



Fiction

Group 3

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Lam, Cherry – 12

Ring! Ring! "Hey, remember you have a school project with two of my students?" asked Professor Lee. "Yeah... I recall they want to be palaeontologists. They want to visit the Yinlin ruins with me in the forgotten lands," replied John.

At 3:00 pm, a pair of students turned up for their work experience from Beijing University. The two students, a girl and a boy, were twins. The girl, Chi, was tall, with long straight hair flowing behind her, and transparent round glasses. Her face wore a huge smile, showing her white teeth. In her arms were three thick books about dinosaurs, and in her other hand was her pastel pink phone. Chi was very nerdy, caring, and was top of her class at the university. Her pink comfy clothes gave her a nice, happy vibe.

The boy, Ming, had straight hair like his sister and had muscles on his legs and arms. On his back was a large backpack containing all the safety equipment, a water bottle, and several snacks. Ming's clothes were sporty and adventurous, and on his face was the same smile as his sister's. He seemed really passionate about sports. Although he was not as academically gifted as his sister, his heart was ready for a blast of fun, and anyone could see his kind-hearted and thoughtful spirit.

Leading them was the famous paleontologist, John Wong. He was unexpectedly young despite his vast knowledge. He was thin, with rough, shaking hands from all his well-known discoveries. His face was rather full of freckles from all the digging in the sun he had done in his past years.

After several hours, they finally reached the Yinlin ruins. Although John had told them it was a village, to Chi and Ming it looked ancient and nothing like a village. Moss-covered grey rocks, several different shades of grey and sizes of pebbles, and some bits of the village were destroyed. Once was a house, turned into rubble, cracks were everywhere. As Chi and Ming walked around the area, they realized it was deserted. "No wonder they call it 'the forgotten lands.' I bet no one knows about this place," Chi mumbled under her breath to her brother.

As they ventured deeper into the ruins, Ming's foot caught on something protruding from the ground. He stumbled, catching himself before falling. "Hey, what's this?" he called out, brushing away layers of dirt and debris. To their amazement, a small wooden box emerged from the earth.

With trembling hands, John carefully opened the box, revealing a weathered manuscript inside. The pages were brittle, covered in faded characters none of them recognized. "This... this could be revolutionary!" John exclaimed; his eyes wide with excitement. "It might be written in an ancient, unknown language."

Chi leaned in, her glasses glinting in the fading sunlight. "Look at these illustrations," she whispered, pointing to intricate drawings of strange creatures. "Could they be... dinosaurs?" The trio huddled around the manuscript, their minds racing with possibilities. They knew this discovery could change everything they thought they knew about the forgotten lands and perhaps even rewrite history itself. As they finished reading the manuscript, in the blink of an eye, the manuscript disappeared and turned into golden dust, slowly heading downwards. The three of them rushed to touch the dust before it touched the ground. In an instant, the 3 of them got transported to the dinosaur world.

"Wh—where are we?" the twins said in unison. The trio looked around the ground and could see different shapes and sizes of dino footprints. As they looked up, they could see dozens and dozens of Microraptor's soaring high, to their left were packs of little raptors chasing each other. On their right were a few triceratops peacefully eating plants, not caring what the world thinks about them. The scenery around was amazing and quite beautiful, with tall mountains, rocky hills and acacia trees surrounding them. Everywhere they looked they could see all sorts of dinosaurs. "I think we're in the dinosaur world! I didn't even think this existed!" Chi blurted out, shocked. Ming gazed in all directions, thunder shock and speechless. "Let's continue exploring, shall we?" John suggested, Ming and Chi nodded.

As they wandered around, pointing out every species of dinosaur they saw. "Hey look up! It's a flock of Microraptors flying! Oh oh oh, in the lake, it's a Plesiosaurus! Awwww... isn't it adorable?" Chi commented. Ming had no words to say, he just stared back at each dinosaur that stared at him, and gave them awkward smiles.

As they passed by the lake, they headed into the path the acacia trees made. The sky became darker, making it spooky. The dinosaurs along the path seemed more frightening. John suddenly halted, and the others saw a strange

dinosaur bone. John was unsure of its origin, but Ming encouraged them to continue, saying they could be heroes if they found a new species. Inspired by Ming's words, the trio set off to explore further.

As they delved deeper, more unusual dinosaur bones appeared. John collected them, hoping to find a new species. After searching, they came across a remarkable dinosaur – it had a stegosaurus-like head, an ankylosaurus-like tail, and a triceratops-like body, blending seamlessly with the green leaves. The gentle giant ignored them as they admired its beauty. John took photos, noting its herbivorous traits. Inspired, Chi suggested naming it "Pangshuangosaurus," meaning "gentle giant lizard," which the others agreed was fitting.

"Sure, call it Pangshuangosaurus, I have to agree too, good name. Last one of its species, T. Rexes, raptors, velociraptors, spinosauruses and other meat eaters ate the rest of the pangshuangosauruses. I've been protecting the young fella for over decades, I think. Maybe even centuries, I don't know." noted a mysterious voice, as a figure slowly crept out from the woods and stood before the trio.

The trio gasped as they faced the source of the mysterious voice. Before them stood a tall, slender figure with piercing blue eyes and shimmering silvery hair, dressed in a blend of ancient and modern attire, giving him an otherworldly appearance.

Who... who are you?" John managed to stammer, his voice barely above a whisper.

The stranger smiled warmly, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "I am known as the Guardian, though I've had many names throughout the ages. I've watched over this realm since time immemorial, protecting the last remnants of creatures long thought extinct in your world."

Chi stepped forward, her scientific curiosity overcoming her initial shock. "But how is this possible? How can dinosaurs still exist here?"

The Guardian gestured broadly to their surroundings. "This is a pocket dimension, a sanctuary created eons ago by an advanced civilization that foresaw the impending extinction event. They gathered specimens of various species and created this haven, frozen in time."

Ming, who had been uncharacteristically quiet, finally spoke up. "And you've been here all this time? Alone?"

A flicker of sadness passed over the Guardian's face. "Not entirely alone. I've had the company of these magnificent creatures. But yes, it has been a solitary existence in many ways."

John's mind was racing with questions. "Why reveal yourself to us now? Why allow us to discover this place?"

The Guardian's expression turned grave. "Because your world is once again facing great peril. The knowledge contained within this realm could be crucial to preventing another mass extinction event on Earth. I believe you three were chosen for a reason – to bridge the gap between our worlds and help safeguard the future."

The trio exchanged glances, the weight of this responsibility settling upon them. Chi was the first to nod resolutely. "We'll do whatever we can to help."

"Excellent," the Guardian replied, a hint of relief in his voice. "But first, there is much for you to learn. Come, let me show you the wonders of this world and teach you the secrets that have been hidden for millions of years."

As they followed the Guardian deeper into the prehistoric sanctuary, the trio knew their lives would never be the same. They had stumbled upon a mission far greater than they could have imagined, one that would challenge everything they thought they knew about the past and potentially shape the course of humanity's future.

With each step, their excitement and sense of responsibility grew. They were determined to face the future together, armed with the knowledge and guidance of their mysterious new ally.

Years later, the trio followed the dinosaur master's teachings, diligently caring for the creatures. Eventually, the master told them to use their skills to find and protect all the untold dinosaurs. He imbued them with golden dust, transporting them back to the Yinlin ruins.

Honoring the master's legacy, the trio decided to create a dinosaur museum. Over a decade, they curated exhibits featuring the newly discovered species, including the popular Pangshuangosaurus. The museum allowed them to fulfil the master's wishes and share their incredible experiences with the world.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Yip, Hedus – 12

Boom! Boom! As the ground shakes from the roar of the storm, as it rages through the village.

“Dad! Dad! What’s that noise? I’m scared!” The 3-year-old boy said as his body was shaking.

“Don’t worry Theo it’s going to be alright. It’s just a thunderstorm. It will pass by soon.”

“No no Dad, I’ve read about this in the books! The sound is the same as the dinosaur books Grandma reads to me every time I go to her house!” Theo said with a trembling voice.

“I like your thinking Theo, but this time it’s a thunderstorm outside. Now go to bed Theo, you still have school in the morning.” Theo’s dad ordered him.

“Fine,” Theo said in a stubborn voice. But his mind was full of doubt. When he laid down on his bed he still didn’t believe his dad, so he grabbed his Nerf gun, then he went to get his bike and helmet but then he realized his bike and helmet was in the garage!

“Oh no now how am I supposed to go on an adventure without transportation? I guess I’ll just have to sneak down and get it.” Theo said in his head.

CREAKKK CREAKKK. As Theo snuck down the stairs carefully, he saw his Dad sitting down on the couch watching a football game on the television. He slowly crouched down behind the couch and to the garage, but then he heard some sound near the couch! Oh no, could his Dad have seen him? What was going to happen? Was he going to get grounded? But heroes never fail! Yes, that night he considered himself a hero. A hero about to prove his Dad wrong! He was too scared to even look! But he had heard no noise after that so he decided to slowly shift his body towards the couch and... Phew, his dad just fell asleep! So he continued towards the garage and found his bike just lying nicely beside the car.

“Great! Now I can go on my adventure!” Theo whispered.

As he rode his bike to the community park he didn’t see anyone at all on his way there. He was confused at first but decided to keep going. When he arrived at the park he saw some birds up in the trees but nothing stood out. Maybe his dad was right. It could be a thunderstorm. He saw a river out of the corner of his eye. Not any river, the river that Theo and his Dad always went to, but this time it was different, the river had no water. This gave Theo hope to keep searching for more clues. Theo rode his bike to the river to see if he could find any more clues. When he arrived he saw some big footprints not made by an animal or human because it was two times bigger than Theo!

He followed the footprints into the forest, his heart pounding with excitement and trepidation. All of a sudden he heard a heavy thud nearby, he froze in terror as the thuds grew louder and louder. He could feel the vibrations in his bones. There must be a humongous creature nearby.

He took a deep breath and kept following the footprints into the forest not knowing what he would encounter next. Out of the blue, he saw a huge tail beside a tree. The tail was brown and had some grey stripes on it. As he walked closer he noticed an extremely long neck connected to a colossal body. The body and the neck were the same. They both had grey stripes and brown skin but the skin was rough, but it offered camouflage and protection. The head looked like a slide and Theo could slide down it but he was so excited to prove his dad wrong! Next to this humongous animal was a small one but still bigger than Theo. The body looked like a bird but it had a tail this time instead of grey stripes this one had white stripes and it looked more violent. The eyes shaped like an eagle ready to hunt its prey down. Now he just had to show his Dad they were here! He walked closer and then whispered, “Hello there.” Unsure if the dinosaurs could understand him. “I’m just a child, I mean no harm.” Theo whispered as the small dinosaur nodded as if it understood Theo “Do you guys understand me? I’ve always wanted to see you! Can we be friends?” Theo said but suddenly the big dinosaur lifted himself and nodded his head. “Can I take you guys to see my Dad, he doesn’t believe you are here!” Theo said excitedly. The two dinosaurs nodded again and sat down so Theo could climb on the dinosaur’s back and go back home, the little one followed and it also carried Theo’s bike!

Suddenly a tiger appeared out of nowhere and wanted to attack Theo, as the tiger opened its big mouth it revealed its sharp teeth “Aaghhh!” Theo screamed but luckily Theo was fast enough and darted out of the way. The big dinosaur used its long neck to create a slingshot and the small dino used its speed to push the tiger in and then the tiger flew away never to be seen again. Theo stood frozen in shock and didn’t dare to blink his eyes.

Theo and the dinosaurs finally exited the forest, but it was supposed to be a river, not a mountain. Theo was shocked to see that he must’ve exited in the wrong direction. But at the top of the mountain, Theo could see some fire. Theo realized very quickly that the mountain was a volcano, and it was about to erupt. The ground was shaking violently and smoke plumes were coming from the volcano.

"It's dangerous here! We must leave immediately!" Theo shouted, the dinosaurs turned it's body as quickly as they could and rushed back to the forest in the hope of finding some cover.

As Theo ran he noticed that sounds were coming from the bushes "*Oh no what could it be now.*" Theo thought, but then Theo saw a little tail poking out of the bushes and... it was just some baby dinosaurs, it was the babies of the small dinosaur, but the babies were still growing, the babies looked just like their father. The babies followed Theo, they treated him like their friends. As they kept running, Theo heard a sound,

"Hey guys do you hear that? It's the sound of water! There must be a river nearby!" Theo signalled, his heart was full of excitement. He couldn't wait anymore, he had to show his Dad! He went straight out of the forest but what was a dried-up river before was a river full of water now. Theo was extremely curious about how the river gained back its water, but in the distance, Theo saw a huge hippopotamus filling up his mouth with water, in a waterfall nearby. The hippo has to have been the one who filled the river back up! After a while, they passed the park, but this time there were people playing pai sho and Chinese chess!

"Hey, Theo! Where did you go? Your Dad has been looking for you!" A man said

"I went to find dinosaurs!" Theo replied.

"Dinosaurs?" The man said confused.

"Yeah! Chinese Dinosaurs remember the huge booms we heard? Those were the sounds of the dinosaurs stomping!" Theo said excitedly.

"But why did you go find them?" A woman said while playing pai sho.

"I went to prove my Dad wrong, as my Dad said they didn't exist! But they are right behind me!" Theo said proudly.

They kept walking forward until they FINALLY saw Theo's house. Theo ran faster than he ever ran before.

Theo knocked on the door and when his Dad opened it Theo rushed in to hug His Dad

"Theo! Where have you been?" Shouted his Dad

"Dad! I went to find dinosaurs, look at my new friends!" Theo said proudly.

"I guess your ri—" His Dad said before getting cut off.

Suddenly Theo felt a pat on his shoulder and the sound of a man, the voice sounded extremely familiar

"Hey, Theo! Wake up! It's time to go to school!" The man said. When Theo blinked his eyes, he was on his bed and his Dad was right next to him,

It was actually a dream.

Lost in Dino Time

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Amos–Marks, Henry – 11

The day started like this: every other day Quin on his way to work stopped in at the coffee shop and then he saw the most amazing thing. He was walking along Nanjing Road in Shanghai. Something Caught Quin's eye. It was a billboard that said there was a time machine for sale. It said it was made by TimeWrap Innovations. It was the newest model. It was called Time Changer and it was selling for 5,000,000 RMB. It was costly.

Today at noon he had only 1 hour to get to Dapu Road, where the auction took place. He flagged down a taxi and was there within 10 minutes of the start of the auction. He took his seat and waited for the auction to start. At last, it started he was very excited when they brought out the time machine. It jumped out at him and it was begging him to win it. It also came with a professional, who would bring you anywhere back in time. While he was at auction he met someone called Li Wei. They both agreed if one of them wins they both share it. The bet started and Quin put in the biggest bid and won. His smile was huge, and he jumped as high as possible. They were both thrilled as they had always wanted to go back in time to see dinosaurs. They walked out feeling proud of themselves and they felt like celebrities. Together they walked home feeling happy but they didn't have the Time Machine. Quin called the company and the company said we would deliver it to you tomorrow. They walked to Quin's house planning what to do with the Time Machine. Quin wanted to go to see the dinosaurs the next day but Lei Wei said they should wait a few days. Quin and Lei Wei disagreed a lot but eventually concluded they would wait one day.

One day later. They were ready to go to the dinosaurs' realm but they wanted to get protection first, just to be safe. They went to an army supplies store. They asked the man what protection can we use to defend ourselves against dinosaurs. The man suggested they buy camo helmets, chest pads, and an AK14 gun. Once they got the protection they went to get provisions for the trip such as food and drink or the occasional sweets and some super yummy dinosaur treats.

After they got everything they went back to Quin's house. When they arrived there they saw the Time Machine for the first time. Up close it was beautiful. It was so much taller than they remembered. A man was standing next to it, was 6 foot tall, and looked small compared to the Time Machine. He was their guide and said, "I am your tour guide for this visit. We will see lots of dinosaurs in this adventure and you might even get lucky and see a T-Rex". They said "When is the best time to travel?" The Tour Guide said "Now!".

They went to get packed and they put everything into one big bag. The tour guide stopped them. He said that you can only bring a small bag and there is no need for some of the protection. Lei Wei and Quin both said at the same time "We need the guns for protection and food to survive". The Tour Guide told them "The company has guns for you to use and we won't be there for more than about 3 days. Also bringing food will attract the dinosaurs, and that might not be a good thing if you know what I mean!" Quin and Lei Wei realized what he meant and were worried the dinosaurs might attack them. So they quickly unpacked and repacked the essentials so they could get time traveling. They were both so excited to time travel but worried about being attacked, and maybe killed.

Lei Wei, Quin, and the Tour Guide boarded the Time Machine and although big on the outside it was tiny on the inside. Quin realised why they were told to pack lite. They all settled into their seats and strapped themselves in. The Tour Guide warned them they were in for a bumpy ride. He asked them "What year do you want to go back to?" Quin said "The Triassic period". The tour guide typed in the code and said "Brace yourselves for a bumpy ride". Woosh and they were gone. It was as fast as the speed of light. Quin and Wei Lei screamed so loud the Tour Guide asked them to turn the noise down as they were not at the worst part yet. 10 seconds later they were going 15 times faster. It was so fast Lei Wei passed out. They finally stopped and Lei Wei woke up in shock he was in so much pain and said "Everything hurts and that was the worst trip I've ever done. This Time Machine needs to be more comfortable and if possible not travel so fast!"

They had finally arrived in the Triassic Period and although the ride wasn't fun, they were super excited to start the exploration. The tour guide was nowhere to be seen and were shocked to find him in a buggy. Quin asked "Where did you get that?" and he said, "There is a compartment in the Time Machine, did I not tell you about that before we left? There are lots that help with our time travel." Lei Wei said, "It will make the exploring much easier and we can travel further distances". They jumped in the back and set off to explore. First, they passed a blue river that was clear and looked good enough for drinking. The Tour Guide said "Shhh the dinosaurs are coming and we must stay quiet so we don't scare them into attacking us." Quin asked "Which one?" The Tour Guide responded "There on the right, can you see the diplodocus?" It looked majestic and so beautiful, with scales and it's long neck. The neck looked to be about 6 feet long and with legs taller than the boys. They were astonished by the view. It was breathtaking.

Next, they saw a swarm of enormous Pterodactyls that covered the sky and made it feel like night even in the middle of the day. They continued to explore until they came across something amazing, that they never expected to see on their travels. It was a Triceratops, it was gigantic. The colour of its skin was light tan, and had giant teeth. As they got closer the teeth looked like they could crush anything, even a double-decker bus. As they passed Lei Wei said, "This is amazing, there is so much to see and to be able to get so close to the dinosaurs makes me realise just how huge they are." Quin said, "What other dinos do you think we will see?" The Tour Guide said often on these adventures we see T-Rex, brontosaurus, and Spinosaurus. They continued to explore in the buggy.

They came to a valley that looked exceptionally dry and dirty. In the distance, they could see something that looked enormous, but they couldn't make out what it was. The Tour Guide turned to them and said "It's a T-Rex we need to stay very quiet and not let it see us or we are dead meat. You can take photos but make sure you stay quiet." They took tons of photos and then the worst thing possible happened. The Tour Guide turned to them with a look of complete fear and said "It's seen us and we need to get out of here as quickly as possible." They drove away from the bloodthirsty beast and when they thought it was safe, suddenly it appeared again out of nowhere and attempted to grab the Tour guide, who shouted "Jump!!!" They all jumped and landed safely on the ground away from the T-Rex. They ran away as fast as they could and hid until the T-Rex got bored and left them alone. Frightened and tired they quickly went back to the Time Machine.

They jumped into the Time Machine and woosh they were gone. As they had done it before, being in the Time Machine felt normal and they were glad to know they were on the way home. When they got back to Quinn's house and were very excited to share their adventures with their friends and families. They told of their adventures and showed all the photos, everyone was fascinated to hear, but glad they were back home safe. The Tour Guide said, "Please don't tell anyone that we lost the buggy or we'll be in big trouble and I mean big trouble." They never told anyone about how they lost the buggy and started working on the plan for the next adventure in the Time Machine.

The Truth Behind the Research

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Assor, Roni – 13

I was moving some old boxes in my parents' basement when I saw one labelled “Top Secret Research.” I didn't think anything of this because my parents were palaeontologists for the government. Little did I know that this box held information that would change the world forever.

Earlier that month, both my parents had died in a tragic car accident on the way to Yunnan Mountain and left no will. As their only child, I inherited everything, including houses, cars, and all of their research.

Growing up, my parents were never home. They were constantly working, so they got me a nanny. Her name was Andrea. She was a cool, young woman I had always aspired to be like. There was one time when Andrea and I were driving and got a flat tire; she put in a new one all by herself and told me, “Never rely on men, you must learn to navigate this world as a strong, independent woman” which I always listened to. I saw her at the funeral and invited her over to help me go through my parents' things. When I saw the box labelled “Top Secret Research,” I asked her if she knew anything about it. She answered, in an awkwardly, angry tone “Madeline, don't ask questions you don't want the answers to,” and quickly stormed out without letting me respond.

Her reaction left me reeling for answers because she had never gotten mad at me before. There was one time when she lost it, I think it was towards my parents. Oh yes, it was. I couldn't understand what they were saying, but there was a lot of yelling, and she stormed out. That was the last time I saw her. After she left, I tried to stifle my tears. She had never yelled at me before and wasn't acting like herself all day. I thought about what she said and contemplated opening the box. But my curiosity got the best of me, and I opened it. Inside were documents and a map. At the bottom of the box was what looked like an eggshell. It was big and had green spots; that's when I had an epiphany: this was a dinosaur egg. I then looked at the map and saw that it was near Yunnan Mountain. That's why my parents were going there, I thought to myself.

After a few hours of internal debate, I realized I had to continue what they started and find out the truth. But I couldn't do it alone. That's when I thought of the one person who could help me, Andrea. So, I called her and begged her to do this with me. She said that it was too dangerous and that she knew things that I didn't. I begged her over and over again and told her that if we encountered danger, we would stop immediately. She reluctantly agreed to help me but said we had to open all their old boxes and find more information before we started. I agreed. She came over every day for the whole week, and we opened box after box, not finding any useful information until Andrea stumbled across a box labelled “For Madeleine.” In the box were photo cards and videotapes. Andrea and I watched the tapes and realized my parents were leaving us cryptic messages, saying things like, “Check the bottom drawer” and “Research just for your jewellery box.” I looked in the bottom drawer of my parents' closet and found their old ID cards. I then found many research documents in my mom's jewellery box.

I called Andrea, and we read every document we found. There was so much information that could help us finish my parents' work. I asked Andrea if she still wanted to do this. She said yes, so we started packing our bags to go to Yunnan Mountain. We knew this wouldn't be an easy task, but we were determined to do it.

We left on a cold, dry morning. The journey to Yunnan Mountain was not easy; we had to drive for five hours and then hike for three hours to the top of the treacherous mountain. On the way, I asked her what that fight with my parents was about. She was hesitant to tell me, but she said, “They wanted to live closer to this mountain for research, but I told them that it wasn't safe for you and that they should wait until you're a bit older. They didn't like my opinion, so they fired me.”

“I'm so sorry,” I said.

She replied, “It's all in the past now. Let's go find some dinosaurs!”

Following the map as we hiked up, the map led us to a cave. This wasn't like a normal cave; this cave was wet, cold, and had this incandescent glow to it. Andrea and I walked around a bit, debating if we should go inside or not. We then decided to enter. Inside, we found all sorts of bygonees, like some animal teeth, what looked like snake skin, and an egg that resembled the shell that was in the box. Andrea said she was getting a bad feeling, but I told her we should stay and look around more.

We then heard a voice that was masculine and powerful. He said, "Hey, is anyone there?" I told Andrea to hide. The man then entered with a flashlight and started looking around. Andrea said, "We should get out of here." I said, "Just five more minutes," and she reluctantly agreed.

As we walked around the cave and saw bats, We were terrified. We then heard a little roar and checked to see what it was. The roar came from a lizard-looking animal. Andrea and I were trying to piece together what it was. I snapped a picture, then looked at my parents' old photographs and saw that they had also taken a picture of an animal that looked like this. That's when I had an epiphany: "This is a dragon!" I yelled with excitement. Andrea seemed petrified and said, "We should get out!"

That's when we heard a thunderous roar. We looked up to see a giant dragon with shiny green skin, giant teeth, and even bigger feet.

Andrea started to run out of the cave. I took a photo and then followed her. We jumped in the car and drove as fast as we could. When we returned to my house, we took a better look at the photos and realised that this was a large Spinosaurus.

I wrote about our experience and went to publish the article. That's when Andrea stopped me. She confessed that my parents' death wasn't an accident and that the government killed them because they didn't want people to know. I didn't know what to do.

Years later, I wrote a book about my and my parents' stories. But I waited till I was 83 years old to publish it. I published it after Andrea died but dedicated it to her and my parents. The book became a New York Times best-selling author. When the government found out about this, they were livid, but the people petitioned to keep the dinosaurs in sanctuaries and let them live peacefully—and that's what they did.

Warm sunlight streamed through the window, and my eyes tiredly fluttered open. Just a month had passed since my father's death, and I hadn't gotten out of the house in days. I felt the warm sun on my skin, but I was unable to shake the chill of grief that lingered at the pit of my stomach. As I sat up, the quiet and emptiness of the house pressed in around me. Suddenly, the sharp sound of knocking shattered the silence like glass.

I made my way to the door, wondering who it could be this early in the morning. When I opened it, I was surprised to be met by one of my father's former colleagues at the Liaoning Paleontology Research Center, in his hands rested a cardboard box labeled with my name.

"Linh," he said gently "I'm so sorry for your loss...it was truly an honor to work alongside your father."

"Thank you" I replied. He held the box out to me.

"Here, your father wanted you to have this." He left without a word and I closed the door behind him. I carried the box into my room and set it on the floor, my heart racing with anticipation. I hesitated before I reached over and opened the flaps, filling the room with the scent of old paper and leather. I admired each item inside: several journals filled with his meticulous notes and entries, fossil replicas, and photographs of my father, grinning beside colossal dinosaur bones. As I dug deeper into the box, my fingers grazed something folded. With careful precision, I fished out the slip of parchment. Unfolding it, I examined what seemed to be some sort of map. I traced my fingers across the path from a little sketch of our house to a cave in the forest. At first, I thought it was one of his silly drawings, but...I couldn't help noticing how familiar that cave looked. My mind flashed to a memory of when my father took me to his office...

I quietly crept down the hall and pressed my ear against the cold wood of my father's office.

"I'm telling you, Dr Chen. This cave is real, you have to believe me!" My father insisted.

"Dr. Song, you're a brilliant scientist, but you're losing touch with reality. Your colleagues are worried about you. Focus on your research, not these wild tales of yours!" Dr Chen said firmly. Just then, a slip of paper slid under the door. I reached down to pick it up and traced my fingers over a drawing of a cave.

My mind shifted back into reality, and I examined the map once more. Did my father find it? Could this map lead to the cave he always talked about? I thought, and as I looked closer, I could see a little note written at the bottom in his unique scrawl:

Follow this map to the cave.

I could almost hear my father's voice, urging me to finish what he started. With a mixture of excitement and apprehension, I realized this was more than just a map; it was an invitation to discover the world he loved and perhaps, in the process, to find a piece of myself along the way.

I tucked the map safely in my jacket pocket and stuffed a few of the journals from the box into a backpack. As I stepped outside, I felt a cold rush down my spine. Snowflakes cascaded from the sky like delicate lace, weaving a soft blanket over the landscape and the trees stood adorned with glistening white coats. I hitched my backpack higher up on my shoulder and set out toward the snow-covered woods.

"Okay," I said, unfolding the map. "Let's do this!"

The lines and markings of the map were faint, but I could make out the path my father had drawn. My footsteps crunched under the powdery layer, and the path was obscured by falling snow. I quickened my pace, my pulse thrumming with a mixture of excitement and exhaustion as I ventured further. After a while, I stumbled across a small clearing where the snow lay untouched and serene as if nobody had ever been there before. As I kept walking, I noticed a rock formation similar to the one on the map. I brushed away the thick layer of snow and found symbols etched into the cool stone. I glanced at the map, and sure enough, they matched the symbols on the drawing! Excitement surged through me as I found a crevice just wide enough for me to squeeze through, and I gathered up the courage before slipping through the opening.

Inside, the air was cool and damp, a stark contrast to the freezing chill above. I gasp in complete awe as I take in my surroundings. Hundreds of enormous dinosaur fossils adorn the stone surfaces, each one greater than the next. Glowworms cover the walls, illuminating the darkness with soft flecks of ethereal blue light, and the soft sounds of dripping water echo around me. I continue forward, the sound of my footsteps bouncing across the walls as I near what appears to be a Mamenchisaurus fossil! I kneel beside it, sweeping my palm against its long neck, when suddenly I feel a warm tingling sensation shoot up my arm and to my head. I gasp as my vision blurs and I am engulfed in a soft warmth....

The sun fills the skies with its final flares of fiery light, casting a soft glow over the lush prehistoric jungle. A herd of female Mamenchisaurus moves gracefully through the vibrant undergrowth, their long necks swaying like elegant pendulums in the golden light. Each step they take pulses through the earth, their presence felt by creatures miles away. They have embarked on an endless journey, bearing the promise of new lives as they let their instincts guide them toward their birthplace.

Suddenly, the vision begins to fade, the vibrant colors blurring as the jungle dissolves into a haze. I can feel the warmth of the sun slipping away, replaced by the cool dampness of the cave. With a final gasp, I find myself once again surrounded by the twinkling walls.

“What just happened?” I whisper, breathless. It was as if I was experiencing the memories of the Mamenchisaurus, and seeing the jungle through her eyes! The warm glow of the sunlight, the lush jungle, and the powerful sounds of their breath felt so real. As I regained my composure, my gaze drifted over to the fossils scattered throughout the cave. My heartbeat quickened and curiosity welled up within me as I stepped closer. Tentatively, I reach forward to press my palm against a small fossil, and my vision blurred once more....

The sounds of chirping insects and rustling leaves engulf my senses, and the air is thick with the earthy scent of damp soil and exotic flowers. The moonlight drapes the night sky in a shimmering silver veil, and each star flares like distant lanterns in space. A small Sinosauropteryx scurries through the bushes, its feathered tail trailing behind it. The surrounding jungle hums with life—the distant call of creatures, the gurgle of the nearby river, and the gentle whisper of the wind through the trees, all partaking in the mellifluous symphony pulsing throughout the lush greenery.

Suddenly, everything went silent. The Sinosauropteryx paused, lifting its gaze toward the sky. The rhythmic hum of the insects disintegrated. It was as if the jungle was holding its breath, frozen in a single moment. The asteroid loomed in the distance against the twilight sky, hurtling toward Earth. Its fiery glow illuminated the darkened landscape, casting an eerie shadow over the jungle. Fearful cries ripped through the silence as dinosaurs frantically ran through the forest, in search of safety....but there was no escape. The young Sinosauropteryx hid in a small crevice in the earth, trembling as it watched the asteroid near closer and closer. The earth began to shake violently, snapping the ancient trees as if they were brittle twigs. The air crackled with unnatural energy and rocks fell away from the asteroid, igniting the jungle. Flames danced in the howling wind, swallowing everything in their path and covering the jungle in a layer of thick gray fog. Suddenly, a white light pierced my senses, blinding me from everything and a sharp hum erupted throughout the empty abyss. Everything went to black....

As I returned to reality, a knot of emotions burned in the pit of my stomach, each thread unraveling one by one.

Tears streaked my face and my soft sobs echoed throughout the cave as I released the emotions I had been holding in for so long.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Chen, Apollo – 11

In China, there was a depressed young man named Lee Yin Song, who owned a rickety, dusty library. He unlocked the door and surprisingly felt a flicker of happiness, hoping today might be different. Unfortunately, his library was failing; he made almost no profit, and his debts weighed heavily on him. Despite his struggles, Lee couldn't bring himself to abandon the library, for it was filled with the books he adored, especially his dinosaur books he had read as a kid. They brought him peace and tranquility, and he had no place to store them if he left no friends, no storage, and no space at home.

One day, while awaiting customers, Lee grabbed a sci-fi novel about time travel from a neglected old shelf. As he read for hours and hours in the quiet countryside, ideas began to swirl in his mind. "What if I built a time machine?" he thought. "If I could travel back in time, I might become a part of history, and people would swarm into my library!" But then doubt crept in. "How would I build it? Where shall I go? I'm not a genius." He decided to go on a risky trip to stop the Titanic from sinking. The thought of being a saviour and helping his family ignited a spark of determination in him.

After a year of sleepless nights, malnourishment, thirst, and countless prototypes that felt like a century, Lee finally completed his time machine, a contraption cobbled together from the books that had always brought him peace. With his heart racing, he stepped inside, pressed a few buttons, and set the date to a time long before mankind. Taking a deep breath, he pulled the lever, and the machine buzzed to life. The world around him blurred into a wave of colors. When he opened his eyes, he found himself in a vibrant, prehistoric landscape. Towering trees stood above him, their leaves rustling in a warm ancient breeze. The air was thick with the scent of rich earth and blooming fauna. In the distance, he heard deep rumbling roars and the flapping of enormous wings.

"Where am I?" Lee murmured, stepping cautiously out of the time machine. To his astonishment, he realized he had landed in the age of dinosaurs. His machine had malfunctioned; his heart raced not just from fear, but from excitement. This was a moment he had never experienced; he was truly part of history! He thought for a while about what he would do to come back to China richer. After a while, he decided on collecting bones from dinosaur corpses.

As he ventured deeper into the jungle, the ground trembled beneath him. Suddenly, a massive Brontosaurus stomped into view, its long neck bending to reach the treetops. Lee stood frozen, in awe of its size and grace. Just then, a loud crash echoed behind him. He turned to see a pack of Velociraptors darting through the trees with speed like bullets, their eyes sharp and predatory.

Panic surged through him; he was scared. He thought, why should I risk my life? I'm fine in my library, safe and sound. He started making his way back, but he quickly reminded himself of his mission; he couldn't bring himself to quit. "Bones," he whispered, recalling the rare treasures he had always read about. This was his chance to collect them, to return home not just with an unbelievable adventure, but with clear proof of his time travel. Lee navigated the jungle carefully, using the knowledge he had equipped through countless books.

He soon found himself upon a clearing littered with the corpses of ancient giants. Bones lay scattered across the ground, partially buried in the dirt. He knelt down, his heart racing with excitement. Among the fragments, he recognized the curved skull of a Triceratops, its three distinctive horns still intact. Nearby, he found a massive femur bone belonging to a long-necked Diplodocus. He thought about which he would bring because his time machine could only fit so much.

Lee worked swiftly, deciding to pick up smaller bones and not be greedy. Using his backpack to collect the bones, careful not to disturb the habitats of animals that would kill him in seconds. Each piece he gathered felt like a victory against the odds that had always held him back. He could already see in his head the look on his family's faces when he returned, not just a time traveler, but a successful one. As he continued his search, a sudden shadow crossed over him. His heart sank as he heard a terrifying roar. A T Rex burst into the clearing, its powerful legs pounding against the earth. Lee's adrenaline kicked in, and he ran as fast as he could to a tall tree a few meters away. After all, a mission is not a success if you get eaten by a beast.

Lee held his breath as the Tyrannosaurus Rex sniffed the air, its massive head swinging in all directions. Time seemed to go slowly. He was both terrified and fascinated, feeling the raw power of nature all around him. After what felt like an eternity, the dinosaur lost interest and turned away, lumbering off in search of easier prey.

With his heart still racing, Lee took a moment to calm himself. He couldn't afford to let fear hold him back. He had more space in his backpack. With adrenaline coursing through his veins, he returned to gathering bones; every piece was potentially thousands of dollars. He uncovered vertebrae from a Spinosaurus and a set of claws from a raptor, each discovery fueling his determination. After hours of exploration, Lee's backpack was filled to the brim. He decided it was time to return before something else caught his attention or worse, before he became the hunted. He retraced his steps to the time machine, his heart swelling with pride at the thought of what he was bringing back.

Once inside, Lee quickly set the dials for his own time and pulled the lever. The familiar sensation of swirling colors enveloped him like a rainbow tornado, thankfully it didn't malfunction and, in an instant, he was back in his dusty library. The difference between the vibrant world he had just left and his dim, quiet surroundings was the exact opposite, but now the library felt different; it felt alive with potential. With shaking hands, he opened his backpack to reveal the treasures he had collected. As he laid the bones out on his desk, the sunlight caught their surfaces, illuminating them in a way that made them seem magical. He could hardly believe he had gone back in time and returned with proof of the remarkable creatures that had once roamed the Earth.

Word of his phenomenal finds spread quickly through his family, and soon curiosity seekers, scientists, and archaeologists flocked to his library, eager to see the bones and hear Lee's incredible tale. Having brought the best dinosaur bones in Chinese history to China, making China the hub to look at rare exotic bones, Lee felt very patriotic and proud of himself. What had once been a quiet, forgotten place transformed into the place to go for a delightful story. He began to sell the bones, each transaction bringing in more money than he had ever imagined.

Soon, Lee was no longer struggling to make ends meet. His library was filled with people, filled with visitors who shared the same passion for books and history. Each day, he felt better, his burdens lifted by the success he had achieved. He even began to host storytelling events, inviting local schools to learn about dinosaurs and the importance of perseverance in the toughest of times.

His family, once worried about their financial struggles, now thrived alongside him. They were filled with pride, not only for Lee's newfound success but also for the legacy he was building. The library became a community center, a place where people gathered to share stories, learn, and explore the wonders of the past.

One evening, as he sat in the library surrounded by eager listeners, Lee reflected on his journey. He had transformed his passion for books into an adventure that not only changed his life but enriched the lives of many. He realized that his fascination with reading had led him to the greatest discovery of all: that sometimes, the key to success lies not just in hard work but in daring to dream beyond the ordinary. With a heart full of gratitude, Lee closed the evening off by sharing tales of his time in the age of dinosaurs. Laughter and excitement filled the room, and for the first time in years, he felt truly at peace. He had found his place in history not just as a time traveler, but as a bridge connecting the past and present, all thanks to the magic of books. Lee donated his time machine to a museum, and he never had another worry.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Chen, Derek – 13

Chapter 1

Carl Sagan once said, "We are all made of star-stuff." I was named after him, and now I am the leader of the international space crew of The Great Democratic Tyrenthia. It was 2207 when our journey into space began— a time when none of us could have imagined what was going to happen.

In the 22nd century, humanity largely ignored the issue of global warming, greedy upper bourgeoisies remained indifferent to the health of our planet. When people finally found out that the problem appeared to be visible, it was too late for any alternative opportunity for remedy. With more than hundreds of United nation's deliberations, they had determined to abandon earth, send astronauts all around the world to space to discover every possible planet for the reproduction of the human species.

Our mission was to arrive at the planet Vespera in the M-298 planetary system with the utmost velocity. After being launched over the Karman line into the deadly environment of outer space with our A4-Infinity spacecraft, things remained peaceful. However, we could never have expected what would happen as we came in to land on Vespera.

As I can remember, the A4-infinity crashed on the beautiful planet of Vespera after experiencing a terrifying debris field. The crew and the AI secretary of the cabin, Tariq, helped the ship overcome the debris field but a violent atmospheric breakthrough meant we crash landed over a pink forest.

'Is everyone alright?' someone finally spoke.

'I'm good,' came a reply.

'Elara?'

'I'm fine, I just hurt my skin.'

'Nia?'

'I'm alright, but I couldn't save that box of ...'

Before she finished, I suddenly felt extreme pain and screamed in agony.

'It's Carl!' I saw my crew struggling to run through the broken parts,

'Uh!' I looked down and saw a long shard of metal stuck in my leg.

'Elara!' someone called, 'Give me the Regeneration spray! Immediately!'

The next thing I saw was lying in a stretcher, held by both Elara and Marlik, the technician, designer of the spacecraft and the navigator of our ship.

Wandering through the forest of pink and red trees, the mind-blowing colors surrounding us, with the soft touch of the winds, it felt like what the Earth used to be.

'Sir, you're finally awakened!' it was Elara,

'Look at it!' That was Nia – biologist, ecologist, and archaeologist. She ran toward me with the notepad in her hand, 'totally unbelievable! The oxygen percentage of the air inside the atmosphere is perfectly fit for human beings! According to the data so far, human can definitely survive on Vespera! If no hostile creatures appear, Vespera is becoming the next earth!'

'I would love to live here.' Marlik agreed, 'just how beautiful this place is! Wow! These pink trees! Wish my daughter would see this.'

As we talked, we stopped in front of a large group of enormous modern buildings. Having the same size somewhere you can put a family of elephants.

'Put me down,' I said while trying to sit up, 'I need to take a closer look at it,'

I take a step toward the object, then another, and another. I stopped at a huge dark entrance, trying to read the alien but a bit of familiar words upon the entrance.

'What?! That's...'

Suddenly, a giant creature appeared and jumped toward me! The size of three elephants, thick feathers travelled from its corners of the mouth to the end of its body, yellow beak and limbs, it stared at me for a second, a mixture of deep roar with a sharp scream hit my ears at the same time – It's a, it's a!

'It's a dinosaur!?' gasped Nia.

'What?'

My brain was full of astonishment and fear, with no idea what was happening, my muscles frozen, what am I going to do? Is it how my life ended? I closed my eyes, waiting for my death.

Nothing happened, I opened my eyes, what I saw was a human, an Asian guy, 'Is it the angel? No, wait, Nia, Elara, and Marlik as well?' the Asian guy pulled me up, I saw the dinosaur still there, standing there, staring at everyone with its sharp eyes,

'I didn't die?'

The guy laughed, 'Not yet, Huali isn't a man-eating dinosaur.'

'Is it a Yutyranus Huali?' Nia asked curiously,

'Yeah, he is a special Yutyranus.'

'What?' Elara doubted, 'isn't it Vespera? Why is there a dinosaur from the earth, China?'

'I think your question is why is there a human outside of the earth?' Marlik asked the Chinese guys with the dinosaur named Huali.

'Wait, you are from outer space? Don't you guys realize the place you are standing on is the People's Republic of China? The Earth that you are talking about?' said the Chinese guy.' 'Are you aliens?'

'Yeah, we are to you, see that space ship over there?' Marlik pointed our A4-infinity over the side of the forest.

'I didn't know there were any spaceships launching recently,' the guy questioned.

'What year is it?' I stood up with the guy's help

'It's 2189 currently.'

'Do you mean we are not living on the same earth? It's 2208 on ours.' Marlik seemed clueless.

'With only one possibility,' I said after a long silence of thinking, 'this is a parallel universe of all the multiverses but one with a slower timeline and dinosaurs.'

'Yeah!' Nia suddenly shouted out after hearing my guess.

'That's the only possibility!' 'It makes sense,' said Elara, holding her chin thoughtfully, 'It would explain why Tariq the AI suddenly lost its ability to calculate the specific impact angle and landed that violently, because he lost his way to our own internet server.'

'But how did we get here without noticing?' asked Marlik while trying to pet Huali the dinosaur. 'By the way, you haven't told us your name, Mr?'

'Oh, you can call me Adrian, Adrian Kwan.'

'Maybe we accidentally went into a space rift while getting over the debris field?' I added

'Possibly.' Marlik said without thinking, he was having fun with Huali.

'I knew there were Mutiverses!' Nia said excitedly, 'We need to report this to our own earth! But first we need to see more of your amazing earth, thank you!'

With one strong jump, Adrian straddled Huali, just like riding a horse. 'Come on.' called Adrian, 'get on here on Huali's back.'

'I can't wait for this!' said Marlik, already having his hands on Huali, trying to climb up.

Since we had quite a big group for one dinosaur to carry. Adrian showed us his other pet,

'Oh my! He's a big guy!'

'Yes, of course, Bingo is from the Choyrodon family.'

'Is it safe?' ask Elara, still being impressed by the huge creature.

'Trust me, he's a kind dinosaur.' I said with Nia sitting on Bingo's back.

As we passed through the giant gate in front of us, we were speechless. A lovely civilization, a picture of a Chinese village from the olden days. People yelling and selling. The colourful street with familiar building style. Varying kinds of vegetables and fruits lie on the ground on top of the patterned blankets. The only difference between them and our earth is, the dinosaurs are still alive.

'Look! Over there – that's a cute little one doing tricks! With that sweet little hat!'

'It's Carl, a Sinosauropteryx.' Adrian said

'Oh! He's got a name, Captain!' Nia laughed.

Suddenly a huge dinosaur figure appeared.

'What is that!' Marlik Shouted in panic

"Relax," said Adrian. "He's the protector of the village, Thorin. He won't eat you."

"He's huge!" Nia called out "what sort of dinosaur is it?"

"He is an Argentinosaurus." Adrian waved his hand to Thorin, "the biggest dinosaur you could possibly find in China."

With renewed spirit, we stepped forward, ready to embrace the adventure that awaited us on this extraordinary planet.

Timeless Tales of Ancient China

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Choe, Yeda – 13

Ling tightened the last bolt that kept the time machine together. A wave of pride sailed across him, and he inhaled deeply, contented, and pleased with himself as he lay on the rotting wooden floor, observing the decaying room. The cracked roof above him threatened to drop at any moment while the worn-out walls—which had long been due for fresh paint—sagged with weariness. A smile streaked across his face.

"I will be out of this mess in no time," Ling whispered to himself in a mix of exasperation and victory.

Before this breakthrough in designing the world's first time machine, Ling had struggled profoundly with finances.

He had never known the comfort of a steady income, and at one point, he had scavenged for food. But all that would change now. Ling chuckled in disbelief, allowing the reality of his escape from this wastebasket of a home to sink in.

Across the other side of China, a poor paleontologist, Chang, was in his own struggle. Every one of his discoveries had been stolen, and he wished heaven would give him a break to get through the relentless challenges in his work. Years of theft had worn him down despite his strong work ethic and boundless creativity. He sought new inspiration, and had set up a conference meeting with a big company, in the hope it would give his career the much-needed push.

With a small wrist fossil of an *Agilisaurus*, which was recently discovered in the far reaches of China, Chang made his way to the meeting room. With a deeply inhaling breath, he reached for the doorknob to the conference room—the air was thick with the sweet, heady fragrance. A long, highly polished to the gold sheen meeting table sat center, accompanied by an advanced projector that looked as if it had been plucked from the 31st century. Around the table were three businessmen and two established paleontologists, all prepared and ready to tear his submission apart. This meeting could be the beginning—or the early end—of his career in paleontology.

"Welcome, Chang," one of the businessmen said, his tone laced with skepticism. "We've seen much of your work, and to be honest, there wasn't much to see."

A shiver of nervousness coursed through Chang. "Sir, my work ethic is stronger than most, and many of my inventions have been stolen right in front of my eyes. My discovery of the first three dinosaurs in China was bluntly ignored or miscredited. I don't know what to do." Cold beads of sweat trickled down his sideburns, and he felt the rush of blood to his head in embarrassment. Time slowed, stretching endlessly before the investor finally replied:

"We know, Chang. We did not bring you here to humiliate you; rather, we wanted to channel your work ethic into something much more profitable—if you could cooperate." Chang racked his brain, trying to find out what the businessmen were insinuating. "How would you channel my work ethic?" he asked.

"I'll be frank; I couldn't approach it. However, there's one recent invention that could," the businessman said, eyes sparkling. "We want you to meet Ling, the inventor of the time machine."

Chang shook his head in amazement. "A time machine?" he stammered. "That would be impossible."

"Ling is a man of few words, but I want you both to help each other become successful." The businessman looked at his watch, and the five men all stood up. "Here's Ling's address. Be there as soon as possible," he said, handing Chang a slip of paper before they all left together.

Recognizing that this was his waited-for opportunity, Chang hastened to the address. He had expected a mansion but was dumbfounded, standing before a small house which looked like it belonged to a family living below the poverty line, let alone a famous physicist who just invented a time machine. He looked again at the address and thought, "Those businessmen were having a ball with me, weren't they? He rapped his knuckles on the door, surprised it didn't flop at the touch of his dry knuckles.

Moments later, a tall, thin man answered the door.

"Paleontologist Chang?" he asked.

"Yes sir," Chang replied, doubting this could be the inventor of the time machine, a contraption hitherto part of fantastical dreams.

"We can skip the formalities," Ling said. "Come in; let's get started."

As Chang stepped inside the worn and crumbling house, he was immediately taken aback. Instead of the large, hulking chunk of metal that he had pictured in his head, he saw a small, intricately designed plate of metal, complicated with wires and technology whose functions eluded him. He began to question whether the plate, not much larger than a small laptop, actually could transport him and Ling back millions of years.

"Let's get on with it. Are you ready?" Ling said, seemingly just having finished programming the machine's code on a big monitor on the floor. The monitor and the time machine looked so out of place in Ling's dilapidated home. Ling placed his palm flat on the metal plate. "Put your hand right next to mine," he instructed. Chang complied.

Immediately, he felt a sensation of free-fall, much like the bottom of his stomach had dropped from a roller coaster. His feet searched for the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he realized there was none. He and Ling were floating in empty space, pulled forward by an unseen force. In the blink of an eye, they found themselves in a lush, humid jungle.

The environment seemed so peaceful, but only for a moment.

Overhead, huge circling pterodactyls and small hunting velociraptors ran on the ground. More familiar reptiles and turtles scurried about by the river. Then the thunderous roar of a tyrannosaurus and its deafening stomps shattered the tranquility.

"One wrong move here, and it's all over," Ling said steadfastly, "Don't touch ANYTHING."

Chang realized how critical this situation was: with a single misstep by himself or Ling—a single crushed insect or an errant item of equipment forgotten in a critical spot—everything could be ruined. Without bringing back samples, he would have to be the observant kind, noticing and writing down everything important.

Chang whipped out his notebook and pen, writing down colorful descriptions of the humid air, the sounds of dinosaurs, and the complex food web of the jungle. Hours passed as Ling led him through the thick foliage, pointing out anything of interest as Chang scribbled furiously. As the sun began to set, with golden hues casting through the trees, Ling spoke.

"We should head back. Have you collected enough?"

"Yeah, I've got everything I need," said Chang, who looked at his notes.

Then, without warning, there was a familiar roar rattling through the jungle, followed by heavy stomps and another terrifying cry. The ground shook beneath their feet as panic set in and they ran, with no sense of direction anymore. They were lost, and the T. rex was closing in.

A shadow cast above them: the huge shadow of the Tyrannosaurus Rex swallowed them where they stood, petrified with fear. "Don't make a noise," Ling whispered, shaking. They had left the time machine far behind, at the mercy of this predator tailing them.

The sun sank lower, casting long, ominous shadows across the prehistoric landscape. Ling and Chang then ran through thick ferns, their hearts pounding with adrenaline. The deafening roar rumbled through the trees, echoing ominously. Out came the huge Tyrannosaurus rex, his glistening teeth catching the last rays of sunlight as the ground shook.

"Run!" Ling shouted, his heart racing as the creature's hot breath washed over him, a chilling reminder of the predator just behind. Twigs lashed at their skin, and the scent of damp earth mixed with overwhelming terror.

Chang's eyes darted ahead to their time machine, nestled in the grass, miles away, it felt like. They burst into the clearing; the T. rex had them in its hungry gaze, jaws snapping in anticipation.

In one desperate leap, Ling and Chang flung themselves at the metallic plate, slapping their hands onto it as before. Relief washed over them as they felt the familiar tug on their bodies, followed by the sensation of floating in open space.

Chang's feet touched the soothing hardwood floor beneath his feet. "Thank God," he said, clutching his notebook.

"Same time here next week?"

The Case of Clorox

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Chung, Abigail – 12

In the heart of the bustling Mars Science Museum, Marcus cautiously pushed his grandmother in her wheelchair as they navigated the museum's grand labyrinths. Bustling crowds hummed with excitement, all the murmurs of awe blurring into a melodious symphony. His grandmother, with her neat silver bun and piercing dark eyes, occasionally paused to gaze at a peculiar artifact gleaming under sunlit glass.

Marcus's heart raced as he approached a curious dinosaur model. Under the display, a freshly polished bronze plaque read "Sinosauropteryx". The lanky dinosaur had oddly short arms, a lizard-like long tail, and a vibrant array of feathers. Even though he kept on reminding himself it was a mere model, Marcus felt as if he was approaching a real majestic creature.

"It's amazing, don't you think Grandma?" Marcus breathed.

Marcus's grandmother gave a familiar glance at the Sinosauropteryx. She wrinkled her nose as if she were recalling something.

"That is a very familiar one," she started.

Marcus perked up.

"Do you know a lot about dinosaurs, Grandma?" Marcus eagerly asked.

Marcus's grandmother squeezed her eyes shut.

"It was a long time ago when we still lived on Earth. Back at the lab, they knew me as Iris..."

Winter, 2031 – China

Iris gasped as the speckled egg on her lap slowly cracked open. The moon showered the dank laboratory with milky light as a baby dinosaur emerged from the crumbles of the shell. It was an odd thing, scrawny with abnormally short arms and an oversized tail. Iris brushed her hand on the dinosaur's back, feeling its blunt, prickly feathers. She felt the warmth of its body and its faint heartbeat. Despite her curiosity about the small creature, Iris suddenly felt sick of herself. She trembled.

"I'm sorry Pao."

Iris plopped her worn satchel on a bench across from Yeung, bitter cold nipping her bare ears and face. She ran her pale fingers through her thick, unusually messy hair.

"You know... you should catch a break soon," Yeung said, adjusting his glasses.

His remark only fueled the fire in Iris's coal-black eyes.

"I need your help."

"Is that so?" Yeung replied.

Iris cautiously scanned the empty, stark lunchroom. She then carefully opened her satchel, revealing a feathered baby dinosaur.

"Iris..."

"I was just planning to sell it but couldn't once it hatched," Iris frantically whispered.

Yeung eyed the small dinosaur.

"A Sinosauropteryx... I haven't seen one before. I thought it would be much smaller" he murmured in awe.

Yeung frowned.

"Where did you find it?" he asked.

Iris bit her lip, feeling the metallic taste of blood on her tongue.

"Hmm, I thought so," Yeung dryly said.

"Well, it doesn't matter where I got it. Right now I need help to keep it safe," Iris insisted.

Yeung looked down at his plate and fiddled with his leftover noodles.

"OK," he said after contemplating a while.

Iris couldn't hide her involuntary small grin.

"Thank you," she mumbled.

Chinese New Year – 2032

Iris sat down next to Yeung, shivering slightly.

"Happy Chinese New Year," she weakly said.

Yeung looked up from his laptop.

"Happy Chinese New Year."

They sat in silence, breathing puffs of mist in the frosty air. Iris rubbed herself as she stared at the pale moon, the iridescent glow of the galaxy sparkling in her dark eyes. She sighed as her gaze skimmed over the barren landscape surrounding the lab.

"Did you already find a place for the baby dinosaur?" Iris asked as she gently scooped up Pao.

Marcus nodded as he shut his laptop.

"I've found a legitimate dinosaur sanctuary we can place the baby dinosaur in," he said.

Iris plastered a grimacing smile on her face.

"How long until it leaves?" she quivered.

"3 days," Yeung replied.

Iris felt her throat tighten.

"There will be a pick-up truck at midnight," Yeung continued.

He gave her a sympathetic glance.

"You'll be alright," he reassured.

"Thank you," Iris said, her voice on the verge of cracking.

After a few moments of stillness, Iris shakily stood up.

"Thanks for your help," Iris croaked, "I think I should go now, goodnight."

Before Yeung could say anything, Iris strode into the velvety darkness.

Iris crept down the staircase leading to the dimly lit basement, occasionally tripping over her oversized pajamas. She scanned her surroundings as she anxiously paced through clusters of mysterious objects draped in heavy cloth.

"Pao?" she softly called, her raspy voice rippling across the silence.

A small grunt beside Iris caught her attention. As she turned, Pao poked her head behind a stack of boxes. The dinosaur innocuously blinked her big eyes as she spat a squished electrical cord from her mouth. Iris couldn't help a bittersweet chortle at Pao's unsuccessful attempt at acting.

Suddenly, Iris heard the pattern of footsteps echoing throughout the basement. Blood gushed in her veins as she pressed her back against the cold wall. Iris instinctively stroked Pao's prickly feathers, her hand tensing up and trembling.

Iris's breath became shallow and fast as she overheard her co-workers' conversation.

"We have to find it before Dr. Chang finds out it's missing," one worker said, her voice tense.

"I haven't seen Iris for a while, it's as if she's been avoiding me," the other worker whined.

Iris's mind raced as their footsteps kept on getting closer. They were looking for Pao. Iris reached out to pull Pao closer to her, only to realize the *Sinosauropteryx* was not next to her. Fear gripped Iris's throat as she saw Pao crouch lowly, her eyes flickering before transitioning to a brooding glow. An unnatural growl emanated from deep within the dinosaur's throat. Every muscle in Iris's body froze. The feral monster was unrecognizable.

Pao's sharp claws clicked against the concrete floor as she emerged from the shadows. The *Sinosauropteryx* lunged at the 2 workers. They stumbled backwards; eyes wide in fear. A blood-curdling scream rang in Iris's ears. She squeezed her eyes shut, refusing to look at the horrifying scene. Iris forced her quivering legs to stand. Doubt clawed at her, but she couldn't give in. Not now.

Iris crept out from behind the crates, holding a discarded empty beer bottle. *Now or never*, she thought to herself. CRASH! Pao turned; surprise reflected on her face. Iris locked eyes with the dinosaur, clenching the severed head of the beer bottle. Both of their gazes did not waver.

Pao surged forward, leaving the injured workers behind. Iris braced as Pao leaped onto her. The *Sinosauropteryx* sunk her sharp teeth into Iris's forearm, brutally tearing off flesh. Pain seared across Iris's arm. Iris staggered closer to the door, her arm dripping with blood. Pao inched closer to her, the dinosaur's eyes burning with blood-thirsty desire. Iris breathed heavily, her heart dully aching.

Suddenly, the door banged open.

"Get down," a voice barked.

Iris crumpled on the ground, feeling her head spin faster than a tornado. She let herself be enveloped by the echoing thunderstorm. As Iris's eyes fluttered closed, she glimpsed the silhouette of a scrawny dinosaur's body, laying cold on the ground.

Iris woke up to the sterile scent of antiseptic and a dull throbbing on her bandaged forearm. Yeung sat next to her bed; his expression heavy.

"I'm sorry about last night..." he said, his voice barely audible. "...about what happened to Pao."

Iris gave a stiff nod. She stared at the ceiling, the harsh lights of the hospital ward swimming in her watery eyes.

"She deserved better."

"It's not your fault, she just...lost control of herself," Yeung said.

Iris paused, avoiding eye contact with Yeung.

"It's not just that," Iris shook her head. "I was the one who caused all of this."

Yeung furrowed his brow, sensing her hesitation.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Iris tried to force down the lump in her throat, guilt gnawing at her.

"Pao was experimented on. She had an AI chip implanted in her brain, and it malfunctioned. That's why she attacked me," Iris stammered.

Yeung's eyes widened in shock, yet he remained silent.

"I feel terrible for causing all this pain to her," Iris sobbed, righteous anger mingled in her voice.

She closed her eyes, letting her tears freely flow beneath her eyelids.

Yeung paused.

"Pao was more than just an experiment; she was alive. You gave her love and care that would last a lifetime," he softly said.

Iris gave a grateful nod. Once again, they did not speak; their tranquility a silent lament to the loss of a life too soon.

Marcus placed his hand on his grandmother's, slightly squeezing her bony fingers. She remained silent, tears running down her cheek like they did so many years ago. A deep silence brooded over them, yet Marcus had never felt a deeper connection to the remarkable woman beside him. Marcus once again glanced at the *Sinosauroptryx* model, smiling as he pictured the playful Pao in his mind. A fuzzy warmth spread within him.

"Grandma, thank you so much for this visit," Marcus gently whispered.

The Ancient Ghast

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Fung, Nicholas – 12

Beijing, described as a dinosaur haven, has gained popularity since time travel was invented. People around the world would stop for a visit to get a chance at a glimpse of these ancient beasts, spectacularly referred to in pop culture. Here, a peculiar company thrived: TimeTrack Expeditions. Their slogan, “Discover the Past,” echoed through the corridors of their headquarters, a monolith amid the bustling city. Inside, the air was somehow different; it was a feeling Jack had never felt before. The walls were filled with photographs of hunts, men posing beside colossal bones, grinning under the shadows of the ancient giants.

But the truth was, every hunt bore its own weight, a silent warning lurking beneath the surface. The hunters were blinded by glory, oblivious to the fragile threads of time they were close to severing.

Inside the lounge, a deep voice rumbled from the corner. “Excited?” Mark stood tall at 6’5”, his imposing figure casting a shadow over the room. Jack swallowed hard, feeling a mix of intimidation and reassurance. “I’m Mark, your guide for today’s expedition.” Though Jack felt a twinge of fear at the sight of him, he forced a response. “N–Nice to meet you.”

“Relax,” Mark said with a chuckle. “It’s not like we’re hunting a T–Rex or anything.”

As he spoke, Mark’s demeanor shifted, his tone becoming more serious. “Now, listen up, everyone. It’s crucial that we stay on the designated path. Deviating could disrupt time itself, causing ripple effects that might alter our reality in ways we can’t even begin to comprehend.” He scanned the group, ensuring each person felt the weight of his words. “So, let’s keep calm and stick together. Remember, we’re not hunting dinosaurs today; we’re exploring the past. Stay focused, and let’s enjoy the journey.”

Jack, feeling a mix of excitement and anxiety, spoke up, “What’s the most dangerous creature we might encounter?” Mark’s expression turned grave. “Every creature here poses its own threat, but there is one in particular that we tend to avoid: the Tyrannosaurus Rex. It is the apex predator after all, often referred to as a living nightmare that embodies the very essence of fear. But don’t worry, we’re not going to meet Mr. T–Rex today. We’re going to a timeline before it existed. So rest assured, and enjoy the trip.”

As the group boarded, the pod sealed shut, cocooning them in a metallic stomach. Jack exchanged nervous glances with his companions; the thrill of adventure was laced with dread. The countdown began, each digit falling like a deadly bite of a dinosaur.

Three.

Jack’s mind wandered to the stories of the great beasts, massive and majestic, yet terrifying in their ferocity.

Two.

His instincts screamed this was a mistake, a dance with fate that would end in disaster.

One.

With a jolt, the world around him shattered like glass, and the pod plunged into a whirlpool of light, emitting a deafening scream as it went.

When the blinding flash faded, they emerged in a realm of lush greenery, the air thick with the scent of damp earth and decay. Towering grass brushed against their legs like the ghostly fingers of the past. The sounds of the modern world faded, replaced by primal roars and rustling leaves.

“Where are we?” one member whispered, his voice trembling as he scanned the landscape.

Mark checked the coordinates, his face pale as he muttered, “This isn’t right. We should be in the late Cretaceous—not here.”

A chill crept through Jack’s bones as he felt it. Bones, shivering in place, organs cowering in fear; he felt as if his heart stopped for a brief moment, but quite the opposite occurred. Thump, Thump, it was beating faster. Thump, Thump, Thump, faster. Thump, Thump; it was so silent that he could even hear the rest of their hearts squirming in fear—“Quiet? B–But, how did such a lively jungle turn into one with a deafening silence through just a feeling?” Then it hit him; it wasn’t just his own fear, it was something else. This feeling, almost vibration–like, was a roar. It was worse, worse than what the movies portray, a million times worse. It wasn’t the vibration, nor the speeding beat of his heart that emitted fear; it was the silence. The deafening silence tainted with murderous intent.

The nightmare wasn’t over; it was just the beginning. A sudden rustle escalated to a miniature dinosaur scurrying across the soil, chittering in fear—but it paused, frozen in its escape. So still, it was like a statue of one Jack had seen in the museum. Jack tried to reach for his walkie–talkie, but was frozen, just like the mini dinosaur. His muscles tightened more than he had ever experienced, and his heart, thumping as fast and as loud as the engine of a Formula 1 car, he looked around; the rest of the crew was in the same state. He felt as if darkness loomed above him, and it did. Darkness encapsulated the area; it was a shadow of death looming above him. The Tyrannosaurus Rex was here. It looked nothing like how movies portrayed it; it wasn’t a mighty lizard roaring with a warrior’s call; it was a ghastly yet elegant horror. It had dark blue feathers like those of a peacock, but its eyes—dark, darker than night itself—almost a void. Jack felt if he even had a second of eye contact, he would be sucked into those malevolent eyes. It was haunting how its mere presence could freeze its victims in place; it was no ancient lizard; it was a demon damned by God back to the depths of hell. But here it was, before his very eyes.

SHRIEK! Jack turned his head in alarm towards the miniature dinosaur; it was gone. In a split second, it disappeared into thin air. Suddenly, rain fell on Jack's head, or so he thought. The dripping was slow; he wiped the water off his head, only to find his hand covered in blood. He looked up to meet jaws with rows of teeth like chainsaws and a mouth that looked as if it could fit three people in at once. He couldn't scream; he couldn't run. He could only close his eyes, accepting his horrid fate. He felt his body flying away in the air—"RUN! RUN, JACK! RUN BACK TO THE POD!" CHOMP. THUD. Mark's headless body lay on the ground.

Jack couldn't move himself, but his instincts did it for him. He ran faster than he ever had before, moving past bodies with no heads, tears flooding down his cheeks. The T-Rex, yet so massive in its size, moved quietly yet swiftly towards Jack, silently opening its mouth. Jack, without a thought, leaped at the time pod, barely making it out of its mouth.

He initiated the button and sealed the hatch. Jack gasped, a breath of relief escaping him like a diver finally surfacing after a ten-minute hold—until the sound shattered his moment of calm: CLANK! CLANK! The T-Rex wasn't done with him; it was gnawing on the pod like a dog with a bone.

"Warning! Warning! Sustained heavy damage. Automatic takeoff initiated."

30% durability.

Jack felt as if he was being dragged back down into the depths, choking on fear as his doom edged closer.

20%.

Another deafening CLANK! The T-Rex's teeth broke through the titanium shell, metal groaning under the relentless assault.

10%.

With a final, spine chilling crunch, the last remnants of the hatch gave way. Jack's heart raced as he turned to face the ancient ghast, its black eyes staring into his very being. Time slowed as he realized his fate; his muscles tensed up, and his heart stopped. Jack's vision was starting to get blurry; he had to move, he had to close his eyes. He couldn't stare longer into the eyes of that demon, but he couldn't. He felt his head getting lighter; he was fighting to stay conscious, but then it happened—the beast smiled. Saliva dripped down its blood-soaked teeth, with pieces of human brain being licked one by one for Jack to see before it was his turn.

The smile, so haunting it seemed like it came from the devil himself, was more than enough. Jack's pupils faded to a lifeless gray as darkness swallowed the light from his eyes. A chill crept through the air, and his breath caught in his throat. The T-Rex opened its mouth, and Jack could only sit there, waiting for the escape of death.

