”

Ruby thought about it but then shook her head.

“I think the monks would have preferred for this to remain a secret, don’t you think?” Shocked at Ruby’s thoughtfulness, Rebecca smiled and nodded.

The Mogao Grottoes, a tall, big and impressive cave. Thousands of caves all into one mountain, still hundreds of caves to be found. Murals, Buddhas, Manuscripts and more, opening a lost world of secrets and breathtaking views. Standing in front of the Mogao Grottoes, Ruby and Rebecca smiled at the secret room they found out, revealing another world of lost secrets once more.

Secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Ian – 10

Last summer, Roy went to visit the Mogao Grottoes which were the highlights of his summer holidays. “Wow” Roy said to himself with amazement. “Look at these paintings on the wall!” There were a lot of things here and lots to find out! I was blown away by how detailed the paintings were and how long it took to draw them. And Roy thought to himself “How did they get here?”

Long time ago, an evil spirit heard about the Mogao Grottoes where people lived happily and harmoniously in one of the most idyllic places in China. He was very jealous, he held up a fist and said “You are having fun now?!” The evil spirit went over there and with a wave of his hands, he put everyone inside the cave's walls and they were stuck there forever.

As the days went by, the Mogao Grottoes became one of the most popular places in China and the world. Tourists from all over the world go there to see the paintings on the walls. Explorers, writers and travelers are all interested in the history and the background of these paintings and their story.

People who visit the Mogao Grottoes admire and look at the paintings on the caves walls depicting the way of life of people from different sectors of the society. They noticed every face, every expression, body postures and costumes of the people that are unique showing great details of how they went about in their daily lives in the past.

While Roy was looking closely and intensely at a painting of a young boy on the wall, he thought he saw for a moment the young boy was smiling at him. But when he looked again after blinking his eyes, the smile was gone. So he didn't give it a second thought and went back to his parents to continue exploring the endless caves of paintings.

That night, in his bed back in the hotel, he couldn't help feeling that there was a connection between him and the young boy in the painting as if the boy was trying to reach out to him.

The very next day, he persuaded his parents to take him back to the grottes for another visit. Roy went back to the wall paintings of the boy gazing at it and trying to establish a kind of telepathic communication with him. Suddenly, Roy could hear the boy's voice in his ears. He was talking to him, the young boy explained to Roy how he and the people of Mongao Grottes were being locked inside the wall by an evil spirit all those years ago.

Their souls were being trapped and they could not move on to the other world. They would be eternally grateful if Roy could help find a certain monk in a monastery nearby to perform a ritual to set their souls free.

Roy related the boy's plea to his parents who felt very sorry for the trapped souls and agreed to help. They arrived at the monastery and invited the monk to the grottes to perform the ritual. The souls inside the wall were set free and came flying out, and on their way to eternal peace in another world. They were all very grateful to Roy and his parents. Roy was glad that he was able to help them. It was an unforgettable experience for Roy who unlocked the secrets of the Mogao Grottoes.

The Storybook Adventure

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chen, Emily – 9

The magical book glowed. Sze Mo opened it. Hand in hand with her sister, she leaped into the book, thus arriving in the vast desert. The magical adventure began.

It was a dark evening. Outside, a sand storm raged: howling wind hit the ground and blew dust. A horde of travelers trapped in a dark cave huddled around a small fire, except the two extraordinary lasses: Sze Mo and Sze Gao, who were identical twins. They stood near the crack where a glimpse of the sand storm outside could be seen, and was deep in thought. Earlier, the travelers blocked the aperture with a big rock.

Han Ying wore a muddy grayish-white shenyi, with gray silk shoes. His intensely icy blue eyes were all attractive, though his expression showed rage. Hu Ying wore a muddy beige shenyi, with brown silk shoes. His eyes were as icy blue as his brother, though his expression showed rage.

The twins wore identical clothes, both white hanfus with green decorations. They both had aqua green silk hung around their neck, shoulders, and arms. Because a big rock was blocking the harsh wind, the wind wasn't quite strong there, so their hanfus and silk only fluttered gently. There was a gleaming golden band with a small bronze square around her wrist as an exquisite ornament. They were perfectly stunning!

Suddenly, the sandstorm stopped. 'Listen, everyone!' shouted Han Ying. 'The sandstorm calmed down. Get ready to go!' But just as quickly as it stopped, the sandstorm started again, more fiercely than before. Hu Ying laughed. Sze Gao turned towards the traders and Sze Mo did too.

'The dust in the atmosphere settled down, and the sky became clear. If we hide under a handy shelter we create, we can evacuate to a safer shelter'. Sze Gao said. Everyone believed her, except Hu Ying.

Han Ying told the traders. 'We should try it. After all, it may be our only hope.' He then asked the twins: 'How do we start?' Sze Mo was startled, then replied. 'We need to build a handy shelter, then everyone can duck under it. Sze Gao shall guide you.'

'Oh, come on. That would never work' interrupted Hu Ying.

Sze Mo rolled her eyes at Hu Ying. 'Oh, wait here.' She approached Hu Ying, asked everyone to move away from him. She turned her back to him. Sze Gao knew it. 'Don't, Mo!' she cried. But it was too late.

Sze Mo turned around, waved her mighty hand, and fairy dust sprinkled on Hu Ying's shenyi. As the sparkles vanished, fairy rope entangled him.

'What did you do?' Han Ying asked. They fight often but if someone upsets his brother he feels upset too. He loves his brother deeply. A sly smile spread across her lips was Sze Mo's reply.

Han Ying felt his brother's pain, and looking at him tied up, he suffered too. He felt anxious about how they could transport him in that situation. Cleverly, he asked Sze Mo that he will guard his brother, but Sze Mo rejected it.

10 minutes later, everyone had ducked under the two shelters. A 'cart' was made for Hu Ying, who was very reculent to get in it. 'Follow me!' Sze Gao, who was hidden in a fairy umbrella, shouted. Sze Mo was also hidden under one, but she was with Hu Ying.

Sze Gao led everyone into a cave, saying the shelter was only three hundred meters away, but they had to cross sand dunes and other hard-to-walk places, so they had to eat and rest for a while.

While Han Ying argued that the traders are experienced 'sand hikers' and did not need rest, Sze Mo firmly stated that if they did not rest, they will not continue to the shelter.

Reluctantly, Han Ying told the traders to stay in a cave to rest, which gave the twins some time to build a town using magic.

'Can we go now?' asked Han Ying. Hu Ying agreed. 'Alright. We can go,' Sze Gao answered.

They trudged on, towards the town that never existed.
At last, the town came into view.

Sze Mo took Hu Ying to a cozy, middle-sized bedroom. She asked softly: 'If I unite you, will you stop annoying us?' A timid nod was enough for Sze Mo to trust him. Immediately, she waved her hand, and the rope vanished like a bubble being popped.

Sze Mo returned to the main hall, the twins led all the traders in their own designated rooms.

Days flew by so fast; and at first, everything went smoothly, but then the traders began to complain about the coldness, the lack of food/water, and more. Sze Mo and Sze Gao were helpless; they didn't know how to help them.

So they decided to use some magic.

But just as they were about to release their magic, a goddess appeared, and warned them: 'Go ahead. Use your magic. But you may be stuck in this era forever.' Then, she disappeared.

The twins glanced at each other. 'We will take this chance. After all, it may be our only chance to save these kind travelers, ' they agreed in unison.

The next day, the twins stood along the seashore under the blazing sun. Soon, they were saying goodbye to the present.

They recognised this place: the Mogao Grottoes. Then, a light appeared. They knew it was the way to return home. Their journey was over.

They gracefully flew into the sky, following the light. Some witnessed it. That's why there are pictures of fairies flying in some of the caves.

At night, the twins took one last look at the desert below, with all their friends tucked safely into bed in the Mogao Grottoes. 'Adieu...' Sze Gao whispered. And with a smile, Sze Mo leaped them out of the book, and closed it.

Way back in the story world, the sky was suffused with a rosy light. And Han Ying was amazed by it.

Han Ying realized that it was the memories that counted, and that the twins had a huge part of their lives.

The traders remembered the twins as their savours.

They had named the caves the Mogao Grottoes, to honor the twins.

The painted fairies and other important people on the walls of the caves represented the young twins which had saved their lives.

And this is the story of the Mogao Grottoes.

The Gift Of The Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chen, Miranda – 10

“Sweetie, how about a relaxing week off at the beach for your holiday?” Mum asked.

“Nah,” I replied, disgusted. I don’t like the beach as I hate swimming. I always struggle to swim for a long distance.

“Then...What about somewhere in the desert? Like... The Mogao Grottoes in western China?”

“Desert visit in the summer?! That’s even worse! But wait...” I suddenly recall the book I was reading just now named “Journey to the West” about Monk Tang’s exotic travelling experiences. Actually, it might be a good idea to visit western China.

We arrived in Dunhuang City, previously one of the most important crossroads on the Silk Road. It is on the edge of the Gobi Desert and contains over 2,000 years of history. It is famous for the Mogao Grottoes, a series of caves filled with Buddhist statues and murals.

We trekked all the way into the desert to see the Mogao Grottoes. After an hour burning in the sunlight, I felt bored and exhausted. My mum wanted me to enjoy the heritage but all the Budda statues and ancient murals looked exactly the same to me.

“I’ll stay here and wait for you,” I grumbled to my parents.

“Are you sure? The Mogao Grottoes are heritages,” Dad tried to make me continue.

“Yes.” I took out “Journey to the West” and sat on a bench in front of murals. Holidays are for relaxation so I prefer reading in the shelter.

It was as hot as a cooking pot. Everything looked distorted, flowing in the heated air. Soon, I fell asleep.

Then a boy tapped me awake, “Hey, would you like to join the scouts and guard the Mogao Grottoes for a few hours?”

Before I even had the chance to decide, the boy continued, “ There will be a wonderful gift afterwards.”

“What gift is it?”

“You’ll never regret it.” He spoke in a cryptic voice.

I was still hesitating but the boy took my silence as acceptance. He told me that my task is to make sure the mural behind me was intact till he came back. He would bring me the gift upon his return. Then he walked away, disappearing mysteriously in the flowing air.

“This is gonna be easy!” I thought. I looked back, and the mural behind me was actually about Monk Tang’s journey to the west. He was to cross the desert under the flaming mountains.

Suddenly, a bright golden light flashed, and I couldn’t help closing my eyes. Then the light was gone. So was the mural behind me!

Unbelievable! I started to panic, feeling butterflies in my stomach. I rushed to the CCTV frantically and checked. For god’s sake, I saw the mural appear on the other end of the Mogao Grottoes!

I sped all the way towards the other end. After running and searching frantically for an hour, I found the missing mural rock lying in a dark cave. The rock was around half a meter long and wide. I held it firmly in my arms and tried to lift it up.

Jesus! It was as heavy as an ox! No matter how hard I try, it didn't move an inch!

Gasping badly for breath, I groaned, "Come on! Holidays are supposed to be relaxing! Forget about this!"

Just as I was about to give up, something in the mural rock became alive.

Was it an illusion? I rubbed my eyes and looked closely. No, something wasn't right! Something... or someone... was staring at me! I recognized the face from the paintings. It was Monk Tang! I was almost shocked to death! Monk Tang said to me in a deep voice, "You can only make it if you persist." Then the paintings on the murals became alive too! It showed Monk Tang and his apprentices crossing the desert. They were running out of food and water, nearly dying but extremely determined.

"So... is Monk Tang telling me that if I persist, I can achieve anything?" Again I held the stone firmly, heaved it up with all of my strength. It worked! Inch by inch and as slow as a snail, I was able to move forward.

"How am I supposed to reach the original place with this snail speed?!" I mumbled exhaustedly.

The deep voice came alive again and again. "YOU CAN ONLY MAKE IT IF YOU PERSIST! ..."

I dared not to put the rock down. I was afraid that if I stopped, Monk Tang would immediately come out of the painting and punish me. The only way out is to move the rock back as fast as I can. I didn't want Monk Tang to come alive again. It would creep me out.

The rock became heavier and heavier. My arms and legs were numb, my head was dizzy, my eyes were dim and my mouth was dry. My whole body was dripping with sweat. Yet, I continued...

I felt someone wipe my sweat. It was Mum. There was no rock in my arms at all! It was a dream! I could have been happy but I was rather disappointed as I wished to complete the task and receive the gift.

The day when I was back home, I had to continue my swimming lessons.

"Can I quit swimming?" I groaned.

"Come on, sweetie, you know you are gifted." Mum said.

Suddenly, I saw the flowing water was making up Monk Tang's face. The waves sounded like, "You can make it only if you persist!"

It didn't creep me out as I knew Monk Tang was right. I was determined to focus and keep paddling. Unbelievably, I could swim a whole lap just like others!

"Woohoo! Good job! I told you! You're gifted." Mum cheered.

Oh, I'm gifted! It is the gift the boy promised! For the first time in my life, I believed that I could do anything only if I persist.

Henry, The Creator of The Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chui, Hing Man – 11

More than a millennia ago, there was a story about a nine-colored lion. It was about a nine-colored lion by the dusty dunes, in the Mogao Grottoes. Its fur has nine different colors, hence the nine-colored lion. This lion seems magical, but it would eat human flesh whenever it saw some. Its nose was once shot by a hunter, but its eyesight could see far distances.

One stormy day, a man accidentally fell into a deep river, as deep as the ocean, maybe deeper. The man was thrashing and kicking, and he was about to drown. The lion jumped into the river with the man and carried him back to the dry land. The lion thought: “I haven’t eaten for days!” When the man pleaded, the lion just laughed and spat in the man’s face. The man was now very scared and also angry. “I’m not letting you run away!” the lion roared. Then the lion spat in the man’s face again.

The man roared too. The lion had insulted him. He punched the lion right in the guts. POW! Then there was a loud BANG and the man fell onto the floor, paralyzed. The lion roared: “Fight, you nauseating filthy beast!” The lion pulled his magical fur. It dropped immediately. He then turned it into a wand. The man gasped. He had a wand! “NO! What the—” But the lion didn’t let him finish the rude word. “Wand, kill the man!” the lion yelled, the wand pointing at the man’s chest. A serpent rose from the wand and was about to bite the man. FLING! The man caught the serpent and threw it into the river. HUH?! The lion thought. The man tried to dodge the lion’s deadly blasts and looked over. Wait, what was it? What was that magnificent view? Yes, that’s right—it is the Mogao Grottoes! “What are you looking at, you filthy veined muck?” the lion roared again. “Wait, is that the Mogao Grottoes?!” the lion exclaimed in disbelief. “What Gro—what?” the man asked. “AGH!” the lion yelled. His precious fur had vanished. Powerless, the lion darted away. “YOU WILL PAY!” the lion hollered in the distance.

Is that some Grottoe thingy? Where did it come from? The man bombarded himself with many questions. I ought to investigate, the man said to himself.

The man got up and left the mysterious land. If this was the exit, where was the entrance? He was excited to find out the secret of the Mogao Grottoes. But day after day, he still had no sign of the name, not even people had heard of it. “What’s the use?” he sighed to himself. The man began to lose hope. What was the purpose if you couldn’t find what you wanted for weeks? He was just about to turn back again when suddenly, he saw a vast cave.

It was empty. “This could not possibly be the Mogao Grottoes?!” And yes, reader, the smart man figured out the name. He entered the dark, vast cave, still slumping, but having a teeny-tiny bit of hope. He progressed further, but still no sign of anything. He was just about to go, dejected when suddenly, he was spun and he spun until there was nothing in his sight.

“AND WHO’S THIS?” a ghost’s voice boomed into the place. “I’m nobody.” said the man. “IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SECRET OF THE MOGAO GROTTOS, YOU MUST IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE.” the voice boomed. “How do you know what I wanted to look for?” The ghost ignored him. “IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE, now!” “I’m-----fine. I’m..uh...Henry.” “Henry WHO?” “Just Henry.” The man lied. “VERY WELL. OPEN THIS CHEST WITHOUT A KEY. IF YOU SUCCEED, I SHALL TELL YOU THE SECRET OF THE MOGAO GROTTOS.” Suddenly, a wooden chest was slammed in front of the man. The man tugged and tugged. This was insane. After real effort, the man unlocked it, panting. Inside, there was a voice, soft but audible:

“The Mogao Grottoes, in Dunhuang, Gansu, is the most important Buddhist attraction in China, and it is renowned for its famous grottoes or small caves. It has lots of grottoes, but when you visit it there are no cameras allowed. But there are seven hundred grottoes you can go to. Each carries a unique story. But the other grottoes are not for tourists. On the train to Dunhuang, you will pass the Gansu wind farm, which is-----you guessed it! The largest in the world. The sand dunes are also a key part of Gansu. It is very popular, but there are only a few people on the top, maybe none. However, there are loads of people on the bottom. Crescent Moon Lake is the most important tourist attraction. It is the national spring. The Crescent Lake is also known as the Crescent Spring, Crescent Moon Spring, or Yueya Spring. It is considered a natural wonder of the Gobi Desert. Just as its name

implies, the lake appears like a crescent moon and with its crystal clear water, resembling a turquoise or pearl inlaid in the vast desert.”

“Not long ago, a monk thought there was something special about a cave he found in the Silk Road in China. He thought: “This cave looks interesting. I want to dig a grotto in this cave.” He was very young, but after he dug the grotto, he had entered the final five years of his life.”

“More and more people came, and more and more stories were told. It was rediscovered in the 19th century, after it was deserted in the 13th century.”

Do you wonder what happened to Henry? Henry is now known as one of the most important creators of the Mogao Grottoes.

Golden Hour

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Hung, Tsz Ching Sabrina – 11

It's the golden hour, the sun had the color of egg yolk, a beautiful sight yet I'm here alone...sitting by myself. the time has hit 7 and I ran back home trying to down all the negativity from my mind and the tears threatening to come pouring down from my eyes,

“Wen qing! Your back!” I heard mom's faint voice from afar.

“Yes, Mom I'm home...” I said with a sigh while I looked at the place I **called** home, I went inside hoping that everything that happened to me was just a nightmare nope there it was upon me... The newest grave was freshly dug down... Xian Zi... I miss her light golden fur with her hot breath that might have smelt funny but I would love to smell again...sometimes when I close my eyes I can still see her falling down from that very edge we use to watch the sunset together

“A-qing? A-QING” Mother started screaming then she got quiet for a while

“I know it's hard I get it but you're 17 and you have to let go of Xian Z-” I cut her off immediately,

“No MOM you don't get Xian Zi was my everything and now without her, I don't think ANYTHING will be the same not the place I called home or Whatever! I JUST WISH I WAS IN ANOTHER UNIVERSE-” in a blink everything became dark, just my mom's faint shoutings, then I passed out.

I feel the sun glazing onto me while I slowly open my eyes, my eyelids almost giving up on me in the middle, my toes lightly stepping on the soft yet burning sand. How did I get here? I looked around and I saw a temple? I see something ...a boy?

“HEY” I shouted with all my might, my throat stinging just as it could get worse I fell

“Miss? MISS?” I hear just as I fell on my knees, he handed me a water bottle

“U-um thanks? my name is Wen qing w-what ab-about you?” I mangle to stammer out

“My name is Lan Yuan, you can call me a-yuan” he replies

“A-yuan? I know this sounds weird but I don't think I belong here. What year is it?”

“It's the year 809?”

“Well I'm from 2019 and I need to get back...I made this stupid wish and-” I was cut off when he suddenly put a finger on my lip

“Ok shh I get it, I've also been wanting to try to get to a cave in the Mogao Grottoes to make a wish, it's a legend that there is a god in there that grants everyone one wish...” A-yuan said while he was beaming bright I couldn't just say no, could I?

“Ok well, let's get going!” I faked a smile trying to keep this positive atmosphere, I saw him taking some things out and handing them to me, A robe?

“Put it on, it'll fit you,” A-yuan said with a slight smile with a hint of sadness?

With curiosity hitting me I asked him,

“Why are you so sad? This robe looks spectacular!” I beamed, trying to lighten the mood a bit.

“It used to be my mom’s...she passed away after I turned 18, I carry it around as good luck.” I saw him staring at the robe with a bittersweet smile and tears forming

“Well let’s go find the god we don’t have much time left,” I said quickly while he stared at me

“What?” I asked

“Y—you need to change” I heard him stutter out “Right”

~After changing~

“A—Yuan let’s go!” I said grabbing his hand while we walked closer to the temple I found something it was... IT WAS A BUTTON?!

“A—Yuan press this button it might be an opening to the—” before I finished my sentence he pressed the button and we plunged down,

“AHHHHHHHHHHH” we both screamed while I subconsciously hugged something then we plopped onto the ground.

“A—A—Qing can you let go?” I looked up at him...Oh no—

“ah S—sorry,” I stammered out while I blushed furiously no—no! I can’t be falling for a stranger!

“A—qing I think we need to rest here let me start a fire and we can rest for a while,” he said staring into my eyes with his sparkling hazel eyes, ah~ how dreamy— A—QING snap out of it

“A—Yuan, I think we can make the wish tomorrow let’s just rest a bit.” After a while, I passed out while I felt A—yuan’s hand wrap around me.

~The next morning~

I woke up, naturally, I looked up but when I did I saw a statue of a goddess with a woman standing next to it,

“Um, miss, may I ask who you are?” I bowed to her with respect

“I am Chen qing... The goddess of wish and I felt a negative feeling so I came.” The goddess said, just then I saw A—yuan awake and I explained everything to him, he told me to make a wish

“Dear Goddess I wish to go back to the universe I came from which is Earth 2019 AD”

“And you boy?” she raised an eyebrow.

“Well I would like to follow A—qing ” I heard A—yuan say, I cocked my head to the side

“Well your wish is granted,” then yet again everything turned black.

“A—YUAN NO YOU WILL REGRET IT!” I screamed,

“Don’t worry A—qing I won’t, okay ?” he gave me a reassuring smile, then we both passed out...

I woke up back on a familiar mountain and I saw A—yuan waking up but the first thing he said is

“Be careful of what you wish because there might be a consequence as you see what happened, you got transferred to another universe” he said while we both chuckled.

“I could say the same for you, you idiot.” We laughed harder and watched the sunset together while he had his arm around me and gave me a peck on the cheek.

A Magical Journey Through The Mogao Caves

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Jin, Louie – 9

“The rain’s coming, we have to go.” said the woman as she walked towards the boy. She glanced at the cloudy sky.

“But ma, the girl won’t wake up! Plus if this girl is dangerous, the rain isn’t the worst.” said the young boy sitting on the sand.

“Ughhh... My head...” I moaned, I started to wake up “wh—what?! What...” I opened my eyes with a startle.

Straightaway, the boy pointed his spear at me with a shaking hand. I took a step back.

“Oh god...” I gasped in amaze as I looked around. The skies were painted with nothing but a dense blanket of low, grey clouds. But what most amazed me was what the people were wearing. The clothing was like the ones I saw in my Chinese history book. The men even had braided hair!

“H—hi? Where am I? Who are you?” I muttered, sitting up. “Who am I at this point?” I said faintly.

“Oh, phew, you’re not one of them...” The boy sighed in relief “Since you aren’t, we have to go, rain’s coming. Wanna tag along?” the boy asked while putting down the spear.

“Uhh, I’m afraid not. Where are my parents? I need to go ho—” I started my sentence, but stopped short. “God, the last thing I remember is me, my parents and my lizard travelling in Mogao Grottoes. Then, I... I ended up here, somehow...” I thought anxiously with my hands on my head. I tried hard to remember everything, but couldn’t. I must’ve hit my head hard somehow.

“I guess I’ll have to go with you...” I said with hesitation.

“Great! We’ll go to the mogao caves for shelter.” said the boy, who stood up with a genuine smile. “Well, let’s go!”

Then, we set off for the Mogao caves.

After we went into the Mogao caves, I realised I was the only one wearing T-shirts and jeans. The others were all wearing ancient Chinese clothes. Was this some kind of cosplay?

“No way” I thought with doubt I was wrong.

“Hey, what are you thinking of?” asked the boy.

“Uhh, nothing, but can you tell me what dynasty is it?” I asked awkwardly.

“It’s the Qing dynasty, everybody knows that...” He said slowly, backing away for a bit too.

“Hehe, um, I’m a bit hungry, do you have food?” I asked, changing the subject.

“Uh, maybe, I’ll check.” he responded. He stood up and went to a sack. After a while, he came back. “We’re out of food...” he grumbled quietly as he sat down. “I’ll ask the grown-ups to go out for food.” He went to a bunch of adults gathering around. He whispered something into his mother’s ear. Then, the mother told all the adults, and they went out.

“Can you show me around? I really wanna find my family. ” I asked quietly, standing up.

“Yea sure let’s go!” He said.

So we followed the path on the right, deeper into the mogao caves...

“Well, until now, I didn’t even tell you my name! My name’s Noah!” said the boy.

“Tell me more about yourself Noah. Why did you leave your city?” I asked.

“My village was invaded by robbers, we were forced to leave. Our people lived here for years. I also have a special book with me that my father gave me before he died.” Noah said sadly.

“Oh sorry to hear that.” I said.

Suddenly, my foot bumped into something sharp. I looked down, it was my pet lizard!

“Oh god, finally, someone from my family at last!” I blabbered, I couldn’t help it. I picked up Lemon and put her on my shirt. I just couldn’t take my eyes off her. Noah looked around and realised something crazy.

“Umm, sorry to interrupt, we’re actually lost.” Noah said, avoiding my eyes.

My smile ended with a frown. “Oh, well we can only go on.” So we kept walking forwards, hoping it would lead to an exit. But we were wrong. We hit a dead end with a cave painting in front of us.

“Seriously?!” I was a bit panicked.

“Calm down, we can make it out. I’ve been here before.” Noah said calmly. “What a beautiful painting! Pity the other half was stolen.”

“Honestly, I’m from like 200 years after...” I said sitting down “Cannot believe I’m time travelling! Cause in my time, all of the Mogao caves were destroyed.”

“Your time? What do you mean? Are you from the future?!” Noah said with wide eyes.

“I think so.” I said looking around. Lemon climbed on the cave painting. The cave painting suddenly turned like a door. There was a gem inside the room behind the painting.

“That is a black opal! That’s so rare!” I exclaimed. I took a step forward and examined the stone. There was a claw carved on it. I took Lemon and put her claw on it. Suddenly, there was a flash of white and we were back at the cave entrance. But this time, when we looked at the path we took, it was GONE!

We looked at each other’s confused faces. “You know I’m from the future right? I visited this part of the Mogao caves. It’s next to Mingsha mountain. When I came here for vacation, I never saw the parts we just explored. By putting Lemon’s claw on the black opal, I think it just triggered the magical power in the opal!” I said shaking him

“Oh my god! I remember in my dad’s book, there was a secret door or something, and to unlock it you need a dragon’s footprint!” Noah said excitedly.

“That’s great!!!!” I said, jumping up and down.

“But in the book, it said the magical power in the gem will twist time and save Mogao Grottoes” Noah said with a frown “I can’t remember the rest...”

Suddenly, my body started fading along with Lemon.

“You’re fading! I guess the magical power makes you time travel again. So we have to say goodbye...” Noah said disappointedly.

“It’s so nice knowing you and take care!” I said before fully fading away.

I sat up. I was reading a book outside the cave. But in the modern times. Was that just a dream? I felt something hard in my pocket. I reached in and took the thing out. It was the black opal. So perhaps the legend was true, the Mingsha mountain was magical. I felt there was something pulling me towards the caves. So I went into the cave and found a book inside. On the book cover, it said: “MOGAO LEGENDS – Owned by Noah liu With thanks to a girl who saved the Mogao Grottoes”.

I knew it was Noah’s book and I knew it was about the secret door and time travelling. I could imagine him standing right there when I faded, smiling for a bit. I will treasure this book as a souvenir of this unbelievable experience.

The Odd One Out

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lau, Chelsea – 10

Cerise Lancaster was not a normal girl or, she didn't act like one, when other girls tried out for: Cheerleading, ballet, and gymnastics, Cerise would walk towards the soccer field—where she tried out for the soccer team. Cerise wanted to make a worldwide discovery when she grew up, she wanted to be known worldwide for her discovery.

As Cerise ran towards the soccer field, two girls walked up to her, Cerise rolled her eyes.

Here we go again. Cerise thought it's the same every single day.

“Hey, Lancaster! Why not be a girl for once, and try out for the cheerleading team?” Pamela Houdini shouted.

“Yeah, why do you always walk towards the soccer field instead of the ballet studio? I mean, are you actually a girl?” Violet Bizarre asked, rolling her eyes. Cerise didn't mind, she turned her head away from the two girls, and stared at the fake green grass on the field. she was used to it, it happened every single day, she didn't mind.

A few years later, Cerise graduated from High School and entered College. There, Cerise found her passion, Mysteries and Legends. When her mother found out, she wasn't pleased at all.

“Cerise dear, why aren't you like other girls? You should be taking cooking classes or maybe even a dance class, not some silly old Mystery or Legends class!” Her mother would say.

“But mom, Mysteries and Legends are my passion!” Cerise would answer.

One day, her professor announced that they would be going to the mysterious Mogao caves to do some research. Professor Liane said, in a low voice “The Mogao Caves were created long ago when a Monk decided there was something special about a cave he found at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China. Over the years, Pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, they dug more and more caves, and they spent their time creating sacred art and literature.” Cerise was astonished by the tale and decided to do some extra research on the Mogao Caves to be prepared for the trip. On the discovery day of the trip, Cerise ran into a cave and was immediately astonished by the amazing art and literature surrounding her from head to foot.

“I never knew humans could create such wonderful artwork...” Cerise breathed, sighing in amazement.

“I know right? I never thought it would be done this well!” Jo Miller. While everyone was busy admiring the wonderful work of the pilgrims, out of the corner of Cerise's eye, she spied a rectangular object half buried in the dirt.

“Hey, guys! I found something...” Cerise called, as she struggled to pull it free.

“Cerise! It looks like a piece of writing... Perhaps a book?” Professor Liane exclaimed, running down and grabbed the dusty item from the damp, wet floor.

“Umm.. Professor? I think we should leave it here. We should preserve and respect these ancient caves and their relics.” Cerise declared.

“It is your decision Ms. Lancaster, and I respect it.” Professor Liane said, nodding curtly. The others nodded in agreement.

Suddenly, Jo Miller piped up, “I found something too! It's right over here!” The others followed her to what seemed like a bedroom in a cave and saw a beautiful sculpture.

“ I don’t understand, what does it even look like?” Jack Louis questioned. As Eliam Brown took pictures of the cold cave.

“ I think we should leave now, let’s send these photographs to the newspaper office, I’m sure our discoveries will be sent out worldwide soon!” Professor Liane commanded, smiling.

Months later, the discoveries of this group were spread all across the world. Cerise couldn't be happier.

One day, as Cerise was skipping down the neighbourhood, basking in the joy of her newfound discovery, she happened to run into a few old frenemies.

“ Hey! Cerise, is that you?” Violet Bizzare asked as she squinted.

“ Violet? Uh yeah, that's me! What are *you* doing here?” Cerise questioned.

“Just came here to buy some groceries, see you around, if you do come around” Violet said, edging closer and closer laughing menacingly.

This time, however, Cerise stared defiantly at her old nemesis. '*You're never ever discouraging me again*', she thought as her mind began to wander down her memory lane. Cerise remembered the upsetting times Violet Bizzare and Pamela Houdini had teased her and laughed at her for trying ‘non–girly things’.

Staring at Violet dead in the eyes , Cerise said "I've grown tired of your teasing and bullying. I do not need to endure your taunts and threats any further, because I have found my passion and that's where I'm heading for the rest of my life, and not listening to your annoying voice talk." And with that, Cerise strolled right past her wide–eyed tormentor without a second thought.

Years later, Cerise’s discovery was made famous, she was known at every corner of the world and she even inspired younger generations to follow their heart and pursue their passion.

After the news came around, many people flocked to the Mogao Caves, discovering brand–new treasures every single day. The soon filled up the cover page of countless news articles, making the Magao caves one of the most mysterious and creative places to visit in the entire world.

One of them even stated, “ I was inspired by Cerise Lancaster's adventurous spirit. Entering the caves was like travelling through a time machine! A truly breathtaking experience!”

Now working as an Archeological Professor, Cerise has never felt more at home. As she continues to inspire younger generations with her passion for the historical wonders of the world.

And that, children, is a story of a young girl named Cerise Lancaster, who decided she would strive to follow her dreams and ignore the whispers that brought discouragement. Instead, she did what she desired and loved: Uncovering a worldwide discovery going towards where her heart desired.

"Find your heart and you'll find your home."

Once upon a time...

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Leung, Hin Ching – 10

“Once upon a time, there lived a monk far away in the middle of nowhere, who no one had seen for the last 10 thousand years. He had a book that could solve any problems. From broke to rich, from ugly to beautiful. Legends say that the only way to find the secret book in Mogao Grottoes...”

“Just one step closer...” I placed one aching foot on the desert floor and pulled myself up. I couldn’t face the sun’s harsh glare. Beads of sweat rolled down my eyelashes, blurring the path ahead. I rubbed my eyes, and it shimmered with delight. I saw it. Mogao Grottoes. A cave with extraordinary features, filled with breathtaking tales, a birthplace of magic. I stood up, tall and proud. I had arrived.

Footsteps echoed through the Mogao Caves. Patterns of goddesses, birds, and ancient people filled the cave with many ancient colors I’ve never seen before but that wasn’t all. Thousands of statues flooded through the cave. I gently touched the golden statue I liked the best and smiled. But something that really caught the corner of my eye was this big brown book with ripped pages and written in Chinese, it looked *spellbinding*. I wanted to know what the book meant so much, I was so desperate, I flipped through the pages touching the letters and closed my eyes... I sighed. Of course it didn’t work. But I was wrong.

The book started to glow until it was impossible to see. *What had I done!* I thought in a panic. Suddenly, I felt like I was spinning. I tried to open my eyes again. Nothingness. I was spinning faster, and I was getting dizzy. I was afraid.

A few seconds later, I fell back onto the ground. I opened my eyes, expecting to see the glowing monk, thinking it was just my imagination. But I wasn’t looking at the sculpture anymore.

“B... But...” I stuttered, not knowing what to say.

I gasped when the monk held out a big treasure chest filled with gold. His seat was a pattern of goddesses. Behind him was a gigantic peacock’s feather, twice the size of a normal person. Beside him were six servants on each side.

“Greetings, traveller,” he said in an old voice. “This treasure chest is from the cave I found,” he said. “If you find the way to my cave again, you get all the silk and gold in it.” My eyes grew wide.

“However,” the monk continued, “This will not be as easy as you think.”

I smiled confidently. This was going to be an easy win.

“Very well,” said the monk, as if he was reading my mind. “May I send you good luck on your journey?”

Suddenly, I felt like I was spinning again. But this time, I felt strong. I was going to be rich.

I ended up in the same desert. I started looking for it. It was night by the time I found the oasis. I spotted a hole, and it was glowing as bright as the monk sculpture. It must be it!

Suddenly, a dragon zoomed past me. I sighed. I’m not sure if I could beat a water dragon.

“If you can defeat me, then everything within the cave is yours,” he said.

“I bet I’m stronger than you!” I said, “Look, I can squeeze a stone until it drips!”

“You are strong,” grunted the dragon. He didn’t know I was squeezing a lump of cheese.

“If you win this round, you win the cave,” he said.

He got two balls. “I can throw my ball over the mountain,” He said, and he to prove his point, he threw it across the mountain

I looked nervously at my heavy ball... an idea popped into my head! “I can throw mine over the sea,” I lied. I threw in quickly and pointed up at the moon. Ha! The dragon thought the moon was my ball.

“Impossible, How did you do that?” the foolish dragon roared, “I don’t care anyway, take the cave!”

I couldn’t believe my ears. I fooled the dragons easily! My heart was beating so fast. This was too good to be true! I

took all the treasure from the cave. I was too happy to feel the weight on my shoulders.

“Very well, look what we have here,” the monk said as I went deeper inside the cave. “You’ve got your treasure.”

I proudly got presented with bags of treasure. The bags were surely heavy, but somehow, I couldn’t feel the weight on my shoulders.

When I got back on land, I heard a terrible screech “Help!”

I looked around, confused. Suddenly, I saw a monkey drowning. It was a deep oasis. I wandered around in panic. I found a rope and a very long branch and tied them together.

“Hold on to this!” I cried to the monkey. He quickly grabbed the branch and pulled. *Please don’t let it break!* I prayed. Luckily, the branch was steady. Fortunately, the monkey was saved.

“Thank you!” said the monkey cheerfully, “I owe you one!”

“No problem,” I replied.

“You’re rich,” he said.

“I didn’t think you’d notice that.” I looked at the bag of gold behind my shoulder.

“I’m not talking about that,” he said, looking at the bag of gold. “Anyway, I gotta go. Thanks again!” His voice echoed in the distance. There are not someth

I frowned. I was rich, but he wasn’t talking about the treasure I had!

As I was about to leave, I realized what the monkey was talking about. I had been rich in my *heart*.

I went back to the oasis and put the treasure down. I looked in front of me and I saw the monk, smiling. “You’re still rich,” his voice echoed.

Suddenly, I was spinning and landed back where I started from. I didn’t have gold with me, but I didn’t regret it.

Long, Long Ago in the Cave

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Leung, Hin Lung – 10

I walked towards the cave standing before me. It was getting bigger and bigger. I took a deep breath as I reached the start of the tunnel. It was great, dark, narrow, and ancient. Who would have gone in there? Who would want to travel a million kilometres to reach this desert? I sat and watched as the first drop of rain kissed my cheeks.

“There! Here is the tunnel; I’ll be the first person there!” And I took a deep breath. Even though I was feeling butterflies in my stomach, I wanted to continue to explore because I was here as an explorer. I took out my notebook, entered the cave and started my journey.

It was not dark all the way along. After a bit of walking, a shaft of brilliant sunlight shone through the top of the cave. But this was too bright for my liking. As I walked in, I found the interior was very particular. Books were left sitting, yelling, shouting for people to read them, though people ignored them. It also contained loads of photographs. A monk in the temple. A picture of the whole cave. All black and white. All centuries old. A tall, narrow diamond shape formed the cave. It was almost impossible to pass through the cave.

I closed my eyes for a second, and I felt all the darkness creeping me out again. When I reopened my eyes, I saw a bunch of patterns on a wall. Looking at the wall, I wondered, what could it mean? What could I possibly do if I was here travelling, doing stuff, finding? But I turned around and realized it was a trap.

The patterns moved.

But then I saw those patterns forming words; it turned out to be a riddle.

A voice echoed in my ears. “Answer the riddle unless you want to stay. If you get the correct answer, you will no longer be led astray.”

The patterns on the wall formed the riddle:

I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have nobody, but I come alive with the wind. What am I?

“The answer is an echo!”

“Correct. You may proceed.” All of the excitement washed over me. I felt a huge sense of achievement, thinking about getting famous and earning a lot of money, by being the FIRST person to discover this cave. I thought of myself going on television, everyone looking at me while the interviewer asked me questions about the cave. I decided to explore further and continued my journey into the cave.

I found Chinese books lying around the edges of the floor. I walked closer. What are they? I took up one book and flipped the pages. It was very long, like the books I read in English. Even though I didn’t know what it was about, I knew it was a history book, and despite not understanding it, it still seemed interesting. Suddenly, a whirling spiral appeared in front of me, and the moment I looked up, the same voice returned. It let me know what happened in the cave and who last walked into the cave. I stepped on the spiral and I was spinning off the ground and when I dropped down, I ended up in a different place.

It was the edge of the oasis, where I first started, but a big monk was sitting beside the oasis, and I observed what was happening. After some time, I understood that this was the past, like what the voice said in the cave.

“There we go! Finally, water, water, water.”

The monk's grumbling voice echoed into the loneliness of the night in the dark desert. This was the oasis on the Silk Road through China. The monk looked into the cave and gasped. He said in his deep voice, "Wow."

The monk goes into the cave, and wonders aloud, "What is this?"

I realized this is the place just outside the cave! I wanted to smash my notebook down and cross my arms because I wasn't the first one to discover this. The excitement washed off me and I felt a sense of anger rise in my body. I wasn't the first one here... no more becoming famous. No more going on television. No more earning money. Ugh! It was so unfair!

I followed the monk in, trailing behind him into the darkness of the cave where I had just gone. I wanted to ask the voice who had brought me in how I had entered this memory, and what this was for? All the surroundings were the same. Both of us heard the same sound, but the riddle was different. He asked the voice about getting his things back, travelling back in time, wanting his temple back because he got angry and broke it himself. But the voice said NOTHING could be done, and that he couldn't change what had already happened.

As the voice said this, I understood that I should think about the present and the future more, because we cannot change what we have done.

Like the same feeling as the start, I zoomed back into the cave and I was back to reality. The voice said, "So you see, that vision was not to tell you what had happened, but it was telling you that you can do nothing about the past."

I gasped; this was a life lesson all along. I realized that I should change myself.

The next day. I went to the same place again with my friends. They were very excited and told their friends, and their friends told their friends until the Mogao Grottoes became a famous tourist attraction. But nobody knew that it all started from the monk, who first discovered this cave, and it has been untouched for more than a millennium.

The Hidden Buddha

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Li, Felicia – 9

In the midst of the Gobi Desert, there was a man called Haoyue who was exploring the Dunhuang Mogao Caves for his presentation in college. He explored the caves one by one. But after a long time, he wanted to give up because he couldn't find any interesting cave paintings. When he finally arrived at what felt like the hundredth cave, he wondered if he should have done this topic for his presentation at all!

"I'll just have to tell Mr. Johnson I can't find anything interesting here..." Haoyue said to himself as he walked into the cave.

He couldn't focus much either because so far, he couldn't even get any information out of all those cave paintings! Inside the cave, he still saw many sculptures and random tri-colored paintings. Just as Haoyue was about to leave, he saw a small lizard stuck under a rock. He felt bad for the lizard as it looked like it was trapped under that rock and couldn't move. Therefore, he tried to lift the rock up, but it was unexpectedly heavy.

He kicked the rock, but that only made his foot hurt. Then, out of the corner of his eyes, he saw a spear leaning against the wall. Inspired by the knowledge he had learnt in physics class, he instantly ran over to the spear and grabbed it. He knew that he had to stick the spear head under the rock and take another stone as support and leverage in order for his plan to work. He pressed and pushed on the spear to move the rock inch by inch, finally he freed the lizard!

Suddenly, a ray of light blinded Haoyue, and a Buddha appeared in front of him. Haoyue had to pinch himself several times to make sure he wasn't dreaming. After a few seconds, the Buddha broke the silence.

"Hello young man," said the Buddha, "thank you for freeing me after all these years of being trapped under this rock as a lizard! All that was caused by the evil sorcerer from old times..."

"Wow! So you're saying that an evil sorcerer turned you into a lizard, then trapped you under a rock?" Haoyue asked. He was very curious.

"Yes, that's right, but the rock was cursed to be heavy, so good job on using the spear to help! I have been stuck here for two hundred years already, and I'd probably still be stuck if it weren't for you!" The Buddha told Haoyue, sounding very relieved that someone came to free him at last.

"Two hundred years! That's a long time, my grandpa's grandpa wasn't even born back then!" Haoyue exclaimed, drinking in every single word the Buddha was saying.

"Yes, but thank you for freeing me. I bless you with great success in your studies and I hope you keep on being a kind man!"

"Thank you, by the way, do you mind if you share some stories with me about the Mogao Caves? My task is to collect information about Buddhas and the Mogao cave paintings!"

"Of course! I'd be glad to!" The Buddha replied, chuckling.

As the Buddha told the stories about the Mogao Cave paintings, Haoyue took very detailed notes; he was fascinated by the stories he heard from the Buddha. There were some about animal hunting, and some about old mighty emperors. All dating back to more than a century ago. They chatted for a long time, and after a few hours, the Buddha said, "It was great talking to you, young man. But I'm afraid it is getting late, and you should get back before it gets dark. Good luck on your presentation and farewell."

"Thank you! Oh and one last thing, do you mind if I take a photo of us together?" asked Haoyue.

“What’s a photo?” The Buddha asked.

“Umm... well maybe you can think about it as modern day magic! We use it to store people's memories! Just like the paintings here that record the history. And I would like to keep my memory with you and remember it forever.” Haoyue explained.

“Sure! Let’s do the photo thing then!”

After taking the photo, the Buddha waved his hand, and another ray of light shone warmly around Haoyue and in an instant, he was back in his hotel room. To make sure it wasn’t a dream, he flipped open his notepad. And there it was, the notes he had taken back in the cave along with the photo of the Buddha and himself!

“I’m glad that it wasn’t just a dream. I was looking for the history of the Buddhas, but I actually met the Buddha himself!” Haoyue thought happily to himself. It was certainly a very interesting experience and he was very grateful for the Buddha’s help.

One week later, it was Haoyue's big day. It was his turn to present. Thanks to the help of his notes, Haoyue made a wonderful presentation! He also shared his experience and adventures with his teacher and classmates as they were very interested to hear his discoveries. In the end, Mr. Johnson gave him an A+ and even put his presentation slides on the school website!

Haoyue was thrilled at this honor and of course, he never forgot the Buddha that had helped him to accomplish all this. So on every Buddha’s Birthday, Haoyue always goes back to the same cave he rescued the Buddha from to pay his respects.

Travis And The Awakening Of Herobrine

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Qin, Winston – 10

The year 2134

My weird nightmare started like this. (Well, maybe that was just a dream, not a nightmare.)

I was dreaming of a big red monster with only one eye, sitting in a dark cave, and reading the scroll of immortality. Totally weird enough. There were also a lot of weapons like swords, knives, arrows, spears, lances, and almost every kind of weapon you know in ancient times. (I guess you will go “Duh!”)

Suddenly there was a trapdoor opened. (I never noticed that trapdoor.) Another red monster with one eye climbed up from the trapdoor. (Which is hidden) Then a third, then a fourth. Then I realized that this was an army of big red monsters.

Then they lunged at me and then....

My dream shifted into something else.

My dark, red eyes were opening, and I sat up from my bed in Manhattan. I am Travis, and I live in the year 2134. At that time there was only Manhattan in the US, no other states. So the capital is Manhattan and it is just a small island. I looked at my clock. Five minutes! I had to go to professor Herobrine’s ancient history lesson. (Don’t ask why) We were going to the Mogao Grottoes in Gansu, China. Now it was only five minutes left to get to the airport. I rushed to the front porch, turned on my hoverboard, (Remember, past beings, this is the future!), and hovered to the airport in two minutes.

Everyone was waiting there. Professor Herobrine said, “Everyone please go and boards the plane! We are already full of people!” Then we hopped on and took off.

Everyone on the plane was chatting about the Mogao Caves in Gansu. Even I was excited. This was going to be perhaps the best trip ever! (Totally not, we will get to that later.) There might be ancient scrolls. (With bizarre poems) There were a lot of ancient things there. Each painting stands for a small story. I thought about a big rich, but rude emperor sitting on his luxurious golden throne. (Waste of money)

Meanwhile, the flight attendant passed out lunches for the passengers.

I think that it is western food like I used to eat, but...(Yeah, it’s Gansu Food.)

A Few Moments Later

It was time for us to parachute off the airplane. (I wonder how people used planes in the past.)

As soon as we reached land, we booked a hotel. It’s a one million trillion zillion gazillion octillion decillion star hotel.

When we got to our rooms, this was like a new home for us. A living room, bedrooms, bathrooms, and so much more.

Me and George (One of my friends) had to share a room. (Argh) George staggered into his bed. (Cus he is tired) and started to doze off.

Suddenly Professor Herobrine boomed, “It is time to go!” Everyone started stumbling along with the steps to the lobby, following him. He led us to a bus stop. We boarded a bus and the bus took off.

We finally got to the Mogao Caves. It was huge! Holes lined the yellow mountain (or dune, I'm not sure). We looked at sculptures and paintings. And also, Professor Herobrine said that these sculptures were once alive before. Huh, I didn't believe that. And that's when the most amazing thing in the whole entire world in a million dillion zillion trillion billion hundred years happened. (That's when it started to go straight down)

One of the sculptures came alive. It was a statue of a warrior. It swung its sword and ran out. Another statue came alive and the statue was a monster (Well, at least it LOOKED like a monster.) Then those two started dueling with their swords. All the valuable things (Or stuff) in the Mogao Caves had come alive.

I took some random sword (That still looked quite new) from the cabinet and slashed at the evil monster statues that tried to kick my gut. George grabbed another random spear (Which also looked quite new) and struck an evil spirit statue. (Great move) We hopped to the rooftop. Professor Herobrine smiled. His eyes turned glowing red, then white. He flew to the tower, and I realized his true identity. (I heard that this Herobrine guy appears in a video game in the past called Minecraft – I wonder what it would be like?)

Next, stone towers rose, circling us. We hopped from tower to tower dodging his attacks. (I have kung fu class, you know.) The stone towers can move diagonally, trying to smash us in the back of our butt. We managed to dodge some of his attacks, but in the end, we got tired of it. "HA! YOU WILL NEVER RISE! YOU DON'T KNOW WHO I REALLY AM! I AM HEROBRINE, DA EVIL SOURCE OF DEPRESSION AND SADNESS!" YOU WILL NEVER SUCCEED." Herobrine said. The stone towers faded.