The Secret Room – Zhang's Journey to Fame

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Levi, Itay – 14

There was an old miserable man named Zhang Wei, everyone just called him Zhang for short. He lived in a very small apartment that could roughly fit 2 people. He got very little money from his job because he was just a waiter. Everyday he struggled to get to work and to get back home because all he had was a bicycle.

Every night, before going to bed he watched the news on tv. He always saw the same people on TV. His dream was to be on tv talking about something whether it's about sports or about the latest news which is about the missing fossil. As he was watching the news he heard that they said that whoever finds the missing fossil will be able to explain about it on tv and get a lot of money for finding it. Zhang was a very hardworking man and that if he wanted something he would be very determined to find it or get it.

As he was going to bed he was thinking about the missing fossil and if he should try to find it. He thought hard about it and came to a conclusion that he will try as hard as he could to find it. He knew that he needed the money and that if he wanted to achieve his dream he would need to work as hard as possible to find it. That's what he did, as he was going to work and as he was coming back home he was looking for it hoping that one time it would be handed to him or that he would find it waiting for him on the street.

Then one day he was going to bed and without noticing he tripped on his couch and stumbled across a secret room. The room was extremely big compared to the apartment that Zhang stayed in. He didn't understand why this room was here and why no one told him about it.

When he got up he heard a voice speaking as if he was explaining something to him. The voice had a very deep and terrifying voice. The voice said “This room is an adventure and in the end you will receive a very special prize that I am sure you will love. But there is one catch: if you leave the room this room will disappear forever.”

Zhang was very confused, he didn't know if he should trust the voice and go through the adventure or if he should just leave and forget about the room. Zhang was a very talented man. He decided to stay and complete the adventure and get the prize that he thinks he will really like. Then the voice asked Zhang “Would you like to take on this adventure and try to win the prize?”

Zhang replied with “Yes, I would like to take on this adventure”.

The voice said “there are 3 rooms, each one gets progressively harder than the last, you will only have 1 hour to finish everything”

Zhang was ready and confident that he would manage to get the prize at the end before the one hour finishes.

The voice said “Room 1 will be a quiz about dinosaur fossils”.

Zhang said “Let's go, I study so much about dinosaur fossils, I will definitely get everything right”.

The voice then said “there will be 5 questions and you will have to get at least 4 of them right to move on to the next room”.

Zhang was a bit worried after he heard what the voice said but still a bit confident because he knew he studied hard about dinosaur fossils.

The voice said “Question 1, What is a dinosaur fossil, and how is it formed?”

Zhang replied with “A dinosaur fossil is what's left of a dinosaur after it has died. Fossils are made when the parts of the dinosaur, like bones, get replaced by minerals over a long time.” Zhang knew his answer was correct and wanted to move on to the next question.

The voice said “Your answer is correct, well done”

Zhang was happy that he already got one question right.

The voice then said “Question 2, What are the different types of dinosaur fossils?”

Zhang replied with “Body fossils, trace fossils and coprolites.”

The voice said “Your answer is again correct, good job. We will continue to the third question now which is, What types of dinosaurs are most commonly found as fossils?”

Zhang replied with “Triceratops, Stegosaurus, and Theropods like Tyrannosaurus Rex.”

The voice then said “You are correct again, you got 3/3 correct answers. If you get the next one right then we will just move on.”

Zhang was really happy that he got all three of the first questions right.

The voice said “Question 4 is: Where are some of the best places in the world to find dinosaur fossils?”

Zhang said “Badlands of South Dakota (USA), the Gobi Desert (Mongolia), and the Dinosaur Provincial Park (Canada).”

The voice said “Well done you got all the questions correct, now we will move on to the next room and you have 40 minutes left. Zhang was really confident now and would not give up because he got so far already.

The voice said “Room 2 will be ranking the dinosaurs from the biggest length to the smallest length.”

Zhang didn't know what to expect as he only studied half of the dinosaurs.

The voice listed the dinosaurs out for Zhang to organize them. “Argentinosaurus, Patagotitan, Dreadnoughtus, Brachiosaurus, Sauroposeidon, Tyrannosaurus rex, Spinosaurus and Stegosaurus. I just listed them out for you, they are not in order. You will need to organize them.”

Zhang was ready to begin feeling confident from the last round.

Zhang said “first: Patagotitan, second: Argentinosaurus, third: Sauroposeidon, fourth: Dreadnoughtus, fifth: Brachiosaurus, sixth: Spinosaurus, seventh: Tyrannosaurus rex, eighth: Stegosaurus.”

The voice said “WOW, that's very impressive. Most people wouldn't be able to do that in 5 minutes. Let's move on to the last room, having 30 minutes left.”

Zhang was delighted because he thought that he was about to get the prize because he had 30 minutes left, which is a lot.

The voice said “Now, the final room, hardest one of them all, the third room. In this room I will give you multiple choice questions and you will need to answer them. There will be 10 questions.”

Zhang was very confident with this room because his general knowledge about dinosaurs is very good.

The voice said “First question: What was the largest dinosaur known to have existed? A) Tyrannosaurus rex B) Argentinosaurus C) Velociraptor.”

Zhang said confidently “B) Argentinosaurus”

The voice said “the answers will be revealed at the end. Second question: Which dinosaur is known for its distinctive three horns? A) Triceratops B) Stegosaurus C) Brachiosaurus”

Zhang said “A) Triceratops”.

The voice said “third question: What did the T. rex primarily eat? A) Plants B) Other dinosaurs C) Fish”

Zhang said “B) Other dinosaurs”.

The voice said “Fourth question: Which dinosaur is famous for its long neck? A) Diplodocus B) Spinosaurus C) Ankylosaurus”

Zhang said “A) Diplodocus” The voice said “Fifth question: What type of dinosaur is a Velociraptor? A) Herbivore B) Carnivore C) Omnivore”

Zhang said “B) Carnivore”.

The voice said “you are now half way through, Sixth question: During which period did the dinosaurs primarily live? A) Cretaceous B) Ice Age C) Jurassic”

Zhang said “A) Cretaceous”.

The voice said “Seventh question: What is a fossil? A) A living dinosaur B) The preserved remains of ancient life C) A type of dinosaur”

Zhang said “B) The preserved remains of ancient life”.

The voice said “Eighth question: Which dinosaur had a spiked tail used for defense? A) Stegosaurus B) Tyrannosaurus rex C) Brachiosaurus”

Zhang said “A) Stegosaurus”.

The voice said “Ninth question: What is the name of the event that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs? A) The Ice Age B) The Great Flood C) The Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event”

Zhang said C) The Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event”.

The voice said “This is the last question before I reveal the answers. Tenth question: Which dinosaur is known for its sail–like structure on its back? A) Spinosaurus B) Diplodocus C) Allosaurus”

Zhang said “A) Spinosaurus”.

The voice then told Zhang if he got all the answers correctly.

The voice said “You got all the answers correct, well done.”

Zhang said happily “Lets go!!!”

The voice then handed the prize to Zhang which was the missing dinosaur fossil. Zhang couldn't believe it. He was filled with excitement as he just realized that he would be able to achieve his dream which is being on the news. As he got back to his room he told everyone that he got the missing fossil. Ever since that happened to him, his life has been better and was on tv talking and explaining about the missing dinosaur fossil. He explained how he got it (the secret room in his house).

The Forbidden Fossil

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Levi, Noa – 11

We waited for our moms to take us to the beach. It felt like five hours, but it was only thirty minutes. I didn't mind; we were at one of the best research centres in China. Huge walls covered in fossils surrounded us. They were known for discovering dinosaur bones, both ancient and new. I've been interested in dinosaurs since I was little, but I only tell my close family and friends.

I continued scrolling through my phone while wandering around, pretending not to care. Taylor set up her phone to film another Instagram post. "I'm so bored," she complained, fixing her hair. Taylor was pretty and popular, but always made time for Rory and me. Rory sat on a bench, sketching in her sketchbook. She was organised, intelligent and detailed in her drawings.

Jeremiah posed next to a fossil, making dinosaur jokes. Conrad, his older brother, tried to stop him but laughed too. Their mom was my mom's best friend from America. Both boys were close friends with me but best friends with my brother Peter.

Peter didn't come to the research centre—he said he'd meet us at the beach.

Conrad was introverted, and loved science and guitar, while his brother Jeremiah played football and kept everyone laughing.

"Belly Chen, come over here!" Taylor called. I came over slowly, pretending not to care, though inside I was excited.

"Look at this," Rory said, showing her sketchbook. Strange circles from the research centre filled the pages. "They're everywhere," she said. "They look weird," Conrad pointed out, leaning closer. "This one's from the T-Rex section, near the reptile bones. Not like normal fossil marks." I moved closer; the circles had lines around them.

"Like clocks with too many hands," Jeremiah said. The rest looked like writing I'd never seen before. From all my late-night dinosaur reading, I knew these weren't normal fossils. "They're fine, come join my—". Taylor said, then stopped. A blue light shone from a display, lighting her face. "Wait, what's that?" Taylor asked as Conrad went to the display. "It shouldn't be doing that." "Doing what?" Jeremiah asked.

Blue light pulsed from the bones. "Let me take a video; this will get so many views!" Taylor said, grabbing her phone. As we moved closer, the light grew brighter. Rory drew faster, her pencil moving across the page. She held up her sketchbook next to the case. The symbols she'd drawn matched the marks on the glowing bones. Taylor reached for the glass case.

As Taylor reached for the glass case, I shouted, "Taylor, don't—". The blue light grew so bright it hurt our eyes. Rory's notebook started shaking and her drawings lit up blue like the bones.

"What's happening?" she whispered nervously, dropping her notebook. "This is insane!" Jeremiah said, but he wasn't laughing. Conrad went closer to the case, looking serious. A humming sound came from the case.. Taylor stepped back with her phone. "Maybe this wasn't a good idea," she said.

The blue light grew so bright, like when someone pointed their flashlight right in your face. Everything felt shaky, like walking on jelly. Rory's sketchbook pages flipped by themselves and shone. The air swirled around us like a tornado.

Then everything disappeared: the research centre, glass cases and fossil walls. When we opened our eyes, the wind hit our faces. The white walls and displays were gone, replaced by huge trees we'd never seen before. They were bigger than buildings with strange leaves.

"Hello?" Taylor's voice was shaking. She kept pressing her phone but it wouldn't turn on. "Where are we?" That's when we heard a deep roar. I knew that sound from my dinosaur books but never thought I'd hear it in real life. "We need to hide," I said, grabbing Rory's arm.

"UGH!" Taylor smacked her phone. "My phone just died! I had so many viewers on my live!" She kept pressing buttons and shaking it.

"Taylor, we have bigger problems," Conrad said seriously, looking up at the sky. Through the huge tree branches, we could see giant things flying around. They weren't planes or birds. "Those are Pterosaurs," I said before I could stop myself. Everyone turned and stared at me. "I mean... I think they are."

"Wait, since when are you into dinosaurs?" Taylor asked. But before I could answer, Rory made a weird squeaking noise. Her sketchbook was glowing differently now. All the weird symbols she'd drawn were moving around the pages. "Look at this," Conrad pointed out, getting closer. "These are the marks we saw on the fossil case."

Then we heard a deep roar that made the ground shake. My stomach felt like it was doing flips because I knew exactly what made that sound and that we were in serious trouble.

"We have to move," I said. "That's a big dinosaur." Taylor rolled her eyes. "How would you know?" Then I replied, "Because I'm still obsessed with dinosaurs, okay?". I know everything about them, especially the ones that used to be here in China. I didn't tell anyone because it was embarrassing."

"Well, that's useful right now, find a way to get us out of here," Jeremiah said, looking relieved. "Guys, these symbols are different now. They're pointing somewhere?" Rory said and Conrad nodded. "Maybe time travel changed them. If we can figure out what they mean—" "We could get home," I finished.

Another roar, closer and louder this time. Taylor grabbed my arm so tightly it hurt. "Dinosaur girl. What do we do?" For the first time since I was little, I stopped pretending I didn't care about dinosaurs. My friends needed me. I looked at Rory's glowing sketchbook, and then at the dinosaur world around us. "First, we need to make sure we don't get eaten."

"Look at this!" Rory's sketchbook was doing something weird. The symbols weren't just random anymore, they made a pattern that matched the rocks around us. "It's like a map," Conrad pointed out. He sounded excited, which was different for him. He pointed at the rocks with the stripes on them. "These lines might help us get home." "I know what these are!" I said, "These rocks are important in China. Scientists found a lot of dinosaur fossils in layers like these."

Taylor finally stopped messing with her dead phone and looked at the symbols. "This is like how I plan my posts," she said. "Everything has to go in order, like a timeline!" "Great," Jeremiah said, trying to make a joke. "Taylor's social media addiction might save us!"

We all worked together after that. Rory kept drawing the symbols. Conrad figured out which rock layers were from our time. Jeremiah kept making us laugh while we were afraid. Taylor made a plan about which way to go, and I told them which paths were safe from dinosaurs.

The blue light in Rory's sketchbook grew brighter every time we followed the right path. I didn't have to hide my dinosaur knowledge. Rory wasn't shy about her drawings, Taylor was smart when she wasn't worried about her phone, Conrad was talking, and Jeremiah made us laugh when we were afraid.

Rory held up her sketchbook. The air felt all wobbly again. We all grabbed hands and made a circle. "If this doesn't work," Jeremiah said, "I want to say you guys are pretty cool. Even if you're all weird."

The blue light grew so bright we had to close our eyes. Everything started spinning. I squeezed my friend's hands tight, hoping we'd all go home together.

When we opened our eyes, we were back at the research centre. Our moms ran over looking worried. "Where were you?" Mom hugged me.

I looked at my friends. Rory felt confident with her drawings, Taylor's phone worked again, but she kept it in her pocket. Conrad smiled, and Jeremiah made jokes. "You wouldn't believe us if we told you," Jeremiah said.

When we got to the beach, we sat together. Rory showed us her drawings and all the weird symbols and dinosaurs we saw. Taylor didn't even make a video of the sunset. "Some things are better than social media," she said. "Tell us more about dinosaurs," Jeremiah told me, and he wasn't joking.

Conrad and I told them everything I knew about the dinosaurs from China. Conrad added stuff he learned about science, Rory kept drawing everything, and Taylor wrote it down in a real journal instead of posting it online.

We decided to keep our time travel a secret. Taylor didn't mind that she couldn't post it. Jeremiah made us laugh and Rory wasn't afraid to show us her drawings. We were lying on the beach watching the best sunset of summer.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Ng, Xanthus – 13

The air was heavy as Wei tried to navigate the dense forest he thought he knew so well. He heard his dog, Bao, bark ahead. They had been playing catch in the dark part of the forest when Bao darted off, evidently interested in a new intriguing scent. Once upon a time, in a tiny isolated village that rests amidst the beautiful mountains in the middle of China whose location is unknown, the village is known for the mysterious vanishing of a young lady around 40 years ago, a young, teenage boy named Wei lives with his grandparents inside a humble little cottage. Grandfather is a farmer and owns a vast farmland behind their cottage while grandmother knits extravagant works and sells them to locals.

As he continued towards the barking of Bao, the forest felt like a huge maze, shadows of the trees gently swaying with the wind, the early morning sunlight disappearing as the dense forest cover got denser and denser. Only rays of sunlight remain now; Wei only heard about this part of the forest from his grandfather's stories, they warned about the potential dangers that were here. Wei nervously walks forward, carefully navigating the ground in front of him, noticing the fog that now is around his ankles. In front of him, he sees the flickering ray of sunlight shining on a large fossil and an excited Bao circling it. Wei cautiously approaches the dinosaur fossil in front of him. Too focused on the fossil, Wei forgets to check the forest floor and trips, landing between the fossil bones, looking to his left as he stands back up, he sees Bao excitedly circling the dinosaur skull, sniffing anywhere that he can reach. Inspecting the dinosaur fossil, Wei suspects that the recent storm moved the dirt away from the fossil to expose it, which is still half buried in the ground. Wei quickly took a few pictures of the dinosaur fossil, intending to show them to his grandfather, who is also a dinosaur enthusiast, sure that he'll be able to identify the mysterious fossil hidden in the forest and know what to do.

Sprinting through the forest back the way he came, Wei didn't stop until he found his grandfather, watering the tomatoes in the garden with a slight smile. Out of breath, Wei showed the pictures and gasped to his grandfather "Look Grandpa! Bao and I found a dinosaur fossil in the deep part of the forest!" His grandfather's eyes widened in surprise, "That's awesome Wei, we must go uncover the rest of the fossil right away to keep it safe from hunters, I'll call my friends at the museum, you go gather my tools right away!"

With Bao excitedly in the lead, Wei walked once again through the forest towards the dinosaur fossil, leading the way for a team of volunteers from the museum and some of Grandpa's friends, as they walked into view of the clearing containing the half-exposed dinosaur fossil, the exclams from the small team broke the afternoon silence in the forest. The team quickly set to work, using different tools like brushes to remove the dirt around the fossil. Wei sat with Bao at the edge of the clearing, watching in awe as the dirt slowly fell away, revealing there was not only one, but 3 fossils next to one another in the clearing, two of those were slightly smaller than the one which Wei discovered first. Grandpa gasped "It seems to be a mother with her 2 children". The small group murmured in agreement, but as they tried to identify the dinosaur fossils, they discovered that there wasn't a single page on any of the dinosaur books containing the fossils they were looking at, excited at the thought of discovering a new species of dinosaur, the team quickly began documenting the details on the fossils.

Suddenly, Wei heard a tiny rustle from behind him, he turned and saw a girl about the same age as him whom he had never seen before, she ducked behind a bush the moment she realised Wei had spotted her, however, after some coaxing, the girl came out and introduced herself as Fang, she said in a tiny voice to Wei "My grandmother knows what the dinosaur's species is." "Please would you bring us to her?" Wei asked Fang. After some hesitation, she led Wei and the small team deeper into the forest, finally coming into another larger clearing where a small beautifully built cottage stood, inside the cottage, the grandma sat on a rocking chair, reading a book.

At the sight of the team walking in after countless bumps and falls, she chuckled to herself lightly and motioned for them to sit. She then told a little story to them, revealing that she had found the fossil around 40 years ago, when she was still a young lady, when she found the fossil, she found out it was an extremely rare type of dinosaur fossil, she also explained that normal books of dinosaurs rarely say anything about this dinosaur because it was so rare and some scientists also disagree that it was a real thing. The grandmother also told them that during the period when she discovered the fossil, there was a very high demand for them and hunters went to extreme lengths to unearth fossils for money, even stealing other hunter's finds. It was then that she planted the forest, surrounding the fossil in the centre to deter anyone from ever entering the forest and taking the fossil for their own fame. She also told Fang not to tell anyone about the fossil because it should be kept safe from everyone.

After finishing her story, the team explained to her that unearthing the fossil would be very important in understanding history and assured her that nothing would ever happen to the fossil as it would be kept safe in the

museum, grandmother, after listening to them, agreed that she had hidden the secret too long, and told the team they could go and unearth the rest of the fossils. As they came back into the small clearing, Grandpa told everyone to take extra care of the fossils, as they slowly removed the dirt, the shape of the two smaller dinosaurs and the mother curled around them emerged, they moved the fossils out back into grandpa's farm, away from the resting place of the 3 dinosaurs.

Wei suddenly noticed something at the bottom of the mother dinosaur, a small carved rock embedded with the words "To the people who discovered the fossils, good luck" along with a small picture of a young lady. "Grandpa look!" Wei called his grandpa, surprised, his grandpa replied "That's the lady who kept asking people in our village to take care of the environment and nature all those years ago before she disappeared mysteriously and that forest started growing. Was that the lady in the cottage we met just now?" "She dedicated her whole life to protecting the fossils from danger and harm didn't she, planting the forest and even cutting herself off from the entire world" One of Grandpa's friends said as they walked past.

A few months later, the fossils were put on display in the museum along with a plaque containing a story about a young lady protecting the fossils from harm. People came from far and wide just to see the newly found fossils. Wei and Grandpa had discovered the importance of protecting history and sharing it with everyone.

The Boy Who Became a Dinosaur Hero

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Ohayon, Rotem – 12

“I believe dinosaurs can really be brought back to life!” Zhiyu announced to his classmates.

A loud laugh could be heard from the back of the class. It came from the meanest bully at Shanghai International School.

Zhiyu was an only child who lost his parents in a horrific car accident at the age of four. He was brought up by his grandma and uncle who supported him in every aspect of his life, including believing in his dreams. Although he was a shy boy, he was confident that he could make his dreams come true.

Zhiyu’s great ambition was to bring dinosaurs back to life in China. He was convinced that he possessed the superpower to make this mission possible.

The bell for recess sounded. Zhiyu left the classroom for the playground. He suddenly found himself surrounded by a crowd of sneering, teasing faces. The big bullies of the school had circled him and were pushing and poking him.

They chanted, “Zhiyu, you think you can do amazing things like bring extinct creatures back to life! Rah, rah, rah! What a nerdy, weak, stupid, dinosaur-lover!! Your greatest achievement will be to become a beggar! Ha ha ha!”

This brought tears to his eyes. When eventually those horrible boys got bored of teasing him and let him alone, he only wished that day would hurry up and end!

The final bell rang and he sadly rode his bicycle home. Uncle Jun greeted him at the front door. He noticed the look of devastation on Zhiyu’s face and asked what was annoying him.

Zhiyu unfolded the story to his uncle and explained the reactions to the announcement he had made to his classmates, his dream to have dinosaurs walking with humans again. Uncle Jun squeezed his hand and whispered to him, “I have a secret your grandma and I have been keeping for a long time now. We want to give you a magic gemstone that had a connection to dinosaurs from generations ago. It will give you magic powers and protection. You must wear it around your neck at all times otherwise the power will stop. You will only have 24 hours to regain the gem’s power once you find it.”

Zhiyu went to bed tightly grabbing the gem around his neck. As he closed his eyes, green lights sparked all over the room and vibrations shook his bed.

All of a sudden everything stopped. Zhiyu found himself in a jungle. He stared around him. A fierce, deafening roar made him jump. Behind him appeared a gigantic creature. It was a Sinraptor dinosaur. Zhiyu started running for his life, his body shivering with a fear he had never experienced before. He ran and ran.

At last he found a small cave which could not be accessed by the animal chasing him. Slowly, but surely, he began to calm down. He remembered the gem around his neck, with its power looking after him. He knew he was safe.

Zhiyu was so traumatized about nearly losing his life that he fell asleep from exhaustion. The gem warmed up as he held it in his hands. He heard the voice of his dead father echo in his mind. “Hello Zhiyu. I’ve come back to help you fulfill your dream to bring dinosaurs back to life. I am going to guide you. You will need to follow my instructions. I do not repeat myself, so you need to listen carefully or you will fail in your mission...”

The voice continued, “Walk out of the cave at ten minutes to midnight. Follow the path from the cave into the forest for about a kilometer, until you see a group of glowing fireflies. Feel inside the hollow of the small tree they surround. You will find a whistle that lets you communicate with the dinosaurs. You must pick up this whistle by midnight! Those dinosaurs need to know not to harm you!”

Zhiyu woke up with a shock! The light had faded on the gem. He looked at his watch with alarm and saw it was close to the time to leave the cave. He thought to himself, “Oh crumbs! It is urgent, I have to achieve this instruction before midnight otherwise the whistle will lose its magic! Hurry hurry!”

He rushed out of the cave and ran blindly into the night. Suddenly, he reached the mouth of the cave again and realised he had been running around in circles! He panicked and rubbed the gem around his neck, realizing he had five minutes on the clock before it lost its powers. Magically, a compass pattern and map plan with arrows and a path

appeared on the gem and pointed out a direction for him. It had to be the right direction! He sprinted along the route that it showed him.

Four stressful minutes later he finally reached the firefly tree. He pushed his hand inside the hollow and grabbed the whistle. It warmed up inside his hand as if it knew this was where it had to be.

Zhiyu was curious to understand how the special whistle worked, but he was so exhausted that he sat under the tree and fell fast asleep. Dreams spun around in his mind. One picture showed a face blowing the whistle three times and then pausing. This was repeated twice. He woke up as a piece of grass tickled his nose and a streak of sun warmed his cheeks.

Yawning, he rose up holding his gemstone tightly. It vibrated! Another map plan appeared with tiny, tiny dinosaur figures at the end. Zhiyu followed the arrows once again. He walked and walked until he came across a field with a peaceful family of vegetarian dinosaurs eating grass. Feeling awkward at first, he tested the special whistle out. Amazingly he heard the dinosaurs chatting to one another, understanding every word.

“Excuse me, excuse me, I really need your help!” he shouted. They looked up in shock. “I’m on a mission to make extinct dinosaurs return to life in 2025.” He held up the magic stone which shone like a glowing star. “This stone has given me the perfect powers to carry out this task together with you. You will have a great life and prevent your kind from becoming extinct!”

At first, the gentle dinosaurs stared at him, eyes as wide as footballs, not believing what they saw. The stone vibrated in Zhiyu’s hand again and seemed to calm them down. Dad dinosaur entered into a heavy discussion with his group. Obviously, Zhiyu’s incredible gem had communicated an important message to him about preventing future dinosaur extinction.

“We would love to help you, but it is important to keep each member of our family safe, especially our little kiddo. What is your plan to take us to 2025?” asked Dad.

Once again the gemstone flickered. A message poured into Zhiyu’s mind which also drifted to the dinosaurs. They agreed to follow the words.

“Inside the gemstone is a liquid potion that can shrink dinosaurs to a size that can fit into a small box to be placed in a pocket. Find the little lid, open it, and give this mixture to the dinosaurs to drink. Make sure they only drink one drop each. When they arrive, pour one drop on each to bring them back to life size.”

The dinosaur family lined up quietly, kiddo first and dad last. Zhiyu poured a drop of potion into each one’s mouth. Immediately each was transformed into the size of a tiny doll.

Very gently, Zhiyu placed them into the little box and carefully put the box in his pocket. He closed his eyes tightly, his hands over the gemstone, and thought hard about returning to 2025 and Shanghai International School. The gemstone flashed blue light between his fingers. Zhiyu opened his eyes and amazingly found himself in the school playground.

He took the box slowly out of his pocket, emptied the dinosaur family onto the ground and tipped one drop of potion from the gemstone on each. Within 30 seconds the dinosaurs were gigantic! The bell rang for recess and students poured out onto the playground. Some of them turned silent with mouths open wide, others screamed with fear. Teachers also appeared, not believing what they saw.

Zhiyu stood in front of the dinosaurs and introduced them. “These are my friends who are saving dinosaurs from extinction. They will not harm you.” He gave the kiddo dinosaur a hug.

For once, the school bullies could not find any words to say. The Principal declared that Zhiyu was a hero. The words echoed through the students and they chanted, “Zhiyu is a hero, Zhiyu is a hero...”

Zhiyu’s heart warmed and he smiled, thinking how grateful he was to his uncle and glowing with pride for his father!

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Carmel School – Elsa High School, OuYang, Talia – 13

In a bright, prehistoric landscape of ancient China during the late Jurassic period, lush green forests and open plains stretched as far as the eye could see. A glistening river wound through the valley, and distant mountains rose on the view, casting long shadows across the land. The air was filled with the sounds of singing insects and distant dinosaur calls, creating a lively atmosphere.

One bright morning, the peaceful sounds of the valley were shattered by frantic calls echoing through the trees. “Help! Someone help me!” A young Brachiosaurus named Bo had gone missing, and panic spread among the dinosaur community. Determined to save him, Li, a quick-witted Velociraptor, teamed up with her loyal friend Zhao, a mighty Triceratops. Together, they set out on a daring quest to find Bo before it was too late.

As the sun rose over the horizon, the valley glowed with golden light. Li stretched her legs and took a deep breath of the fresh morning air. Just as she was about to race down to the river, she heard a distant commotion. Curious, she perked up her ears and listened closely.

“Help! Someone help me!” The cry was filled with desperation, echoing through the trees.

Li’s heart raced. “Zhao! Ning! Come on!” she shouted, dashing toward the sound. Her friends, Zhao the Triceratops and Ning the Ankylosaurus, quickly followed.

They arrived at a clearing where Ning was speaking to a group of anxious dinosaurs, their faces etched with worry.

“What’s going on?” Li asked, her heart pounding.

Ning turned to her, his expression grave. “There’s been a sighting of a lost dinosaur—a young Brachiosaurus named Bo. He wandered away from his herd and hasn’t returned. His family is frantic!”

Zhao’s eyes widened. “We have to help find him! He could be in trouble!”

Li nodded, . “Let’s do it! We can’t let him stay lost.”

The three friends quickly gathered supplies—a few berries for energy and some sturdy branches for protection. As they set off into the forest, Ning explained more about Brachiosaurus.

“They are gentle giants,” he said. “But they can easily get scared when separated from their herds. We need to be careful.”

As they traveled deeper into the forest, the thick trees created a maze of shadows and sounds. Li led the way, her keen eyes scanning for any signs of Bo. Suddenly, they heard a faint cry.

“Did you hear that?” Li whispered, stopping in her tracks.

“Yes! It came from over there!” Zhao pointed to a cluster of bushes.

The trio carefully approached the bushes and pushed them aside, revealing a small clearing. There, they found Bo, trembling and alone.

“Bo!” Li called out gently. “We’re here to help you!”

Bo looked up; his big eyes filled with fear. “I got lost! I don’t know how to get back to my family!”

Zhao stepped forward, his voice reassuring. “Don’t worry, Bo. We’ll help you find your way home.”

Just then, a loud noise came from behind them. The friends turned to see a pack of hungry raptors eyeing Bo. “We have to protect him!” Li shouted, her heart racing.

“Stand together!” Ning instructed, positioning himself in front of Bo. Zhao lowered his horns, ready to defend.

The raptors circled around, looking for an opportunity. “This is our chance!” one of them hissed. “Let’s grab the little one!”

Li quickly thought of a plan. “Zhao, you create a diversion! Ning and I will protect Bo!”

Zhao nodded and charged at the raptors, letting out a loud roar. The raptors momentarily froze, surprised by his size and strength.

“Now, Li!” Ning said

Li moved, using her speed to dart around the raptors, drawing their attention away from Bo. “Over here!” she said, leading them in a chase.

As the raptors chased Li, Zhao charged at them, creating confusion. “We need to move now!” Ning urged Bo, leading him toward a thicket. Li spotted a narrow path by the river and called, “This way!”

The friends raced to the riverbank, and the raptors lost interest, realizing they were outsmarted. Once safe, Bo looked up at his rescuers, eyes filled with gratitude. “Thank you so much! I was so scared!”

Zhao smiled and patted Bo gently with his horn. “You’re safe now. Let’s get you back to your family.”

As they followed the river, the sounds of the valley surrounded them again. When they reached Bo’s herd, he joyfully called out, and his family rushed to him, filled with relief.

Li, Zhao, and Ning watched the happy gathering, proud of what they’d accomplished. “We did it!” Li exclaimed.

“Together, we can overcome anything,” Ning added.

As they headed home, the friends knew they would always look out for each other in their vibrant, prehistoric world.

Lost in Time

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Wigisser, Aline – 13

I've always loved dinosaurs, from the day I found a *Sinosauropteryx* fossil in my backyard as a child, in Lufeng. The moment I touched it, I knew it was no ordinary stone or bone. Bones hold stories. Some more than most. This bone was the beginning of my story.

After years of pursuing my passion for dinosaurs, I became a paleontologist at the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Paleontology. Although I had always considered myself a paleontologist, I needed an official certificate to validate my identity. After years of re-learning all of the things I had already known as a child, the moment finally arrived: my first summer after college!

I settled back in Lufeng, where a group of paleontologists gathered every year to hunt for dinosaur fossils. Lufeng is well-known for having one of the largest numbers of dinosaur fossils in China. I always dismissed their efforts as a waste of time since they rarely found anything. However, this year was different. They were searching for a cave rumored to possess magical fossils. Intrigued, I decided to join the group.

The day started off just as I had expected: tedious. We sifted through miles of dirt and rocks as the sun beat down on us. Hours of endless shoveling passed with little to no reward, and boredom began to wash over me. I found my mind wandering off from the dull and useless conversations with the other paleontologists – favorite foods, weekend activities, and town gossip. I tried to involve myself, however they ignored me, thinking I was merely a naive, inexperienced girl. I began to question why I had even joined, let alone had a sliver of hope in finding anything.

Frustrated by the lack of discovery and the arrogance of the other paleontologists, I turned to leave and abandon the journey altogether. I traced my steps back to where I started. In my anger, my steps grew heavier and less cautious. I slipped on an uneven surface, and before I knew it, I was tumbling into darkness.

To my relief and surprise, I landed on a soft bed of moss. Momentarily dazed, I could hear the faint music of water slowly trickling down into a pond. I turned on my phone for light, and the beam illuminated the darkness to reveal a jaw-dropping sight. Each rock was polished so smoothly that even the smallest beam instantly reflected off their surfaces, dazzling me. My footsteps echoed, amplifying the soft sounds reverberating throughout the cave. It was almost as if the wind was whispering in my ear. The eerie, irregular symphony both intrigued me and unsettled me, but my gut urged me to forge ahead and discover the hidden secrets within.

As I explored the cave step by step, my smile grew. Each crystal embedded into the wall held fragments of dinosaur fossils. As I stood before them, mesmerized, I couldn't help but brush my fingers against one of the rarest dinosaur fossils – the *Spinosaurus*'s back vertebrae. As the tip of my fingers made contact, I felt a jolt of energy pierce my body. Suddenly, I was no longer in the present, I was pulled into a vivid flashback.

I found myself in a lush, wide forest, filled with prehistoric creatures. The air was thick with humidity and the sounds of rustling leaves and mighty roars. Then, I saw it – the *Spinosaurus*. With its grounded, trunk-like legs, and its massive claws, the *Spinosaurus* stood tall. It had an elongated snout and razor-sharp teeth, and it commanded over the forest, frightening even the fiercest creatures. As I stood in awe of the *spinosaurus*, the emerald grass started to tremble. The sky darkened, and I saw flashes of lights in the distance. I watched in horror as the *Spinosaurus* and other creatures in the forest began to panic, sensing catastrophe. In an instant, the ground erupted into flames and jagged cracks, as a colossal rock smashed onto the face of the earth. The meteorite annihilated everything. Then, the vision shattered. I gasped awake, back in the cave with my heart racing, and the vivid vision of destruction lingering in my mind.

Clearing my head and still trying to make sense of what had just occurred, I glanced at the other shimmering crystals and geodes around me. In a daze, inexplicably drawn to the strange gems, my body slowly floated to another fossil. With trembling hands, I reached out to touch a large curved fossil that looked like nothing I had ever seen before. The moment my fingers brushed it, a wave of energy surged through me once again. I was pulled into another flashback.

I opened my eyes to a dry and vast plain where herds of prehistoric creatures peacefully roamed. Among them, I found a *Stegosaurus*. Its rounded back covered in an array of spikes made the *Stegosaurus* appear intimidating. Yet, I knew that this creature to be one of the friendliest dinosaurs in the world. I watched as the *Stegosaurus* interacted with its surroundings, and my mind was washed in peace. However, that tranquility did not last. The ground started to tremble, and the sky darkened once again. I knew that the meteorite was about to strike. I watched as the creatures

panicked and scurried into caves to protect themselves, but their efforts were futile. In a heartbeat, a blinding light struck us. The ground shook violently, and the once peaceful environment transformed into complete chaos.

But this time, I did not wake up back in the cave, in the present, as I had before. Instead, I was trapped in the past. My heart was racing with terror. Then, in the midst of the smokey air and the lifeless landscape, I spotted the Stegosaurus, still standing strong. Its spiky silhouette was dark against the flaming sky, and it gave a resilient roar.

I decided to move closer to the Stegosaurus. I mimicked low, calming sounds to avoid presenting myself as a predator. The magnificent beast in my presence brought me a sense of protection. I remembered the caves I had seen earlier where all the creatures scurried before the meteorite struck. To my surprise, the Stegosaurus turned its head with its gentle eyes and seemed to acknowledge me. I gestured to the nearby caves and guided my new friend.

As we moved, the ground shook forcefully, filling the air with dust and making it hard to see. However, I used the Stegosaurus's strong frame to protect myself from all of the harmful debris. Together, we navigated through treacherous terrains and threatening rocks that dared to crush us.

With hesitation at the cave entrance, I stepped and breathed a sigh of relief. Inside, I felt a cool breeze and scattered holes throughout the ceiling dimly lighted the cave. I knew that we wouldn't be able to stay here forever, but at that moment, we were safe. I began to explore the cave, searching for anything that could help us survive. Deep within, I found small pools of water that provided hydration, and small beds of moss that the Stegosaurus could eat from, and where I could rest my head.

After laying next to the Stegosaurus for what felt like days, I lost track of time. I had lost hope in returning to the future. That's when I saw it: a flicker of light in the distance. It was a glow stick! An object that had no place in this prehistoric world. This was an object from my world, from the present. People were searching for me. The stick illuminated the cave with a neon green hue. The light had ripped through time, casting a glow that reached me in the past. I turned to see the Stegosaurus slightly nod its head, encouraging me to leap through the light. Its ancient face seemed to say thank you, and goodbye.

I turned once more and whispered a promise never to forget this experience. As I stepped forward, the light swallowed me and in an instant, the world around me transformed. The chaos of the flashback faded and was replaced by familiar sights and sounds of the present.

"Hey guys! I'm over here!" I shouted as I ran toward the sounds of concerned voices. I turned the corner and saw my family, their expressions a mix of fear and relief. I embraced them tightly, and could not help but shed tears of gratitude.

"Where *were* you!?" the head of the paleontologist group snapped. "We've wasted days searching for you, and now we'll never have time to find the cave."

"Open your eyes," I said to him. "Open your mind." He looked around, seeming to consider the walls of the cave for the very first time, and gasped at the glittering fossils perfectly preserved in crystals. As his hand stretched greedily toward what looked like a Giganotosaurus hip bone, I said, "Be careful. Bones hold stories."

Echoes of the Past

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Yeung, Gabrielle – 13

In the heart of Zigong, Sichuan Province, renowned worldwide for its rich fossil deposits, a team of paleontologists ventured into the rocky wilderness, their tools and curiosity ready to uncover secrets buried for millions of years. The site was alive with the rhythmic chipping of stone and murmur of anticipation as brushes swept away layers of dust. Dr. Dan Yuan, the lead paleontologist, crouched over a partially unearthed femur, his hands trembling with excitement. “This is incredible,” Dan whispered, his voice barely audible over the soft breeze. “It’s larger than anything we’ve found before.” Beside him, his assistant, Fu Xing, peered closer. “It’s almost perfectly preserved. Look at the details. It is as if time itself paused for this one.”

The bone was massive, ridged with grooves that hinted at the sheer power of the creature it once belonged to. Surrounding it, fragments of a rib cage and what appeared to be the remnants of a skull began to take shape. The team worked tirelessly, excavating what they believed to be a new species of theropod dinosaur. But there was something unusual about these fossils. Beneath the layers of sediment, the bones seemed to shimmer faintly in the sunlight. At first, the team dismissed it as a trick of the light or some sort of mineral deposit. Yet, as night fell and the fossils were transported back to their temporary lab, the faint glow persisted.

“Dr. Dan” Fu said, her voice uneasy as she stared at the fossil under the lab’s fluorescent lights. “The bones... they’re warm.” Dan frowned, placing his hand on the femur. To his astonishment, Fu was right. The fossil radiated a gentle warmth, unlike anything he had encountered in his decades of research. “It could be a chemical reaction,” Dan said, though his tone betrayed his doubt. “Perhaps the minerals in the surrounding soil...” But before he could finish his thought, a faint vibration coursed through the table. The instruments rattled, and the lights flickered. The team froze, their eyes darting to the fossil. The glow intensified, pulsing like a heartbeat.

Suddenly, the demur cracked. A sharp, echoing snap filled the room as the ancient bone split apart, revealing something within. The team gasped as a dark, viscous substance began to ooze out, shimmering with an otherworldly hue. “What is that?” Fu whispered, stepping back. Dan, however, couldn’t look away. His scientific curiosity overpowered his fear. He reached for a scalpel and carefully scraped some of the substance into a vial. But as he did, the vibrations grew stronger. The entire lab began to shake, and the fossils on the table started to shift. “Everyone, get back!” Dan shouted, his voice cutting through the chaos. The bones began to reassemble themselves. Piece by piece, they rose into the air as if guided by an invisible force. The rib cage snapped together, the skull fused, and the femur returned to its place. Within moments, the skeletal remains of a massive theropod dinosaur stood upright, towering over the trembling scientists.

The room fell silent, save for the sound of the creature’s bones creaking as it moved. Its empty eye sockets glowed with the same eerie light that had emanated from the fossils. The dinosaur’s skeletal head turned, scanning the room, and then it let out a deafening roar, a sound that seemed impossible for a creature without flesh or lungs. Panic erupted. The team scrambled for the exits, but the creature moved with terrifying speed, blocking their path. It didn’t attack, but its presence was enough to paralyze them with fear. “Dr. Dan!” Fu yelled, her voice shaking. “What is happening?!” “I... I don’t know!” Dan stammered, his mind racing. “This defies everything we know about science!”

The dinosaur took a step forward, its massive bones clattering like thunder. But as it moved, the shimmering substance began to spread, coating its skeletal frame. To the team’s horror, muscle and sinew began to form, wrapping around the bones like vines growing at an unnatural speed. Within minutes, the creature was no longer a skeleton but a fully formed dinosaur, its scaly skin glistening under the lab’s flickering lights. “This isn’t possible,” Dan whispered, his voice barely audible. The dinosaur roared again, louder this time, and then turned its gaze to the large metal doors of the lab. With a single swipe of its tail, it smashed through them, disappearing into the night. The team stood in stunned silence, their minds struggling to process what had just occurred. But before they could regroup, more vibrations shook the ground beneath their feet. “No,” Dan said, his eyes widening as he looked at the other fossils in the lab. They, too, were beginning to glow. One by one, the fossils around them began to reanimate. A stegosaurus, a triceratops, and even a massive brachiosaurus, all of them came to life, their skeletal frames transforming into living, breathing creatures. The lab was soon a cacophony of roars and crashing metal as the dinosaurs broke free, stampeding into the wilderness of Sichuan.

The sun rose over Zigong, illuminating a world transformed. Dinosaurs, once thought extinct, roamed freely. Dan and his team had unearthed fossils that seemed revived by a mysterious force. It was as if Earth had rewound time, bringing these ancient creatures back. Dan stood outside the ruined lab, pondering why. Fossils from other sites across the globe were also coming to life. The substance inside the bones was not natural but something ancient may be alive. Fu interrupted with news of the spreading phenomenon. Dan suspected the substance was a biological trigger, reanimating the fossils. A massive theropod attacked, showing signs of intelligence. Fleeing, Dan decided to study the

fossils at the Zigong Fossil Museum. Inside, they found a sauropod skeleton emitting the mysterious substance. It seemed to be calling to something.

As the Earth shook, Dan realised it wasn't just about the dinosaurs but the planet itself. The creatures ruled once, and now the Earth was giving them a second chance. Humanity had to adapt or be swept aside by Earth's first rulers. Driving away, Dan contemplated the new reality. The Age of Dinosaurs had returned, and humanity would have to find a way to coexist or face being overshadowed by the ancient rulers of the Earth.

Human?

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Zagury, Abigail – 12

They arrived at the port at 5 am on Thursday, June 5th, on a rundown boat that creaked with each wave. There was a chilly breeze, though they were able to find some warmth from the sun as it had just started making its appearance. Maya Brooks and her brother, Caleb Brooks, stood at the edge of the port, staring into the endless ocean. Maya pulled her jacket tighter, thinking about all the fishing trips she and her brother would go on with their father, though she didn't say anything. She was used to keeping her feelings to herself. Their mother died when they were young, and their father was taken away by cancer. Though, they were still able to live off the money they made at previous jobs.

They pulled up Lufeng County, the sun shining bright. “Do you really think Dr. Lin will take us seriously?” Maya broke the silence, her voice sharp. “I haven’t even gone to a college, we’ve never even set foot on a real excavation site, and you think this paleontologist will trust two 20-year-olds with no experience?” “Hey, calm down. Firstly, it is not my fault you didn’t go to a college, secondly, *you* are 20, I am 23, and lastly, I trust my professor; he would always say I was his favorite student”, Caleb retorted. Maya put on a grin and moved her long, blonde hair out of her face, “Well you were always a bit of a teacher’s pet”. Then in a tense voice she said, “I just don’t believe it’s going to be that simple.”

When they arrived at the excavation site in Lufeng County, Maya noticed Caleb’s optimism had faded. He was quiet as they found their way to Cabin 5, and when Dr. Lin Wei finally appeared, Maya could sense a shift in the air. They knocked on the door and heard a voice say, “Come in”. Dr. Lin Wei had dark brown eyes, shoulder-length black hair, and tanned skin from the hard labor all day. “So you are Caleb”, she said while looking at him with a faint smile. “Your professor and I are very close friends. Did he tell you he lived here for quite some time?”. “Yes, he did mention it”, answered Caleb. She then shifted her focus to Maya, “So then you must be Maya.” Maya replied coldly, “Yes, that is my name”. An awkward silence followed. It was broken by Lin, “Well then we better get going; you will both be working in section 27.”.

They were working with 4 other people; they would dig and record their findings. Some days they would find a bone, but there was never something very exciting. One day passed, then another one, then another, then another one. Every day was as uneventful as the last. The heat of the excavation site weighed heavily on them, and Maya’s skepticism about the work only grew. Caleb, however, continued with a determined optimism, trying to make the best of their situation. They were often at odds—Caleb saying the work will finally pay off and Maya retaliating on how this path was a dead end.

Then, one afternoon, as they dug into the earth, Maya heard a clunk as her shovel hit something hard. She was not surprised, because this was not the first time she had found bones before. What shocked her was what she saw after Caleb brushed away dirt. There lay a fragment of bone unlike any dinosaur fossil she’d ever seen. “What is that?” Maya asked, her voice nervous. “The only bone it resembles is a—” “No,” Caleb said quickly. “That isn’t possible, and before we jump to conclusions, it could be from a different time. It doesn’t necessarily mean—” “But what if it is?” Maya’s voice cut through the air. The world seemed to hold its breath. The silence seemed like it lasted an infinity. Everyone was waiting for someone to say something. No one did...

More and more people came, they were all focused on one thing—what appeared to be a human leg bone, buried with the dinosaurs from millions of years ago.

Maya crossed her arms, glaring at the cabin ahead. “I don’t want to do this,” Maya groaned, voice tight. “What if that bone isn’t from the dinosaur era, what if it is modern, Dr. Lin will never, *ever* trust us again. She’ll never think we can handle any type of responsibility.” “Yes, but we cannot just hide from her what could possibly be one of the biggest discoveries in paleontological history,” Caleb retorted. He glanced at her again, this time in a soft tone. “We’ve got this, Maya. Dr. Lin won’t throw us out over one mistake.” Maya shook her head. “You don’t get it. Even if she doesn’t fire us, she still won’t trust us anymore. We will be stuck doing filing or something like that.” Caleb took a step forward, determination in his voice “Then we make sure we don’t mess up.” Maya hesitated, then sighed. “Fine. But if this backfires, I’m blaming you.”

They arrived at the cabin after a moment of awkward silence and knocked on the door. They heard a voice call, “Come in”, and entered the room. They found Dr. Lin Wei at her desk writing something down. She glanced up at them “So I heard you have found something interesting”. “Yes, that is correct; we have found a bone from the dinosaur era”, Caleb replied. “What? On a dinosaur excavation site? That is so weird” Dr. Lin Wei said sarcastically. “Sorry, he means we have found an odd bone. One that doesn’t look like it belongs to a dinosaur, explained Maya. “What are you talking about? What other bone?” asked Lin. “Well, we think it might be a human bone,” Caleb answered.

"A human bone!? How is this possible!?" she exclaimed. After calming herself, she asked, "Well, are you sure?". "Well, no. This is why we came to you. We want to bring it to the lab to get it carbon-dated. Would that be possible?", he said, hopefully. "Yes, yes, I will arrange for the bone to be sent. For now, bag the bone, label it and bring it to me."

"I told you it would work", said Caleb while leaving the cabin. He was grinning ear to ear. "Hey, don't get your hopes up. We still need to find out if the bone was from the Mesozoic Era". Though, Maya couldn't stop herself from grinning a bit. They walked back to the cabin in silence.

The next couple of weeks were as bland as the first couple of them. Though they had been able to find 3 other human bones (that were all sent to the lab), Maya was looking anxious and down. It was a late afternoon when Caleb finally broke the silence. "Maya, what's going on? You really haven't been yourself for the past couple of days?". She opened her mouth then shut it. Caleb tried again, "You know if there is anything you want to talk about, I am here for you". Maya opened her mouth again, this time not closing it, "I am scared. I am scared that we will be using the lab's resources for nothing. I am scared that I will fail... again. Caleb raised an eyebrow. "Again? What are you talking about?". "Well, while you were at Cambridge, Dad got sick. I did everything in my power to help. I used every bit of money to pay for his medical bills. But—, she sobbed, "it wasn't enough; I failed him, and I am scared that I will fail you." She broke down in tears.

Caleb hugged his sister. "You are being absurd; you can't actually be blaming yourself for Dad's... situation. You have never failed anyone. Why have I never heard you talking about this?" Quietly she muttered, "Well I thought if I kept this to myself, the feeling of guilt would pass." Caleb let out a small chuckle, "You really know nothing about grief. You need to talk to people about these things. Okay?" Maya didn't say anything. Caleb asked again, "Okay?". "Okay," Maya muttered. "Louder," he teased. "Okay!" she exclaimed as she let out a small laugh.

One of the workers came up to them, "I know this is a bad time, but Dr. Lin Wei is asking you two, something about lab results. "Well this is it. This can make or break our future" Caleb said, turning to Maya.

They found Dr. Lin Wei (once again) at her desk. "Sit down, this is important". The leather chairs squeaked as they sat down. She continued, "So as you both know, you have recently found a... particularly strange bone" Maya and Caleb held their breath. "and the results from the lab have just come back. So here it is; the bone was, in fact, human and it was, in fact, from the Mesozoic Era.

The Curse of Intelligence

Chinese International School, King, Sophie – 14

The words “Dino Babies” flashed in bold letters before me. These very words have haunted my dreams every night as I drifted away, hoping the next day would be better than the last. These very words have lived rent-free in my brain, pestering me to make the right move. To move towards a better future. To give my child something that I never had. And now, as I stare at the dominating sign above me, I take a deep breath, and amble wearily into the store.

“Ding, ding!” The store bell sings out joyously. I stare at the overwhelming visual before me. Huge floor-to-ceiling windows covered the spacious area, with blinding rays of sunshine raging in. All seemed well. To my left, I saw a row of tables and chairs, displayed neatly across the room. To my right, was a counter. The line to the counter stretched a mile a minute, while employees typed busily onto computer machines, their faces forcing wide, Cheshire cat smiles as they attended to all the customers’ requests. Behind them, stood a robust display of the latest winged reptile findings from Liaoning. The translucent glass case reflects my shocked face as my eyes move to meet a fossilized feather *Sinosauropteryx* – the first of its kind. Its fragile bones, each intricately shaped to perfection, whispered stories of a life once lived. A cold shiver traveled down my spine. The dusty chalkboard on the wall was filled with massive letterings: “Want to bring out the most intelligent version of your child? Time to invest in the Dino Babies Program! **Eligible for individuals 18 or under. No refunds are accepted after purchase.*” I nodded my head determinedly. Yes, I did.

I dashed to join the queue, my mind still in a freakish lavender haze. As I surrounded myself with parents who were also waiting in line, I could only begin to think of the world of difference between them, and me. I started worrying, pondering if I was making the right decision. I sighed heavily. The truth was, I wanted my child to be like me, to not have to be engineered to perfection. But being a “misfit” sure came with a cost.

Back when I was little, everyone was on an even playing field; one’s success solely relied on themselves. You get out what you put in, they always say. I still recall the day our high school professor announced to us that paleontologists recently revealed that the newly discovered titanosaur in Jiangxi was reported to be 38% more intelligent than the human species. We were all so riveted about the fact that there were creatures that outranked the intuition of humankind. Frankly, we were too full of ourselves. But ever since the release of “Dino Babies”, the world has changed. I still recall the day when The Fossil Exhibit for Kids officiated their new branch: Dino Babies, where humans can inherit the intelligence of titanosaurs through a newly created genetic liquid. Many were ecstatic, but I was hesitant. Within 8 weeks, Dino babies completely dominated the population. Every parent in the country wanted their child to inherit the quick-witted traits of titanosaurs, and this resource gave them that power that they desired so hungrily. These dinosaur-emulated creatures strolled around our property, their heads held high

as they sneered in disgust at us. To them, we were too foolish, too ignorant. The Dino Babies may have the highest IQ, but they had coal for a heart. They immediately earned spots from the most prestigious universities in the country, leaving us with dirt. We tried protesting the injustice of the situation, but there were simply too many of them, and too few of us. We were no longer humans. We were misfits.

A jolly man in an enormous dinosaur costume whistled loudly as he strolled past the long line, jolting me back to reality. I was getting close to the front of the line. Next to me, the spotless window exposed my tired, dejected face, so pitiful standing next to these perfectly enhanced creatures. I see why they are favored in our society. It wasn’t ethical, but it was the truth. I knew what I had to do. I’m doing it for my child. For him to not have to suffer the same pain as me, to have to live through the same cruelty. It would only get worse as time went on.

“Next!” The counter lady called out cheerily.

I walked forward, mustering up as much courage as I could.

“Welcome to Dino Babies!” The young, teenage-like lady sang.

She finally looked up from her computer, then stared at me in suppressed disgust. I knew why. I was a misfit, and she was one of the many intelligent humans. I took a long internal breath.

“Hello, yes, I would like to enroll my child into the Dino Babies program,” I said as normally as I could manage.

“Very well, the traits are shown below for your choice.” The lady said, this time, in a much more flat and scripted manner.

I stared at the countless options, feeling immensely bewildered. Just for IQ alone, there were ten different choices, spanning from “high adaptability in academics” to “exemplary adaptability in all areas”. As I spanned the options, I

was suddenly blind with shock at the overwhelmingly high price for each trait. I glanced over at the counter beside me, my mind flashing with dollar signs as I relished in awe at how swiftly the parents picked and chose without a care in the world. "If they can sacrifice for their child, then so can I.", I decided, as I took out the rest of our emergency savings. After finalizing the rest of the choices, she finally told me to choose a unique character feature adapted from the Titanosaur. The words curiosity, honesty, bravery, creativity, and kindness flashed before my eyes. "Bravery," I replied without a doubt.

"Okay then, thank you for investing in the Dino Babies program. We wish you and your child a bright future ahead." The lady muttered half-heartedly.

"Please take a seat at the table. We will notify you when your traits are ready to take home. A vaccine will be given to you. Please insert it in your child's arm for 10 seconds. Release when the liquid in the vaccine is used up."

She glanced up at me, her face looking like she had something more to say. She then drifted back to reality, her face back to the usual weary expression. Huh.

I scooted off to the table area, nervously anticipating the vaccine. I couldn't believe I had done it. It had seemed so distant yesterday, but now, it was my reality. As I gazed over at the display of dinosaurs looming in the corner, I could feel my heart thump loudly with bittersweet emotions. All around me, parents were lovingly chattering about their future ambitions for their children. Who knew one dose could change your life.

"Number 981, your vaccine is ready."

That...that was me! I scurried to the front of the counter, jogging lightly on the spot to calm my nerves. Strangely, the lady stared at me, her face full of unrecognizable emotions. In a flash, she briskly handed me the bag. A puddle of tears began to form in my eyes, as I looked down at the vaccine. This dose was the dose that would determine my baby's future, the dose that would relieve him, at just six months of age, from the undeniable hurt I experienced for decades. His sweet, chubby face reappeared in my visions, his eyes closed shut, his soft, glassy skin touching mine, his delicate, rosy lips curved into a faint smile. The rush of love and affection that shot through me in that moment was beyond indescribable. It was perhaps the happiest I have felt in a long, long time.

"Ma...am," The teenage lady spluttered.

Her face turns ash white.

"Ma'am, perhaps I forgot to tell you our program disclaimer before the purchase. Those who inherit these traits will never be able to experience happiness."

My eyes boggled.

"WHAT?"

I froze rock hard, my face red with fury.

"I DEMAND A REFUND!"

The lady looked at me apologetically.

"There is nothing we can do. The purchase has already been processed. My deepest apologies."

I drop the bag. Blood drains from my face, as I storm out the store, and run.

I had made a promise to myself. To give my child the life I never had. To not see him suffer their whole life in a pool of regret. Regret that I never changed myself. Regret that I never followed in everyone's footsteps. But today, I realize that the most painful sacrifice in life is to lose the feeling of joy. To lose the feeling of experiencing life to the fullest. I'm not ready to take that away from my child. Not in a heartbeat.

Unanticipated Breakthrough

Chinese International School, Lin, Jayden – 11

In the year of 1896, years after Richard Owen coined the term “Dinosaur”, a surprising exchange of events happened in the northeastern part of China.

Shen ZiXuan, a 17-year-old average boy with an average name and an average life (you could even argue his life was not even as good as those considered average), was living in Chengde, China and got ditched by his parents during his sleep on an average Wednesday night. The reason as revealed by a note left on his bed was because he was costing his parents a ton of money, and his parents had refused to financially support him anymore. The house rental cost was not paid, and ZiXuan had absolutely no money. In desperation, ZiXuan took off for Beipiao city, where he had a friend who was willing to let him sleep at his house for a few nights.

ZiXuan had an adventurous personality and was always looking for things to explore, which was the reason why his parents left him, because he was always barging into forbidden places to explore the interior, and when he did that, his parents had to pay a huge fine. He was always wondering when his curious personality would do him good.

When ZiXuan arrived at his friend’s house in Beipiao, he immediately wanted to explore the city and nearby places to get familiar with the area. His friend, an American-Chinese citizen named Cyrus Guo, accompanied ZiXuan around the city and showed him around his village. That’s when Cyrus and ZiXuan came to an abrupt stop in front of an odd shaped pile of bones. ZiXuan blew on the dust hovering on the bone, and tugged at it. It must have weighed around 70 kilograms, to see two to-be adults carrying a single bone in such strenuous effort. The two friends were sweating hard when they carried the bone back to Cyrus’ house at midnight.

The next day, ZiXuan and Cyrus strapped the huge bone to their horses and set off for Shenyang, where they had scheduled a meeting with some scientists to examine the fossil they found. ZiXuan was shivering – what if the bone meant nothing and the scientists would think that they were just a fraud? The tension was on as the two friends walked into an examination room in the science center. After a minute of silence, the scientists had declared that this was the first ever dinosaur fossil discovered in China, and they were willing to buy the bone for 20 million dollars! ZiXuan and Cyrus were overjoyed, this was music to their ears!

ZiXuan and Cyrus returned home with their 20 million – who said exploring doesn’t pay off?

The Legend of The Long

Chinese International School, Liu, Amy – 13

Once upon a time was never the start of a fairytale for Mingying as he had never believed in them. Never. They were just a cheap trick the elders used to placate the children with; there was no such thing as a *loong*, it was impossible, at least not in “Qiudu village”, the smallest settlement and certainly the most destitute.

As the morning sun rose, casting magenta streaks across the tiled roofs, Mingying awoke, grumbling at the birds that ought to be made into soup. As he trudged along the snow-streaked path, making his way to the dilapidated schoolhouse, his accomplice Jiayun blocked his path and he had news to share. “The ancestor’s folktales are true! They found a *loong*; it’s a miracle.” rambled Jiayun.

“Really? It must have been a rumor, all the bored, silly *Nainai*’s with nothing to do.” “No, it’s the truth, in Sihetun village.”

“Next you’ll be telling me that there are 10 suns”

After an exasperated look and a roll of the eyes from Mingying, Jiayun retaliated in a huff. “Fine, I don’t care, but once it’s on the news, you’ll feel like a fool.”

Watching Jiayun’s retreating figure, as if a tempest. Skepticism and curiosity swirled in Mingying’s mind. The notion seemed preposterous, a figment of imagination. Yet, a tiny flame of intrigue ignited within him. With a resigned sigh, Mingying trudged into the schoolhouse, its weathered walls echoing the chatter of his classmates. The stern face of Mrs. Li stared back at him, clearing her throat to silence the class, her gaze sweeping over the expectant faces. Promptly, the lecture blurred into the background, allowing Mingying’s imagination to conjure a vision of a shimmering creature—the *loong*. As the lesson droned on, the bell signaling the end of the day finally rang, releasing the students into the crisp afternoon. Mingying lingered behind, his mind racing. Glancing around, he noticed Jiayun scurrying from a goose as feathers flew, enveloping him in an ivory coat. Mingying chuckled, the tension of their earlier conversation dissipated. “Looks like you made a new friend,” he teased.

“Just a misunderstanding,” Jiayun replied, blushing

“Have you got more info about the *loong*? I saw something in a vision—maybe it’s the same one painted on the scrolls,”

Jiayun’s eyes sparkled. “If it exists, we should search for it! We could be heroes!” Mingying felt a rush of determination. But before he could respond, Liwei, the perfect student, sneered. “Talking about *loongs*? Skipping school for a wild goose chase, how typical.” “Join us, Liwei,” Mingying suggested, surprising himself.

“Why would I?”

“What if it’s true? You could be part of something amazing,” Jiayun added. After a moment of contemplation, Liwei huffed. “Fine, I’ll join you, but I won’t carry your bags.”

The unlikely trio set off toward the hills, eager to uncover the mysteries ahead. As they hiked, a sudden headache struck Mingying. He fell to the ground, vision blurring until it coalesced into the figure of a dragon. “Good evening Mingying, I am Loongwei,” it said. “If you wish to seek me, take the road east past where the stars twirl. Trust your heart.” Suddenly, everything dissolved into mist. “Ming, what’s wrong?” Jiayun asked, kneeling beside him. “Just saw a dragon,” Mingying admitted, still dazed. “Was it a hallucination?” Jiayun remarked skeptically. “No, it was real! We have to go east!” Mingying insisted.

“Uh, I knew I shouldn’t have followed you idiots. Just my luck that pea brain here is a fainter” muttered a voice in the distance. “I didn’t faint,” exclaimed Ming, sitting up. “The *loong* is this way. It told me itself!” “

Um, I don’t know.” Insisted Jiayun.

“Well, goodbye losers. I’m leaving.” Remarked Liwei.

“Yeah, Ming, I’m not sure, sorry...” His grin faded into a single, straight line. “Fine. Don’t come groveling back.” Mingying stood alone as he swore under his breath. “Just when I thought they might have my back, they bail on me.” The curses spilled out in a torrent as he continued towards the edge of the path; the words of Loongwei echoed in his mind, urging him forward.

A rustle in the underbrush caught his attention. Mingying froze. The sound grew louder, and before he could react, a magnificent tiger sprang into view, teeth sharp as daggers, muscles rippling beneath its sleek fur. He instinctively turned to run, but the tiger was faster, leaping in front of him with a growl "Stay still, boy," the tiger spoke, its voice deep. "Why do you wander into my territory?" Mingying stammered, his heart racing, "I'm looking for a *loong*. I didn't mean to intrude!" The tiger's golden eyes pierced Mingying's soul. "The *loong*? You think you can find it? Now keep quiet or you'll be my dinner tonight."

Just as Mingying opened his mouth to respond, he heard a voice calling from a distance. Where are you?" It was Jiayun! Mingying felt a surge of hope, but the tiger's gaze remained fixed on him. "You should leave," the tiger warned.

Please don't hurt me! I just want to learn more!" Mingying pleaded, desperation creeping into his voice. The tiger's expression softened slightly, but before it could respond, Jiayun and Liwei burst through the trees, breathless but determined. "Mingying!" Jiayun shouted, his eyes wide as he took in the scene. "Get away from him!"

Liwei, though initially hesitant, stepped forward. "We'll handle this, Mingying. "Are you two insane?" the tiger growled. "This is not your fight."

"Maybe not, but we're not leaving our friend behind."

Liwei stepped closer to the tiger, her demeanor surprisingly calm. "We're just looking for answers."

"Answers can be dangerous, especially when sought in the dark. But if you truly seek the *loong*, you must prove your worth." Mingying, still shaken but feeling the weight of his friends' support, spoke up. "What do you want from us?"

"You must face a challenge. There is a cave within sight, shrouded in shadows and whispers. If you fail..." The tiger's voice trailed off, leaving the threat unspoken but palpable in the air. Mingying glanced at Jiayun and Liwei,

"We'll do it,"

"Whatever it takes."

"Fine," the tiger spat. "But remember, what lies within is not to be taken lightly. They moved deeper into the forest, and the atmosphere shifted. The trees loomed taller, skeletal fingers against the twilight sky. The path was narrow and winding, the air thick with damp earth. Mingying felt a knot of anxiety in his stomach, but he pushed it aside. Finally, they reached an ominous opening carved between jagged peaks. The tiger turned to them. "Once you enter, there is no turning back." Taking a deep breath, Mingying nodded. "We're ready." With

a final sigh, they stepped into the darkness. The moment they crossed the threshold, the cave seemed to swallow them whole. Immediately, the cave shifted, the walls swirling around them like a living entity. Mingying felt a wave of dizziness wash over him, barely gripping Jiayun's arm in time. "What's happening?" he gasped.

"Stay close!" Liwei shouted, her voice barely audible over the growing cacophony. "We'll make it through this together!" As the chaos intensified, images emerged from the darkness. Mingying stood surrounded by faces. "You'll never find the *loong*," "We detest you," "You'll be like everybody else," they scoffed, their voices merging into a haunting chorus. "No!" Mingying shouted, rocking his head. This is just an illusion"

"Focus!" Liwei's voice cut through the fog. Remember why we're here!" With her words anchoring him, Mingying closed his eyes and recalled the promise to seek the truth. When he opened his eyes, the illusions faded. Liwei was lying on the ground, her body shaking; Jiayun sat beside her. He glanced up at Mingying, relief washing over him. Liwei looked up, her eyes wide.

"I failed, failed my family," she stammered, still trembling. "I let them down, they detest me."

"It was just a trick. You're here now," he replied, trying to maintain his composure. "But it felt so real!" Liwei yelled.

Mingying stepped closer. Whatever you see, we'll face it together."

The three pressed onward, their footsteps echoing faintly, they entered an expansive chamber lined with shimmering crystals, each one a kaleidoscope of colors. In the chamber's heart sat a massive, intricately carved fossil. Broad ribs splayed out like skeletal wings and curled appendages that suggested a life once filled with movement. "Is that... Loongwei?" Mingying whispered, stepping closer.

Mingying approached cautiously, examining the intricate detail. "But how could this be? The stories say the *loong* is a living creature."