I grabbed my sword. George raised his spear. Those two weapons are gleaming with blue light. Next, the towers rose again. (I knew it, plus, Herobrine's eyes are still shining white) (I guess he is becoming a bit like Entity 303) We squinted in all directions, dodging the mighty smash on top of the Mogao Caves. If we continue like that, the Mogao Caves will be crushed. All of the valuable stuff from history will be gone. So George and I loaded up our last of our parachutes and flew off the caves. Herobrine lunged at us.

Herobrine started to get annoyed. A big radioactive wave shot out like a ring from his body. Of course, we dodged it. EVERYONE dodged it. Herobrine was so angry he released all his power and then...

Bang! I woke up at the airport. Ahhhhh! I missed the flight! That was all a dream? The guy next to me, who is reading the book MN0087, said, "You slept for forty hours." What??

Uh Oh...

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sutherland, Sophie – 11

“Well, that will be the end of the story!” Mum said, “But I want you to tell me another story! Please!” I groaned, my mother looked at me with her sweet and charming smile, and whispered, “I’m sorry, but the mogao caves will have to wait till tomorrow.” Ughhhhh! One story wouldn’t hurt!” “Lila, the world is filled with amazing and fascinating things, and one of them is patience, so wait till tomorrow, and you will get your wish.” As she got off my bed I rolled my eyes, I just don’t understand why she couldn’t tell me another story. I turned my back to my mother as she walked out of my room and bid me goodnight. I waited until she was in her bedroom. As I heard the door lock, I slowly crept over to my desk, ready to grasp my mothers book. I had to see what other stories would spark my imagination, Creek! Creek! I winced my eyes as the floor slowly quieted down, the world seemed to be disappearing, but suddenly, I heard my mum’s footsteps coming towards my room, like a giant stomping across the forest, ready to attack. I knew i was supposed to be on my bed sleeping, so I grabbed my mothers book and bounced onto the bed just in time for my mum to think i was sleeping soundly, dreaming of the mogao caves and its beauty, it was truly easy to feign sleep, i just had to close my eyes and pretend to go to sleep, but it was quite hard to stay awake.

My arms suddenly felt weird and numb, like a thousand ants were crawling around me. The book was still right next to me, but I was too tired to open it, too tired to move. I closed my eyes and let the world drift away....

I felt like I was falling into a well, but when I opened my eyes, the atmosphere seemed different. I realized that I was still holding my mothers book. I heard footsteps, I hid behind the door, then i heard someone say “I swear I heard someone here, thought it was a thief coming.” My heart was pounding now, i had no idea where i was, or maybe the question is when am i? As I looked out the window I saw people sitting on the sand drinking from goblets, holding gold coins.

I ran up to someone walking my way, looked at what they were wearing and realized what had occurred, I HAD TIME TRAVELLED BACK TO WHEN THE MOGAO CAVES WERE BUILT! My eyes looked like they were going to pop out, my jaw was about to hit the floor. The monk looked at me strangely and walked away whispering “*What is going on today?*” I opened the book to see where I was, remembering that my mother had told me she had a map inside the book. But which page? When I opened the book, I had expected pages and pages of stories, but instead I had found pages and pages of wordings and pictures of strange beings, but the pages never stopped! All the pictures and notings all seemed familiar, as I flipped through the pages I saw that it created a flipbook with a letter on each page spelling out: PRINCESS PINGYANG. My mind was confused and blown away at the same time, why did my mother have a spelling of princess pingyang? Was she Princess Pingyang? But how was she still alive? It happened so long ago! As I looked around I spotted my Mother! I knew my chances were bad but perhaps I could work this out.

But before I get distracted, I had to go find my mothers doppelganger, so I sprinted across the road and ran up to her, “Princess Pingyang, I’m your daughter, I’m from the future, i have no idea how you are still alive but, all i know is that you have to get me out of here and back to where i belong.” “I *am* Princess Pingyang, how on earth do you know, and I am supposed to be your mother! And you’re from the future! That’s just complete nonsense!” My face was filled with disappointment, but I opened her book and flipped through the book looking for the word time. When I found it, my face was lit with joy, I skimmed through but nothing helped, I was standing there like someone who had been rejected badly. I knew that I had to continue, so I pushed it in my mothers face and she snatched it from my hand looking utterly disappointed, “Where did you get this? And even if you were my daughter I would not have taught her to steal from people!” “Please! Please! I know that I don’t seem like your daughter but you’re the only one that can help!” Her face of anger and confusion slowly faded away and made a gesture to me to follow her.

This was my only chance, she pointed towards the entrance of the mogao caves and I followed her inside, when I first stepped inside, the paintings and statues were extraordinary, I had this feeling when I stepped in, I felt like a new person, i felt like i was reborn, a flashback of my mother telling me about the magic in the caves came flooding back,

but i was starting to get old. But now I understood what the magic was, my mother was talking about how the paintings and sculptures were like magic. I knew why people adored the mogao caves, but most importantly, if my mother was the princess and could see the mogao caves and do extraordinary things with it, I would have those too! If me and my mother worked together to bring me back home, it would work. When we finally reached the last cave, my legs were like jello, but I had been distracted by the beauty of the mogao caves, I didn't really care! My mother gestured at me to go and stand in the middle of the room, and then tapped my forehead gently and felt the world drift away....

As I fell asleep I slowly rolled over and realized I was back in my bedroom, and it was already morning! I heard my mother calling for me, so I packed my bags and rushed onto the bus. Even though I barely got any sleep, I was wide awake from what I had seen! I could only think about the mogao caves! When I came back home, I decided to tell the story this time, but halfway through the story my mum looked pretty surprised about what was coming out of my mouth, but everything worked out perfectly fine.

Value

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sze, Yuen Hei Kristen – 11

My feet sank under the sand, well beneath what I could see, with every step that I took. Every second, my journey got harder. I had run out of water a long time ago, and my lips were cracking and bleeding. Dehydration made the world spin. My brain screamed at me to stop, to give up, to pass into a blissful, endless sleep. I refused. I was nearly there, the treasures in the Mogao Grottoes so close I could practically feel their presence, calling me, inviting me in. Just a few more steps.

I fell against a wall, legs buckling from exhaustion. My eyes closed and I took a few deep breaths. My map had been blown away, and I wasn't sure if this was the correct spot. If it was, then lucky me. If it wasn't, I'd just have to continue the next day, assuming I survived until then. Curling into a comfortable position, I ignored the small pebbles falling onto me and the grainy sand grinding against my skin. Sleep didn't come easily, but when it did I was incredibly thankful.

I dreamt about being in the rain, which was a nice change from the harsh heat of the desert, until the small droplets of water started to hurt, striking me hard. My eyes flew open and I snapped back to reality. Pebbles were falling everywhere, dislodging from the fragile wall, and they were rapidly getting larger in size.

I ran away from the wall, but something caught my eye. I saw something glint near a nearby rock. It was risky, I knew, but I couldn't resist checking it out. The treasures promised in the Mogao Grottoes was temptation sweet as honey, and I couldn't stop myself from sprinting back to them.

Just as I thought, there was a hole in the wall that the fallen stones had covered. It was so small that my underfed body could just fit through. As soon as I had wriggled through, I gasped. The cavern was massive, and sitting in front of me was a Buddha statue with years worth of dirt and grime covering the surface in layers. I didn't understand. The legend of the Mogao Grottoes told of treasures beyond compare. When I made the journey out here to the desert, I was expecting diamonds, rubies, gold, jewelry, all of that and more! Was I in the wrong place?

I ran my hand along the cavern wall and some dirt came off, allowing me to see beneath the earthy layer. Pictures and scriptures covered most of where I touched. The wall paintings had probably been there for very long and were preserved quite well, but I didn't see why they were important. Some pictures depicted various versions of Buddha, dressed in elegant outfits from ancient times, hands held together sitting on clouds. As I moved further into the cavern, I realized the wall paintings were neverending and extended towards the inner chambers. I didn't know why but a sense of calm and tranquility was building up within my heart as I moved closer to the inner chamber. My thirst for treasure was somehow dampened.

One would think that it would be completely dark within the cave, but there was natural light filtering in through from somewhere above illuminating the dark space. For a minute, I thought it might have been the halo of the Buddhas around me, guiding me. I reached the inner chamber, closing my eyes as I entered, certain that this was where the treasure was. All the suffering I had been through would be worth it. I opened my eyes slowly, ready to be dazzled with shining treasures. But what I saw was not treasure.

Laying in an untidy pile were well-preserved scrolls lightly scented with the typical ceremonial incense among other religious instruments. I passed a big statue of a sleeping Buddha and unconsciously sat next to it. I was surprised, not by the fact that there was no treasure, but that I wasn't disappointed. Yesterday, I would have considered the sleeping Buddha a useless piece of rock, but looking at it more closely, I felt unexpectedly calm and an indescribable feeling of fulfillment filled my heart. To me right now, this statue was a masterpiece. Over time, the statue had clearly aged, but at this moment, I felt the craftsmen's sincerity and couldn't deny my admiration. I had an urge to join the statue, to just lay on the ground next to it.

As I laid down, I pondered why I came here in the first place. Blinded by greed, I lived a life of decadence. I was hungry and thirsty, and my greed would be the cause of my demise, stuck in this cave for eternity.

Something caught my eye. One of the Sleeping Buddha's fingers was missing: it must have broken off over the years. I saw it lying near me. It was pointing towards the wall within the inner cave. I instinctively got up and headed towards that area.

There was a small opening in the wall and the stones were loose. Removing the rocks, I entered another corridor. It wasn't long until I reached an exit. In front of me outside of the cave was an oasis, with crystal clear water and lush vegetation. The evening light of the sun shone down onto the lake, only to reflect back at me, the surface of the water glittering.

Thank you, Buddha, I thought, You've taught me that the art pieces and scrolls can teach me a lot about history, and the importance of history and culture. I've realized that the knowledge we can gain from those, from the Mogao Grottoes and its library on the walls, was the real treasure here.

My eyes fluttered open and I pushed myself up. My arms had been laying on a textbook, flipped open to a page in the middle.

Value

noun. the importance, worth, or usefulness of something.

A True Treasure, A True Adventure

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Tan, Liya – 11

Lucy is a smart schoolgirl that lives in China. She is a total teacher's pet but has lots of friends. Seth, on the other hand, is a pure math genius but is the worst at every other subject. To both of the children, weekends were the best days of the week because it gave you extra time to study or play. This week, they were each reading a history book that they found in the local library. Suddenly, as they were reading it, a bright, sparkly light swallowed them up, then spat them out in the middle of a dark, dank cave. The history book sat in front of them.

The book started furiously flipping through its pages. When it stopped, there were words writing itself onto the page. *You are in the Mogao Grottoes, the 420th cell. You will be transported to the first cell shortly after to begin your journey.* Suddenly, the book started to flip through its pages again.

Finally, the book calmed and lightly flipped one more page for Lucy to see. It was a tiny footnote. *There is a treasure yet to be found in the Mogao Grottoes. The original creators of the Mogao Caves hid it, waiting for one worthy of inheriting the Mogao Caves. Pass the tests of discovery, bravery, and adventure, and you will find the treasure. Somewhere.*

Then, words started forming, tinier and tinier under the footnote. *Look to the end of ends, look in between, look at the front and the start, but only one will help you discover.*

"Oh!" Lucy gasped. This must be the way to the discovery test..."

"Or it could already be the discovery test!" Seth finished with a smile.

Once again, a sparkly light swallowed them up and spat them out in another cave. "This must be the first cell," Lucy said.

"Yep, it is! "Come on, I think I already know the answer to the riddle, and it's not here. Follow me!"

As Seth animatedly raced through the tunnels, barely dodging the artworks, Lucy gasped and panted as she hurried along behind him. "Where are you... going? How are you not tired?!"

"You see, the riddle says that we have to look at the front, the back, and in between. We've already looked at the back; we came in at the 420th cell but there was nothing there, then we got transported to the first cell, and there was nothing there as well. So all we have to do now is find the in between, otherwise the middle. And 420 divided by 2 is 210! So we're heading to the 210th cell."

"Since when were you a math genius and a riddle genius?" Lucy snickered.

Surprisingly, Seth knew this place better than Lucy did. "I thought this was your first time here?" Lucy asked.

"Oh, I have more connections with this place than you think..." He replied with a sly smile. Suddenly, he turned red as a tomato. "I shouldn't have said that—" He muttered to himself. "My secret almost saw the light of day..."

"Secret? What secret?"

Seth shook his head. "It's nothing. Oh look, we're here!"

Indeed, they were standing right in front of the 210th cell. But unlike the other ordinary cells, instead of art, there was a singular, metal door with no handle and no hinges. Suddenly, the floor started rumbling. *You have completed the discovery test. Now it is time for the test of bravery.* A voice said. Cracks appeared through the ground that had so faithfully held them steadily under its grasp. Before Seth or Lucy could even move, the ground gave away, and they fell into darkness.

They woke to the sound of footsteps. Eyes fluttering open, a stone ceiling stretched over them. Seth sat up first. Then Lucy. A shadow stood over them. They both gawked at the person for different reasons. He had gigantic buttocks, a pear shaped body and a Budha shaped head.

"Oh my goodness! Grandfather, is that you?!" Seth gasped.

“Yes, it’s me, but only my spirit. And I’m afraid your secret that you hid for so long is now uncovered.” The stranger made a swift gesture at Lucy.

Lucy goggled at Seth. “Your secret’s that you have a grandfather?”

He sighed. “It’s much deeper than that. You see... My grandfather’s the monk that started the Mogao Grottoes. That’s why I know this place so well— it’s like some of his knowledge was passed to me. Even when it was my first time here, I knew every single path and exit.”

“But none of that matters now. My time here’s limited,” The monk said sharply. “You have just passed all three tests. Therefore—”

“But—” Seth interrupted, “We only finished the discovery test! What about bravery and adventure?”

Lucy was having this thought too. Pondering it over, something in her brain clicked. “I think I got it! Was the bravery test not running away from the tests and the adventure basically our entire trip through the caves?”

The monk beamed at her. “Yes, that’s right. But that is not important either. I have come to reveal the treasure, so—”

“Woah, stop right there,” Seth interrupted. “If you’re going to give us the treasure, then where’s the treasure chest?”

“If you keep interrupting me, we’ll get nowhere and you won’t even get the treasure! So shut up, will you? Anyway, the treasure is not related to riches. Money can’t buy you happiness. Love can, friends can, and so much more! You don’t need money to get happiness. So that’s why the treasure I will give you is a lesson. Always do what you want to do. Be happy. And just trust the fact that you can be happy. This journey has surely taught you that. Now...”

The monk waved his hands around in a pattern, and a familiar book glowed with the same sparkly light Lucy had seen the first time she travelled into the book. Now Lucy knew it was time to do that again, and go home.

“Goodbye...” Lucy whispered.

Seth and his grandfather both smiled back at her, great, loving smiles that filled her heart up with love. Now she understood the true meaning of the monk’s lesson. *It is a great treasure.* As the light slowly swallowed her up, Lucy responded with a matching smile towards Seth and the monk. And the last thing she saw was a family that she had just accepted herself into— and the family that had just accepted themselves into hers. True happiness comes with love, after all.

Secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Tsao, Joshua – 9

“The Mogao Grottoes have been rediscovered!” newsboys hollered at men hurrying to work. When Thomas heard this, he called a cab excitedly as he thought: Mogao Grottoes! I cannot believe I am going there! Let’s just hope that Atlas doesn’t show up again to steal the treasures... Soon the cab came, and he told the cabbie to drive him home at the speed of light for double pay.

At home, he grabbed a sword, a cloak, and the book his father had about the Mogao Grottoes. Childhood memories of his father telling him about Mogao Grottoes flooded his mind. Thomas remembered his father used to tell him that there was a great library within Mogao Grottoes, and that it stored many paintings, scrolls and sculptures which would be priceless and teach us wisdom of their times. His father used to spend all his free time reading and researching the lost Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, and always hoped to visit it one day.

Thomas hopped on his coach, patted the horses. He cried “Mogao Grottoes, here we come!” It was already late at night when Thomas arrived at the boundaryless desert, it must be the Gobi desert in front of him, he believed. Thomas decided to rest for the night as it was getting too dark to continue. Though Thomas felt nervous in this deadly quiet desert, he felt excited as he was one step closer in fulfilling his father’s dream.

Without much sleep, Thomas woke up early to continue his journey. Not far ahead he saw many pillar-like structures so he quickly looked it up in his book, and lo! It was a stupa! A sign read: Meditation. This must be where monks did their spiritual meditation, assumed Thomas. He hopped off the coach and studied at the stupa closely which was covered in runes. Thomas rode forwards through the desert until he saw a hint of a river near a cliff. Carved into the cliff was a temple-like structure. He rode until the structure near the river was in full sight. “Is that the Mogao Grottoes?” Thomas shouted.

“I must be seeing things.” muttered Thomas.

He rubbed his eyes several times and saw that it had a temple-like design. Each of the floors got smaller and smaller. This indeed was the Mogao Grottoes just like how it was described in the books. The Mogao Grottoes towered over his coach as he rode forwards. Thomas pushed open the door lightly and the door creaked on its thousand-year-old hinges. He cautiously stepped into the musty caves and saw a little cave under a trapdoor that was poorly hidden. He tiptoed in and saw a shirt of glittering chainmail, a cloak, and a longsword in a gleaming scabbard with gems embedded on its scabbard and hilt. The hilt was jet black with a ring of silver which separated half of the hilt with the other half. That was the fabled Lightbringer, thought Thomas. Legend has it that it was lost when its previous owner fell in battle. He put on the shirt of the mail, cast off his old cloak and sword, put on the new cloak, and hung Lightbringer on his glittering belt.

Thomas climbed up a ladder and found himself in a room. In the room were racks and racks of countless manuscripts, paintings, sculptures that were encased in countless layers of dust. They had a musty smell to it, as if it had not been cleaned for eternity. On the walls, he grabbed a burnt out torch and lit it. As he tiptoed around the room, he tripped over something. He looked down. A skeleton stared at him with empty sockets. This must be the Library room, Thomas thought. He continued to wave his torch around. Suddenly, Thomas noticed a stone tablet sticking out of the wall completely covered in dust. He brushed away the dust with his hand and on it was written, “Be kind to others, be kind to yourself.” This must be the secret that my father told me about! Thomas took the tablet and left.

When Thomas was about to leave the Library Room, he was shocked to see a familiar silhouette standing there. It was Atlas! My nemesis, thought Thomas. Atlas bore a sword in a black sheath with pieces of amethyst embedded on the sheath and pommel. “Darkbringer.” gasped Thomas. “Give me that tablet or die! I WANT THAT TREASURE!!!” cried Atlas. “You’ll have to pry it from my cold dead hands!” cried Thomas. Thomas drew Lightbringer and Atlas did the same. Atlas leaped at Thomas, and Thomas parried. Thomas slashed wildly at Atlas but Atlas deflected and knocked Lightbringer out of his hand. As Atlas strode quickly towards him with Darkbringer

in his hand, Thomas rolled away, snatched up Lightbringer, and parried the attack. The blow knocked Atlas's sword out of his hand, and Atlas drew a long knife. Atlas stabbed Thomas, and the blade scored a hit on his left shoulder. Thomas cried in pain, but managed to raise Lightbringer. And with a swift, but sure stroke, clove off Atlas's head, and all went black...

When he woke up, he was lying on the floor of the Library Room. He looked around and saw a notched knife and Darkbringer. It was the knife Atlas wielded. Thomas snatched the knife and peered at it. "How did Atlas get this dangerous artifact?" muttered Thomas. He couldn't feel his left arm. He rushed out with the tablet heeding nothing, for he had to get home. He ran out of the Mogao Grottoes and leaped on his coach. He whipped his horse and they rode home.

The next day, Thomas went to the museum and donated the tablet to the museum. A few weeks later, he got a letter inviting him to lead the expedition to the Yellow Mountains. Thomas snatched his newfound Lightbringer, mailshirt, and cloak. He then sprang onto his steed and rode off into his next adventure...

Legend of Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Wang, Ellie – 10

In a peaceful village in Dunhuang, lived a kind 12 year old girl named Mei. She was as pretty as a flower, she loved reading fairytales.

One night, Mei was sitting on her bed and reading a book named The Legends Of Mogao Grottoes, when she thought she noticed one of the rabbits move. Then suddenly the tree swayed, the pages were alive! Mei started rapidly flipping through the rusty yellow pages of this old fairytale. To her surprise, all the pages were alive, words were falling down the pages like tiny parachutes, the pictures were like videos, playing in front of her eyes. “No! This is a dream.” she told herself again and again trying to steady her thoughts at the same time. Just then, Mei looked around her surroundings “W—what?” she mumbled confusingly as she looked around. The world was turning hazy, blurry, then. . . it went black. Everything was quiet. A bird flew by the window, then away into the grey night sky.

An hour later, Mei opened her eyes. A bald man was standing before her, she sat up as quickly as she could. Everything but her surroundings were the same. She was still in her pink PJs, her gold clip and her book in her hands, but giant trees were surrounding her, sand on her hair, in her mouth.

“Bleh!” Mei half coughed, spitting out the sand. She quickly stood up and stared at the man “ Excuse me, who are you?” said the man suspiciously. Mei was confused and scared, she stared at the man and the man stared at her. “ Oh my god! What is happening to me?” Mei thought as she blinked blankly at the man. Wait a second, this man looked familiar.

Mei thought, she thought and thought, then her eyes met the cover of the fairytale she was holding in her hands. She knew. She knew what had happened to her, who the man was and where this place is. She knew it all.

She was in her book. The man standing in front of her was one of the monks that built the famous buddhist artwork. The actual Mogao Grottoes!

“Excuse me?” came a voice. Mei steadied her thoughts and started explaining why or how she was here. Half an hour past, an hour past Mei finally finished explaining – how she got whisked away to this place. Even though Mei herself didn’t really understand how the magical book had somehow transported her here. Now she definitely wanted to know all about the Mogao Grottoes.

Days passed as Mei became good friends with this buddhist. During these days, Mei inspired the buddhist to build the Mogao Grottoes, they worked together, designed the building, told each other jokes. . . “This structure should have 500 temples!” “It shall be the most beautiful extraordinary structure ever made by monks!” They happily discussed their brilliant ideas. As days passed, the buddhist and his friends kept working on this magnificent structure.

But as time went by, Mei started missing her family and friends, she was homesick! She started getting worried, she wondered if she could ever see her family and friends, Mei was determined to find a way out of this.

In the following days, Mei tried to find ways to get back to her village. She would spend days flipping through the book, staring at the foggy sky. The monks noticed Mei becoming depressed day by day, they tried to encourage her but they knew something was wrong. As days turned into weeks, Mei grew skinnier and skinnier, she refused to eat, usually she’d spend her time sitting under a tree.

Just sitting there and staring blankly at the layers of sand swirling in front of her. Mei had lost hope of going back home, meeting her friends and family again, all she knew was that she was going to be trapped in this dynasty for her life. The monks tried to be helpful by giving her some personal space, but they knew nothing could give hope to Mei.

Until one day the monks finally had enough of this depression, they marched up to Mei and dragged her into the tent the monks shared, they forced her to eat and drink, they tried to tell jokes but nothing made Mei smile, Mei was too broken to do that, her family and friends meant everything to her and nothing can make her smile if she couldn't see them anymore.

The monks were stumped, they wanted to help Mei but didn't know how. That night when one of the monks was just getting ready for bed "ping!" Something fell down beside him. The monk turned around, then he just stared. The object was tiny, but it was absolutely magnificent. The smooth side of the round sphere, the golden light it let out blinded.

"Oh my gods!" the monk exclaimed, the monk suddenly noticed a note beside the object, on it was the most perfect handwriting one could do. On the paper wrote: "As shiny as the sun, as precious as gold, for the sweet girl as pretty as a flower."

The monk knew this was god's work, god wanted this object to be delivered to Mei. He quickly jogged to Mei's privy chamber, Mei was there weeping silently, when Mei noticed the monk was there, she quickly steadied herself. "Oh my dearest Mei, I believe this is for you!" The monk slowly held out his shaking hand to Mei.

"Oh why is it magnificent, why don't you keep it?" Mei asked.

"Mei sweetheart, god purposely delivered this to you and you only you shall take it. Mei gave in and took the tiny sphere from the monk's hand, suddenly golden light slowly sprinkled down on her body, Mei noticed the book of the Mogao Grottoes flying up from the light, the golden light wrapped the book like a cocoon. After a few moments of complete silence, the cocoon burst as specks of gold covered Mei. There in front of her was another unfamiliar book, the title of the book was "A complete guide to the village of Dunhuang!" Mei was overwhelmed with tears, she thought about all the fairytales she read, thought of all the memories with her family and monks. She held out her shaking finger and pointed at the book "I wish to go there!" Mei stammered half croaking out the sentence.

The next moment, Mei was back in the village, on her bed. She sat up and stared, pinching herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming "I'm back!" Mei said to herself in fluent Chinese. She bounced with joy. Mei suddenly realised how tired she was so she curled up on her bed and slept like a baby. P

Beyond the Mysteries of Ancient Heritages

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Wong, Leah – 11

The top of the cave shines like the starry night sky, as this fellow traveller stares, as he knows that his life is coming to an end. This traveller had explored and found numerous secrets upon his search, but no one knows. He had kept it a secret for his whole life, and never told a soul. But of course, he would not want these secrets to go to waste, because he had spent his whole life searching. He knew these secrets couldn't fall into the wrong hands, this extraordinary information could make a whole difference to the world, he could succeed, gain money and afford countless things. And so he decided to hide the secrets in a letter. He grabbed a bowl and what looked like a berry out of his pocket and squeezed the juice out of the berry and into the bowl. Then he finally begins to write on a thin piece of wood with his finger. – year 350

1,467 years later...

I opened my diary, which is a collection of thin parchment, and was about to write the date. Then I asked myself "What's the date again?" I recovered my memory and realised that the date was the year 1817, March 18. I turned to Noah to see how he's doing. But as always, he acted like a couch potato and was slouching on a sheepskin chair, and I was sitting on the weak wooden chair. My back is sore, but it was all I got. Then I told Noah "Hey bro, we are visiting the Mogao Grottoes today!" But there was no big reaction. It seemed like Noah won't do any packing, so I'll have to do the work. I had no choice so I rushed to the living room and borrowed one of mom's big cloth and placed the following items on it: A gas lamp, a med-kit and extra and warmer clothes made by mom. I was panting by the end of preparing my stuff and my brother's stuff, and I was exhausted and ended up collapsing onto the floor. A few minutes later, we left the house to go to the Mogao Grottoes.

We all entered the Mogao Grottoes, holding our gas lamps. I examined the Buddha art painted on the walls, wondering how people were able to do these extraordinary things. Some I liked were the 2 giant sculptures that represent Maitreya Buddha. They were ginormous in person! I took out my dairy and started sketching out the stunning sculpture. Next we found the monk's room. It was an undecorated plain cave room and all the walls were concrete grey coloured. We moved on to even more art, and all of them were unique in their own way.

Then, the cave started to rumble. Rocks crumbled and fell to the ground like threatening rain, about to hit me and my family. Noah tackled me and moved me away from the fall. Dust flew everywhere, I couldn't see anything. Noah and I were coughing. I asked "Is everyone alright?". The only response I hear is from Noah. There were no signs of mom and dad. When me and Noah finally opened our eyes, we discovered that we've been separated from mom and dad by a wall of rocks. I turned to Noah and took a glance at his leg. Blood trickled down his right leg, slowly touching the ground. I cried "Are you okay? Can you walk?" Noah panted "I'm alright, just give me a lift please." Before I could do anything I grabbed the med-kit and immediately wrapped a small cloth around the wound. "Thanks, sis" he said. "You're welcome!" I replied.

We turned around the corner of the route, and heard a slither... I turned back but there was nothing there. I continued on the path and the sound of the slithering was louder. I turned back again. And a shadow appeared. Whatever it was, it came closer to me and Noah. I got a glimpse of it and I swore it was orange. And in a book, orange reptiles and insects are usually poisonous. "RUN!" I shouted. We both ran like a cheetah. I was curious to know what it was so I turned back again. But the creature was not only ONE, but there were FOUR. I ran while looking back, and the figure of the creature was a long straw-like shape. It was a snake.

When we finally got rid of the snake, we found ourselves in a room full of paintings on the wall. We stared at the paintings in awe, hoping for a miracle to happen, but nothing changed. We were stuck in a room, with no parents and nowhere to go. We moved from every side to corner, checking every single painting. Then Noah suddenly asked, "What's this stuff?". He pointed to a small golden handle at the very corner of the room. I pulled the handle carefully, resulting in a drawer. Inside the drawer was a note. The note was in an envelope and it was begging me to open it. It read:

Dear Traveller,

You are about to uncover the secrets of this cave...

From long ago, I have found this riddle. But it has never been solved. I hope you find good use of it.

On the day the moon turns bloody red,
Can see those who they love and are dead.
Just say the names of those you want to meet,
And they will all appear for you to greet!

From: _____

I looked around, but there was only me and Noah. Who would write a letter about a riddle? It made me confused. But Noah exclaimed, "Wow! What a surprise. Can we actually meet those who are dead?!" Although I was a little disappointed, I realised that the time I spent with Noah was important, not the prize.

10 years later...

The top of the cave shines like the starry night sky, as we stare upon it. We grabbed a bowl of ink, and finally wrote the answer to the riddle: Sometime in November, there will be the Blood moon. On that day, if you say out all of the names of the people you would like to meet, they will appear in the room where we found the letter. But there's something, something we never checked yet... I grabbed the note and opened it. My eyes flicked to the end of the note. It showed:

From: Cheung Li Fu

"Wait... Isn't this one of our ancestors from the family tree we made?!" I blurted out.

A Young Man, Meng Gao

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Xu, Julia – 11

"Don't let me ever see you again!" Shouted Meng Gao's boss. Meng Gao sat on the edge of the company, he could feel water in his eyes. He looked at the ground and it felt like there was no light in life. Suddenly Meng Gao saw a shadow of two people, it was his wife and daughter. "Daddy where have you been?" Meng Gao's daughter asked. Meng Gao held back his tears and hugged his daughter. At that point, he promised that he will take care and prop up this home.

Meng Gao woke up and left home in the morning, his dedication to find a job. He went to a bakery store and tried out for a baker job and he got hired. However, two days later, the bakery store was shut down, because there were no customers. Meng Gao came home full of disappointments, he laid down on his bed and closed his eyes, he thought of all the jobs and tried thinking of one that he is suitable with. The next day, he woke up before the sun was awake and didn't give up on looking for a job, he continued to look for a new job. He went on to the street and suddenly he saw a board full of posters and a sign up form that said that Mogaoku needs workers to construct the Mogaoku. This could be a great opportunity for me, Meng Gao told himself, without hesitation, Meng Gao signed his name onto the list.

A week later, it was time for Meng Gao to say goodbye to his family. Meng Gao's daughter was only three years old, she wasn't familiar with emotions and didn't know what to say. Meng Gao's wife bite her teeth while having the last hug with her husband.

The construction started for Meng Gao. He put bricks on top of the bricks and stack it over and over again. Sweat felt like rain, his hair was wet and his hands were full of dirt. Meng Gao's hand shook and his legs were too tired to carry the weight of the brick. The sun went down and the moon peaked ur of the clouds. It was rest time, it was already 10pm, everybody was in there accommodation, only Meng Gao wasn't in his accommodation. Meng Gao was looking at the moon, he thought of his family. In the dark clouds, Meng Gao could see all the memories that he spent with his family.

Three years later... "Auchhhh!" Meng Gao exclaimed. Blood dripped from Meng Gao's arm, his arm was covered in dirt and blood. Meng Gao's friend, Rong Qi rushed to check out what happened, before Rong Qi could arrive there, Meng Gao fell on the ground and passed away.

Meng Gao was sent to the village doctor's home, Meng Gao was laid on a bed and the doctor claims that this injury needs a bandage, he may never use this arm again! Meng Gao still had a positive attitude, however, nobody knows that Meng Gao always saved the tears till nighttime.

Days went by, Meng Gao had to go back to work, he wrote a letter to his family and sent money to them, he also told them to not worry about him. Meng Gao went back to work, Meng Gao's clothes always got fully wet, his face was always covered in sweat. Just to do the work requirement, Meng Gao had to lift a heavy brick with only one hand, others did it with two hands, so he had to do double the amount of it! Good thing is that Meng Gao strived so hard that he didn't take up double the time and he only took three hours more! However Meng Gao still had to work from seven in the morning till one in the midnight, while others got three more hours of rest.

Soon , Meng Gao finally finished his 4 long years of work. He remembered how he had to do so many repetitive actions and how he didn't have any time to stop during the day. Meng Gao was ready to go back home and see his family, however he was worried if his daughter wouldn't recognize him.

Meng Gao stepped towards his home, nothing changed. "Mom, somebody's at the front door." Meng Gao's daughter said. Meng Gao's wife could smell the familiar sent, she could see the familiar face, she could also see the familiar hairstyle, however the hair is much longer than she thought it would be. Meng Gao's wife could see his broken arm, her eyes tried to hold the tears back but she failed. She knew it was him, it has been a long three years.

Meng Gao came to hug her daughter, but his daughter rushed to the inside of the house and rejected his hug. Meng Gao's arms dropped, Meng Gao's wife tried to tell her that he is her father, but his daughter didn't have a father for such a long time, she was insecure of everything.

One years later, Meng Gao found a job as a doctor and finally reconnected with his daughter. During the years, Meng Gao always had been there for her daughter, he always had time with her and attended all the activities with her. Meng Gao spent a lot of the time with her family and he also donated his savings to the charity.

Throughout this experience, Meng Gao learnt to bear with loss and learned that everything can have a good side and a bad side. Just like this experience for Meng Gao, the good side of the experience is that he participated in the construction of the Mogaoku and finished, and he also earned a lot of money for living, but the bad side of this is that he lost a lot of time with his family. Meng Gao wishes that for the rest of his life, he can be with his family and share happiness together!

The Miracle at the Mogao Grottoes

W F Joseph Lee Primary School, Leung, Hoi Yu – 11

Harry leaned his head against the window of the tour bus. His class were on a field trip to Gansu, China for 3 days.

The class soon arrived and got off the bus.

“Mr. Johnson, I can’t wait to look at the buddha statues!” Amelia exclaimed.

“That’s the spirit!” he responded. Harry rolled his eyes and Nico snorted.

“Did I just hear someone snort?” Amelia asked loudly. The entire class, who were all chatting previously, fell silent.

“Amelia, I think it was Nico,” Hailee stammered.

“Do you think it’s funny, Nico? I suggest you stop wasting time on laughing at people and pay attention for once,” Amelia snapped. Some kids laughed quietly.

Harry quietly wished that time would freeze so he could rest.

Just after that, everything froze and began to glitch except for Nico, Amelia and Hailee. He looked up and gasped. There was a giant looming over the children.

They all screamed.

“Who are you and what do you want?” Amelia demanded.

“I’m Wong,” he answered, “And I want to teach you kids a lesson.”

“Lesson? Are you sure, Mr. Wong? I mean, me and Hailee have done research on the Mogao Grottoes before the trip,” Amelia explained.

“I’m pretty sure you did, but it’s not about knowledge, it’s about friendship. Anyway, you four would make a really good group, you know?” Wong said calmly.

“Us? A group?” Nico laughed.

Wong smirked, “Well. I froze time, if you want to unfreeze it, you’ll need to solve two tasks together. I’ll send you to your destination now.”

They all got sucked in a tornado and found themselves in a dark room.

They all screamed again.

Then, they heard a giggle.

“You kids are really funny when you’re panicking,” Wong joked.

Wong snapped, “Your task here is to find a way to get out of here, after you do, I’ll see you all in the next destination.” And by that, he disappeared.

“I think I can solve this and get us out of here,” Nico stated.

Amelia looked at Nico doubtfully, “Are you sure you can handle this?”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Nico replied and started patting stuff.

“What are you doing?” Hailee asked.

“I’m looking for a handle of some sort.”

Harry imitated his friend and also started to touch stuff and stumbled upon a lever and he pulled it with all his might.

“Guys, is it just me or has everyone wet themselves?” Nico asked nervously as he looked at the floor.

Water was filling up the room very quickly.

“Oops,” Harry mumbled.

“Oops? What did you do, Harry!” Amelia yelled.

“I just pulled a lever,” he mumbled.

“Without even talking to us?” Amelia screamed.

The water now reached their waists and they would soon need to paddle.

“We’ve been looking around; we haven’t looked on the ground!” she yelled.

Harry dived under and saw a door on the floor.

“Hailee’s right, there’s a door on the floor,” Harry said.

Harry dived down again and pulled it, only to lose strength.

“I think it’s locked!” he panted.

Nico groaned and swam after Harry and started searching for a key.

“I found something!” Nico screamed as he emerged from the water.

Nico and Harry dived under and tried to unlock the vent and shot back up.

“I don’t want to say this, but we don’t have enough strength to open it,” Harry grumbled.

Hailee volunteered to help.

She was surprisingly very strong and they finally lifted the vent.

Then, they felt their bodies going in a downwards spiral.

“Hi, kids!” Wong greeted.

“Mr. Wong? I believe these challenges are extremely dangerous, is there a manager I can speak to?” Amelia asked.

“I’m the manager,”

They were in a park. Around them, were gold, diamonds and different valuable things.

“You are surrounded by everything that any person would want. Choose something that the Buddhas would appreciate. Good luck,” Wong said.

With that, he disappeared into thin air.

“Well, I guess we can work together then,” Amelia said.

Nico and Amelia went to inspect a horse made out of solid gold.

“It’s beautiful here, isn’t it?” she sighed.

“I suppose,” Nico responded.

Hailee and Harry soon approached them.

The four of them brainstormed a lot, thinking about different animals, materials and jewels the Buddhas would value.

All of a sudden, Wong reappeared in the room.

“Children, you need to hurry up! The garden will self-destruct in five minutes,” he warned.

“What happens then?” Nico asked.

Wong sighed, “You die.”

Wong gave them an encouraging smile and disappeared.

“I didn’t know we could actually die here!” Nico wailed.

Harry looked at his watch and gulped. 60 seconds left.

He glanced at his watch while it ticked.

“That’s it!” Amelia suddenly yelled.

“What?”

“I know the gift we need to give to the Buddhas! It’s something Phoenix related!”

Harry remembered the Phoenix statue.

“I saw it!” he exclaimed.

Nico looked the right side of the garden. It was fading into ashes.

“Hurry!” Hailee cried.

Harry went to the stone table and grabbed it.

There was a strong wind, it seemed to be preventing him from reaching the Buddha statue.

Harry heard a scream; Amelia was fading away and soon vanished.

He began to run.

Within seconds, he was the only one left in the garden.

He placed it gently on the Buddhas palm and felt his arm being tickled.

Harry looked at his hands and saw nothing. They had vanished.

He thought of his friends and let a tear drop on his cheek.

They had tried their best.

Harry opened his eyes and looked around his surroundings.

He was back at the end of the class line with Nico standing next to him, looking as equally confused.

The boys went to Hailee and Amelia.

They all embraced and even cried tears of joy.

The four best friends looked into each other’s eyes and smiled.

Amelia smiled to herself, the phoenix symbolizes peace, which the kids finally have.

Wong has succeeded.

Adventure at the Mogao Grottoes

W F Joseph Lee Primary School, Maksian, Kalysta Anoush – 11

Heather has always been really curious about things around her, she was extremely curious about the tall building near her house. She never got a chance to ask her parents about it since they were always out of town for business. Every time her parents were away they would have a babysitter to come look after her. Heather has always thought the idea of having a babysitter ridiculous. Besides, she was 15 – she definitely had enough responsibility to take care of herself.

She had always found the building really fascinating, she believed the objects inside would come to life. Nobody believed her and thought she was just out of her mind, but that didn't stop her from believing it, so one night she decided to sneak out of the house right after dinner when her babysitter was sleeping on the couch. She followed some tourists just to make sure she was going the right way. Once she arrived she was astounded at how tall it was – it didn't look this tall from her house. Even though she had looked forward to going in these caves for a long time, she still felt really nervous. Do they really come to life? Will they do anything bad if they come to life? Guess she'll have to figure that out by herself. She definitely didn't expect the Buddhas to be that big, some of them had patterns carved into them. After exploring the cave for a while, she heard some people walking in saying the cave will be closed but Heather didn't want to leave so soon so she quickly hid behind a door, Heather had no idea what this door would lead to.

Behind the door was a couple of Buddhas, nothing too scary or unexpected. Abruptly she heard a bell rang, she heard mysterious sounds coming from the Buddha behind her. She couldn't believe her eyes – she was right! They did come to life! She definitely didn't think this through, she started to regret coming here. The Buddhas were whispering to each other, Heather couldn't understand what they were trying to say, she then said hello to them, and they stared at her up and down. They looked really confused. One Buddha came up to her and told her that they weren't able to escape for a long period of time, they figured the only way to escape was if each Buddha had their elements. Heather then examined the cave and found a mysterious box, it had a keyhole. She then saw a little compartment on the ceiling, luckily she could reach to it by standing on an old looking chest. She opened it and saw a key, bingo. She opened it and saw a map, perfect that must be how she could find the elements. She quickly introduced herself to the Buddhas and explained how she got there, apparently she was the only person that could see that door. Heather could not believe all this. Heather had another problem to worry about, how could she go back home when the cave was closed? The Buddhas handed her a piece of cloth and told her to hold on to it until she got far away from the cave, and so she did. She walked out the door and passed the guards, the guards didn't even notice her! In fact, no one seemed to notice her when she walked past them, she thought the cloth was magical.

She held on tight to the cloth and ran into the house, Louis? Louis is Heathers best friend that lived next door, his jaw dropped when he saw her appear out of thin air, he thought she was a witch. She quickly explained everything to him, he believed her. She was out of breath after all that, Louis wanted to go to the cave with her the next day, Heather wasn't sure if that was possible, could he see the door? Guess they'll have to figure that out tomorrow.

The next morning Heather and Louis were woken up by the smell of pancakes, they quickly ran out to the kitchen to eat. Right after that Heather told her babysitter she was going to the library for a few hours. She rushed to her room to get her cloth and headed out the door.

Louis found a book about the Mogao Grottoes in less than ten minutes! They sat down and started reading it. Heather noticed something odd, there was a piece of cloth inside the book, she lifted it up and placed it next to the one the Buddhas gave her. It was like a puzzle, they fit together! But it seemed like there was three missing pieces to it, could they be the elements? Five pieces of cloths and five Buddhas, it must be right. They rushed to borrow the book and went back home to do more research.

Finally it was dinner time, Louis and Heather finished their food as fast as they could and told Heather's babysitter they had to go to Louis' house for a school project. They definitely weren't going for a school project, instead they ran to the tall building just a few minutes before midnight. They still had seven minutes to sneak into the cave. Heather handed the other piece of cloth to Louis and he turned invisible! She then held onto the cloth she received earlier and they both attempted to go through the door, it worked! They examined the room to find more cloths to complete the "puzzle", it wasn't long until the bell rang and they all came to life. Heather asked one of the Buddhas if

they had any more of these cloths, they did! They handed the cloths to Louis and Heather, they both thought, this all happened pretty suddenly, they decided to pick a girl that didn't know anything about the Mogao Grottoes to help them escape? What if all this was a trap?

Heather was about to put the cloths into her pocket when one of the Buddhas picked the cloths to fit them all together and each piece of cloth had a shiny element and they all fit into the Buddha's chest. They started to rise up in the air when the paintings carved into the wall came to life and a bolt of light shot at each of them and they all shattered into tiny pieces of glass. Is that the end of this adventure? Louis pointed out that he heard running water, he was right, the room started to fill up with water! Heather checked to see where the water came from, it was the compartment on the ceiling! Louis lifted her up since the water had already covered the old chest she stood on last time. She picked up a really heavy piece of brick and it fit perfectly, she then closed the door of the compartment. Although the water stopped filling up the cave, the water was still there and the cloths were ruined. How would they go back home without anyone noticing? Louis dragged Heather out the door and through the guards, the guards saw them but they both decided to hide behind a tall bush, surprisingly the guards never found them. They both ran back to Heather's house, and Louis showed how they could sneak into Heather's room by climbing a window, that's how Louis went into Heather's house! Once they got in, Heather's babysitter was standing right in front of them, except it wasn't her, it was Heather's mom! Heather couldn't believe her eyes, her mom asked them what they had been up to, and Louis was about to tell a stupid story but Heather decided to tell the truth. Heather didn't expect her mom to believe her, but she did. She then held up a piece of painting, it looked like the cave they were in! Did she casually have that in her pocket? Her mom said that she experienced similar things but she was the one who trapped the Buddhas into that cave. No wonder why she kept telling Heather not to go in. Her mom, Louis and Heather then reached in for a group hug. Heather's life is definitely full of surprises. She couldn't wait for her next adventure.

The Mystery of the Thousand Buddha Statues

W F Joseph Lee Primary School, Wong, Hiu Ching Bella – 11

The sun was high above the sky, spreading its heat around, as if threatening to burn the world to ashes. The whole world seemed to be collapsing under its fiery gaze. Water was scarce – not even a drip of it was found on the desert.

The traveler struggled to keep his eyes open. After walking on the desert for three days without rest, every step seemed to drain him of the little energy that was left. That was the least of his worries, though, as he had drained all the remaining droplets in his water bottle in one big gulp a few days ago.

The traveler wished he hadn't had done that. His thirst was unbearable and his throat was burning. Looking up, his vision blurring, the traveler yearned to spot sight of any source of water nearby, yet all he could see was the endless sand oasis. His knees buckled and gave way – the traveler fell face down onto the sand. At the corner of his eye, he saw someone who was wearing a robe. Feeling his last bit of consciousness slipping away, the traveler opened his mouth to cry for help.

"Help...me," The traveler mouthed weakly as his vision cut to black.

A few hours later, the traveler blinked his eyes open. He was lying in the sand – no, on a bed. He sat up and a kind face swam into view.

"Oh, are you awake?" a caring voice said. The traveler blinked. The man by his bed was wearing a robe. His head, however, was bald.

"Who are you?" the traveler croaked hoarsely. Then he realized that he might sound rude. "Where am I?"

"You are in our temple," the man smiled, not at all offended. He watched as the traveler help himself to the carrot soup that was just brought in by the fellow monks. "My fellow Buddhists carried you in. You were out cold for hours."

"Xie xie," said the traveler, his voice stronger after drinking the soup. "May I ask what temple is this?"

The man smiled again.

"You are in one of the most famous temples in China," he said with amusement. "The oasis city of Dun Huang, as known as the Mogao Caves."

Monks can never have much fun.

That's what Yanfei learnt from her stay at the temples.

"Where had that little girl gone?" Her mentor could be heard bellowing while Yanfei ran around exploring the Mogao Grottoes Caves.

And today, Yanfei was yet again in a place where she wasn't allowed to be in.

"Hi mother!" Yanfei cried, catching sight of her mother in the painting cave. The cave walls and ceilings were sure to take people's breaths away. It was covered by paintings devoted to the Buddha, such as people worshipping, meditating or even just talking nicely to one another. They were hand painted and shown with any color under the sun. There was no sign of any discord in the paintings. Yanfei's mother saw her and sighed.

"Dear, you should be meditating with your mentor," said Yanfei's mother, pursing her lips. Yanfei groaned.

"I did, and it was boring," she said.

Just as Yanfei's mother opened her mouth to lecture her daughter, a distant scream could be heard!

"OH MY DEAR BUDDHA!" it cried, panicked. "One of the sacred Buddha statues is gone!"

Yanfei hurried into the Thousand Buddha Caves, her heart fluttering with excitement. It was a common belief that anyone who came here would be blessed with visions. A guard was weeping by one of the statues while the priest comforted him as everyone in the temple came to look. Yanfei stared curiously.

“Yesterday there were 289 statues, but now there’s only 288!” the guard exclaimed. The priest glanced around suspiciously.

“No one can go in or out in this cave until I say so!” He bellowed, and the doors were locked. Yanfei breathed heavily in the semi-darkness.

“Pssst!” Yanfei recognized the voice as her friend, XieWuju. “Let’s investigate. It’s looking suspicious to me.” Yanfei nodded and beckoned him behind a statue. She nearly slipped on a puddle on the floor. XieWuju looked surprised.

“Why is there water on the floor?” he wondered, bending down to check. “Wait a minute...that’s oil!”

“It must have been left by the thief! How did they get that?”

The friends returned to the others. Yanfei stared at the guard who had fell to his knees and cried, “MY DEAR BUDDHA FORGIVE ME FOR MY SIN!” and felt a bit guilty about her lack of devotion. The priest shook his head miserably. “I feel so ashamed. We’ve clearly neglected our duty upon your holy bodies of art— As the priest, the blame lies with me alone.” And he too sank down and bowed.