For a moment, there was silence, and then a crack broke the fossil. A figure materialized before them, Loongwei emerged, feathers glistening. "You have found me" Loongwei's voice resonated, deep and soothing. "But I am no longer the creature of legend. My time has passed."

Mingying stepped back, heart racing. "Loongwei, we came to learn from you. "Though my physical form has turned to stone, my essence remains. "Remember the past, for it is the key to your future. Go forth, young seekers!" As Loongwei's spirit faded, a warm glow illuminated the chamber, leaving behind the fossil. Stepping into the daylight, Mingying embraced the world outside. He understood now that the journey was only the beginning.

Echoes of Cataclysm in Cretaceous

Creative Secondary School, Huang, Isabella Zixuan – 14

As relentless heatwaves invade the land, they bring more than discomfort—they carry the foreboding scent of impending revolt.

I, a typical Chinese dinosaur, a Microraptor, lived in this land hundreds of million years ago. To be honest, I am no towering giant or fire-breathing myth but a humble Microraptor with wings to traverse the skies of ancient China. But I have wings, and traveling all over China is convenient. But when disaster comes to dinosaurs, from seeing the whole progress of all my similars die in a struggle, I felt my wings could do nothing to save them.

When I was born in this world, it was during the Cretaceous period. The weather was muggy, sometimes drizzling, and we could even bathe. Hearing the murmur from the deep side of the volcano was not frightening; it was already a potluck for us.

At that time, we never considered extinction; it was so far away, and not much perplexity surrounded us. We were free and wild, as the king was dominating the world, with no menace or sense of fear accompanying us. Even the carnivores never approached us. Numerous big fish were already in the flowing streams, and lobsters were in the vast ocean.

How can I describe the scene? It was a legend.

The forest was a tapestry of colors. The waterfall cascaded down the rocks, and the mountains stood tall and majestic. The lake sparkled under the sun, its surface shimmering like a sheet of silver. The morning dew glistened on grass like pebbles, and the gentle breeze carried the scent of flowers and smashed grasses, filling the air with fresh sweetness.

I love being a dinosaur in China. I am keen on sleeping in this generation forever.

I like to fly on branches before I sleep. I stare at meteors and count the stars that still hang in the sky until I close my eyes and drop into my night dreams. I am not afraid of being attacked by other dinosaurs because I thought I could always fly to the top of the world and be the healer of the world.

On my way traveling, I saw herbivores swallowing berries and leaves, with crunchy sounds and spilled juice, carnivores competing to get the most fish, and some older dinosaurs curled up and buried under the tree shade. I am especially interested in hiding in a corner and watching those humorous dinosaurs fight and argue with each other, which could be breaking news in China.

I have heard many tales about the Jurassic. When my granny tucked me in at night, the end of it was a perilous period. I saw the chewed-up corps with stink, the trees were crushed, with burnt smells from the volcano about to erupt. Before that, the Jurassic was full of picturesque scenery and tranquil ambiance, like now, the generation I live in, but the Jurassic was far more enchanting.

“The awe-inspiring nature.” Granny always murmured after she finished the bedtime story.

And I never knew that I would be devoured by nature.

I still remember the month before the mishap. It was the turning point from Spring to Summer, but the weather was peculiarly hot. In the morning, I tumbled on the branches until they snapped, and I was confused and dizzy. I hadn't thought about too much of my misfortune; I just grumbled that I was so hapless. I felt gloomy and unenergetic after that misfortune. Low pressure seemed to cover me, and I didn't feel any activity from the volcano.

That day began like any other, with the soft rustle of leaves in the morning breeze. Yet, an unshakable sense of unease lingered as I took to the skies. I was soaring to the seaside. There is an enormous volcano. I tried to cross that as usual, but I was scalded when I just entered the area; I was already in the highest place I could reach, but the fire was like scratching me in a short distance. I could not see the status in the hole of the volcano; I was just puzzled, sighed with lousy luck, and flew away.

The day is not coming with no sign and prelude.

Until that day came, with a bump and vigorous vibration, I was awakened with fright and saw the sky was still darkening and so hot. I lower my head and see everyone running, only my granny left behind and eagerly finding me.

I turned over and saw the magma lighting up the world, flowing down on the ground, and kept reaching out towards us, towards Granny. I suddenly felt conscious and cried out to let Granny run. I stood paralyzed, my wings heavy with despair, as molten death consumed her. The tears streaming down my face burned as fiercely as the magma itself. Trembling, I sat up and looked at the dinosaurs dying into the magma. I could no longer recognize them after they got burnt; I could even see them struggling with hopelessness.

I am finally awakened and flying like I am possessed. I want to heal everyone, heal the place *I live in, but I can only see the last phase* coming; the magma roared like an untamed beast, devouring everything in their path with an insatiable hunger. I cannot hear the begging from us.

How cruel it is. I haven't let off anyone; the plants perished and burned, and the fish parched. I could not smell the vita in China, in the dinosaurs' home, until I, the last dinosaur in this generation in China, drowned and died from nature's attack.

Ultimately, we were but fleeting echoes in the vast symphony of life, silenced by nature's unyielding force.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Creative Secondary School, Lin, Cici Si – 14

On a simple day, the sunshine shines on George's adventure book, making the cover slightly shine, and the breeze brushes the books out with a glow...

'George! Come here, look what I found!' Lily's voice echoed through the dusty factory. She found a bronze mirror, its eerie glow reflecting onto the walls. When George came out, he saw this strange mirror and thought: 'This is the real thing he wants to get!' There was like an invisible force pulling him.

He took the mirror from Lily's hand and stared at it as if in a trance. As his fingers touched the cold bronze surface, a strange sensation spread through him. The mirror seemed alive, pulsating with an ancient energy.

Lily looked at him, curious and uneasy. 'George, what's the matter? You look like you've seen a ghost.' George did not answer at once. His mind was filled with a jumble of images and sounds, none of which made sense. After a while, he finally said, "I don't know, Lily. But I feel that this mirror is more than just an ancient relic." Suddenly, the mirror in George's hand shook violently. A bright light came out of it, blinding them both. When they opened their eyes again, they found themselves in a completely different place.

'You guys are in the ancient China Han Dynasty, around 100 BCE, which had significant technological advancements and trade.' A voice came from inside their heads. 'where are we? And why are we here?' Lily's voice trembled with fear as she clung tightly to George's arm.

Before they could make sense of their surroundings, a deafening roar split the air. They looked up to see a colossal dragon soaring towards them. Its scales were deep, and its eyes glowed with a red light.

"George, we're in trouble," Lily whimpered. George swallowed hard, his mind racing. But fortunately, George was driven by curiosity and a thirst for adventure. He knew they had to find a way to defend themselves. "Stay behind me, Lily," he said firmly, his eyes never leaving the approaching dragon.

As the dragon swooped down, George noticed a large boulder nearby. He grabbed Lily's hand and pulled her towards it. Just in time, they took cover behind the boulder as the dragon unleashed a stream of searing fire. The heat was intense, and the smell of burning rock filled their nostrils.

Once the dragon had passed, George scanned the area. He spotted a cluster of sharp-edged rocks and some long, sturdy branches. "We need to make weapons," he said to Lily. "We can't just sit here and wait to be attacked." Lily nodded, her fear replaced by determination. Together, they gathered the materials and quickly fashioned some crude spears. They also filled their pockets with sharp rocks.

George and Lily stood their ground when the dragon circled back for another attack. As the dragon came within range, they hurled their spears and rocks at it with all their might. Some projectiles bounced off the dragon's tough scales, but a few managed to strike its wings and head.

The dragon let out a furious roar and lunged towards them. George and Lily scattered in different directions. George sprinted towards a small outcropping of rocks, hoping to use it as a vantage point. On the other hand, Lily ran towards a narrow gorge, thinking she could lose the dragon in its twists and turns.

Confused for a moment, the dragon split its attention between the two. It decided to go after George first. As it approached, George threw more rocks at its eyes. One of the rocks hit its mark, and the dragon reared back in pain.

Taking advantage of the dragon's distraction, Lily emerged from the gorge and hurled her spear at the dragon's underbelly. The spear pierced the dragon's softer scales, and it let out a blood-curdling scream.

Enraged, the dragon turned its full attention to Lily. Seeing the danger she was in, George ran towards the dragon, yelling at the top of his lungs to draw its attention. The dragon hesitated for a moment, then decided to charge at George.

George leaped to the side at the last second, and the dragon crashed into the rocks. Its wing was caught between two boulders and flailed helplessly, trying to free itself.

George and Lily wasted no time. They rushed towards the dragon, throwing their remaining rocks and thrusting their spears at it. After a long and brutal struggle, the dragon finally went still.

Exhausted and covered in sweat and dirt, George and Lily collapsed to the ground. But they knew they couldn't rest for long. They had to find a way to get back home.

George remembered the bronze mirror. He reached into his pocket and pulled it out. The mirror still glowed with a faint light. He held it up and concentrated, thinking of their home.

Suddenly, the mirror's light grew brighter, and a swirling portal appeared before them. Without hesitation, George and Lily stepped through the portal.

In an instant, they were back in the dusty factory. They looked around, hardly believing their eyes. They were home, safe and sound.

Lily let out a sob of relief and hugged George tightly. "I never want to go through something like that again," she said. George nodded in agreement. "Me neither. But we did it, Lily. We survived."

From that day on, the bronze mirror was carefully stored away, a reminder of their incredible adventure and the strength they had found within themselves.

When George and his sister accidentally saw the mirror while exploring the abandoned factory, he did not hesitate to study it, and then he did not know what switch was accidentally touched, causing him and his sister to be accidentally sucked into ancient China by the mirror.

After being sucked into ancient China by the mirror, he also experienced some difficulties, such as encountering the legendary unicorn, the punishment of heaven and other divine beasts and seeing their brilliance, but it was this that enabled him to quickly adapt to the environment here and successfully find the Han imperial capital. He also learned that the people here are terrified of a ferocious bird lizard called Sinornithosaurus, which eats people on sight, loves gold and jewelry, and causes rebellion in the imperial capital.

After constantly fighting with other Chinese gods and beasts and learning a lot about ancient Chinese dinosaurs in the real world, he understood the vulnerability of Chinese dinosaurs. In the middle of his forehead, he stabbed the dinosaur's vulnerability with a sword in the end, becoming a warrior in ancient China during the Han Dynasty and successfully bringing his sister back to the real world.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Creative Secondary School, Ng, Titus Kai Long – 14

In those days of old, some 1000 B.C., when the Romans were constructing their buildings based on the Greek and far to the east was a mysterious breed of an ancient Chinese dragon that disappeared. Out of the human-made myths and legends, these magnificent creatures went, footprint by footprint, until nothing remained of their breed but whispered in books of lore, tales passed from generation to generation.

Back to the present, Chinese scientists found a dragon's bone fragment with an ancient, intact chain of DNA. The news spread like a bushfire to Mong-Yee, a scientist with a passion and a remarkable career. Her accomplishments in creating a device that defied the flow of time and inventing anti-gravitational machines had brought her world recognition and historical value. Yet, one goal remained unfulfilled: to create an indestructible element. It had been her father's dream before his untimely death in a space mission, a one-way trip to the sun, as he indubitably knew that no element on earth could withstand the sun's radiative power. However, he still onboarded this trip for the human race; the reason was classified, but his choice is understandable for Mong-Yee. She had this dream promised to be fulfilled in his memory. As a respected father, his child Mong-Yee decided to work hard.

She had worked in experiments for years, desperately searching for a method to turn this from an untouchable dream to something achievable. But she's gotten nowhere until discovering dragon DNA brought her fresh hope again. Mong-Yee put forth the theory that given the structure this DNA contained, it must be why the secret to forging material to break through these apparent barriers standing before all known physical limitations may finally be unlocked. Newly resolved, Mong-Yee threw herself into her project, toiling away day and night in an isolated laboratory.

Weeks passed, but no matter how the DNA was adapted, it refused to merge with the synthetic material. Mong-Yee had reached a dead end. Her father's words echoed in her mind: "The impossible is just another word for something we haven't figured out yet." Inspired this time, she let go of the rigid methods and allowed the DNA to guide the process, using bioreactive simulations that could let organic and synthetic components bond naturally. She tried, tried and failed, failed and tried again. But this time, she is not walking in circles; each trail is a process. She worked on and believed the DNA would bring the miracle she had been waiting for.

And then, one evening, the breakthrough came. In stunned silence, Mong-Yee watched as the new material formed: a shimmering, metallic substance pulsing faintly, almost alive. Tests confirmed its resilience: it withstood crushing pressure, searing heat, and radiation. She had succeeded.

But in an instant, her triumph turned to astonishment. The material began to change, swelling into an unbelievable shape: a dragon. Its gleaming metal body shone bright, its eyes aglow with intelligence, and its wings unfolded majestically. It let out a heavy hum as it burst through the laboratory ceiling and took to the night sky.

Mong-Yee stood in dumb amazement. Her father's dream had been fulfilled, but she had brought something far greater into creation: ancient, powerful, and alive.

The world would never be the same again.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Creative Secondary School, Wong, Priscilla Wan Ting – 14

“Breaking News! New species of titanosaur found in Jiangxi!”

Or so the heading of the news article says. Cho skimmed through the article and thought to herself, “Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to be a paleontologist? Getting to discover new species every day...sounds way more fun than this research nonsense.”

Cho is a researcher who aspired to be a paleontologist, but her parents never liked the fact that this was her dream occupation. Instead, they forced her to take on the path of a researcher; how cruel. One day, Cho decided to take a walk down the park for some fresh air and relax after reading the news article. However, she couldn’t do so, knowing that she had to do research papers every day and was practically glued to the articles and any source of information all the time!

“How aggravating...why do I have to do things I don’t like at all?! I really hate my job, but I must satisfy my parents.”

Cho walked through the park several times again and again as she mumbled to herself and clicked her tongue once in a while, but her annoyance began to rise simultaneously until she accidentally bumped into someone.

“Hey! Watch where you’re going!”

Cho cautiously looks down at the figure and notices the person picking up tools. He seemed very nervous and avoided eye contact as he apologized.

“Sorry about that... I wasn’t looking where I was going, I hope I didn’t bother you...”

Cho looks at him curiously and then at his tools. She realizes that those tools look oddly familiar to her. Where has she seen them? She stands there thinking to herself, trying to recall her memories. However, the figure in the middle of it interrupts her. It seems like he wants to ask her something.

“So... are you a researcher by any chance? You see... I’m a paleontologist... and we are investigating the area in Jiangxi... but we don’t know much about doing research on that place and uh—”

Cho’s eyes lit up as she heard the word ‘paleontologist’ and started cutting off his sentence to ask him endless questions. The figure stood there nervously as Cho went on and on with the questions without letting him have a chance to answer or even say anything. The more questions Cho asked, the more stressed and pressured he felt. In the end, he finally mustered up the courage to interrupt Cho with her barrage of questions.

“So, are you up for the job? I think the leader of this project will be there as well...”

As Cho excitedly agreed to his proposal, 13 gave her his business card and told her to come to the institute at noon. Then, he hurriedly left after realizing he was about to be late for his meeting about the upcoming schedule.

Noon came, and Cho got into her formal attire and arrived at the institute quickly, clearly looking forward to working with 13. As she approached the institute, her eyes sparkled with excitement and awe. This was her chance to enter a new world she had always dreamt of. The main entrance opened, and Cho went inside, admiring the interior of the futuristic-themed institute. She sees 13 sitting on the couch next to someone in the break room and goes in to greet him.

“You’re here. Let me introduce the leader of this project, Ming, to you. She has worked here for 15 years and has made multiple noticeable discoveries. You may or may not have seen her in the newspaper.”

Ming looks at Cho coldly, observing and silently judging her.

“And what is your name?”

Cho introduced herself as a researcher who had published various articles on different subjects. She tried to show her area of expertise and speak a bit about why she wanted to work on this project. Meanwhile, Ming just sat there and stared at her for the time being, though she was slightly convinced that Cho might be the one suitable for this job for obvious reasons.

“Alright then, nice to meet you, Cho. I look forward to working with you. Now I will send you the details about this project, and 13 will answer any questions you may have. Now, if you will excuse me, I have another meeting to attend. You may contact me if you have any other questions that 13 cannot answer. Until we meet again, Cho.”

Ming quickly left the break room, leaving 13 and Cho behind. 13 offered to take Cho to the institute for a tour while also answering her questions. After an hour of sightseeing, talking about the project, and planning to make a great future discovery. They bid each other farewell and scheduled a date and time to gather the team to make further preparations and go on an expedition to collect fossils on the newly found species of titanosaur.

Cho has been waiting for this day for ages as she has always dreamt of this wonderful job opportunity. The long anticipated day arrived, and the team gathered in the conference room and discussed it amongst themselves.

“Since we all agree that we will pinpoint the location of the fieldwork in Jiangxi and there is sufficient basic information about that, we will be heading over there now. Everyone went to get their tools. Cho, you will be following 13 for the whole expedition and collecting information with him, so you don’t need any particular tools except a pen and notebook.” Ming says.

As soon as the team hurriedly gathered their tools, they all set off to the fieldwork location. This is a very exciting upcoming experience for Cho as she explores a whole new research topic.

After they arrived at the location at noon, Cho walked around the area to observe the field and got ready to record any interesting information coming from 13.

As Cho followed 13 around the fieldwork location in Jiangxi, her excitement grew with each step. She watched intently as he identified the key geological features and potential fossil locations and wrote the information she obtained.

As time went on, Cho and 13 shared important discoveries on titanosaur species. They were fossil discoveries bringing strong evidence into the ancient creature's behaviors, dietary arrangements, and habitats.

The expedition was nearing its end, and Ming had been silently watching Cho’s behaviour to observe her. To her surprise, Cho's incredible work ethic and enthusiasm have contributed significantly to the project. Some of the team members would even see Cho as a successful paleontologist with bright prospects ahead. After the expedition ended with great discoveries, Ming offered Cho a position to be a part of the team, knowing her talent and passion for the field.

Overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, Cho accepted the offer without hesitation. She bid farewell to her previous life as a boring researcher and embraced her new role as a paleontologist with open arms. The thrill of discovery, the rush of exploration, and the satisfaction of discovering Earth's ancient mysteries filled her with a sense of fulfilment she had never experienced before.

Cho's journey has turned out to be from that of a reluctant researcher to that of a passionate paleontologist: she has truly learned to follow and pursue her dreams. As she stood in the company of the fossils on the titanosaur, she knew that this was her calling, her true purpose in life. And with this long-awaited opportunity, she can finally live her dream. This special and unforgettable experience strengthened Cho's love for paleontology. From then onwards, Cho has been enjoying her job as a paleontologist, and there are interesting projects and expeditions that involve new knowledge of dinosaurs. This is the start of Cho’s new life.

The Thrilling Discovery of a Lost Fossil

Creative Secondary School, Chan, Jeremy Cheuk Wang – 11

Some scientists were assigned a super cool quest to discover dinosaur fossils in the desert of China named Gobi. The team leader is Dr. Mei Zhang! Who is a well-known paleontologist with a massive passion for dinosaurs? She is joined by Dr. Wei Chen, a geologist, and Liang, an assistant who couldn't wait to learn everything he could about these ancient creatures. They all knew the Gobi desert was famous for discovering dinosaur fossils, and they were eager to see what they could find there!

Liang is a very young assistant who has been interested in dinosaurs since he was 9! He recently graduated from the University of California and was one of the smartest students in his class. He is still studying dinosaurs in his free time, which shows how excited he is to learn new things from people like Dr. Mei Zhang and Dr. Wei Chen. As they explored the Gobi Desert, they found incredible fossils.

They soon walked through the Gobi Desert, and Liang felt very excited. He carefully listened to Dr. Mei talking about how the smooth sand could hide the old dinosaur fossils. Dr. Wei pointed out some fun facts. Suddenly, Dr. Mei stopped and knelt right next to some odd-looking stones. "Look here!" she said. Liang rushed over, desperate to see what they found together in this fantastic place!

Liang's heart raced as he examined the peculiar stones Dr. Mei had found. One of the rocks seemed out of place... His excitement surged. "Could it be a fossil?" he asked, his voice trembling with anticipation. Dr. Mei swiftly checked and brushed away the dirt. "Yes! This could be a dinosaur bone!" Liang's disbelief turned into pure joy as he realized the significance of their find.

As Dr. Mei checked the bone, she explained how fossils form over millions of years. Liang listened carefully, imagining in her mind that the dinosaur once lived here. "Can we take it back to study?" he asked. Dr. Mei nodded, and Liang couldn't wait to tell Dr. Wei and the rest of the team back at the lab about their fabulous find.

They carefully wrapped the fossil in a soft, fluffy cloth and placed it in a special case. Liang felt a surge of pride as he realized the importance of their discovery. This was their first mission, and they had succeeded! As they continued their search, Liang looked around and felt the warmth of the wind on his face, a sense of accomplishment filling his heart.

About an hour later, Dr. Mei and Dr. Wei suggested returning to the study lab. As they headed back, they were very cautious with the dusty dinosaur bone as they moved it across the dusty and sandy terrain. Liang felt good deep down as they walked. He even reminded himself how much he'd experienced in the past day.

At that time, the other lab workers were still working in the lab while some workers were inspecting the fossil, and some were in the middle of discussing how rare it was. Dr. Mei put the dinosaur bone on a table and then told Liang. "However, we have to scan it in The X-ray to determine what type of unique dinosaur it could be," she said.

Dr. Wei joined them with a big book with pictures of different dinosaur fossils. "This will help us see our type of discovery," he said, opening the book to show Liang!

After a few days, Liang and the whole team studied the bone. They took key notes and talked about what they found. Finally, after lots of hard work, they identified the fossil coming from a small bone from a Tyrannosaurus Rex that died in the Gobi desert very long ago! Liang felt a big burst of happiness! He was so excited to have helped find something so incredible. He had helped find a piece of a very unique dinosaur! This adventure motivated him to continue learning about dinosaurs and to dream of becoming an expert paleontologist one day! With tons of excitement! Liang knew that this was just the start of many more adventures!

From the Grove of the Banyan Trees

Creative Secondary School, Chen, Ella Nuo – 14

My name was Jack Wong, and I was a university student with outstanding grades. Although I was not very sociable and had fewer than five friends, I was lucky to have a wonderful girlfriend who meant the world to me. It felt like we were born to meet each other. We were classmates, and since day one, she never judged me by my background or appearance. Slowly, our relationship deepened, and finally, we decided to be together forever.

After dating for two years, we planned to visit her hometown and her parents. They warmly welcomed me when we arrived, and we had a great time together the next few days. We explored the village and visited various interesting places. However, there was one place that felt strange, which was a grove of banyan trees. The trees were tall and thick. It was weird that all the villagers seemed to keep their distance from it. They looked scared whenever the wind blew from that direction, and they reminded us not to go near it. They were unwilling to tell us the reason.

After two weeks, the village was about to celebrate the “Dragon Festival” for the near ten years. On the day of the dragon, everyone in the town would gather around a ten-meter-high altar outside the banyan grove. Every family would bring their best meat and place it on the altar. With contributions from hundreds of families, the meat tower had become high. According to the villagers’ beliefs, the meat would be taken away by the “dragon,” this act was a secret contract between the village and the dragon, ensuring the safety and prosperity of the town.

However, the most shocking part was that the villagers also believed in the “reincarnation blessings” brought by the dragon. The youngest person in the selected family would be placed on the altar and offered to the dragon. It was said that this person would receive the “beast’s” blessing and be reincarnated in a very wealthy family in the next life, and then the whole family would receive the dragon’s blessing. My girlfriend quickly covered my mouth, signalling me to be quiet. She explained, ‘Questioning the dragon was forbidden, as the village got the protection from it for so long, and all the villagers have deep respect for the dragon.’ I kept my doubt to myself to avoid unnecessary conflict and decided to shut up.

On the day of the festival, the atmosphere in the village grew more tense, especially on the day of the drawing ceremony. The names of all the families were written on bamboo sticks and placed in an old wooden box. The village chief started dancing with a stick. The villagers held their breath, as the outcome of this drawing was a matter of life and fortune. When a bamboo stick was drawn, the village chief announced loudly, “It’s the Qingyun family!”

Qingyun was my girlfriend’s name. Her family had been chosen. The villagers immediately began to discuss among themselves. However, Qingyun’s parents reacted in a way I couldn’t understand. They didn’t show despair or worry. Instead, they looked excited and joyful, like they had won the most precious prize. They repeatedly said, “Great! Our family has finally received the dragon’s blessing!” But Qingyun’s face turned pale. She gripped my hand tightly.

I looked at her parents in disbelief, completely unable to understand their reaction. The selection meant Qingyun would be tied to the altar in three days as an offering to the so-called “dragon.” While there were no signs of worry on her parents’ faces. They even began to thank the village chief, the dragon, and this “blessing from heaven.”

I whispered to Qingyun, “Blessing? How can they think this is a blessing? You’re going to...” I couldn’t say the words that she might be in danger or even lose her life. She looked down and said, “They believe this is the dragon’s blessing. As long as I’m chosen, my family will receive the dragon’s blessing and be wealthy and safe.” I was angry and helpless, gritting my teeth, “What about you? Aren’t you afraid?” She looked at me quietly, her eyes mixed with helplessness and sadness, and replied, “Afraid? This tradition is passed down through generations in the village, and no one dares to break it...” I couldn’t accept her sacrificing herself. To me, all of this seemed like a ridiculous crime. That night, I was unable to sleep. I couldn’t bear to see this happen to her. “If there is a dragon, I want to see what it is in person!”

Three days later, the village was filled with a solemn atmosphere. Everyone wore red, and every family took out the cured meat they had prepared, putting them on the altar. The altar was built of massive stones, surrounded by thick smoke from burning incense. Qingyun was tied up, wearing a beautiful white dress and a flower crown. The villagers carried her to the front of the altar. She looked back at me, her eyes filled with despair and sadness. I stood in the crowd angrily. After taking a deep breath, I made a crazy decision. I rushed towards the altar, shouting, “If she has to go, I’ll go with her!”

Qingyun’s parents rushed forward, trying to stop me with their shocking faces. But I pushed them aside and coldly said, “If the dragon can protect the village, it won’t mind taking one more person!” The village chief was silent, and

then he slowly nodded and said, "Since you're willing to accompany her, then we will let you do so." I looked at Qingyun. Her eyes were filled with gratitude, yet she shouted, 'No, go back to where you are from. Let me alone.' I ignored her. Then, we were tied together in the center of the altar. After a noisy discussion, the villagers gradually calmed down. As part of the tradition, they cheered and fired guns, waiting for the giant dragon to appear.

As the sky dimmed, low roaring sounds began coming from the banyan grove. We held our breath, our hearts racing with fear, not daring to look up. Suddenly, a roar echoed, and a giant creature appeared from the dense forest. It was a huge dinosaur, about ten meters long, with dark grey skin and a scaly texture. Its eyes were cold and sharp. Its sharp claws left deep footprints in the ground. My cold sweat ran down my spine. It turned out that the "dragon" the villagers had worshipped for years was just a dinosaur that had survived.

The dinosaur slowly approached the altar, opening its massive jaws to reveal its terrifying mouth full of sharp teeth. Qingyun's body began to shake, and I could feel her fear. I tightly gripped her hand and whispered, "Don't be afraid. I will protect you." The next second, the dinosaur bent down and swallowed us.

Inside the dark body of the dinosaur, we were pulled into its throat by a massive force. The walls of its esophagus were sticky and narrow, making it hard for us to breathe. At that moment, the poison I had secretly bought may help. I quickly took the deadly powder from my pocket and spread it on my hand. Then, I touched every part of the dinosaur that I could reach, trying to spread it across the walls of its esophagus. Afterwards, I looked at Qingyun with despair and said, "I'm sorry, we will meet in the next life".

The dinosaur suddenly started shaking and roaring, shaking the whole forest. It rolled around like it was trying to get rid of us, and I began to lose consciousness. The last thing I remember is Qingyun hugging me tightly.

Three days later, the villagers found the dinosaur lying at the edge of the banyan grove. Its enormous head was on the ground with no motion. Qingyun's parents rushed to the scene, crying and looking for their daughter. All they saw was the giant dinosaur. The village chief arrived, looking serious, and said, "Someone has broken the contract."

After an investigation, the villagers learned the truth about the chief. The past village chief made a deal with it that is, if the villagers gave it meat and a human sacrifice every ten years, the dinosaur would stop attacking. The villagers feared the dinosaurs for years and believed it was a blessing. Now it was dead, the villagers realized that the blessing was just a lie from the evil chief. Qingyun's parents held each other and cried, finally understanding that their good luck was fake and their daughter was gone forever.

The dinosaur was gone, and the "Dragon Festival" ended. But my name and Qingyun's became forbidden to say.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Creative Secondary School, Cheng, Grace Chi Yuet – 14

Redfron Vando had always been interested in dinosaurs. After a long day of work, he sat on his armchair and turned on the television.

"Wait, This is a waste of time. This is real life, not a movie. Dinosaurs are extinct!" Someone from the crowd shouted. "You thought... Today, I proudly represent the central China laboratory as the main scientist leading this project. My name is Grace. Grace Cheng. It has always been my dream to re-populate dinosaurs. It all started when my dad told me the story of the Loch Ness Monster in River Ness. Initially, I wasn't interested and thought it was just another stupid myth that was fake, but when I saw the picture, I grew interested because of its appearance. It has a long neck. At first sight, I knew it was a part of the Plesiosaur family; it could be an Elasmosaurus, Hydrotherosaurus, or Plesiosaur. It might even be a Nothosaur. It might be possible to repopulate dinosaurs. There are lots of places on Earth that haven't been explored that hide great mysteries. Because of that mindset, I succeeded in re-populating over 400 species from all three periods and introducing Mesozoic Park. This park allows all ages to visit. There are places where you can interact with dinosaurs or feed them. Most importantly, it has wifi... I'm just kidding, of course; that is not the most important thing, right? If you have any questions, go to www.mesozo..."

"Aw, come on, Can you just let me watch TV in peace for once!" Redfron exclaimed. "I'm sick of you going straight for the TV every day! You have never, not even once, taken a bath first, and you are a dad of two kids! Two kids! Do you even remember their names?" Mrs Vando replied. In a rage, she busted into her bedroom...

Redfron thought about what his wife said to him over and over again. He thought about how he hadn't talked to them in a while, even though they saw each other daily. He seemed more like an outsider than a father to his kids. So, he decided to share his interest with his kids, Malisa and Damilid. Since tomorrow is Saturday, he can spend the whole day with them. "Mesozoic Park, here I come..." He mumbled, and his consciousness started to fade away.

"Good morning, world," Damilid said as he woke up. It was just an ordinary morning for Damilid and her elder sister. They will have breakfast together alongside their parents and go their separate ways. But today, it's different; Redfron, their father, finally said something to them after a long time. "Kids, I don't know if you want to go. I'm not forcing you to go with me or anything. But do you guys want to perhaps go on a little trip to Mesozoic Park with me..." Redfron said with a soft voice. Damilid said yes almost immediately because he didn't want to waste any chance he had with his father. And Malisa said yes out of respect for her father. "Dad, are we going right now? I'll change!" said Damilid, feeling over the moon. "Yes, Damilid, change your clothes for the both of you. You guys are not wearing this in the park." Redfron replied.

After Damilid and Malisa backed their bags and changed into their casual clothing, they got into Redfron's car. But all of this is new to them. They had never gotten a ride from their father before. And now they are going to Mesozoic Park, all three of them together... for the first time... All of this feels weird; it feels too good to be true. But Damilid and Malisa put that aside for now.

On their way there, Malisa noticed that Damilid had brought a big green bag full of stuff. So she asked Damilid, "What is in your bag? And do you seriously need to put that much stuff in your bag?" out of curiosity. "Oh, you're talking about this? It stores everything important for today's adventure. Like this taser and pocket knife. And the black bag on the bottom is my secret weapon." said Damilid with an innocent smile. "Damilid, you know we are not living in the movies, right? There's no way dinosaurs will get out and start attacking people, even if they do. What is a pocket knife and a taser going to do to a dinosaur." said Malisa. "Just in case..." Damilid mumbled. "Alright, kids, we have arrived at our destination," said Redfron.

When they left the car, they first saw a giant sign for Mesozoic Park and a fountain with multiple dinosaurs surrounding it. Damilid rushed in without hesitation, and Redfron, who was most excited about the trip, followed.

First, they visited dinosaurs from the Triassic, then the Jurassic, touching countless passive dinosaurs and playing many dinosaur-themed games. There's still one more section to see, the Cretaceous section. But before that, they got a bit hungry and tired, so they stopped by the center and ate something in the food court.

Malisa, feeling embarrassed, said, "Dad... not gonna lie, this trip has been pretty fun, thank you." Once he heard this, Redfron felt something touching his heart. It was so heartwarming. He hadn't had this feeling in a very long time. He simply smiled at Malisa and gave her a thumbs-up.

“Alright, kids, I think it’s about time. We should go visit the Cretaceous section before night falls,” said Redfron as they all walked out of the center building.

Damilid suddenly remembered leaving his bag in the food court as they walked to the Cretaceous section. On his way back, he saw a strange group of people carrying a green suitcase like his into a grey, blocky-looking building. Damilid followed them, thinking he could get his bag back. But what he saw was something he wished to unsee.

The people were collecting the shed skin of Beipiaosaurus. And they were being treated horribly. And those Beipiaosaurus couldn’t move freely. They were squeezed into a tiny space like chickens on a farm. The people were boiling the skin of Beipiaosaurus and adding different types of it, turning them into bottles and bottles of liquid. Damilid couldn’t watch anymore, so he grabbed the green bag and returned to his family.

As he sprinted through the maze of exhibits, Damilid's heart raced—not just from the panic of being lost, but from the horrifying images that replayed in his mind. He clutched the green bag tightly, the weight of his discovery heavy on his conscience. And he found himself lost. “Where am I?” he muttered to himself. It was not just that the green bag felt heavier than it should have been. Damilid checked inside the bag. Instead of finding his stuff, the bag contains bottles of Beipiaosaurus skin liquid. He immediately rushed to the center building to get his green bag. When he arrived at the center building, he ran towards the information, but he bumped into a staff member, and all the bottles fell out. “I’m sorry, are you okay? Wait, are those “Dragon scale” the new drugs in the market. No wonder some Beipiaosaurus are missing,” said a young lady. “Wait, you are the young scientist Grace that re-populated dinosaurs. I’m sorry, I have no clue what this bag does or what “Dragon scale” means, but I just want my green bag back. But I do know where they make these bottles.” Damilid exclaimed. “Oh, that’s great, so we can finally stop Dragon scales' harm to a human body and save the Beipiaosaurus.

“Not so fast, kid. Give me back the “Dragon scale” you got, or this little girl gets it.” A guy who just entered the centre building shouted as he grabbed a young little girl from the crowd. Damilid takes a green bag from information that he believes is his and throws it at the mysterious guy along with a lighter “RUN!” he shouts as his bag explodes into fireworks. The mysterious guy froze and was processing what had just happened. Damilid ran towards him and gave him a final blow, knocking him out. “Mr Lam?” said Grace, “You know him?” Damilid asked. “Yeah, he is the head of security guards.”

Mr Lee was arrested for drug dealing, animal abuse, and harassing a kid. It was then Grace brought Damilid to meet up with his parents...

Grace talked about how much Damilid helped catch the drug dealer. He also gave his family a five-year pass to the Mesozoic Park, and all three of them are very excited to visit again. Refron is proud of what his son did and promises they will see the Cretaceous section next time. He also promised not to let them leave their site next time.

Refron put the kids to sleep at home, as it was already nighttime. He thanked his wife for waking him up and telling him more about his kids.

Lost Worlds, New Dawns

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Tsing Yi Vanessa – 14

The wind howled, a persistent sound that shook the moonless night.

A hulking shadow emerged from the ashy dust, an exhausted dinosaur seeking shelter. The duststorm was an unwelcome intruder in the subtropical areas of Inner Mongolia, its thriving greenery withering under a new coat of choking soot. Only a few moons ago, the earth had begun to shake, and the spasms of intense vibrations had awoken the slumbering creature. The shadow materialised into a visible form, stepping out from the cover of grey-tinted leaves. Amber scales lined the length of its body, golden leaves plastered onto thick flesh. A narrow head, adorned with metallic, angular plates, peered around, cautiously examining the environment. Suddenly, the gobisaurus whipped her head backward, alarmed by muffled groans echoing from a nearby cave.

Against the harsh screeching of the furious gale, a broken whimper cut through the deafening noise. Hesitantly, the dinosaur stepped into the narrow cave, the soft thump of its steps reverberating in the hollow space. A young primate lay curled on the cracked, limestone floor, its fur matted with dust and blood, heaving breaths growing increasingly shallow. The struggling animal stared with pleading, slit eyes, the curvature of its spine prominent underneath the feeble muscles set in its back. In the scrawny, bone-jutting limbs, the reptile saw a recurring memory...

A tiny gobisaurus shuddered in pain, its body pressed against the scale-lined belly of its mother. The young dinosaur was littered with open wounds, an agonising reminder of a vicious attack from a sinosauromorph. The mother nudged her youngling into a makeshift bed of larch leaves, tainted with specks of gleaming, ruby blood. Fear, a potent odour, hung in the air, and both parent and young breathed in the bitter smell, dread curling firmly around their ribcages. Out of the corner of the mother's eye, a glassy pearl slid down weathered skin, and –

settled silently onto unmet fur. Instinctively, the dinosaur dropped onto her stomach and gently wrapped her warm body around the shivering primate, wrapping her tail protectively around the animal. The primate quieted, its eyelids flickering shut, tugged into a sound slumber.

Despite the frigid weather battering the cave walls with a thunderous roar, the two animals felt something warm and tender blossoming, benevolent petals of trust nestling in the raw thudding of hearts. Something precious, delicate, that transcended the natural boundaries between reptile and mammal, a unity that was embedded into the entwining threads of their cells.

Outside, the unyielding wind screamed in protest, heavy snow falling relentlessly, melting their poison into the unsuspecting forest.

The wolves cried out, a doleful sound that soaked energy into the weary muscles of the tribesmen. Lin gasped, swallowing desperate gulps of air, urging himself to run faster, faster, faster. Out of the corner of his eye, he could glimpse blurred grey fur, and fangs akin to milky, iron blades.

"Here!" one of the men shouted, gesturing fervently at a cave burrowed under a hanging cliff, wild, shriveling vines shielding its narrow entrance. The scarce-numbered tribe thrust their way in, moving swiftly towards the back of the cave, eager to escape the rabid wolves.

As the group settled down, Lin noticed strange markings that had left deep imprints on the rough, granite ground. He traced his fingers over the crevices that formed the picture of a long, slender reptile. Across the curved spine of the animal, crown-like plates had left triangular impressions, comparable to the mighty mountains that graced the arching back of Inner Mongolia. The reptile's prints curled around those of a smaller animal, more round-boned, softer around the edges, more... human.

Shocked, Lin whispered, under his breath. "Dragons."

Lin sat at the base of the reptile's imprinted tail, a crude bowl carved from the ancient willow tree that had silently guarded the entrance to the cave for millennia. A stream plied through the slim gaps that lined the rugged, dusky cave walls, pouring into the fossilised indentations. Everyone knew that dragons were age-old legends; primordial, celestial creatures, gods that roamed the earth. They were holy beings and had to be respected, lest their anger would shake the world to its very foundations, humans mere insects squashed in the face of astronomical power. The cave

was a sacred space, touched by the most heavenly entities. Lin collected the clear, rippling water in the bowl, holding it firmly in his lap.

Bright laughter danced through the cave opening, and the bustling sounds of activity flowed in a steady stream, echoing across lusterless rock formations. The tribe had expanded, with almost a hundred tribesmen living in the myriad cavities crisscrossing the imposing mountain surface. Lin basked in the joyful atmosphere, eyes closing as he let the scent of smoke and sweat, faint now in the wafting breeze, overwhelming his senses.

An ear-splitting howl broke the slow, humming reverberations that echoed through the cave.

Startled, Lin jumped and darted deeper into the cave, lithely bounding over carved staircases that led to higher points of the mountain. He emerged from the depths of the cave onto a narrow ledge near the peak. Below him was an expansive stretch of plain that completely surrounded the foot of the mountain. Bodies were scattered all across the ground, satin-like blood wrapping its vermilion ribbons around limp corpses. A pack of timberwolves reared their hefty heads, ears pressed firm against their taupe pelts, baying to the cerulean sky, and drops of crimson red slid down their sleek physiques.

A wooden bowl of clear, spring water lay overturned, and the fossils left by the gobisaurus and primate were swathed in scarlet-tinted liquid, gleaming in the dawning sun.

The hallways of the mountain palace shone in the candlelight, intricate gold carvings etched on every inch of flat surface. Emperor Ai of Tang, the dying dynasty, raced across the smooth, marble floor, and felt his shoe catch in a slit between cold tiles. He fell gracelessly onto the spotless – granite? With a groan, Ai stood up, brushing loose dirt off his yellow, silk robe. He was in the middle of a perfect circle cut away from the limestone, bare soil and rock exposed. On the uncovered earth Ai saw imprints of a huge, reptilian beast, its body wrapped around a smaller creature, which was vaguely the shape of a human.

Ai's eyes trailed across the jagged frame of the fossil; the firm bend of a shoulder bone jutting at an acute angle, the minuscule patterns of scales lining the entirety of the reptile's body, some smudging into the disjointed grain of the clay ground. The boy emperor's imagination enveloped the faint marks, conjuring up images of a mighty battle, man and monster locked in a vicious wrestle, wild like the voracious wind as visions soared through his mental landscape.

Ai smiled, a childish grin that stretched the length of his youthful face.

“Kneel.”

Emperor Ai was now a few years older, his face untainted by the cruel touch of time, but his heart curled with hate. Stepping into adulthood, the threat of dethronement from his former military governor, Zhu Wen, became an ever-tightening noose around his neck. He sat on an aureate throne that stood firmly on the impression left by the primate, encircled by the imposing reptilian fossil – once a fond obsession of his wistful childhood. An eminent, foreign emissary crouched in front of Ai, head bowed in reverence.

“Your Majesty, I present to you the finest wine on earth, sweetened with the plump, flat peaches that hang from rain-soaked trees on the Altai Mountains,” came the voice, muffled by swathes of concealing, inky fabric.

Curious, Ai clasped the small bowl of lucid liquor, an unusual carmine against the pure-white porcelain. He raised the container to his cracked lips, feeling the sickly taste of sugary peaches. As he opened his mouth to speak, a sudden burst of bitter almonds engulfed his senses. Behind shut eyelids, flashes of light, bright and blinding, overtook his sight, something sticky and metallic poured out of his mouth, a sheer ringing pounded through his head, angelic singing tore apart his eardrums, in the sky a reptile and human ripped at each other's flesh and –

Darkness.

A broken porcelain bowl of poisoned cerise wine lay overturned, the fossils of the gobisaurus and primate draped in a thin, steady stream of bitter liquid, seeping into the fissures of the primitive ground.

The slender, calloused fingers of an archeologist brushed past crumbled pieces of gold and loose dirt, unearthing two incongruous fossils that lay still, undisturbed by the passage of time. Moving his gaze closer to the imprints, the archeologist could almost hear the whispers of archaic history, the events that the cave had bore witness to. He stretched his hand over currant-red stains that ran through the hollowed spaces, where the bones of the ancient creatures had previously lain.

As rays of new-borne sunlight filtered into the cave entrance, the fossils stretched their long-buried figures, prepared to tell their millennia-long story.

The Last of Their Kind

Diocesan Girls' School, Lo, Ellis – 12

In the vast valley where colours of the Earth were muted by the dust of ages, the last clan of sinosauropteryx were seeking shelter in a cluster of boulders and walls of spiralling trees. They were the remains of a once—thriving lineage who's early ancestors once soared the skies in vibrant colours and clear chirrups; now, they were mere descendants who bore thinning feathers, a meagre mirage of the glorious past.

Their habitat was changing at an alarming speed: fragrant flowers wilting to faded stems, rich blades of grass gave way to dried weeds, the ever—scorching sun casting long shadows across the terrain. With the rapid rise in climate, the seven were faced with a dire decision: migrate or face certain extinction.

Guan, oldest and leader of the clan, wrinkled his snout as he felt the rumble of the ground beneath his feet. The Earth was slowly becoming a looming threat, the heat chasing away prey and causing many other smaller species to dwindle in number, resulting in stripping away many of their food sources. Sensing the urgency of their situation, Guan gathered the other older sinosauropteryx to discuss their future.

“Listen,” Guan began, his black pupils landing on his companions. “Our home is no longer safe or a proper haven for the youngest.”

Guan's mate, Zhi, nodded. “You're right. The land is no longer our ally. We've all sensed the tremors in the ground, it whispers of dangers ahead. We must leave this place.”

Cheng's tail curled in trepidation. “But where would we go? We've never been anywhere else. This is all we know and all we have. This is our only home.”

Sheng touched her snout to her mate's. “We'll find a way, as long as we have each other. The children are all that matters.”

Almost in unison, all four of them gazed out to where the three youngest, Ming, Yong and Guo were wrestling playfully on the reddish—brown ground, nearly completely camouflaging them due to the coloration of their feathers. Young, naive and completely oblivious to the tension and fear in their elder's eyes.

Guan finally spoke in resolution, “We will set for the north tomorrow at sunrise. Together.”

The sun peeked over the horizon and casted soft waves of light over the wakening sinosauropteryxs, who woke with heavy eyelids and a heavy mission to fulfil.

“We're going on an adventure.” Zhi promised the children, which seemed to satisfy their curiosity and peak their excitement and enthusiasm. With Guan in the lead, everyone set off side by side into the unknown.

Days turned into weeks as the sinosauropteryx travelled the undiscovered landscape, some fields bore lush plants and fresh flowing streams; some lands were rugged and barren, smudged with hopelessness and lifelessness; some were covered in rocky bumps and muddy puddles. Each day tested their resilience and will: one afternoon, they stumbled across a ravishing Tyrannosaurus Rex searching for lunch. Sheng led all of them into a dense forest where the Rex would have a harder time traversing and finding them. They managed to get the Rex off their tail and Cheng led them out of the forest. Another evening, violently frigid winds shrieked through the whole night, the elders tried to cover and keep the children as warm as possible using their body heat, but the youngest — Guo fell sick anyways.

Days after Guo caught the cold, his health seemed to be worsening due to the lack of food and constant state of being on the move. His older sister Yong, who was originally the keenest on moving out, constantly complained. “If we had never journeyed out, Guo would be in perfect condition right now!” She snapped and Guo coughed as if in response. Ming tried calming his younger sister down, but it only made her more bitter.

“Young one, we must have faith and determination. Our strength lies in each other and we can't afford to lose any of our numbers,” Zhi tried consoling the stormy teen. “As long as we have each other, it will be okay.” Yong reluctantly nodded.

By miracle or luck, after a day of travel, while Guan was searching for a stream, he came upon a secluded clearing flowing with flourishing flora, a sparkling pond located between two massive boulders and evergreens surrounding the area. Overwhelmed with exhilaration, Guan tripped over his own tail when he rushed back to his family to share the good news. “I've found it.” Guan spoke breathlessly. “A home.” All tails perked up at his words and sighs of relief and animated words immediately broke out in cheers, Yong and Ming had a small celebratory dance around Guo; Sheng and Cheng touched their snouts to each other; Zhi hugged Guan by tucking her head to his side.

All seven weary travellers spent the rest of the day feasting on their remaining food supply and bathing in cool waters. The silky ripples that washed across their feathers were a massive relief and comfort after trekking through thousands and thousands of miles of heat and rocky road for weeks.

When the sun bid the sky goodbye and dipped below the horizon, all seven of them sat in a circle. The younger ones recounted little moments from their journey:

“Remember when Cheng got stung by a prickly bush?”

“He was doing his business at that time!”

“Also, when Ming broke his teeth!”

“Hey! I thought it was a berry; I didn’t know it was a pebble.”

They bickered on and on while the elder ones listened, content smiles on their faces, watching their kids argue over who’s version of what happened was accurate. After the little ones got tired, they told stories of their own: Guan told funny fables that were passed down from his family; Sheng shared silly beliefs that older dinosaurs used to believe; Cheng spun tales of ancestors dancing in rain or hunting for food.

“We are the remains of many generations. We used to soar the skies and dominate the clouds. Hundreds of sinosauropteryx with beating wings passing over in the sky, imagine that.” Zhi’s voice was like warm honey as she spoke, the children were enchanted and hung onto every word.

“Remember, little ones.” Zhi continued, tapping the small snout of each child. “We may be the last of our kind, but the spirit of the sinosauropteryx will live on in every feather.” The warmth of the night sank like a blanket and constellations lulled the littles to sleep. For a brief moment, all dangers were forgotten. They were together and that was enough.

Alas, their tranquillity was short-lived. A few days in their new home, signs of trouble appeared. Grey clouds shrouded the sky for unusually long lengths of time and the ground seemed to be heating up slowly. The air was quiet and little insects were seen scrambling up from the ground and elsewhere into the jungle. Zhi, unsettled, discussed with the other elders but they brushed it off: they just migrated to somewhere far away, there was no way they were in danger again.

On the fateful day, all seven sinosauropteryx were foraging for food in a wide valley when the sky flashed and the Earth rumbled violently, knocking Cheng off his feet.

“We have to run!” Cheng panicked.

“Guo isn’t in a condition to run, he’s still weak with sickness!” Yong argued, standing over her little brother protectively.

“Look! There are two suns in the sky!” Ming pointed upwards.

“That isn’t a sun.” Zhi whispered.

“What do we do?” Cheng spoke worriedly. All the adults looked to Guan; he was the only one who could possibly come up with a solution but his shoulders were also drooped with helplessness.

“I’ll...roar at the sky, a hundred percent success rate so far.” Guan shrugged.

Before anyone could answer Guan’s sarcastic response, the sky erupted with fire and rained chaos. Deafening crashes sounded around them as trees and boulders cracked. Asteroids splintered everything in their way and the forests lit up like a massive flame. The kids screamed. The adults shouted.

“Run!” Guan roared. “Stay together!” Cheng picked up a frail Guo by his neck, keeping it clamped tight in his teeth as they ran. Yong fell behind but Sheng quickly reached for her.

“Do not leave anyone behind!” Sheng cried, keeping Yong tight to her side.

The Earth shook again and an asteroid crashed right into their path, forcing them to a halt. Fallen boulders and trees surrounded them and there was no way they could escape. Guan pulled his family close to him. “It’s okay.” He consoled the sobbing kids; tears were threatening to fall from his eyes too. “No matter what, our spirit will remain in every feather, remember? We will face this together.” A crash sounded near them and the ground rumbled. Everyone winced. “As long as we’re together.” As the world crumbled, Guan hugged his family, the last of their kind close until his vision faded.

I See Her

Dulwich College Beijing, Guo, Catherine – 12

I walk the Silk Road, unseen. I do not cast a shadow upon the sand, for I am a presence felt, not seen. I drift in the corners of the living's vision, just beyond their reach. The sun and stars guide me, as they guide all things, and the moon's glow touches me like the soft caress of a palm. Spirits float overhead, and they drift through the night, whispering secrets to those who listen. But I, have no need to listen; I already know.

I have always known.

I touch the air around her, and just for a moment, she gasps. Warmth fills her body, as though something hibernating stirs within her. She doesn't feel it as I do. She doesn't feel the coldness of the soft brush of time slipping through my fingers. She doesn't feel the wounds etched deep within me, every single one a remembrance of the passing of a being. She doesn't see me, but I see her, that woman, the one named Tabitha.

Her worn boots click-clack against the desert sands, each step a rhythm in the silence. The wind whispers myths she cannot hear, and the desert is still, except for the faint jingle of the caravan behind her. Her companions laugh, but she does not join in. She listens, and seems sharpened. I know that look. She's looking for bandits, members of gangs.

The crimson fabric that wraps her belongings, catches the moonlight like fire. Yet it's a remembrance of her mother. Her mother is gone, but the memory lingers, like the echo of a bell. I touch her shoulder, just briefly, and she stiffens, as though she feels me for the first time. There's a warmth that fills her as it spreads through her chest, into her limbs.

I am everywhere. I have always been here, walking beside her, watching.

Her companions talk about the golden egg in her satchel. The one that pulses with a strange energy, one that draws my attention. There is power in this treasure. I know there is. Yet they do not understand. Neither does she, not fully. But I know.

I have always known.

A plump man with tiny ears grumbles about the egg. "Mark my words, child. That's nothing but trouble," he warns. He doesn't know the truth, but I let him speak, for his voice echoes a fear that is instilled in all mortals. The fear of the unknown.

Tabitha doesn't flinch. "Trouble comes regardless," she responds. I detect her voice. She's scared, but she doesn't show it.

Another woman in green chimes in, her voice softer. "Perhaps it's no ordinary treasure," she suggests. "Maybe it's meant for those with courage. A pure heart. Just like the legends. Just like your mother, Tabitha."

A laugh escapes the plump man named Marcus. "Liar," he scoffs. He strides up beside Tabitha, casting a wary glance at the egg. "Don't be foolish. Some are best left buried. They bring nothing but misfortune."

I brush the air around them. There is a sharpness in the air now, a stillness as the night deepens. They do not feel me, not in the way I feel them, but the tension rises. The desert is restless. The winds rise and fall, and somewhere, just somewhere, an owl cries out.

Tabitha smiles faintly, tracing the edge of the egg through the fabric. "Secrets," she whispers, "are meant to be uncovered. We are all driven by curiosity. I..."

There is a low growl, and they stop. I watch the way they tense, how their hands instinctively reach for weapons. And then, the creature appears. From the shadows, it moves. Slow, deliberate, something old. I see the fear in their eyes, the way their hearts beat louder in the silence.

Tabitha gasps, warmth flooding her, but this time, it is not her fear that holds her. She sucks in a breath, her pulse quickening. She does not know what I know, but the creature knows. The golden egg hums faintly in her satchel, as if answering its call.

The creature steps forward, its form emerging from the dark. It's enormous, ornamented scales glinting faintly in the moonlight, its wings folded gracefully against its back, with threads of silver. It is not a dragon, not a beast. And yet, I feel its presence as something familiar.

I reach into Tabitha's thoughts, touching the edges of her memory. Mama's stories resurface in her mind. Whispers of winged creatures, of dinosaurs, and something in her stirs, something she cannot yet understand. I feel her connection to the past, to the world that existed before, to a life that was and is no more.

The creature's amber eye glows brightly, locking onto Tabitha. It sees her.

I know it does.

The creature moves closer, and the desert air thickens, as though it's holding its breath.

The creature parts its jaw open. And it speaks, its voice a deep, rumbling command that vibrates through the very earth beneath them. "Silence, frail ones," it says. The air stills.

And it begins.

"I am the hand that molds earth together.
I am the breath that lights up the stars."

Marcus steps back, his hand gripping the hilt of his blade, but it is useless. He is a child with a stick. He does not know what this creature is, nor does he know me. He has no knowledge of what hides in the dark.

"You, frail one," the creature continues, its gaze falling upon Marcus. "You wave your blade as if it will protect you. But you cannot cut me, not deep enough."

Tabitha's breath catches.

It continues.

Its voice softer, touched by sadness. "My kind are forgotten, like dust on windowsills.
Yet the egg you carry is a token of hope, a promise.
A reminder of what we ought to become."

I feel her hesitation. I can almost taste the fear that grips her. But I know. I know that not all fear is born of terror. Some fear is born of responsibility, of the burden of knowing what must be done.

The creature's gaze shifts to her, its amber eyes softening, waiting.

"Bearer of the egg," it says. "The choice is yours."

Tabitha's hands tremble, but she does not falter. The egg pulses in her satchel, its warmth radiating through her skin. She breathes deeply. She's taken aback by the abruptness of everything, I know she is. Yet she doesn't show it. She tries not to.

"If you are the rightful keeper," she replies, "then take it."

The creature lowers its massive head, its wings folding slightly. It extends its great claw, its fingers curling delicately around the egg. The moment it touches the golden surface, the egg blazes with light. The winds rise, howling, swirling around them. The creature roars as it lifts into the air, its wings spreading wide, the golden egg clutched tightly in its grasp. It roars as it beats its wings and fly away.

It roars. With strength. With power.

I look left to Tabitha, and I see her gulping down tears. I reach into her thoughts once more, and I see her. I really do.

I see her asking herself "why, why me?"

"Why was I the bearer of the egg?"

I see her fighting back tears. Or at least, trying to. The tears pour down her face, gushing out like a river. She's thinking about her mother. I know she is. She's thinking about mama's stories, about her mama.

She's thinking about a world that existed before, to a life that was and is no more. With her mother.

It triggers me.

And so I float towards Tabitha.

I whisper in her ear:

The words of wisdom:

Of how,

“Courage, responsibility, and respect,

Are the three key aspects,

That guard the door to the unknown.”

Of how,

“Through your mother,

You inherited courage, kindness, and the will to listen when others do not.

These are the gifts of a guardian. And that is why.

You are the bearer. Just like your mother was one.

Your mother carved out the path, and you are the light.

You are your mother’s daughter. You are bright, and you are strong.”

Legend of the Dinosaur Academy

ESF Sha Tin College, Shi, Iris Sun – 12

The forest seemed to hold its breath. The usual cacophony of chirps and rustles had vanished, replaced by an ominous rumbling that reverberated through the trees. The ancient pines stood like silent sentinels, watching as the earth trembled.

Gui, a Microraptor with four shimmering wings, darted through the canopy, her feathers catching the dappled sunlight. Agile and quick-witted, she had a knack for finding trouble, and trouble always seemed eager to find her. But this was something entirely different.

Through the haze, Gui spotted it — a fiery red crack slicing through the earth, smoke curling into the sky like a giant serpent. The ground split open, glowing with molten lava that hissed and bubbled as though the earth itself were alive. The acrid stench of sulfur was everywhere.

She didn't hesitate. Turning back sharply, she raced back to the academy, weaving through ancient redwood trees and leaping over trickling streams that wound through the misty valleys. Her mind raced with the implications. What if the academy was already in danger? What if she couldn't stop it in time?

She was familiar with the route to a location hidden deep within the hazy valleys of what would one day be China, where there lay a place unlike any other: a sanctuary of knowledge, courage, and survival.

The Dinosaur Academy.

Here, dinosaurs of all shapes and sizes gathered, their scales glinting in the sunlight or feathers ruffling in the breeze, to learn not just how to endure their perilous world but how to thrive within it. The academy's mission went beyond teaching their students to fight and flee because it sought to uncover how vastly different creatures could unite to best even the most overwhelming odds.

At the heart of it all was Professor Lufeng. Though modest in size, her sharp mind and no-nonsense demeanor made her a natural leader. Her claws, adept at prying apart tough plants, were just as skilled at pointing out the flaws in her students' excuses. Yet, even she could not have anticipated what was going to happen next.

"Watch it, featherball!" Jiang snapped as Gui zipped past him. The Monolophosaurus was known for his brusque and competitive nature, but Gui wasn't in the mood for his usual antics.

"Can't talk! Disaster!" she squawked over her shoulder, leaving Jiang blinking in confusion. Bursting into Professor Lufeng's office, Gui skidded to a halt, feathers flared in agitation. "Professor! Something's wrong, terribly wrong!"

Professor Lufeng didn't flinch. Her calm presence was as steady as ever. Moments later, the great horn at the center of the academy bellowed, its deep tone echoing through the valleys, summoning every student to the clearing in the dawn redwood forest. Standing before the gathered crowd, Lufeng's voice was calm, but her words carried weight. "A fissure has opened in the forest, spreading quickly. Lava threatens to destroy our home. This mission requires strength, courage, ingenuity, and teamwork. If we fail, everything we've built here will be lost." The silence was broken only by the faint crackling of distant lava. Then, volunteers began to step forward.

First was Tao, a Tsintaosaurus with a smooth, horn-like crest that gleamed in the sunlight. She moved with quiet dignity, her movements measured and confident. Tao had earned a reputation for her strategic thinking, often solving disputes between her peers with her steady logic.

Next came Chuan, a towering Mamenchisaurus whose impossibly long neck swayed as he stepped forward, his calm and steady demeanor a reassuring presence. He was known as a gentle giant but had a surprising knack for tackling physical challenges with ease.

Then there was Jiang. The Monolophosaurus prowled to the front with an irritated flick of his tail. "Why me?" he grumbled. "I'm a hunter, not a hero. And with the Microraptor? You've got to be kidding me."

Perched on a low branch, Gui grinned mischievously. "Don't worry, I'll make sure you don't trip over your ego."

Two professors joined the team: Professor Dongi, a Sinraptor who walked over with razor-sharp precision, and Professor Psitta, a Psittacosaurus whose bright green tail feathers bounced along with her gait. She had already begun sketching plans for the mission in her mind, and her vibrant quills were practically vibrating with excitement.

As the team set off, the forest grew eerily quiet. Their footsteps crunched through the undergrowth as distant roars echoed in the stillness.

Their first challenge came at a roaring river. Jagged rocks jutted out, and the water surged dangerously. “We’ll cross here,” Dongi announced, his eyes scanning for the safest route.

“Unless you can grow wings, that’s a bad idea,” Jiang snorted. “Maybe Gui can leave us here.”

Psitta bounced on her toes, her vibrant quills shaking. “What about a raft? Or a vine bridge? I could weave it quickly!”

“Too slow,” Dongi replied curtly. “That fallen tree will serve as a bridge. One at a time.”

Gui darted forward to test it. “It’s steady!” she chirped, but when Chuan stepped on it, it groaned with his weight. Suddenly, with a violent crack, it splintered beneath him, sending Jiang tumbling into the frigid water below.

In a split second, Chuan’s long neck whipped around like a coiled spring, and he dove forward, his head plunging into the current. “Grab on!” he shouted, just as Jiang’s panicked eyes widened.

With a powerful flick, Chuan hooked Jiang’s arm, yanking him free from the swirling depths. “I didn’t ask for your help!” Jiang spluttered, water cascading from his crest.

“All right,” Chuan replied, calm and stoic. Tao gave a small, approving nod at the teamwork on display.

As they neared the fissure, the forest gave way to a barren wasteland. The air was thick with ash, and the ground radiated unbearable heat. It seemed to stretch endlessly, glowing with molten lava that hissed and bubbled.

Dongi surveyed the scene. “We’ll redirect the lava into that canyon. Build a barrier strong enough to hold it back.”

“We’re building... what, a dam?” Jiang asked incredulously. “You’ve seen the lava, right?”

Dongi’s tone was firm. “Unless you have a better idea, start clearing debris.”

The team worked tirelessly. Chuan hauled massive boulders under Tao’s direction, while Gui zipped overhead, scouting for cracks. Psitta tied vines, her cheerful chatter a sharp contrast to the tense atmosphere. “If this works, we’ll call it Psitta’s Perfect Dam!” she joked.

“Please, shut up,” sighed Dongi.

“Another crack on the left!” Gui called, darting back toward Dongi.

Just as the barrier neared completion, the ground shook violently. Lava surged forward.

“It’s going to breach!” Tao cried, her voice steady but urgent.

“Hold your ground!” Dongi barked, though his voice betrayed tension.

Psitta darted forward, her energy undeterred. “We can funnel it here!” Using vines and stones, she created a makeshift channel, slowing the flow.

But it wasn’t enough. Tao’s voice rang out, sharp and urgent. “We need to collapse that ridge to redirect the flow! Quickly!”

“Impossible,” Jiang growled, then exhaled sharply. “But I’ll do it.”

With a fierce determination, he charged toward the ridge, his claws ripping into the unstable ground like the predator he was. Gui zipped after him, her wings a blur as she darted around the falling debris. “You’re not doing this alone!” she shouted, adrenaline surging through her.

The ridge trembled under Jiang’s relentless strikes, rocks shuddering and dust swirling. With a final, earth-shaking blow, the rock gave way, collapsing in a thunderous crash. Debris tumbled down, cascading into the molten lava below, diverting its fiery path into the canyon.

The last echoes of destruction faded, and the fissure took its last rasping breaths before that waned as well. The five of them stood there, triumphant, and began their slow return by land to the academy. Exhaustion and silence dominated their journey. But when they reached the lush green forest once again, Psitta’s chirpy voice broke the stillness. “We make a good team, don’t we? I mean, aside from Jiang being a grump half the time.”

Gui fluttered down to land beside Chuan. “She’s right, you know. Grumpy or not, Jiang, you pulled through.”

Jiang rolled his eyes but said nothing. It was Tao who spoke next, her soft voice carrying strength. “Without everyone’s efforts, we wouldn’t have made it. Chuan’s strength, Psitta’s ideas, Dongi’s leadership, Gui’s quick thinking... even Jiang’s courage. It all mattered.”

As they reached the academy gates, Professor Lufeng awaited them, her gaze scanning the team's weary faces. For a moment, she softened and told them how proud she was.

"You've all exceeded expectations," she said. "Not just in strength or skill, but in spirit. The academy stands because of your resilience and teamwork."

The once-mismatched group, now bonded by their shared trial, became legends at the Dinosaur Academy—a tale of courage, ingenuity, and the power of working together.

The Red Envelope

ESF West Island School, Lee, Claire – 12

Fern didn't need to be reminded of the address that her father had texted her. She knew it all too well already. It was the home of her childhood.

She walked up the stairs to the patio, an amber glow lighting up in the sky behind her. Fern smiled wistfully, then removed the rarely-used hidden key from under the corner of the cheerful welcome mat, brushing off months of dust to restore its original luster.

Fern had just visited her father, Evan B. Wilder, a wealthy icon in his industry. Outside of his field, he was little-known. His opulence was a mystery, even to his own daughter – the very person whom most of the fortune was bequeathed to. Fern's father had made it clear that he didn't want to concern her about such matters, even though was more than ready to hear what he had to say.

And he didn't have much time to say it.

Evan Wilder had just been relocated to a private ward in the hospital – he had been diagnosed with an illness, presumably decades of work taking a toll on him. Professionals had informed Fern that her father's chances of living another dozen months were slim. Since he didn't have much time left, she had returned to her childhood abode to stay nearby.

She unlocked the door, which creaked in protest after years of use. She stood on the threshold and inhaled deeply, taking in the scent of wood and the fragrance of late summer flowers.

Something caught her eye. A crimson envelope was barely poking out from under the front door. It had likely been slid under the door . . . which was odd considering there was a mailbox outside.

Curiosity piqued, Fern set her bags down, picked the envelope up, and headed to the dining table. It couldn't be addressed to her – for years, the only resident of the house had been her father.

The name on the back was Evan Wilder.

She fumbled to unseal it. Out fell a handwritten note and a magazine article on pterosaurs discovered in Liaoning. Confused, Fern proceeded to read the note, hoping it would offer more information.

Evan, let's talk – tomorrow at 11AM

It was surely from a friend of her father's – only, who?