The friends exchanged glances.

“The sooner we catch the thief, the better.”

“Did you see anybody near the crime scene?”

“Yes, XiaoMin and DaWen was there.” The guard sniffed.

“DaWen works in the kitchens!” Yanfei recalled. XieWuju ran to the kitchens. “Did you see DaWen here in the morning?” The chef shook his head. “I know for a fact that he was out on the Silk Road. He promised to give some cows to me. Hmmm cows.”

So, DaWen wouldn’t have enough time to get back and steal the statues.

“Then that leaves ...XiaoMin.”

“RELEASE ME STUPID!” XiaoMin demanded as he was held by the guards. The priest stared coldly at him. “Did you steal the Buddha statue?”

“I did.” XiaoMin hissed. “It’s destroyed now. Look at your faces! As if the sky has fallen down.” The priest gasped unbelievably.

“Your confidence will be ruined and the temple will fall!”

Yanfei stepped up. “No! Although the statue’s gone, our loyalty will stay. It’s not the statue who connects us— We will not collapse!”

A beat. Then everyone in the temple started clapping. Peace was restored.

“It might have been better,” said Yanfei’s mentor, “If you have showed an ounce of devotion to Buddha.”

Catch That Cave Robber!

Wellington College Shanghai, Bi, Lyndsey – 9

It all started when I first met this young courageous girl, Shayne. It happened when I was completely in awe of the spectacular Mogao cave, the ancient Dunhuang people built. I accidentally bumped into Shayne, and she said, “I’ve finally found you Ellie.” Oh, my name is Ellie, by the way.

I was filled with curiosity and my mind was swirling with question marks and confusion, but I tried to remain calm. In the rays of sunshine, Shayne held my hand and said, “come on, I’ll show you.”

I was so shocked and frozen to the spot when I saw what Shayne was trying to show me. Two graverobbers was peeling of the murals of long ago! “Why would anybody do that, hurting all the wonderful memories, stories and secrets from the past? This is our only chance to understand the past of Dunhuang and share our knowledge with the world but they were just taking it away, unbelievable!”

“That’s why I brought you here, the secret map had chosen you and me to complete the mission.” Shayne took out an ancient map and said. We have to solve this problem before sunrise, or these murals will all vanish!”

“But what should we do?” I asked. “We can tell they’re really skilled graverobbers. They’re using sharp knives to peel, what if they attack us?”

“They have knives, but we have the ancient map and our knowledge,” Shayne said, “The ancient map will guide us with instructions, you may read the first one.” I read, “Solve this problem and you’ll have the first ingredient in a potion, which will surely stop your enemies and made the murals back to normal.” “The plant you need to find is a beautiful flower. There are loads of kinds, but the one you seek, has not yet been seen. It’s gorgeous white and has lots of petals. It’s now on an imaginary field, which is in your sight. Follow your imagination, and go where it leads you. Then dig in deep and the flower will find you!”

“Hmmm... I think it’s some kind of a daisy,” I said. “Me too!” Shayne exclaimed.

Meanwhile in the dark shadows, the two graverobbers with beady eyes were whispering to each other, “We’ll steal the famous Maitreya Buddha statue with some kind of a smooth face that’s round and feminine,” “Ha! Big jokey? Who cares what it looks like, as long as we’ll go famous and rich!” the other graverobber explained, “Actually, the look of the statue makes it famous because myths say that the statue’s face was sculpted in Wu Zetian’s likeness, who was the first and the only female emperor in China!”

“Come on let’s find the daisy before they break the statue!” “We shall follow our imagination... It’s leading me to the west, so what are we hesitating for?” I walked ahead and Shayne followed me to the west of desert. The sun was boiling above me, it felt like walking through a volcano! Finally, my intuition told me to halt, and we started to dig, we dug so deep, I was certain the ocean is right beneath us, but it seemed not! So, we dug on and on, until I saw the blended wet sand and soil. Water started to leak and the petals appeared, then the leaves, the stem and whoosh! The whole plant appeared and was pulled out by Shayne. We put it into a bottle we found on our way.

“OK Shayne, let’s read the second instruction.” “The potion juice, is certainly important, you’ll find it, in the petals of the magic daisy. Squish it and squash it until you’ve got a third of your bottle daisy juice. Then add in the petals, shake it to a greenish slime. Smear the slime onto the old murals, and link your pinkies to chant, the friendship key!” “Well, it looks like more works need to be done, let’s get going!”

We squashed the leaves and shook the bottle, we crept in the cave and luckily, the two graverobbers were snoring on the floor because of the back-breaking work which was of no use. We quickly smeared the slime on, linked our pinkies and chanted the words. Suddenly, rainbows shoot out of the slime with red, orange, yellow, green, turquoise, blue and purple lights. The lights twirled and swirled until finally healed the murals.

“The murals are marvelous and the statue is spectacular!” We exclaimed.

Shayne called the police, who arrived moments later and took the two graverobbers away.

“Yes, we did it!” I highfived with Shayne.

The Sparkle of Magic

Wellington College Shanghai, Cai, Ayden – 9

CHAPTER 1

The Mogao Caves

Once upon a time, the Mogao caves was a place where people pray to buddhas as sculptures lies on the sandy ground, but now it's just a tourist's destination where people now look at the ruins of it...

Still, some magic sparkles upon the cold, gloomy caves, until something will happen to it...

As it was the first day of holiday, as me and Alex had our last class which the topic was the Mogao caves, we sat down on the sofa.

Our homework this holiday was to go on a trip to the Mogao caves and write a story about the trip and now we're just about to go. We've packed our bags so we're ready!

Chapter 2

The Mysterious Earthquake

The wind blowed to the right as the sand on the dessert stayed calm and hot as the white clouds caught the bright, glowing rays of the sun.

We were at the Mogao caves and was very excited about going into the caves, we went in cave No.1, darkness flowed around as if black paint was sticking permanently everywhere.

"Hey, I think something fishy is going around here." I said in a low voice, "do you feel it?"

"I think I feel it" answered Alex quietly, glancing around. Something sparkled in mid-air, it flowed over me and gently touched one of the buddha sculptures. Just at that point, I felt the one and tinniest little fragment of movement and everything happened too quickly for me to describe. Everyone started shouting, "EARTHQUAKE!" And everyone was trying to run out of the cave as the ground started shaking and we were trapped in the cave. My head suddenly hit the ground and finally I went into a deep, deep, sleep... All that I knew was that I saw one thing just when I had woken up, a Buddha sculpture moving towards me. Was I dreaming? I rubbed my eyes and looked again. It was still moving towards me. Believe it or not, the Buddha came to life! He can move and he can talk.

"Hello, what's your name?" he asked.

"...I am Ayden." I said with a small voice.

"I am Buddha Wu; I was sent here by Buddha Ru-Lai (roo-ly) to give you an important mission."

"What is it?" I asked, full of curiosity.

"Well, look around, what do you think is wrong here?" said Buddha Wu.

What I thought of first was my friend Alex. "My friend is gone!" And sure enough, Alex was nowhere to be found.

"Yes," he said, "I'm sending you on a mission to find your friend Alex."

Chapter 3

The Journey to Find Alex

“If you want to find him then you need to find a shard right in the middle of the inner core of the earth. I’m afraid the shard is guarded by Buddha Ka, the Buddha of evilness and is in the volcano of Ka so you better go in the volcano when Buddha Ka is gone. I’ll help you by giving you a costume, so you won’t be burned to ashes. Oh, and you get a special digging machine for digging your way to the inner core, every minute you dig counts for 1000 km. Good luck! You can start digging right here,” the Buddha finally moved back in place.

I put on the costume, took the machine, and started digging. It was full of darkness and dust and no one else seemed around. I felt scared but I didn’t have time to worry. I needed to find my friend.

When I started from the crust, I saw the sparkle of magic, the same kind of sparkle that flew around before the earthquake happened. I grabbed it and put it into my pocket and wondered what I could use it for. Then I continued digging.

I dugged at full speed with the magical machine while the heat around me grew hotter and hotter at the atmosphere around my body. My body felt it as hot red fire flickered around me until I heard CRACK! The tip of the blade of the machine broke and fell into the ruby red flames, my eyes reflected the colour.

“OH NO, NO, NO!!!” I howled, “I cannot dig anymore, and I am stuck in the middle of nowhere! What can I do now, help me Buddha!”

Just then, I found a very special poker card and it had some dust on it, so I rubbed it. Just when I rubbed it, fire came out from it and then slowly the fire stopped. I knew what to do now.

chapter 4

Let Me Stop This

I need to burn the sparkle of magic into ashes so the earthquake wouldn’t happen, the Buddha wouldn’t come alive, I didn’t need to dig and mostly, Alex wouldn’t be gone. I knew that if Buddha Wu couldn’t come alive, my costume would be gone so I could be burned and get hurt. But I know, sometimes when people show big love, it could also mean releasing sacrifices. That’s when I rubbed the poker card and put the sparkle of magic inside the fire. Slowly, my costume disappeared from head to toe. The heat rose at least from 50 degrees to 1000 degrees. I got the feeling that slowly I was disappearing into ashes. And finally, I was gone...gone...gone...

chapter 5

A Happy Ending

When I opened my eyes, I was at the hospital. I was alive! I was alive! And guess who was right beside me? Alex!

“Are you okay?” he said to me, looking worried.

“I’m okay!” I said happily and I gave him a big hug. “We are back together, and we are alive.” Alex looked at me with puzzled eyes, I knew why as he knew nothing about what could’ve happened.

So, I wrote my story: Once the Mogao caves was a place where people pray to Buddhas as sculptures lies on the sandy ground...

The Journey South

Wellington College, Shanghai, Hu, Annie – 11

“Quit pacing around the room!” Hailstorm complained.

Icicle stopped, but she still couldn’t stop herself from feeling excited. A bird cawed outside, as if understanding her excitement. A sudden thought hit her.

“Hailstorm, we forgot to pray to Buddha!” Icicle yelled in horror. They scrambled to the prayer room and prayed to Buddha for an exciting journey. At least that was what Icicle prayed for. Hailstorm probably prayed for a safe journey.

DING DONG! DING DONG!

The clock struck ten. Looking into each other’s eyes, they muttered, “Uh oh.”

They dashed back to Icicle’s bedroom, grabbed their bags, and rushed downstairs for the ceremony, getting there just in time for the announcement. Icicle’s father, who was king of Snow World, wore a cloak of fresh snow.

“Aha!” Icicle’s father called, spotting them. “Here comes our fellow adventurers! Let us welcome Icicle Winter and Hailstorm Autumn onto stage!”

The crowd cheered. Taking a shuddering breath, Icicle stepped onto the stage to face the people. Her people. Suddenly, she noticed that Hailstorm had not followed her and looked back to see Hailstorm standing there, frozen with fear.

“Come on,” Icicle encouraged her.

Hailstorm walked stiffly up the stage and stood there, as silent as a cat.

After an hour or so, the ceremony finished and Hailstorm and Icicle were about to start their journey. south. The crowd were still telling them to be careful when Icicle’s father appeared and pulled Icicle away from the crowd and Hailstorm. He whispered in her ear and she returned to the crowd, her face grave. They flew into the wild woods after many more goodbyes and kept flying and eating snacks. Icicle reached inside the snack bag and—

ROAR!

She dropped the piece of dried fruit she was about to put in her mouth.

“What was that?” Hailstorm whispered.

“Dunno,” Icicle whispered back.

“Bet it’s something big,” Hailstorm said.

Another roar was heard that made them both shudder.

A day later, they were still traveling and could hear roars every few minutes. A few times, Icicle almost fell out of the sky. It was making them nervous, but they couldn’t avoid it. There was nothing to do but block their ears.

Icicle yawned. It was already ten days since they left Snow World. Beside her, Hailstorm yawned too. Suddenly, a black hole in the middle of two trees caught her eye.

“Hey! Let’s go and check out that cave,” she beckoned to Hailstorm.

She called up every single wisp of magic in her, in case there was danger inside. Cautiously, they stepped inside. It was hot and dry inside. They walked further into the cave. And there it was. A dragon. A dragon the size of ten African elephants. A dragon with wings like spears. A dragon with teeth like daggers. A dragon with a breath of fire. Icicle concentrated her magic on the dragon and blasted it towards it. But—no, those were teeth sinking into her shoulder. The dragon was faster than her. The whole world blacked out.

Her eyes fluttered open. They surveyed their surroundings. She was in a cave, and she was lying on a massive piece of rock. She sat up. And saw the most outrageous sight in her *entire life*. Hailstorm was *chatting with the dragon*.

“HAILSTORM!WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” She screamed.

“Icicle! Listen! This is Seacess. He’s a friend. Friend, not enemy. Ok?”

“Explain.” Icicle crossed her arms.

So Hailstorm started explaining everything. From how Seacess recognized Icicle as a descendant of Snowfall, who had saved her life once, and realized her mistake, to explaining to Seacess about their journey to receive education from perfectionists of magic at the Mogao Grottoes, the sacred place of magic. Even though Icicle knew how to use her magic, she couldn’t control it very well. Hailstorm told her that Seacess had offered to take them there, because it would be quicker.

“Right, let’s go then!” Icicle swung her leg onto Seacess’s back and seated herself at the front. She helped Hailstorm on too.

At the Grottoes, their teachers merely congratulated them on reaching the Grottoes so early and put them in separate bedrooms, which was what Icicle had wished for. Icicle lay on her bed, staring at the large, bright, moonlit ceiling. She closed her eyes, then opened them again, shining. It was time.

Grandma's Tales – The Mogao Grottoes

Wellington College Shanghai, Kothapali, Shanvi – 9

Dolphin! Dolphin! Dollphinnnn! Shouted Marigold. Gran said “it’s time for dinner “ Every summer, our family had our dinner in the moonlit patio. I could already smell dumplings and noodles out in the patio. When I got there, Marigold and Star were already slurping and chomping down noodles. “There’s nothing left for me!” I started having a tantrum. A gentle voice spoke, “ Dolphin, here’s your dinner dear.” It was grandma! So I ran to gran and gave her a big cuddle and chomped down my food, gloriously. Just then, I, Star and marigold all clamoured at gran to tell us a story. Gran smiled and began narrating her childhood memories of Dunhuang. Our gran questioned us, “Have you heard about “The Mogao Grottoes”? If not you’ve been stuck in a grotto all your life!” It was summer time I was and we had a school trip to the Mogao Grottoes which is located in the Gobi desert, Dunhuang district, Gansu province. We had all packed our bags and tucked ourselves to our seats and now the bus is all set to go. I and my friends started chatting about the Grottoes. When I looked outside, all I saw was a vast place filled with sand dunes. There was no sight of vegetation at all! Then, I rocked myself to sleep and I slept like a log. It was morning we reached Mogao Grottoes. When we got off the bus we could only see caves and monks all around. Our teacher managed to book a guide and we set off. The guide said “Let’s dig deeper into history. The Central Asian people acted like a middle men to hook the west to east by the means of trade. At the start of the rule of Emperor Wu Di, he was curious about what was happening after Central Asia. As a result two or three spies were sent to Central Asia and beyond to find out what was happening. As they ventured into the markets of Central Asia, they found out that the Central Asians were trading Chinese silk and getting more valuable items in return from white men. The emperor Wu Di found out there were other mighty civilizations than them. Han Wu Di was the first emperor who facilitated the route and established a new age of trade for the east and west. The Romans in the west went gaga for silk, lacquer ware, porcelain, jade and the Chinese admired horses, gold, silver and glass beads. Han Wu Di established a new route for the trade which now is called The Silk Road.”

After listening to the guide I was flabbergasted! Even though I was born and brought up in Dunhuang, I had never known the history of the trade route and how it had played a key role for the setting up of the Mogao grottoes. Many cultures and traditions were spread throughout China. Buddhism was spread all over China. The monks started preaching Buddhist principles. During the Han dynasty period the emperor funded the monks to paint the murals. The Mogao grottoes have a history of a whopping 1000 years– 4AD to 1400AD. Then we visited Statues, Paintings, Murals and sculptures. The monks were nomadic who built the grottoes. Well, we know that monks built the grottoes but... Who started it? Le Zun did. He had a vision of a thousand Buddha’s bathed in a golden light. This inspired him and some other monks to construct the grottoes. We then reached the first cave ever built in 366AD. Meanwhile, we were interrupted by our mom, who said it was time for bed. We were reluctant to leave our gran so we cuddled her and trudged to our beds.

I stepped outside into a bustling place filled with people. Their camels were carrying loads bulging with emeralds and rubies which sparkled in the sun light and the glass beads jingled at every step. I decided to walk further. Then, I noticed the murals which resembled all of the Tibetan kings who were great followers of Buddhism. Suddenly, my eyes drew towards a magnificent sculpture of Bodhisattva Manjushree and Shakyamuni Buddha. I heard a voice calling out ‘Dolphin’ I looked back and saw my gran! I immediately sprang into her waiting arms. Then I blurted out ‘How are you here?’ She replied ‘Sshh.It’s a secret.’ I’m going to take you to the LIBRARY CAVE. The cave filled with Buddhist scripts, Buddha sculptures, paintings and sculptures, Buddhist sutras, scrolls, documents in ancient languages including Tibetan, Sanskrit and Uygur, and even more than 50,000 manuscripts! Some say that in the diamond sutra there is a special mantra which can make us immortal! As we reached the LIBRARY CAVE I was looking at the murals display natural scenery, buildings, mountain and flying Apsaras. I and Gran walked towards the other grottoes happened to find Indian king, the chakravartian ruler Ashoka. Ashoka was a follower of Buddhism and harnessed Buddhism in his dynasty. We could feel the history as we walked through each cave. The oldest one we visited had an original painting from the 5th century Sui dynasty. I and gran entered into a grotto and I tripped over a stone and bumped into a sculpture and my knee was bleeding and I started sobbing. I felt I was being jerked and I opened my eyes and saw 8 googly eyes staring at me. I cowered and screamed I pulled the quilt down and saw Mary, Star, Gran and mom. They were ever so astonished then Gran asked me why was I sobbing so loud? I replied ‘call the doctor, my knee is bleeding!’ Gran inspected my knees and couldn’t find any blood. I leapt out of bed and started checking my knees. What! Gran don’t you know I tripped onto a sculpture in the grottoes. ‘Grottoes?’ my

Gran asked. 'Dolphin we are at home!' Then only it hit my head that I was dreaming about the Mogao Grottoes! Then mom left us as she has lots of chores to be done for the day. Star asked me to narrate my dream. So did Mary and Gran. So I told them of my visit to the Mogao Grottoes and how I met Gran and how we explored the Library caves. 'LIBRARY CAVE' Gran exclaimed 'But that is a famous grotto recently found in the modern times.' Marigold and Star said what an amazing dreams you had Dolphin.

'Mary, Star and Dolphin come here dears.' said Gran. The tale of the Mogao grottoes teaches us how Dunhuang was a hub for commerce and for Buddhist practices. Mural paintings of different dynasties show the different painting styles and reflect the political, economic and cultural conditions of Ancient China. Mogao Grottoes is the culture integration of Buddhism and Chinese traditional culture.

The Revenge of the Gods

Wellington College, Shanghai, Li, Dalen – 11

“Come on, quick! The show is about to start!” We all flew to the sofa in the living room when the deafening, dramatic music that introduced the start of National Geographic started to blare out of the speakers. My name is Jack, I’m 19 years old, and I’m now in London, England. I’m now in a gargantuan mansion as huge as four whole African elephants, just after filming my own wildlife survival TV show, like my father’s friend Bear Grylls. I am utterly exhausted, and nothing would mean more than a relaxing afternoon slumped on the sofa watching National Geographic. I have a Hitler-like mustache right above my upper lip, and a round face. To be honest, my whole body is round, but not like how other people say. I mean, no human has the body of a hippo and the head of an ant, do we? Another thing other people call me is a tiger. They think I am afraid of nothing, absolutely fearless. This is because that I could go into record breaking haunted houses without even breaking a sweat, and I would love to say that they are right, but that would be a lie. I have one titanic fear. Spiders. Such a simple fear, so simple fear that nobody would even suspect that I had it, but I do. Anyway, the music was playing, and our hearts were drumming out of our chests in hope of a good episode. My whole family was addicted to National Geographic. No, not just addicted. We needed it. It was like food to us, giving us energy and feeling, giving us life and thought. Oops. All that talking made me miss half the episode. The strange thing was, my mom, my dad and my brother’s eyes were not blinking, not even once. Before I even knew it, everyone started packing like there was no tomorrow. “What is happening?” I asked my brother, “Is there an air raid or something?”

“You won’t believe it!” He screamed back, “We are going to the Mogao Grottoes!” At first my mind was blank, but suddenly I remembered a geography class where I had learnt about it. The teacher even showed us a photo. The grottoes were beautiful, with lush green moss dotted randomly across the gorgeous carvings of various gods on the walls of each and every one of the caves.

In a blink of an eye, we were already wandering around the majestic grottoes, staring at the elegant bhuddas towering over us and the elaborate, ancient, astounding wall carvings littered across the crumbling cave walls. The actual scene was much more pretty than the photos, with more color and liveliness and basically more everything. Also, the grottoes had a special aura that could not be sensed in the photos. Eventually, we stopped at a gargantuan stone gate. There were four workers on each side of it, and one of them, and one of them was holding a sign which said: the sky God’s room. VIP only. “It’s our lucky day.” Whispered my mom. “We got VIP tickets.” We casually strode into the room, flashing our tickets at the bystanding guards who pulled the door open for us like we were members of the royal family. As the door slammed shut behind us, my eyes slowly took in the scene around us. People were staring intensely at the sky god, which also seemed to be the most important god, and it was covered with a thick layer of translucent white fog. It had eight arms, each holding various objects essential for survival, and also covered by uncountable carvings and a variety of fluorescent colors. “Sky god,” my brother snorted, “It’s just some kind of fake.” Strangely, as soon as he finished the statue’s eyes changed color. First to green, then to blue, then to orange, then to red. Red. The color of blood. The color of fury. “Run, quick!” I screamed, pushing against the immense stone doors with all my might.

“This must be some prank!” hissed another man. A growl was already audible, and my heart was drumming with fear while the others buried themselves in the vast variety of carvings. Slowly but steadily, the growl increased into a roar, and the ground started shaking like we in the world’s most powerful washing machine. Just as the other visitors were starting to get worried, a mysterious voice boomed: “You shall be punished.” Everybody immediately started shrieking in terror and pounded on the immense stone door, but it just would not even budge. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the roof of the cave opening, revealing multiple tons of dirt and rubble. The last thing I heard was the sound of rock hitting rock...

“Are you awake?” That was the first sound I heard when I finally woke up.

“Come on, the alarm clock hasn’t gone off yet.” I grumbled. I sat up, stretched, and looked around. Oops. I wasn’t at home. I was trapped in one of the most important caves in the Mogao grottoes. I was in the middle of a gigantic

crowd, with a short man trying to count us, but failing because we kept on moving around. The man had chocolate brown eyes, bizarre hair and a triangular shaped nose. Everyone were in small groups, sharing food and resources among themselves.” So we’re trapped.”I thought, while trying to somehow find a secret escape route by staring at the cave walls, but failing. Funnily, another huge rumble was building up.” Not again,”I thought “I survived it once already, and with my luck I won’t survive twice. I listened more carefully, and found out that the noise was from outside!

Suddenly, a gargantuan crane lifted the top of the cave. Whoops and cries of joy echoed across the vast cave, and teardrops formed in my eyes in thought of home.

The Magical Journey

Wellington College Shanghai, Lu, Hedy – 9

Long, long, ago, there was a group of sellers that sold colored glass. They traveled all along the silk road, but one day a big sandstorm separated them. Hua Shizhao was one of the people that got separated. Even though, she couldn't see clearly because of the sand, she heard a strange bell sound. She went closer to the sound to hear it because she thought it might be another travel group, but actually it was robbers. She didn't know what to do, she thought maybe she should stay and hide, but she realized she needed to go to the bathroom. She thought it would be best to start going to the Mogao caves, because it was the next stop on the trip, and she thought that her traveling group would be waiting for her there.

She ran as fast as she could, and finally she reached a long, dusty road. At the end of this road, there was a huge shape that looked like a cave.

Hua Shizhao decided it would be best to hide there. Once she entered the cave, she saw a carving of Buddha. She thought that Buddha could save her, so she hid behind his chair. However, once she had finished climbing up there, she realized that there was a hidden door. She tried to open the door, but she couldn't. On the door, there was a painting of the *thousand hand goddess*, on one of the palm's there wasn't an eye, there was a small Buddha. Hua Shizhao pressed that hand hard on the door, and it opened.