Fern attempted to turn on the computer on the desk, which remained stubbornly dead. She noticed a pale yellow Post-It note tacked to the screen. *Call Justin Barret.*

Oh! – she remembered Justin Barret. An acquaintance of her father's, whom Fern had met some five years ago. He was a dino specialist – perhaps he would help her make sense of the cryptic message. She would go see him tomorrow morning, she decided.

Even so, Fern couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

Tension prickled in the air.

The house no longer felt warm and inviting.

The following morning, Fern rapped on a semi-translucent glass door. The plaque fixed to the door identified it as the office of Dr Justin Barret, PhD in palaeontology.

"Come in."

She steeled herself and entered the room. Sitting primly in a swivel chair was a man in his forties. His lined face wore his typical grave expression.

"Ms Wilder." He spoke in a curious manner – monotone, in a way that made everything a statement.

"Hello, Dr Barret. I believe you knew my father?"

“Certainly,” he replied, remaining taciturn.

“This envelope came yesterday for him. It contains an unsigned note and a magazine clipping about the pterosaurs of Liaoning. I’ve no idea who the sender is. I was wondering if you did.” She dropped the ruby envelope onto his desk.

His expression remained impassive, but his hooded eyes betrayed surprise.

“Perhaps the sender prefers to stay anonymous. Have you asked your father?”

She took a deep breath, “My father is on his deathbed, and I’ve moved into his home. He’s in no state to be questioned about such things.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Ms Wilder,” said Barret sincerely.

Silence.

“Well . . . as for the magazine, the Liaoning Province is a dino excavation hotspot. Recently, new species of pterosaurs have been found there. For example, the *sinosauropteryx* and the *Chuanqilong*.”

“Thank you, Dr Barret. I should be on my way now.”

“Goodbye, Ms Wilder.”

Fern was about to unlock the front door when she got a call.

“Hello?” she replied breathlessly.

“This is Pine Grove Hospital. Are you Ms Fern Wilder?”

Her heart dropped. “Yes,” she whispered, clutching her cellphone.

“We’re sorry to inform you that your father has passed.”

She heard nothing more.

Fern collapsed on the front porch. Objects shattered. She could no longer discern reality from nightmares. She had lost her grip on everything. She didn’t know how long it was until her head stopped spinning.

Colours flashed in her eyes, her cheeks heating up, a hum in her ears. The only thing she registered were her shaking hands, nails chipped. A successful man’s intrepid, resourceful daughter appeared to be a homeless, derelict person. All she could do was stumble down the pavement, dazed.

Her feet led her to a glass door.

“Ms Wilder?” Dr Barret looked up from his desktop screen.

“My father’s dead.”

His face changed, and for the first time, she noticed the wicked upwards curve of his lips, the slight smirk they betrayed; the abhorrent cold stare of his hooded eyes.

“I suppose it’s time to tell you.”

“Tell me what?” demanded Fern. “He’s gone now.”

His voice was clear and icy, “Do you know anything about his career?”

“He’s in business,” responded Fern sharply.

“His business is dinosaurs. Evan Wilder owns an excavation site in Liaoning, China, and has been reaping the rewards for years. Now that he is . . . not with us anymore, that excavation site will be entrusted to you . . . his only heir, who has no interest in dinosaurs. What a *waste*.”

Realization dawned on her, and with it, horror.

“You’ve . . . been sending my father these . . . notes? For this excavation site?”

His eyes darkened.

Instead of answering, he held up a carmine-red envelope.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

ESF West Island School, Lim, Declan – 13

This is a fictional story about how the research team discovered the titanosaur.

The research team woke from the sunlight peeping through the cracks in the tent. The air was cool and smelt of rock. Immediately, voices came from all around the camp, excited for what was to come. A new researcher, Isaac, was equally excited as the other, more seasoned researchers and quickly got to work on chipping away at a mountain said to have an abundance of fossils. It was the year 2021 and China was one of the most prominent fossil-hunting communities in the world, with over 40 dinosaur species being discovered in the province of Liaoning alone.

Isaac chipped away at the digging site, also known as 化石山 (fossil mountain). He was quickly accompanied by his mentor, Jamal, who is from Wuhan. They discussed the chances of finding something insane, like another pterosaur. They were talking so animatedly that it got the attention of many archaeologists, who were giving them the side-eye. The leader of the team had to rush over to their location and tell them to be quiet. Isaac and Jamal quickly complied, not wanting to be kicked off the research team.

After a few hours, Isaac was still chipping away at the site, not having any luck in finding anything at all. He was exhausted, but even so, he persevered. Until suddenly, he struck gold; he broke into a cavern filled with bones that even he could not identify. Overjoyed, he called his mentor over. His mentor instantly recognised the bones to be incredibly big, as if they belonged to a giant. The instructor stood there, analysing every square inch of the fossils, until he slowly took out his mobile phone and called for backup.

The bones were carefully removed from the rocky site and brought back to camp. Experts looked at the bones and determined that they were too big to be any ordinary dinosaur, so it could only be one thing; a titanosaur. The camp was shocked to hear that the newbie archaeologist's first find was one of the biggest animals to roam the earth. Additionally, the bones recovered, according to the experts, consisted of around 40% of the titanosaur's skeleton, which was remarkably rare due to the fact that the fossils have been buried for millions of years.

At night, the camp exploded with noise, shouts coming from all directions. Researchers filled to the brim with happiness; excitement was visible in the camp, and it was all because of the discovery that Isaac made. This discovery, while he did not know it yet, would make him one of the most famous individuals on the face of the planet. At midnight, everyone was sound asleep when someone dressed in black sneaked into the camp and stole the fossils that were on display.

The next morning, the camp exploded with noise, but not with happiness but instead with terror. The screams of panic coming from every researcher made the site seem like a horror movie. Instantly, teams were dispatched to try and locate the fossils. Government officials were informed and requested aid immediately to find the missing titanosaur fossils. They searched day in and day out, but to no avail. Government officials arrived at the scene quickly and made a 50-mile perimeter. Again, both the officials and researchers searched even more. They searched far and wide but again, to no avail.

At night, the search died down, but Isaac persevered; he had to find the fossils before they disappeared forever. At midnight, he finally found the fossils, but it was a trap. His own mentor was actually the one who stole the fossils because he was jealous of Isaac for finding something that would massively benefit the world, whereas the mentor, Jamal, has never found anything worthwhile; his best claim to fame was finding another pteranodon.

Isaac was quickly overpowered by his mentor in terms of strength and was quickly tied up. Jamal started ranting about how he was going to turn in the discovery as his own and leave him in the dust. Jamal was ranting for hours on end until suddenly government officials stormed the location. It turns out someone actually followed Isaac while searching for the fossils and saw everything that happened, so this person ran back to the campsite and told everyone everything. Jamal was soon taken into custody; however, the fossils were still not found.

Each researcher attempted to interrogate Jamal into disclosing the location of the fossils, but he did not yield. Every time someone got close to him, Jamal quickly silenced himself and did not let a word escape his mouth. Until Isaac got his turn. It didn't take long for Jamal to start getting personal with Isaac, telling him that he was an excuse of a researcher and did not deserve this job. However, since Jamal was getting so into his insults, he accidentally revealed that the location of the fossils was buried beneath his tent.

When Jamal realised what he had just said, his eyes widened. He became perfectly still and quiet as the gears in the researcher's head started to turn, processing what Jamal had just said. Government officials had to bring them back to reality to try and retrieve the fossils. They quickly located his tent and started to dig until finally, after so many hours of searching and panicking, the bones were finally rescued and were, luckily, in perfect condition.

Finally, helicopters flew the bones back to the mainland, where the bones were slowly reconstructed into how they looked when the dinosaurs were still roaming the land. While it was only 40% complete, the fossils were a marvel to the world and drove countless archaeologists to China, hoping to uncover something even grander than the titanosaur. This is what made China the number one fossil hunting ground in the world, attracting thousands of aspiring archaeologists; this is the start of the **Great Fossil Era**. As for Jamal, he was sentenced to 25 years of jail time for theft, assault, and kidnapping.

The Legend of the Jade Dinosaur

ESF West Island School, Misra, Yana – 11

The strong wind swept my raven-black hair into my face. I knew that what I was doing was wrong, but I had no choice. I couldn't bear to witness my mother being embarrassed another day. I had to do it; I had to follow the legend of the jade dinosaur.

I hiked down the treacherous mountain to an opening in the dense trees. I gave out my signature bird call. Just like clockwork, Fai, my best friend and partner in crime, jumped down from a gigantic tree. Our families had both been forced to evacuate from Beijing because of the never-ending water pollution; the water was becoming toxic and unsafe to drink. Jobs were becoming harder to find, and both our fathers had to go to drastic measures to put a simple meal on the table. Ultimately, they worked so many unsafe jobs that they both perished due to toxic air intake. Ever since then, Fai and I, being the oldest in our families, had to start providing for them. Our mothers were both disgraced in society because their own children had to drop out of school to help put food on the table.

"Did you get the map?" I asked Fai.

"Yes, did you get the supplies?" he asked. I pulled out the two heavy backpacks that I had been carrying and handed him one. These bags had enough food to last us for two and a half weeks—a month if we rationed.

"Are you sure we should do this?" Fai asked me.

"Yes, of course, but could we go on horseback?" I replied, gesturing toward one of the rare horse stables next to an opulent mansion. I snuck through the trees like a shadow. As I reached the horse stable, I grabbed the reins of the finest and most well-fed horse. I jumped on and rode back to Fai; he clambered up onto the horse, and we rode off into the night.

After about three hours, we reached Cangshan Mountain just as the first rays of sunlight hit the peak. Fai and I exchanged glances, silently agreeing that we should eat something. We were ravenous, so we gobbled down our sweet potatoes and rice on a bench near the base of the mountain. Soon, Raven, as we had named our newly acquired horse, needed a few hours of rest. While she slept, Fai and I ventured into the nearest town to buy food for ourselves and Raven. We spent most of the money we had on food, but with the pennies that remained, I scraped together just enough to buy low-quality paper and some second-hand pencils.

After Raven had eaten her fill, we were freezing to the bone, but we ploughed on toward the final, most daunting landmark of all. The jade dinosaur's cave was in the southernmost part of China on Wuzhi Mountain, in Hainan. Fai estimated that it would take about a day and a half to get there. We gathered our provisions, feeling a surge of gratitude for Fai; if it weren't for him, I would never have got this far! I lunged forward and pulled him into a bear hug. I quickly recovered from the moment and awkwardly pulled away, unable to meet his gaze as I petted Raven's soft fur. Summoning my courage, I looked Fai in the eye and apologised profusely.

"It's okay, Fai, it's not a big deal!" he reassured me.

Soon after, we were off, heading to the final, most daunting landmark. As dusk fell, we were freezing and exhausted, so we decided to spend the night beneath a cluster of ancient oak trees. The town we had stopped in was small, filled with shady-looking people roaming the streets. Fai and I had devised a system to ensure we both got enough rest while the other kept watch. Fai offered to take the first shift, so I slumped into a surprisingly comfortable pile of leaves and fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke up to the sound of pacing. As I returned to my senses, I found Fai already awake, pacing in front of our camp.

"Fai, what's the matter?" I asked sleepily.

"I saw it—the dinosaur," he said, his eyes wide with excitement.

"Are you completely sure, Fai?" I asked, jumping up.

"Yes," he replied. "I woke up in the night because of Raven's snoring, and I saw a huge figure in the sky." His voice was filled with urgency. "Oh, and I had a thought about the dragon's cave. I think this entire area is the dragon's cave."

"Really, Fai, are you sure? Because if you are, then we need to get out of here fast," I warned.

But alas, it was too late. The dinosaur was walking toward us, its massive footsteps shaking the ground. We would never be able to escape! The dinosaur stopped in front of us and tilted its head, almost like a dog. It had long, furry red ears and red scaly skin. Then, it licked Fai, causing him to topple over. I realised this dinosaur-dog was not a threat. I cautiously approached and began to pet its head, which it seemed to enjoy. It lowered its back, as if inviting us to climb on. Fai led Raven onto the dinosaur's enormous back, and I gently coaxed the creature to lift its head.

Miraculously, the dinosaur seemed to know exactly where to go. We were going home safe and sound, riding on the back of a flying dinosaur—dog.

It took us barely an hour to reach home. We landed in front of Fai's house, and mine was just next door. Fai's mother and sisters emerged, wearing black, alongside my own mother and sisters. They had been grieving for us right in the middle of our own funeral!

"Fai and Fei, where were you? We were worried sick!" my mother shrieked.

"Mother, we were simply trying to complete the ancient prophecy of the jade dinosaur," I explained calmly.

"Fai, that legend isn't real," she replied, disbelief etched on her face.

"Well, you're looking at the newest discovery of mankind: the flying dinosaur—dog," Fai announced proudly.

"Now, could we please have a proper meal?" I asked my mother.

"Yes, yes, of course, my child," Fai's mother chimed, now recovering from the shock.

"And where will our dinosaur stay?" I inquired.

"It can stay outside," Fai suggested.

"No way," I countered. "He is going to stay inside with us."

Fading Gods

ESF West Island School, Sia, Sofia – 12

Your eyes scan over the newspaper. It reported that a fourth person had gone missing this week. This time, it was a young female, who was last seen at 1:42 AM, near the slaughterhouse. At least, that was what the random passerby who was questioned said. Not much more information about the time of her disappearance was uncovered, since it was dark at the time. A woman, who identified herself as the missing woman's mother, informed the police department personal details about her daughter. Facts such as her full name, Alissa Evans, and whatnot. But besides her personal information, there weren't many leads. All the staff at the slaughterhouse were questioned however, many of them were not in the area, but at home sleeping, at the time. Though there were almost no clues, one interesting thing was observed. All the people who have recently gone missing were last seen near the slaughterhouse. And this led to the claim that someone who worked at the slaughterhouse was responsible for the series of abductions.

You placed the newspaper down on the coffee table in front of you, leaning back in your chair. The atmosphere of your place was a unique one, as multiple clay masks surrounded the room. They mainly consisted of half-masks, ones that you made. You knew that you could make money from these clay masks and move out of this studio apartment to somewhere where you would be much more content. Despite this, you kept your masks to yourself, since you made them out of passion, not so you could benefit off of other people. One distinct feature of the masks you made was that they were mainly based on animals, real or fantastical.

Your friend of twelve years, Grant, who works at the slaughterhouse where the recent disappearances have been reportedly happening nearby, often requested you to make masks which were inspired by dinosaurs. You had no problem with this, since you two would often talk about dinosaurs in your spare time when you were younger. Once you were done making the masks, Grant would often take them with him, though you didn't know what he did with them. You just assumed that he kept them in his house, as a sort of.. "symbol" to your friendship.

Dizzy and disoriented, Alissa woke up. Despite being in an unfamiliar environment, that wasn't the first thing she noticed. Her vision was more limited than usual, and her head felt heavy, but she dismissed this as fatigue. However, when she reached up and touched her face, her fingertips came into contact with ceramic instead of skin. She was wearing a mask, one that represents a microraptor. She felt herself kneeling on the cold floor, but as she looked around she could only see vague shapes hanging in the dark, which she immediately assumed were the carcasses of animals, since the only thing she could smell was the strong scent of raw meat. A feeling of realisation of her situation started to build up. Alissa tried to move her legs to get up, but her movement was cut short as she felt something bind her legs to the ground. Hearing the metallic noise it made when it moved, she instantly knew that there were chains binding her limbs.

Panicking, sweat started forming on her face, and the mask she was wearing made it worse. She couldn't think straight. Even so, what good would thinking straight do when the situation was hopeless? But what sort of psychopath would do this? Who would be cruel enough to, looking around at the floor and the inverted pentacle that was surrounded by sigils, do some sort of twisted ritual, Alissa thought. Then the swirling thoughts struck her like an axe through her head. Of course. There was a madman that was responsible for the disappearances in the news, and she was about to become the main headline for the week. And.. this mask. There was only one person in this town who could make masks with this sort of intricacy, or make masks at all. Damien. No, he couldn't be the killer. Never! He was too nice of a person to deal with business as heinous as this. But if it wasn't him, then who?

Her thoughts were cut off when a rusty door in front of her opened, letting dim light into the pitch black room, before the door closed once again. For a split second when the door was opened, Alissa could finally make out the looming shapes around her. They were humans, dead and disfigured. Some of them were skeletons by this time while some of them were fresh, their dried blood still bright red. And this same fate would happen to her, in the hands of someone whom she so dearly trusted, she thought. He spoke. He spoke, but it wasn't him. It wasn't Damien. The smoothness and slight accent, one that would remind someone of a 90's radio host, wasn't the voice of Damien's.

"How naïve that mortals like you think that you can intervene with the gods' affairs."

"What the hell are you talking about!? Who are you?"

"That.. doesn't matter. What matters is what I'm doing this for."

The killer clicked his tongue. “66 million years ago, the day the dinosaurs died. That’s what the scientists say, at least.”

“I don’t care about what happened to the dinosaurs! Let. Me. Go!”

“When the asteroid hit Earth, a mass extinction occurred,” the killer continued, ignoring Alissa’s pleas. “Most of the dinosaur species were killed from the impact of that asteroid. Though a few were able to survive, albeit not long. However, those that were able to adapt quick enough were able to survive a longer time. Eventually, around 30 million years ago, only a few herds of dinosaurs remained, and all of them were present in China.”

The killer explained how these remaining dinosaurs, the agilisaurus, anchiornis, avimimus, and finally, the microraptor, were noticed by greater beings. Despite everything that the celestials have put them through, they survived, ironically because of their small size. Their endurance gave them the attention of the gods below. The rulers of Hell, Shamura, who represents greed; Heket, who represents famine; Set, who represents fakeness; and Narinder, who represents pride, each vowed these dinosaurs will succeed their throne once they faded away. The agilisaurus would have the throne of Heket; the anchiornis would have the throne of Shamura; the avimimus would have the throne of Set; and the microraptor would have the throne of Narinder.

“These gods were able to keep China, and in turn those four dinosaurs safe, so they would die natural deaths. However, all the texts that recount these events were burned during the Salem Witch Trials, so these gods were left to rot, and now they only exist in my bloodlines’ memories. And when knowledge disappears, so does the existence of what it was about. Hell’s rulers started to grow weak, and in the end, all the dinosaurs vanished.”

“And what do I have to do with these ‘gods’!?”

“You? Someone like you has nothing to do with them. It’s what I’m using you for. Once a year, each god demands a sacrifice so they keep some of their strength, because simply existing isn’t enough for them. They don’t care who it is, they only care that they are wearing something correlated to them. Hence the masks, which I can thank my dear friend Damien for. As for you, you were just in the right place at the right time. Or perhaps, the wrong time for you.”

The killer glided across the room in a graceful manner, quite contrary to his actions. He picked up an axe from the corner of the room, and started sharpening it slowly, building up the tension for Alissa. She started struggling again, trying to break out. No, no, no! This couldn’t be happening to me! I wouldn’t let myself be sacrificed by some crazy cultist!

“Let me go, you monster! What’s the point of doing this when those ‘gods’ you speak for aren’t even real!”, a panicky screamed by Alissa.

“Tell that to your soul once it meets them,” said the killer without a hint of guilt but confidence.

The killer then swung his axe at Alissa, and time seemed to go in slow motion for her. No, this couldn’t be it, she had to be saved somehow. This wasn’t the end. This wasn’t the end. This *couldn’t* be the end. Then everything went pitchblack and blank.

I, Dinosaur

ESF West Island School, Yu, Teah – 13

The night was dark, a surreal ill-lit darkness – as though a flask of jet-black ink had spilled across the sky. But beneath the moonless black, a sprinkling of little lanterns quivering with fire, like an old grandma's fist trembling at the touch of her aged mao-bi. Below the light, dwellings swarm with families dancing, singing, sharing stories around the flame.

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“...preserve culture, let us retain the tradition of the Anyang people of Shang dynasty; of the Zhou dynasty, and of the final script chosen in Qin.” Master Zhen declares triumphantly, passing fragments of bone, stone and rice paper around the room.

I hold my shard of bone above the fire. It seems to illuminate the fragment's cracked surface, which is swiftly filled by my queer anticipation. It is a turtle shell. Inscribed upon the shell's surface are shallow grooves, arranged in a pattern like no other knows. I run my fingers along them in wonder, feeling each, and every delicate line. “An oracle bone...” I utter softly to myself, eyes widening in wonder as I behold the fragment.

Zhen tells us to follow our hearts and let them lead our brush along the ragged edges of bone. We begin to write. I drag my maobi along my coarse oracle bone, boisterously glue my eyes shut and scatter ink across the surface. When my eyes flutter open, I see the word ‘龙’ vigorously marked on the bone. My heart races as I squint at my product.

龙? This character has always fascinated me. As I carefully trace each stroke, I notice something peculiar. The sweeping curves and sharp angles of the character begin to shift in my mind, transforming into a shape that resembles...a dinosaur footprint I saw in one of my books. My mind wanders to the fossils in the stories I was told—particularly the footprints of dinosaurs embedded in ancient stone. Fossils, too, tell stories, but their narratives are often silent, etched in the rock like whispers of a time long gone. The delicate ridges and impressions left by a dinosaur's foot reveal not just the size or shape of the creature but also hints its existence to the world it once inhabited.

My brush floats above the oracle bone, and I imagine the character coming to life, transforming into a dinosaur tracking through a prehistoric landscape. I shut my eyes again. The chinese character contorts in my mind and twists into great herds of dinosaurs grazing peacefully, their scales glistening in shades of emerald and gold. I envision the mighty Sinosauropteryx—the feathered dinosaur that had captured my imagination. Its delicate feathers, like a painter's brush strokes, painted the air with vibrant colours.

By midnight, as I drift into sleep, the boundaries between reality and my dreams begin to blur. I can almost see the fossilised footprints leading away from where I lay. I feel a warm, gentle pull, as if the universe is guiding me to a different time and place. Soon, I find myself standing in a lush, prehistoric landscape, the ground beneath my feet, soft and inviting. Towering ferns and towering trees surround me, their trunks thick and aged, reaching high into the sky. The air is alive with the mere sounds of chirping insects and rustling leaves, the familiar, yet foreign melody of nature.

And then, there it is—its vibrant feathers glistening like jewels in the dappled sunlight. A majestic Sinosauropteryx stands before me. I feel a mix of awe and disbelief, my heart pounds deeply in my chest. The creature is smaller than I had imagined, but its beauty overpowers its size. Each feather shimmers in shades of orange and cream, and its eyes sparkle with curiosity.

“Hello,” I whisper, my voice barely breaks the enchanting silence. I am mesmerized, unable to take my eyes off the peculiar creature.

To my utter disbelief, the figure huffs, its voice resonating like wind through the trees, “Child, I once walked these lands where you stand. You must preserve our stories for the decades which follow.”

Wonder, reverence, and a profound sense of responsibility wells through me. The Sinosauropteryx drew closer, its feathers gently touching my arm in a soft caress, almost reassuring.

Night after night, my slumbers in the prehistoric landscape become so alive and real in my imagination. The Sinosauropteryx is my regular companion, taking me through forests and across rivers teeming with life, telling stories of survival and adaptation. Each evening, I come back into my world, my heart afire with purpose, ready for oracle bones to trace the wisdom of my sleep.

One night, I sit beside the shimmering river with the Sinosauropteryx, and notice something glimmering in the water. It is a small, smooth stone, reflecting the light like a jewel and attracting my attention. The dinosaur nudges it gently with its beak, encouraging me to pick it up. As I hold the stone in my hand, I realize it is not just a rock—but a fossilized feather, perfectly preserved.

"This feather...was once mine" whispers the Sinosauropteryx, its eyes speaking volumes of some ancient wisdom. "Long ago, I soared through these skies. Now, I'm in the trees, I'm in the breeze, my footsteps lay on the ground."

My breath catches in my throat. It dawns on me that this creature, of which I had dreamed, is not a figment of my imagination — but the remains of a spirit that was once attached to our land.

"What happened to you?" I inquire, my voice trembles.

The creature looks me in the eye, "My kind faced great challenges. As the world changed, so did we. The feather in your hand is a reminder of our existence and the fragility of life."

Abruptly, I feel a strange sensation wash over me, a tingling in my fingertips that spread through my body. The ground begins to shudder, and the vibrant landscape around us warps and twists, colors blending in a surreal, foggy haze.

I shriek, panic rising in my chest.

Before I can fathom what is occurring, a blinding light envelopes me. When it fades, I find myself back in my bedroom, the familiar sights of my nightstand and plush toys come into view. Yet, the feather still lays in my palm, and there is a queer feeling that something is...off.

My grandfather storms into my doorway, but his expression is strange, his eyes wide with fear. "Son, you've opened a door that shouldn't have been opened!"

Confusion floods through my mind and flows into my face.

"The feather! It's...a portal." he exclaims. "You've brought something back!"

Just then, a small rustling murmurs from the corner of my room. My heart races as I turn to see a shadow moving. To my horror, a small, feathered creature emerges, but it is nothing like my friend, the Sinosauropteryx. This creature is grotesque, its feathers matted and its eyes glow an unnatural red.

I gasp and step back. Grandfather squeaks as the creature lets out a low growl, and I feel a wave of impending dread wash over me. I clutch the fossilized feather tightly. As I stand frozen, the creature begins to morph, it shapeshifts into a bizarre hybrid of dinosaur and something utterly alien.

"Quickly, child. Close your eyes and think of the world you came from!" Grandfather urges. "You have to banish it!"

With my heart pounding, I squeeze my eyes shut, recalling the lush landscapes. But as I concentrate, the creature lunges forward, and the candle flickers out.

When I open my eyes again, I am alone in my room, the feather still in my hand, drenched in an eerie silence. Has it all been a dream? What have I unleashed?

As I gaze around my room, uncertainty gnaws at me. And then, from the corner of my eye, I see it. A flicker of movement. I turn, only to find my own reflection in the mirror staring wide-eyed, ghostly-pale back at me.

But it's not just my reflection. It's... different. My eyes glow with the same eerie red as the creature. I reach up to touch my face, and to my horror, I find small, feather-like patterns beginning to form on my skin.

"No, no, no!" I whisper, backing away, panic surging through me. "This can't be happening!"

I feel a strange compulsion, as if the feather in my hand is calling to me, urging me to embrace this transformation. I stumble back, my heart races as a deep, guttural growl escaped my lips...one that didn't sound human.

I am becoming the very thing I had sought to understand. A twisted blend of boy and dinosaur. I haven't just opened a door; I have become the portal, trapped in an existence where the past and present collides.

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Huaxing And The Hunt for History

ESF West Island School, Yu, Theodora – 10

The night was dark, a surreal ill-lit darkness – as though a flask of jet-black ink had spilled across the sky. But beneath the moonless black, a sprinkling of little lanterns quivering with fire, like an old grandma's fist trembling at the touch of her aged mao-bi. Below the light, dwellings swarm with families dancing, singing, sharing stories around the flame.

—

“...preserve culture, let us retain the tradition of the Anyang people of Shang dynasty; of the Zhou dynasty, and of the final script chosen in Qin.” Master Zhen declares triumphantly, passing fragments of bone, stone and rice paper around the room.

I hold my shard of bone above the fire. It seems to illuminate the fragment's cracked surface, which is swiftly filled by my queer anticipation. It is a turtle shell. Inscribed upon the shell's surface are shallow grooves, arranged in a pattern like no other knows. I run my fingers along them in wonder, feeling each, and every delicate line. “An oracle bone...” I utter softly to myself, eyes widening in wonder as I behold the fragment.

Zhen tells us to follow our hearts and let them lead our brush along the ragged edges of bone. We begin to write. I drag my maobi along my coarse oracle bone, boisterously glue my eyes shut and scatter ink across the surface. When my eyes flutter open, I see the word ‘龙’ vigorously marked on the bone. My heart races as I squint at my product.

龙? This character has always fascinated me. As I carefully trace each stroke, I notice something peculiar. The sweeping curves and sharp angles of the character begin to shift in my mind, transforming into a shape that resembles...a dinosaur footprint I saw in one of my books. My mind wanders to the fossils in the stories I was told—particularly the footprints of dinosaurs embedded in ancient stone. Fossils, too, tell stories, but their narratives are often silent, etched in the rock like whispers of a time long gone. The delicate ridges and impressions left by a dinosaur's foot reveal not just the size or shape of the creature but also hints its existence to the world it once inhabited.

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The Kingdom of the Lost

German Swiss International School, Agrawal, Siya – 12

Hong Kong, China

“Lin, I have terrible news for you, Aunt Limei is dead.”

Lin sat up straight in shock. Her mother’s words had shocked her. Aunt Limei? Dead? She wasn’t old, and she was perfectly healthy, so what happened?

“Mom, what... what happened?” Lin stuttered.

“She was murdered... they said that the murder scene was... I shouldn’t mention it” her mother sobbed.

“Who killed her?”

“No one knows. The killers haven’t been found. The police couldn’t find any clues either. They had a hard enough time figuring out it was Limei.”

“Mom, please tell me what happened,” Lin begged.

“Her corpse... It was half eaten and the rest was torn apart” Lily whispered in a horrified tone. “Maybe some wolves got to her corpse”

Lin couldn’t process what she was being told. Wolves? Half-eaten corpse? How could this be happening?

“When is her funeral?” Lin asked.

“Next week. We’re travelling to Liaoning— given the state of her remains, we can’t bring her back here.”

Limei was a palaeontologist and had been at a newly discovered excavation site in China for the past six months. The best in the field. Who would want to kill her? A jealous competitor? A psychopath? Could it just be wild animals as Mom said?

Liaoning, China

Lin and her mother arrived at the funeral parlour, dressed in black. After the initial shock had worn off, Lin needed answers— who could kill her beloved aunt?

After the burial, Limei’s colleague, Dr. Smith, pulled Lin to the side.

“Limei had special instructions on what to do if she were to die ... unexpectedly” she said.

This was bizarre. Lin knew that Aunt Limei had a plan for everything but how could she know that she was going to die unexpectedly?

“She left this package for you, Lin”.

Lin gingerly took the package from Dr. Smith. It was a large box gift wrapped in newspaper. Aunt Limei was being as frugal as always— Lin smiled despite herself.

Gripped by curiosity, Lin raced back to her hotel room. She ripped open the package

“*What is this I am looking at— is this a tooth?*” Lin wondered.

It was a slightly curved object, around fifteen centimetres long and it looked ancient. A dinosaur tooth! Under it, there was a golden clock without numbers, without hands, just an engraved notch.

“*What a weird item to own,*” Lin pondered.

There was a note taped to it.

“Most likely a historical report saying everything about this dinosaur, down to what it liked to eat for breakfast.” Lin thought. *“But maybe it isn’t?”*

Dear Lili,

If you are reading this then I am unfortunately deceased and I know who is responsible.

There is a kingdom, a sanctuary for those believed to have gone extinct.

A place that, only those who belong, can enter without the key.

A place so secretive that no one has the key.

No one but you...

I have placed the key in your possession.

You, Lin Chang, are the only person in the entire world who has the key to the Kingdom of the Lost.

Lin was puzzled— Aunt Limei was a scientist who believed in facts, and scoffed at fiction and fantasy.

“Aunt Limei hated fantasy, she wouldn’t even let me read Harry Potter. She called it balderdash, but now she is telling me about secret kingdoms, magical keys and extinct animals being still alive? Could this be true or is someone messing with me?”

No one called her Lili, other than Aunt Limei. The note must be real. So where was the key?

Aunt Limei was so frugal that she had barely given Lin a present her entire life, other than dogeared scientific textbooks. So where is this key?

“The tooth, the tooth of the Zhuchengtyrannus magnus. The tooth is the key”

Lin yelped with surprise. She hadn’t spoken, so who had?

“I must be hearing things” Lin thought *“That voice sounded so much like...”*

Limei would know what to do, Limei could help her, and Limei was dead.

Lin looked at the items that Limei had left her. The tooth looked like it could fit in the notch of the clock.

Lin placed the tooth in the notch. A bright flash of light left her blinded for a second.

She rubbed her eyes and looked around— she wasn’t in her room. She saw a world like she had never seen before. Dragonflies with wingspans as tall as she was flitted about, as if they were normal sized dragonflies. Three foot long lizards ran about chasing butterflies.

Lin was frightened, excited and puzzled at the same time. She saw that the tooth had come out of the notch and frantically tried to put it back in, but it wouldn’t fit.

Lin was trapped! How could she go home? At least she hadn’t taken her backpack or shoes off after the funeral, so she still had those. Lin slipped the clock and the tooth into her backpack.

Lin decided to figure out this strange world she had entered. She examined the lizards first.

“Wait... those lizards aren’t lizards.” Lin thought. *“Sinosauropteryx”*

Limei had taught her about them. The first non—avian dinosaurs with featherlike structures. They had recently been discovered in China. Limei had been excavating these when she was killed.

“Hello. I haven’t seen anything like you before.” One of the sinosauropteryx was staring right at Lin.

“Did it just speak?” Lin was dumbfounded.

“I’m Yanya, what are you?”

The sinosauropteryx had spoken again.

“I’m Lin,” Lin stuttered. “I’m a human”

“Oh finally a human! Welcome to the Kingdom of the Lost. You’re going to save us from the murderer. The prophecies say that a ‘human’ child who can understand dinosaurs will come and save us all. Then the Pathway can open and the human can go home.”

“Murderer?” Lin asked nervously.

“You don’t know?” Yanya seemed surprised. “They have taken over the Kingdom. They kill at random. No one knows who they are.”

“Then how will I save you?”

“Find out who it is. We will do the rest”

Suddenly a large dinosaur lumbered towards them.

“RUN,” Lin screamed.

“Relax. It’s just Shilei. He’s my friend

Lin recognized it as a Zhuchengtyrannus magnus.

“This is Lin. She will find the murderer!”

A shadow passed over Shilei’s face.

“I don’t think Shilei likes me,” Lin thought.

After a long discussion with Yanya, Lin found out that the Kingdom of the Lost was only accessible in China, and was only inhabited by dinosaurs native to there.

“Do other countries have secret kingdoms too?” Lin had asked.

“No, I don’t think so, China has the only dinosaurs advanced enough to build a secret kingdom” Yanya had answered.

Lin also learned that the murderer was able to access the human world.

“That must be who killed Aunt Limei,” Lin figured.

“Where have most of the murders happened?” Lin asked.

“You ask way too many questions, human” Shilei said wryly.

This was suspicious.

“All the murders have happened in the Dark Woods,” Yanya answered.

“Why don’t you take me there, Shilei?” Lin asked.

Shilei immediately agreed.

“Follow us there. Bring backup too” Lin whispered to Yanya. Yanya nodded, disturbed.

The woods were dark and creepy. Endless trees and shadows fell across the woods. Lin was so busy following the path Shilei had taken, that she didn't notice Shilei had disappeared.. She felt a tingling in her spine. Someone was watching her, waiting to strike.

“Shilei! Shilei! Where are you!?” Lin screamed.

Suddenly Shilei leaped in front of her, his razor-like teeth shining in the dark, his green eyes flashing with an evil glint.

Lin was right. It was Shilei this whole time, and now he was coming to kill her.

“You’re the killer! Why did you kill Limei” Lin whispered.

Shilei growled and lunged at Lin.

“You are as nosy as your aunt was. She tried to be the hero. Just like you.” Shilei roared.

Lin threw her backpack at Shilei, hitting him on the nose. Then, without a second thought, Lin ran. Shilei chased after her baring his teeth, but then he suddenly tripped over a vast net of vines .

Yanya appeared.

“Unbelievable,” Yanya said ruefully. “Shilei, it was you?”

“All I wanted was to rule the Kingdom,” Shilei groaned.

“You know what I have to do next.”

Yanya whistled and suddenly, hundreds of dinosaurs appeared, savagely attacking Shilei. The next thing Lin knew, Shilei’s decapitated head was rolling on the ground.

“He killed someone close to you. Didn’t he?” Yanya asked. “Do not despair. Dinosaurs believe that even when someone dies, they are not gone forever. Sometimes they will even communicate with the living!”

“So are you free now?” Lin asked

“Of course!” Yanya responded “Now you can open the Pathway again.”

It was finally time to go home.

A Wishful Apocalypse

German Swiss International School, Cheung, Isaac – 12

Jack Anderson was under intense pressure and that was an understatement. “Good morning,” his robot Zig greeted him. Jack only groaned. “It is June 29th, 2063, and two days left till your medical test!” chirped the robot cheerfully in Chinese. It then tried to grab his clothes, but Jack shooed it away. Annoyed, he did the only thing he started every morning: gazing at the perfect metropolis of Beijing, its people prospering under the safe government precautions against crime and foreign enemies. Having started his medical studies in England, Jack was now attending Peking University miles away from home. He was on a trip to a nearby facility on this particular morning.

The bus commute there felt longer than expected, and Jack noticed many blockades along the road, but they were most likely freak accidents.

Upon entering the facility, Jack met up with his mentor, Professor Wei, and followed him around on a school-like tour.

“You are one of my brightest students, Jack and your test is coming up! Let's review some lab techniques and basic surgery today!” Said his mentor enthusiastically.

While he trailed off into the world of medical issues, Jack couldn't help but wish that he didn't have to do his test so early and on such pointless things that would most likely just sit idle in his mind.

If only something exciting happened, he thought.

Just as that thought passed his mind, a strange noise caught his attention. It started as a low rumble, gradually growing louder and more intense.

The tremble concluded in a spectacular loud explosion that rocked the building and caused rubble to fall all over the facility. Jack then heard a loud animal roar that sounded much different to anything that he'd ever heard before. Sirens rang out all over the place. First brushing away the cloud of dust in front of him, Jack's next instinct was to check if the professor beside him was ok.

What he saw before him was pure chaos.

As he surveyed the environment, the first thing that looked off was the amount of blood on the floor. Dozens of wounded on the floor and medics tending to their injuries. Jack himself had seen and helped treat many animal bites from people all across China, but even a bear attack looked like a scratch compared to the state of the wounded people. Massive lumps of flesh were missing from their bodies and blood leaked everywhere. As Jack was only a medical student, he could do nothing but stare at the scene unfolding before him. As he did so, he couldn't help but wonder: What happened?

His heavily wounded mentor gasped, “A few hours ago, I was told that our test specimens escaped in a pack and an organised fashion through the tunnels.”

Upon hearing this, Jack's face turned white as a ghost, as if all the blood had been drained from his veins.

“Specimens? What specimens?”

A roar rocked the building once again and Jack could have screamed in terror if the professor wasn't still talking.

“Remember, do what's right...” His mentor could only make out these words before his hand, holding Jack's own, went slack.

As the professor died, Jack stood up and wiped his tears on his dust-covered shirt.

“MEDIC!” He shouted although he knew from his training that a man could never return from the gates of heaven.

However, perhaps one would have come if not for the massive creature that barged into the facility.

Even massive was a severe understatement for the animal or dinosaur as the professor had referred it to be. It looked every bit like in the documentaries and Jack instantly recognised its type. Tyrannosaurus Rex or T-Rex, the most feared dinosaur to ever roam the earth. And now, after a long slumber, in the 21st century, mankind has awoken it from its long hibernation.

Next to the dinosaur was a small man with a red remote. He had the carefree face of every citizen in the city, except for his dark blue eyes that showed no fear of standing next to the predator and even grinned evilly at his surroundings.

What a madman, Jack thought as he predicted his quick death.

He couldn't have been more wrong.

Instead of eating the man, the colossal T-Rex waited. It just stood there for 5 seconds, eyes dull and uninterested in the vast amounts of prey scurrying about beneath its legs. That was until the madman pointed his remote at the crowd and clicked a button.

The T-Rex's pupils sprang alive and only then did he seem to comprehend the situation around itself. It glared at the crowd on which the red dot landed and sprung towards it in an incomprehensible 70-meter jump. Its landing terrified the already shell-shocked crowd and with the element of surprise, its razor-sharp teeth and claws made quick work of the human flesh, covered only by ragged pieces of clothing.

It looked like something out of a horror movie, yet it was real and unlike the movie characters, Jack didn't have plot armour to protect him from thousands of tonnes of prehistoric muscle.

Keeping that thought in mind, he sprinted for cover behind the wreckage of an SUV.

He would have been saved, but the same madman had grabbed him by his collar and whispered in his ear, Come here kid.

Caught off guard and still reeling in shock over the recent events, Jack reluctantly allowed himself to be dragged towards the field of death. More dinosaurs seemed to have arrived and were terrorising the poor civilians, but one click switched off the man's remote and the dinosaurs seemed to go into a trance, completely ignorant of their prey skittering away.

Nobody bothered to help Jack, and he felt slightly annoyed.

As they approached the large group of dinosaurs, Jack couldn't help but wince at his indefinite and bloody fate.

However, he would be proved wrong again.

The madman smirked at Jack like the way any supervillain would in a cartoon.

"Apologies for the conditions that you're in now and I'll get straight to the point. You can refer to me as X. Any questions?" X put this in simply and Jack, understanding that he had the upper hand in this conversation, took his question as a rhetorical one and shook his head.

"Perfect", X replied.

"You are the only student alive of which Professor Wei taught and although I unleashed this rampage to find him, he seemed to have ended up in one of their bellies", he said, gesturing at the dinosaurs like an angry mother.

"However, let's let the past stay the past. Here I have an invention from the professor and this is where you come in," he continued, "Although unfinished, this invention has the power to alter the dinosaur's form and change them to fuse with the user's wants."

"So I have to complete it?" Guessed Jack.

"Yes!" Exclaimed X, "Now I understand why you were his student. Such a bright child."

"And I don't?" Asked Jack cautiously

"Well let's just say that one of our friends here can skip dinner tonight." Replied X happily as he handed Jack the device.

It glowed green and was surprisingly small for such a powerful device that X had stated it as. Gazing upon its intricate design with awe, Jack noticed one part was missing: the main chip of the device, crucial for anything to run in this age. As he remembered this, a plan slowly formed in his head...

"I'm done," Jack said.

"Ah finally," exclaimed X, snatching the device from Jack and staring at it with power-hungry eyes. "I see you've fixed the main chip," he added.

"I also added a voice control for your convenience," offered Jack timidly.

The most powerful tool ever was in his hands. He could do anything with this horde of monsters, but Professor Wei had always told him to do the right thing. And he would follow his last words.

When Storms Collide

German Swiss International School, Guo, Crystal – 12

The translucent clouds seemed to dance around the sky like a shoal of minute fish, shifting across the vast grey sky like a veil. The storms that had been raging for a fortnight were still spitting mad, growling at every stray piece of ice before devouring it. Although the storm thought itself to be so powerful, it did little to change the bare, harsh, and unforgiving landscape of the tundra.

The only place of peace and warmth was a small cavern situated just over the mountain. There, the snowflakes twirled and whispered little secrets of their travels to those who knew how to listen. But they all knew how to listen, everything created by this world could, except for those who have turned their backs on nature; Bipeds, or as some others named them, humans.

The small cavern was nothing glamorous. Tiny shrubs grew within, shielded from the frost. But the lack of sun prevented them from fully maturing into the size they were meant to be.

CRACK.

An icicle as long as a polar bear crashed down. A quick succession of footsteps ensued, and a tiny head popped out from behind the icicle.

“TEMPEST. GET YOUR TAIL BACK IN HERE NOW!” a booming voice echoed through the cavern. The little creature whose name was Tempest immediately ducked back into the safety of the cavern. A low murmur of conversation later, a trio of the creatures came outside, stretching in the soft snow drifts.

“Tempest, dear, I apologise for yelling at you earlier, but I cannot risk your safety, not after...” Their mother’s expression clouded, but she quickly shook her head, then beckoned to her children and walked around the back to the edge of the ocean.

“I have been observing the waters, and there appears to be a small lap of cod. Paradox, Tempest, do you still remember the fishing technique I taught you a few days ago?” Both sisters nodded, and the mother smiled.

Suddenly, there was a flash of movement in the ocean, and without missing a beat, the mother plunged her head into the water and emerged a few seconds later, triumphant, with a large cod hanging from her jaws. The sisters gaped and Tempest immediately tried to copy her, eyes wide to detect any movement in the waters.

Meanwhile, the mother sliced the cod into three sections, picked the smallest for herself, and prodded the other two to her children.

“You know, when I was still a hatchling, there was a never-ending supply of fish in the ocean. Your grandmother would always bring back heaps of fish, and I would watch her from this very cavern, desperate to learn. But now,” she sighed. “Now the fish have either all been poisoned or left these waters.”

“Finish your meal. I do not know when we will be able to eat again.” The mother turned and slowly walked back to the cavern.

Tempest and Paradox exchanged glances and picked up their pieces of fish and followed their mother back into the cavern. The stories of their ancestors echoed in their minds—tales of lush forests, warm sunlit shores, and abundant fish that once filled the oceans. They had originated in the depths of China, where the lush valleys had thrived. Their kind had flourished, roaming freely, basking in the warmth of the sun. But as humans spread, they took more than their fair share of the world, forcing the dinosaurs to retreat further and further into inhospitable lands.

The cold was harsh, and over generations, they had adapted. Their scales became thicker, and their bodies grew more robust to withstand the icy winds and biting frost. But adaptation could not shield them from the poison that seeped into their waters. The poison the humans had released. The poison that took away Euphoria.

Tempest could still remember her laughter ringing out like music and the sparkle in her eyes. That morning was so beautiful, and she had caught a shimmering herring. It was too late when they realised, and by the time they reached her side, Euphoria was already fading, her once vibrant voice cracking, her eyes losing their spark. Tempest had watched in helpless horror as her beloved sister succumbed to the very waters that had once provided life.

The cavern felt colder now, the shadows creeping in as the sisters finished their meal in silence, but Tempest couldn't shake the feeling of dread crawling up her spine.

As night fell, the storm outside raged even more fiercely, approaching their little cavern, echoing the turmoil within Tempest's heart. She paced the cavern, her thoughts racing. They were cornered, trapped in a world that no longer welcomed them.

As if on cue, a loud crash echoed from outside the cavern, followed by a series of thuds. "What was that?" Paradox asked, her eyes wide with fear.

"Stay close!" their mother commanded, her instincts kicking in. She nudged them behind her, ready to protect her children with her life. The noise grew louder and louder until suddenly, without warning, a group of humans emerged from the storm, their lights cutting through the darkness. They moved with purpose, their eyes scanning the area. In their hands, they held nets and tools that made Tempest's heart race.

"Run!" their mother shouted, but before they could move, the humans advanced. In the chaos, Tempest felt a sharp tug on her tail. She turned to see Paradox being pulled backward, a net ensnaring her small body.

"PARADOX!" Tempest screamed, lunging forward, but her mother grabbed her, pulling her back.

"NO! If they capture us, we will all die!" she hissed. Tempest struggled desperately, but the humans were already retreating, dragging Paradox away.

"We have to save her!" Tempest's voice plea echoed through the cavern, mingling with the howling winds outside. She turned to her mother, tears overflowing.

But her mother's voice was firm.

"There is no *we*, Tempest. *I* alone will go and find her. *You* will stay here." Looking back at Tempest the final time, she left the cavern. Tempest stood there for a few seconds, then felt a fire ignite within her, fueled by rage, fear, and despair.

"All my life... I have been waiting," Tempest's voice trembled as she whispered to herself. "Waiting for food, waiting for storms to pass, for humans to leave. Tonight... I am done waiting."

Did You Have Fun?

German Swiss International School, Jeyarajah, Ella – 13

The thirteen-year-old girl stared out the window at the blur of trees, as they passed, feeling every bump of the gravel road beneath her. They had driven further into the forest earlier, leaving behind the futuristic city she knew. Holly leaned her head against the cool glass and let out a sigh. The dense greenery let in very little sunlight and the shadows loomed around as if trying to hide what was near.

This was true, of course. Until recently, the entire area was thought to be uninhabited, just another random island off the coast of Hong Kong. Holly was one of millions who had seen the flyers and posts that “Our Dinosaurs” had sent out. It was a famous documentary show. Recently they asked for 4 volunteers to join them in “exploring the past”.

To be honest, Holly wasn't the biggest dinosaur geek, but she was a long-time watcher of the show, as her parents and siblings were super keen on it. She signed up for them, and also for something to make her stand out a bit from her peers. She however later regretted this decision and wasn't looking forward to being bored to death by dinosaurs.

The taxi jerked to a halt and the driver got out. Holly hurriedly slung her bag over one shoulder and clambered out.

She observed the scene in front of her with great interest. 3 other kids stood in front of a grey slate building, with three other vehicles behind them. 5 adults stood nearby talking quietly among themselves. A woman with sleek black hair in a plait reaching down to her waist stepped forward.

“Good morning children. My name is Dr Linh and I will be helping through the simulation today. I'm sure we will have lots of fun together” She smiled but it didn't quite reach her eyes. She clapped her hands together and stared at them expectantly. “If you could please follow me inside.”

The others followed behind her, into a well-lit corridor. Holly felt a hand tap her shoulder. A girl with wild red hair and green eyes smiled back.

“Hi I'm Scarlet, who are you?”

“Holly,” she replied warily.

“This is Caiden and Niko.” Holly glanced at the two other boys. Caiden, the oldest out of the 4, waved at her. The other boy stared at a map on the wall, not saying a word.

“Hurry up!” Dr Linh called, from up ahead. The 4 of them quickly made their way into another white room, this one with 4 strange incubation pods in the centre. “We are ready to begin the simulation. I'd like you each to take a survival pack and then get into your pod.”

Holly grabbed a rucksack from the pile and began transferring some of her things into it. Caiden was the first one in the pod, followed by Scarlet. Holly hesitated for a moment, then climbed inside. It was rather cold and cramped, and she resisted the urge to jump back out again. That option disappeared very quickly as two of the researchers quickly shut the lid, and started pressing buttons on a side panel.

“When you arrive in the correct period, you will find sample bags and a camera in your bag. Head north to work your way through the simulation to reach the checkpoint. Make sure to take lots of pictures and samples for our further research.” Dr Linh's voice floated through a speaker in the pod. “Have fun.” The pod went black and there was a shrill beep. Something flashed green and Holly felt her eyelids droop as she fell asleep into a deep sleep.

Deeper and deeper until she opened her eyes to rough brown terrain becoming increasingly and alarmingly close. She hit the ground with a dull thud, distantly aware of 3 other identical thuds around her. Holly groaned and turned over to stare at the bright blue sky. She felt a cool breeze sweep past her and slowly began sitting up. She had to blink twice to fully understand what was around her.

The trees around her were emerald green with large fan-shaped leaves. The berries and fruit nearby glistened in the sunlight streaming through. Flowers bloomed nearby and Holly gaped at the beauty of it.

A sound disrupted her amazement making her spin round. The other children were also climbing to their feet in astonishment.

“...Wow,” Scarlet said, her mouth hanging wide open. “Where are we?”

Holly noticed Niko crouching back to the floor to examine something and a small smile appeared on his face as he glanced around at their surroundings.

“We should be sometime in the Cretaceous period which is uhh.” Caiden trailed off.

“Nearly 150 million years ago,” Niko said, looking towards the others. Holly was slightly surprised he was talking to them but nodded.

There was a rustle in the bushes behind them, and all 4 of them whipped around. “What was that?” Scarlet asked, slowly backing away. A small lizard burst through the leaves rapidly, running on its little two hind legs. It was about 2 feet in size and had a knobby head. “Awwwww,” Scarlet gazed adoringly at the creature. “What is it?”

“A [Micropachycephalosaurus](#),” Niko answered, also focused on it. He was met with three pairs of eyes blinking at him in confusion.

“A tiny thick-headed lizard,” He explained. “It’s Greek.”

“Oh, o-k then,” Caiden said. Scarlet immediately knelt to touch it.

“Don’t, we have no idea where that’s been,” Holly told her. Scarlet grumbled something under her breath and straightened up.

The little dinosaur bounded forward disappearing behind them, through the brushes. Scarlet chased after it, disappearing in a flash of red hair.

“Wait no, *Scarlet*,” Caiden called. He charged after her, Holly and Niko quickly following.

Through the brushes, Scarlet was watching the dino bound up and down the river bank, the water cascading down past them crystal clean. The children stood and watched the [Micropachycephalosaurus](#) play happily. Suddenly, a twig snapped hard from behind them. A dinosaur stood at about 6 feet tall snapping its jaws menacingly.

“Oh my gosh.” Scarlet breathed, staring at the hungry raptor-looking dinosaur in horror.

“I’m guessing that isn’t a herbivore?” Holly directed this at Niko, without taking her eyes off the dinosaur in front of them. “Nope. It looks like some kind of Dromaeosaurus.”

The dinosaur in question lurched forward abruptly and two other Dromaeosaurus appeared. They all circled the tiny [Micropachycephalosaurus](#), who tried to zip through a gap and ended up in a fourth dromaeosaurus’s claws.

Scarlet clapped a hand over her mouth and watched the Dromaeosaurid leave. “That’s horrible!” she cried once they were out of sight. Niko sighed next to her. “It isn’t just black and white Scarlet. Those Dromaeosaurid needed to feed their children.” This kept Scarlet quiet, and they began to head north.

3 hours passed, and the group spotted multiple dinosaurs of all shapes and sizes as they went.

“It’s so much more peaceful here than our time,” Holly said, her eyes tracking the Archaeoceratops herd they had been following for a while. She was beginning to enjoy the experience. Caiden snorted, opening his mouth to comment on how *peaceful* their encounter with the Dromaeosaurid was.

“I get what you mean,” Niko agreed. “The leaves are greener, the water’s cleaner and even the air is fresher here.” As they talked, they still trailed behind the herd.

Without warning, the herd began to scatter, turning and bolting in the opposite direction. “What—” Holly began to ask but was cut off by a loud rumble.

Chaos erupted. Birds flew out of trees and small critters scurried around their feet. In the distance, roars were heard and the water in the river seemed to rise.

The rumbling continued violently, causing the children to cling to one another. “What’s happening now?” Caiden groaned. A mountain close by seemed to shake especially hard.

“Well, uh scientists believe that the mass extinction event that wiped out the dinosaurs here was a—” Niko replied.

“Asteroid?” Holly asked, her knees buckling as she began to lose her grip on Scarlet.

“Actually, no they found dinosaur bones preserved so well that the scientists concluded that they were preserved by *ash*. Think the Chinese cretaceous version of Pompeii.”

Three horrified heads spun round to face him. “What do you mean, *Pompeii*?” Caiden asked, his voice dangerously low. Before Niko could answer, there was a loud bang and ash and rock exploded out of the ‘mountain’.

“Run!”

Holly panted as they tore across the ground, feeling the heat of the ash getting nearer. She stumbled to the ground, tripping on the terrain, distantly aware of the others following. She braced herself for the impact of the dirt floor and instead was met with a soft pillow.

“Welcome back, children.” Dr Linh’s voice was music to Holly’s ears and she slowly sat up from her pod. “Did you have fun?”

Goobye, Georgie

German Swiss International School, Lee, Summer – 12

Dinosaurs, Georgie thought, were a lot like humans.

They walked around, the majority at an excruciatingly slow pace, just like most people did. When Georgie tried to navigate the Mid-Levels escalators during rush hour, with all the people coming back from work, trudging along in not much hurry, she wanted to kick something. Dinosaurs also ate a lot, like the average person. To Georgie, three meals a day plus tea and snacks was far too much food, she could barely hold down lunch and dinner, how could she be expected to eat more than that? Some dinosaurs made careers out of stealing eggs, just like how some people burgled for a living. The same type of dinosaur also ate their friend's corpses. Again, a lot like humans, but not quite literally. Plenty of seemingly innocent members of society waited until their peers were at their weakest to strike. Georgie had experienced that first hand, and it was certainly not pleasant.

Sighing, she turned to another display, her classmates getting further and further away, but she ignored them. Having been reluctant to go on the field trip in the first place, she regretted not faking sick now that she was at the museum. Staring up at an information board on the Sinosauropteryx, she criticised each sentence she read. "The China dragon bird," the brunette scoffed, "Looks more like a red panda ripped off a tree from the uncanniest of valleys." Turning, she found that the crowd of students from her school was almost out of sight, and took leisurely strides, still making sure not to be irritatingly slow. Georgia Dao was a lot of things, but a hypocrite was not one of them.

Just before she caught up with the group, her school-assigned peer counselling mentor tapped her on the shoulder. The dark-eyed girl turned around to face Maryam, tilting her head questioningly. "I saw you looking at the Sinosauropteryx," the redhead smiled softly. Everything about the girl seemed delicate, almost like porcelain; one punch and she would break into tiny little pieces, scattering across the ground in a shower of china.

Nodding in response, Georgie continued on at the same pace, despite the fact that her classmates were now further away. She refused to hasten or slow her pace for anyone. It was a massive roadblock in her path to a healthy social life, but she really couldn't care any less. She had herself, and that was all she needed. The last time Georgie began to think otherwise, she had gotten painfully betrayed, and following that incident, promised to never rely on other people again. "Georgia," Maryam called out, "When are you going to start talking to me? Or to anyone except yourself, for that matter?"

Turning on her heel, Georgie stared her mentor dead in the eye, raising her hands to sign, *When someone gives me good reason to*. Arms crossed, she looked back in the direction of her schoolmates and took a few more strides towards them before she was, irritatingly enough, stopped once again by a light hand on her shoulder; the grip holding her back was so weak Georgie could just barely feel it through her dress shirt and blazer. Wrenching her arm away, she signed over her shoulder, *Don't touch me*. The counsellor had assigned her with the only other person in the school who knew sign language, and it just had to be someone who seemed to have no respect for personal space.

Sighing, Maryam rushed in front of her mentee, blocking her way, "Georgia, come on. Let's talk about the dinosaur you were looking at." Georgie pursed her lips slightly. It wasn't the older girl's first attempt to distract her with small talk to get her to open up, and it nearly offended her. Did her mentor really think she would fall for a well overused trick that hadn't even worked the first time? Irritated, she sighed, shrugging her shoulders in reluctant agreement, *OK. What about the*— Georgie dismissively gestured towards the information board, not bothering to fingerspell out its name, *Also, it's Georgie*. Pleased that she had managed to convince her, Maryam began to speak, pulling a slightly odd face at the last comment, "My older brother actually saw a Sinosauropteryx fossil in person before, out in nature."

Is he an archaeologist?

"He is. He loves his job," the redhead nodded, "I don't think he will be for long, though."

Why not? Georgie did her best to disguise her genuine curiosity, keeping up her perfectly structured poker face. People rarely quit a job they truly cared about without a good reason.

"He was diagnosed with a terminal illness eight years ago, and he's hospitalised right now in critical condition. It causes an unusually early decay of nerve cells in the brain—"

Holding up her hand in a 'wait' gesture, the younger girl interrupted, "Huntington's Disease."

Blinking away the surprise of hearing her speak, Maryam nodded, "They say he doesn't have long to live," she didn't seem too upset, apart from the barely detectable sadness in her tone. She had already accepted her brother's fate, unlike how Georgie had been unable to accept her parents'.

“My parents had Huntington’s.”

“Oh.”

There was a stretch of awkward silence, settling over the two like fog in San Francisco. Georgie had only been to the city once for a couple of days with her family, and they hadn’t even gotten to see the Golden Gate Bridge because her brother Evan was sick for three out of the five days they were there, but she had seen the amounts of fog that came in on the average day. Maryam cleared her throat, “Anyways. My brother really liked the *Sinosauropteryx*. It was the first feathered species of dinosaurs humans discovered that weren’t directly related to birds. It’s also the first dinosaur that scientists are sure about the colour pattern of. It was special.”

“Humans tend to get a lot of things wrong,” Georgie pointed out.

“True. But that’s beside the point. The team he usually works with and a museum curator is putting together an exhibition about them and various other Chinese dinosaurs, but mainly the *Sinosauropteryx*. They’re going to have the skeleton display in the centre of the room be a memorial of sorts to my brother. They’re naming it after him.”

“Oh,” Georgie didn’t know what to say, “What’s his name?”

“George. We called him Georgie. He refused to be called anything else by friends and family,” Maryam jogged to catch up with the group, but Georgie stayed where she was. ‘*Georgie*.’ Just like her. Turning to the information board, she examined the creature again, tilting her head slightly. “Goodbye, Georgie 1.0.” After one last look over her shoulder, she took off after the redhead, trudging on at her preferred pace.

The New Tale of the 'China Rex'

Harrow International School Beijing, Cheng, Shiyan Jason – 12

“This is CCTV reporting here. Recently in the Liaoning province, we made a great discovery. We have uncovered a fossil that is clearly a feathered dinosaur,” the reporter spoke excitedly. “Now in Liaoning, we welcome any person of any age to excavate for fossils. Who will be the next one to find a new species of dinosaur and gain the grand prize of RMB 4,000,000? Will you be the next great archeologist?”

“Grandpa! Did you hear that? Can we go to Liaoning to hunt for fossils this summer?” Tomas pleaded to Grandpa. Tomas dreamed of becoming the best fossil hunter in the world.

“Since it is summer holiday, we might be able to negotiate with your mother to let us go and be there for a month,” answered Grandpa. Thinking about the plans, Tomas’s heart rose with eagerness.

Grandpa talked with Mom and announced, “Mom said it’s okay as long as you are responsible for yourself and finish your summer homework.”

On their plane ride, Tomas was very excited to explore and experience his dream of being an archeologist. The night before, Tomas and Grandpa had read 74 websites abouts fossil hunting and the essential skills and equipment for excavation. Mom and Dad had spoken to Tomas that they wished him luck to win the grand prize.

Once they arrived in Liaoning, they first went to the hotel to freshen up and immediately headed to the camp where they registered and got their ID as Team 16. They walked all around the camp, seeing professional fossil hunters with all kinds of expensive electronic devices. Then Tomas looked at himself with only two shovels, three brushes, a bundle of ropes, and a cheap sonar. After seeing the competition with such professional equipment, he felt pathetic and weak. The fire of hope in his heart diminished and he began to doubt himself.

Tomas exclaimed, “Grandpa, how could we possibly win over those people, they…… they look so professional! I’m only a kid, I don’t think that I can beat them…”

Grandpa looked down at him, patting his back, “Don’t lose hope in yourself. With all our heart and hard work, and maybe some luck too, who knows who would win? Get some rest and we’ll start bright and early.”

Listening to Grandpa’s advice, Tomas began to imagine himself walking up to the stage trying to stay cool as he receives the four-million-yuan grand prize. He fantasized about being a hero and accepting many interviews. They tried to have a good night’s sleep, but as Grandpa slept soundly, Tomas was planning where to go for the fossil hunt.

The next morning Tomas took his grandpa to the area away from the other hunters, a plot of land approximately 50 square meters. They start at one side and began to prod their shovels into the dirt as they dug and dug. At first, Tomas was energetic for the hunt but as the time went on and the sun began to rise, he became tired and felt miserable. Sweaty and tired, his hopes for finding fossils wavered. He tried his best and worked harder as Grandpa encouraged him to not give up. Then, out of nowhere, he felt he hit something hard in the soil. A wave of excitement came over him as he frantically dug for the mystery item. When he finally saw what it was, his heart sank. It was just a random piece of rubbish.

“I thought this was going to be a piece of cake, but it is not easy at all!” Tomas yelled angrily as he threw the trash away. After the long day of work, Grandpa decided that they should try some local cuisine.

At dinner, trying to comfort Tomas and lighten the mood, Grandpa said in a lively way, “If you already feel down after the first day, how can you persist for the next 59?”

“This is not going the way I predicted.” Tomas answered while he shoveled all the food on his plate into his mouth. “It is very unfair to a kid like me!”

“Eat up kid! Life is not fair. God helps people that help themselves,” Grandpa laughed.

The next day, Tomas tried harder, searching in a different plot. Suddenly, someone yelled. “I found a fossil!” All the people in this campground raced to see if it was real. Right in the ground was a 4-meter-long fossil. It had a sharp mouth, a small wing and a long tail. The fossil looked fierce and scary.

“It looks like a dragon, but it also resembles a bird,” thought Tomas.

As Grandpa began to laugh, somebody asked, “What’s so funny?”

“Mr. Yan, that is not a new species, it’s just a *Sinosauropteryx*!” responded Grandpa, still laughing, “You nearly freaked us out!”

After Grandpa's comment, everyone started to agree, joining in and laughing, "It's just a China dragon bird, Mr. Yan."

Mr. Yan became really embarrassed. His eyes looked as if they were going to explode, and his face was as red as a red pepper. He finally couldn't stand the embarrassing comments and stomped away while swearing.

At least this incident made Tomas sure about one thing. He thought to himself, "There are fossils here, possibly including more than one new species yet for me and Grandpa to discover."

After the very first month, Tomas gained useful life lessons, learning to be patient, be optimistic, never to give up, trying your best, and to take risks. Now everything Tomas just give it a try.

"Today is going to be extra sunny, so be sure to drink water if you are working outdoors!" reported the weather forecast through the radio.

"Grandpa, it's time for work," said Tomas as he shot up from his cozy bed. They arrived at the campsite at 7 AM while it was still cool and they dug, using their sonar to hover over the ground. Being careful, Tomas made sure not to miss any spots and worked like a cleaning robot doing its repetitive duty again and again. After an hour of sweeping with the sonar, Tomas heard a loud beep.

"Grandpa, I think I have something here. Come quick!" Tomas shouted to Grandpa and waved his arms up and down.

"Whoa, this is huge, this is a probably a fossil! Let's start digging!" Grandpa answered excitedly.

By lunch, Tomas and Grandpa could see the massive skull of the ancient creature, and by sunset they had uncovered the huge torso of the cool creature of the past.

Late in the night, Grandpa and Tomas could not stop thinking about the fossil. "What species does it belong to? Is it a new one or it is just an already discovered one?"

That night, they camped by the site and stayed up checking websites for any similar fossils to the one they had discovered.

The next day, after dawn, they started work again. This time filled with hope that it would be something new. Tomas gently brushed away the dust on the bone like Picasso doing his masterpiece, not damaging the fragile bones. In the other hand, Grandpa was doing the opposite job, busily using the shovel to break down the stones and dirt around the fossil.

After three days and nights, the huge fossil was finally pulled out of the ground with the length of 6 meters and the width of 3 meters. The fossil was a predator with big back legs, long and sharp teeth, and the huge tail. It looked very similar to a T-Rex, but it was not since it was smaller yet already a grown adult.

"We did it Grandpa! We are going down in history!" exclaimed Tomas as he stood admiring their hard work.

The news of their discovery spread like wildfire. CCTV sent profession archaeologists and scientists to see if it was really a new species. All day, the scientists wandered around the fossil trying to estimate its age and comparing the fossil with similar species. At last, they concluded, this fossil was nothing they have seen before. They asked if they could take the fossil back to Beijing for more in-depth studies.

Grandpa replied, "Tomas and I will pass the fossil to you, but only after we receive the grand prize."

The very next day, on the stage was the proud Tomas and his humble Grandpa. They both received the grand prize and the great honor of finding a new species.