In the cave, she sees statues of Buddha, and many different types of colored glass. She is shocked! She wants to stay here forever, but she can't. She can only stay here for the night.

The next day, she wakes up, and goes on the long dusty road again. She finds her travel group, and they continue their journey along the silk road.

Adventures in Magao

Wellington College Shanghai, Tan, Jessie – 9

In the Gleason of the sixteen Kingdoms, there was a young writer who wrote a book...

Centuries later, a girl was reading the book in her garden. She felt her mind swirling. Her surroundings faded away. She could hear nothing but wind rushing past her ears. After a blinding flash of light, she woke with a jolt and found she was lying on soft sand in a totally different world. So different she had never ever known, no beautiful garden with colorful flowers and no birds singing in tall trees. She stood up wobbling. What she saw was nothing but enormous sand dunes. The furious wind slashed sand against her skin painfully. The strong sunlight blinded her eyes. After a while, she found there was a tall cave with a blurred figure standing not far away.

By the time she reached the cave, she was almost worn out. However, when she entered the cave, she was astonished to find that there were so many fantastic paintings on the wall. With the variety of patterns and colors, each painting seemed as natural as though it were living, telling some ancient stories. The little girl couldn't help stretching out her hands. All of a sudden, she was sucked into the painting before her own eyes.

She landed on a soft grassland. Thirst and hunger gnawed and weariness weighted her limbs. Suddenly, she noticed a deer dashing out of the bush. Its right leg was throbbing. In the distance, a hunter riding a horse raced over.

The little girl ran in front of the deer and shouted in a stern voice: "You should not hurt this deer!"

The hunter started to speak but the girl kept on saying, "The deer is actually a human."

"She's right", said the deer suddenly.

The small girl looked as surprised as the hunter. "I created a story to save this deer so how can it speak?"

"I was a prince and played tricks on my father. He banned me from his kingdom and turned me into a deer." The deer continued in a sad tone, "I need to help someone to compensate, otherwise, I can't turn back into human form."

"You can help me!" squeaked the girl, "I was sent here by the unknown."

"I think I can help you. But first, I must defeat the Dark King. Will you help?" asked the deer hopefully.

The deer bounded through dense vines and finally reached a tree with a hollow on its trunk. "What am I supposed to do?" asked the girl. "Fit your hands inside the hollow shape." ordered the deer. A riddle suddenly appeared on the tree trunk.

"Things to help you to defeat: the Sun's heat, books, kindness from a hook, magic, but not tragic."

"I know how to get books and get kindness. But getting magic is difficult if you don't want a single bit of tragic. Also, how do I collect the Sun's heat?", said the deer sadly.

"I'm sure we'll know what to do by the time we get to the library." The little girl said calmly.

When they got to the library, they chose two books. The first one is called <<how to trap heat>>, the second one is << how to get pure magic>>. "We need two bottles to trap heat and kindness," said the girl, looking around eagerly. The deer used his tail to brush two of his spots on his body. Magically, two bottles appeared in front of them. "My spots contained different kinds of things." The deer whispered with a mysterious smile. "Now let's find kindness from a hook."

"Great!" said the deer softly, "The magic mist helps you get magic while the tragic mist helps you get tragic. The bad thing is that these two kinds of mist were mixed together by the dark wizard—Mardred five years ago."

"I think I know how to make magic!" shouted the girl. Then she ran off leaving the speechless deer behind.

Within a second, she came back, with a feather and some cotton. Without a word, she pulled out a needle from her pocket, then brushed the feather against the needle. The needle went sparkly while the feather turned dull.

She sewed the needle in and out of the cotton as if there's an invisible thread behind. Suddenly, the needle turned dull and the cotton turned sparkly. Then she put the cotton into the bottle with kindness and closed the lid. "Finally, I get some pure magic!" whispered the girl excitedly.

“Let’s mix all the things together!” said the deer.

The things inside formed into a golden unicorn horn. The girl picked up the horn and she immediately turned into a unicorn. She then gave the horn to the deer and it put it into one of its spots. He turned into a unicorn too.

The girl who turned into a unicorn got a shiny gold mane while the deer got a sparky silver one. “Great! Let’s call ourselves Sparkly and Shiney!” shouted the deer happily.

Suddenly, something rushed past them. Shiney’s blood turned to ice. “It’s a Rury! They are murdered women. They want to drink unicorn’s blood to turn them into humans!” screamed Sparkly. She raced off without another word. Shiney dashed off after her. However, she couldn’t catch up with Sparkly. A narrow path appeared ahead. She followed it cautiously. “Where is Sparkly?” she wondered. Without warning, something rushed over. It was Sparkly, gasping and covered with mud. “I thought you were dead!” said Shiney with a sigh of relief.

“Let’s go and defeat the Dark King.” Said Sparkly, shaking her mane to get off the mud. “Let’s be his top advisors, Admos Wood and Kailer Smith when they’re on holiday. The dark king hates unicorns. We can take him to the Unicorn Party Land and then push him into the center of the unicorns’ circle.....

“ Ah! Admos and Kailer! You come back a few days earlier than expected!” the Dark King said softly but dangerously.

“Yes. Your majesty! We found out a way to kill all the unicorns!” said Admos.

The Dark King followed them to the circle of unicorns. They led him into the center of the circle.

“All the unicorns are under control. Your majesty.” A bright flash of light came out of those unicorns’ horns and stabbed into the Dark King. With a scream, the Dark King was burnt into a cinder.

After that, Sparkly became a handsome young man and Shiney turned back into the little girl.

The young man took out the golden horn from his pocket. “Hold it in your palms, turn three circles.”

The little girl took the horn from the young man and found she was in the garden again. Everything seemed like a dream. When she looked up, a sparkly bird was just flying over...

The Lost

Wellington College Shanghai, Thoma, Atia – 9

It's a long time since this pen touches this paper, but today was a crazy day...

Chapter 1

The bad beginning

We were looking at the depths of the Mogao Caves when she spotted the “amulet of the lost” behind the majestic statue of one of heavenly kings. Taking it off the holder she held it in her hands in a blink of an eye the amulet was gone...

Chapter 2

NO!!!!!!

“Where did it go” she said anxiously “nowhere” said a voice. Laughing it came out the Mogao Stealer Ha ha ha you're right. “What” “NO”

Chapter 3

The horrible horizon

“I'm going to start World War III” “No you're not” “What are you doing here?” “Stopping you” “Never” “I have armies and bombs” “He'll destroy the caves if he's fires the bombs we need to get out of this

Cave” “You're not going out” “He still has the amulet” “The amulet has magic that can help the good to destroy the evil” A flash of light the amulet sprung up into that air and

Chapter 4

Back to normal

..... and all of a sudden the Mogao Stealer died the army disappear “what about the amulet” she said as it float back to its original place.

Now writing in my diary about this crazy day I thought.....

Skylar's Magao

Wellington College Shanghai, Wong, Bella – 9

On Christmas holiday, Skylar's parents decided to go somewhere warm. Skylar's dad gave a suggestion, why don't we go to "Bella's island". Skylar asked, "What made you think of Bella's island? What does it look like?" Skylar's dad replied, " well it's actually a mountain, so maybe we should go there." "Ok, we will, 'said Skylar's mother excitedly. They started getting in the car, then they drove to Bella's Island. While Skylar's dad was driving, peaceful music was being played. Skylar and her mom even sang a song. Finally, they arrived.

The first thing they did was mountain climbing. They climbed really high. Skylar saw something really odd. She saw a door then asked herself "why is there a door?" She thought but she still didn't understand. She asked her parents but both of her parents said nothing also confused, they had a wired face. Skylar's dad being the adventurous type decided to have a look. He told Skylar and his wife "I'll be back, just wait right here." Then, he went in, Skylar and her mother waited and waited but Skylar's dad still didn't come out. Skylar's mum was worried so she also decided to go in. Skylar waited for an hour but both of her parents didn't come out. Skylar made a decision, she was going in and she did, she went in....

It was very dark inside. Then she suddenly stepped on something. She remembered she had her phone in her pocket, she took her phone out of her pocket then turned the flashlight on. She saw walls with carvings on them, it was beautiful. The thing she was stepping on was becoming watery. She used her phone to face what she was stepping on, she was stepping on water. Actually, it wasn't quite the water she thought, it was red muddy water. She kept on walking, and she saw a head with no eyes, only a big mouth. She got scared looking at this unknown thing. Luckily, it didn't have eyes so it couldn't see, but Skylar must be really quiet because the head has ears, she looked at the side of this place, she felt a tap on her shoulder, it was her parents. Skylar wanted to shout out, "You're here! You found me!" Just as she was going to do that, her mother put her right finger on her lips, Skylar knew what it means, it means "be quite". The three of them tiptoed away from the head, Skylar accidentally stepped on a rock and tripped, it was terrible. She made a loud BANG! sound when she tripped. The head also heard it and turned around. The head didn't like people in its cave, so it started chasing after the family. Skylar's dad shouted "RUN" at the top of his voice. The family saw some light white running and knew it was the door they came through. They went out of the door and closed it quickly.

They ran down the mountain and drove back home. None of them talked as they have never been so scared before but they all knew without talking they were never going back to Bella's Island ever again.

Song

Wellington College Shanghai, Yang, Yanis – 9

I am Song, a pine tree. How old am I? Let me think, time elapses like a flash of light. I am almost 2000 years old now.

I have been living in the Gobi Desert since I was a baby. The fierce sandy wind blew and was about to take me away with it. There were only my family and other tree families living there. The entire world was quiet and I like to look up at the starry sky.

I grew up as a teenager and one day I saw some humans. They moved here by horses and carriages. They even built houses. We call them people. People settled down adjacent to the desert and life was not easy for them.

Some years passed, one day a monk appeared, climbed up on a mountain and meditated there for some days. He left and followed by some men days after. They began to dig a cave and worked days and nights there. I stopped looking up the sky. I was eager to know what they were up to.

One night I was sleeping, someone was patting my arm and said, "Follow me." I looked around and no one was found. I was flabbergasted to see my feet moving to the mountain. Some magic power pushed me to the cave. The magnificent murals and sculptures crashed into my eyes. That was incredible.

Every night, I could walk and see the caves, more and more caves were built. I was obsessed with the beauty of the artifacts. They gave it a nice name, Mogao. People went to pray for a better life.

Thousands years later, one day some vicious and greedy men came, attempting to steal the treasure in the caves. I was overwhelmed by anxiety. Before I realized, I said, "Stop it!" The gang looked up and widened their eyes, never in their lives would they expect to see a tree talking. They yelled in fear and fled immediately.

That night the same hand touched my arm and said "Thank you buddy." I have never seen him in my life. Years and years have passed, I am old and weak now, however Mogao still flourishes and attracts people around the world to explore the glory.

Entering the Unknown

Wellington College Shanghai, Yuzuhu, Yuzuhu – 9

The awakening sky shifted to amber, then red, and the sun rose in a glorious explosion of pink and gold. Rustling on the treetops, the flock of birds welcomed the new day. Amelia gazed out through her cottage window as the warm air gently brushed her skin, like an artist painting a canvas. Slowly and soundlessly, she stepped out of her cottage, instantly being washed by the divine, fragrant aroma of the elaborate garden. Cherry blossom trees form an arch of pink leaves that created beautiful canopy above her. Amelia was enveloped in the vivid and sparkling treasures of Spring.

Amelia lay on the ground painted with white daisies and red poppies. ‘What a restful day!’ thought Amelia, immersing herself to the tranquility in such a haven. Suddenly a glittering blanket of butterflies hovering over a field of bluebells fascinated her. The butterflies had glistening, shimmering wings, and their bodies shone like a jewel in the sunlight. A gorgeous golden butterfly rose and fluttered away without noticing Amelia following it. She chased the butterfly and didn’t realise where she was going until she stumbled into a damp, dimly lit tunnel and was followed by a creaking reverberation.

The deeper she went into the tunnel, the darker it became until she completely lost the sight of the butterfly. It was too late.... As the tunnel closed in on Amelia, her unease grew tremendously, and she lost track of where the exit was. She wanted to wail but could not shake off the sensation that she was being followed and hence dared to make no sound, not at all.

Amelia faltered, froze to the spot, with only her heart heavily thudding in her chest. She was in a sheer panic. The next thing she knew, she felt anxiety infecting her body, yet she was forced by herself to gingerly edge forward into the unfathomable.

It was a seemingly never-ending tunnel, and took for ever for Amelia, but eventually, the tunnel became less gloomy and inky. Amelia knew she was approaching the exit, she hurried forward, dashing for the shadowy glow in the far distance. Quivering and shaking, she with all her might ran as fast as a tiger chasing its prey. Amelia could feel her legs burning and hear her chest heaving and gasping for breath, but she didn’t dare to halt until she came to the end of the tunnel with more mysteries to be unfurled.

Abruptly, Amelia stalled, gazed around, and watched streaks of sunshine sneaked through the gaps of the stones, projecting sparking shards that shimmered onto the ground. Wind shrieked through the hollows and gaps of the walls like a banshee haunting a graveyard. Amelia felt enchanted as she found herself encircled by mystical and majestic statues. Dithering and uncertain, she swept away the dust and debris of one statue, one by one, and exposed herself to unprecedented decaying artefacts and models. Some of them were so vivid, they shone like diamonds in the beamed light, while others looked so ancient, yet colourful, as if they were telling Amelia a tale of long, long time ago. Amelia couldn’t believe her eyes. Her fears were vanquished and swept away by immense curiosity, and her face was lit up by layers of paintings on the silk paper, rare collections of manuscripts, and tons of magical artifacts, that she can’t even comprehend what they were. Only time could tell.

History and mystery intrigued; Amelia knew with joy that she discovered an unknown world that was so magnificent. A path was laid down in front of her to explore the secret civilization.

Adventures at Mogao Caves

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Cheung, Tsz Hei – 10

Last week, Ben and I went to the fascinating Mogao Caves. We needed to prepare a lot of things before we went there. We brought hats, beverages, lots and lots of water, a camera, etc. There was so many things that we needed to pack two suitcases and two backpacks full of important stuff. At sunrise, we were ready to leave, and we got on a bus. The bus drove around the whole day and finally, we arrived at sunset at the splendid and wonderful Mogao Caves. When we got off the bus, it was cloudy but absolutely hot because we were in a desert in August.

In the evening, we checked in a hotel. There was an ancient China setting with low tables, big drawings of legends, and special Chinese water dispensers. At night, we ate a rich meal and enjoyed a show. We had a wonderful night at the hotel. We got a lot of rest because we needed all the extra energy to explore the famous Mogao Caves.

Early in the morning on the next day, we met our tour guides, Max and Sam. We got ready and went to the entrance of the Mogao Caves. Finally, we went into the Mogao Caves that were known as the second cave of wonders.

When we went into the Mogao Caves, it felt like a whole new world. There were as many paintings, artifacts, ancient tools, and sculptures as the eye can see. One painting told a tale about another land of happiness and prosperity, and that painting held the secret for entering that land. Another painting described the story about a person called Manjusri who met Vimalakirti once upon a time. I thought that the story was just made up of Buddhist theories. I did not really understand it but maybe archaeologists have another point of view. Another place in the Mogao Caves was a favourite for art lovers and history lovers – the Library Cave. In the Library Cave, there were a lot of paintings and scrolls that told fascinating tales or stories. It was also a place where pilgrims could read literature. Another fine, cultural painting was about someone named Bodhisattva leading a beautiful lady donor towards the Pure Land, where everything was pure in heart and everyone was very kind.

While we were looking at the wonderful arts of the Mogao Caves, we were separated from the tour guides. It turned out that the Mogao Caves were a gigantic place. We had no internet connection or phones, and we did not bring any maps. Fortunately, we could see the whole place from the top of a tower. On the tower, we saw the entrance. However, when we headed there, we found out that we needed to go through an almost infinite maze. When we walked through the maze, it looked like every time we saw light, it was a dead end. One time, there was even a pit of wooden spikes. When we successfully crossed it, it was a dead end, so we needed to cross it again. After what felt like a lifetime of searching, we finally found the exit, but we were still a mile away. While we were finding the exit, we came to a thin wall. 'Maybe we can smash this wall and go into the desert, then it'll be much easier to get to the entrance or maybe even find our hotel,' said Ben in Chinese. However, I replied, 'We shouldn't destroy public property.' When we argued and argued, suddenly, we heard the voice of Max. Luckily, the conscientious guide found us.

A few moments later, I heard someone coming and I thought they were the cats from the story that I saw in the Library Cave. The Mogao Caves were actually made by three-eyed cats which came to the Earth a long time ago. They weighed 300 pounds each. They had amazing tech like teleportation devices or planet-killing guns. They used their hair and a special type of coffee bean to create concrete, art, paint, and legendary artifacts. After they made enough things, they created the Mogao Caves and they died after that. About six centuries later, a monk found the Mogao Caves and finished what the cats had started. He used a tree trunk in the oasis to make wood and charcoal. He also ground the grit, gravel and rocks to make sand and forged weapons from stones and metals. When the monk renewed the place, he found a lot of paintings and tech made by the cats. After I cleared my head, I said, 'The three-eyed cats are still alive and are coming, run for your precious lives! Ah!' A few seconds later, everyone was running towards the maze, although the entrance had a fire on it.

Then I heard someone say that what on earth I was doing. I thought Ben said that, but it actually came from the direction of the three-eyed cats. When I took a closer look at them, I found out that they were tourists. I walked closer to them and asked, 'Where's the Mogao Caves' exit?' I waited quietly. A few seconds later, one of them replied

in a British accent, 'The exit's there.' Then he pointed at a tunnel with a sign saying 'Exit'. A few moments later, we got out and immediately got back to our hotels. Max was back to his RV to take wonderful and relaxing showers and a fine nap.

The Mogao Caves were a magical place where there were different kinds of art. Some caves were made for living, while others had art for hobbies like painting or art appreciation. However, most caves had art that unfolded stories or historical moments or both. Although I did not think the Mogao Caves were magical, I still wanted to visit such places again. Next time, I would not forget my maps again!.

The Secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Ng, Lok Yiu – 10

It was 2050 and two sisters, Sophia and Christina, were building a time machine for a science project. Christina was talking about the Silk Road. She had been learning about it at school. They both thought it was very interesting.

Just then, Christina's mum called. 'Girls, have you packed your things? It's time to go.' Christina looked at Sophia. 'Oh, we still haven't finished,' Sophia replied. 'Let's pack our things quickly. We can check it later.' They packed their things and went back to checking the time machine. As they stepped inside the time machine, Christina tripped and fell onto the control panel. Suddenly, the door slammed shut and everything went dark. Soon afterwards, the lights came back on and the door swung open. The year on the display said, '1896 AD.'

The girls stepped out. 'Where are we?' Sophia asked. Christina looked around, shocked. She saw some caves and a sign that said, 'DUNHUANG.' 'This must be the Mogao Grottoes on the Silk Road,' said Christina. 'That means ... the time machine really works!' said Sophia. 'This is so exciting! Let's go into the caves,' said Christina.

They went into a cave. It was so dusty with rocks everywhere and there were pictures on the walls. 'Wow! Look at this Buddha statue! I've never seen such a huge Buddha before!' Sophia said. The gigantic Buddha was lying down. It was as big as four buses. 'They call this place the 'Thousand Buddha Cave'. It's made up of 500 temples. Let's keep going,' said Christina. They went deeper into the caves and saw another enormous Buddha, but this Buddha had its hands together and it was sitting up. The girls were amazed.

After a while, the girls went back to the time machine and saw that it was glowing with sparks flying. Sophia said, 'That's strange. It shouldn't be like that.' The two girls stepped back into the time machine to find out what was going on.

Once again, the doors closed and everything went dark. When the lights came back on, they saw the year on the display read, '0004 AD.' The door swung open and they walked out. They saw some men dress in rags, dragging heavy stones and smashing rocks with giant hammers. 'What are you doing?' asked Sophia. One of them said that they were building temples. Christina asked another workman, 'Who are you building them for?' The workman replied, 'We are building them for the Tang Empress Wu. Everyone who lives here must build them or they will be punished.' Suddenly, a soldier shouted, 'Hey you, get back to work!' The frightened workman hurried away. Then the soldier looked at the girls and said, 'What are you waiting for? Back to work! If I see you chatting again, you'll be sorry you were born.' Christina and Sophia were scared, so they did what he said.

The girls worked very hard for hours. Later, two soldiers grabbed them and led them to a palace. The soldiers took them to the throne room. The Empress' son, the Prince, was waiting for them. The girls felt scared. 'Welcome to my palace,' said the Prince. 'I want you to feel comfortable while you stay here with us.' Then he looked at a soldier and ordered, 'Take them to the jail.' He looked at the girls and said, 'By tomorrow morning I will know if you are good or bad. If I am happy, I will make one of you my wife.' The Prince added, 'If I am not, you will stay in my jail forever.' The soldier took the girls to a cold, dark room with no windows.

The girls chatted inside the jail. 'This is a nightmare. I hope we wake up soon,' said Sophia. 'Being his wife is scary enough, but being here forever is even worse,' cried Christina. 'I just want to go home,' said Sophia.

The next day, Christina and Sophia were taken to the Prince again. He looked at them and pointed to a picture on the wall. 'In the picture there is a rich person and a poor person. Which is better?' he asked. The girls thought for a moment before they answered at the same time. 'Neither,' they said.

The Prince said, '...very good, you passed. Now who shall be my wife?' Christina started to cry. She told the Prince everything that had happened and about the time machine. 'We are so sorry,' she said. 'Please let us go,' cried Sophia. The Prince felt sorry for them and decided to let them go.

The Prince's best scientists helped the girls to make their time machine work again. The girls thanked everybody and said goodbye, then stepped back into the machine. Once again it went dark but this time when the lights came back on, the girls were back in Sophia's room. Just then, they heard an angry voice, 'GIRLS, I'VE BEEN CALLING YOU FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES. WE'RE GONNA BE LATE!' Mum stomped into the girls' bedroom, her face reddened with anger. Christina and Sophia had never felt happier to see their mum so angry. They ran and hugged their mum. 'We love you, Mum,' they said embracing her tightly. 'Yes, ok, I love you too,' said Mum. 'Dad is waiting in the car downstairs, so let's go.'

The girls grabbed their things and ran to the car. When they got in, their dad said, 'I was just looking at holidays for next year. I thought we could visit the Mogao Grottoes in China. I heard you girls talking about it all the time.' The girls looked at each other and smiled, 'Um, no thanks,' said Sophia. 'We just want to stay home with you and Mum this year,' added Christina. Dad looked at Mum, confused. 'I don't know,' said Mum, 'But they have been acting a bit strangely.'

A Trip to the Mogao Grottoes

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Pang, Hong Ching Clara – 11

Last year, six of my classmates and I were the lucky winners of a history painting competition co-organized by the History Club and the Art Club. Earlier this month, we went on a trip to explore the Silk Road in China. After a few exhausting days of travelling, we finally reached our destination – the Mogao Grottoes. The Mogao Grottoes are caves in the desert found more than one and a half millennia ago. However, about a thousand years later, the caves were forgotten.

Upon reaching the caves, we were mesmerised by the sheer size of them. There were hundreds of caverns. In the caverns, we found some of the finest paintings, sculptures and literature in the world. The first cavern we went to was filled with paintings. There were more than two thousand paintings in the cave. Despite being well-preserved, the paintings were dull yet somehow colourful at the same time. Most of the pictures had faded. This made them messy and confusing to understand. However, my friend, George, and I were particularly fascinated by the paintings. We kept gazing at the murals because we felt like there was a hidden message behind them. During the trip, we got so busy analysing them that we missed our teacher's call when moving to the next cavern.

We followed the message from the paintings which led us to another cavern. In that cavern, we did not see any paintings. We found plenty of old boxes instead. "Let's open some of these boxes. Who knows, we may find something cool," George said jokingly. Upon opening some of them, we found some dusty scattered photos and poorly written notes. In the second box, we found some small bones. We could not seem to figure out where they came from. Before giving up, we tried one last box. To our surprise, within that box we found there a few maps, some gold coins and a diary written by a pirate many years ago. I wondered, "Why had nobody found these before us?"

Upon examining the diary, we realised that the maps would lead us to some treasure along the Silk Road. While we were wondering if we should go find the treasure, we heard our teacher calling our names. George and I started to panic and quickly grabbed some gold coins, the maps and the diary before our teacher found us. When we left the cavern, we looked back and realised that the cavern was gone! We wondered if we were the chosen ones to find the maps and diary. Will it really lead us to some treasure?

After we went back to school, I reflected on what had happened. I learnt that we should not forget about national treasures like the Mogao Grottoes, as there is a lot of history associated with them and there may be a lot of interesting things within them. George and I are looking forward to planning another adventure to look for the treasures when we are older.