At the end of the ceremony, the TV journalists asked Tomas, "If you could, what would name will the fossil?"

After some thought, he replied confidently, "I will name the fossil the CHINA REX, because we discovered it in China, and the Rex stands for huge skeleton."

Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Harrow International School Beijing, Sun, Yuhua – 12

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, called avancé κοινότητα (French: avancé (advanced) Greek: κοινότητα (community)).

They were before us, before the time when dinosaurs roamed Earth, just after the first cells formed within a primordial soup of complex, carbon-rich chemical compounds, which was 4 billion years ago. Just like their name, the avancé κοινότητα was over civilized, they lived in a 7D galaxy where the people can change themselves into everything they want, with advanced science, so advanced that it seemed easy (like proving $1+1=2$ which is not easy at all and it need quit a lot of proving and factorizing), owned everything and is immortal under some circumstances. They can take control of the left side of the universe, also the black hole. One breathtaking fact is that they have every element in the periodic table of elements, even the ones that are extremely, incredibly rare, for example, elements that can only display for millisecond before vanishing or ones that are deadly poisonous.

It's always been their dream to go and explore the very right side of the universe and see if there is living things or anything that's beneficial to them. That is not easy to achieve, they spent on other things, and nearly forgot them, but one day the Receiver of Memory told Madame president that one memory was about to be forgotten. Madame president remembered it and sent some citizens to spread the news out. Things are not easy.....They must plan and build a spaceship to teleportation themselves to there, and there is not one spaceship suitable. It took them 4.3 hours to only build a spaceship and calculate equations of their routes, which is the longest time they used to build spaceship. Well from a normal human's point of view this is the shortest time to build a spaceship and is impossible. But the time difference between the very right and very left of the universe have a time difference of 10 million years, so, 4.3 hours is incredibly long to them.

They chose the 5 smartest scientists to go, called κόσμος (Cosmos in Greek) , Πολώνιο (Polonium in Greek), καλιφόρνιο (Californium in Greek), Ογκάνεσον (Oganesson in Greek), υδράργυρος (Mercury in Greek). They were the oldest and wisest scientists.

“Madame president, are you coming”, asked Ογκάνεσον. “No, I need to meet with the governments to talk about letting the citizens experience 5D world, now, off you go and hopefully you can find something alive in Mercury.” And off they go.

Things were not easy, the scientists were stuck above a blue planet, with a few bits of white, which is definitely not υδράργυρος's namesake mercury. Because the other planets were either brown, red, or dark blue, this special planet is the odd one out. Time is going fast, the scientists decide to explore the blue planet seeing that it's so special.

They wanted a challenge, which is to walk into the planet without modifying the spaceship. “It's so weird, looks as if we are now in a 3D world” groaned κόσμος, everyone in avancé κοινότητα agreed that 1D to 4D space is the most boring place in the entire universe. “But let's prove them wrong and go back with a living thing or two so different that no one will say 3D world is boring”, exclaimed καλιφόρνιο, who was the most positive one.

So, they went. The blue planet was beautiful, there were tons and tons of water, but with lots of 11.17 in it, it is now NaCl, the chemical formula of salt. They found a small creature with long legs and an elongated neck, another way of describing it would be comparing it to an ostrich or ornithomimus. After experimenting with these extraordinary creatures, they found out they were herbivorous, with a body well adapted for running and evade predators. The length is approximately 20 feet and the weight is approximately 1 ton. The scientists were super impressed the Chaoyangsaurus (a name they think is suitable) because first, they were living, and secondly, they have features and functions the avancé κοινότητα doesn't know. The scientists can predict the future, they have a good feeling that the place where now is occupied by water will be a land where they can trade. The name will be called China because these people will be good at making china ornaments. Now continue with the Chaoyangsaurus, they have a toothless beak for feeding on vegetation. It is the most amazing, weird, awesome, breathtaking dinosaur they've ever seen. But the other gruesome/amazing creatures is about to arrive, and this is going to be the most adventurous day in their life, both for the scientists and the dinosaurs.

The next thing after they put the dinosaur into the safe deposit box, and another mark made by these extraordinary creatures were found. This time is different, a creature with a neck so long and a little body came. The length of it is 79 feet, and height approximately 26 feet, it is rare to see a living thing so big and tall, because all the citizens have a height of 7–8 feet. Still based on the future, the fossils of long neck will be found in Mamingxi, a place in Sichuan province. It will be called Mamenchisaurus because some people thought its Mamexi instead of Mamingxi, it will

belong to the sauropods so combining them together is Mamenchisaurus. They are herbivorous, that's why their necks are so long, it's for reaching the leaves on trees. The two types of dinosaurs were all herbivorous, but it's not like that, there are brutal scenes of carnivorous dinosaurs biting and eating other dinosaurs, it's just now the scientists don't know. Its hind legs were longer than the front legs and its skull was box-shaped, based on research, it would drink over 100 gallons of water a day and eat about 1,150 pounds of vegetation per day. It's funny that they don't chew, they just tore the tips off branches or stripped the leaves from trees with their teeth and swallow the greens whole. They minimized one of the Mamenchisaurus and then went looking for more dinosaurs.

They want to go back a few million years so they went into the Middle Jurassic period, where a dinosaur is eating another one, this is not a beautiful scene. It is very bloody and uncivilized. After some research, the predator is called Monolophosaurus, it means "single-crested lizard", referring to its single crest on its skull. They are carnivorous that measures up to 20 feet in length and weighed 500kg. It belongs to the theropod dinosaur and is closely related to Sinraptor, another large theropod. It had lots of sharp, serrated teeth and a big, skinny head. It possibly hunted defensive herbivores such as [Tuojiangosaurus](#). This is an interesting creature, they minimized this one and went out looking for one last dinosaur before leaving.

This time they went into the Cretaceous period. This dinosaur's name is very funny, it's called a Psittacosaurus, meaning "parrot lizard" in Greek. The Psittacosaurus is about 6.5 feet long, and weighs up to 44 pounds. Some species were slightly smaller and some were bigger (based on the future). It has a series of long bristle-like structures projecting out of its back end and along its tail. This ceratopsian lived in large family groups, and may have burrowed underground for warmth and protection (the scientists didn't see it, they saw what the humans wrote on their books in the future). Why is it called the "parrot lizard"? It is because the Psittacosaurus have a beak like a parrot, they are herbivorous, this provided a sharp surface for cutting plant materials. Their teeth are self-sharpening and would be useful for slicing through tough materials, however they had no chewing. Instead, they have gastroliths in their stomach for grinding food. This is the last dinosaur they minimized, and went out of the magic world/kingdom.

After exploring Earth, they agreed that a 3D world is a fun place and is not boring at all, in fact an exciting place. They rebuilt a spaceship and teleported themselves to their own planet. The citizens and Madame president were all extremely impressed by what they found on Earth (since they didn't go on Mercury). Now there's not only the advanced **κοινότητα** but also dinosaurs, they cloned them and made different types of it. Everyone has a pet dinosaur and some even have two! They love what they found and is thinking of going to other galaxies to import more creatures, so their planet is not boring.

Peace In Nothing

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chan, Charlotte – 12

The ground screeched, the rocky shaking due to the impact. The sky was as dark as charcoal, the fire engulfing the once grassy plains. The ringing in his ears refused to quiet down, his eyes barely being able to differentiate the shades of browns and blacks that now surround him. Staring made no difference, the colours were all muddy.

The creature blinked. Good that he could still move his feathered eyelids. He could hardly stand onto his two scaly feet, his miniature claws barely being able to dig into the hard ground. He was nothing compared to it—small, scrawny, and frail. The goo from his mother's eggs were dripping down his reddish-orange feathers, once unique but now it seemed to blend in with his surroundings.

The creature cried out, his voice cracking as he wailed in desperation. Tears gushed down his ashy cheeks, thinking, what happened to the bright pigmented colours and why is only ash and darkness left? What happened to the blossoming flowers upon the trees and why are they shrivelled and fallen to the hard soil?

And where is everyone?

Once upon a not-too-long-ago time, the rest of them would huddle here and play, frolicking in the lush grass and thriving in the sunshine. But it seemed to all be gone. Now, there's just a myriad of ashy carcasses lying on the ground. The flames scorched the scaly flesh, tearing through the bones.

Nothing is left.

The creature helplessly fell into the soil, watching his once flourishing home be torn apart and become overrun of flames, mercilessly tearing down his forest home. The only thing he could feel was pain. The ashes have overrun his nostrils, the ringing in his ears couldn't back down, and the near blindness in his left eye wasn't helping much. His twisted leg felt numb, his body flailing like a rag doll in a pathetic attempt to get up. His claws chipping as they tried to dig into the soil, his tiny arms reaching for anything strong enough to hold his weight. Hissing and screeching, yearning for an end to his misery.

He unraveled his tail from beneath him, hooking it onto a branch and barely being able to stand up on his claws. He took step by step, his tail barely being able to lift up and keep him balanced. He had to find someone, something that had survived. Digging his claws into the hard ground, his tiny body aching after each and every step, moving through the ashes and rock.

He walked and walked for hours, his remaining feathers drooping down. He went to the peaceful oasis that his mother once took him—clear, fresh, and clean. It was in the middle of nowhere though, where the threat of all the big, scary dinosaurs was constantly looming. It didn't matter anymore though—nothing was left. But hopefully not the oasis.

Shuffling through the crumbling leaves, he followed along his hazy vision. It had gotten better, but his dying thirst was making everything seem wrong. His body was shaking, his legs wobbling, using all of his strength just to keep him up on his scaly feet. He looked up, and saw the untouched oasis.

The leaves and plants crumbled, laying dead next to the peaceful waters, the ashes dissolving in the crystal clear waters, turning it a shade of blue grey. He smiled a crooked little smile, his jaw hurting from when he fell onto the hard ground. There's hope, he thought. He collapsed, sitting next to the water, dipping his tiny feathered arms into the water, staring into his reflection. His beak was covered in dust, his once orange feathers nearly completely stripped off his body, claws chipped and dry.

Maybe there is hope, he thought. After all, *something* managed to survive. A tear rolled down his cheek, plopping into the waters he sat above. Maybe one day.

The Last Echoes of Christmas

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chan, Valarie – 13

In a vibrant classroom filled with the buzzing movement of scribbling students, students strive to be the best in the class. The teacher's voice sliced through the air like a knife.

“5 minutes left,” he announced.

The word echoed ominously, resonating like an eerie orchestral note, filling the room with a sort of impending dread. Outside, in a dance room, slender dancers twirled and leaped and spun, their expressions meek yet synchronized. Each graceful like swans gliding across a serene lake, each attempting to be the most elegant of all. Meanwhile, in a bustling office building, workers hurried about, their voices a low murmur drowned out by a domineering boss's barking orders, each one trying to outwork their peers. This—is the world we live in, bursting with competition and passion. This – is what humanity granted us with.

A Chinese idiom states, “The strong eats the weak,”. This summarizes the harsh realities of the world: then and now, that might makes right, that the powerful dominate those most vulnerable amongst us, that to the mightiest always go the spoils. In Southern China, as dinosaurs once roamed, their heavy footsteps beat a rhythm that echoes through the ages—a stark reminder of the balance between power and humility, echoed today in the rhythm of the hum of hardworking students and tireless businessmen.

Imagine a world thick and humid, where the air is alive with the sounds of exotic creatures. Instead of tall skyscrapers and honking cars, soft grass and colossal trees dominate the landscape, their leaves whispering secrets of the ancient past. This is the Jurassic Era, where dinosaurs ruled the Earth, a period that ignited the imaginations of scientists, writers, and adventurers.

In this ancient kingdom, Sam the T-rex roared mightily, his powerful foot stomping the earthy ground. Clad in a metaphorical suit—a cane in one hand and heavy leather shoes on his feet—Sam embodied authority. The cane didn't carry him; he carried the cane, a symbol of his dominance. The dinosaurs scurried to avoid his gaze, knowing that a single squeal would be their last. Sam's roar echoed through the valleys like thunder, a sound that sent shivers down the spines of even the largest creatures. He ruled with an iron fist, boasting about his place at the top of the food chain, and for Sam, that was how it always was and always would be.

However, the winds of change began to stir one Christmas. A newcomer named Hide, a swift and cunning velociraptor from far Eastern Europe, had arrived to escape from his own tyrant. He constantly wore an arrogant expression which matched his swift momentum. Hide quickly began to question Sam's authority, gathering a pride of dinosaurs who were tired of living in fear. The air grew thick with tension as the two alphas faced off. Their eyes glared in a fierce battle and the kingdom buzzed with anxious whispers about the imminent conflict.

In the midst of this turmoil, a tiny dinosaur, Tiny Tom, a gentle herbivore with a heart full of hope, stepped forward with timidity. “Please, it's Christmas, don't fight!” he warbled, his small voice trembling. “It's Christmas...”

The onlookers fell silent, their eyes darting between the two titans, as though keen observers at the Wimbledon Championship, the final point in play. All hoped desperately for a peaceful resolution. But Sam, blinded by his anger and pride, scoffed at Tiny Tom's plea. With one swift wave of his powerful jaws, he slashed the little dinosaur, spraying the grass with blood. A hollow gasp rang through the watching crowd.

The sun set, and so too the somber atmosphere died, taking the final remnants of Christmas. The crimson sun cast a pall over the kingdom. Innocent dinosaurs, once filled with fear, now felt sorrow ripple through their hearts, the visceral pain of Tiny Tom's loss casting an unbearable shadow over the gathering of friends, and many began to turn away. The battlefield, once teeming with life, now lay silent, punctuated only by the distant cries of mourning. In the wake of this tragedy, the once-mighty T-rex and the ambitious velociraptor found themselves in a world filled with loss and regret and emptiness. Without a crowd, there would be no victor, and without humility, the kingdom began to crumble, and extinction loomed ever closer.

Sam and Hide stood amidst the ruins of what was once a thriving kingdom, the ashes of a once flourishing civilization, realizing too late that their struggle for dominance, for supremacy, for ultimate power and control had broken the bonds of the community. The vibrant landscape that had once flourished with life now lay desolate and solemn. The moral of their tale lingered in the air: conflict will always exist, but true strength, true courage, lies in humility. As the last echoes of their roars faded into the ruins, the dinosaur's fossils transitioned to embody the balance between power and compassion, a symbol of the precarity of obsessive greed. In their quest for dominance, they had left behind a world that would never again echo with the sounds of their vibrant lives.

As we reflect on the past, it is apparent that conflict will always be an indelible part of our existence, inextricably linked to who we are. However, humanity can learn from the dinosaurs' mistakes. "The strong eats the weak" In a world where we can be anything, let us be the strong ones who are courageous and kind. Instead of allowing fear to fester and power struggles to sway our actions, we can choose to act with fellowship, with a sense of unity that embraces our differences, that unshackles limiting prejudices. In this modern age, Tiny Tom is a symbol of the power of collaboration, that when we unite, we are capable of mighty deeds, thereby turning the echoes of the dinosaur age into a harmonious melody of human potential.

Under The Amber Sun

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Cheah, Christopher Zu Zheng – 13

Day Zero

“The final rockets depart in fifteen minutes. Asteroid impact in twenty minutes.” A monotone voice threads through verdant forests and deserted cities, earth’s final countdown echoing like a fading heartbeat.

Hundreds of shuttles rise into the sky like metal tears streaming upwards from a dying earth. Decades of preparation had forged humanity’s path to Mars, a chance for survival before Day Zero, the day the asteroid would shatter their world.

The asteroid’s blaze is a glint of sapphire, beautiful, devastating blue; its radiance spills through cloud veils, casting phantoms of pink fire that dance and writhe against the golden-dappled canvas above.

James watches the sunset, dreams of tomorrow disintegrating into dust.

An unlikely companion born from amber tombs and scientific miracles – a dinosaur, presses close. Her eyes are filled with love as warm as summer sunshine, filled with despair as deep as the oceans.

The words of the space engineers flood his mind: “There’s no room for non-human creatures. This mission is for humanity’s survival.”

“I have to go,” he whispers softly to the dinosaur. The tears that fall from his eyes are crystalline, catching the asteroid’s light like fallen constellations.

Two memories ambush him.

Two Years Before Day Zero

The hospital lights hummed overhead, casting their sterile glow across the polished floors. James felt that familiar hollowness in his chest.

He pushed open the door.

“James?”

Her voice was barely a whisper, but it was warm, warm like the sun on a cold day, filled with as much love as it needed to be.

“James, is this you?”

Her eyes were unfocused, as grey as winter twilight, smouldering like the embers of a once-blazing star.

“James. You’re here,” she said softly, tears tracing delicate paths down her weathered cheeks.

He sat down next to her. Her skin ruptured on the softest of touches, pale, cold. Almost lifeless. Almost gone.

“Mum?” His voice cracked, drowned in his shallow breath. “You’re going to be okay, right?”

She smiled sadly. “Not quite.”

James squeezed her hand gently, feeling the delicate bones beneath her skin.

Stay here. Stay with me.

“Your father’s been waiting for me,” she whispered, her gaze drifting towards the window where the evening sky painted itself in gentle purples and golds. “In heaven.”

His parents – the ones that birthed living dinosaurs from amber tombs, who taught the world to dance with dinosaurs, were going to disappear.

“Please, mum.” Tears cascaded down his face, a waterfall of sorrow. “Don’t leave me.”

“I never will,” she whispered. “Love knows no bounds; we’re all inter-connected in nature and time. When you feel lost, afraid, I’ll be there – *in the painted skies, above the mountains, under the amber sun.* Always beside you, always catching you, my son.”

Her words floated like dandelions in the space between them, carrying promises to eternity.

One Year Before Day Zero

He figured this was the best way to die – on a bridge, with rivers of warm sunlight spilling across the vast ocean below, with the world stretching right before his very eyes.

A beautiful world.

A cruel world.

The vast ocean beckoned below with azure fingers, each wave whispering his mother’s name, a symphony of absence that told him they could only be reunited – in death.

You promised you'd be here.

The universe held its breath. Time crystallised into amber moments, each second dripping with the weight of everything he lost. His tears, when they fell, were molten gold in the dying light – little stars of grief that spiralled down, down into the abyss that awaited him.

He stepped off the bridge.

Falling was a peaceful sensation. The waters seemed to pull him in, promising the solace that death had whispered so many times before.

The descent stirred a memory within him, a hope to feel happy one last time – the warmth of his mother's arms, her soft presence cradling his fragile being.

He closed his eyes, waiting for the cold embrace of water.

It never came.

Instead, he felt heat – living, primal heat. He felt talons, firm, yet impossibly gentle, wrap around his body. Its warmth seeped into his, like sunlight through stained glass, painting his despair in new colours, painting the world in shades of promise.

A dinosaur had caught him.

His mother's absence still echoed, but it mingled with something else, something that tasted like tomorrow. Like living. For the first time since his world shattered, his heart beat not with despair, but with hope.

He wanted to live. Oh God, how he wanted to live.

"Rockets depart in one minute. Asteroid impact in six minutes," the same monotone voice announces.

The boarding bridge extends to the shuttle in front of him, a stark metallic walkway suspended in the skies amidst an endless sea of clouds.

He is the last one to board the shuttle, the last human on Earth.

Walking slowly towards the rocket, he gazes at the deserted city, lush forests, towering mountains – the earth seems beautiful in its final moments. He hears the calling of the dinosaur that he had grown to love, the creature that saved his life; she flies around the bridge, eyes glimmering with longing.

James stands in front of the door leading to the rocket, a step away from a chance to live.

He takes that step.

66 Million Years After Day Zero. Year 2030 A.D.

The ancient hall in Zhucheng, China's dinosaur city, breathes history, its air thick with anticipation and excited whispers.

Xu Xing, a famous palaeontologist known for naming more dinosaur species than any other person, steps onto the stage.

"Welcome," his voice ripples across the hushed space, "to a journey through time. I have a special guest."

Elon Musk strides forward. "After landing on Mars, we found unexpected traces of fossil fuels, evidence of previous life on the red planet. A new focus for The Boring Company arose: to dig not just for infrastructure, but for history."

Xu continues. "Together, we've built thousands of large drills with mapping technology to discover subterranean fossils, rendering them as holograms. Though designed for Mars, we're testing them here in Shandong province, where we've only dug down to 20 million years ago. Today, as the world watches our livestream, we'll dig deeper, down to 66 million years ago."

Rounds of applause.

The first hologram appears – a small bird from 25 million years ago. "A *Sinornithosaurus* descendant," Xu breathes, watching as digital proof of avian evolution hovers before his eyes.

Shortly after, a second hologram arises. "Here, from 45 million years ago, are feathered flying dinosaurs. They descended from bird dinosaurs that survived the asteroid collision by taking to the skies, finding refuge in the mountains as the world burned below."

As the drills descend, a matrix of beams scans across the period from 66 million years ago.

Suddenly, gasps ripple through the hall, whispers erupting then falling into a breathless, stunned silence.

An impossible vision materializes: an amber tomb containing two figures that should have never existed together – a modern looking boy, and beside him, a dinosaur resembling a shoenobill stork.

"This cannot be," Xu stammers. "Humans appeared a few hundred thousand years ago, not millions." He readjusts the controls, hoping to find sense in this inexplicable scene.

As the hologram shimmers, pixels coalescing into a revolving render in high-definition colour, the worldwide audience sees a smiling boy embracing a beautiful bird dinosaur, arms and wings intertwined around each other.

“Five minutes to asteroid impact,” the voice announces.

He steps not into the shuttle, but off the bridge, on to thin air.

Gravity claims him like an old friend; he whistles, the sound piercing through the wind’s soft melody.

He closes his eyes. The fall doesn’t feel like surrender – it feels like coming home.

His mother’s presence wraps around him, not a dream or a wish, but as real as starlight, as tangible as the air rushing past.

When he opens his eyes, he’s no longer falling, but riding above the dinosaur; her eyes are filled with love, warm like the setting sun, as bright as the embers of a blazing star. She clicks, a sound that echoes in his bones, his mother’s voice crystallised in prehistoric song.

I’ve always been with you, James.

The asteroid enters the horizon, fiery red drowning cerulean blue until it shatters slowly; thousands of trailing fragments crack the sky like broken glass, engulfing the earth in a parade of azure light. The sun’s rays dance with the asteroid’s approach, painting the world in impossible colours: crimson bleeding into gold, violet swirling with navy, nature’s last masterpiece spiralling across the canvas of oblivion.

And as the asteroid crashes onto the surface of the earth, exploding into a million different hues, lighting up the land and seas into a tsunami of fire, of everything beautiful and terrible, they soar into *the painted skies, above the mountains, under the amber sun.*

Sinosaur

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Choi, Valarie – 13

I got out of bed and the floorboard creaks as my oversized, scaly feet sinks into the floor. I heave my body out of my room and into the bathroom. I open my eyes and look in the mirror. My neck can barely fit, my skin is dull and scaly, my heavy tail whips across the bathroom floor.

I'm a dinosaur.

A Chinese dinosaur.

I took my school Uniform, and I slipped on the white blouse, followed by my dark plaid red necktie that matches my undersized skirt. I grabbed my skirt, put one leg in, then the other. It lay there right on my thigh, way too short to be worn outside. I tried to pull it as low as possible and stepped into my tiny black loafers.

I drag my tail out the door, down the stairs and sit down at my dining table—my chest heavy as the strong smell of garlic fumes out the kitchen. It's another one of those breakfasts—either a pork-packed bun, fried dumplings, or a plate of a salty combination, maybe a radish cake or a bowl of spring rolls.

Not a chance I would ever eat any of those.

Before my parents could notice; I snatched my boulder from a bag and snuck out the front door, down a flight of stairs into the bustling, loud road. As I walk down the sidewalk, I could feel the non-existent stares of the shopkeepers I've walked by, the imaginary laughs of my all-American schoolmates and the horrified look in my parent's eyes as I tell them,

"I hate living here. I want to go to a place where I don't have to feel so different and so attention drawing."

But I didn't say a word. I was supposed to be happy for my dad for finding such a nice job in New York City, not complaining about being abnormal. Whenever I return to China, I turn back into a regular girl. A girl with jet black hair that doesn't feel the need to hide, dye it or curl it, just to blend in a little bit more. Sure, here in the US, there are some girls like me, Chinese. However, they all seem so confident, so popular and so American—maybe like a Velociraptor or a triceratops.

I wasn't necessarily bad at English. I was quite good at it. I had no problem catching up in lessons. It was my accent that was the problem. If I got a dollar every time I had to repeat a grammar-perfect sentence because they didn't understand it, I'd be the richest girl in New York. Whenever I opened my mouth, it felt like a roar. Whenever I was told to read aloud, I could hear the classmates mumbling and giggling. I was always told to sit down after about halfway, and never got asked again. After that, I just sat on my chair silently without speaking, hoping my classmates wouldn't suddenly remember my presence and started snickering.

Breaktime was my least favorite part of the day, where all the other kids run off into their own respective friendship circles, while I'm just the little dinosaur girl who looms over the football field, watching people's every movement wishing I could laugh as loud as them. I'll always feel different—my skin just a little bit too green, my neck far too long, and my tail will constantly be a part of me. What if it's forever? I generously bit into my red apple, wishing I hadn't thrown away my homecooked fried rice. I can hear the cars miles away, the hustle and bustle of downtown, the chatter amongst the concrete walls of the many buildings. It's such a big city, such a big world.

"So, what if it's forever? Why am I trying so hard to be something I'm not? Do people even care?"

I stare into my bathroom mirror when I get home from school. I have never seen this much of myself: the sharp teeth hidden inside my jaw, the bright orange hues on my feathered—not scaled—skin, the weight on my chest and my tail fading away.

I'm a dinosaur.

My tail can whip pounds, my roar allows me to speak up louder than ever, and my strength is nothing but a reminder of my identity. I'm not just a dinosaur. I'm a fossil, a memoir of my roots. I can feel the heaviness of my heart sinking into my feet, illuminating the tangled feelings I have harbored for so long. I'm still not a girl. I'm still a dinosaur, but for once I don't have to feel so strange anymore.

I snatched my boulder from a bag and snuck out the front door, down a flight of stairs into the bustling, loud road, but I have never felt lighter. As I walk down the sidewalk, I felt the non-existent stares of the shopkeepers I've walked by, the imaginary laughs of my all-American schoolmates, and I silently thank myself for never listening to them.

If I lived in a place where I feel so different and so attention drawing, I might as well roar.

The New Tales of Chinese Dinosaurs

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Li, Favian – 11

I spread my demonic wings across the sky as I soared over the desert wasteland, China, this is when I realised how much damage my species has done. We have grown too powerful, too strong for Earth to handle. I remember, when the Earth had lush emerald fields, only reduced to ashes by our battles and need for food. The tranquillity only reduced to chaos and rubble. We razed the Earth with our various abilities and decimated the homes of animals, now in flames. I know what I must do.

I sped up, tracking a nearby dinosaur, I swooped down but time seemed to slow, the T-Rex turned, I couldn't move, I was stuck in time. Was this his ability? Panic clawed at my heart, the T-Rex was approaching, he was getting closer, closer and closer, his jaws spread as wide as a crocodile. It was over...

My vision blurred into a dark shade of red, I felt bloodthirsty. I went into a rampage as a murderous intent took over me. I bit into the T-Rex's neck, flames erupting from the jaws. The flames seeped into his throat and BOOM. He imploded. The delicious, no disgusting smell of blood filled the air, what was that uncontrollable thirst? My head was splitting into two, I had an excruciating headache, my body seemed to force me to feast on the dinosaur's blood-soaked corpse. I knew I couldn't, I knew it was wrong, but something inside of me was urging me to eat it. Uncontrollably, I feasted on the remains of the T-Rex, and something snapped in me. Maybe this wasn't so wrong after all, all we are doing is ruining the Earth after all, and besides, this is delicious.

Suddenly, my body was consumed in a blood-coloured aura, my thirst for blood grew stronger and stronger, a malicious feeling washed over me. I could feel my power growing. I realised I could now control time. "Is it the more dinosaurs I eat, the more powers I get?" I said to myself. I need power, more, more and more, to restore Earth to its peaceful original form.

I swooped into the air to find my next prey; I slowed time all around me to maximise my speed. I left China, my birthplace, to go to the domain of the pterodactyls, Germany. I erupted in flames as I approached the nearby group pterodactyls. They were fast, they swarmed me, blasting sonic booms at me, it was ear-splitting, I felt like my head was about to implode.

I was covered in a shade of red as a smell of blood and murderous intent erupted from my body, I roared, forcing the pterodactyls back and with lightning speed clawed one down, stopped time and used my flames to eliminate the rest, they shrieked in pain as the heat melted their flesh, I took the body of the last pterodactyl using my claws and ripped his head off. Its power coursed through my veins, almost electrifying. As I absorbed the last of the pterodactyl's power, something strange stirred in me, a feeling I hadn't experienced before. It was a darkness, not the kind that drove me to thirst for blood, but one that whispered doubts, regrets, and memories of lives lost by my hand. I shook it off, but my mind felt sluggish, heavy, as if something had planted roots in my thoughts.

Then, I felt it—another presence, lurking deep within. I looked around and saw him: a dinosaur unlike any I had encountered before. His scales shimmered, and his eyes glowed with an unnatural light. He was massive, but his power was like nothing I'd felt. I could sense him, reaching into my thoughts, planting seeds of despair.

"Who... what are you?" I demanded. "How are you in my mind?"

"What you are doing is wrong, you have caused too much bloodshed and despair, I am the last of the dinosaurs, you have almost wiped us all out."

A wave of self-doubt washed over me. I remembered the lush landscapes, the untouched forests, and the emerald fields I once soared over, have I really brought these things back? My eyes went bloodshot, my hands were covered in blood as my body seemed to weigh tenfold with grief.

"Enough!" I roared, trying to shake his influence. "We need to restore what we destroyed. I am gaining powers for that reason, to bring back what once was."

"But at what cost? You won't be able to bring back us, you may be able to bring back the lush fields," the dinosaur asked, his words sinking into my mind, entwining with my memories and regrets. "You've made excuses to justify every death. Yet, you still think you are different from the mindless beasts that ravaged this land?"

My heart thudded. I wanted to refute him, to cast out his words, but it was as if he'd seized my very will to fight. My memories came flooding back—the T-Rex, the pterodactyls, each life snuffed out, each power stolen. I realized he'd planted these regrets deep within me, unearthing my own doubts and amplifying them to the point of unbearable clarity.

I was powerless, and he knew it. He crept closer, his eyes locked onto mine, feeding on my anguish, his teeth glinting with satisfaction.

“It’s too late for you. You can never undo what’s been done.”

But a spark ignited in my mind—a flicker of defiance. I had one final power left: control over time. With a last surge of strength, I forced my mind clear, pushing back against his influence.

I roared and lunged forward, tearing into him with all my remaining power, flames erupting from my jaws as I clamped down on his neck. His influence clawed at me, but I held strong, feeding the fire until he could no longer withstand it. His body crumbled, disintegrating into ashes.

I had won, but his final words echoed in my mind. As I gazed out over the ruined landscape, I felt the weight of his thoughts linger in my mind. How many lives had I taken? What good have I done? The flame within me flickered, as doubt crept into the very core of my being. In a final act of regret, I let myself fall from the sky, my wings folding as I plummeted toward the Earth.

Mountains and Mysteries

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lui-Schwille, Maia – 12

Astrid had always felt a magnetic pull towards the mountains. Growing up in a small town on the coast, she'd spent countless hours exploring the crags and cliffs, often with a tattered old climbing guidebook in hand. Everyday, she found a new way, struggled up a different path, but the spectacular view made all the effort worth it. With light brown hair that danced in the wind and sea green eyes that sparkled with determination, she was a self-taught climber, learning the ropes through trial and error, passion and perseverance.

Ever since she could talk, the folk stories and traveller's legends of Yunnan's Earth Forest captivated her – an otherworldly landscape known for its towering limestone pillars and unique rock formations. The prospect excited her, not just the climb itself, but for the sense of adventure. She had also heard of strange fossils being found, dinosaur fossils in fact, and that made the wait all the more unbearable. Her parents had always been supportive, and now they were allowing her to go all the way to Yunnan, that was some serious trust they had in Astrid. All they'd asked of her was to come back in one piece! At seventeen, she already began preparing: studying maps, watching documentaries, and meticulously packing her gear, swearing she would return, full of stories and adventures.

Finally, on the morning of her eighteenth birthday, she set out for Yuanmou, heart racing with excitement. As she arrived, the sight took her breath away. The Earth Forest spread out before her, a labyrinth of stone. The sun bathed the landscape in golden light, the air buzzed with the sounds of chirping birds and rustling leaves. It was a dream come true for anyone.

Astrid began her ascent with a mix of caution and exhilaration. She navigated the first few hundred feet with ease, her fingers finding purchase on the limestone. The view above was stunning, with twisting spires resembling ancient, petrified trees. As she scaled the rough rocks, she felt a deep connection to the earth beneath her and the sky above.

Hours passed, and she decided to take a break. Perched precariously on a narrow ledge, she took a sip of water and looked over the vast expanse. As she scanned the horizon, something caught her gaze – a glimmering object embedded in the rock face below. Amber, larger than any seen before, catching the sunlight, emitting a soft orange glow.

Curiosity took hold of her, she carefully descended to examine the amber closer. It was stuck in a stone crevice, with a wide, flat surface facing out. Strangely, there seemed to be nothing there, but Astrid felt the need to stay near it. So, she set up camp on a ridge and began cooking dinner.

The sun started to set, casting a warm glow of coral reds; wisteria purples; vermilion oranges; marigold yellow and so much more. This place was truly incredible. While she was preparing for bed, something tugged at her mind, like something was missing. It kept her up past dusk, so she grabbed her climbing belt and torch, and stepped outside. Nothing looked amiss, but Astrid couldn't shake the feeling, so, to clear her mind, she decided to do some climbing.

Somehow, she ended back up at the amber, but this time as she approached, she caught a glimpse of something inside and gasped. As if by magic, the once empty amber had a creature in it, a dinosaur! Perfectly preserved – curled up, small feathered, and seemingly frozen in time. It was unlike any she'd seen on TV: this creature was no bigger than a Great Dane. Its vibrant colours were visible through the resin, and its wide, unblinking stare appeared to follow her.

Astrid's heart raced. She was witnessing something extraordinary, and as she leaned closer, putting a hand on the rock, she felt a small pulse emanating from the amber. It was alive. *How?* Her mind spun with questions, this dinosaur had been here for millions of years, yet no had ever found it. *Why me? Out of all the people, why did I find you?* She thought, breath quickening; she was torn between excitement and fear. What had she stumbled across?

Suddenly, a cracking sound reverberated through the air. The amber began to fracture, sending shards flying. Astrid carefully backed away, instincts kicking in. The beast stirred, breaking free of its ancient prison. It stretched upwards, revealing a magnificent plumage that shimmered in the dim light. The colour shifted every few seconds, from deep midnight blues, to bright sea green. The dinosaur towered over her, much larger than what she'd been expecting. It blinked at her and for a moment, they locked eyes – human and reptile, separated by millions of years, yet united by this bizarre coincidence.

Astrid felt an unusual bond forming. She couldn't help but wonder if it had been waiting for someone to set it free. He let out a soft chirp, like a greeting. The world around faded away and all that mattered was the beautiful creature before her.

Reality snapped back like a boomerang as she realised, she could be in danger. The creature could be frightened or aggressive, and she was alone in an isolated forest. She took another step back, trying to gauge its demeanour. To her relief, it seemed more curious than hostile, tilting its head at her. Astrid knew she needed to move, so she turned and clambered over the ledge, hoping it would follow. Glancing back, she saw him climbing gracefully, leaping up beside her. He had strong, muscled legs, with a long tail and claws for grip.

"Okay little guy," she whispered, in awe and disbelief, "we're going to figure this out together."

With her heart pounding in her throat, Astrid started up the spires again, this time with the dinosaur keeping pace easily. It was so surreal – mountaineering alongside a creature that had roamed Earth millions of years ago. They reached a higher vantage point overlooking the sprawling forest, shining in the moonlight. The view was magnificent, but Astrid's mind was on her companion.

As they paused to catch their breath, Astrid took a moment to gather her thoughts. What to do with a dinosaur? There wasn't exactly a step-by-step tutorial, so she was on her own. She couldn't leave it there; the world needed to know. But what if they hurt him? It had been trapped for so long and now had a chance at freedom.

"We can't stay here forever," she said softly, "but where can I go?"

She decided to sleep on it, so she headed back to her tent, and immediately hopping onto her mattress, promptly falling asleep. Waking up at dawn, she changed, ate some food, and went outside. The dinosaur was impatiently waiting, eyes glinting as if to say, "what in the world took you so long?"

"Somebody was up early," she laughed. With an irritated dino watching her, she packed up camp and set off down the towers. His colour dulled and he seemed to flicker in and out of sight in the sun, threatening to disappear. As they climbed down, his form became clearer in the shade. *No wonder I couldn't see him earlier, he's transparent in the day.*

Finally, they reached the base of the limestone cliffs, the soft pastel sunrise painting the sky in a gorgeous array of colours: soft pastels, like delicate peach, blush pink, robin's egg blue, cerulean, accented by wisps of golden-yellow clouds. Astrid knew she would return – if only to protect her secret.

Together, they stepped through the brightening sky and into the canopied jungle, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead. But this was just the beginning.

Everlasting

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Mo, Charlotte – 12

The day I died was unlike any other day. The sky had been a curious shade of grey, and the morose, pale grey clouds hid the normally radiant sun from view, and casted a tenebrous shadow on the land below. The river meandered lazily down the stretch of grass, as if unbothered by anything else. The mountain in the distance was shrouded in a mysterious mist; the scenery seemed to all be dull yet holding precious secrets. I reckoned that the day would be extremely mundane and ordinary, that it would be insignificant, and I certainly didn't believe that that lugubrious day would exist in my memories forever. Little did I know that the most dramatic event that happened to the whole dinosaur species, not just myself, would occur on that unusual day.

When the rumbling started, we all presumed that we would be safe, that we would be far enough away to experience the assumed earthquake without any mishaps. After all, we were in Lu Feng Valley, and the rumbling was so minimal that we believed it started on the other side of the world! We waited for the vibrating to stop, but it endured. It didn't just endure, it strengthened. Even then we didn't consider the possibility that this was more than an earthquake. We were foolish, and ignorant to the truth. Only when thick clumps of ash started to fall from the grey sky, we realised the grim truth: that it wasn't an ordinary earthquake, that it wasn't even an earthquake at all. Upon realising, some dinosaurs (including myself) rushed to tell the pterodactyls of the danger, and that they should migrate to faraway land for their safety. I witnessed about a dozen pterodactyls take flight while most dismissed us as fools. To this day, I cannot be sure if I had helped them survive a few more hours, or perhaps sent them to their deaths.

Meanwhile, dinosaurs, huge and tiny, powerful and powerless, tried to find shelter under trees, or in the caves. Alas, it was a futile attempt. The once-dependable trees betrayed us dinosaurs, and swayed so fast we were afraid it would crash to the ash-covered grass at once. The once-mighty caves seemed to vibrate under our bleary gaze (the ash made it hard to see), and it seemed no longer a safe haven. Even the grass under our feet seemed detrimental; the grass's blades, once a gentle, pleasant tickle, seemed to be made of sharp, prickly spikes, intent to harm us. Lu Feng Valley, our home, was suddenly transformed into a world of furore, tumult and chaos.

The shuddering of the ground created new, thin fissures beneath our feet; they were like incisions made by a knife, and just as deathly. Some unlucky creatures fell through these sudden holes, their shrill screams echoing long after their premature death, screams which still haunt me today. The ash fell heavier and in larger quantities, burying the miniature species within. Soon the air was heavy with the shrieks and muffled cries of the fallen and scared; the sound created a discordant cacophony which rang persistently in my ears. Everywhere, dinosaurs were dying undeserved, innocent deaths, creatures were mourning for the deceased, dinosaurs were hysterical with terror. A tidal wave of fear and grief roared in our ears, drowning our all of our coherent, rational thoughts, all of our sanity and logic, flooded by illogic and confusion. It was discord of the worse kind, the kind which obliterated all of our astuteness, the astuteness which we desperately needed.

Ash started to fall in massive clusters, and the temperature began to rise drastically. Dinosaurs started to stumble clumsily into the steaming river –which was now cloudy and tainted with ash– as the temperature began to become stifling, far too hot to abide. The boiling landscape radiated heat; it sent shifting waves of shimmering air above. I wonder now, that had I traversed into the river too, would I have had a few more hours of life, but a few more hours suffering in this relentless, unbearable heat? But perhaps the dinosaurs in the river had died a worse death than mine?

The heat began to rapidly rise, and dinosaurs started to drop like flies. Even the strongest, the most robust, started to succumb to death, collapsing to the ground helplessly. I knew I too would soon be amongst them, a lone soul with smoldering skeleton of a body. *'Death will be such a relief,'* I remember my feverish mind speaking. *'The absence of this torrid, immoral heat beat upon my body would be such an alleviation. If only death would come quicker and sweep me into his welcoming arms.'*

I did not moan, I did not cry out, I did not shed tears of neither sorrow nor regret. I did not admit defeat to death, for death to me was a relief, a blessing. Instead, I embraced death with pleasure, and let my soul float high above the ash-stained clouds, and let myself witness the torture to the tormented Lu Feng Valley, my home, below. My home which once flourished with succulent fruits and fragrant flowers, but now ravaged with corpses lying on the land, ravaged with despair and melancholy. My home seemed torn apart; it wasn't the home I knew and loved; but in the years that followed, it healed, wildlife and vegetation returning, but not any dinosaurs. It greatly saddened me to think, that no-one would know about our existence, that there was no-one to realise what a unique species we were and the disaster that befell us. I was wrong.

Millions of years later, I watched as my pearly-white fossils, coated in a heavy layer of grime, were excavated by human paleontologists. I know that I was wrong now, as humans are not only aware that we dinosaurs existed, but they are working hard to restore our skeletal bodies, treating them like fragile, precious masterpieces of art and displaying them in museums for the public to marvel at. My home, Lu Feng Valley, is now a famous museum, where it hosts a variety of fossils –including mine– which humans have patiently found over the years.

There is still one thing that I have yet to learn, despite over millions of years watching the world evolve and change. I still do not understand that why humans are captivated by the discovery of fossils. Perhaps in another few million years, some other creature will be unearthing humans' bones and fossils and will cherish it as much as humans cherished mine.

Foreshadowing

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Su, Christina – 13

It's over.

The *tick tock* of the oscillating pendulum on the old grandfather clock echoed in my head, each interval drawing closer and closer to doom. Blinding white lights drowned out the surroundings of the room I was confined in; sleep was a paradise I yearned to experience, yet it was merely an intangible dream. My hands were drenched in sweat, hopelessly gripping the edges of the rope wrapped around my torso like a python. It's the year 2080. The world war between robots and humanity is long gone. Humans had succumbed to the very weapon we created with our own hands. We were fools. We deserved this.

As the dreadful *tick tock* of the pendulum beat echoed in my head, my vision began to swarm, tinnitus piercing a hole through my eardrums until...

Four minutes till midnight.

Fifty years ago...

"Look, it's a sauropod fossil!" My son beamed at me eagerly, with glimmers of excitement shining in his eyes, reflected on the frame of his glasses. My heart bloomed with pride, as I wrapped my arm around him and flung him onto my shoulders. I had made history; I had discovered the first fossil to ever be found in Hong Kong. All of it, me. The sunlight reflecting on the edges of the glass panels that protected the fossil illuminated the room in gold, and for a moment I felt utterly satisfied. All the years of arduous work as a historian and palaeontologist had finally paid off, I was standing upon a pillar in the centre of the world. I *am* the centre of the world.

Tick tock. Three minutes.

1,800 years ago...

"You loathsome thing! How dare they call you a man!" hissed Lü Bu, one of the most feared warlords during the Three Kingdoms' period. He paced up and down the courtroom in a tight strut, casually twirling his spear. China was in the darkest period it had ever been in, the greatest power struggle of a millennia. Dong Zhuo, who was tied to the rusted bars of a dungeon cell, foolishly blurted, "I am your future emperor, you must bow down to me!" Upon hearing this, Lü Bu turned swiftly to face the tyrannical leader, knelt down to his eye level and jeered threateningly, "I once called you my father." In a trice, Lü Bu whipped his spear into Dong Zhuo's stomach, effortlessly slicing apart the thick layers of fat protecting his organs. Blood sprouted from his intestines, flooding the drains of the dungeons. As a gasping Dong Zhuo was on the cusp of death, Lü Bu turned to face the cruel authoritarian one last time, before casually tossing a box of lit matches onto his writhing figure and walking away, in an unremorseful stride.

Tick tock. Two minutes.

140 million years ago...

A substantial tremor rumbled through the land; its epicentre located in the core of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Super volcano was a ticking thermonuclear bomb of destruction, ready to bring an end to the dinosaur dystopia. As the months went by, the waves that used to brush upon the South China coastline began retreating in fear, replaced by murky, apathetic clouds of fog. Tremulous ripples of earthquakes and sudden jolts scattered throughout the land; the spectre of doom was looming upon the late dinosaurs.

The ground ruptured. A grey blanket of impenetrable smoke fell over the vast seas and skies, and the ongoing dinosaur war ceded to a stalemate; after millennia of war there was finally peace, but at what cost? Eternal famine consumed the land, all that was left of the surroundings were ashes of what once were the most dominant empires. Many dinosaur species went extinct, marking the end of the great Jurassic period. The species who survived the explosion were forced to rebuild and adapt to their new surroundings, eventually reinhabiting the site of the explosion. Hong Kong's geographical landscape was completely transformed, with new islands composed of distinctive volcanic rocks, and a Sauropod's head resting upon the top of a famous mountain, now known as Lion's Rock. This event marked the end of the Jurassic, the beginning of the Cretaceous period. The final age of the dinosaurs.

Tick tock. One minute

200 million years ago, during the Jurassic War

200 million years ago, during the Jurassic Period, from the depths of treacherous valleys to the heights of altitudinous mountains roamed fearsome creatures called dinosaurs. These tremendous creatures owned the seas and the skies, no other feeble species would ever be able to surpass their dominance. The dinosaurs were ruled by a great leader; the Dinocephalosaurus Orientalis, which was the last of the Chinese Dragons species. Although the lands were long at peace, little did the dinosaurs know, an inevitable conflict was beginning to stir deep in the trenches of China.

The dinosaur warlords began to part ways. On a fateful day, the Dinocephalosaurus Orientalis was assassinated by the Sauropod warlord, in a desperate act of revenge. The dinosaurs were infuriated; the last descendant of the historic Chinese Dragons had been assassinated by a Sauropod, a mere herbivore. The Sauropod was assassinated, meeting the same fate as the tyrannical warlord Dong Zhuo. Its body was lit into flames, sparking its death, and the beginning of the dinosaurs' demise. Just like how the Han Empire fell to ashes, the once peaceful world cascaded into an abundance of civil war for millions of years. The Sauropods body was buried deep into the land surrounding the South China coastline, and as the years passed by, its internal pressure gradually built up like a bomb, evolving into a super volcano.

Tick. Tock. Five seconds.

???

The pendulum struck its final beat. Midnight. In a single, overwhelming moment, my senses abruptly returned, knocking me to the floor. As I attempted to blindly grope onto the padded white walls, I could distinctly perceive church bells from afar beginning to chime. It all made sense now. The dinosaurs, or apex predators of their time, were trapped in eternal conflict over greed. A once peaceful civilization had ended up in the inescapable arms of war, simply because their leaders prioritized their own best wishes over what was right for their nation. Once disaster struck, they became too weak to adapt, eventually succumbing to newer species. We were merely their replacement; we were always destined for demise. As the church bells rang for the third and final time, the last few nukes buried deep within the former territory of the USSR went off simultaneously. The sonorous echo of life gradually faded, symbolizing the end of the human age, and the start of a new group of apex predators, Artificial Intelligence.

As Karl Marx once said: "History always repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce."

Bones of a Moral

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Sze, Amber – 12

The fifteenth day of the eight months of the lunar calendar.

Mid-autumn festival.

She could hear the noises of delight, escaping her neighbours' houses: cries of happiness, infants singing with joy, and the laughter that, by the time it reached her ears, morphed into a scratching, scraping screech. Outside her neighbour's door, lanterns hung like second stars, humming with brightness and rabbit stickers, radiant things, were gingerly pressed onto the glass. Those animal eyes seemed to stalk her.

Li felt a strange sensation as laughter seeped through her door. Her neighbours must be enjoying their mooncakes, sitting in the moonlight with friends and family, passing around the egg custard filled delicacies and sharing stories. They were savouring the sweet, like honey, and salty, like tears, reconnecting with relatives they hadn't seen for years.

She peered at her own mooncake, the lone store-bought piece that seemed to blur with the rest of the thousand grey shades in her home.

Where was her family?

She got up, leaving the house in an unexplainable anger.

Perhaps at work it would be better.

And Li barely looked back to acknowledge the uneaten mooncake that seemed more desolate than ever, having only itself and... itself, to keep itself company.

The office was empty; brim-filled with books, field notes, microscopes, brushes, chisels, hammers, computers, specimens on display.

Often, she pondered as she stared into the hollow eyes of the showcased fossils, drifting into emptiness for hours. Could dinosaurs get lonely too? The thought was ridiculous, yet wondered – as lonely as she was?

"Lonely?" Li had asked the fossils, her words had come out in sharp, short puffs, hoarse, barely escaping her lips.

Like clockwork, she would recognise the absurdity of the situation: the fossils were dead.

Everything was dead.

Li saw her boss.

And other things, she wanted them dead.

"Dr Chan," she responded curtly.

Dr Chan ignored her unappreciated assistant, like silently scolding a child.

Li felt her insides recoil; Dr Chan was lonely too.

"Of course," she whispered, the words tasted like a sour, rotten apple.

Li turned but stopped at the fossil. Her hands brushed against the cold surface of the fossil before she fully realised it. She warmed it with her breath, and, for a moment, was frozen with enchantment.

Bones. Skull. Teeth.

The very absence of a body, brain, and heart.

That content face, as if all its needs were satisfied.

Li looked at the fossil with not pity, but envy.

Why couldn't her life be so simple? Why couldn't it just be a clutter of inanimate bones, instead of a web, spun with extravagant delicate silk, that always created intricate chaos?

On the fossil, were two dinosaurs, microraptors, tails entwined with each other; one with their head tipped to appreciate the sky, and another, hunched with eyes on the ground.

Li studied it, for a long moment, and closed her eyes, before she forced them open. "Your name is Thankful," she invented, tapping softly on the sky-gazing raptor. "And you..." her voice dropped, "you're Scornful."

Li imagined, dreaming, with pieces clattering together, the puzzle unravelling, its layers falling away to reveal the story.

Li felt words start to spill, and spin, a song, a dance, a play, no – a story.

The story of Thankful and Scornful:

Once upon a time, he saw...

His eyes opened for the first time, and he saw...

He saw the warmth of his mother's breath, the sky that yawned above, and the Pteranodon that plummeted through the air. He saw the emerald leaves, a contrast to the cobalt-coloured lake. He saw Dromaeosaurus, Sinornithosaurus, and Microraptors, his own kind: Four wings that could rival the speed of the comets themselves,

with feathers that could be mistaken as daggers, soaring through the treetops, leaving a gash of wind behind. His colours were sunkissed azure, and moonkissed dark stygian, like a smiling shadow with eyes.

His teeth ached to snap and devour, and his eyes too, wanting to steal every picturesque memory and keep them, forever.

The world was beautiful.

It was magnificent.

It was heavenly.

And he was grateful.

“You will be Thankful.” mother nuzzled him with affection.

He was thankful.

He *is* Thankful.

Long ago, in a dark time...

So dark, she couldn't see the sky...

Her eyes opened for the first time, and she saw...

She saw the dim leaves that hooked like claws trying to choke her, she saw the dirt that made her itch, and the pterosaurs that circled the skies, searching for hatchlings like her to murder. She heard the grim hisses from her father, which held the same mood to the shades that blanketed her nest. She looked around, it was her and her father, and the rotten stench of corpses that slithered through. She looked at herself and instinctively sneered with disgust: Stupid feathers, Stupid wings! Stupid claws, stupid teeth! She was the colour of a blossom, a *stupid* blossom. She was pink, and she glowed, like the *stupid* colour of the *stupid* sunset.

Her teeth yearned to tear something apart, and her eyes were a glare, warning dinosaurs to stay away.

The world was ugly.

It was foul.

It was grotesque.

“Name yourself!” Father spat out, turning to leave into the darkness.

She was scornful.

She *is* Scornful.

Thankful waited patiently as his family ate. They had swooped down from the thickets, ambushing the prey with a flurry of claws, teeth and the sting of sharp feathers. Belly full, he withdrew from the crowd silently.

He was grateful for his pack that hunted for him!

Then he threw out his ebony feathers and slipped away, scaling a tree before flinging himself into the air, his four wings flushed out as he glided through the maze of trees and the pockets of sunshine that came from above.

Scornful was hungry.

She felt her bones showing through her shrivelled body, and the undernourished feathers that, even though were still *stupidly* pink, they were also flimsily weak. She hadn't eaten in days.

She hated her kin; they were *stupid* idiots that let her starve!

Scornful flew, the hunger was venom and poison, eating into her, and both killing her, as she skimmed the blackened forest floor for prey.

There! Thankful lit up when he saw a parade of large dragonflies.

Stupid insects! Scornful snarled at the sight of the dragonflies but it was better than nothing.

Thankful almost paused in mid-flight, seeing another microraptor stranger, and attempted to give a friendly smile.

Gah! Another microraptor! Scornful felt her jaw tightened.

Thankful got to the swarm of dragonflies first, seizing one, before smoothly landing on a branch.

Scornful seethed as the dragonflies vanished with the arrival of Microraptor, then turned to land on its branch, a new plan stalking into her mind.

He dropped the prey into his claws and spoke. “I'm Thankful. I come in peace.”

“I'm Scornful, and give me that piece of prey, now!” She took a step forward threateningly.

Thankful was stunned. “I—”

Scornful tore the prey from his talons. “I deserve that! You made all the other dragonflies flee.” and dove away with a growl.

Feeling pity for starving Scornful, he chased her down, cornering her on the ground. “I’m sorry if I have caused a disturbance and I guess you are right, you need the prey more.”

She was confused at first. Then she remembered— ah —she remembered how *stupid* the world was. “Scram.”

“...”

“Scram!”

“Look!”

Then, a thunderous roar came, like the grumble of mother nature unleashing her anger amongst the forest. It came, again, louder, it screamed, and it shrieked, the trees uprooted, and the adamant winds tore from their tender state and spat out a storm.

All was so sudden, that within the chaos, Thankful and Scornful instinctively pressed themselves against each other, wings over each other, a small sphere of feathers against the wind.

“The sky is so beautiful.” Thankful shouted through the havoc, allowing himself to look up.

“The sky? A *stupid* storm is going to kill us!” Scornful yelled.

“A beautiful storm.” Thankful breathed.

“Hmp.”

“...Do you tend to see things negatively?”

“...”

“Well... The storm *is* beautiful.”

“I think it is ugly.”

“Maybe it is because of its colour: gray.”

“I guess.”

“Yet, isn’t the ferociousness of the storm beautiful?”

“Yes... Like me.”

“Something ugly, is always pulchritudinous on the inside.”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“And I guess, now that my life is ending... maybe the world isn’t *that* stupid, afterall. *Maybe*.”
Then, a bolt of light came— striking the two microraptors, Thankful and Scornful.

Li blinked, focusing back to reality from her imagination and turned to Dr Chan. “I’m going back to my house.” Li thought about Thankful and Scornful and how, through today had started out unfortunate, she could make it better, “I want to celebrate the Mid–Autumn Festival.”

“With whom?”

“Want to join?” Li ventured.

Both gave a grin as they exited the laboratory.

The Exile

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tam, Jacelyn – 13

This is day 127 of my exile. I've been confined in the hold of the Odessa III for the past week, growing more restless with each passing hour. Every day I wake up to the same glittering sunrise bursting out over the waves, filtering through the singular porthole. We're supposed to arrive at the place the Elders call 'Paradise' soon; no one has ever made it back from the obscure isle. I'm unsure as to what lies ahead in the coming days but know that I'll never forget you. I must tell you something. I...

A flash of light— I'm instantly slammed against the door and slump to the floor, crimson ink flowing down the side of my face like molten copper. My mouth is dry, my breathing scattered and erratic with my heart ramming inside its cage like a hurricane trapped inside a bottle of fragile glass. Another massive wave hits, rattling the ship, and as I struggle to get up, adrenaline courses through my body, something new and unknown thrumming in my veins.

As the strange sensations in my body fade and my hazy vision slowly refocuses, I glimpse the sky above crawling with creatures made from the darkest pits of hell, thunderous clouds swarming the inky darkness as black as obsidian night.

In my wake, I notice the door hanging slightly ajar after the impact of my body hitting it. My right hand reaches for the door tentatively, but I hesitate, frozen temporarily in fear, before I realise that I would preferably not like to die in this hellhole of room.

Swiftly and surely, I make my way out of the room and up the stairs. The deck is a blur of frantic movement with people scrambling to find shelter or trying to fend themselves from vicious attacks from scaly and serpent-like creatures. People are in disarray; stumbling across lifeless bodies whilst shouting orders lost to the beating wind through the roar and thunder of savages' pillaging.

The creatures themselves are wicked to the core, showing no mercy to whomever faces the brutality of their attacks. There are some with gleaming black scales and piercing golden eyes cutting like an arrow straight to your heart. They have razor-sharp teeth, smeared red with the blood of their enemies. Some have large, magnificent wings displayed to make cowards tremble in fear, while monsters in the water have their fins lined with sharp flints attempting to sink the ship.

As I watch in desperation at the scene unfolding around me, I'm overcome with nausea with bile rising up my throat. Trickle of sweat run down my back while my face scrunches up in excruciating agony. Those strange sensations come back to me, vibrating throughout my body.

One of the hellish demons from the inferno of the Underworld stalk towards me, ready to make the kill, but as our eyes meet, it hesitates. As if sensing what was going on in my body it looks at me, almost sympathetically. Without a word of notice, I'm seized into the claws of this creature, and it begins to fly away. I struggle to fight my way out of the beast's talons yanking and trying to free myself from its grasp, but to no avail. As if sensing my discomfort, the creature loosens its touch slightly but not giving me enough room to break free. I scream, kick and thrash against its grip but no one hears me. No one sees me.

We move further and further away from the ship before the speck on the edge of the horizon shoots up in flames and sinks down towards the bottomless sea. The chaos that once was is silenced by the sea, instilled by a blanket draped over the once roaring flames of their voices.

Feeling weary and drowsy, I succumb to sound of my heartbeat, pounding and strong, amongst the tenderness of my fear. Everything goes dark.

...

A wave laps gently at my feet, cool and tranquil. Sand is at my fingertips, soft and pristine white. My eyes flicker open, suddenly aware of every single movement and heightened tension in my body. My body feels so much more powerful and... alive.

As I take in my surroundings, I take note of the now clear skies, a cerulean blue matching the clear aquamarine water of the ocean waves. I stand on the shore of the beach, the wind ruffling my hair and breezing past me into the mouth of a cave behind me. It leads me on, flowing towards that direction. With no clue as to where I was, or where the creature disappeared to, I cautiously enter the cool, damp space. Crystals adorn the walls with their sparkling light

whilst overgrown plants hang from the ceiling, tendrils of their branches and leaves framing around me. Further in the chamber, I notice a faint glow and a humming energy surrounding the cave. As I proceed forwards, the scent of fresh water fills my nostrils, crisp and clean. A mist envelops me, cool to the touch, before a cascade of water splashes against my skin, the droplets dancing underneath a beam of sunlight coming from the other side.

Emerging from the waterfall, rays of light pour through an open ceiling like liquid gold, filling the entire enclosure with warmth. I'm met with a cacophony of sounds, from the buzzing of insects, the patter of hooves and the roar of magnificent creatures; melodies and harmonies threading through each other to create a spine-chilling symphony, singing a tale of forgotten old within this utopia. With vivid-coloured feathers, flamboyant manes, and iridescent wings, these creatures' graceful movements and free-natured spirits make you feel as if they've been lifted from the pages of ancient myths and legends or the carefully thought-out brushstrokes of a masterful artist. The feeling of nature is all around me, from the vibrant plant life and earthy smell of the hearth to the majestic creatures soaring freely through an open sky.

I want to be free; I want to explore this world waiting just for me, beyond any limit, any boundary that tries to push me back. As I relish my memories, past and present, I prepare myself to let go, to surrender myself to something new and exciting which awaits me.

Dear Xia,

I've found a place much further and better than anything I've ever known my whole life. I'm no longer forced to follow their rules and live in fear of their hushed society like a prisoner, instead I can be whomever I want, whenever I want.

I miss you dearly and want you here, beside me, to experience the next chapter of our lives. Wherever you are, I hope you find happiness and know that you too can escape from their solitary confines and experience a life of your own. Don't be afraid. I have every faith in you. I have faith in the both of us that we'll be able to find each other again. Until we meet again.

*Yours truly,
Your exiled but free friend*

...

And as I let go of what once was, I embrace the future with open arms, knowing that I will live with no more regrets.

This is what paradise feels like. This is home.

The Jaded Dragon

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Yan, Theo – 14

In the heart of ancient China, where mountains kissed the sky and rivers flowed like silver threads, tales of magnificent creatures echoed through the ages. These weren't just any creatures; they were the dinosaurs; mighty beings that roamed the land long after the great cataclysms had passed. Deep within the dense bamboo forests and sprawling plains, the dinosaurs thrived, hidden from the eyes of the world, yet woven into the fabric of Chinese lore. People only saw small glimpses of these creatures, yet they are one of the main stories that are told. The great Dragon.

The villagers of a small settlement at the foot of the Great Wall spoke in hushed tones about the "Jade Dragon," named for their shimmering scales that glistened like precious stones in the sunlight. They were guardians of the earth, believed to be the protectors of balance and harmony. The most admired among them was a colossal giant named Longwei, whose long neck reached the treetops, allowing him to feast on the most succulent leaves. He was said to be wise, often guiding lost souls back to safety with his gentle steps.

One fateful year, a great drought swept across the land. The rivers shrank, and the earth cracked under the heat of the relentless sun. The villagers prayed to the spirits of nature, seeking guidance and assistance. In their dreams, the villagers were visited by a great bird that soared through the skies, whispering secrets of the past. The winged creature spoke of a hidden valley, lush and vibrant, where the waters flowed freely, and the dinosaurs thrived. But to reach it, they would need to face the challenges of treacherous mountains and ancient guardians. Emboldened by the vision, a young girl named Mei decided to lead a group of villagers on a quest to find this hidden valley. Mei was known for her bravery and her deep connection to nature, often seen wandering the forests, listening to the whispers of the wind. Accompanied by her best friend, a skilled crafter named Jiao, and an elder named Master Chen, they went on their journey.

They climbed the rugged mountains, they heard the distant roars of the dinosaurs, echoing like thunder in the valleys below. The air was thick with anticipation as they traversed rocky paths and dense underbrush. Finally, after days of travel, they stumbled upon a breathtaking sight: the hidden valley, where vibrant flora blossomed, and the sound of rushing water filled the air. In this paradise, it was said that the dinosaurs roamed freely. But there was no sign of anything. A huge head came looking down on them. Longwei approached the group, his massive form casting a shadow over them. Mei stepped forward, her heart pounding but her spirit unwavering. She spoke of the drought and the plight of her people, asking for Longwei's help.

Longwei listened intently and then nodded solemnly. "The balance of nature must be restored," he rumbled, his voice deep like rolling gravel. "We work together with us, for you and us are connected." In a remarkable alliance, the villagers and dinosaurs worked side by side. The villagers used their knowledge of the land to create irrigation systems, guiding the waters from the valley to their parched fields. The dinosaurs, in turn, helped clear paths through the forest, creating channels for water to flow more easily.

As the seasons changed, the fruits of their labour blossomed. The valley flourished, and soon, the villagers returned home, bringing water and life back to their fields. In gratitude, they honoured the dinosaurs in their stories and rituals, ensuring that the legends of the Jade Dragon would live on for generations.

Years passed, and the bond between humans and dinosaurs deepened. The ancient tales of Longwei became part of the cultural heritage of China, a reminder of the harmony that could be achieved when different beings worked together for a common cause. And so, in the quiet corners of the village, around flickering fires, children listened intently as elders recounted the stories of the Jade Dinosaurs, the guardians of the earth who taught them the importance of respect, collaboration, and the enduring connection between all living things. The legend of the now we know dinosaurs became a symbol of hope and unity, a testament to the power of nature and the spirit of resilience that lay within the hearts of those who dared to dream.

A Glimpse of the Past; A Paleontologist's Quest

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Yu, Violet – 12

As I step through the pungent, lumpy and moist earthy matter that... seems to be mud, every squelch I hear I can be a pleasing sign, signifying a step closer to our goal. We hope to find the preserved remains of the magnificent creature called dinosaurs. The noise is celebratory, bringing a shuddering yet comforting sound to our ears. My team of paleontologists trails behind me, giving me motivation to go forward; I will never let them down. The gleaming sun blurs our eyesight, forcing us to squint against its brightness. I will stay positive in the face of our challenges for my team.

The land shifts beneath our knees, then our ankles, and finally to the bottoms of our feet as we trudge along, following the sun, while the luminous moon and serene stars rise from the depths of the Earth. The forest surrounds us, its ancient trees whispering secrets through rustling leaves. Each step feels heavy with purpose; we are on the brink of a discovery that has beckoned us through time.

Hours pass, the sun inching toward the horizon, casting long shadows that stretch like fingers across the forest floor. The air thickens with anticipation as we push deeper into the underbrush. My heart races, fueled by the thrill of the hunt. Every rustle, every shifting of the earth beneath us, feels like a promise of something extraordinary.

We finally stumble upon a clearing, the ground disturbed, a hint of what lies beneath. My breath catches as I kneel, brushing away the layers of soil with trembling fingers. A few small fossils emerge—fragments of bone, weathered and worn. My heart sinks slightly; they are far fewer than I had envisioned. The taste of discovery is muddled with disappointment; a bittersweet flavour on my tongues.

“Is this it?” I voice my thoughts, the weight of unfulfilled expectations heavy in the air.

But my team rallies around me, their faces alight with determination. “Let’s keep looking,” one colleague urges, her eyes sparkling with resolve.

One sharp breath snaps me back from disappointment to recharged perseverance. With renewed energy, we leave the clearing behind, the promise of discovery still flickering in our minds. Each step forward feels like a leap into the unknown, and I can feel the camaraderie growing stronger among us, a silent pact to support one another in this quest.

As we navigate the thickening forest, the sun begins to dip lower, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink. Just as the light starts to fade, we come across a rocky outcrop, partially obscured by vines and thick underbrush.

“Over here!” someone calls, and we gather around, breathless with anticipation. The rocks, uneven and rugged, conceal a treasure beneath layers of time. As we clear away the debris, the outline of something massive begins to take shape.

“Is that...?” I breathe, the words catching in my throat.

As we uncover more, the realization washes over us—it’s a dinosaur. The bones are larger than anything I’ve ever encountered, a colossal structure entwined in the earth’s embrace. Excitement surges through my veins; this is no mere fragment.

“Can you believe it?” I exclaim, turning to my team, my hands trembling with exhilaration. We work together, each movement a dance of discovery, as we begin to piece together the skeleton, our minds racing with possibilities.

The sun sinks lower, casting an ethereal glow on our find. Shadows stretch long, yet we are undeterred; the thrill of discovery propels us forward. As we work, I can feel the energy in the air crackling, a tangible excitement that binds us together.

Finally, as the last rays of sunlight fade, we gather around our discovery, faces illuminated by the soft light of our headlamps. The fossil lies before us, a testament to a time long past, whispering stories of ancient life.

“Here’s to teamwork and perseverance!” I raise my water bottle, and others join in, laughter spilling into the night as we celebrate our incredible find.

As darkness envelops us, we gather around a makeshift campfire, the crackling flames flickering against the backdrop of the forest. We recount the day's events, voices rising and falling like the gentle breeze. Each shared story deepens our bond, the earlier tension replaced with joyous camaraderie.

"Imagine what this means for our research," one of my colleagues says, eyes wide with wonder.

We toast our water bottles, the cool liquid refreshing in the warm night air. Each sip feels like a promise of future adventures, of unearthing more secrets hidden beneath the earth's surface.

Under the vast expanse of stars, we sit in awe, the Milky Way stretching above us like a cosmic tapestry. The moon casts a silvery glow, illuminating our faces as we share our dreams and aspirations, our voices blending with the symphony of the night.

As I lay in my sleeping bag, the sounds of the forest wrapping around me like a warm embrace, I can't help but smile. We have ventured into the unknown, faced our doubts, and emerged victorious. Tomorrow will bring new challenges, and I feel a thrill of anticipation at the thought of what we might discover next.

With the warmth of the fire beside me and the cool night air against my skin, I close my eyes, letting the sounds of the forest lull me into a peaceful slumber. The adventure has only just begun, and I know that together, we will uncover the mysteries of the past, one fossil at a time.

As I drift off, I can still hear the laughter of my team, the crackling of the fire, and the gentle rustle of leaves. This moment, this sense of belonging and purpose, is what I have always sought. Together, we are not just paleontologists; we are explorers of time, united by our passion for the ancient world and the discoveries that await us.

When the dawn breaks, the first light of day spills into the forest, and with it comes the promise of new discoveries. We rise, our spirits renewed, ready to continue our quest for knowledge and adventure. The forest, with its secrets and stories, stands before us, and the thrill of the unknown beckons once more.

Echoes of the Past

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Zhao, Yingying – 12

1980, 2nd October

The Yunnan Lu Feng mountains is a horrible place. Steep cliffs, dusty soil, with scarce bushes tinting the land. Nothing lives here. Harsh winds whipped through the valleys, howling their displeasure at our appearance. Ronan sent us here for investigation. I don't see the point – no one ever comes here. It's like the deserted deathbed of a battlefield.

1987, 23rd May

I wandered alongside Ronan, making a trail in the sea of bobbing plants. The short grass ticked my ankles, urging me to grope for it, but there were more things on my mind. The calm, silent peacefulness that once enveloped the lands has lifted. Masses of journalists crushed around teams of ecstatic palaeontologists. Thinking back to this morning, they seemed like swarms of ants around me.

"Mr Yang, what do you have to say on this newest hub of dinosaur discoveries?"

"Mr Yang can you give us an update on how many fossils we have just recovered?" Recovered? I scoffed in my mind. More like destroyed.

"Mr Yang! Please answer this..."

No. I gave a small shudder and rubbed my eyes. This wasn't how things are were meant to be. Looking at the stomped ground, I sighed. The crowds would only leave a mess that palaeontologists have to clean afterwards.

"They're destroying this," Ronan said, echoing my thoughts. I sighed and clapped my friend on the back.

Palaeontology sustained my family for all the generations I have knew. Dad and mom were two of the best palaeontologists of their time and when the palaeontology society found me, the neighbours said, "you really are your dad's son." Am I? I don't really care, as long as things are in peace.

Which, right now, they obviously aren't.

I went out early the next morning, to avoid the loud, surging crowds that would be inevitably arriving only a few hours later. A cool breeze swept through, but it couldn't calm my mind. With my heart heavy, I decided to go down to an unexplored valley opposite to my cabin.

As I slowly trailed down the fine, loose soil of the valley, it greeted me with the solitary cricket's feeble chirps and the echo of my absent-minded footsteps. The valleys are a source of comfort for me and Ronan, where we can hide ourselves within the looming curves of them, away from the scorching heat and the overwhelming pressure.

But then, as I grazed my weathered fingertips on the rough walls of the valley, I froze. The bump on the angled wall tugged me back into reality. What is this? My gaze fixed on the small, lumping shape amongst the crumbling walls. Something told me it wasn't normal. Without hesitation, I reached out my compact chisel and duster and started to work on it.

The sound of the chisel breaking into the rock felt like a ringing in my ears, growing fainter and fainter as my heart pounded quicker with every exposed crack of the object. After proceeding with carving, dusting, and occasionally hammering, the thing fell into my hands.

It was a dinosaur tooth, but metal. Its cool slick surface and dense weight made it feel distant, out of this world. Small, engraved letters were covered by scrapes and abrasions that wounded the shiny surface. Something glinted out of the side of the smooth curve, reflecting the thin rays of sunlight that penetrated the valley. It was a small slender gold piece of silicon encased inside the grey metal.

I reached my thumb out and stroked the clean surface and —

My vision was blurred by a blinding light ahead of me. I could feel stretching in my hands and feet, the feeling of something plastered onto my body. My breath was sharp as my legs threatened to give out.

Welcome back, MSPD1950083, a smooth feminine voice vibrated through my skull. My head pounded and it felt weak as it lolled from side to side. I looked down and — oh no — I could see what was wrong. Sick yellowish plates covered my skin with occasional blotches of pale kelly green. My neck was four times longer, and my hind legs packed muscle that I would have never imagined to be possible.

I was a dinosaur.

I lifted my head to take in my surroundings. It was burning around me; forests of verdant green were alit, their flames like helpless hands that waved in the air to plead for aid. The sky was stained by a vermillion red, like a whole bottle of paint had been spilled into the sky.

Suddenly, I found myself uncontrollably moving. A set of numbers began to tick at the bottom of my vision. I started galloping towards the flame-indulged bushes ahead of me. It was like acting in a movie – apart from the fact that I couldn't control where I was going... I silently whimpered as my body – THE body – charged straight into the flickering flames and to the side of another dinosaur.

I started wailing and roaring and screeching with emotion, then nudged my enormous head at the creature curled up on the withering grass. Around us, herds of other dinosaurs fled, whimpering and screeching, their tracks leaving flattened trails in the once-lush bushes. In the skies, flocks of birds and dinosaurs flew, their ginormous wings covering the sky like a piece of black cloth.

Suddenly, I whipped my head back at an alarming crack. Another animal came into view. My mind froze in shock while a low snarl rippled through my body at the human.

Ronan. Ronan, carrying a gun so big he was dragging it through the bloodstained ground. How could it be?

“Let's see... MSPD1950083.” He peered at the smudged, attempted wipe out of the black, bold letters printed to my side. I stepped in front of the other dinosaur. Flames flickered at my feet.

“You've been quite a nuisance to handle, haven't you?” Another growl ripped free of my throat.

“It doesn't matter,” he drawled, “1950083, your time to die.” Ronan lifted the gun and pointed at me. I tried to inch backwards but the body wasn't letting me. No, no, no.....

It was gathering light then nothing.

My heart was racing as the searing sensation of peeling off skin still tingled my body. I blinked my eyes once. Twice. And the world reshaped around me. The cold, unmoving shape of metal. The feeble chirps of the cricket. The sweat trickling off my face. My heavy panting.

“That was quite the adventure, wasn't it?” My body tensed in alarm. I whirled around to find Ronan, leaning back on the wall of the valley, staring at me intently. The small mound of red soil that I had carved from the valley seemed like the only barrier I had from him. I clutched the tooth more tightly.

“What did you do with them?” I rasped, trying hard to not let my legs give way.

“Them?” He laughed. “Feng, there was never such a thing of what I 'did with them'. They were always mine, mine only.”

“It was all an experiment, you know. Imagine, with the technology my grandfather's generation had found, how many new species we could create? How many we could plant into the depths of time? How many we could destroy afterwards?”

“Feng, it was all an experiment and a game. My grandfather created the dinosaurs. He plants them into the past. We killed them after a while. Then all of you come and crave for their remains. Pity you had to discover the memory microchip though. I didn't expect you to find it.”

A quiet roaring started in my ears. My hands were numb and grey and shaking uncontrollably. A game?

“You tell me this is all a game, after nearly ten years?” I gave a wild laugh.

“You're wrong.”

Then I ran into him.

I stared at Roman, bound and tied. The man I once trusted had unraveled, exposing what he truly was. I should've felt triumphant, but instead I could only feel the hollow ache in my chest.

“This is more than a game, Ronan,” I said quietly, the weight of the dinosaur tooth in my pocket grounding me.

“You can't twist nature to your pleasure and expect the world to cheer.”

He smirked, his bruised face plastered with mockery. “Nature is chaos. I gave it order. You'll see that one day.”

The police dragged Ronan away, his gait swaggering as usual, but his words lingering like smoke in the air.

I stood alone, staring at the valley, quiet in the chaos. The tooth pressed into my palm—a relic of a manufactured past, an experiment gone wrong.

Maybe life is a game.

But if it is, then it's not ours to play. Maybe that's enough for me.

Musings

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Zhu, Ethan – 13

Introitus

It might have been any time of day, any hour of the night, any interval between dusk and dawn. The land above might have been a blooming paradise, a parched desert, perhaps an unforgiving, arctic blizzard. Perhaps, the ground above was submerged in the waves and covered in the domains of sharks. Perhaps, the ground above were snow-capped peaks, reaching for the skies. Perhaps, life stays.

I have no way of knowing what I wish to know, and I wish to forget what I do know. Instead, I'm reminded of my eternal fate, trapped within the earth. I don't like it; I was forced into these circumstances. No amount of thought and meditation would bring to light what would cause such a tragedy, but I live indifferent to the world, even if I am just bone.

I remember the cascading rain of death, seeking extermination and destruction as molten rock erupted from the earth, the boiling oceans imploding on itself as Armageddon was upon us all, screams piercing the air while acidic fumes razed my insides and ate my eyes, knowing others were dying around, shattering my lifeline, my mentality—

No. No, no.

The memory is too painful to bear.

I'd rather live my mundane, unremarkable life.

Preludio

I remember how things used to be.

I was a predator of the leafy greens, which covered at sight yet could do nothing as I happily munched and ended their lives. I was one of the fastest, an orange blur racing through the trees and the vines while I saw my comrades tossed into a pit of despair littered with white pearls known as teeth. I was one of the most courageous, unwavering in the presence of any beast or creature that came my way with just a few minute exceptions:

- T-rexes, Allosauruses and Ceratosauruses
- Any creature that ate meat
- Any creature walking on two legs
- Any creature that liked coriander more than mint
- Any creature that didn't eat mint
- Any creature which looked like me and I didn't know of personally
- Any creature which didn't look like me

And more, which I will not mention since this is enough to prove that I am quite a brave creature and will not run away from most things. Yes, quite the brave creature, quite the brave creature...

Meditieren

You may divulge from this information that I am underground. Indeed I am. An acrid, loamy scent of earth wafts through the cavities of my skeleton, do not ask me how I know this scent, it is a presence and nothing more. My circumstances are well, my abode traps me in and keeps things out – not like I need anything from outside, I am bone after all – while providing warmth.

However, this abode seems of a malevolent nature; unable to leave or receive information from the outside world, I am ignorant of the circumstances above. The area is secret and self-contained, solitary as an oyster existing within the depths of the sea. It is a nice life, a mundane life, a life of monotony that no one wishes to live. Perhaps even the experience of the day of reckoning was better than this.

I live here as time passes on at a constant pace, and I ride its waves along, wherever it carries me. But I know, that nothing will happen, nothing will ever happen, till the end of time, when all is destroyed and I am but a mote of dust and all conjoins in a final conflagration that compresses all matter into infinity while time loops onto itself while I witness the world crumble into dust.

Dark thoughts for a glorified crow with too many feathers.

Hello? Anybody there?

Does anyone know I'm here?

Pentastich

I'm lonely.

There's nobody out here, and there will be none.

I heard distant reverberations out in the distance today.

It reminds me of the apocalypse, it's probably something else.

Whatever it may be, I'm ready.

Eventi

Loose dirt fell from the ceiling today. That's never happened before.

The reverberations are getting louder, a deep hum intermittent with piercing shrieks so reminiscent of that time long ago, a constant whirring no longer able to be ignored, a nuisance that brings back bad memories, of Armageddon and the end of time, a moment of agony, a moment of pure pain as all turned crimson and burned to fire as chaos ensued and my last thread of sanity snapped and shattered into oblivion—

The cacophony stopped, and all was peaceful again.

I considered the implications of these strange tremors that had disturbed the area I was buried within, the abnormal noise, the falling dirt. Strange events out of place of this monotonous place. That's never happened before. Why did it fall?

I calm myself. Perhaps these are the echoes of long past gone. Perhaps these are simply the reverberations of a mountain imploding. Perhaps a mole is tunnelling through the bedrock.

Or perhaps someone, or something, is looking for me.

Whatever it may be, I welcome the abnormality.

Lux

I brace myself.

I hear shrieks and noises, a cacophony that rings through the air and through the bedrock. I am certain they are digging for something. I state 'they', as there are multiple. Cracks have appeared within the walls; they are hollowing out the area and will soon discover this air pocket I have called home for so long.

They will find me.

The ceiling crumbles and falls, burying my carcass under the multitude of detritus. It is a redux of that time of chaos and destruction when all was lost and the world crumbled under its own weight, when all turned to black as soot erupted into the atmosphere and blanketed the land in an impenetrable fog, the time that so many perished within the great flames and the—

Sunlight. A dazzling, frightening sun. Clouds, snowy white. Living beings.

Then they took me away.

Anachronism

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Zhu, Olivia – 12

Rain danced on the roof; a gentle breeze stirred the curtains, and a Velociraptor was perched on the edge of Jennifer Li's bed.

It was only the size of a small dog. Mottled brown feathers coated it and it had sickle-shaped claws. A long tail twitched on the post while it delicately held something in its mouth.

Jennifer stared at it, trying to stay calm. She pinched herself. It hurt. She pretended to be asleep.

There was a tug at the blanket. Then another one. Another.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

The Velociraptor growled softly. It jumped off the post and padded over.

It placed a small object on the pillow and left.

★ ★ ★

Time passed. The rising sun brought the return of warmth. Jennifer's open window brought the smell of chicken congee. And 7 a.m. brought the screaming of the alarm clock.

Jennifer reached through the covers to stop it. She lay there for a second before getting up. Something fell to the floor with a clink.

She went downstairs. Although it was a Sunday, no one was home. Jennifer ignored that as she habitually went to the kitchen, shoving aside the door.

She froze.

The kitchen was flooded.

Cold water lapped against her feet as large *creatures* lurked beneath ripples. The back door was open, a shadow slinked in. Jennifer slammed the door shut.

The house echoed with thundering footsteps as Jennifer dashed up the stairs and into her room. Hurriedly shutting the door, she tried to organise her thoughts.

Okay, it's a Sunday, and no one's home. The kitchen's flooded. I think I saw a dinosaur...I'm dreaming. She pinched herself again. It still hurt. *Fine, not dreaming.*

Just then, a ping came from Jennifer's phone. She searched through the mess until she found it. There was a notification. It read:

'Dinosaurs Rampage Across the World: What We Know'

That's stupid. But she clicked on the notification anyway.

The article was long and — Jennifer thought — rambling, so she skimmed through it. Brief pieces of information flashed through her mind like a shoal of shiny silver fish.

But only a swish of wings was enough to divert her attention. She spun around, grabbing the closest thing she could find — her alarm clock.

The swish was made by a crow-like dinosaur on the windowsill. It hopped off. It was like a small version of the Velociraptor, but with black feathers. Jennifer jabbed alarm clock at it, hoping to get it to leave. It did not.

Instead, it scattered to a spot beside a shiny rectangle by her bed. She raised the alarm clock at it, but it only made a chirp. It kicked at the rectangle.

Maybe it wants me to pick it up, she thought, although she knew it was ridiculous. Still, Jennifer bent down and picked the rectangle up.

The rectangle suddenly came alive with flashing lights and shaky letters. Seeing it, the dinosaur made another chirp. Words appeared on the screen:

‘Is it working?’

Jennifer could only say “What.”

More words:

‘Do you have a boat?’

“Y—yes,” she stammered, turning towards the door.

★ ★ ★

Jennifer had led the small dinosaur to an overflowing river — before it could hardly be called a stream. The boat was tied to a mostly submerged post. It wasn’t used a lot, i.e. ever.

The dinosaur regarded it, trilling.

‘It’s decent. Get in.’

“What?” Jennifer blurted. “No! Why?”

‘I’ll explain when you get in.’

She stared at the moist interior, swallowed, and stepped inside. The dinosaur gnawed on the rope until it broke, then hopped onto the boat’s control panel. The dinosaur made a few squawks; words appeared on the screen.

‘Hold the wheel and listen to me. If we don’t make any stops, the journey will take two days and two nights.’

“What? No, I’m —”

‘I said that I would explain this, and I plan on doing so. Thus, shut up.’ It paused, then let out some trills, chirps, and growls. ‘So, the dinosaurs. They weren’t supposed to come here all at once. And it appears that we have also misplaced some of you. It was only supposed to be a few. To see.’

“Wait, where do you come from? I thought that the dinosaurs all died out,” said Jennifer.

‘In your timeline, apparently. We come from an alternate one. We wanted to see what other realities there were. So we created a way that would connect the two timelines. But there was an issue. And...’

Jennifer gazed at the foliage on the riverbank. There were plants that were supposed to be extinct, like seed ferns, and there were plants she had never seen before, like a vase-shaped tree with bursting yellow flowers. In the distance, she could spot a city with more trees than buildings. *But maybe it’ll be good*, she thought. *We’ll have more trees and—*

The dinosaur growled to get her attention. Then it whimpered.

‘They’ll all die. All of them. It might be from the temperature difference, from the native organisms, or even from the humans. It doesn’t matter. They’ll soon be dead.’

Jennifer wasn’t sure what to say as the sun set and a chorus of buzzes and caws started up from the forest.

★ ★ ★

The next day passed uneventfully. Neither of them spoke much, except for when Jennifer asked the dinosaur about the translator. It didn’t reply. It was hot, so they stayed under the shade, although it slowed them down. They made one stop to gather food, splitting up. Jennifer gathered edible plants, and the dinosaur hunted for something they could both eat. There wasn’t much, and when they met up again, the sun was going down in a brilliant blaze of light.

‘A day wasted,’ the dinosaur growled.

“But at least there’s a nice view,” said Jennifer.

They didn’t make any stops after that.

★ ★ ★

It was the third night. Jennifer was sweaty, tired, and hungry. A waxing moon hung in the sky, casting light on the river. Beside her, the dinosaur was pacing. The translator, propped up against the window, read:

‘We’re running out of time! Drive faster; we’ll reach it by sunrise!’

But Jennifer was tired, so she didn’t pay attention.

At that moment, a crash of lightning lit up the sky. Then, a roll of thunder.

She was paying attention now.

The dinosaur pushed the throttle forward, screeching, ‘Head for deep water!’

Rain poured down as Jennifer stared at the wheel, hair whipping across her face. *It’s just like driving a car*, she decided. Only she didn’t know how to drive a car.

Whatever. “It can’t be that hard,” she muttered, jerking the wheel one way, then another.

The rain was pelleting now, and she grit her teeth as wind began to blow the boat towards shore.

Then, as quickly as it came, the storm dissipated. The boat swerved back into the middle of the river, and Jennifer let out a breath. The dinosaur tugged at her shirt sleeve.

She looked at it, then at the riverbank full of sickly yellow leaves, drooping stems, and fallen, rotten flowers.

It growled, ‘We’ve got to get there faster.’

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The building the dinosaur presumably want to go to was a pyramid. It sat not far from the river and glistened even in the dim light.

Hopping off the boat, the dinosaur headed towards it, Jennifer following. It led her inside. Its walls were made of a grey stone streaked with silver and gold, and dinosaurs were everywhere. They must’ve been pre-informed that she was coming, as none of them even looked at her.

‘Now,’ the dinosaur began, ‘there’s one thing left. It’s quite simple, actually. Things will return to normality in two to three days.’ It glanced back at her. ‘However, I will need your help for this.’

“I though you said it was easy?”

‘It takes two.’

Jennifer was led down a series of stairs into a tightly packed room.

‘You only need to press this button,’ said the dinosaur.

“That’s it?” said Jennifer. “Then why’d you bring me here?”

‘Your boat,’ replied the dinosaur, working at an object placed at the centre of the room. ‘Press it now!’

She did, and for a moment she saw flashes of electricity zapping from every object in the room into the one in the centre. Then the whole room filled with a radiant light, first yellow, then white, and finally an aqua that seemed brighter than the sun. It appeared to spread out from the room, growing brighter and brighter and then—

—nothing.

Where Jennifer was standing before — hard, solid stone — was soft earth. She was no longer surrounded sharp, metallic objects but by trees and grass.

Something caught her eye. It was the translator, with a sentence:

‘Tell them what really happened.’

She considered this, then walked to the river, gravel crunching beneath her feet. Jennifer Li started off, chestnut-brown boat in sage-green river, towards the light.

Epic of the Ancient Skies

Harrow International School Shanghai, Chen, James – 11

A tranquil village in Liaoning, Northeast China—1996.

A song from the village broadcast reached Gigi, the chick, as she pecked intently at grains, bobbing and darting about. She froze, stunned, and lifted her gaze skyward...

The Fireball

The periphery of the Eurasian landmass, the primeval Cretaceous China.

A small dinosaur roamed, a survivor in a merciless world where fireballs rained endlessly from the heavens. Once, he had loving parents—until a fireball's inferno tore them away. Consumed by grief, the little guy yearned for vengeance. One evening, spotting yet another fireball blazing across the sky, he charged toward it, driven by the primal instinct of a predator. But as he neared, the fireball revealed itself as a scalding boulder, untouchable and vast. Overwhelmed by fury, he roared to the sky, "I will tear you apart!"

"Oh my, quite the temper for one so young!" A sarcastic voice rose from the glowing haze.

"Who's there? Show yourself!" the little one snarled.

Emerging from the shadows was a creature, smaller yet covered in a lush array of feathers that shimmered like flames.

"Watch your manners!" snapped the stranger. "I'm an adult!"

The little dinosaur's anger flared. "You brought these fireballs, didn't you? I'll tear you apart for bringing this plague upon us!" He lunged forward, only for the other creature to spread its wings and struggle into the air.

"Calm yourself, young one!" the creature gasped, wings beating. "See my size—if I brought those fireballs, I'd rule the Cretaceous World!" The logic struck true, softening the little guy's wrath. The stranger gently descended, keeping a certain distance.

"I'm Confi. And you?"

"Teryx."

"What riles you so?"

Teryx shared his painful story.

"I understand," Confi sympathized. "My parents fell to a Linheraptor's talons. This is the way—life feeds on life. Revenge never crossed my mind. But these endless fireballs... if this continues, we'll all perish."

Teryx's eyes flared. "Then I'll find our enemy and bite him to death!"

"I'm not sure you'd stand a chance."

"Why not?"

Confi sighed. "It's brutal for a child, but I saw an entire pack of Zhuchengtyrannus fall to a single fireball—a terrifying sight, seared into my mind. Tell me, do you believe you're stronger than a Zhuchengtyrannus?"

"Maybe not stronger, but I'd know how to handle them. Stealing their eggs while still in the nest—something most dinosaurs wouldn't think of."

"Who would dare?"

"Oviraptors would!"

"Ahem! Absurd! Oviraptors, as it turns out, were caught 'stealing' only their own eggs! Wait, you're not suggesting fireballs lay eggs?"

A pause. "From what I've seen, fireballs start small in the sky and grow near the ground. If we could strike them high up, before they grow..."

Confi, seeing the sense in Teryx's idea—something he'd noticed but never thought to act on—nodded. "It's late.

Let's sleep. Tomorrow, we'll ask the pterosaurs. They fly a tiny little bit higher than me and might have seen fireballs before they grow."

Teryx lay in the grass, eyes on the stars, excitement lingering long. The wind murmured in his ears, singing a lullaby:

*Cycads whisper in the breeze,
While stars in endless night shine with ease.
Tiny they are, smaller than my eyes,
Yet bright enough to fill the skies.
What are stars? Fireflies on a dark tapestry!
See—one streaks, a spark, so wild and free.
Oh, if only I had wings to soar and glide,
To catch a few to adorn my feathers bright.*

The Bold

“You can’t be serious!” a pterosaur laughed, clutching its belly with its massive wings. “To stop a fireball before it grows? Who dreamed up that scheme?”

“I did!” Teryx replied, unfazed by the giant before him.

The pterosaur’s face turned solemn. “I don’t blame you for flying low and seeing little. But I’ve soared to 4,000 meters, overlooking the vast expanse of dinosaur lands. Up there, I’ve seen fireballs bigger than mountains. From such heights, even the mighty Patagotitan looks like an insect! We can do nothing.”

With a powerful beat of its wings, the pterosaur launched skyward, vanishing into the smoky veil above. Disheartened, Confi turned to Teryx. “We can only wait for the end.”

“No, listen!” Teryx’s eyes gleamed. “We can try! We could stockpile food in caves and ask Tyrannosaurs and Triceratops to seal the entrances with their giant claws, keeping out the firestorms! Or we could ask Pliosaurus, Sinopliosaurus, and Ichthyosaurs to teach us to dive deep underwater during the strikes. And you—you can fly! With Yi qi and Longchengpterus, you could help others learn to fly.”

Confi stood in awe of this young creature’s resolve, a courage unlike any he had ever seen. His own ancestors had endured the fireballs’ relentless siege, yet none dared to defy them as this little one did.

“I’ll stand with you,” Confi said firmly. “Together, we will try every last idea!” Humming together, they ventured into the unknown, hearts aglow with quiet defiance...

*A fleeting spark, so small, yet bright,
A tiny frame that defies the night.
Through toil and trials, I find my way,
With answers rising, come what may.
Though shadows press, unseen, unknown,
Shall I yield, face fear alone?
No force, however fierce or sly,
Can quench the flame that dares defy.
For flesh may fall, subdued by night,
Yet none can snuff my will to fight.*

The Undying

In 1995 and 1996, paleontologists unearthed two remarkable fossils in Liaoning: a larger, primitive feathered dinosaur called Sinosauropteryx and a smaller, early bird named Confuciusornis. The broadcast news stated, “Dinosaurs never truly went extinct; birds are the dinosaurs that survived...”

Gigi heard the song form the broadcast rising like a whisper from the ancient past:

*In awe of life’s enduring grace,
Of evolution’s tireless chase.
A gift from cosmic winds to Earth,
Rare treasure of boundless worth.
Through eons vast, through storm and fire,
Life soared firm, would not expire.
The dragon’s kin still fill the skies,
In feathered forms, with ancient eyes.*

“I am a flying dragon!”

The Fault Was Never Ours

Heep Yunn School, Deng, Cheuk Yuet – 13

A final screech of defiance pierced the stagnant air of the battlefield, sending a shockwave down the ranks of the human army. This mighty creature reared up for the final time in its life, then dropped down lifeless in a crimson pool. Blood was running out of hundreds of wounds on its body, and its once magnificent feathers were matted and torn. A brave soldier inched out, crawling to the beast's broken body and making sure that it was dead. Soon, the entire army was shouting jubilantly, and the Sinosauropteryx' existence was wiped out once and for all. In the midst of all the tumult, a bright blue-green feather fluttered down and landed gently on the sandy ground. The sunlight glinted on its unusually polished surface, catching the eye of a certain little boy with round glasses and eyes uncannily in the same exact shade as the feather. Sticking his head out of a tent flap, he shouted some unheard words to someone inside and ran to pick up the feather. Admiring it, he tucked it in his back pocket for safekeeping. Suddenly, a sharp wind whistled through the air, raising hair on its end.

News article from the Daily Herald, dated 18th of May, 2143

Breaking News!

The ongoing battle against the dinosaurs has finally been won with years of biological advancements and the valiant work of our armies. The enemy has been vanquished! The entire country has been engulfed in a series of celebrations, with a press conference with a spokesperson from the government soon to be arranged tomorrow afternoon. With the death of the last Sinosauropteryx, our age of war and strife has been ended and our people can finally live in peace. We offer our special thanks to Dr Fok for his diligent research and astounding breakthrough in biological warfare. Our country is proud of you, doctor!

A bang reverberated around the underground research lab, which was filled with fascinating specimens and delicate instruments. The sound appeared to have come from a newspaper being slammed down to a wooden table, its owner a kindly-looking man with thinning grey hair and brilliant blue eyes. Frowning, he muttered under his breath, mocking the contents of the newspaper, "Astounding breakthrough... proud of me...yeah right..." He suddenly exploded, "If they were *actually* proud of my work, they wouldn't be using it for things it isn't supposed to be used for!" He flopped down onto a creaky wooden chair, burying his face in his hands, "Well, I mean, at least someone's proud of me." But there was still a hint of uneasiness in his eyes.

20 years later:

Rows of gleaming, sharp teeth bared at him, a trickle of saliva dripping from a tongue; Dr Fok almost got a heart attack. He fell onto his behind, scrambling away on his hands and feet. He breathed heavily, looking around and saw a vast green plain, with dinosaurs soaring in the sky. Dinosaurs? His heart leapt with joy. Those magnificent beasts drifted gracefully among the clouds, their blue-green feathers looking beautiful in the cerulean sky. He gasped in awe; ever once had he thought he'd be able to observe these Sinosauropteryx in their natural habitats. The only time he had ever seen these ethereal animals was when they were trapped in a lab, grotesquely squirming and shrieking, looking nothing like their free kin. He turned his head back to the dinosaur who was baring its teeth at him, frozen in reverence. The creature strode closer, ruffling his striking feathers. It bowed its head down with its eyes closed. Dr Fok reached out his trembling hand, lightly caressing the Sinosauropteryx. It almost purred in comfort, then it reared its head up and suddenly clamped its teeth down onto the doctor's neck. He tried to scream, but blood was pouring out of a wound punctured in his throat. The dinosaur took a sniff of the sick smell of copper that filled the air and looked satisfied. Taking one last glance at the corpse, it strutted away as if nothing happened, leaving the doctor with his life source draining out in the grass.

The doctor screamed in fright, squirming and getting tangled in his sheets. Cold sweat streamed down his face and his eyes had a wild erratic look. His heart raced at a hundred miles per hour and he suddenly got a brilliant idea. Racing out of his room barefoot, he took a piece of paper and started scribbling like mad.

Excerpt of said note:

DNA extraction...reactivate dormant genes in descendants? (if there are any) ... dig for bones fragments... unlikely remains...I SHOULD HAVE NEVER HELPED THEM...undeserving...

Three months later:

A door softly clicked, and a tall shadow tiptoed into the laboratory. Seeing the doctor's silhouette, the shadow tried to creep out, but it was too late.

“Going somewhere, Leo?”

“No, Dad, come on. Can I see what you’re working on?” Leo groaned, rubbing his bright blue–green eyes.

“No, not yet, now run along, I’m very busy.” His dad replied absentmindedly, peering at something underneath a microscope.

“Yeah yeah, you’re so important and so busy, right? I’ll just run along like a good little boy, right? Like I always do...” He muttered sarcastically.

He stalked back to his bedroom and waited for sleep to take him. That is until he heard his father blow out the candle and close his room door. Then, all traces of drowsiness vanished from his face. Leo crept into his father's lab and located the slip of paper his father was writing on. He was immediately floored by the contents. *My dad is planning to resurrect the dinosaurs? He can't do that! They're disgusting and brutal things! They killed Mom!* The candle guttered as he hurriedly put on his shoes and threw on a coat. In the wake of his departure, a bright blue–green feather fell out of his pocket.

My beloved,

I miss you. I wish I could be with you. Your parting from this unfeeling inferno of a world is the most unjust thing that has ever happened. I regret my fragility. My actions for “protecting” you were pathetic excuses for not standing up to the cruel confines of society. I swear I will atone for my unforgivable mistakes, but I fear that nothing will suffice. I am resurrecting them. Nothing will stop me.

Forever yours.

Doctor Fok slammed a huge dusty volume on the creaky wooden table. Dipping his pen in ink, he wrote as if he would die at any moment. Suddenly he stood up, rummaging around the million slips of paper around his cluttered lab. After ten minutes of futile searching, he stopped in his tracks. He flopped down onto a stuffy armchair, “Oh Leo, you poor child...” He stood up heavily and looked as if the light had gone out inside him. Closing his book listlessly, he wrapped it with some sort of metallic cloth and stuffed it in a hole behind some exposed brickwork. He barely turned around when his son strode in with fear but also coldness in his eyes.

“Hey Leo, what’s up?” He asked with no curiosity at all.

“Hello *Father*. I should be the one asking that question.” His son replied aloofly.

“Yes, yes, then. Just doing a bit of research.”

“Hmm... about resurrecting dinosaurs... perhaps?”

“Very well, son, what about it?”

He exploded with a sudden vigour, “You really don’t know what’s wrong with it? You’re supposed to be smart, dad! Or should I say...traitor? Do you really feel sympathetic towards them? They killed Mom, for god’s sake! What is wrong with you? You don’t love her, do you? You only married her for her connections! You– you’re a horrible person!” he gasped for air and glared at his father with red–rimmed eyes.

Dr Fok’s eyes screwed together and he seemed older and more exhausted than ever. His face was filled with immense pain and his wrinkles looked as if they were carved out by a knife. He started shaking silently, wrapping his arms around himself to offer some inkling of comfort and deflated like a balloon. All of a sudden, a squadron of armed soldiers burst through the door, all pointing their guns at the doctor.

“Oh son, if only I could make you understand. But I see you're bent on revenge, so I'll spare you and me the agony. I loved your mother very, very much, Leo. I did everything I did out of love for her. Your anger is misguided, my son, I am the one you should be hell–bent on destroying, not the dinosaurs. But you've already done so, haven't you? I mean, I deserve it, because what kind of father kills his son’s own mother?” He smiled feebly. “Goodbye.” He lifted a gun to his head, trembling as if he was carrying the weight of the world.

Companions

Heep Yunn School, Law, Ka Yuet Yvonne – 12

Once upon a time, there was a secret, hidden valley in the high mountains of China where dinosaurs roamed secretly. The valley was protected by the ancient magic the fossils of the dinosaurs bring. And today's story is about a guardian whose name was YiXin.

'Grandma! This is where we are going for my summer holiday?' YiXin examined the green grass field and felt the refreshing breeze of flowers. Grandma smiled mysteriously. In a soft tone, she said, 'This is the Last Valley. Come with me.' YiXin followed her grandma as they went towards a deep and dark cave. YiXin scanned the entrance of it.

It was enormous with some unique shaped touches dangling from the top. It's weird. The cave seems so creepy, but to YiXin's surprise, she felt a sense of belonging. It was like she had this feeble connection with whatever was inside the cave. Uncontrollably, YiXin steps forward. 'Go inside.' A voice whispered in her head. She glanced at Grandma and saw her supporting gaze and encouraging smile. YiXin pumped herself up and with a lot of questions, she entered the cave.

'Flop!' The torches lit up automatically, scaring the daylight out of YiXin. She walked with a slow pace through the cave and her eye caught something lurking in the shadows of where the torches did not shine upon. She swallowed in nervousness. It's fine, continue! She said to herself while going deeper to the cave.

Suddenly, a voice appeared, saying, 'You are the new guardian of the Last Valley.' YiXin's eyes widened in shock but before she could ask anything, a blinding white light flashed and she was brought into a different place.

'Thump!' YiXin landed on the green grass. She looked at her surroundings and shockingly, she saw dinosaurs! As a dinosaur lover, she could not describe her feeling of excitement. After she sat up, a winged dinosaur flew to her face. It landed elegantly and cleared its throat, 'Hello, Miss Guardian. I am a Sinosauroptryx. Call me Sino in short.' YiXin stared and was not sure whether she should be more shocked by a living dinosaur or a talking dinosaur. Realising her silence, another dinosaur sprinted towards her. 'Hi, I am a Micropachycephalosaurus. Call me Mike.' 'We are your companions. Guardians are the chosen ones to protect this place, so they receive the blessings of the fossils, the ability to see and hear dinosaurs!' The two dinosaurs said in unison.

Without leaving YiXin anytime to doubt, Sino grabbed her on his back and soared to the blue and clear sky. YiXin's heart skipped a beat, not in fear but excitement. She was always a nature lover, seeing fields of blooming daisies and rivers so clear you could see the fishes made her thrilled.

Soon, the ride ended and she landed on a huge tree. Seeing the wide grin on YiXin's face, Sino and Mike's smiles widened too. 'Every guardian is trained here. It's a magical land. When you get out, the time is the same. So don't worry!' Mike confronted YiXin. As her last worry was solved, YiXin accepted the training.

Each day she would wake up and catch fishes or lend fruits from Mr Money for breakfast. With the help of Mr Monkey, she even built a treehouse on the huge tree. After breakfast, her training starts. 'Why are we training for fighting?' YiXin asked in curiosity. 'That is a long story. Remember the meteor that should have wiped out existence from earth?' YiXin nodded.

'It was actually caused by an evil dinosaur named HeMing. He tried to steal our ancient magic by massacring us to gain the power in our bodies. We sacrificed many and were cursed to never return to earth. Luckily, the first ever Guardian appeared, made us this magical land and trapped HeMing. In repayment we have to make sure HeMing's trap is strengthened every decade. The materials to strengthen the trap are hard to get and can only be taken by humans.' Sino explained.

And so, after a few years of training, YiXin was ready to go collect the materials. She stepped into the teleportation portal and in a blink of an eye, she was sent back to the cave.

Looking at the familiar surroundings, YiXin rushed out the cave and greeted Grandma with a big hug. She knew it was going to feel weird because in Grandma's eyes they have only been separate for less than an hour. While she was trying to find words to explain what happened, Grandma spoke, 'Go on and do what you should do.' YiXin looked up in surprise and a thought came to her mind. Was Grandma a Guardian too?

Suddenly, Sino's voice appeared in her mind, 'Time to set off! Let's go!' Before she set off with her dinosaur friends, YiXin took her last glance at Grandma and waved her goodbye.

There were three materials they needed which were the teeth of a dinosaur. YiXin frowned when she knew what she needed, these items are also way easier to collect than she thought as this is literally a Valley with dinosaurs. As if reading her mind, Mike sighed and said, 'The dinosaur is no ordinary dinosaur. It's the kind of first Guardian's companion dinosaur. We don't even know if it's dead or alive,' Sino pulled some paper from beneath his wings and passed them to YiXin. After going through the information, her mouth corner rose. She knew exactly where to find the fossil of this dinosaur.

YiXin hopped on a taxi. 'TianLi Museum please.' Sino and Mike were so confused and YiXin explained her thoughts in a low volume. There were descriptions of the dinosaur on the paper Sino gave her. It was called Big Tooth, and she happened to know a dinosaur with that name. It was the Megalodon. Dinosaurs in the Valley did not know him because Megalodons live in tropical waters. And as a dinosaur lover, she knows exactly where to find the fossil.

Soon, YiXin arrived at the TianLi Museum. Sino flew around in awe looking at the dinosaur models and Mike was meddling with YiXin's phone trying to take a selfie only to find he was invisible. YiXin scanned the items and her eyes lit when she found her target.

Unexpectedly, the lights went off and an alarm went off. Intruder alert! She heard the cries of people and... the shattering of glass! The light lit again after a few moments but the target fossil was gone, all that was left was some shattered glass. YiXin was in shock when Mike came rushing, 'Sino went after the intruders already.' This was when Sino's voice appeared, 'I am at KaiTan Road! Come! The blessing can let you hear me no matter where I am.'

She rode on Mike and sprinted to KaiTan Road through the bushes which had no cameras. They followed Sino's instructions and finally saw the old building the intruders were in. YiXin sneaked in using the skills she learnt at training and saw the intruders talking about how much profit the fossils could bring. Anger roared in her heart and she gripped harder on a pipe she found on the way. Mike helped YiXin go invisible while Sino gave her jump and strength boost. YiXin followed one of the intruders into the staircase and grabbed the chance to hit.

'Bang!' The intruder passed out and a walkie talkie slid out of his pocket. Sino did not notice where they hid the fossils. How could she find out? A plan came to her mind. YiXin took the walkie talkie, lowered her voice and faked a worried tone, 'The police are here! They are planning to secretly come up. I am behind them. Grab the fossils and escape from the lift. Over.' Then, she dashed down the stairs as fast as possible.

Panting and sweating, she held the pipe firmly and awaited in front of the lift. She counted there were three people in total, with Mike and Sino's help, she can handle these intruders. The lift door opened slowly, revealing two nervous men holding a big, black bag. YiXin slammed her pipe onto one's chest and the other's head. She grabbed the bag and dialled 110 after she found her target. She looked at Mike and Sino, it was time to go back.

With Sino's flying speed, they were back to the Valley in no time. YiXin took out the tooth and placed it on an empty torch. She was quite shocked to know it should be placed on a torch. Seeing another empty torch appear, she knew that she would be putting something else there in ten years. After she waved her goodbye at the others, she left with Grandma, bringing away an adventurous experience.

Unattainable Glory

Heep Yunn School, Leung, Louise Grace – 15

The wind carried the murmurs of a bygone glory.

A spotted dove left traces of its cries, an echo, oscillating. On the balcony I stood, watching, my gaze curious, as its grey head bobbed with a slight tilt.

I inched closer, placing the tips of my fingers on the barbed railing, drawn in by some sort of gravity that held a peculiar force of intensity. It hummed to a tune of beguile. I could only stare. It was feathered with blotches of buff brown, grey, and a tinge of pink, with a white-spotted black collar patch wrapped around its neck.

The dove whirled around all of a sudden. I flinched— had I scared it? It mattered not; it had already taken flight, its long tail a blade tipped in white instead of crimson red, unusually sharp— almost razor-edged. It followed the whispers of the wind, as did my eyes, but there was an inexplicable chill, a lingering doom that loomed ahead, imminent.

A sudden shriek pierced through the air, disrupting the tranquillity that once existed under the cerulean sky, the cry a deafening plea. The dove could only wail in agony, twisting and thrashing as the wind tossed it around. It seemed like the black-coloured feathers were pressing into its flesh, tightening, suffocating. Or rather, it was the flesh hidden beneath the feathers that were growing, caged, hungry and greedy for more and more with the heart of mad avarice, until it would break free of any restraint. It tore through the skin of the dove with such animosity, a ravaging beast waiting to emerge from the depths of its soul, insatiable.

Strangely, curiosity grew within me, just as the creature within the dove did. I was sick, and twisted, but still, I was curious.

It did not last long, the wonder dissipating as swiftly as it came. Fear encroached on my heart. The creature's gaze drilled into me, its orbs glinting with seemingly malicious intent. It was odd and somewhat petrifying that its head remained perfectly still as the rest of its body thrashed vehemently. I stilled, and I gaped back.

When I realized the creature frantically took off at an unprecedented speed, diving straight at me, I prepared to scream.

Instead, I was met with utter darkness.

In the heart of China, a beast was birthed anew.

The dragon bird's tail curled, swaying, as his body rose altogether. A sly smile danced around his dry lips. He was bathed in the splendour of cold, familiar air, just as the tenebrous clouds welcomed him.

At last, the Sinosauropteryx was awakened.

The feathered creature rumbled to life. He revelled in the darkness of it all, jaws unhinging to taste the pungency of the cruel air, harbouring a foul desire to destroy everything around him. The wind carried his breath, his roar a declaration of triumph as he stomped victoriously.

A sharp pain slashed across the back of his body. He wailed in pain and fear, his head snapping upwards. Rain was cascading from the heavens above, vicious, with the thunders and bellows of an angry God.

And there came the end of his glory.

The ferocious wind slammed against his body. He stumbled backwards, limbs flailing pathetically amidst the wilding tempest; the rain enveloped him, untamed, beastly, its cadence a part of the harsh cacophony of nature's wrath, a whirling dance of chaos.

And so the sky came crumbling down, punishing the sin of a wrongly birthed creature who tried to defy the laws of the universe. The dragon roared in defiance, a valiant attempt to escape his fate, but he knew, he knew it was futile all the same.

again

★ ★ ★

I looked around, but the dove was already gone.

Fliandor's Wingless Tragedy

Heep Yunn School, Li, Lok Sum – 12

“C’mon over and play! Right, you still have your so-called job to do. You are so mean!” I don’t know how that made me mean, but that’s what my whiny, stubborn, narcissistic elder sister said as I was halfway to falling off the bed.

Welcome to my life of duties upon duties and everyone acting as if they could be a better me. I was a fluffy, feathered dinosaur with no wings, a characteristic only occasionally found in my family’s lineage, while my sister was your average Sopertex, a winged version of me. Along with my unique appearance, I was the only Sinosauropteryx with the ability to influence the fate of my species after their deaths, making me the “supreme leader” despite lacking wings.

As the leader, I had to maintain harmony between the land-dwelling Sinotexes and the flying Sopertexes, both of which are members of my species. It was troublesome to regulate them because they had been despising each other for millennia. Despite this, I tried to unite them and live up to my parents.

I brought my kids to the most luscious part of the Savannah. “Remember, we have to hunt some tasty meat for Daddy and ourselves to have enough energy for the day,” I said while I inspected our surroundings for fresh stock. One of my kids said, stomping the ground in retaliation, “But Mom, can't we play first? I want Auntie to fly me again!”

“You can play as long as you want after we get all the meat we need. Let's find it together!”

“Ugh, Fine!” he moaned.

I smiled, hurt by his response, my mind spontaneously listing all the insults my sister had told me over and over again, “Hey, pipsqueak, even your kids think I'm better! You are so tedious.”, “You don't even help me. How do you take care of your children?” and so on.

One evening, I accidentally bumped into a Sopertex while strolling on the streets, staring at me with resentment as she mumbled, “I hate those clumsy Sinotexes.” Hearing her words shook me and left me feeling disheartened. I had to do something about this. I looked away from her, fearing that I had failed my responsibilities. With my blurred vision filled with tears, I saw a familiar-winged figure standing in the intersection, running off laughing after seeing my face.

There was a gathering to announce the enormous project that needed everyone, Sonitexes, and Sopertexes, to build the bridge, and I was in charge. I held up my nose and told the crowd, “We will come together and prepare materials and Sinosauropteryxes for the upcoming project. We will have to work together!” The crowd erupted into chatter, filled with speculation and annoyance. “How can you even lead us if you can't fly?” Around me became a deafening silence, awaiting my reply to such criticism. I struggled to maintain my composure, saying, “I may not fly, but my heart is with all of you. Together, we can achieve great things.” My mind pulled me into a state of dreadfulness, thinking about how I had caused this situation to become even worse than before, not listening to how the crowd responded to my helpless wail.

When the crowd had dispersed, I ran to my husband in tears. My mum could call the whole tribe with a flick of a wrist, while for me, no one bats an eye. Was I destined to be small and cowardly? Among all my species, some who are significantly more willing, why did I get the role? Why do I get this vital role? I am a somebody who seems like a nobody. Wherever I go, it gets worse, like an unlucky charm. Words couldn’t come out of my mouth as I hugged him. He knew he knew what had happened. He reassured me that one day, they’d realize how outstanding work I did and how much effort I put in, but all this seemed impossible. How would they understand?

One random afternoon, I was cleaning the house as usual. I heard a “Crack!” come from the living room. “Who made that noise?” I shouted from my room. “Not me!” they replied simultaneously. I figured that it was nothing. Suddenly, “Boom!” our roof snapped clean off, revealing a beastly storm above. “Get the kids!” I speedily told my husband before the door slammed behind me. Sonitexes and Sopertexes were left standing, denying their reality, staring at their broken homes.

“We all have to put ourselves into the remaining houses. We are going to work through this together!”

“Don’t you think it’s such a coincidence? Fliandor bosses us around right when the storm starts. She thinks she can manipulate you all into being together for her contentment. She must have caused it. She may be lying about her powers, awaiting the perfect chance to strike,” the sound of thunder erupting, revealing my sister, putting on a wicked smile. “No, no, that’s not true! Don’t believe her!” Skeptic filled the air, whether to trust me or my ‘perfect’ sister. I found myself standing isolated from everyone, glaring with their beady eyes. “What kind of leader does that?” “Hungry for contentment? Step one, don’t lie!” “We’re going extinct with her here,” I swamped myself with doubt. “The world would be better without me.”

“Ahh!” a high-pitched scream echoed behind me.

A speeding piece of furniture was about to crash into my son, trapped under debris. There wasn’t time to think. I sprinted to him, laid flat. Then I closed my eyes and shielded my precious baby. Life flashed before my eyes.

It seemed like I lost half of my weight, and around me, rough and dry. “Where... where am I?” Blinking hard, I found myself floating through translucent rocks under the ground.

“You must be new here,” an old Sonitex spirit approached me. “We are underground right now. All Sinosauropteryxes are here, which means our spirits will lie here for eternity. If our fossil ever touches the air, we fade away. Trex learned the hard way when a kid dug up his bones.”

Fossil realm? Spirits? I couldn’t process what was happening. But from then on, I had to get used to that because I would spend the rest of my days there, at least I thought.

The fossil realm wasn’t much more enjoyable than life on land since all the newcomers were those influenced by my sister, and rumors about me spread like wildfire to the older and newer generations. I waited and waited, but it seemed like my husband had passed away far from me because even after a hundred years, he was nowhere in sight. I was now truly alone, except for my power.

I felt strength through my veins. I knew how to do it. It just took a flick, and I could leave this unbearable misery and explore the world. Would it be worth it? If I got dug, I wouldn’t disappear. I would just be free. It’s in my blood. However, it worked for the whole species. All of them would fade except me. If I did that, it would prove I’m a heartless leader.

After a few million years, I finally made that decision. It was too much. I manipulated the timeline so that humans would find my fossil, discover, and endanger the other Sinosauropteryxes fossils near me.

I witnessed my kind’s fading souls, slowly disappearing one by one, mouthing screams only to find no sound coming out. My heart, heavier and heavier with the tormenting guilt and agony. I had betrayed my community, driving into a pit of loneliness, regret, and despair.

Remembering all the love I received from my family and all those times they helped me through my low points, I knew vengeance was a grave mistake. Genuine leadership involves sacrifice and unity. I should not have let anything ruin my loyalty and devotion towards my tribe. My tragic destiny was final.

In One Fell Swoop

Heep Yunn School, Li, Xinyan Cathy – 13

Present day

Dr. Long frowned, eyes firmly fixated on the dinosaur fossil in front of her. She stared at the sinosauropteryx's jagged skull, entirely captivated by the raw yet ruthless beauty written over its every sharp and unforgiving bone. And yet, as an adept paleontologist, she felt that something was simply not right. Despite the seemingly indifferent and harsh expression etched onto what was once the face of the legendary creature, she was almost certain that there was something more, something much more than what meets the eye. She could guarantee that beneath the cold and unfeeling air of power that the skull carried so confidently, there was an undeniable hint of vulnerability hidden from the naked eye. From the way the sinosauropteryx's eyes seemed to droop downwards ever so slightly at its edges, from the way its nose seemed to be flared in both shock and rage, from the way its mouth seemed to be wide open in not a fearsome roar of victory, but a fearful cry for help, Dr. Long knew that this dinosaur had a tale that never got told, a tragic piece of history that never got the chance to be shared with the world.

Thus, she carefully cleaned her hands, put on protective gloves, then meticulously and ever so gently picked up the precious fossil. However, just before she could take a proper good look at the skull, a relentlessly sharp feeling of pain-filled nostalgia forced itself into her brain, taking her by surprise, then proceeded to render her unconscious.

In one fell swoop, all went black.

125 million years ago

The sinosauropteryx lifted his massive wings, preparing to take flight. With a blissful smile adorned on his needle-like face, he gazed up at all his other dinosaur family and friends up in the sky, the sinraptors, the microraptors, and the sinovenators, all carrying mighty wings on their broad, powerful backs. So up he flew too. Up. Up. Up. Until he, just like every other dinosaur, was gliding smoothly through the soft comfort of the white velvet clouds.

He flew, flew, and flew across the boundless skies, his wings firmly supporting his feathered body, his silhouette a vivid splatter of vibrant paint on a bright blue canvas. Up in the sky, the sinosauropteryx felt what could only be described as unrestrained freedom and exhilarating jubilation. Up in the sky, he knew that there were no longer any restrictions, rules, or obligations. Up in the sky, he would not be controlled or confined by anyone or anything. Up in the sky, the sinosauropteryx could be a mindless child again, having the time of his life without a care in the world.

Up in the sky, it was beautiful, breathtaking, a sight far beyond imagination. And yet, this rare sense of euphoria would only accompany the sinosauropteryx for so long. For he knew, deep down, that trying to break free from the restraints of reality by flying would only get him so far. He had a family to look after, he had responsibilities, and he had a life. He didn't know, however, that everything would soon drastically change.

Little did the sinosauropteryx know that he would soon bid an early tearful goodbye to the one thing he treasured most.

The pterosaurs' council meeting

"Enough. All of you shut your jabbering mouths and listen to me right now." The chief of the pterosaurs hissed, nostrils flaring in annoyance. This was already the 17th council meeting they'd held on the matter of the other dinosaurs' access to flight, yet there were still incessant arguments going on. Saying that the chief was irritated was a heavy understatement, his wings were practically trembling in unadulterated and barely contained fury. He just couldn't understand, what was so hard to get about not allowing the other inferior dinosaur species to fly?

Once the room finally quieted down, once he ensured that he had every dinosaur's full and undivided attention, the chief spoke again, enunciating every word, "We are the pterosaurs. We are the mighty ones. We were the first and only ones to be granted the highly coveted ability to soar through the endless skies. We were the first and only ones

to be born with wings. And I fully intend to keep it that way. It *should* be kept that way. Those other pathetic species have no right to share our power, not even a single ounce. Clear?”

“But...how?” came a meek voice from the crowd.

“Excuse me?”

“I mean...I certainly don’t mean to be rude, sir, but how could we possibly rid the others of their wings?”

The chief of the pterosaurs smirked, and it was quite possibly the most terrifying expression that one could ever make, “Isn’t it obvious? We rip them off ourselves with our jaws, of course.”

The sinosauropteryx’s point of view

He heard them before he saw them. The pterosaurs. The strong, steady, and forever unwavering beats of their instruments of flight. They were the first of the dinosaurs, the first to hatch from their eggs with wings glued on their backs, the first to ascend to the all-seeing skies above. Therefore they never deigned to appear among the other species, not without good reason at least. When they *did* decide to show themselves, however, utter terror would always be induced, bones would always be shattered, and blood would always be splattered. Thus, the sinosauropteryx tensed immediately, swivelling his head towards the back to glance at his family behind, hoping to warn them to be on guard no matter what.

And that was when he heard the first of many guttural roars of helpless desperation to come. It was a massacre. It was destruction. And right at that moment, he felt the sensation of a set of jaws forcefully clamping onto his left wing. A pterosaur’s savage, merciless jaw.

He kept on trying to shake the pterosaur off of him, kept on trying to slam his body against nearby trees, kept on trying to break free of the teeth so tightly clinging onto him. And yet, every time the sinosauropteryx tried to retaliate, every time the sinosauropteryx tried to pull himself up, the pterosaur only seemed to hold on even more firmly, only seemed to enjoy it more.

And with one last cry of helplessness, the sinosauropteryx could only watch with wrath-filled eyes as the pterosaur ruthlessly tore his wings off his now scarlet-coloured back, where his feathers of glory were grotesquely stained with bright and bitter red paint.

And the last thing that ever blessed his bleeding ears were the sadistic laughter of the pterosaurs, and the feeble yet fierce wails of the victims’ futile attempts at defiance.

Then the mighty sinosauropteryx, along with his fellow companions, fell, fell, and fell for the first and very last time, adding one final drop of murderous red onto the biting hard ground. They were never seen again.

All in one fell swoop.

Present day

The now awoken Dr. Long sat in her chair, at a complete loss of words. She didn’t dare to think about what she had just seen, didn’t dare to think about the possibilities, didn’t dare to think about the implications.

But what if, just what if the legends about the mass extinction of the dinosaurs were all wrong? What if it wasn’t because of an asteroid, what if it wasn’t because of a comet, what if it wasn’t because of a volcanic eruption? What if the disappearance of these creatures was the result of their own wrongdoings? What if the annihilation of these beasts was due to their selfish greed? What if the pterosaurs were the very reason behind the fatal obliteration of the dinosaurs?

Dr. Long didn't know what to think or do, but as she gazed back at the ancient sinosauropteryx's edged skull, an unexpected sense of sorrowful pity filled her with overwhelming ruth and woe. The history books would never record this heartrending story, would never record the final fall of the winged dinosaurs. But maybe, just maybe, Dr. Long hoped that this mighty creature would finally be in a better place. A place where he could finally fly freely with no oppressions, no restrictions.

Unknown location and time

He let the breeze carry him across the horizon, reveling in the comfort, satisfaction, and security that it graciously offered. He, resembling that of a weightless feather, floated effortlessly above, grinning warmly at his comrades beside him, all enjoying these cherished moments of serenity.

He did not know where he was, he did not know why he was brought here, he did not know how he had arrived here. But what he did know was that here, he had no need for wings to fly, he had no need to fret about his safety, he had no need to worry about being confined.

For in one fell swoop, they had fallen; in one fell swoop, they had risen to this better place.

Dirt On the Canvas

Heep Yunn School, Liu, Huen Laam – 14

The day I am revived is also the day I die.

Beneath the flaming sand marked with soles of hiking boots, I am found as an aggregation of fissured bones and gravel. Each fragment of fossil retrieved signals the eruption of a cacophony of cheers that is warbled in my single, creviced ear. The world spins fervently when I resurface from the shadows, rekindling with the light.

Bare under the wrenching glare of sun rays, I am made aware, too aware of the hollow where my pupils should've been, the skin and flesh peeled clean from my body, my quivering femurs on the cusp of collapse. And yet I am able to take in the sounds of the crowd, astonishingly of a higher pitch than my peers from who knows how long ago. Then I come to the realisation that their voices are simultaneously directed towards me.

My jaws retreat and reconcile to deliver my message. I do not speak the creatures' language, and this is where everything goes wrong.

The creatures fumble with a monstrous white web, and only when it is too late do I realise their intention to capture. Musk returns, pilfering the finality of my freedom.

When my vision clears after what seemed to be a lengthy slumber, I have been encased yet again. Only this time, I am no longer conjoined with the earth's crust and instead have what's left of my femurs clanking within a compact glass cube.

Peering at me with wide-blown eyes is a myriad of the same creatures, palms pressed up against the glass. Every shift of my body brings about the crowd's fretful shrieks, and some of their young huddle up against the older ones, tear streaking their cheeks. Yet how can I show that I possess no peril if I do not move? Why is my appearance considered monstrous by all these creatures even if they have not truly understood my motives?

I suppose there is no knowing when you never had the freedom to know in the first place.

By the time dawn and dusk have embraced and parted too many times to count, I cease to wonder. In a purgatory like this one, you stop thinking how escape could be possible, especially when a chance for communication was never around.

I have been revived, but somehow I wish I were as lifeless as my soul is.

It is during late vesper when the staff watching my exhibit runs off to the restroom, and something ruptures my mundane routine of misery.

"Psst! Hey!"

A small creature (or a boy, I have come to learn) stands with his tippy-toes, shouting up at me. "You're a datousaurus, right? Can you hear me?"

"Yes," I say, voice hoarse from the weeks I have spent in silence. It's not to say that I have not attempted making use of my voice to seek help and acceptance – conspicuously, such an attempt did not end in a peaceful manner. "How do you speak my language?"

The boy furrows his eyebrows, and something in me softens. "I've kinda been doing this since I was like, this little maybe." He demonstrates his size with his arms stretched out. "My Mummy and Daddy don't really believe me, 'cause they think I'm just telling silly stories, but now that I can talk to you and you can hear me, that means I'm not a liar! Ha!"

There is a momentary pause of silence, but then the child grins and points at me. "Hey, you're smiling!"

For a second I am astonished at the fact that the movement of my jaws is not being perceived as danger, but it does not take long to recover. “I suppose I am.”

“Well, that’s good, ‘cause…” He hesitates for a moment. “I’ve got something to ask you. For help.”

“Help?”

“No one ever believes me, but Georgie told me about a huge attack that’s going to happen soon. It’s by some stupid people who want to um, steal all the dinosaur bones in here and sell them for money. And it’s—”

“Apologies. I’d have to interrupt you there – who precisely is Georgie?”

The boy puts his hands on his hips and beams. “That’s my friend and she’s a horse. I mean, she’s actually the horse of the guy who wants to sell your bones.”

I beckon with a bare femur for him to continue on.

“And I know dinosaurs are super wise, right? And they’re powerful and brave and stuff, like you! So I really really want you to help!”

“I do not think I would be of much help, however,” I say, gesturing towards the walls of my cage. “I believe you understand that I am a monstrosity to many. Even if I am able to escape, I would traumatise the hearts of the people.”

“But you’re not! You’re just a dinosaur.” His face falls, body shrinking into himself. When I look closer, I can almost see the quiver of his lips and the brined liquid gathering at the corners of his eyes.

“I—”

“Henry! I’ve been looking everywhere for you!” A woman hurries across the tiled floor. I snap into position and watch as she frantically sweeps the boy into her arms. “You can’t just run off like that!”

“But Mummy, I was talking to him!” Henry sniffles, cheek pressed against his mother’s with the tenderness of a child.

She glances towards where he is pointing at and shakes her head. “Of course, Hen, of course. Oh, for heaven’s sake, baby, you don’t know how worried we were…”

I watch as they vanish off into the distance.

Weeks of being the outlier has certainly taken a toll on me. It is fatiguing when you are denied before you can even attempt to convey your thoughts. But perhaps one thing you need to know about me is that now and then, my body destroyed or intact, I remain a fierce fighter for justice.

Which is why, by the time the sun has risen again, I have conjured up something resembling a plan. The lock guarding me from the rest of the world is metal-clad and ridiculously tough, so damaging it would mean my freedom.

Violence doesn’t have to be the key to my lock. I retrieve a chapped piece of femur I have taken from my body and turn it in the keyhole, swinging open the glass door. I let the free air fondle my femurs as I step out of the door.

There are so many things you could possibly do as long as you have grasped the power of freedom. For instance, enjoyment. But within me stirs something different – a desire to rescue.

I pad along the museum floors, an onerous task at the start, but then it becomes such a familiar action that it requires little thought by the time the gates have opened to hundreds of visitors hoping to spectate the sole datousaurus in the entire institution. Rave about its horror-inducing stance, perhaps, and how they are all so, so grateful for this monstrosity of a creature to be locked up.

Not anymore, apparently.

Cutting the line, however, is the very man who has arrived to take away the femurs of dozens of dinosaurs, dead or alive. I recognize him because he looks like someone who would make such an attempt, especially with the hefty weapon in his hands. Especially with the meticulously lined-up men behind him, all armed with a similar weapon.

The men look rather taken aback at my escape, but it does not take long for an implosive sound to emerge from that weapon of theirs.

Fortunately, I have grown to recognize attackers, and while my femurs are well-aged with time, they possess the perpetual ability to sweep them off their feet. Literally.

They all howl, perhaps dosed in debilitating pain. Security rushes in, handcuffing a number of them. There is no tension, no excitement in our small dispute, for I am this massive and they are that tiny. I have made use of my size to cease their victory, but I am frightful that the people would not show appreciation towards this difference. Towards the fact that I, as opposed to the rest, loom over others when attempting to intimidate.

Yet, the anticipated excitement comes when the people cheer.

I ensure that I am not to be captured again before I decide it would be safe to stand rooted in where I am, careful not to trample a single member of security or one of the schoolchildren who have come to visit.

Henry dashes over and hugs half a femur. "You're the best! Different, but still the best."

Is the outlier apparently allowed to be loved? Is it?

Well, I do not suppose I get a choice. Not when dozens of children squash my femurs, each clinging onto some part of me.

This is the day that I am truly revived. And this time, I am showered with life.

Birds of a feather

HKUGA College, Lai Chun, Tong – 14

Beams of light land speckled, scattered on the matted forest floor, fettered by ferns swaying gently overhead.

He turns his head to the rest of the pack. The dappled light glints off their teeth – twinkling, like the little dots that appear when the day's flame falls behind the mountains. Maws: red, open wide; trickles of saliva seeping from the gaps between chipped fangs. Snapping at the remains of some small creature unfortunate enough to be stranded right where they were passing through. He exhales softly, nostrils flaring. Pitiful, he knew. The hunt waned and waxed, but even so, prey was uncharacteristically meagre, even for a down season.

They finally finish up. He hadn't got a single bite. Where the corpse lay is now a small pile of pinkish-grey bone and crimson organ matter. Some flesh still stubbornly clings on, but most had since been stripped away. Empty. He is suddenly conscious of his empty stomach. But, staring at the moist, darkened dirt, the appetite leaves him.

The first of the elders begins to leave, the young stumbling, nipping at their heels. He lingers behind for a moment, eyes still drawn to the pile. It was walking, struggling, clawing just moments before. Now it was still. Why did it not move anymore? Noticing the pattering of steps getting fainter, he swivels, striding to catch up.

He throws a backwards glance; it didn't follow after.

The flame begins to fall. Those trodding in front are silhouetted by reds and yellows, their contours lined with gold. These moments are nice; The time before nightfall, when it isn't quite dark, and long after the flame's peak. It isn't a bit as blinding, and the sky is free for him to take in.

The sky is vast, huge. Without the trees fragmenting the sky, there is nothing to obstruct his view, and it occupies the whole of his vision. He lets it consume his thoughts. It lets him almost forget about his hunger. Almost. Still, pangs from his abdomen bring him back down to earth.