A Tale of the Mogao Grottoes

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), She, Pak Yin – 10

In a place of China, a news reporter suddenly remembered something that his grandpa said. “There was this place called the Mogao Caves. It is very secret since everybody forgot it. Maybe if you go there and report it, it will be great news!”. He wanted to check it out, so he grabbed his camera and went into the caves.

There were only a few coins on the ground, but they were quite new. The year on the coins was 1900. “How is this possible? This cave has not been found for a thousand years!” He looked around very carefully but slipped on a rock. When he thought he went to the wrong caves, he saw that the walls were not similar to the rocks. He took a rock and threw it against the weird wall, nothing happened. He There were only stairs to what seemed like a secret basement. He wanted to go in. Just as he went in, his camera went out of battery. “This is a bit like the Bermuda Triangle!” he thought. As he slowly went down the stairs, he was looking at the cave ceiling the whole time. As a result, he carelessly stepped on a booby trap. Poisonous gas was released. It made him unconscious. Someone dragged him away. When he woke up, he was in the basement, locked up in a cell. There were a lot of treasures such as diamonds and emeralds, with no ways to get out. His only plan is to wait for help.

A little boy that lived near that cave heard someone scream, so he went in. He saw footprints and fingerprints full of sand. He was still new to investigating, so he did not know where to start. One hour later, he felt bored so he wanted to go back home.

When he walked out of the cave, he slipped on a rock and fell down. He accidentally broke the weird wall and it opened stairs to the basement. He walked down and saw a terrible sight! The man was still alive but he was starving. He was so skinny that he was only bones!

A thief hid in a corner and said, “Hello, you’re very brave but I’m afraid I’ll have to take you out.” The boy did not know what to do. He ran quickly into the thief and made him fall. He was very surprised at what he did. Then, he saved the man. He took the thief’s keys and unlocked the man. He asked him to report to the police to arrest the thief. “Thank you. Thank you so much!” said the man.

The news reporter got a promotion and the boy told his family the story. They all lived happily ever after.

The Great Monk Who Built the Mogao Grottoes – Lezun

Ying Wa Primary School, Chan, Wun Tung – 11

He was riding on his camel's back and stopped after eight hours controlling it all the way from Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province. Then he took out a loaf of bread and his porcelain water bottle from his leather bag and had a short break to cool down a little.

"How on Earth can I survive in this long journey?" he said, miserably. It was the year 366, and he was shivering despite the thick wide-sleeve clothes he was wearing. The dusty air made him really uncomfortable, and he was surrounded by the dry desert in every direction. He was an earnest Buddhist, and a few days ago he had decided to be a monk. Monks needed to go to the White Horse Temple in Henan and complete a written test with a writing brush, in which he didn't have much confidence.

Now he was in Dunhuang, still a long way to go, but he thought he wouldn't make it through. He was completely exhausted, so he slept on the soft sand after finishing his bread, thinking of whether he would continue in his journey or just give up and be as normal as everybody else in his village. When he woke up, he saw something really peculiar. It was the great head of Buddha, whose long ears made his earlobes extend out of his head.

"Why... why are you here, Great Buddha?" he asked, in great surprise.

"Lezun, I know that you want to become a monk, don't you? If you really want to be one, you must build a cave here," said Buddha, in a deep voice.

"Why do I need to do so? It is very cold here and I want to leave this environment as fast as I can," said Lezun.

"The monks in the temple will need you to tell them what I told you to do," said Buddha, "and you need to bring evidence that you have completed the task." Lezun still wanted to ask Buddha another question but he saw many fairies afterwards. Lezun was curious about what he saw but they disappeared one second later.

All of a sudden, he found a shovel beside him, and he thought that must be what Buddha gave him. Then he transported the sand to somewhere else with the shovel's help and did his very best to make the largest and stables cave he could, which was one of the Mogao Grottoes. He felt very comfortable inside so he lived there with his camel and rode on it when he was bored. On the next day, he saw a paintbrush and some paint beside him, and being a good artist himself, he painted the fairies on the wall, which he had seen the day before. In the painting, they had beautiful pink lips, delicate little noses and hair with two braids on either side of their cute and round face.

After a few days, as he thought the food was scarcely enough for him, he decided to leave and arrive at the temple as quickly as possible. When he was packing his belongings, he took a closer look at his painting, appreciating how beautiful it was, but when his nose touched it, he was absorbed into its world! "Argh!" he screamed, and the next second he found that the fairies were all staring at him with curiosity. They looked just like girls, but each of them was only the width of an adult's palm.

"Run! Please don't go!" they yelled together. "We are seeking you for help!"

"We have lost our wings," a little fairy told him with a sweet voice. "A few days ago we had wings, but they were somehow gone suddenly. Without wings, we don't have magic powers. We wanted to explore this place but it turned out to be dangerous. Look! A volcano eruption has occurred, and that's why we are running! How can we go back home, which is on the other side of the mountain?"

"Uh... once I saw people setting off sky lanterns at the Lantern Festival, and maybe we can make something similar!" said Lezun. Now they were safe, for the lava was out of reach from them, so they stopped and the fairies accepted his suggestion. The land there was completely different from the desert. There were plenty of trees with birds chirping, and green grass could be found everywhere. The sky was blue and clear, with no clouds stopping the sun from shining onto the ground, so Lezun took off his jacket and wiped his sweat off using a handkerchief.

With the help of the fairies, Lezun successfully made a sky lantern with a basket so that all of the fairies could sit inside. He chopped wood from a tree and made a fire from it, and one of the fairies gave him a present in return.

After checking the wind direction, Lezun waved them goodbye while the lantern was flying in the sky, until it disappeared out of sight.

Then, he felt himself whirling in the air, and a bright light appeared in front of him. Everything was now back to normal! It was still daytime, and he noticed that he forgot to paint wings for the fairies, so he painted them back.

He was now no longer afraid that he would not be able to arrive at the temple, because he now believed that everything was possible with faith! Therefore, he rode on his camel and continued on his journey hopefully.

After three months, Lezun finally reached the temple. The monks asked him for evidence that he finished the task, and he suddenly remembered the present from the fairies. He opened the box and found that there was a pair of shiny wings! "Lezun, congratulations that you pass the test! You are now a real monk!" said an old monk in the temple. He was proud of himself because he completed all of the difficult missions with his strong faith, determination and self-belief.

From A Writing Assignment to the Mogao Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Cheung, Chun Wang Isaac – 11

I sat tiredly on my bedroom, which was filled with piles of battered, crumpled paper balls. The sky was dark, with grumpy clouds soaring over the gray, lifeless sky. I had been sitting there for hours. Beside my depressed body was a sheet of paper, proposing the words “HKYWA writing”. Frustrated about not knowing what to write. I scrunched and threw the worksheet away, leaving it landing on the floor in a heap. The worksheet shook dramatically, summoning a vortex which sucked me in, my sound fading.

Upon opening my eyes from the blinding light, I found myself in a rather unpleasant place. It was completely deserted, with little cracks running through the hot, dry land. Enormous sand dunes rose from the ground, acting as roadblocks, further stopping any would-be survivor around, leaving only sand and dead bushes for the barren wasteland. I was about to recall what happened, when a group of men came by on camels. There was no time to think.

“Where are you heading?” I inquired the group of men.

“We’re going to the Mogao Grottoes to do research,” said one of them. “Would you like to join us? We could use some extra people.....”

When I nodded, the kind-hearted men welcomed me on their camels warmly. They wore brown hats and boots, with cloaks like a cowboy’s.

The road to the Mogao Grottoes was very dull. Although we could see camels, lizards gradually, it was always either animals or dead bushes or other animals again. The most interesting was a particular camel I spotted just then, which had something on his back. Wait—that’s not something, that’s someone—rob.....robbers!

The robbers had ugly, cruel looks. They had tall, chubby bodies which were covered in rough, leather clothing. They all had cold eyes and round noses, with a dropping mouth with gold teeth underneath. On some of them were deep scars representing victory, and all of them had a symbol on their clothing. Quick as a flash, a robber took out his rifle and fired a shot, narrowly missing one of our men. Then, a “tink” sound rang, and the robbers’ lethal weapon had disappeared. Other robbers pulled out their guns, and the same event happened also to the unsuspecting criminals. Without their weaponry, the robber panicked and ran for life, until they were out of our sight, into the blank desert.

Just then, a man in our gang surprisingly pulled out all of the robber’s guns. We were astonished.

“Just needed to give them the old-fashioned grapple-hook,” said the man, “name’s Paul Pelliot. I’m off to find the treasure of the Mogao Grottoes. Used the grappling hook to ‘confiscate’ their guns. Oh, and can you find the treasure with me? If you find it, I’ll give you something special.

It was agreed to rest through the night. After eating some corn bread for breakfast, we continued our road to the Mogao Grottoes.

After some close encounters with robbers (again), we had finally arrived at the Mogao Grottoes. From far away you could already see the gigantic silhouette, but when close-up, it was truly a sight to behold. The magnificent architect had tall, stone walls surrounding it, and staircases and rooms stretched out both sides of the wall. Where the walls met were a towering eight-story building, and it was decorated by curved rooftops and elegant, patterned walls.

There was no time to waste. We split into two teams: one for the renovation works, which started to refresh the paintings on the walls immediately; and the other, which consisted of Paul and me, went into the interior to explore.

The men were just done refreshing a coat of painting when we heard an air-splitting cry. Paul! We ran to him anxiously. Fortunately, he was only mildly injured. On the other hand, he seemed to be sitting on some sparkling items—manuscripts!

Looking carefully at the first manuscript, a fellow historian found that it dated back to the year 868—that's older than the oldest printed book! The other script seemed different. It was ... a treasure map!

Following the instructions, we first had to find the painting where the sun at noon shines on, for some reason. After a tedious while, I saw a blur ray of light slowly trailing across the wall, and stopped at the exact frame of an ancient piece of painting. We gazed thoughtfully at the artifact, which wrote "to find the next clue, enter the first room." — that means the treasure map room!

When we backtracked back into the treasure map room, however, things changed drastically. The former environment of all its glory had disappeared. Surrounded by mist was a blank room. Unwary of the dangers ahead, we stepped into the room carelessly. A low rumble followed by a mild earthquake, and thick, stone barriers covered the room, effortlessly trapping us inside. The place had turned into an arena.

Out of nowhere came the artifacts, alive. Smoke billowed out of their bodies. They chanted, "Drop that manuscript, or we shall eliminate you from existence," Extremely frightened, I trembled and dropped the manuscript. Suddenly, the symbol in the script started glowing, and the artifacts returned back to their position as if nothing happened.

The large, drastic change to the room seemed to have revealed a secret chamber. Inside was, about 300 artifacts, waiting to be discovered! These must be the legendary treasure Paul talked about! As a reward for finding the treasure, Paul winked and gave the treasure map to me. Suddenly, the map turned into the writing assignment and the vortex appeared, echoing the words "writing idea found".

I was sitting in my bedroom for hours. However, I picked up my pen and started to write. Well, you're reading it now!

The Second Shower of Golden Rays

Ying Wa Primary School, Choy, Tung Lam – 11

“Wake up! Wake up!” shouted Wanhe, a Buddhist priest. It was the Tang Dynasty, and Wanhe was shouting for the monks in the Mogao Grottoes to wake up. That day was no ordinary day, for the Monks had learnt about the fall of the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan to the Islamic conquerors from Kashgar. That day was the day when the monks would seal the library cave, then escape, to avoid any destructions to the Buddhist establishments in the grottoes. The cave temples were named Mogao for it was built in the tallest peak of the desert, and the monks knew that this fact endangered them, since the temples would be easy to spot. They had to act fast.

The monk’s first destination was the library cave, for they wanted to seal it. The reason for them to do so was because it contained over 50,000 manuscripts, scrolls, and booklets filled with sacred Buddhist information. If the people of Kashgar found them, the books would be burnt. Led by Wanhe, the monks sealed the cave entrance with tons of dirt until it blended in with the walls. Their next goal was to escape.

On their way out, they passed the Sleeping Buddha Cave. It contained sculptures of thousands of Buddhas, and the monks stopped to pay their respects. As the leader, Wanhe led the monks in to a prayer. While the monks were chanting, Wanhe thought he saw the 16 metres long Buddha’s eyes open slowly, and a ray of gold shot out, then vanished. He didn’t mention this to the others, because he thought he was mistaken. After that the monks prayed to the Gauntama Buddha, who is regarded as founder of Buddhism. Then Wanhe once again saw a streak of gold light come from the sculpture’s eyes. What he didn’t know was that the rays meant an arrival of some sort of spirit, and he would soon find out.

Maybe you’re wondering: Why did the conquerors of Kashgar want the monks dead? The answer is simple: They were Christians. But there were no Christians in China! Yes, but these people come from the west of China, outside its boundaries. And since the grottoes are near the Silk Road, which was used by the people of the West to leave and enter China, that meant the Christians would soon arrive. And also the cave was built in Sanwei Mountain, the highest point of the desert, so the Christians soon spotted the mountain. Then Siwilltong, the leader of the troops from Kashgar, shouted out, “Fellow brothers! I have spotted the demon’s nest! Let us march on!” His words roused a chorus of cheers from the army. As for the monks, they heard the stampede above the caves and made a run for it. That was the end, they thought. Or was it?

Very soon, the party of Kashgar arrived in front of the grottoes in Dunhuang. Then Siwilltong announced, “Troops! Thy entrances of Hell lie before us! By the power of the Lord, we must enter!” Then again a chorus of cheers arose from the army. And on the other side, the monks stopped running, and Wanhe said gravely, “By the power of the Jade Emperor, let us march on and meet our enemies.” So both sides continued on.

When the two groups met, the leaders approached each other. A solemn conversation started. “Here is the leader of thy demon!” shouted Siwilltong. “Open up to the Lord, and thou shall be forgiven.” “Never.” replied Wanhe, calmly. “You shall not pass.” “Then by the power of our true lord,” boomed Siwilltong. “You shall die!” But still the monks stood, not even flinching. “If you want to pass,” said Wanhe, “then you must step over our corpses, looked by the devas above.” He gestured to the Thangka on the ceiling of the entrance, about the size of 792 square centimetres. “Very well.” growled Siwilltong. “Then we shall fight.”

Now you must know the monks had a huge disadvantage: They had no protection. Their fight was based on nothing but their belief. And on the split second when the Christian priest’s blade reached the Buddhist priest’s chest, a miracle happened. All the Buddhas, be it sculpture, be it painting, their eyes glowed a shade of gold. A ray of gold struck Siwilltong’s blade, saving Wanhe. Then the paintings above shot out thousands of rays. It was as if history was repeating itself. Wanhe sure felt that way because he knew legend has it that Yuenzun, creator of the grottoes, saw a shower of golden rays, so inspired, he started building the caves.

This was the second time it happened.

The second shower of golden rays.

In the confusion, the golden rays merged into a golden ball. It then said, “Christian Siwilltong, is this what you seek. Is this hatred, this war, this fear, this confusion what you seek? Isn’t it peace that your God yearns?” “Who are

you?” demanded Swilltong. “I am you. I am also Wanhe. I am everything. And I am here to warn you, that what you are doing is wrong. I am no Lord, nor Buddha, but if you dedicate your belief to something, and try to achieve its purpose, then the something exists. Just like Wanhe, he dedicated himself to Buddhism, and now he is fiercely protecting this place, because he believes that Buddhas exist. So if any of you dare harm another believer, he shall pay the ultimate price. “With that, the swirling mass vanished.

“I don’t know what sorcery this is, but I’m not falling for it.” Shouted Siwilltong, keeping his cool. “Brothers, charge!” But with these words, no cheers came, because Siwilltong slowly turned to ashes. With that, the people of Kashgar had a breakdown. Words like “heaven help us!” and “I want my mommy” were spoken. The monks were safe, without having any men to die.

A mysterious voice sounded out in the distant, “Believe your belief...”

The Mogao Labyrinth

Ying Wa Primary School, Kwok, Ho Lam – 11

For years, the Mogao Grottoes have fascinated mankind, ancient scrolls containing knowledge about Buddhism, paintings and sculptures, immortalising the Buddha. But recently, archaeologists have discovered a new cave, and they plan to send in two of their finest explorers to retrieve some valuable information.

“Do you remember what we’re looking for?” asked Martin to his fellow archaeologist Bruce.

“Of course I remember, we’re looking for more pieces of the Gandharan scrolls right? The oldest and most famous Buddhist scroll ever?” answered Bruce confidently.

Martin and Bruce have been best friends since first grade, and they have both decided to go down the path of exploration and discovery, it’s an understatement to say these two know each other well. Even though they are best friends, they don’t have a lot in common. At least on the outside. Martin has blue eyes and dark hair, he was quite tall and usually had a serious tone. He doesn’t make too many jokes but that isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Bruce has hazel eyes and blond hair, he’s a little shorter than Martin and he’s a lot more relaxed.

Martin looked up from his map, “Right on. So... You ready to go inside? Hold out your torch.”

The two carefully marched up to the entrance of the cave and ventured inside. There were lines of books and the walls were covered in paintings, a large clay statue sat at the end of the room, holding up one hand. The two explorers instantly recognised that this was the meditation mudra, which symbolises wisdom, this was often done during meditation.

“The Gandharan scrolls have a birch coloured cover so if you see anything similar to it, just let me know.” Martin said while scanning the room.

“Hey Martin,” Bruce suddenly said, “Can you come over here for a quick second?”

Martin walks over to Bruce and his eyes locked onto the thing Bruce found, it was a lever.

“I don’t think we should pull this, even though this was from ancient times it could be a trap.” Martin said with a shaky voice.

One thing you should know about Martin is that he is a very calm person, he doesn’t get nervous easily, so his voice getting unstable must mean he is *really* nervous and concerned about this lever and what it can do.

“It’s probably just a lever to open a door. That might be where the scrolls are hidden! We should go for it.” Bruce said, a little bit too relaxed for Martin’s liking.

Bruce was always the one that was more carefree, he always thought of the best-case scenario, which explains why he wasn’t even slightly concerned about the lever in this cave.

“No, we really shouldn’t –”

It was too late, Bruce had pulled the lever, different clicks and ticks began immediately and a cracking sound began, the floor was pulled underneath them and they fell down into a ravine.

“Ugh... Where... What is this place?” Martin said while getting to his feet, “Bruce... Bruce? Where are you?”

Bruce was right next to his feet, unconscious.

“Bruce no! Wake up, wake up! You can’t leave me now, I need your help! What do I do, what do I do... Oh!”

There was a pool of water a couple of metres away from them, Martin put his hand into it, and lucky for him, it was cold. It should be able to wake up Bruce. Martin cupped his hands and poured a little bit of water of Bruce's face, and sure enough, "Ah! What happened?" Bruce screamed, his voice echoing throughout the entire ravine.

"You pulled the lever and we fell down here, I told you it was dangerous! Why didn't you listen to me?" Martin said, sounding angry and scared at the same time.

"Well, I thought it might be the key to finding the scrolls! We would be famous for it! It contains so much information! The first Gandharan scrolls told us about the birth of the Buddha and his early years, maybe this will tell us about the fall of the kingdom of the Buddha! No one has ever really known what happened, there's only been theories!" Bruce reasoned.

"It's not worth us risking our... Wait what's that over there?" Martin paused mid-sentence, staring at a shining yellow object at the end of the ravine.

They walked close to the stone pillar that had the object on top of it, it turned out to be three shapes, a triangle, a square, and a sphere.

"What are we supposed to do with these?" Bruce asked.

"I'm not sure... there's a little box like object in the wall, maybe it has something to do with that?" Martin said while reaching out to hold the shapes.

"I think we're supposed to choose a shape that's suitable for that box." Bruce suggested.

Martin nodded to agree with him, "Which one is the suitable one though... Oh! I think I know which one it is! There're three shapes right? I think we should pick the sphere, if my memory serves me well, the sphere is the sacred shape in Buddhism. There are a total of three shapes, and there are three spheres in Buddhism, one for the Earth, one for the sky, and one for the atmosphere. It seems perfect, three shapes, one sphere that has to be a connection!"

Bruce's eyes lit up, "Oh my word, you're right! I think we should choose the sphere, if we get it wrong, it was nice meeting you in this life. If we don't make it out of here, I'll see you in Tushita."

They put the sphere in the box, and there was a rumbling sound, the box lit up a bright shade of green, and a gust of wind blew them back up into the Mogao Grotto.

"Hey, look at this weird birch coloured thing," they both said in unison.

Skippy's Mogao Grottoes Adventure

Ying Wa Primary School, Milas, Mitch Christopher – 11

An urban legend, a dusty mystery— these are adjectives that perfectly suit the wonderfully mysterious caves of the Mogao Grottoes. Skippy, the young adventurer, would love them. ‘Who is this Skippy?’ you ask. Well let me tell you about him. Skippy is a brave and clever modern-day detective and adventurer.

One extraordinary day, Skippy and his friends, Hennesy and Farren, were relaxing at home when an old yet friendly-looking man walked up the sidewalk and over to him.

“I have a treasure map from my grandfather. It’s a bit torn, but I’ve always wanted to see where it leads to,” said the man.

Skippy looked at the ancient map. Though not knowing exactly where it led, he could see some faint letters on the scroll.

With a sense of curiosity, he searched online, and found what he was looking for—the map was of the famous and mysterious Mogao Grottoes. Skippy told the man that he accepted his request, and he would give whatever he found from the map to the man – excluding his finder’s fee of course!

They took a direct flight from their hometown, Mitchton, and not long later, they arrived at the fabulous Mogao Grottoes. Wonderfully stacked caves lining perfectly on every row of the grottoes, one upon another, colourfully illustrated pictures surrounding every bit of stone wall. Although some ancient monuments might have fallen or collapsed, some statues still looked brand new after restoration. Little did the three know that within this fabulous network of caves were a multitude of cavernous tunnels with each and every part of the tunnel walls being fully engraved with undiscovered secrets that were created long ago.

Skippy, Hennesy and Farren went in the caves and looked at the ragged map, and instantly recognized the area. The map told them about a lever found on the head of one small sculpture. Luckily, that sculpture was so small that no one had noticed the lever before. They found the statue and turned its head, and a little stone door in the tunnel wall creaked open. Nobody had noticed since all of the people were too busy sightseeing. They went into the dimly lit corridor, and the stone door shut behind them. They were in total darkness, until suddenly torches magically lit up and showed them the path onwards. Next to them were stone carvings of ancient people and faint paintings that were worn away over the years. Skippy noticed one of the paintings, and began to translate the worn letters into English – “We the keepers of this tunnel, as this is the place our true creator built himself. We built this monument to honour him.”

Skippy knew they were unearthing secrets from ancient times, so they decided to keep on trekking through the damp and murky passageway. Enormous Buddhist statues lined the walls. Soon they arrived at a room. It seemed like a magical place. All the paintings here looked as if they had never been touched before, since they were all very vibrant. They didn’t look worn out at all! Between the paintings, was a door, gold-plated, and with figurines of Buddhist monks engraved on it. They opened the door and slowly walked in, Skippy was still holding the map.

“We’re almost there, we just have to go through this room!” exclaimed Skippy.

They arrived at another room. Everything was made out of pure gold. A Buddhist statue was standing in the middle of the room, with luscious golden flowers blooming around it, and also water flowing in tiny gaps in the ground. Although they knew the treasure was ahead, something caught their eyes, a sign made out of gold, engraved in big, bold Chinese letters, telling them that onward was the library. But to get in, they needed to find a book made out of pure gold.

Somehow, Farren had the luck of the Irish, and found the golden book hidden in the base of the statue. He took it, but mistakenly, also triggered an ancient trap. Dozens of arrows shot out from the ceiling. Fortunately the trio dodged the arrows in time.

They inserted the gold book into a slot next to the door, and the library doors opened. Inside, rows of scrolls, books made from animal skin, and bamboo etchings filled the room. Torches illuminated the aisles, making it bright. Everything amazed them, though none of them decided to take anything because everything was too precious. They exited the library, and then went to find what the real treasure was.

Entering the final room of the library was going to be glorious. When they opened the final golden door, gold light flooded in. They had found the treasure: it was the creator Lè Zūn's finest work — One thousand Buddhas made of pure gold bathing in glistening gold light, which was from the gold ore hanging on the top of the caves, all illuminated by the wooden torches hanging on the walls. This treasure was priceless! Skippy couldn't wait to share it with the world.

After staring at the amazing sights, they decided to go back the way they came and go to find the man who had given them the map. When they arrived back at Mitchton, they saw the man pacing up and down the street they lived on. The man asked, "Did you find the treasure?"

Skippy replied, "Yes, and thanks for your treasure map. We unearthed a brand new place greater and grander than all of the other caves."

"What is it?" The man asked.

"It is a cave which holds the thousand golden Buddhas of Lè Zūn."

The man told Skippy to show the public to the place, and so he did. Now everybody could enjoy the newly-discovered Mogao Grottoes, including scientists and adventurers, who will be happy to help find more secrets about the wonderful Mogao Grottoes.

The Tales of Dong The Monk

Ying Wa Primary School, Sze, Long – 11

Li Dong was sent to the palace by the Genghis Khan Emperor for a secret mission. He had no clue what the “mission” could be, and why he was chosen, as he was such an ordinary farmer, who was also a widower. Dong had many wrinkles since his twenties as he worked industriously on field days and nights. Other than that, he seldom talk to others as he had a mole covered half his left cheek which made him abased of himself.

As Dong walked into the palace, the Genghis Khan Emperor greeted him with a feast, and said, “Anda! You must be Li Dong! Good to see you. Have you heard of the ‘Diamond Sutra’, which is the oldest printed book? It was told that the one who own this book will have wisdom and power! I need it to help me to unite the tribes! I think it’s in a cave, which is somewhere near the southeast of the centre of Dunhuang. Go and get it for me!”

Dong replied in confusion, “Yes my majesty, but why did you pick me? I’m nothing but a poor farmer. I don’t think I am able to complete your mission.”

The Genghis Khan Emperor replied, “You are a middle-aged man, with eleven fingers, a mole on the left cheek... Perfectly matches the description of the ‘chosen one’ from the rumour. Do not let me down! Anda!”

Dong left the palace and started heading to Dunhuang, wondering if he would ever reach there. He traversed through jungles, deserts, and he even climbed tens and hundreds of tall mountains. When he reached Dunhuang, there were scars all over his body.

With pain and tiredness, Dong entered a medieval village for a rest. Suddenly, he saw an infant cry in pain, with a lot of blood all over him, who was being attacked by a cow. Without hesitation, he rushed over there, fought the cow and rescued the baby. He did that thousands of times to stop the cows at home from escaping so it was just a piece of cake.

An impoverished lady who wore torn clothes and had no shoes, who seemed to be the parent of the baby came out in tears and said, “Thank you for saving my baby! You are so fearless and kind. Here’s my pickaxe to show appreciation.” Dong accepted the gift and continued with his journey.

Sometime later, he met a famished and skinny boy who had no arms, and was begging for money. Although Dong had little food left, he gave some of his bread to the poor boy. The boy was in tears as he was extremely thankful, gave him a gourd water bottle to thank Dong.

Many days later, Dong came across a cave which was called the Mogao Grottoes. There were hundreds of temples and a lot of Buddhist paintings and sculptures inside. It was quite creepy for him as all of them seemed to be looking at him. He searched through the temples, one after another, and in one of the smallest rooms which wrote “Library caves” on the walls, he finally found the “Diamond Sutra”! He was so relieved as he couldn’t believe he could complete the mission so easily.

When he touched the book, the walls started crumbling. He started to panic so he snatched the book and start running back the way he came. However, he saw three scary-looking shadows in that hallway. In fear, Dong ran the other way to find somewhere safe. As he was running, the art on the walls came alive and stretched their arms to catch him. He eventually reached a dead end and a huge boulder was rolling toward him. He saw a crevice in the wall so he used the pickaxe to mine through it. Luckily, it broke easily as it was almost as thin as paper. He squeezed his body through the small hole to save himself from the danger.

Dong leaned on the wall for a rest, he panted so hard and many drops of sweat were dripping down his neck. Tears flowed down Dong’s face, and his eyes were redder than tomatoes. Then, the light sob became a painful cry as he whined, “Why did the Emperor do this to me? Why did these statues come alive and hunt me down? Why...”

As he was too exhausted, he took out the gourd water bottle for a sip. Something in front of his eyes emitted a shiny light, and he saw a big Buddha. The Buddha had 108 dried snails on its head, and it sat in front of Dong with its legs crossed. A strong deep voice came out from the Buddha, “Man, the pickaxe on your hand is from the Lady of Kindness, which shows your wisdom and courage. The gourd water bottle on your waist is from the Monk of

Mercy, which shows your generosity and your willingness to sacrifice. You are the chosen one to come here to spread Buddhism. Are you willing to stay here to continue to write down the history of Buddhism?”

“Of course...”, Dong knelt down and said sincerely, he knew immediately that the one in front of him was the founder of Buddhism, the Shakyamuni Buddha.

A severe shake later, the Mogao Caves were then covered by sand and no one could find it until millennia’s later. It became a system of 500 temples. Inside, thousands of Buddha caves, lots of wall paintings and massive amounts of documents were found witnessing the cultural, religious activities of Buddhism.

In the twentieth century, Monk Wang Yuanku re-found the Library cave by accident. When he opened the cave, an old monk which was believed to be Dong said to him in a weak voice, “You are finally here, please pass the treasure of Buddha to future generations”. Then the old monk lied down on the floor and transformed into a statue made of mud.

The Golden Bohdi Tree

Ying Wa Primary School, Tsang, Hau Hei – 11

Thomas woke up, starting a new day of his third year at the Dunhuang Academy. He entered the classroom at precisely eight o'clock. His teacher, Professor Fan Jinshi, smiled at him – he was not late, at least for a day!

Professor Fan started to talk about a Chinese painter called Zhang Daqian, “He was a famous painter, famous for his paintings of scenery. When he went to the Mogao Grottoes, he realized that there were two layers of paint on the cave drawings. Therefore, he scraped off the first layer of paint to see what was beneath it, causing damage to the cave drawings...” Thomas started dozing off, he found the Mogao Grottoes a very boring topic! “And under the first layer of paint, he found” Professor Fan continued, “words etched on the cave wall. According to the myths, the words were ‘Find thy child who seeks thy last cave. “I do not believe in myths, but, well, that’s what it said.” Professor Fan shrugged. At this moment, Thomas snapped awake. What was inside the ‘last cave’?

When the class ended, Thomas rushed to the library, a place that he seldom went, to search for more information about the words on the cave wall, but with no success. He decided to ask Professor Fan. However, she was very sensitive about the topic. She became frustrated in the middle of the conversation, “That is all I know! Stop bothering me! Do I seem like a superstitious person?”

The next day, Thomas finally found a dusty, leather-covered book. The author was Zhang Daqian! He borrowed the book immediately. When he went back to his dormitory, he started reading the book. The Mogao Grottoes did not seem so boring anymore! He found out from the book that there was a little hole in the Library Cave. Zhang Daqian had used a lot of ways to enlarge the hole, but failed. Thomas did some online research and realized that modern people did not know about the hole. Maybe the hole led to the ‘last cave’! There was only one way to find out about the hole – going there by himself. Thomas decided to set off at once the Christmas holiday started.

Time flies, it was already the first day of the Christmas holiday, Thomas was on the train to Dunhuang. The Mogao Grottoes were much more spectacular than what he had expected. There were over one thousand Buddha statues, and an even larger amount of cave paintings. All were crafted by the ancient people. Following the hints he got from the book, Thomas entered Cave 148 and saw the hole, for it was shaped like a hexagon. Thomas came up with a fabulous plan.

That night, to avoid the guards, Thomas snuck into Cave 148 in a flash, the hole was glowing brightly. Thomas looked around the cave; there was a statue of the Reclining Buddha. It took up most of the space of the room, being sixteen metres long. It was made of clay and lying sideways on a platform rising a few feet off the ground. Then, the minute hand struck twelve. The Buddha’s eyes snapped open, glowing gold. It was all so eerie. Thomas stood petrified, rooted to the floor. Then, a kind voice spoke in his mind, “Thomas, why are you here?”

Thomas stammered, “Who...who are you? Why do you know my name?”

The voice spoke in his mind again, with a grand tone, “I am the Reclining Buddha, and I know all and see all.”

Thomas said respectfully, “May I know more about the glowing hole?”

The Buddha replied, “That is blinded even from my vision, all I can provide you is this piece of magical stone, which I have been guarding here for decades or even millions of years.”

Thomas said, “Um...okay.” Not knowing when had the stone appeared in his hand, nor how would the stone help him. Then, abruptly, he realized that the stone was shaped like a hexagon; same as the hole on the wall.

Thomas inserted the hexagonal stone into the hole, and it fitted perfectly! At that moment, the wind calmed, soft Chinese music was heard and a golden light blinded Thomas just as the wall slid open sideways. There was a little cave. Thomas estimated the cave’s floor was four times four square metres in size. In the centre of the cave, there was a bodhi tree which seemed to be made of gold. The strangest thing was, under the tree, there was a Buddha, mediating. Thomas stood there for a long time. The Buddha’s eyes opened and said slowly, “Sit, and we will talk more.”

Thomas asked, “Sit where?”

The Buddha replied “Why? On the floor!”

Thomas sat down and the Buddha explained, “You are the ‘child’ in the prophecy. “Thomas’s jaw dropped at this moment. The Buddha continued, “Why? It’s because you are the descendent of me, Sakyamuni.” The Buddha

explained, "I once was a prince from Nepal, after mediating under a bodhi tree, I became Buddha. I want to give you and offer you something now."

The Buddha handed him a scroll made from tree bark, which was also golden. The Buddha said, "Give this to your dear old Professor Fan, she will need it. As for you, you will become the next guardian of the Mogao Grottoes. Do you accept the job?"

Thomas replied sincerely, "Yes, I accept the job." At this moment, the Buddha dissolved into light and vanished.

Then, Thomas fainted and found himself back in his dormitory!

He went to the staff room, clutching the golden scroll tightly in his hands. And handed it to Professor Fan. He started to explain, but he was cut off by Professor Fan. She said, "You are the next guardian of the caves, right? Then you should do your job well." Then, she turned and walked away, leaving a bewildered Thomas in the middle of the corridor.

Secret Adventures of Wang Yuanlu – Discoverer of Mogao Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Wong, Yan Sum Ambrose – 11

There was an ancient cave in the past that has been discovered several times, and 735 caves were found, but one particular cave had been the most mysterious, and there were still many secrets that weren't discovered.

Wang Yuanlu, a Chinese Taoist and an itinerant monk, discovered this extraordinary cave while exploring the ancient Silk Road. But what we don't know is, this monk actually had an unknown adventure inside.

When he discovered the Library Cave, he found out that one of the 'residents' in this cave was Hongbian, who used this cave as his retreat in his lifetime. He found that many manuscripts and documents dating from 406 to 1002 were heaped up in closely packed layers of bundles of scrolls. Wang picked up a book on the ground, and read, 'Heaped up in layers, but without any order, there appeared in the dim light of the priest's little lamp a solid mass of manuscript bundles rising...' Suddenly, the ground below him began to move...

'Wha...' Wang said with mystification. Then everything went blank.

'Wake up, you monk,' In his ears came a muffled voice, 'Ignore him, you idiot. He is dead already,' Came another voice, which was scabrous. He opened his eyes. There were two men, planning on building a thing on a cliff.

'Finally, dude,' Said one of them, 'We were arguing about building 734 caves or 735 caves yesterday, but you came out of nowhere, and stopped us from building. I am Yuezun, and beside me is Faliang. Who are you?'

Wang was stupefied. He had been dead to the world for one whole day? In his brain was: one second prior to now, I was exploring an unknown place, and one second after, I am in an unknown place, watching two insane people bickering? He was anguished, but what could he possibly do? He said, 'I am Wang. But please tell me, where am I? I came from the twenty-fifth of June, 1900.'

'What in the...' Faliang stumbled, 'What are you talking about? Whatever. And by the way, why is it fundamental to build a thousand golden Buddhas?'

'Yeah, we need to build the cave according to my abnormal vision – the golden light to the edge of the cliff with a thousand golden Buddhas and celestial maidens singing and dancing,' replied Yuezun.

Finding out that the two monks totally ignored him, Wang asked more deafeningly, this time intentionally, 'What are you two doing, and most importantly, where am I?' But they ignored the questions, so Wang gave up and raised another inquiry, 'Can you let me see what you're doing?'

This time, Yuezun replied, 'Look behind you.'

Wang looked, and saw a very intimate view. This was the cave he was exploring just now! Wang was puzzled and bewildered. Did he travel back in time to when the extraordinary cave was built? He was only a small Taoist and he transtemporally travelled? But he found this hard to explain to two quarrelsome monks, so he simply said in wonder, 'Wow!'

Yuezun said, 'So do you know what this is related to?'

Wang said with ease, 'This cave is related to Chinese Buddhism, and there are numerous manuscripts and scrolls that are about apocryphal works, workbooks, Confucian works...'

Faliang interrupted him, 'How do you know about this? Are you a spy from other places?'

'No,' Wang said, and he thought that this was a good opportunity to explain why he was here and how he got here, 'I am from the future, and...' While he was saying, five people appeared out of nowhere, each with a katana, saying ferociously, 'Give us the Buddhism manuscripts, or we will sever you,'

Although their approach was adequate, Yuezen still said, 'No, the ones who will be severed are you.' Then, the five people fell down, each with a razor-sharp blade in their head.

'Ouch! That is excruciating!' Faliang said, guffawing, 'And by the way, what should we name this incredible cave?'

Wang quickly suggested, 'You could call the caves "Mogao Caves", because "Mogao" in Chinese means "peerless", and nothing is higher than it.'

'The first thing you've said in the whole day which is not pointless,' Faliang and Yuezun said contemporaneously. Then they started bickering again, 'Then how about the 735th cave?' 'We should not add one more cave!'

Wang was in a battlefield of voices again. 'Stop!' He shouted, without thinking how inappropriate that was, 'I think you should add the 735th cave, and name it the Library Cave, and store most of the manuscripts and scrolls there, and...'

'How demanding!' Yuezun said, half serious, 'But why not?' And they started planning to build it.

'Should we add an enchantment to it? Yuezun asked, 'I mean should we make a series of words, and that will make them travel here?'

'Great idea!' Wang and Faliang said simultaneously. And they said in sync, 'Heaped up in layers, but without any order, there appeared in the dim light of the priest's little lamp a solid mass of manuscript bundles rising...' Instantaneously and suddenly, the sky turned grey, and the ground began to move.

'What in the...' Faliang and Yuezun said extemporaneously. Then everything turned black.

Wang opened his eyes, and found himself in his original place, holding the book. He swiftly dropped the book frantically. 'This book is cursed,' He said to himself, 'I will call it the Diamond Sutra!' and he went on exploring the inexplicable cave. But what he didn't know was, the book magically added this time adventure to it as soon as Wang left, and 'signalled' its writer: Xiantong to alert everyone that the Mogao Grottoes, which had been hiding for years, was officially discovered.

The Truth of the Magao Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Yau, Cheuk Lok – 11

Many believe that a monk dug a cave which later became the Mogao Grottoes. However, nobody knows the truth. This story happened in AD 366, and no one has heard of it yet.

A monk named Yuezun sat down to rest. He'd been walking aimlessly in the desert for days. He was supposed to send a message to Dunhuang, but now he was lost. As he sat, Yuezun saw some green on his left. He squinted. It seemed like a mountain. Seeing something else than sand and sky, he forced himself to trudge on. After a million years, Yuezun got to the foot of the hill. This skinny monk wasn't keen on exercise. He had never felt so tired.

Then he looked up and saw a cave at the hip of the mountain. Yuezun ran up and stepped inside. "Who goes there?" A voice boomed out of nowhere.

Yuezun fell with fright. Afraid not to answer, he spluttered, "I...I am a...messenger...you...I..." He kept stammering uncontrollably.

"Spit it out." The voice echoed, and the tone was calm, with a tinge of amusement. Those were harsh words you would expect the shyest people to roar out.

Yuezun calmed down a bit and said, "I am a monk from—"

"The Shaolin Temple? I am one too." With that, there was a rustle behind Yuezun. He whirled around. The monk was behind him! The monk stood up and faced Yuezun. He looked as old as time, with an overflowing beard and wrinkles all over his ancient face. "Why did you come?" Yuezun told him along with his name. "I see. I don't have any name," The monk continued. "You may refer to me as The Abbot. I was once one. I will show you the way out if you promise not to say anything about the things you are going to see."

Yuezun asked, "What?" and added, "My lips are sealed." when The Abbot raised one of his eyebrows.

"Good. Come." The Abbot strode deeper in the cave and opened a door, camouflaged in the darkness. In there was cave with three passageways. They walked in the middle one, and Yuezun gasped.

This cave had murals, paintings and sculptures. Gold bars were to be seen as well. Some books were stacked neatly in a corner.

Yuezun picked up a book and opened it gently. It was coated with dust. Who knows how many years it had been there, with an inch thick layer of dust? The monk put it back and stared at a mural. The celestial fairies were beautifully sketched, although the colours were fading a bit. One was flying while playing a pipa, whereas most of the painted figures were singing. A statue of a Buddha stood, towering over Yuezun. The eyes gleamed, and as Yuezun looked closer, he discovered that they were in fact diamonds, as big as eggs.

The Abbot said, "This is priceless treasure, and I would not like the monuments to be taken away."

Yuezun agreed. "How many caves are there?"

"Five hundred. All of them filled with objects of value. Sometimes tomb robbers nose in even though there aren't any tombs. He continued. "I fight them off. Like this one here. Look, behind that statue."

Yuezun looked up, startled. He saw a masked robber skulking in a corner. The reason The Abbot saw him first was because he was experienced, and his ears were sharp. The robber held a knife as well, and he tried to kill Yuezun first. Suddenly, a hand reached out astonishingly fast and grabbed the robber by the neck and pulled him away from the frightened monk.

The robber also seemed shocked at his speed. He slashed at the monk, but he dodged it and rolled on the floor. When he stood, there was a staff in his hand. Then as they fought, The Abbot unmasked the robber. Yuezun saw that she was furious.

Yes, the robber was a woman.

She yelled a war cry and rushed forward, slashing crazily like a madwoman. The Abbot rushed to fight her. After a minute, The Abbot discovered that this wasn't an easy task, as the robber was so angry at being unmasked. Sometimes the knife would strike the wall, making cracks appear, but the woman would immediately use all her strength to pull it out and fight on recklessly. It seemed like they had already fought for an hour. When they stopped, they both gasped for breath. Both had streams of sweat trickling down their foreheads.

Suddenly the robber threw the knife, which embedded itself in the Abbot's chest. Yuezun yelled in shock and ran there to help. Blood was streaming down like a raging current. The Abbot smiled faintly. "Yuezun...you cannot go out through the maze, so keep north-east always. Remember that. Also, if you want...tell others about this place I built, you can. But do not mention me." Then the Abbot died.

Yuezun said a prayer, glared at the woman, and left. As he got down from the mountain, eight rumbles were heard, along with a scream. "Alas," Yuezun sighed. "Only four-hundred and ninety-two caves are left. The robber is dead as well."

Yuezun told everyone about the cave, but he changed the story. Most of the clay statues were Buddhas, so he said that after seeing the image at a thousand Buddhas on the hill, he built a cave and put the relics there. He said that he would like the objects to stay. He named this marvelous place "The Mogao Grottoes".

So ends the tale, and if you wonder why I know of it, it is because I found Yuezun's diary by accident and I can retell the story. Till now, we still do not know how old the caves are, since it wasn't Yuezun who built it, and Yuezun's diary did not note down how old the Abbot had been when he died.

Hidden in the Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Yuen, Hei Wang – 10

Legend had it that thousands of Buddhist monuments remained undiscovered. Riddles in some Buddhist paintings were written in such mystifying ancient Indian runes that even the Dunhuang archaeologist, Paul Pelliot, could not make heads or tails of them.

Max and his archaeologist companion Michael had been cracking the riddles of the Buddhist monuments for years, and finally pieced together their destination – the Mogao Grottoes Cave 323, already visited by millions. Doubtfully, they arrived at the cave. Max found a golden lotus under a clay Buddha statue. Curiosity pulled him to touch it. They fainted in a mystic light.

Woken up by the heavenly music of Buddhist fairies, Max and Michael found themselves in a lush green landscape. A giant Buddha statue stood on a golden lotus at the center of the oasis. His right hand spread out, as if he was showering the land with a peaceful blessing. Monks of various nationalities walked around.

An old man with eyes emanating wisdom helped Max up and said, “Hi, I’m Rahula and I manage this oasis. Who are you?” he paused. “How did you get here?”

Still bewildered and frightened, Max and Michael told Rahula their experience truthfully.

Rahula scrunched his eyebrows. “The lotus in the Grottoes showed your fate with us. In the Tang Dynasty, Buddha appeared to monks Le Zun and Fa Liang in a vision, prompting them to construct the Grottoes in Dunhuang. Buddha summoned worthy people, including Buddhist craftsmen, traders on the Silk Road, and monks by his divine influence to conserve the Grottoes. Since Buddha has revealed you this place,” Rahula explained, “you can stay for one month before making up your mind – to stay permanently or never return.”

Rahula toured them around the oasis. By the crystal-clear lotus pond, a group of pious monks were practicing their mantras. Great golden temples in Tang Dynasty style gleamed under the smiling sun. Next to them stood a holy Bodhi Tree, stretching into the clouds as a bridge from heaven to earth.

“Yes, we will stay for a month first,” Max and Michael chanted, almost in unison. They were already getting jittery about making the most influential archaeological discovery of the century.

Having stayed with the monks for days, Michael met an acquaintance, Sarvajna. Sarvajna confided to Michael, “I have been here for years. The hustle and bustle of the outer world always calls for me. How I long to reunite with my family – but alas, I must stay!” Pointing at a dark cave at the west end, Sarvajna wailed miserably, “See that door? There’s an orb lodged into that door. It’s a piece of Śarīra! It seals shut the door to Naraka, the realm of hell. Rahula and we are the guards of the door.”

Meanwhile, an evil plot streaked through Michael’s mind. Whispering conspiratorially in Sarvajna’s ear, he said, “I’ll strike you a deal. You steal the Śarīra for me, and we leave together. You will get handsomely rewarded.”

Sarvajna’s jaw dropped to the floor after hearing the wicked idea. However, the demons of temptation triumphed over the angels of responsibility finally. “Outer world! I’ll be coming soon!” he murmured hopefully.

One night, it was Sarvajna’s turn to guard the Śarīra. As he plucked the Śarīra out of the door, he felt a twinge of guilt. The door rumbled, like the yawns of a titan that had just awoken.

Stealthily, Sarvajna sneaked back to the rendezvous to meet Michael – the golden lotus. Sarvajna pressed the Śarīra into Michael’s palm. He touched the lotus and a beam of light shot out from it. Sarvajna asked Michael, “Aren’t you coming?”

“Not yet. I want to witness the plan the demons cooked up.”

Sarvajna stepped into the beam of light and instantly disappeared.

Rahula rushed out from his quarter. “I had a terrible vision of the door to Naraka, the realm of hell, opening,” Rahula panted. “We must pray to avert this horrendous disaster.” A thunderous rumbling boomed.

Everybody, including Max, got to their knees and started praying. Beads of sweat lined their heads. Only Michael peered from the shadows, intrigued.

The cackling of the demons got so deafening that the monks had tears welling in their eyes. It was their end. Rahula commanded, “Keep on praying. Buddha is in our hearts.” A wave of calmness washed over the monks, like the tides of the ocean. All the sacred Buddha paintings and sculptures in the Mogao Grottoes glimmered, radiating a fearless aura. The Buddha statue in the middle of the oasis gestured the Abhaya Mudra, symbolizing fearlessness. A strong wind kicked up and slammed the door to Naraka. The rumbling stopped.

As the monks prayed, Michael suddenly saw his past lives. He was the reincarnation of Devadetta, a jealous cousin of the Buddha trying to kill him. Over the past millennia, Michael had reincarnated as hungry ghosts and cockroaches. He finally built up a store of good karma enough to become a human again. Now he threw it all away with greed... He admitted his wrongdoing and sobbed, “Please cleanse my sins.”

Rahula said sympathetically, “Your sin is heinous, but you can be purified in the rest of your life here.” Two monks carried away Michael, who was still mouthing “Thank you”.

Rahula turned to Max. “Now I must tell you the whole truth,” he said seriously. “I am a Bodhisattva, here to protect the Śarīra which keeps the door to Naraka shut. Our mission is to prevent demons from spreading temptation and evil among humans.

“Now you know our duty, I must ask the big question – will you stay or leave forever?”

“Sorry, I have other responsibilities in the outer world,” Max responded firmly.

Rahula nodded and showed Max back to the golden lotus portal.

At the entrance of the Mogao Grottoes, Max looked ahead at the azure-blue sky. He thought about the monks. They stayed loyal to truth while facing temptation. Whether to succumb or to stay true – this was the true secret of the Mogao Grottoes.