A pace beyond the forest is an expanse. It is the one silver lining to their predicament: the hunting grounds here might be poor, but it also means that there is no rival pack to compete for land. For their pack of 40 strong, excluding the young, they need all the space they can get. He shakes his head and grunts, slowly squatting down. Curling into a fetal position, watching the others settle into their spots. Most had some patch of land that they "reserved", through silent agreement and habit. Those patches are easy to identify – each was bare and stripped of grass. They stayed here so long that each patch noticeably caved inwards. Too long, he thinks.

He doesn't like being grounded in place, not one bit.

The reds and yellows fade to black and the white dots start to reappear. And that disc. It looks like a pebble. He wonders who hung it up there. One day, he promised himself. One day, he'd go up there and check for himself. He'd leave his worries, his hunger behind. After all, all his problems are stuck with him here on the ground. He'd shed all of them like feathers when he rose.

A hatchling creeps up next to him and squawks raspily. Mistaking him for its parents, assumably. It still hasn't noticed out of drowsiness, and nestles into his feathers with a contented chirp. He stares at it for a while, watching the rise and fall of its flanks. It had fallen asleep. Deciding to let it stay, he rests his head on the cool ground.

Eyelids are a little heavy. He lets them droop bit by bit. As the world around him dims, he is increasingly aware of the sounds surrounding him. He listens. He listens to the lowing of the tired laying down to rest. He listens to intermittent squeaks of younglings rushing back to their parents. He listens to said parents grunting as they urge them to sleep. He listens to heavy steps and light ones. He listens, and knows he can't leave this all behind. Not now, not ever.

Above them, a star streaks towards the ground.

The wind wafts beneath his wings. He senses an updraft to his left. Making a sharp turn, he climbs higher, riding it all the way up. It takes him farther than expected. Circling, he lets himself glide a little lower, dipping below the cloud cover. He feels so fast, with the wind buffeting against his face, but the ground below him barely moves. He can't

quite place what it is, but watching the ground gave him a sense of detachment. Everything is so far down. No one can touch him up here, but neither can he reach them.

His chest grows increasingly sore, and he lets himself plummet, the ground coming up to meet his face. Half the flock also descends to refuel on the marshlands. The more enduring of them continued onwards. He hopes he'll see them again.

His claws grace the water; skimming once, twice, land. Making a couple soft clicks, he signals his arrival. Around him bustles three other flocks of birds, all of different species. The one pond wasn't quite large enough to handle all of them. He craned his neck. An emptier spot could be farther off, perhaps. His eyes sweep across the landscape. None. Sapped, he can't be bothered to fly any farther.

He inhales deeply, and plunges his head into the water. It's devoid of anything. Not even the one stray tadpole. Lingering a little longer, he closes his eyes, and reopens them. Nothing else had manifested in the meantime. He silently strides onto land.

Deep beneath his feet, are two piles of fossilised bone, one larger, one smaller. There may be an imprint or two of feather or fang surrounding the former.

They never really did leave the ground.

Untold

HKUGA College, Pui Yee, Li – 12

66 million years ago
Uncharted territory

Crescent moon hanging above.
Serene. Peaceful. Unbothered by anything.

But that night, Fate shifted forever.

A figure darted past, as if afraid that the moonlight would catch her.
And in her clutches was a simple piece of stone, shaped like a cube.
But it was no ordinary stone. The plain appearance was a disguise.

The figure was not a human, nor was she from our time. She was an Alectosaurus named Conar'kkal Sykari. And in her hands were the future of her species, Eyvasarns—or as we call them, dinosaurs.

The inventors had gathered twelve moon-cycles ago to discuss a new technology they'd developed together. But it got dangerous. Sykari didn't know what happened—she was just a messenger—but she'd picked up rumours here and there.

The inventors had created some sort of journal that recorded down your thoughts and could translate it to any creature. As the rumours went, they saw something that happened, something that happened in the *future*. And they recorded it down in the stone cube. Sykari had no idea what it said, but she wasn't anxious to find out.

The Conar'kkal Tribe—*her* tribe—was left in its possession, and the TribesLeader told her to get rid of it, as the stone cube couldn't be smashed, melted or broken. Those infuriating inventors and their stupid inventions.

Sykari snapped out of her train of thoughts. She'd stopped at the foot of a mountain. She tested the ground with a branch. Quicksand. Just as she suspected. Perfect for disposal.

She threw the stone cube into the ground. Sykari watched it sink, and she slipped back into the shadows.

65 million years ago
A cave in the Javerii Terrain

Piercing screams in the distance.

Scarlet blood staining the ground.
Stygian black attacking Sun's last rays.

Javerii Forc'stuuk collapsed against the stone wall, amber eyes glazed over. Violet scales pierced with bright red scars settled against the dull gray rocks.

He curled his tail tighter around an object he had been holding onto and brought it up to his chest.

A stone cube, barely bigger than his head, with Eyvai engravings.

His legs ached from running for days and his breath was ragged, as if someone had scraped his lungs with obsidian. His cuts were still bleeding rivers of crimson. His neck was made for reaching for the tallest leaves, not for being cramped in a tiny cave.

But Forc'stuuk had a mission to finish. With every last spark of energy he had left, Forc'stuuk hurled himself towards the cave walls.

The entrance collapsed in an avalanche. Boulders tumbled all around him, pinning his whole body against the ground, burying him and the stone cube in darkness.
Fresh stabs of pain erupted through his nerves. Every inch of his body screamed in agony, his lungs starved for air.
This is it. He thought faintly. *This is how I die.*

There were so many things Forc'stuuk hoped to forget, so many decisions he wished to take back. The whole Javerii Tribe was dead, because of him.

He wished he'd never gone to those mountains two moon-cycles ago. Never dug into the ground to look for roots to eat. Never found that glowing stone cube that described ludicrous ideas. He didn't know it by then, but he—a young, seven moon-cycle old Eyvasarn from a small titanosaur Tribe—had just discovered a *rock* that told the Future.

The first time the cube glowed, Forc'stuuk learned what drove the inventors mad. They described that every Eyvasarn would, in the near future, all die. And, soon, in their place would be tiny, arrogant creatures called *humans*. *Eyvasarns*—intelligent species with elaborate society structures, deep knowledge of the sky's rotation and cooperation between carnivores and herbivores—would become known as mindless dim monsters to humans.

Forc'stuuk became obsessed with the cube ever since. Every time he learned something new, questions flooded his head.

Why do humans think that Eyvasarns roared? Wasn't it possible that Eyvasarn communicated with their own language—Eyvai? And why do they assume that dinosaurs always killed each other? Only a handful of carnivores resorted to that when prey was scarce.

The trouble came several days after he told his parents about the Eyvasarn's "extinction". Forc'stuuk truly wished he hadn't.

The news spread like wildfire, through various Tribes. It terrified every Eyvasarn. They were already running out of food, Carnivores and Herbivores alike, due to the amount they each need to consume for survival. The Eyvasarn population had been tumbling down a canyon in the last three hundred moon-cycles. And now, a seven-cycle-old and a lump of rock confirmed that they will all die.

Even in the absurdity of the situation, the Eyvasarns had been scared. And when they're scared, they attack. For information, for truth, for their own reasons.

The first was the Alectosauroids. Forc'stuuk had snuck away when they came. Being a small, unassuming seven-cycle-old does have its perks. But now he wished he hadn't. Being absent when every last member in the Javerii Tribe was killed, hiding cowardly in a cave while his Tribe was massacred for something he did.

Only one thing was clear: any more knowledge will crush the Eyvasarns. Forc'stuuk can't destroy the cube. But he can hide it. Preferably, a little more than forever.

Forc'stuuk closed his amber eyes, clutching on to the stone cube, allowing the pain and numbness to wash over him.

His thoughts circled his mind, and the unforgiving hands of Death trapped him like an icy prison, like the boulders pressing against him...inescapable...inevitable...

Today
Jiangxi Province, China

Jiang Tsz Lin looked over from the cliffs.

Plain, unremarkable, forgettable. Sort of like him.

Most of the nearby villagers would come by, barely sparing a glance at the mountains, and walk away, the memory already fading in their cluttered, busy minds. But when you sit down and listen, everything has a story to tell.

Tsz Lin liked the silent whispers of the singing wind, the calm gushing of the nearby river and the beautiful symphony of the clicking rocks, orchestrated by the autumn breeze.

Every day, after his chores, he would come here, sit down, and let Nature's music steal his worries. About the raised taxes, about his brother's school fees, about the last storm's damages, about his crops dying.

One autumn afternoon, Tsz Lin was immensely frustrated.

His crops were dying too abruptly from a recent storm, and if he didn't earn enough, he couldn't help pay his three younger sibling's fees. Things weren't so good at the time.

Tsz Lin tried his favourite spot—a large boulder by the cliffs—but the pestering worries refused to leave his mind, despite the persuading breeze, trying to coax them to go away.

Torn by his tsunami of worries, he hiked up the mountains, trying to find some peace somewhere else.

As he climbed on, Tsz Lin began to feel a little more relaxed. He didn't think he'd been here before. It wasn't very high up, but it was definitely quieter.

As he walked, something, unexpectedly, caught his attention. Rocks, embedded in the mountain side.

Being from a plain, simple village, Tsz Lin had little education, although he'd always dreamed of learning more. But when Fate cruelly stole his parent's lives, placing the family's burden on his young, fourteen year old shoulders, that dream was torn away from him.

But Tsz Lin could still see that the stones were stranger than usual. There were a few that were oddly shaped like...bones. But one of them stood out.

It too was partly embedded in the cliff, but Tsz Lin guessed it was at least four meters wide out in the open. But it looked like...a cube. It had strange carvings, jagged patterns and symbols—not unlike those Egyptian hieroglyphics he'd once heard of—that ran in diagonal rows, with a few of the characters forming shapes suspiciously similar to the crescent moon and magnolia leaves.

Tsz Lin gently brushed away the dust, trying to get a better look at the engravings.

Without warning, *sounds* erupted from the stone cube. Tsz Lin stumbled with shock, his heart was pounding up to his throat.

The strange echo sounded so much like a string of words, too elaborated and varied for the human tongue to copy. Rhythmic clicks and dizzily fast chitters, low guttural growls and repeated pitched tones.

Suddenly, the cube started to glow. And, translated in fluent Mandarin in Tsz Lin's mind, was a story from an Eyvasarn who lived 65 million years ago.

'Knowledge' is a powerful and dangerous word. Most people just don't realize it.

Imagine what humans might do if we knew what the future holds. Would we be driven mad by the little impact, the little understanding we would make in the eons to come?

But we've existed for mere thousands of years, while the Eyvasarns have roamed the Earth for almost 170 million years. And yet, we still think of ourselves as superior to them.

So I want to leave with this message. Sometimes all you need is a new perspective. Push away that veil of ignorance in front of you and dare to explore even the wildest possibilities.

Journey For the Key

HKUGA College, Sum Yu Alvina, Wu – 12

I dug and dug into the ground; my hands sore with all the labor I had endured. Brushing a drop of sweat from my forehead, I looked at the map in my hands, certain that this was the spot that my family had told me to dig for. It was my 13th birthday when my parents gifted this map to me, saying that it was passed down through the family. Curious, I ventured to the province of Sichuan in hopes of finding the X spot on the map.

The scorching sun hit my worn-out back as I kept digging. Suddenly, I hit something! I was ecstatic. I brushed the soil apart to find that it was a bone. “Could there be treasure here?” I thought, my heart racing, as if it was about to jump out of my chest. I further uncovered it to find an entire dinosaur fossil. I was in awe! Just as I was about to celebrate my find, the ground beneath me rumbled, and panic surged through me like a tidal wave. Before I could even react, the sudden vibrations turned into a massive vortex, and I was sucked into the tunnel, soil flying everywhere. I looked around me, and saw the dinosaur fossil next to me come to life!

The chaos then subsided. I tumbled onto a ground with lush greenery. I heard distant roars and chirps from all around me. I was about to faint! How come there were dinosaurs here and there? Where was I?

To add to the confusion, the fossil that I had uncovered transformed into a dinosaur with glimmering emerald scales. It started to speak, its voice deep and resounding. “Welcome to the prehistoric era, fellow traveler. You can call me Xiaoloong. The reason you are here is because another group of people have somehow found the path to this land and are trying to find a key that will change our destiny, which could even bring us back to life in your own time! They’re trying to display us in theme parks and museums, even selling us for profit. But the thing is, we dinosaurs don’t know where the key is! That’s why we need you to help us find it.”

I gawked. This information was coming to me way too fast! But nevertheless, I knew I had to help Xiaoloong and these dinosaurs.

“Sure, I can try to help. But how can I go back to my original world? And why would you choose me as the one to find the key?”

“First of all, you can go back to your original world after you find the key. The key also acts as a guide back to your world. As for why we chose you, there are two reasons. Your ancestors studied dinosaurs for a living and loved them a lot. Second, you still have that childlike spirit in you. You don’t just think about profit and business—instead, you would choose to love animals wholeheartedly.” Xiaoloong replied.

That was certainly true. “Alright, Xiaoloong, I’m in!”

We began to search the forest first. I brushed away the bushy leaves in my face and saw a world of wonder awaiting me. Different dinosaurs were all around. Some were large, some were smaller, but all of them were majestic creatures.

“This forest is beautiful,” Xiaoloong informed me. “But we must stay alert. The group going after the key won’t give up easily.”

As we traveled across winding paths and clear rivers, I searched every nook and cranny, leaving no stone unturned. We then reached a rocky mountain, but my eyes were drawn to a nook in the ridges, partly covered by cascading vines.

My curiosity piqued. “What could be inside?” I wondered aloud. “I think the key might be in there.”

We hiked up the rocky trail until we reached the nook. My palms were starting to sweat. I was getting increasingly nervous as we ventured deeper and deeper into the cave.

Without any warning, a chain suddenly wrapped around me and Xiaoloong! A cacophony of laughter filled the cave, echoing off the walls. Xiaoloong and I tried to force the chains off us, but they just choked us more, like a serpent coiling tighter with each futile tug.

“Xiaoloong! What’s happening?” I cried frantically.

“I don’t know!”

A gang of men stepped out from the shadows.

“Well, well, well. Look what we have here? You’re the chosen one, right? You should know where the key is! Now tell us before we shoot you both down!”

I felt a cold wave of fear wash over me as I stared at the men, their eyes glinting with malice. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” I shouted, trying to sound braver than I felt. My heart raced, and I could hear Xiaoloong’s deep breaths beside me, a steady reminder that I wasn’t alone.

One of the men, tall and imposing, stepped forward, a sinister smile creeping onto his face. “Oh, we think you do. You see, we’ve been tracking the energy of the key for some time. It’s powerful, and it’s in your blood. Your ancestors left clues when they studied dinosaurs, and now you’re here to lead us to it. We’re going to build theme parks and museums, and we’ll make big money.”

An idea rushed into my head. “Let’s make a deal. If you let me and Xiaoloong go, we’ll find the key for you.”

Xiaoloong stared at me, wide eyed. “WHAT are you doing?” he whispered.

“Trust me! I have a plan.”

The men nodded. “Then so be it!” One of them unchained us. “Lead the way.”

Xiaoloong and I walked deeper into the cave. I sensed a wave of energy bonding me to something, but I didn’t know what. I followed it until I saw it—the key!

“THAT’S THE KEY!” One man shouted, and all of them dived towards the key. “Give it to me!”

Before Xiaoloong could say anything, the key emitted powerful beams of light, shooting all the men down, and started to vibrate. The cave started to crumble as well. It was a cave-in!

“RUN!” I cried, pulling Xiaoloong with me. All of the rocks and debris were tumbling down, narrowly missing us by inches. We got out just in time!

We all breathed a sigh of relief.

“But...where’s the key?” Xiaoloong reminded me.

“I didn’t get it. But what matters now is that you’re safe.” I looked around. All of the men were collapsed on the ground.

Then, I saw a beam of light coming out from the destroyed cave. The key! Was it still there? A key with rubies and diamonds engraved in it slowly rose from the debris, floating to me and Xiaoloong. I gasped. “Xiaoloong, Xiaoloong! We got it!” I cheered for joy, hugging him tightly.

“You did a good job! Now, it’s time to send you back home.”

With a swish of the key, a portal opened. I stepped through it, waving goodbye to Xiaoloong. This was a journey I would never forget!

After some tumbling through the vortex, I landed with a thud on the muddy ground, the map in my hands again. But I also found one more thing: A small ruby from the key, with a note from Xiaoloong attached.

‘We’re all really grateful for you. Keep this ruby as a memory of this journey.’

Smiling, I put the ruby in my pocket. I still couldn’t believe what I had experienced. Now, I love animals more, and to this day, the memory is still etched deeply in my heart.

The Dragon In My Garden

Hong Kong Academy, Naraain, Aria – 12

I'm pretty weird, even if I didn't have a dragon in my garden I'd still be weird. All the other kids in the neighborhood look away and start whispering every time I walk past them, with the occasional snicker too. Maybe it's because of my stories, the way I'll suddenly walk away from a conversation or a game and bury my nose in my notebook and start writing for hours. I'd gladly take writing over social interactions anytime, humans can be awkward. But recently their opinions of me have become more apparent ever since I started telling everyone about the dragon.

It was a pretty terrible day two days ago, that day everything went wrong. First I failed my math test, then my bullies pushed me and made me spill my lunch, on top of all that I had a huge 1000 word essay and presentation due the next day that I hadn't even started on. But the worst part of that day was that I went home and my parents didn't even care! Instead of comforting me like they're supposed to they just gave me more chores.

I stormed out of the room and started my chores, my face twisting with rage. I loathed my parent's ashamed face when they looked at me, I loathed how much my classmates hated me just because I'm different, I loathed how much I disappointed myself. That day a terrible feeling came back, it's a pain that feels as if you've been pushed off a building, where every single bone and muscle in your body is achy and sore, it feels like you can't move, even if your life depended on it. It was just my luck that I tripped on a small rock and got my clothes all dirty. My face was fuming you could practically see the steam coming out of my ears. Infuriated, I tried to pick up the rock and throw it but it wouldn't budge. No matter how hard I pulled the rock just would not move, soon I was about to learn that it was not a rock at all.

I kept digging around the rock as my anger slowly melted into curiosity, my thoughts wandered as I carried on the tedious task I put upon myself. I wondered what I could possibly be uncovering, a secret underground room? The world's largest rock? Ching Shih's buried treasure? Eventually, I realised I dug around something most unexpected, I uncovered a massive jaw, with at least 60 teeth that were almost 4 inches in length. The sheer size of it sent a shiver down my spine, the jaw looked so powerful, like it could crush bone

Next thing I know I'm frantically running through my home looking for my parents and shouting "I found a dragon! I found a dragon!" Once I filled my parents in on everything they hugged me and told me how proud they were. Just kidding. They ended up shouting at me for wasting time, not doing my chores, and always writing "silly stories" that aren't true. I should've known nobody would believe me, what I needed to do was tell everyone about it, then find somebody who believes me and can do something about it. So here's how I executed my plan: The next day I went to school and started off my essay presentation by saying, "Hello everybody, my name is Mei and I am going to talk about the dragon in my garden." I think you already know how that turned out, turns out you can get used to being shoved into a trash can.

I thought nobody was going to believe me until it hit me right in the face. Really, my yeye lost his glasses and accidentally hit me in the face while looking for them. I couldn't believe I forgot about my yeye! My yeye is the nicest person in the entire universe, no matter what he supports me. Even when I said I wanted to move to a big city and become a writer, while everyone else was laughing at me he said, "Don't mind them, if you work hard you can achieve great things, all they are going to be is mean."

After I told my yeye about everything he told me to dig around the rest of the dragon, he said he had a friend who could help me. So I set to work, I used every bit of the free time I had digging in the dirt. Most people would have given up, but in a way I needed this, if I uncover the dragon I will prove to everybody that I was right, and that I'm not crazy. For once my parents will say my name with pride, for once, the other kids might let me play with them even though I'm different. For once, I won't be so disappointed in myself.

Once I fully uncovered the skull I was astonished, turns out it was never a dragon after all, but something else. It was a large reptilian skull, I heard about the titanosaur discovery a few years ago. I discovered a dinosaur. My yeye said that he had a friend who was a professor and studied these creatures. He said we can sell my dinosaur for a lot of

money. Of course I agreed because we needed extra money and I didn't know what to do with it, it's not like it could write my homework for me. I thought my parents would be proud of me, but my mom was mad because we have to dig up the rest of her garden in case there are any other bones, my dad says it's all a big waste of time. That was of course until they found out how much the skull is worth.

Just when things couldn't get any better we dug up an entire skeleton! Finding a complete Tarbosaurus is very rare and worth way more than just a skull. Though they didn't admit it I know they were secretly happy that I discovered a Tarbosaurus, what I uncovered was incredible and they have to have acknowledged that. Even though I found a dinosaur the people at school weren't very nice about it either, but I think they were all jealous, especially when my teacher said I was "astronomically lucky". I don't want their attention or kindness, because no matter what they will always try to bring me down, all they'll ever be is mean.

The best part about this was that I realized even with something that would make me popular, I'm still not accepted by others. But that doesn't mean I can't accept myself, I'm proud of myself, I know I'm a good person who is capable of great things. I vowed to try harder at school and try to be more social, not because I want to, but because there are obstacles one must overcome to achieve their dream, and in the end it's one hundred percent worth it.

Xingyun's Golden Fortune

Hong Kong Academy, Singhal, Shriya – 11

“Jiě Jiě, what do I pay your school fees for? Troublemaking and messing around? You should be ashamed of yourself. All you think about is your own pleasure. The least you can do is help me in the fields!” Bà Bà yelled. I looked at the floor, not daring to look at the livid expression on his face. Once I mustered up the courage to move my eyes, I saw him sigh and shake his head. Shame washed through me.

“If you have any sense of responsibility, you’ll change your behaviour and start working with me. How do you expect we’ll get the money for Mā Mā’s treatment? I—”

Huiying bursted into the room, her pigtailed bouncing up and down and a huge grin on her face. She definitely lives up to her namesake of joy. Bà Bà’s scowl immediately turned into a smile. I noticed a piece of paper clenched in Huiying’s right hand with a messy drawing typical of a five-year old on it. She waved it in the air at Bà Bà, who took it carefully and looked at it, smiling the whole time.

“You are very talented, Mèi Mèi! I know you’ll grow up to earn lots of money.” he praised her.

I walked out of the room and sat on the bench outside. Since I wasn’t part of the conversation, there wasn’t any point in being there.

I stared into the distance, beyond the hills and straw-roofed houses similar to ours.

“If I had drawn that, he would have scolded me and told me that my drawing skills are terrible. But since Huiying drew it, it’s amazing! He treats anything she makes like a masterpiece.” I wanted to shout. Anger bubbled up in me like lava.

I sighed.

“And I do really want to help Bà Bà and live up to my namesake, golden fortune, but my mind is constantly swirling with pranks to play, things to try, and places to go. I stop thinking about the consequences or how it might affect others.” I buried my face in my hands.

I emerge from the bushes, soaking wet, my hair and clothes covered with leaves and sticks. I smile at Bà Bà and hold up a jar of frogs.

“Look, Bà Bà! I caught five frogs all by myself!” I say, hoping to impress him.

“Jiě Jiě! Look at the state of your clothes! Now your mother will have to spend hours cleaning them and fixing all those holes. Spend your time on something useful like studying. I saw your report card. Will a B make you successful?” He sighs and shakes his head. My smile disappears.

“Jiě Jiě!”

I looked up, jolted back into reality.

“Oh, Jiě Jiě, here you are! I need help getting some flour. The sack is too heavy for me in my condition.” Mā Mā said, poking her head out the kitchen window.

I stood up and walked into the kitchen. A stove, a sink, some shelves and a cupboard for storage is all we had in there; just enough for Mā Mā to cook decent meals. I opened the cupboard and found a white cloth sack with 面粉 written on it. I pulled it out and set it on the floor.

“Thank you, Jiě Jiě.” Mā Mā looked at me, noticing my downcast expression. “What happened? Was Bà Bà scolding you again? Don’t mind him. He’s just stressed because he thinks it’s his fault that we aren’t well off and can’t afford the treatments for my illness. Unfortunately, he takes it out on you. You are perfect just the way you are. Don’t forget that, o—cough cough.”

“Mā Mā!” I exclaimed. “You should rest.”

"I suppose a few minutes would do me good. Would you mind taking the pot off for me?" she asked while sitting on a chair to rest.

"Oh, okay." I answered, gripping the charred black pot by the handles and lifting it onto the table before turning the fire off.

"Thank you, Jiě Jiě. How was school? Did you get any homework today?"

I groaned.

Mā Mā smiled. "Run along, then. The sooner you begin, the sooner it's done."

I plodded to my room, and pulled out my math, science and English homework.

"The sooner I begin, the sooner I'll be done." I repeated to myself. I pulled out a pencil and looked at the first math question: $-5+9=$

"Xingyun!"

I looked up.

"Who said that?" I thought.

"Xingyun!"

I poked my head out the window. A boy was standing before me; my best friend, Zixin.

"What is it? I'm doing homework." I hissed.

"That can wait until later! Have you heard? In a place called England, a woman found the bones of some strange extinct creature that looked like a giant lizard. What was it called? Dino—dino...dinosaur! Yes, a dinosaur." Zixin said excitedly.

Bones? Dinosaurs? All of this sounded thrilling to me, but I hadn't forgotten everything Bà Bà said.

"I don't have time for this, Zixin. I need to focus on my studies so that I can become successful and earn money for my family."

"But you can, and without studying so much. If you can find a dinosaur bone, it'll surely sell for thousands, maybe even millions of yuan!"

I stood there for a moment in disbelief.

"Thousands? Millions? This can't be true. It takes a month for Bà Bà to make a thousand yuan, let alone multiple or even a million! That much money could solve all our problems; Mā Mā's treatment, a bigger house, nice clothes, and everything we could possibly need. Most importantly, I would make Bà Bà proud." I thought.

Gripping the sides of the window, I placed one foot on the rim and thrust myself up, landing neatly next to Zixin.

"Well then." I said, dusting my hands off. "Let's get going."

Zixin started walking, and I followed.

"Tell me more about these dinosaurs." I prompted.

"They're gigantic, maybe ten times bigger than a human."

My eyes grew wide. "Ten times? You've got to be kidding me."

"The bones would match that size, so maybe five or so metres?"

"How are we going to carry them back?"

"We'll figure that out."

“Do you at least know where to start digging?”

“I was thinking about the persimmon grove, near the stream. These dinosaurs had to have drank water and eaten food. As a bonus, no one goes there much. Adults! One careless boy breaks his arm and now the whole area is considered ‘dangerous’. Pah! We’ll use our hands, unless you want to try and steal one of your father’s farming tools.”

“Nope. Never. I’m already in trouble. What’s the point in fanning the flame?”

“We’re here.”

I looked around. It was as beautiful as it was last time I was there. The perfectly dark brown branches looped over each other, dotted with orange persimmons. The soothing rush of the stream. The shaded clearing, surrounded by piles of red fallen leaves. To this day, the tranquility of the place still amazes me.

“We’re lucky that it’s persimmon season. We can eat those as snacks.” I suggested.

Soon, we had rolled up our sleeves and were on our knees.

Half an hour in, my hands and arms were covered by dirt and my nails weren’t any better, but I didn’t mind. I’ve been worse.

I wiped the sweat from my forehead, replacing it with dirt. “Let’s take a break. Tiring ourselves out won’t help at all.”

I washed the dirt off and drank some water from the stream before munching on some persimmons. When I felt my energy returning, I got back on my knees. I couldn’t afford to waste time.

“You know, Zixin, if these dinosaur bones really are as big as you say, we would have discovered one by now. Also, you said they were found in a place called England, which means we don’t know if dinosaurs existed in China. What if all of this is just a big waste of time? Bà Bà will get mad at me if I don’t start focusing on my studies. I should probably—” I stopped mid sentence. I could feel something. Something cold and hard. It didn’t feel like a rock, or a big clump of dirt.

“What’s wrong, Xingyun?” Zixin asked.

I don’t reply. Excitement surged within me. I started to dig like a dog; as I do, images fly through my mind. Bà Bà smiling at me, telling me how proud he is. Mā Mā, coming back from a successful treatment. Huiying playing with cute dolls. All of us living happily in a large house.

When I was done, I looked down at what I’d unearthed. Zixin’s eyes widened.

There, lying before me, was the biggest bone I had ever seen.

“You did it, Xingyun! You found a dinosaur bone!”

Dinosaurs

Hong Kong International School, Chang, Jay – 12

Rumbling roar and screeching sounds are coming from the portal. The metal clanked as we walked towards the time machine. The purple portal is an inch away from us, the swirling line circling like a hypnotizing illusion. “Next stop, the dinosaur age!” yelled Professor Bill. In the unexplored world of China, dinosaurs were buried, forgotten, and lost – until today. Now, we finally get to uncover the secrets of the dinosaurs in an adventurous journey.

It all started a year ago when my professor decided that China was the perfect place to study dinosaurs. “Oh Ethan, America is so well explored, there's not much to find,” my professor exclaimed in disappointment.

“Dinosaurs weren’t just in America; there are other places that had dinosaurs, just not as well explored,” I told Professor Bill, trying to lift his mood. I didn’t mean it, but he took it differently.

“I know just the place, China! China has barely been searched for dinosaur fossils, only about 10% of it. So much to explore, so much wonder awaits us. I knew you would be a great disciple, Ethan! We should go to China and build that time machine we spent so long designing. After all, it would be most efficient if we used it there.”

And we got to work. We flew to China with all our equipment and immediately started building. A year passed with many long and hard hours. Every day, we pushed ourselves to the brink of exhaustion. Sometimes, we were so drained we would fall asleep on the floor. Every time we improved something, the longer the sparks from the machine lasted. Every time the sparks came out, hope emerged from our hearts, but was quickly replaced with anger and sorrow when the portal didn't appear. Day after day, our hope and determination slowly drained away, like ice melting away under the hot sun, slowly but steadily.

All hope was lost, only little specks of it remained. “Test number 200, yay,” I said sarcastically, my heart sad and depressed. We connected the wires and improved our time machine, though a sense of doubt hung in the air.

Suddenly and surprisingly, the portal roared to life! Excitement surged through our bodies as a grin stretched across my face.

“Next stop, the dinosaur age,” yelled the professor in excitement! We stepped into the portal and immediately entered a blue empty void. Suddenly, images started appearing. Images of modern day 2050, King Auther’s reign, Jesus being born, Cleopatra's tomb, and finally, the dinosaurs. I took my professor's hand, and with no warning, we jumped into the image of the dinosaurs. The space around us bent as our bodies turned into mush. I looked at my distorted professor, his facial expression twisted and turned until he looked like a pale blob with lines swiveling all over the place. Finally, we landed on top of a cliff, staring at the most beautiful view ever witnessed by mankind.

A Brachiosaurus roared as it effortlessly plucked a 30-foot tree out of the ground, the 20-foot-long roots dangling helplessly. A Pterodactyl soared through the sapphire blue sky, diving down at lightning speed and flying up with a fish that was trying everything it could to escape the winged reptile. A Tyrannosaurus Rex fighting a losing battle against three Triceratops, the trio surrounding the giant predator as it looked for ways to escape.

“Wow, I never thought I would see a world with no pollution, no factories, and no cities. Humans really have destroyed our world, this place feels so... natural,” I spoke in awe, only now realizing really how much the world has changed for the worse.

Suddenly, something pierced my back as I fell to the ground, sharp talons sinking into my flesh. I looked at my professor in fear, but he had a much bigger problem. Surrounding my professor were eight sinosauropyterxes, their brown and white fur dancing in the powerful wind. Their brown eyes were fixated on the helpless professor, sharp shrieks came from their beaks as they communicated amongst each other. In the blink of an eye, the sinosauropyterxes charged at him, slashing at him until he was shredded severely. His chest was covered with three bloody slashes, his shirt was blown away as the wind carried the torn bits of cotton and leather.

I crawled toward my professor, the sharp rocks scraping against my skin as I used every ounce of my strength to reach forward and pull myself closer to him.

"Ethan, my left pouch...heal syringe," my professor whimpered as he lay there helplessly. With a great effort, I managed to get beside him. I opened the left pouch, my frail and bloody fingers protesting as pain surged through them. I took out the two syringes, filled with a glowing green substance. I poked one into my professor, then the other into me. I felt my internal organs revive as I recovered full strength, and I instinctively reached for the hole in the back of my body, but a shockwave of pain assured me that it was still there. "This serum is used to keep your body moving and alive, it will give us one hour, then we will fall and die because our bodies should've died a long time ago. N..."

"What! Then why did you tell me to take the serum, I could've survived without it." I interrupted him abruptly, angry that the side effects weren't clearly stated."

"Let me talk, and don't interrupt me, you impatient weasel, as I was going to say, now we have to heal ourselves manually with bandages and medicine, then we won't die." My professor said in an annoyed tone "I told you so!" as he rummaged through his pouch, looking for the right tools to heal our bodies.

"Ah, that hurts" I yelled as the sharp pain returned after an hour, the medicine and cream barely stopping the pain from reaching a physically unstable level.

"We need to get back to 2050; there we can heal fully," my professor said as he reached for his time-traveling watch.

Horror spread over the professor's face as he dumped the pouch's contents onto the cavern's rough stone, looking urgently as his eyes searched the items on the floor. "No, no, no, it's not possible, it can't be." My professor exclaimed, his hands shaking "The time-traveling watch, it's gone." Professor Bill said urgently, fear and anxiety building up. He reached into his bag, taking out a 6 by 6-inch square. "This is a tracker I put on the watch," the professor said, finally recovering from the impact of realizing their desperate situation. With a click of a button, a large hologram appeared in the middle of the cave. "It's currently in a pile of food heavily guarded by the sinosauropteryxes that attacked us." A worried look spread across his face, his finger rapidly tapping his thigh. "If we don't retrieve it in time, they're gonna eat the watch."

"Thump... thump... thump," they ran quickly across the lush forest. The horsetails and ferns brushed against their skin, their eyes moving left and right as they scanned the area for potential threats. Suddenly, a screech erupted in the distance, followed by noises that resembled chalk against a blackboard. "Okay, here's the plan. We go in, we get the watch, and we run quickly but quietly. We can't outrun them, so we should use a distraction to scare them away from the watch, which would give us just enough time to get the watch."

"I have an idea, Professor Bill! We can make loud noises to scare them away, grab the watch, set the time, and leave. I have some fireworks and a lighter I was gonna use to celebrate our accomplishment of building the world's first time traveling device." I said confidently as I gave a thumbs up to my professor.

"Alright, all set. Let the plan begin," the professor whispered, his heart beating hard as the spark burned through the fuse. The fireworks shot into the air, exploding with blinding brilliant colors spewing out of them. "Run!" shouted the professor as he ran for the watch. The sinosauropteryxes fled from the fireworks. The professor took the watch, shielding it with his body. "Time: January 10, 2050. Place: North 1.9653, South 9.8634. All set, hurry, get over here," the professor shouted as he reached over and grabbed my hand. In an instant, we were teleported into the blue empty void. Once again, images started appearing, and we wasted no time as we ran into the image of our home...

When I woke up, I was in my bed, wondering if this was all a dream. Suddenly, the door swings open. "Hey Ethan, so glad we made it out ok," said the professor, relieved that we were home.

"So it wasn't a dream?" I asked in disbelief. The professor chuckled as he reached in his pocket and took out a feather with red and white stripes. "Wow, a sinosauropteryx feather!"

Choosing to Fly

Hong Kong International School, Chee, Elena – 13

Pterodactyls soared gracefully through the azure heavens, their wings casting long shadows over the dreamy valleys below. Among them was Wei, known for her radiant plumage and flying. Wei's heart soared as high as her wings, but her joy was intertwined with a deep bond she shared with her best friend, Feng, whose wings glimmered in shades of emerald and sapphire; beautiful, but futile. Unlike Wei, Feng couldn't fly. She was long given up on. Branches snapped and leaves rustled as Wei burst out from the trees, into the open air, every thread of wind helping her glide more smoothly across the bright morning sky. The sun framed the lush mountains of what would one day be called China.

From below, Feng watched her best friend soar gracefully across the sky, envy and self-loathing filling her. She glanced down at her wings, wondering why they never moved as she wished.

"Feng!" She called out as she spotted the red-blackish pterodactyl by a nearby cliff. Feng looked up, squinting in the bright sunlight.

"Wei, we're supposed to be hunting right now; there's not much food in the sky."

Feng called out, "at least make yourself useful and keep watch from above." Wei sighed as she lowered herself back down next to Feng. "But I'm tired... I don't want to my morning doing boring hunting; cover for me, please?" Wei begged, flashing her pleading eyes. She wanted to fly; to see the vista from a pterodactyl's eye, not hunt first thing in the morning.

"I'll give you a flying lesson."

The sun dipped low in the sky, casting golden hues across the rugged cliffs that dotted the landscape. A gentle breeze rustled through the foliage. Perfect flying conditions. Perched on the edge of a rocky ledge, Feng stared out over the sprawling greenery, her wings quivering with anticipation.

"Alright, let's see what you got," said Wei, as she hovered above Feng, perched at the edge of a high cliff.

"Not much, I've never flown..." muttered Feng, so only the two of them could hear. Wei's eyebrows furrowed. She knew that the older pterodactyls had long given up on Feng, in favor of the "ones with potential", as they phrased it.

"Come on," Wei said. She had already spread her formidable wings, glinting in the warm sunlight. "You won't know what it feels like until you try! It's exhilarating!"

"I don't know, Wei," Feng replied, a mix of excitement and trepidation in her voice. She fidgeted, her sharp claws gripping the ledge tightly. "What if I fall?" Wei flapped her wings impatiently. "You won't! Look, it's all in the technique. Just watch me, and I'll show you how to do it."

With that, Wei leaped into the air, her wings catching the wind with a powerful thrust. She glided gracefully, carving through the air. Feng watched, wide-eyed, her heart racing. Wei displayed absolute confidence, spiraling and dipping, her cries of delight echoing through the canyons below.

"Feel that Feng? It's freedom!" Wei called from above, gliding effortlessly in loops and dives. "Trust the air; it'll hold you!"

Taking a deep breath, Feng took a cautious step forward, her heart pounding in his chest. She hesitated, glancing down at the rocky drop below. But the allure of the sky was too strong.

"Okay!" she ultimately shouted. "Here goes nothing!"

She took a leap off the ledge, wings outstretched in a desperate attempt to mimic Wei's graceful form. But she plummeted, the rush of wind rushing past her, panic bubbling in her throat. She instinctively unfurled her wings fully, praying the wind currents would catch her. She beat her wings frantically to stay afloat, but to no avail, her wing muscles burned from her brutal attempt to survive. She screamed as she dived. She shut her eyes. Wei, as if sensing her friend's distressed state, immediately dived alongside her.

"I've got you!" said Wei, talons digging into her friend's shoulders. Small gasps and shallow breaths left Feng's beak as her eyes automatically drifted down. The towering trees seemed like pebbles from this height. Falling meant death.

"Come on, it's getting dark, and there's something you must see."

“Where are we going?” Feng yelled through the rush of wind running through their ears.

“Nowhere, just enjoy the view.” The deep indigo of the heavens served as a canvas for myriad stars, each shimmering with a unique brilliance. The moon cast a gentle silvery light that bathed the landscape in a serene illumination. Little stars littered the night sky, its billions of distant stars creating a hazy glow that invited contemplation.

“We should head back; we're not supposed to be out here so late...”

But Feng's resistance seemed to crumble more and more as she witnessed the sight before her. Wei chuckled at her friend's conflict.

“It's beautiful, isn't it? Nothing beats a pterodactyl's eye view,” Wei said with a smile, as she carried Feng across the breathtaking evening sky. The silence soothed and contented.

“I never wanted to be a teacher. But I believe that those who can fly, should fly. There's no need to be stuck on the ground with everyone else. Though it's your choice.”

“I chose to fly.”

“Go!”

Suddenly, Wei released her hold on Feng, causing her to fall immediately.

But this time, as she spread her wings, she felt a powerful lift—she was flying! Feng let out a whoop of exhilaration, the world opening beneath her. A surge of confidence coursed through her as he began to flap her wings, clumsily at first, but gaining rhythm with every beat.

“Just like that!” Wei cheered, gliding beside her, her eyes sparkling with pride. “Keep your wings steady! You've got this!”

Feng found a rhythm, beginning to rise higher, mimicking Wei's movements. The air felt like a warm embrace, filling her with a sense of elation she had never experienced before. With each flap, she ventured further from the cliffs, weaving and laughing.

“Of course you could!” Wei replied, diving in beside her. “I knew—”

Suddenly, the serenity of the moment shattered. A low, rumbling growl echoed through the valley, sending chills down the girl's spines. Instinctively Wei's head snapped towards the sound, her sharp eyes scanning the ground. Emerging from the thicket was an allosaurus, its muscular frame rippling with power. The predator's fierce gaze locked onto her, a predatory gleam revealing its intent.

“Feng, run!” Wei shouted, knowing that Feng wasn't capable of escaping on her own.

“I'll distract it, go!” yelled Wei, as she instinctively angled her wings and began to ascend higher, hoping to leave the ground-dweller behind. But the allosaurus was faster than anticipated. Its powerful legs propelled it forward in a furious charge. It let out a deafening roar, a sound that resonated through the valley. Wei prayed for Feng's safety. She beat her wings furiously, propelling herself up, but the allosaurus was relentless. It lunged, jaws snapping just beneath her, nearly catching the tip of her wing. The wind rushed around her as she barely evaded the predator, the sheer force of its near miss sending a shiver of fear down her spine.

The allosaurus tore through feathers and flesh as it pounced and clamped its jaws down on her wing. Wei plunged downward, her cry reverberating throughout the valley. With one last jolt of will, Feng dove down and pushed Wei's body up, pushing her out of the predator's grasp.

The sudden counterattack took the allosaurus by surprise, and it missed its opportunity, growling in frustration. Feng raised her body upward and led Wei out of the predator's reach as they soared.

The allosaurus had bitten off only one-third of Wei's wing. An inch more meant death. While alive, Wei had never felt emptier. Like an empty shell.

It was clear. Wei could no longer fly. Her eyes blurred with tears, and she choked back a sob. Feng couldn't stand to see it.

"Come."

Feng spread her powerful wings, their large, leathery surfaces catching the faint glow of the moon. The air was crisp, filled with the scents of earth and night blooms. Her mission tonight was to lift her injured friend for a flight to heights they both cherished. Feng circled back, allowing Wei to drink in the view. They hovered briefly, high above the world, where the sounds of their hearts synchronized with the rhythms of the night. In that moment, Wei forgot her pain; all that mattered was the feel of the cool night air, the strength of her friend holding her, and the infinite expanse of the sky. Tears of gratitude filled her eyes.

"You know, I feared messing up if I tried to help you," Feng smiled. "But someone said to me before: those who can fly, should fly; there's no need to be stuck on the ground with everyone else. Though it's your choice whether you want to."

Wei smiled as determination crept back into her.

"I chose to fly."

Sinosauropteryx Story

Hong Kong International School, Choy, Kimberly – 13

The sight of my forearm has become a wonder— the brilliant hues of orange and red grasp my sight in a way that I don't ever want to look away. I wonder how my mother, who's covered in hundreds of thousands of feathers, can ever do anything at all.

As if responding to my thoughts, the grass reflects an orange shadow, I hear my mother's booming footsteps which are almost musical like the thrumming of a drum against the floor. Her dazzling orange plume makes even grass beautiful.

She drops a couple small critters for me and my siblings and a delectable scent fills my nostrils, I scurry for the lizard— my favorite.

I brush up against her, still chewing my food, "Mom, mom look! I've gotten my first feather!" I raise up my arm proudly and she looks at it for only a moment before concluding it's the most beautiful thing she's ever seen— the praise warms the chill that has settled in my bones from the cold day. I curl up against her, relishing the warm tingling that rushes through my limbs and warms my heart. I begin to doze off— slipping into a dream that's breathtakingly beautiful.

I strut through the forest, hundreds of plumes dancing on my chest in a beautiful blend of colors. I feel a brush of cold air— the kind I know would've frozen me as a child, that would have made me curl up against my mother, that carries serenity now. I walk with mom, who's feathers have dulled in her old age. She pokes and prods a million questions and the only thing that stops me from quieting her is the distant memory of her patience when I chattered endlessly about every new quill I grew.

I awake with a jolt from my blissful dream because suddenly the warmth feels suffocating, I free myself from my mother's plumage but the heat still licks at my skin. There's desperate wailing ringing through the air in a horrendous symphony of panic and pain. There's the throbbing rage of the ground carrying the terror of fleeing feet. There's a fiery glow in the sky.

It's so beautiful.

It's more beautiful than all of the feathers in the world.

It's so many colors.

It's so bright my eyes water and burn and sting until I can barely see it— but I can't pry my eyes away,

It's so colorful that I can't decide on a single hue

It's breathtaking.

Until I realize that it's approaching.

A visceral fear settles into me,

It's because I'm just realizing that it's coming from the sky,

It's because as I look around I can see it setting the grass and the trees and the flowers ablaze

It's because it's still the most beautiful sight.

Until the heat becomes painful.,

I can smell a mix of bloody ashes and sulfur in the air

I throw my legs forward,

I stop in my tracks when a shadow that pitifully attempts to dampen the inferno settles over our nest, and I can see my mother's gaze flitter between my siblings and I

She has to know it's hopeless,

She has to know that she should run,

She has to know that this is it.

The tears begin to trickle down her feathered cheeks,
They say a million things that she can't,
I love you
I'm sorry
I'll miss you

And I watch, because it's all I can do.
And her beautiful feathers become ash,
And her skin begins to crumble, leaving a loose skeleton,
I can see the pain in her eyes before they go blank white,

And for a moment I don't feel anything,
As I watch her ashes cascade around me,
The flaming powder ignites my own feather,
My one feather my mother praised so,
And in a beautiful and tragic burst of flames,
It's gone,

I watch each speck of dust fall onto my forearm,
And then I feel what my mother did—
my eyes burn and dry,
my skin prickles and stings,
my blood bubbles and boils,

But more than the searing pain I feel rage,
It's such a strong rage I'm not sure if it's the flames or the tantrum stirring in my chest that's making my blood roar
and scorch my bones,
I'm Infuriated because I thought there was something more magnificent than my mother's feathers,
I'm Infuriated because I know in her last moments she saw it in my eyes.

I'm infuriated because,
Because...

And then I let go of whatever I'm holding onto
Because there's nothing left to hold onto,
Not my mother,
Not my warm dreams of a future stolen from me,
Nothing
I scatter into the wind,
I crash into the soil,
I cement into the rock,
And I am one day, far, far away found

The Mesozoic Era

Hong Kong International School, Gan, Evelynne – 12

As the ancient machine whirled to life, the air shimmered around them, and the world they knew faded away, replaced by the vibrant sounds and sights of a Mesozoic era.

In a cluttered laboratory filled with gadgets and books, four friends stood around a peculiar invention that looks like a cross between an old-fashioned grandfather clock and a spaceship. There was Dr. Mia Chen, a curious scientist whose love for paleontology has made her explore the past; her cautious friend, Oliver, who often worries about the potential dangers of their adventures; Mia's adventurous younger brother, Leo, who is always eager for excitement; and their loyal dog, Rusty, whose funny actions always made them laugh.

Motivated for more knowledge and the thrill of adventure, the team had spent months building this time travel machine, eagerly anticipating their first journey to the Mesozoic era. As they activated the device, a rush of energy surged through them, and in an instant, they were transported to a rich, historic landscape in what would one day become China.

As the shimmering light faded, the group found themselves surrounded by enormous trees and tall grass. Strange sounds filled the air, calls from creatures they had never seen before. "Wow! Look at that!" Leo shouted, pointing to a distant hill where a herd of Triceratops ate, their horns shining in the sunlight.

Oliver looked worried. "Is this safe? Those things are gigantic!" Mia laughed excitedly. "This is amazing! We're in a world from millions of years ago! Did you know Triceratops were herbivores and used their horns for defense against predators?"

Rusty barked happily, agreeing with Mia. Their adventure had just begun.

As they observed the dinosaurs, the friends drifted closer, captivated by the dinosaurs' behavior. Suddenly, a thundering roar echoed through the valley, causing them to freeze in place. From behind the trees emerged a massive Tyrannosaurus rex, bigger than anything they had ever seen.

"Look out!" Oliver shouted, his voice filled with panic.

The T. rex scanned the area, its senses picking up every movement. The friends quickly ducked behind a large boulder, hearts racing. They could see the T. rex sneaking, its sharp teeth glistening in the sunlight as it let out another earth-shattering roar.

"Did you see how it walks?" Leo whispered, eyes wide with fear and awe. "This is amazing!"

Mia nodded her head, trying to keep her excitement to a minimum. "It's a top predator! T. rex can run fast and have incredible eyesight. We need to stay hidden!"

As they huddled together, Rusty began to wag his tail and bark. The T. rex turned its gaze toward the sound, and the friends exchanged alarmed looks.

"Rusty, quiet!" Oliver whispered urgently.

Just then, the ground trembled beneath their feet, and the T. rex moved closer. "What do we do?" Leo asked, his voice trembling.

Mia took a deep breath. "If we stay here, it could find us. We need to find a way back to the cave!"

As they prepared to make a run for it, they heard the flapping of wings above. A pair of Pterosaurs soared overhead, their massive wings casting shadows on the ground. "Look!" Mia pointed. "They're searching for food, looks like they're hunting for fish or small animals!"

But there was no time to marvel at the Pterosaurs. The T. rex was getting closer, its eyes fixed on them. "Now!" Mia shouted, and they sprinted toward the bushes, adrenaline coursing through their veins.

They dashed through the trees, but the dense trees made it easy to lose their way. "I can't see the cave!" Oliver exclaimed, panic rising in his voice.

Suddenly, Rusty barked again, but this time it was different, a warning bark. The T. rex had picked up their scent and was on their trail.

"Over there!" Leo cried, pointing to a narrow canyon nearby. "We can hide!"

They scrambled down the steep slope, landing in the grass. Heartbeats thundered in their ears as they crouched low, hoping the T. rex wouldn't find them.

As they caught their breath, Mia's eyes darted around, seeking a way to escape this situation. "We need to distract it!" she said, her voice firm. "If we can create a diversion, we might have a chance to get back to the cave and check the machine!"

The friends quickly brainstormed. They remembered the Pterosaurs hunting nearby. "What if we could use Rusty to create a diversion?" Leo suggested, his adventurous spirit shining through.

With a plan in mind, they gathered some nearby fruits and leaves to create a scent trail leading away from their hiding spot. They made a lure that Rusty could carry, hoping it would draw the T. rex's attention.

As Rusty led the way, they set up the distraction, laying out the fruits and leaves. The tension was noticeable as they waited, hearts pounding in anticipation.

Finally, the T. rex roared, its enormous head swinging toward the noise Rusty made. The dinosaur began to move closer, its nostrils flaring as it caught the scent of the food.

"Now's our chance!" Mia whispered urgently.

The friends climbed back up the canyon, Rusty trailing behind, adrenaline surging through their bodies as they raced toward the cave. They had faced danger and uncertainty together, and now they were ready to check on the time travel machine.

Inside the cave, they quickly assessed the machine. "I hope it's okay," Mia said, concern shown on her face.

After a tense few moments of checking the controls, Oliver let out a sigh of relief. "It seems to be working, but we need to get back before the T. rex returns!"

With their hearts still racing, they prepared to activate the machine again, they had a glimpse of the Mesozoic world and were ready to go home, knowing that the challenges they had faced and seen were nothing they had ever imagined.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Hong Kong International School, Li, Seth – 12

"Run!" yelled Mother, her voice booming over the rustling leaves as I sprinted towards the forest, hoping to blend in and hide from the small but vicious Sinosaurs. My heart raced as I glanced back to see my mother defiantly and singly fighting the horde of Sinosaurs, swatting some with her immense tail.

"Mother!" I yelled from the safety of the forest. "Come with me!"

But she shook her head; her determination beamed, yet her eyes were filled with sorrow. Just then, a swarm of Sinosaurs overpowered her and took her down. She looked at me one last time and slowly closed her eyes as an alpha Sinosaur knocked her out with a fatal blow to the head.

"Mother!" I yelled one last time before running away as tears filled my eyes.

After the death of my mother, I built a home on a cliff at the edge of the forest, overlooking the sea. I could not understand the discord between us Titanosaurs, a peaceful and massive plant-eating herbivore breed, and the Sinosaurs, a smaller but vicious carnivore dinosaur who engaged in aggressive tactics. They blamed each other for various issues but mainly fought for land and food, so I chose to stay away from both. I wanted to live in solitude, away from all the disagreements and fights. During my time in seclusion, I sharpened my physical and mental skills. My abilities became known to the other dinosaurs after I helped fend off some Sinosaur robbers from a wayward Titanosaur. Although I knew my wise tactical brilliance was needed in the conflicts, I decided not to take sides and stayed neutral. Years went by without any major incidents. However, my life was about to change drastically.

I was having breakfast, relishing the picturesque view of the never-ending sea from my cave when suddenly, a battered Titanosaur, its back marked by open wounds, emerged from the depths of the forest.

He frantically cried in agony, "They caught us by surprise, slaughtering many of us in a brutal massacre! We were outnumbered five to one by the Sinosaurs. I was one of the only survivors! The Sinosaurs have allied with the Pterosaurs, and established a law banishing all Titanosaurs from the plains surrounding the Great Rivers! They have taken over, slaughtering us and taking our homes! Please help us!" He pleaded.

This was not good. The winged Pterosaurs were also vicious, carnivorous beasts that were able to soar through the skies, often ganging up with the Sinosaurs to create trouble. If they try to take over the Great Rivers, the main source of food and water in China, this could only mean a lot of bad things for the Titanosaurs. Panic surged over me. He added, "We have to hurry up! I was spotted by a Pterosaur patrol as I was coming up the mountain!"

We fled into the forest, where no one could see us through the thick and dense canopy covering the secrets underneath. Suddenly, the flapping of wings could be heard as a gust of wind rustled the leaves – the Pterosaur patrol! We sprinted deeper into the forest as quickly as we could. They lost sight of us, and all they could see were a few leaves still drifting in our wake. The Pterosaurs gave a mighty roar and flew back, probably to report to the military leaders about the Titanosaurs in the forest.

The messenger and I bolted to the Titanosaur village, where everyone was gathering, preparing for the evacuation. A crucial vote was underway: to either stay and fight or flee to the inner areas of China, where the Sinosaurs would leave us alone because there was a larger population of Titanosaurs living there, who would provide protection and support against our enemies. However, the long road to Inner China was hard and arduous, as there were no trees to cover us from the Sinosaurs and the natural elements, and there were not many plants and leaves, which is our precious food. But that was the safest option for us, so we packed our bags with our essentials and valuables, and that was the day we began our journey to Inner China.

Weeks had passed, and we were nearing Inner China with only a mountain to cross. If everything went according to plan, our weeks of hiding from the winged Pterosaurs and running from the vicious Sinosaurs would be over. Excitement buzzed in the air.

The next day, everyone was in high spirits as we hiked up the mountain. However, as night fell, there were increased sightings of Pterosaur patrols, and the Titanosaurs grew uneasy and wary of their surroundings.

As we climbed the steep mountain towards safety, chaos ensued when a horde of Pterosaurs swooped down upon us. The air filled with screams and flapping wings as we fought our attackers. I swatted a squadron of Sinosaurs away, sending them tumbling down the mountain. Next to me, a young Titanosaur was beaten into submission by several Sinosaurs as they climbed onto his back and clawed him with their dagger-like teeth. With a yell, I leaped onto his broken body and crushed the Sinosaurs with one blow. Seeing their slaughtered comrades made the rest of them glance at each other before retreating down the mountain to await reinforcements.

Although we succeeded in pushing back the Sinosaurs, we suffered many losses. It was another unanimous decision to rest at the summit for the night before advancing towards the Inner China's edge.

The next day, I awoke to alarm bells ringing in our camp. Glancing down the mountain revealed nothing unusual until I spotted rocks moving. With a gasp, I realized that an entire Sinosaur army was camouflaged in grey, hiding behind the rocks. They were advancing slowly but steadily, and they would reach our camp in less than an hour. This was a tribal emergency!

We were faced with two dire options: fight or flee. If we stood our ground and fought, we would get completely decimated, and we could not flee either, as the enemy would eventually catch up with us. However, I came up with a brilliant idea that combined both options: we would set up a trap that would send logs tumbling down onto the valley below. Then, as the Sinosaurs chased after us, they would step on the tripwire and unleash the trap on themselves.

In absolute silence, we tiptoed down the path toward the valley, which would connect us to the safety at the next mountain, which was officially Titanosaur territory and no Sinosaur would dare intrude. Halfway through the journey, we heard the Sinosaurs' army bearing down on us, so we sprinted forward as fast as possible to get out of range from the logs. A few moments later, I heard an ominous click followed by reverberations booming from the hills to our left. From behind, my ears pierced in agony as high-pitched screams could be heard from the mass of Sinosaurs running in terror. Running from every direction, carnage and destruction could be seen in the wake of the deadly logs, flattening and crashing upon the Sinosaurs. Although logs were harmless to us massive Titanosaurs, they were as big as the Sinosaurs, capable of turning them into pancakes. Meanwhile, the Pterosaurs flew overhead, unsure of what to do and what was happening in that instance of chaos, and although they could have hindered our progress to our destination, they didn't as if knowing that it was for a lost cause. In a flash, we leaped across the line of rocks separating the Titanosaurs' land from the Great Rivers.

After moments of absolute chaos, the logs finally stopped rolling, and the stampeding subsided. The general was foaming at the mouth and was extremely furious at everyone, including his army, who had failed to stop the Titanosaurs from escaping, even the Pterosaurs, who hesitated when the Sinosaurs were being pulverized by the logs. "I'll take my revenge for this, so you'd better watch your backs!" he yelled angrily towards us while motioning for his army to retreat home, stomping furiously and throwing fits along the way.

Looking back upon my experiences and challenges, I realized this was the best path for the Titanosaurs. By honouring my mother's legacy, we fought against the Sinosaurs and reunited with the other Titanosaurs. We could seek a haven in Inner China where we could thrive and enjoy our lives without having to look over our shoulders. We could each go our separate ways, the Titanosaurs living with their tribe and the Sinosaurs and Pterosaurs living at the Great Rivers. However, my hope is that someday, the Sinosaurs and the Pterosaurs could make peace with us and we can coexist together again. But for now, I glanced towards the tall and proud mountains of Inner China— a new beginning awaited us here among these distant mountains where hope glimmered on the horizon.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Hong Kong International School, Li, Spencer – 12

Clang! Clang! Clang! The sound of the archaeologist's chisel reverberated throughout the wide valley.

"That should be it!" he exclaimed, his eyes dancing with excitement and pride.

"Incredible! Look at the size of that fossil!" the archaeologist's colleague remarked. The two climbed up a rocky ledge and peered down below. A massive dinosaur fossil sprawled out across a ten-meter-wide expanse. However, this was no ordinary dinosaur; it was a newly discovered species, rumored to be the king of the Mesozoic Era, known for its ferocious teeth and reflexes sharp as lightning. The Giganotitan was often depicted in cave drawings from ancient civilisations, as a symbol of fear and power.

As the two archaeologists took pictures of their work and celebrated, night fell. They decided to stay up and watch the rare blue moon as part of the celebration. But fatigue overtook them and they slowly nodded off before the blue moon! Sadly, they didn't witness the spectacular and unusual scene that followed.

As the clock struck midnight, a bright beam of light shone down on the dinosaur. Its bones rattled against the desert ground, and dust flew everywhere as it took the form of the Giganotitan. Its muscles and organs all regrew and lastly grew some protective scales.

"Ah! It feels good to be alive again!" I looked around at my surroundings, perplexed. Where am I? To my left lay a large structure shaped like a red box with a pointed top. As I peered inside, I noticed lots of cubicles with lots of partitions. Some of the objects were long, with patterns. Perhaps these objects were inside the structure. I peered through the transparent objects, keeping my eye on the peculiar items inside as I stuck my claws through the exterior and moved them around. Sure enough, there were objects inside. I tried to smash the structure with my claws and it easily crumbled. Pathetic. I crowed, triumphantly, finally, being able to solve the mystery of these strange objects. Just then, two critters let out loud and insufferable shrieks averting my attention.

"Quiet!" I shouted. But that just made them scream louder. Arghh! These tiny folks were getting on my nerves! I walked closer to them but they fled. Huh! That was easy. Maybe modern-day creatures still fear me.

Using my superior eyesight, I scanned the surroundings, hoping to see where they had gone. In the distance, I could see a group of majestic mountains on the horizon. Perhaps I would find more of my kind there. It was getting boring here. I placed the broken boulder down and set off.

After what felt like forever, I finally reached the outskirts of the outlandish mountain range. But as I approached, I realized it wasn't a mountain range, but more like a set of thick blue sticks jutting up from the ground surrounded by more structures and some critters.

I had wandered into a large setting of structures. Around me, many critters were shrieking, some were holding up tiny objects with glowing screens at me as if they could shield themselves with them, while others pressed furiously onto their objects. What was wrong with me? Why did they seem so scared?

As I walked closer to the tallest poles, I noticed that they were, in fact, enormous. These sticks were so tall that it seemed like they were scraping the sky. Technology had advanced so much! I slowly realized that some critters were following and pointing black sticks at me. Some were riding on big black birds with rotating wings in the sky! This was the strangest thing I had ever encountered, stranger than that meteor that had struck our world a few million years earlier.

Suddenly, a critter let out a shriek that echoed loudly throughout the valley. These critters could scream surprisingly loudly for their size. I picked the critter up and roared, "Be quiet!" Something the critter was holding had amplified my voice; surprised, I released the critter to examine the strange device.

"What's this?" I muttered to myself. My incredibly magnified voice shocked me; I jumped and dropped the object.

Without warning, I heard a crack and a sharp pain shot through my toe. A group of annoying critters were attacking me! Even though I wasn't keen on fighting, I was still the king of the Mesozoic Era, a Giganotitan, and I lashed out with my tail in a surge of fury.

Before long, chaos erupted around me. I kicked and roared ferociously while swiping at everything in sight, but the critters were relentless. Soon, my attacks were random and all over the place, destroying boulders and large items in my way. Some fiery bangs set off and made one of the blue sticks wobbly. Aware of what was happening, I swiped my tail at a critter and a yellow rectangle on circles. Bam! One blast sent a nearby blue stick wobbling dangerously. If that thing collapsed, it would be devastating. Now, all my efforts were to make the structure stable again. However, a flash and a bang were all it took for it to come crumbling down. In this instance, I saw a critter out of the corner of my eye. Something stirred inside me, a desire to protect this creature. A tinge of pity or attachment to this critter made me jump, pushing it out of danger just before disaster struck.

Time slowed down to a halt. It seemed we were moving in slow motion, like the universe was mocking me for saving the critter. As I saw the blue stick topple over, a flashback of my life raced through my mind. I was trying to scream but no words came out. I looked desperately at the critters, hoping for a silver lining, but strangely, they seemed to be in a cheering position. Why? Hadn't I just saved one of their own? Perhaps to save this critter wasn't the best choice after all. These species were so narrow-minded, so foolish, that they could not view me from my perspective. They could only see me as a villain. Sure their choices were perhaps carved out of fear, but it was still unusual.

Then I reflected on my choice. Maybe some part of me had wanted to save the critter to prove that I wasn't half-bad as they thought, but perhaps, I acted out of pure reflex. However, the stubborn critters still couldn't recognize my sacrifice. Why didn't they try to save me? They should try to think outside their perspective and treat others nicely instead.

Finally, I looked up. I drew my last breath and sighed, as the stick collapsed on me. Then all went black.

Commander Li stood up, shaking with fear. The past few minutes were a blur – the firefight with the dinosaur, the skyscraper collapsing, then a swipe of a tail and a push. Wait. The dinosaur was dead? Had I been saved? Commander Li was shocked. After all, they had done to this creature – attacking it, throwing grenades at it, and yet, it had saved his life. He gazed at what remained of the smoking disaster where once stood a skyscraper with a new vision. And it was respect. He realized that humans were less advanced than he had ever imagined.

What A Charm!

Hong Kong International School, Li, Zoe – 12

The sun rises over the rugged mountains of the city, casting a golden glow on the peaks, painting the sky in hues of pink and orange. Below, the bazaars awaken; people and dinosaurs roam the streets, and rich aromas of scallion pancakes and tanghulu fill the air, heralding the start of a new day.

I sit on a smooth red sofa, staring at the walls covered in Chinese paintings in the fanciest building in the city, the air thick with anticipation. It's my 12th birthday today, but despite the celebrations, a whirlwind of nerves churns in my stomach. I'm nervous about welcoming my lifelong friend, a creature that will change my life. I picture the small, cute dinosaur peering out of its egg, taking its first look at the world. But what if it's not cute or elegant? What if it's... ugly? My heart races.

"Isabel Lin?" a man in a black suit calls, cutting my thoughts.

I follow him through a pair of doors into another room, similar to the one I just left. The walls stand clean and stain-free, and a chandelier shines above. Another man enters, pushing a cart with a massive egg perched on top. He places it in front of me, and I take a deep breath. *In, and out.*

"It's time," I whisper to myself, steeling my nerves.

The beige egg has the word *male* on it. I pick up the tool and slowly crack open the top. A light yellow dinosaur is revealed. He has a cone-shaped head with a line of dots going down to the end of his scruffy tail, and round, black eyes. The creature reluctantly climbs out and crawls around.

I do *not* like this look.

The dinosaur trots over to me and I sigh in disbelief. How could this happen to me?

One of the men explains, "This is a Yinlong, a herbivorous that measures about 1.2 meters long from the Late Jurassic Period of China and—"

"Okay, I don't care," I snap, cutting him off, and walk out, throwing my hands up in exasperation. The men scramble to nudge the dinosaur to follow me.

When I get home, I settle at my desk, diving into my studies to drown out negative thoughts swirling in my mind. When I'm done, I inch the door open and step outside, but I feel something silken and delicate being squished under my feet. The Yinlong has left a pink tulip for me. A gift that I have crushed.

I walk over to the window and gaze outside at the streets, watching people frolic with dinosaurs of every hue and size. My heart sinks with jealousy, heat flushing my face as I struggle to hold back tears. They spill down my cheeks, tracing paths like raindrops sliding down a window. My eyes drift to a towering billboard. Big, bold letters announce: Dinosaur Skill Competition – December 10th.

I blink twice, wiping my tears. Perhaps I can join. There is a month to train my dinosaur. I can't help but believe he has potential for something as long as not a beauty contest.

So I bring my new dinosaur to my backyard. I take out a few hula-hoops and set them out, and before I finish, the Yinlong has already hopped into the first hoop.

"Good! Again," I say, and he cocks his head. He sits there for a minute.

"Come on," I urge, but smile, telling myself to be patient. Finally, he jumps into the other hoop, then the other without reminder.

My baby brother comes outside shaking his rattle, "What is that? He looks *strange*."

"He's a very smart and fast dinosaur," I say. "I'm planning to do the competition. It's okay. Looks don't matter in the competition, at least." I chuckle to myself and look at the Yinlong. This genius is *my* companion. How great is that?

Day after day, I bring my Yinlong out to train. As the days pass, my frustration over this dinosaur melts away like ice cream on a hot summer day. This Yinlong is starting to grow on me, despite his looks.

“I think Charm is a nice name for him,” I tell my mom.

“Surely he’s a dinosaur ‘prodigy,’” Mom says.

I bring him out the next morning and train him, even in the rain, until sunset. Then I take some sandwiches from the kitchen and we eat outside, lying on the thick grass, gazing up at the brightly glowing stars. Water from the wet soil seeps into my clothes. But I don’t care. I have this intelligent, agile dinosaur.

I sit on the benches, shaking with nervousness. Thirty minutes till it’s our turn. I taste metal-like blood from where I just bit my lip too hard.

My eyes scan the convoluted course. A million objects were placed carefully to create the course. Hula hoops, hurdles, stairs, slopes, tunnels, ladders, and other objects I can’t recognize. We haven’t trained with those! I tell myself to breathe, but my heart is beating faster and faster. Will Charm be able to understand what to do? What if he falls and injures himself?

It’s too much to think about. But my thoughts immediately go to something else.

The first dinosaur – a Microraptor that is elegant and graceful, its feathers and scales a deep ocean blue – and her friend, a tall teenage girl, walk into the arena. The crowd gasps with awe. The horn honks, and the creature races through the course quickly to the finish. The announcer declares that their time is a stunning 27.1 seconds. The crowd cheers, and the girl flips her brown hair in triumph.

I shake my head. I’m going to beat them; I’ve settled on that.

The announcer finally calls our names. I lead the way as we walk to the center of the arena. The horn honks and startles me, but Charm is already dashing his way through the first few obstacles. He swiftly runs through the parts we have trained already, but then he stops at the entrance of a small maze. Charm looks at me, and I nod slightly. He turns and runs inside, and I wait on the other side nervously. The time is ticking fast. Finally, Charm appears on the other side! He doesn’t hesitate to go through the other sections of the obstacle course and figure things out.

Long, nervous seconds later, Charm reaches the finish. Our time is *26.3 seconds*. That’s faster than he’s ever gone in our training before—even with a race this long—and we’ve beaten everyone so far. Even the pretty blue dragon. I smile, but a strong doubt swivels in my mind as we wait for the others to finish.

Eventually, the results are calculated. Every second feels like hours. But finally, finally, they come in and I look up at the big screen. The screen that holds the results that matter the world to us.

I can’t believe it. Our names are at the top, next to the number one. My heart is beating so fast my chest might pop. We did it. We won! Pride and joy burst through me like fireworks exploding in the night sky. I pinch myself, half-expecting to wake up from this exhilarating dream, yet here it is – a sweet taste of triumph.

I step onto the podium, Charm by my side. Smiles are plastered on our faces. We beam at the crowd, their applause and cheers roaring in my ears and filling the air. There are many opportunities ahead, as bright as this moment right here.

Looks aren’t everything – it’s the hidden traits and talents that truly matter.

A Sky of Stars

Hong Kong International School, Wong, Alexa – 14

12-year-old Hao trudged through the dark forest, his breath ragged and uneven. He had been camping with his family in a remote part of Guangxi, but as he had been scouting around for firewood, a thick layer of fog settled into the forest, and by the time the fog lifted, the sky had already dimmed to the colour of a faded bruise, and he had wandered too far to find his way back to the campsite. Hao came to a clearing and realized that he had reached the edge of the valley. In front of him stood a large hulking mountain with an enormous hole yawning in the side of it like an open mouth.

It's getting dark, he thought. I'll stay in this cave until they come to find me.

Hao cautiously entered the cave, tendrils of ivy brushing softly against his back like a stroking hand. The sound of his footsteps echoed eerily across the cold hard stones. The cavern was a long limestone tunnel that spanned about three stories high, and at the very end of the tunnel, if he squinted just enough, he could see a tiny speck of light breaking through the darkness. Secret hideout? Treasure? Curiosity got the better of him. Taking a deep breath, Hao broke off into a sprint towards his only source of light, hoping for the best.

Hao stepped off the hard rock of the cave into lush green grass. Fireworks danced across his vision as he struggled to adjust to the blindingly bright daylight. He took in the scenic landscape in front of him. An expanse of vibrant green field stretched across the dirt floor like a soft mossy carpet, while in the distance, creatures with long necks drank from a vast shimmering lake the colour of sapphire. Mountains possibly taller than the Alps wrapped around the entire valley, its jagged edges and sharp ridges cutting into the vividly blue sky.

He turned around, ready to run back into the cave entrance, only to be greeted by an empty slab of mountain rock.

Great, what do I do now? What do I do now? He punched the mountain rock over and over again. Suddenly, a dark shadow crawled across the ground where Hao was standing. Trembling, he slowly looked over his shoulder to see an enormous scaly creature. It resembled a stouter version of an orange bearded dragon, with short spikes protruding out of the sides of its face and a stumpy lizard-like tail that dragged softly on the grass.

Before Hao could scream, a calm voice entered his mind.

I'm sorry I scared you. Let me introduce myself. I am Ash, and am part of the Bristlehead Tribe. The creature held Hao's gaze, and Hao realized the creature was communicating telepathically.

I have never seen a creature like you before. What brings you to the beautiful place of Aether Valley?

"I came here through a long tunnel in the mountains. But nothing here makes sense. When I walked out of the cave, the opening disappeared! Everything here looks too beautiful to be a place on earth, and you—you're a dinosaur, aren't you? I must have travelled back in time!"

Ash cocked her head. *I do not know what "dinosaur" means, but do you want to live with us for a while, until you find a way home? We are always willing to help travellers in need.*

Hao gratefully agreed, and so he lived the next few days with Ash and her family in a village where dinosaurs like Ash, called Bristleheads, lived. During the night, Hao slept in a small cozy underground cave accessible from the floor of their den made of fallen oak trees. During the day, he watched Ash and the Bristleheads perform their daily errands. They went to the lake to drink water three times a day and mainly ate fruit gathered from the trees surrounding the borders of the village. *Do you want to try? It's really fun,* Ember, Ash's son told Hao as he rammed his powerful head into the sturdy trunk of a tree, sending dozens of round golden fruit the size of a basketball raining down onto the grass.

Hao politely shook his head and told him that he would break his neck if he did.

Even though living with the dinosaurs came with its own challenges, such as having to do his business in a rather unpleasant bathroom pit, he still found enjoyment in the simple yet fascinating life of the dinosaurs. He particularly liked those clear cloudless nights, when just him, Ash, and Ember laid on their backs in a wide empty field and looked at the stars. Hao would gaze, open mouthed, at the vast expanse of constellations, spilled across the vast night sky as if a basket full of many tiny pearls had tipped over and sent the precious stones flying, skipping, rolling to all the corners of the universe.

“This is amazing,” Hao had whispered on the first night he was able to witness the galactic masterpiece.

Do they have stars back where you live? Ash had questioned.

“No, not really. You’d be able to see one or two if you’re on the outskirts of town, but on most nights the stars don’t shine. There’s too much pollution and sadness in the world.”

Nothing can stop a star from shining, even as it grows older and eventually dies. Look at the sky. All this light came from faraway galaxies a long time ago, so long ago that some of these stars may not even exist anymore. Yet we can still see it. A star’s light keeps shining even when it has disappeared, Hao. Please don’t forget that.

Hao! Come outside immediately!

Hao snapped his eyes open from Ember’s voice pounding into his skull and crawled through the hatch of the cave, disoriented from sleep. He saw Ember, who was romping around the den in excitement.

Ember lumbered over to Hao, excitement glinting in his eyes. *Follow me! There is a shooting star in the sky!*

Hao stumbled after Ember into the blinding sunlight where many Bristleheads were clustered together, their heads tilted upwards. Sure enough, when Hao followed their gaze, a white shining ball of light soared across the sky like a shooting star in slow motion, weirdly captivating as much as it was mysterious. It wasn’t until the ball suddenly glinted fiery red with flames when realization hit Hao with a sickening jolt. Shooting star? Oh no, this red ball of light was no shooting star.

“Hold on! You got this all wrong!” Hao ran around tapping the dinosaurs, who were sitting on the grass, their eyes glowing with the reflected light of the asteroid. “This thing will kill you! You need to evacuate while you still have the chance!”

The dinosaurs took no notice of Hao and continued to stare unblinking at the sky under the mesmerism of the asteroid, no matter how loud Hao shouted and stomped his foot.

There’s nothing you can do about it. This is our fate.

He spun around to see Ash standing behind him, her expression grave.

Our time is approaching fast. You must leave now, before it is too late.

Ash led Hao back to the bottom of the mountain where they had first met. The cave entrance had reappeared.

“I’m not leaving without you!” Hao shouted defiantly, even though the ache of all those days being away from his family burnt in his stomach like a wildfire.

You have a bright future ahead of you, young one. Please don’t let us drag you down. We are only of the past, after all. Ash’s eyes glimmered in emotion as she gave Hao’s shoulder a gentle nudge. Go now, there is not much time left. Do it for me, please.

Blinking back tears, Hao gave Ash one last hug and stepped into the cave mouth. On and on he ran until he came out of the other side of the tunnel into the warm summer night. Then the despair gripping in his throat burst out of his mouth in huge, gulping sobs. He’d just left all his friends to die horrible deaths and now he was lost in the deep dark woods, all alone.

Shh, child, do not be afraid. You are not alone.

Hao blinked away his tears in surprise. A luminous white glow suddenly swept through the valley. When Hao looked up, there was a trail of stars running through the sky like a cascading river of pearls. A billow of campfire smoke rose up from the air where the starry path ended.

“A star’s light keeps shining even when it has disappeared. You were right, Ash.” Hao whispered, sensing peace at last, and he swore for a moment he could see his friend’s smiling face in the stars as he slowly made his way back to his family.

Secrets of the Ancient Cavern

International Christian School, Chan, Sze Ki Charlyne – 12

“Wait up!” was the last thing I heard before I fell into a deep pit. Who am I, and how did this happen? Well, to tell this story properly, we have to start from the beginning on a boring old bus.

That day, I was absorbed in my phone, scrolling through social media on the bus to Jiangxi, just like all the other kids from my boarding school. The only difference? While they would be dropped off in the bustling city of Nanchang, my best friend Lynn and I were being sent to a newly discovered fossil excavation site where our relatives worked.

“I wish I could go to fun places over the break, but no, my ever-so-amazing mom just has to send me off to a bunch of ruins in the middle of nowhere to visit my eccentric aunt,” I thought bitterly, staring out the window.

Suddenly, the screech of the bus door opening snapped me out of my thoughts, and a wave of kids rushed out, excitedly greeting their parents. The joyful sounds echoed around me, made me feel even more glum about the summer ahead.

The harsh sunlight hit my eyes as I stepped off the bus, dragging my suitcase toward the black van that my aunt had sent to pick us up. “This is going to be the worst summer ever,” I grumbled as I settled into the back seat.

“Don’t worry! It’s going to be so much fun! Just think of all the adventures we’ll have!” Lynn nudged me lightly, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. It was hard not to smile at her infectious excitement, even if I was still skeptical.

After a few more hours of driving through winding roads and lush greenery, we arrived at a bustling valley filled with tents and peculiar machines. “Welcome to the excavation site!” Aunt May greeted us, bouncing as she hurried over to take our luggage. “Let’s go and tour the site first.”

“Wow, it’s huge!” Lynn exclaimed, her eyes wide as she took in the sprawling landscape. Ahead of us lay a tunnel drilled into the mountainside, its walls shimmering with brilliant crystals, illuminated by strings of twinkling lights.

“It truly is beautiful, isn’t it?” Aunt May replied, a proud smile on her face. “And that’s not all—we’ve discovered hundreds of ancient fossils in those caves. Legend has it that this cave is the very center of all the magic this world has to offer.”

“Magic doesn’t exist, Aunt May, and even if it did, I doubt a cave could be the source of it,” I retorted, rolling my eyes.

“Believe whatever you want,” she said, her tone teasing. “But trust me, you’ll see just how magical it is once I take you on a full tour of the caves tomorrow. For now, it’s getting late, so you’d better rest up. Tomorrow is going to be a whole new adventure!”

That night, as I lay in my sleeping bag, the stars twinkled brightly above, looking like little diamonds sprinkled across the sky. Next to me, I heard Lynn snoring softly, curled up peacefully in bed.

Suddenly, a soft voice echoed in my mind. “Ah, little one, come find us.”

I jolted upright, glancing around the tent in shock. “What’s wrong, Grace?” Lynn mumbled sleepily, rubbing her eyes. “Did something happen?”

“Did you hear that?” I whispered, my heart racing. “Something was calling me, telling me to come find it.”

“Probably just your mind playing tricks on you. After all, we’ve had a long day, and you’re probably just tired,” she said, sounding a bit grumpy at being woken.

“Come find us.”

“There it is again! It’s coming from outside now.” I quickly slipped on my shoes and grabbed my bag, opening the flap of our tent. “You coming or what?”

Lynn sighed but reluctantly followed me outside. “Well, where’s the voice coming from now?” she asked, watching as I looked around, searching for the source.

“We’re over here, little one. Come find us before time runs out.”

I heard the voice more clearly now, urging me forward. “Over there, in the tunnel!” I whispered, making my way toward the entrance. The tunnel was even more enchanting in the moonlight, the crystals reflecting a soft glow that illuminated the passage like a fairy tale.

“Quickly, little one. Time is running out. You must find us now.” My heart raced as I sprinted deeper into the tunnel, adrenaline surging through me. Suddenly, I tripped over a rock and fell into a pit. The last thing I heard was Lynn yelling at me to slow down.

I landed with a thud, the impact knocking the wind out of me. “Where am I? Where’s Lynn?” I murmured, shaking my head lightly to clear the fog.

“Follow the lights.”

“Huh? What lights?” I asked, still disoriented. Just then, the passage lit up with tiny glowing dots, shimmering like fireflies. Reluctantly, I got up and began to follow the lights, hoping they’d lead me back to safety.

After what felt like hours, I finally reached the end of the tunnel. In front of me was a hole barely large enough for an adult to squeeze through. Cautiously, I approached the hole and peeked inside, gasping at the sight before me.

The cavern was adorned with elaborate tapestries depicting a story. They showed many feathered dinosaurs living peacefully on Earth, controlling the ground, creating flowing rivers, and lush jungles teeming with life. At the center of this magic was a beautiful gemstone, glowing with power and beauty. But then, darkness fell, wiping out most of these magnificent creatures. The survivors fled underground, using their last powers to create a cavern that would record the tragic events and hide the Heartstone, a gemstone created from the dead soul of a powerful dinosaur.

I looked around in awe before noticing a huge gemstone in the center of the cavern. My eyes widened in shock; it was the same gemstone depicted in the tapestries. I slowly approached the Heartstone and placed my hand on its smooth, shimmering surface.

As I touched it, a rush of energy surged through me. I felt the heartbeat of the Earth, and the whispers of ancient dinosaurs filled my mind. “You have come,” a voice echoed, resonating in my very core. “You are the chosen one.”

“Chosen for what?” I stammered, overwhelmed by the gravity of the moment.

“To restore the balance,” the voice continued. “The darkness that consumed us is returning. Only you can awaken the magic of the Heartstone to protect our world.”

“But I’m just a kid! I don’t know how to do anything!” I protested, panic rising within me.

“You have the spark of curiosity—the key to unlocking the magic. Trust your heart, and the path will reveal itself.”

Suddenly, the tapestries glowed, and the stories within them began to come alive. I saw dinosaurs creating storms and summoning rain to nourish the earth. I felt their joy, their struggles, and their connection to the magic that once flowed freely.

As the visions faded, I realized I had a choice to make. I could return to my old life or embrace this new adventure and the responsibility it entailed. I looked back at the Heartstone, its glow beckoning me.

“I’ll do it,” I whispered, determination swelling in my chest. “I’ll help protect the magic.”

The Heartstone pulsed in response, and the cave trembled with energy. “Then you must find the three dinosaur souls that were turned into gemstones and scattered throughout the valley. Only when united with the Heartstone can the magic be restored.”

“I’ll find them!” I declared, my fear transforming into excitement. “Where do I start?”

“You must seek the first soul where the rivers meet the mountains.”

With newfound purpose, I glanced back at the Heartstone as I left the cavern. “I won’t let you down,” I promised.

I squeezed back through the hole, a surge of excitement coursing through me. I had no idea how I would find the stones or what challenges lay ahead, but I was ready to embrace whatever came my way.

Once outside, the night air was cool, and the stars twinkled above, as if cheering me on. I spotted Lynn sitting at the edge of the pit, worry etched on her face.

“Grace!” she exclaimed, rushing over. “I was so scared! What happened?”

“I fell into a pit, but you won’t believe what I found!” I burst out, my words tumbling over each other. “There’s a magical Heartstone, and I’m supposed to find three dinosaur souls to protect the magic!”

Lynn’s eyes widened. “That sounds incredible! We should go find them together!”

I hesitated for a moment, considering the dangers that lay ahead. But I couldn’t do this without her. “Okay, let’s do it!”

And so, our journey began, the echoes of the past guiding our steps as we sought to unlock the magic of the Heartstone. I guess this summer won’t be so bad after all.

The Boy and the Feathered Dinosaur

International Christian School, Fan, Wing Sze Emily – 13

October brought a welcome change from the sweltering heat of summertime in the southern villages of China. Villagers could finally leave their huts to enjoy the refreshing air, especially the children.

One day, Chen, Ming and Wen sat in a circle in their backyard, surrounding their ancient grandfather, who sat on a rickety chair that they dragged outside.

Chen, the eldest, pleaded, “We’re so *bored*, grandpa! Could you tell us a story, pretty please?” Their grandfather, who had seen more than any other person in the village and therefore had countless stories to tell, chuckled.

“Since you asked so nicely, it is time I told you a story from my past, long before any of you were born.” He took out a strange striped feather that he always kept in his pocket, and began: “Would you like to know where I got this feather? Well, it all began in a faraway town...”

“Jiaming! Gather some ginseng roots from the mountains for me,” called Master Fang. “Winter’s coming soon, and our stocks are low.”

Jiaming groaned inwardly. He was the *worst* at following directions. Master Fang seemed to sense his reluctance, and said, “Don’t dawdle! You’ve been stuck at the apothecary long enough anyways. Just follow the path, unlike last time, and you won’t get lost!”

Ignoring his master’s snarky comment, Jiaming got up from the desk and grabbed a wicker basket before trudging his way towards the mountain.

Jiaming shivered at the frigid wind as he wandered around the mountain. He had strictly followed the path up the mountain and searched around everywhere; there were no ginseng roots in sight. ‘Master Fong will be so disappointed,’ Jiaming thought. ‘Perhaps I would have better luck if I went off the trail...’ Suddenly, he remembered the catastrophic incident that had happened the last time he left the path, so he dropped pebbles behind his trail to retrace his steps.

After hours walking off the path, Jiaming still couldn’t find any ginseng whatsoever. He kicked angrily at a twig on the ground. He was tired, hungry, thirsty, and yearned to run away from this dumb mountain and never come back.

Suddenly, Jiaming stepped on something soft and pillowy. Through the light filtering through the trees, he saw a trail of feathers and...*blood*. He stared in horror, but his curiosity overwhelmed him.

He followed the bloody trail when he heard small pitiful wails drifting from behind a bush. As he slowly edged closer, holding his hands in front of his face for protection, he saw a creature – a tiny...*lizard?*

It looked like an overgrown gecko with a long striped tail, covered in filmy feathers. It was curled up like a ball, and Jiaming could see blood beneath its hind leg. As Jiaming pondered what to do, the creature whimpered again.

Jiaming gently scooped it up into his wicker basket, and whispered, “Come on, you poor scrap, let’s get you some help.” He made his way back to the dirt road as quickly as possible and left the mountain.

After rushing back to the apothecary, Jiaming burst through the doors and declared, “Master! I found this...lizard and it’s injured! What do we use to treat bite wounds again?”

Master Fong looked up from his papers, stared at him and answered slowly, “What. What *is* that? Weren’t you just collecting ginseng roots? Where are they? Don’t tell me you got distracted again!”

Barely paying attention to him, Jiaming cleaned the creature’s wound, applied a herb paste, then wrapped a strip of cloth carefully around its leg. Finally, he propped it back in the basket, newly lined with cotton, and watched as it slowly fell asleep.

Master Fong whispered exasperatedly, “I gave you one job, and you come back with a random injured animal for us to take care of? Do you know exactly what that thing is anyway? It’s not an animal that I know of. It...looks like a dragon. Could it be...”

Jiaming laughed. “Master, surely you don’t believe in all that legend stuff!”

It was only four months since they adopted the creature from the mountains, which they lovingly named Ginseng, and he became larger and larger each week, already being the size of a puppy. Now, he bounded out of the front door, and jumped right into Jiaming’s arms, knocking out all the scrolls he was delivering.

Master Fong appeared at the door, saying, “Be careful with those scrolls, the ink won't be dry yet—*Jiaming!*” He snatched the scrolls, checking the ink for smudges. “That little rascal is getting harder to manage everyday!” he grumbled. “Now come inside—we need to clean the apothecary for His Imperial Majesty the Emperor’s visit!”

They hurried inside, cleaning the apothecary when a gong echoed through the bustling town. Jiaming watched as people rapidly cleared away from the main road as large carriages slowly emerged from the distance. The carriage at the front was decorated with extravagant gold patterns. Through the red tinted window of the carriage, the Imperial Emperor himself sat, gazing at the houses around him. The Emperor’s gaze suddenly stopped on the apothecary, and he stared directly at Jiaming and Ginseng. He radiated sheer *power*, like a tiger surveying prey. His eyes gleamed and he whispered something to his attendant, who started sketching on a piece of paper. Jiaming shuddered. What did the emperor want?

After the parade, Jiaming went outside to run an errand. As he reached the town square, he saw large signs posted on the billboard. Ginseng’s small pointed face was drawn in detail, and above it, in bold, red ink, was written: “DRAGON SEEN IN THE TOWN. IF FOUND, REPORT TO HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY FOR REWARD.”

Jiaming stared at the signs in horror. Something inside him knew that if he handed Ginseng over to the Emperor, terrible things would happen. He forced his eyes away from the poster and sprinted back to the apothecary.

He dashed into his room, throwing a few necessities into a sack, just in case they needed to hide for a while. Master Fong burst into the room and asked, “What’s the matter? Why are you packing?” Jiaming hurriedly explained the situation to his master, and blurted, “I’m going to hide in the mountains for a while with Ginseng, until it’s safe.”

Master Fong’s eyes darkened for just a moment, but then he nodded and said calmly, “I’ll try my best to distract the soldiers while you run. Pack a few healing herbs just in case. Now go!”

Jiaming flew out of the back door, clutching Ginseng and his belongings, and made a run for the mountains in the distance. Behind him, he could hear the commotion of soldiers storming the apothecary, and heard someone bark, “Where is the dragon?” He forced himself to run faster than he had ever run before. Finally, he arrived at the foot of the mountain and climbed the steep incline.

Jiaming had just reached the trail when he heard the stomping of heavy boots and armor behind him. He quickly hid behind a clump of bushes, his heart pounding. How on earth had the soldiers caught up to him already? Then, Jiaming heard a rough voice say, “The boy has to be here somewhere, if that old fool was telling the truth.” Jiaming almost gasped out loud. How could Master Fong betray him like this?

At that moment, Jiaming’s arms loosened, and Ginseng wriggled and scampered out, straight into the path of the soldiers. Jiaming ran out of the bushes as they spotted Ginseng, and threw himself on him. The soldiers watched them with cruel grins, and one said, “I didn’t expect this hunt to end so quickly. His Majesty will be thrilled to receive his prize, and will be relieved to hear we have *done away* with pests like you...”

The soldiers slowly advanced, pointing their halberds straight at Jiaming, who wrapped himself tighter around Ginseng and shut his eyes, bracing himself for an onslaught of blows. Suddenly, Jiaming felt something huge growing below him, and yelped when he was suddenly airborne. His arms spread, feeling Jiaming’s feathers quadruple in size. When he opened his eyes, he saw that he was on the back of a gigantic Ginseng. The soldiers, who seemed tiny from so high up, screamed in fear and ran for their lives.

Jiaming yelled with a mixture of joy and adrenaline as they flew faster and further away from their town, disappearing beyond the mountains.

They finally landed in a remote village in the far south of the nation. Everything seemed different, but Jiaming knew that they could rest here, beyond the emperor’s influence. After landing, Ginseng slowly shrank back to his normal size. Then, Jiaming understood that he couldn’t keep Ginseng forever. With a final hug, he whispered, “You’re free to go now. Go find your family. I’ll always remember you!” Ginseng, looking back at him, squawked and scurried off into the woods, leaving behind a single red and white striped feather.

Kendra

International Christian School, Lie, Christy Heidi – 14

The barbed branches struck my mud-caked arms as I slashed through the bushes, gnarled and thorny as if prepared to strangle every weary traveler that wandered past. Before me, a blanket of fog stretched endlessly, shrouding the thick jungle of dense forest. The magnificent, tall trees seemed stooped and ghostly, and a writhing carpet of buzzing insects crawled beneath my worn, black boots. My arms burned with cuts and blisters, and my parched throat begged for the forgotten delight of cool water. My neatly-bunched auburn hair danced in the sudden, brisk breeze as I settled on a nearby boulder.

The sweat dried on my brow as I uttered a sigh of relief. My tense shoulders relaxed for the first time and I unloaded my travel backpack—which, over time, had seemingly grown to weigh a hefty ton of bricks. I yanked out my water bottle and gulped its nourishment madly, as if I hadn't tasted water for days. *Perhaps, I truly hadn't*—it was difficult to keep track of time in the dark, tangled maze of the Jianfeng Ridge National Forest Park.

I drew out my map miserably, aware of the looming loneliness that enveloped my presence. I had once been a famed paleontologist, leading grand expeditions throughout China's provinces, receiving honors and nominations, and a determined leader within my society. However, power often attracts the greedy hearts of unwanted acquaintances. I will never forget the day Kendra, who I had once viewed as my "best friend", announced that she had blackmail evidence of my "disloyal" actions towards our dearest country. She had framed me, publicly humiliated me, and I was removed from office immediately—without opportunity to defend myself.

I still remember how her venomous, skull-like face stretched into a hideous sneer, then into a dramatic look of mock sympathy, "Oh, Christy, this must be *such* a huge setback for you! Don't worry, though, I'll take good care of your team...as *their newly reinstated leader*,"

At night, I still dream of her obsidian eyes narrowing into slits, and her smile as empty as a carcass. That day, I had held an unblinking expression as I left the room. But nearing the car park, a hollow sadness infected my chest with a dull ache as I stifled shuddering sobs. My lips trembled as tears poured down my face, scalding my cheeks as they flowed. *This will not be the end of my career*, I vowed to myself furiously, *I will find the next dinosaur fossil, no matter how impossible it seems*.

Suddenly, the earthy soil beneath my feet shifted, collapsing inwards as I scrambled up the jagged boulders, disoriented through the maze of steep paths. "*Oh, God, my backpack!*" I cried to myself, snapping out of my trance as it tumbled into the chaos. The earth had trembled and sent everything sliding into the newly-formed pit, and it was sinking deeper every second. The air was thick with dust and soil, and a wheezing cough escaped my lips as I struggled to make sense of the catastrophe, "*No...what have I done?*"

I stood corpse-like, motionless and paralyzed by fear. *Surely, the ground had not collapsed from my heavy weight*. Instinctively, I glanced at myself. I was tiny and delicate like a china doll, with loose sleeves hanging from my shoulders. *No*, I decided, *it can't be*. Convinced that there was not much I could have done, my thoughts wandered to my lost backpack, which was my sole beacon of hope to leaving the forest alive. *That's it*, I felt a hard ball of determination tightening in my stomach, I could not afford to waste time, *I'm going down to get it back*.

Cautiously, I inched down the rocky slope sideways, planting my feet and steadying myself at every step. I wobbled uneasily as my arms remained outstretched, prepared to grip onto the dirt in case I lost footing and fell, defenseless, into the abyss. Few thoughts crossed my mind: *How could the ground have collapsed? Why had the forest ground trembled?* Yet there was no time to ponder, and my brow furrowed with concentration as I neared the gaping hole that led to somewhere below.

Slowly...slowly, I thought to myself, *I'm not going to die...oh no, not yet. Kendra's going to pay for all this...yes, Kendr—*

"*Ahhh!*" A piercing scream escaped my lips as I tumbled down the daunting pit of darkness, feeling ridiculously like Alice in Wonderland—my childhood favorite—except I wasn't a naive little girl dreaming, but a full-grown woman who was hoping for sweet revenge.

Thump.

“Ow,” I rubbed my crooked right leg as I suppressed a pained shout. My lips pursed together tightly as I fought back instinctive tears. Frantically, I groped for my emergency flashlight in my pockets as a faint light flickered on. I stood, breathing heavily, stunned by the miniature engravings on the cool, rocky walls—the *original ancient Chinese characters*.

My hands shook with anticipation as my body tingled with excitement. *Studying Chinese and its history has always been my utmost passion.* I hobbled feebly through the cave, shining my flashlight maniacally while glancing up at the faint glimmer of sunlight—a reminder of survival—every now and then.

Without warning, my good leg knocked against a fragile pile of stick-like figures that scattered into a million broken pieces. “*This sure doesn’t sound like glass*”, I muttered to myself amusedly, dark eyebrows raised, as I pointed my flashlight towards its direction.

Human bones.

My heart missed a beat, squeezed like a vice by the shock as I stared, aghast, at the sight of what had once been a rotting ribcage. Paleontologists were taught to distinguish between fossils, and this was of a human’s millions of years ago. My lips moved silently in prayer while every nerve in my body warned me not to go any further.

Breathe, Christy, breathe. I steadied myself. *You’ve been dealing with fossils your entire life.* I swivelled to run, but collapsed pathetically as a jolt of blistering pain shot up my right leg. The flashlight flew out of my weak grasp, landing with a thud that illuminated a hidden corner, its deafening “*clang*” echoing eerily through the cave. Mist descended on my mind as I struggled to help myself up, shaking and hobbling towards the dim light in a blizzard of nerves and confusion.

I arched my back to pick up the flashlight, and chewed nervously on my tongue as I pointed it directly at the hidden corner. It seemed to grow larger as I ventured further into it. *You’re stuck in here anyways*, I soothed myself, still half-paralysed with fear. *You might as well explore its long history.*

My wide eyes strained to pierce the darkness, darting wildly from side to side as I raised my flashlight, quivering uncontrollably among the pitch black. *What would I find here?* I wondered despairingly. *Another haunted fossil?*

Suddenly, the white light hit a humongous, yellow-brownish structure and I let out a high-pitched squeal, my body tingling with excitement as I clenched my fists and punched the air, shaking with laughter and disbelief. The pain in my leg had disappeared, and my bright eyes danced with pure joy.

“*The Gandititan cavocaudatus fossil. Impossible!*” I breathed, whispering softly to myself as my fingers swept through the enormous fossil gently. *No wonder humans had died in this cave before!* The grandeur of its largely intact, 14-meter body dawned upon me. It was the most magnificent creature I had ever laid eyes on. Still glowing with happiness, I retrieved my backpack half-heartedly, which had landed near the opening of the hidden corner.

You know what? I continued to grin like a Cheshire cat, ignorant of the brief moment of alarm that struck me: Would my discovery die along with me, buried in an unknown cave? *I don’t really care.* I knew that even with no way out, my mission had, at long last, been accomplished, and flawlessly indeed—the discovery of the rarest Gandititan cavocaudatus fossil!

Just as I had settled on the damp floor, a calm and deep voice made his words dance in my ears, “*Hello? Is there anyone down there? Don’t worry, we’re here to rescue you from the earthquake!*”

“*Yes! Well, yes...please!*” I replied in a croaky whisper. *Oh, how I longed to be back home.* The pounding eased in my chest as I closed my eyes and uttered a heartfelt sigh.

Oh Kendra. Oh, my sweet Kendra. I finally did it! What are you going to do now?

Battle Against the Dinosaurs

International Christian School, Lo, Yin Hei Ellie – 12

“Well?” I demanded.

“Sir, there are dinosaur bones found and the bones are arranging themselves into living dinosaurs!” Alexander, one of the soldiers, panicky explained.

“What happened?” I asked him.

“I was on patrol and I heard something rumble under my feet so I investigated. One of the farmers dug it out and saw that the bones were joining together on their own.” He explained, calmer this time.

“Quick! Gather the others and I’ll meet you by the main entrance.” I ordered.

“Yes sir,” the soldier dipped his head politely. I sprinted into my equipment room and gathered everything I’d needed: weapons, food and water. I hurriedly stuffed all the items into my bag and headed toward the main entrance.

“Does everyone know what we need to do?” I asked.

“Yes sir, kill the dinosaurs,” everyone chanted.

“Alexander, please lead the way to where you last saw these dinosaur bones,” I politely ordered. Alexander guided us through rocky terrain, dark caves in our territory, and finally, we arrived at a desert with bright yellow colored sand, where the dinosaur bones lay.

“Here we are,” Alexander announced. Abruptly, a dinosaur made out of dinosaur bones leapt from under us and came to the surface.

“Quick! Pull out your weapons!” I cried, drawing my sword and pouncing on the dinosaur. “Someone slash its throat!” I ordered, landing on the ground after slashing the dinosaur’s arm.

“I’ve got it sir!” Gideon, one of our army’s best soldiers, replied as he flew overhead and plunged his sword into the dinosaur’s neck. The dinosaur fell back instantly.

“Good job, Gideon,” Balveer, another one of the outstanding soldiers in our army, congratulated him. While we discussed what happened, the dinosaur was rearranging itself.

“Guys?” Balveer slowly said. “The dinosaur is coming back!”

“Wait what?” Everyone turned to face the dinosaur.

“Okay guys,” I tried to stay calm. “It looks like we need to find another way to get rid of these bones.”

“Hmm,” Samuel, a soldier, looked thoughtful. “We could try putting each bone into a separate jar so that they cannot rearrange themselves.”

“Samuel, it’s a good idea but won’t it just rearrange itself to make it a dinosaur made out of jars?” William joked. Everyone laughed.

“Alright, William, since you can’t control yourself, go get the jars.” I said angrily. “The rest of us will hold off the dinosaur.”

“Okay, I guess,” William muttered as he headed back to fetch jars.

“Which strategy do we use, boss?” Balveer asked.

“Number 5, surrounding the enemy and attacking in waves.” I replied. “I’ll replace William’s spot.”

When we were in position, I yelled. “Batch one, attack!” Several soldiers took flight and dove at the dinosaur. As they landed, the second batch attacked. After a while, we all started to get weary.

“Oh when is William coming back with the jars?” Samuel moaned.

“Don’t worry, Samuel. He’s right there!” Balveer told him.

“Later, the junior soldiers will attack first to get rid of the easier bones like hands and feet. Then, the senior soldiers will get rid of the harder bones. Everyone got it?” I asked.

“Yes sir,” everyone eagerly awaited the signal.

“Alright. Juniors, attack!” I shouted. The juniors sprinted towards the jars and pounced on the dinosaur.

“Seniors, are you ready? Then attack!” I yelled. Leorushed over with an arm bone in hand. “Wait, boss!” he cried. “I got the first arm bone!”

“Nice,” I nodded as I sprinted towards the dinosaur. I knew that it was going to be risky but we would have to do it fast before...

Another dinosaur made out of bones appeared on the surface.

“Quick! Split into two teams with a mix of juniors and seniors. Go!” I cried. The groups rushed to attack their assigned dinosaurs. I joined a team, sliced down a dinosaur’s head with my machete, and rapidly stuffed it into a jar, slamming the jar shut so the bone wouldn’t escape. I stared at the wriggling bone, satisfied, before racing to add it to the pile behind us. It was already mountain-sized. I grabbed another empty jar and sprinted back, determined to help my team finish this. With the head gone, the dinosaur was disoriented, allowing one person to distract it while the rest of us claimed its bones. As everyone returned to the pile, I noticed a brightly glowing bone – the red, pulsing heart. I sprinted over, snatched it up, and sealed it in a jar. Our dinosaur was done.

As everyone gathered around the giant pile of jars, we shared stories of our brave feats in claiming dinosaur bones.

“Let’s head back to camp, everyone,” I announced. “We all earned a feast and some well-deserved rest.” Everyone cheered at the prospect of their reward and started the journey home, exhausted but victorious.

The Attack of the Dinosaurs

International Christian School, Williams, Atley Alvi – 12

Paige

Just so you know, getting involved with Chinese dinosaurs is DEFINITELY not a good idea. I get it, I get it. Your friend Gobi is dying and you agree to a life long protection of a very rare, very powerful gem in panic and tears. But trust me on this one. DON'T. Let me tell you a small story. Once upon a time there was this group of friends. One of the friends gets kidnapped by a very depressed girl and takes her on a field trip into the secret tunnels of Shanghai International. There she meets a dinosaur (Gobisaurus) named Gobi. Gobi is 66 million years old and can't eat mint ice cream because it makes his tail hurt. Anyway, this friend includes the rest of her friends in the knowing of Gobi and eventually they learn that he wants to find out how old he is. They search his really epic treehouse and eventually find a painite gem that's connected to Gobi's lifeline. Apparently he forgot that he was anointed the guardian of the gem until a vision from his past "wakes" him up. But, for some reason he decides he's retired and asks US— I mean, the girl and her friends to swear to protect the gem. For some reason they agree and the rest is history. But actually it's not. Because that story is about me and my friends. And now we are the guardians of the gem. JJ, Nova, Butterfly, Finn, Raya and me, Paige. Sorry for the rushed story but people are coming for us. Scaly people. Yeah, the dinosaurs are back and they won't stop until they get their grippers on this gem. Right now, my friends and I are hiding in a tree house left by the creator of this mess, Gobi. We may or may not be eating his chocolate ice cream stash. *Bwahaha!* Anyway, basically the gem is so powerful it can wipe out an entire continent. And the dinosaurs want Asia gone. We don't know why but it's first on their list. Kind of like dinosaur terrorists or something. I— BOOM!!! Oh no. They've found us.

Finn

Hey everybody! Welcome back to my channel, Life is Cool. Today, someone is starring in a jurassic-apocalyptic near death experience. And that guest star is me. Sorry about the sarcasm. I get really weird when I'm about to die. But that's besides the point. Point is, dinosaurs have found us but we managed to escape (somehow?) with Nova's extra quick escape route that we built into Gobi's mud spa. (I know, I can't believe he has one either!) I'm not going to say where we are because when SOMEONE, *ahempaigeahem*, told you, we were found really quickly. But one thing Paige did mention is our next quest. We have to find and stop all these somehow alive dinosaurs and stop them before they destroy Asia— and possibly the world. We are lucky however, because my boy JJ found something that fell from the dino attack. It looked like a 3 year old drawing but Raya "deciphered" it and guessed they were hiding underneath the school. I know. MY school. SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL. Who knows how long they've been in there. Doesn't matter, but what we need is a plan and luckily, I have a great one. I explain to the gang how we should create a superhero force with thousands of people we know and ambush the dinosaurs in the school. I was, and still am, very proud of this idea and surprisingly, Nova was too.

"Finn, that could actually work. Think about it. The dinosaurs knew where we were, but so do we. We can give them a taste of their own medicine or in this case, injury," Nova said. We all agreed and began calling, texting, mailing anyone and everyone we could get who was brave enough to stand up for earth. I was so excited, I couldn't sit still and had to jump up every time I heard a "yes" to our cause. I knew it was a great plan all along.

Raya

Finn told you it was a great plan, didn't he. It started out as a great option, especially considering the fact we had no other option. Then the day of the planned attack came. We had a large amount of dino haters and lovers alike, prepared for battle. Mrs. Ping, my neighbor down the hall, was holding her son's dart gun and had metal cooking supplies attached to every inch of her body. I watch in amaze as she runs with ease to the front of the school with the others, as if the metal weighed nothing at all. If only I had known what little it would have done to save her. So, we were ready to ambush. Everyone was as protected as they could be, at least as much as you can be from carnivorous monsters. Then, we heard the call. It was JJ actually, sounding that everyone was here and ready as ever. People started charging, quietly at first but got louder as soon as the doors were opened. Screams of, "Save Asia" and "Go back in time to where you belong!" The roars then shushed those screams, like someone swiftly blowing out a candle. A giant Yangchuanosaurus or Lizard, as the name means, (Nova told me a while back),

strutted out like it was the king of Asia. Screams not of war but of terror echoed across the once nice gardens of the brown school grounds. The Lizard warped his tail around everywhere, knocking the remaining fighting citizens down with one blow. We knew in our hearts that this was the end. We were going to all die uniquely, yet as one. Some men who ran the gas station even saluted as they were taken down. Goodbye forever world. It was nice knowing you.

Butterfly

So, Raya can be a bit depressing sometimes but in this situation, she was right. We were all going to kick the bucket or literally be kicked. I tried to look for a bright side but the dinosaurs were so big; you can't blame me! But then, I felt it. Deep in the pocket of my shorts, the Painite gem was pulsing, as if searching for some way to get out. I take it out and place it on the ground, hoping I would just wake up from this horrible dream. Instead, I begin to see a bright side; literally! It's a ball of light that keeps expanding. It was coming from the Painite gem! I suddenly feel as light as a bird and begin to float. I see all my friends floating up too, until we're at the top of the light dome. Suddenly, Gobi's voice enters our heads.

"My friends, I have missed you deeply. I am here now, to protect you and put my kind back where they belong. I realized once you make an oath, you must stick with your oath, so I have never been truly gone. Which reminds me, you all owe me a carton of chocolate ice cream when we return to the tree house. Now, touch this ball of light, and you will have the Powers of the Painite gem." We all agree and press our hands on the ball of well, Gobi. And then we're falling. Thankfully, faster than you can say, Gobi LOVES mint ice cream, we are flying again, but this time, we're in control. I really want to test my powers but this is no time for tests. We have some dinos to beat.

Nova

I guess they saved the best for last. With our new found powers, we were able to have an equal fight against these dinosaurs. The people left of our army retreated and gave us room for a fair fight. We didn't know how this was going to end but the gang and I all agreed if it didn't happen, WE were going to end. The Lizard stalked toward us, trying to inhale(?) the power? His buddies, Left and Right were right (see what I did there) on his tail, getting ready to pounce. We could literally read each other's minds as we sped right into the pit of near destruction. We were the guardians of the painite gem. We were signed, sealed and done and it was our job to protect and uphold the gem from anyone or anything that got in our way. We are...

The Guardians of the Gem.

Dinosaurs of the Orient

King's College, Lau, Shing Hei – 14

'Happy Chinese New Year!'

'Wish you prosperity and wealth!'

'May all your wishes come true!'

It's the Year of the Dragon, and I was at my grandparents' house, getting ready to receive red pockets from my elders. I got the chance to have fun with my siblings whom I would only meet once a year. All my siblings went out into the garden with their parents, and I followed. Kids from within the village were there too. As they set off the firecrackers, we children covered our ears to evade the deafening noise. In the scarlet sea of spring couples and lunar costumes, the village was brimming in vibrance.

Suddenly, amid the celebration, the sound of thunder blared, and three dragons emerged from the thick clouds. The villagers marvelled at their majestic postures and shiny red bodies. 'It must be the Jade Emperor sending his heartfelt blessings to us!' One of the elderly cried. The others agreed and stared at the dragons in awe. Surprisingly, the dragons can communicate with us! 'Greetings, everyone. We are here to deliver our blessings, but we are commissioned by beings you might not expect,' one of them explained. 'We are sent by our holy dinosaurs. Yes, dinosaurs!' The reality was not as it was in stories told by my parents! They even told us that they were subordinates of the dinosaurs, and that they were also featured in the legends passed on by our ancestors.

'I suppose you all know about the legend of the Nian beast? It wasn't the firecrackers and red banners that had scared the beast off. Our leaders, the dinosaurs, had defeated the Nian beast. Years of destruction had finally irritated dinosaurs on land, underwater and in the vast sky, across Huaxia. Without the beast's annual disturbance, the land prospered more swiftly than ever. Unfortunately, people regarded dinosaurs as "scary dragons", as in Chinese characters. How pathetic were our lords to be seen as a threat! Their hearts were as kind as you could imagine,' another one explained.

We were all dumbfounded by the story, but it didn't end there. After their great extinction, they all had revived as guardians to protect the land. As a dinosaur enthusiast, I can't wait for a chance to meet them. I suggested, 'Can we see them in person? I've got so many things I'd want to do with dinosaurs!' My cousins were as interested in meeting them. Another of the three dragons said, 'We would have to inform our masters, though I'm sure they'd be glad to see you all.' They then flew past the layers of clouds. My heart was racing. Such an unexpected visit had caught me off guard!

Hours of wandering around had created boredom. Just as skepticism started to spark, we heard the familiar thunder blast. Doziness disappeared, and we all stared at the broad sky again. The dinosaurs! They were in front of my eyes! Their gifted wings vanished as they materialized and landed. They greeted us with roars and whinnies. Some of them were ferocious carnivores, while some were relaxed herbivores. The dragons said they wouldn't treat us as food, since their aim was to protect mankind. I was astounded by the view! They often bellowed, and the dragons acted as translators. They suggested visiting every family in the village. The children all followed, but I found a dinosaur behind a towering tree. It was a Chungkingosaurus. Its dorsal spikes inspired me to have a ride on its back. Although it was too shy to follow its fellows, it seemed welcome when I walked up to it out of curiosity. I decided to crawl onto it and get a comfortable seat. Then it started sauntering to the crowd. The kids turned and saw me with the dinosaur. Without asking, it tilted its tail so they could get on. We got a wonderful ride after everyone was settled. As we got off, we witnessed a Bellusaurus standing tall. My cousin wondered if we could have thrilling slides on its long neck. It seemed to show us it agreed when it bowed down on its head. It rose up again and we slid with our hands up high, showing excitement.

My grandfather joined us as well. He brought with him a basket of fresh vegetables and shouted, 'Hey, everyone! Why don't you kids feed them?' It was thought to be a good idea, and an infant from another family showed interest immediately. Its father lifted it up on his shoulder where it sat. The baby fed the herbivores with vegetables in its hands. Their smile was proof of their satisfaction. It was then my turn, and they even wiggled their tails!

We had lots of fun without realizing that dusk was falling, and the adults came outside as well. Witnessing such a large crowd, the dinosaurs chose to entertain us. The feathered Microraptors glided and dashed through the pale-yellow sky. The gloomy whines of the long-necked Datousaurus filled the atmosphere. Hours of playful moments with the dinosaurs have finally come to an end, and farewell was inevitable. The appearance of their angelic wings marked their official departure. Some bellowed while some screeched, as they passed through the clouds. This Lunar year started off with a special day with the dinosaurs. It's unimaginable that they appeared right before my eyes. I will forever remember this as a wonderful day of my childhood. How fantastic would it be if I were able to meet them again?

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

King's College, Wong, Yui Hei Cyrus – 13

'Oh no...I think something's missing. Wait! Press the emergency button now!' That was the last thing I heard before Stephen, Adam, Clara and I went way back in time to save the dinosaurs. We watched as the scientists behind the reinforced glass slowly blurred as we went back in time. We soon arrived roughly 70 million years ago into the past on an island, with lush green trees surrounding us and a mission yet to be completed. However, what the scientist meant by something missing still frightened me.

Back in the present, the scientist, Anthony was freaking out. 'This is atrocious.' He said, swiftly fidgeting with the control panel, but slowly losing hope. 'Why? What happened?' another scientist asked. 'We forgot the time belts, they can't go back.' He walked in circles thinking, deeply about how to save them. When he rushed back, the colour on his face drained even more when he discovered the radio wasn't working properly.

'The view is amazing here! I guess humans really ruined this place, with all the greenhouse gases and the terrible air quality.' Said Clara. Disrupted by a sudden noise near our waists, we all picked up our radio to reply. 'Hey, I don't have much time but—come back—' As the radio got cut off, a deafening noise that most likely came from a dinosaur was heard.

'I believe we should go up that mountain for a better view.' Stephen proposed. 'What if a Pterodactyl swoops in? We should go around to avoid being seen.' Clara said, looking annoyed at her brother. I still don't know why they love quarreling, shouldn't they have already grown up? 'I agree with Clara though, the mountain could be dangerous, and besides, we don't want to waste our energy, right?' I added. 'Cyrus, why are you always on her side?'

We went around the mountain, following the noise, Adam, Clara, and Stephen following behind. 'Wait, what did Anthony mean by, come back? I'm pretty sure it was something like that. The connection also got cut off by the way. What happened?' Adam asked. 'Probably some technical issues, they'll fix it in no time.'

Chapter 2

Back in the lab, all the scientists were tackling the problem. It was a disaster.

'Hey, close gate A.'

'Pass me the screwdriver now!'

'No, the code is wrong. Something is tampering with the signal.'

'The manor was very excited to witness this improvement in scientific technology. We didn't even know that time travelling was possible. He is going to be so disappointed with this. We should have experimented more first before sending them back.'

After restoring the order in the lab, we finally figured out what had happened. 'So there has been something messing up the signal, and the sensor for the time belts, which led to them not being able to come back, and not being able to communicate with them. Now, as we discuss what to do, all of you try to track down the team's location.' Anthony ordered.

Chapter 3

We found a spacious but hidden bush near the dinosaurs. 'Nice, great place to set up cameras. We should set one here.' Adam said, taking out a stand from his beige, spacious backpack and placing it on the ground to start filming, hoping that this camera would connect to the lab. 'Hey look! Over there!' Stephen pointed out. We turned our heads to a once-in-a-lifetime sight. A T-rex was charging at an Ankylosaurus, a rookie mistake because seconds later, the defender whips his tail and defeats the T-rex, proving that size doesn't matter.

Chapter 4

As the team of experts was tracking the location of the time travellers, Anthony, Julie, and Stephanie stepped out. He announced, 'After some discussion, we decided the only solution is to go back in time ourselves,' Stephanie said in a serious tone. The others chattered and objected to the decision, but what had to be done had to be done.

'Ready?' The team of scientists asked through the reinforced glass. Feeling nervous, they held hands and nodded. As they slowly fall down, feeling weightless and free, another group of time travellers gets into some trouble.

Chapter 5

‘Oh no! We forgot about our time belts! That’s why Anthony was panicking.’ Clara said, looking at us for a response. Devastated, we all sat down thinking of a solution. Even Clara couldn't figure out a plan. She is always the brightest and wisest of the group, always being able to find creative solutions out of the box, even under pressure, like this time.

‘Wait, don’t you think something is weird in this?’ Clara asked out of the blue.

‘What do you mean something is off? I mean, Anthony and his team just made a mistake, right? And the radio just lost signal because we are 70 million years in the past. Considering this is the first time anyone has ever time travelled, this is pretty normal. Right, Cyrus?’ Adam disagreed, turning to me hoping that I would be on his side for once.

‘I’m sorry, Adam but I think Clara is right. Anthony has been my best friend since grade four, he wouldn’t make careless mistakes like that, going back safely is the number one priority for this project, even if it means not getting any information about dinosaurs.’ I responded.

Stephen finally spoke, ‘Wait, so what do you guys suspect if the radio incident and the time belt incident aren’t just an accident?’

‘There is an insider.’ The three of us answered simultaneously.

Chapter 6

Somewhere far away, three scientists spawned inside a forest. ‘Well, that was weird.’ Stephanie said, regaining balance from the dizzy trip.

‘I agree.’ Anthony said, turning his head, trying to find signs of the group.

‘Where should we head to, Anthony?’ Julie asked, looking around for potential clues.

‘Look! Footprints, there. We should follow them now! Let's go.’ Anthony pointed out as their team set off to find and save Cyrus’ team.

Chapter 7

We took hundreds of pictures which will be great for research. We even recorded footage of dinosaurs mating and took some samples of Triceratops, which were extremely heavy.

‘This will be great. I think we could go back to the lab with this much, we recorded dinosaurs battling, mating, and even discovered that some dinosaurs hunt in packs.’ Stephen said with a bright smile on his face, proud of his work. ‘Only if we actually could go back though.’ His expression turning into a frown. ‘Besides, there is still an insider, either back in the lab or right here, maybe it's one of us.’ He added.

Chapter 8

In the meantime, Anthony followed the footprints and ended up in a plain, with the sounds of Pterodactyls and other undiscovered species flying around. Ankylosaurs and Triceratops roamed the grassy fields.

As they were walking, they heard some chattering noises. ‘Hey, I see them!’ Julie exclaimed. She rushed to the squad, Anthony and Stephanie following behind.

‘Then how do we go back if—’ My words got interrupted by a hug from behind. ‘Cyrus! I missed you so much and we didn’t know what to do and—’ Julie got interrupted. ‘Whoa, chill, we are safe, Julie.’

‘Anthony, Clara, What’s the plan?’ I asked, standing up, preparing to find out the saboter.

‘We’ll figure this out in the lab.’ Anthony replied.

Chapter 9

We all strapped in our time belts and made sure everything was ready. We nodded and were back in the lab in the blink of an eye.

‘Oh my god, you guys are safe. Thank god. I think we found out what had happened.’ Hilary, another scientist working with Anthony said. ‘So, we tracked the interfering signal waves of the radio and the checklist and discovered they came from the same device.’ She clicked a button on the computer and something was beeping. ‘Whose phone is beeping?’ Hilary asked. We all took out our phones to realize that Adam’s phone was beeping non-stop.

Chapter 10

'look, I'm sorry okay.' Adam finally spoke. 'Ever since my mum and dad died, life has been hard.' Tears were running out of his eyes. 'Making money is tough and someone offered me a gigantic sum of money if I sell the info to him. It would last me at least 30 years, maybe even for life. So—' He stopped.

2 months later

'Case dismissed.' The jury slammed his gavel against the sound block. Adam was arrested for sabotaging the time travelling project. 'I feel bad for him though.' Julie said. 'If I had the chance, I would sabotage the project too.'

'But wouldn't being famous and loved by the community be better than suffering like Adam?' Stephanie said. 'Anyway, the most important thing is that the dinosaur samples are unharmed.'

'Then what are we waiting for? We have a meeting with the mayor, let's go!' I said as we all stepped into the meeting room, ready for the next mission.

Fallen Dreams, Hidden Truths

King's College, Yang, Pui Him Tony – 14

Lin was desperately clinging onto an outstretched boulder, her shoulder screaming in pain. She dropped the large piece of eggshell she was holding, grabbing the boulder with all her strength. Despite her effort, she soon felt her hand slip. As she screamed in fear, the last thing she saw was the ground rushing up to meet her. Then, everything went black.

When Lin woke up, she didn't know where she was, or who she was, for that matter. All she remembered was the hair-raising sensation of free-fall. Lin looked around. Her head and limbs were wrapped in oversized bandages, and she lay on a bed in a small, cramped room.

"You're awake." A stranger remarked, entering the room with a bowl in his hands. Lin tried to get up, but her body screeched in protest. "No, please don't try to move too much, you're still injured," advised the stranger.

Lin coughed. "Where am I?" she rasped. The stranger gave no response. "Drink this. You'll feel better," he said, handing her the bowl. Too delirious to question anything, she sipped a little from the bowl before falling back to sleep.

In the following week, Lin felt slightly better. She was still bed-ridden, but at least she could talk without suffering a splitting headache. Over the days, the stranger introduced himself. He was an elderly man called Chen, and he was the person who saved her and brought her to his place. "I saw you lying on a bush, right beneath the mountains." Chen explained. He asked Lin what happened, but Lin didn't remember. In fact, to Lin's horror, she realized that she couldn't remember a single thing about herself. Chen was sympathetic. "Sometimes, you might temporarily forget things after a bad accident," he remarked. "Try not to worry."

Chen offered to let Lin stay at his living quarters until she was healed. Over the weeks, Lin started to get better, but her memories were still elusive. She became increasingly close with Chen, who listened to her fears and consoled her in her hour of need. Still, he seemed somewhat mysterious to Lin. He would leave for hours every day, and he never told Lin where he went. He didn't let Lin go outdoors either. Some nights, Lin could hear animal cries that sounded strangely familiar, but when she asked Chen about the cries, he avoided her questions.

One afternoon, Chen came rushing in from outside, holding a round object in his hands. He bolted straight to his room. Curious, Lin followed him in. Chen placed the cement-colored spheroid on his bed. For some reason, the spheroid looked very familiar to Lin. "Is that a Lufengosaurus dinosaur egg?" she asked without thinking.

Chen turned around, flabbergasted. "W-what? H-how do you know?" he stammered. Instead of replying, Lin held her head, under the onslaught of a sudden headache. What was she talking about? Looking at the spheroid, Lin heard herself say, "it'll hatch any day now."

Suddenly, Lin's headache returned with a vengeance, and she blacked out.

The next morning, Lin woke up to find Chen sitting beside her bed. "I have to show you something," he said, with an unusually nervous tremble in his voice. Without offering any further explanation, he led her to the exit of his living quarters for the first time since she arrived. Squinting from the sunlight, Lin looked around. She was in a large valley, surrounded by mountains.

Lin's heart stopped for a beat as she saw a few curious creatures roaming around the valley. Inexplicably, these creatures felt extremely familiar, like the animal cries she heard every night. As one of the creatures walked closer, Lin suddenly remembered a name: dinosaurs.

Like a thunderous torrent, all of Lin's memories flooded back into her head.

Dinosaurs. Lin first heard their name on one fateful day, when she was still a young child. That day, her father claimed to have seen a living dinosaur in the mountains of Northeast China. He was an esteemed paleontologist, but when these claims were made public, he became a laughingstock. In her formative years, Lin witnessed her father slowly becoming a shell of his former self, as his career was burned to the ground, his reputation ruined. She still remembers him grabbing her arms in a drunken stupor, muttering, "Lin, I trust my own eyes. There are dinosaurs in China! Find them! Prove the deniers wrong!"

In the end, Lin's father drank his way to an early grave, but Lin never forgot his wish to prove the existence of dinosaurs. Over the years, it slowly became her wish, her lifelong ambition, and her way of clearing her father's name.

Lin ended up becoming a paleontologist, just like her father. To realize his wish and prove dinosaurs' existence, she scoured mountain ranges across Northeast China, no matter how remote or dangerous they were to traverse. On her latest expedition, she found a piece of eggshell from a fresh dinosaur egg on a snowy ledge. With this finding, she could prove that dinosaurs still existed. But just as Lin was reveling in this breakthrough, she slipped and fell down from the ledge. And that's how she ended up being found by Chen.

"Listen." Chen started talking, dragging Lin back to reality. "These beautiful creatures are dinosaurs, the last ones on Earth as far as I know. They have lived here secretly and freely for many years. Ever since I discovered them, I've dedicated my life to protecting their secret." His voice dropped dangerously low. "But I don't have much time left. Somebody needs to continue my work. You may not remember anything about yourself, but you do know a lot about dinosaurs, and I really need your help. So, I know it's a lot to ask, but please stay here and protect the dinosaurs' secret."

"Why should their existence be kept secret in the first place?" Lin countered, her memory now fully restored. On the brink of realizing her father's dream, Lin was starting to get annoyed at Chen for not showing her the dinosaurs sooner.

Chen took a step back, surprised at Lin's annoyance. He argued, "if this secret is revealed, the dinosaurs will be exploited! They would be forcefully taken by greedy businessmen and paraded around the world for profit, losing their freedom! Would you want to be forcibly dragged from your home, locked in a tiny cage, and then flown around for the world to see?"

Lin paused. Chen's words made her think. Am I really doing the right thing by proving their existence? She wondered.

Just then, dawn broke, and the breathtaking view distracted the duo. They looked in awe as the sun began to ascend in the crisp morning air, painting small slashes of pink across the rich blue horizon. Cool winds whistled through the trees, light and soothing, whispering of the serene beauty in this secret sanctuary. Golden beams of sunlight shone through the rugged mountaintops. The dinosaurs began stirring, trotting, and basking in the rising sun.

Something brushed against Lin's knees. Looking down, she saw a baby yinlong dinosaur. There was no fear in its eyes, only innocent curiosity. This baby dinosaur was born inside the valley, and it had never suffered cruelty at the hands of humans. Lin reached out to stroke the dinosaur's small, scaly head. Instead of flinching backwards, it stayed put, showing complete trust in those bright eyes. Lin smiled at the cute dinosaur.

Then, she remembered her goal of proving dinosaurs' existence, and her smile turned into a pained grimace. Even if she succeeded and restored her father's honor, would it be worth the cost of these beautiful dinosaurs' freedom? Plus, Chen saved her life, so shouldn't she also respect his lifelong commitment to protecting the dinosaurs? Conflicting thoughts, arguments and desires bombarded Lin mercilessly, and all she wanted to do was wake up from this bad dream, so that she didn't have to make this decision. The sun rose higher, bathing the valley in gentle warmth, but Lin felt sick to her stomach, crushed by the immense weight of her decision. She held her head in her hands.

After some time, Lin looked up. "What's wrong? You seem stressed." Chen inquired. Her friend and savior was looking at her again, eyes filled with worry. Lin sighed, letting her gaze sweep across the valley. The baby yinlong dinosaur from earlier was now trotting in the dew-laden grass. In the distance, large dinosaurs grazed peacefully amongst the foliage, without a care in the world.

Then and there, Lin made her decision. She simply couldn't stay in the valley for the rest of her life, but she promised Chen to keep the dinosaurs' secret safe.

Soon, Lin was completely healed, and the time came for her to leave Chen's valley. As she was about to go, she looked back at the peaceful dinosaurs, smiling wistfully. A cool breeze tickled her ear. In the distance, Lin heard a dinosaur's call...

Fossilized Echoes

Korean International School, Chahar, Saanchi – 12

Dr. Maya Barbier was a palaeontologist who was born and brought up in the exquisite city of Paris. She really loved fossils and their mysterious stories since she was a child. For her love of fossils, she focused hard on her studies and 10 years later became a well renowned Paleontologist.

On a gloomy Sunday morning, she awoke to the smell of freshly baked croissants flying into her house from her ajar window. As she reached her phone, she saw a bunch of missed calls from her boss. Half-zoned out, she gets up from her bed, goes to the bathroom and splashes ice, cold water on her face. As she returns to her phone, she calls her boss. “Why weren’t you picking up?! I called you so many times,” exclaimed her boss.

“Sorry ma’am, I overslept,” Maya replied while yawning, still trying to stay awake.

“No problem...That doesn’t matter, I’m sending you tickets to China. The flight is in 5 hours, so get ready and go,” Her boss gleefully said.

Maya felt a rush of anxiety. “This is happening too fast. Why am I going to China?” Maya asked doubtfully.

“Well you are my best employee; the most hardworking and passionate. So, I decided to let you go to China and find the lost fossils of the famous Sinosauropteryx, which almost everybody in the 1990’s was trying to find.” her boss explained.

“Really? I promise I won’t let you down!” shockingly Maya said, with excitement mingling through her tone.

She stuffed her suitcase with clothes from her messy closet and a couple of essentials. She changed her clothes and rushed to the airport, with her heart racing. She reached her flight right before it was about to take off, letting out a huge sigh of relief once settling in her seat. Exhausted, she fell asleep almost immediately.

After a long 11 hours, she was welcomed in the airport with classical Chinese music. After exiting immigration she saw a man who was wearing a black suit holding a board with her name on it. As she approached, he asked “Are you Dr. Maya?” She gently nodded her head. He took her bag and led the way to his tiny, black car. She sat in the car, the car was filled with an awkward silence throughout the journey to the hotel. Maya glanced out the window, her mind swirling with the thoughts of the expedition.

When they arrived at the hotel, the driver quickly drove off. Maya entered to find a lavish setting, red carpets everywhere and thick grey curtains that hung down like those in a fantasy story. An employee of the hotel helped her to her room, and she dropped her suitcase next to her bed. Just then, the doorbell rang. Maya opened the door to find a guy with messy, curly hair, a red shirt, and black pants standing outside.

“May I help you?” Maya asked, curious.

“No, actually I’m here to help you. I’m Max, your assistant for the expedition,” he said, a hint of enthusiasm in his voice. “I’ll meet you tomorrow at 9 AM, and we will head off to the village of Liao Ning.”

“Uh, okay,” Maya replied, confusion on her face. She closed the door, wondering about his odd impression. Was he really going to be helpful in this expedition?

The next morning, she woke up early, her mind filling with anticipation. After getting dressed, she headed downstairs to meet Max, determined to make the most of this incredible opportunity. When they met, they rented a sleek, black jeep and set off to Liao Ning. Max didn’t say a single word throughout the 1 hour drive, Maya couldn’t shake off the fact that there was something really peculiar about him, but she couldn’t pin-point it yet. They finally arrived at the tiny, but densely populated province of Liao Ning. She noticed that all the locals were bowing as they passed. This gesture made her feel special and a sense of excitement grew within her. The car went through a couple more rocky and bumpy roads, Maya couldn’t help but notice the gorgeous hand painted hand fans that were being sold on the street market. They finally reached the spot where the fossils of the famous Sinosauropteryx were rumoured to be.

Maya and Max stepped out of the car, and she took a couple of minutes to soak the breathtaking scenery before them. The landscape was a contrast of rugged terrains and vibrant greenery, but the heat was intense and the air dry, making them exhausted. After a short walk, they finally reached the site where the fossils were rumoured to be located.

"It's strange that everyone knows where the fossils are, yet no one has found them," Max remarked suddenly. "But I believe this is the spot—after all, many of the other famous dinosaur species were discovered here."

"Yeah, I think we should start digging right away. I'll call the team, and they can join us," Maya replied, her enthusiasm and excitement taking over her body.

"Sure, let's do it," Max muttered. Maya quickly contacted the team, and they arrived about thirty minutes later, ready to get to work. As the sun was setting, the team dug tirelessly throughout the day. In the evening, Maya and Max left for the hotel, promising to stay updated on any discoveries.

Days went by and despite their effort, nothing was found; not even a single bone. Maya was losing hope and faith. She decided to visit the excavation site without Max, hoping for a miracle. On her way, she saw the fan that caught her eye the other day and she decided to buy one. When she admired the beautiful hand painted fan she saw a map of Liao Ning that was intricately illustrated and it had a tiny red dragon pointing to a specific location. She was shocked by the way the dragon was painted with such detail. After purchasing the fan, she went to the site but, as expected, found nothing. Frustrated, she went back to the hotel. As she sat on the bed, her gaze fell upon the exquisite fan, the dragon suddenly clicked in her mind. Without a moment's hesitation, she snatched her phone and quickly dialled Max's number, she told him to come to the hotel. Her heart started racing with a newfound determination.

Max rushed to the hotel, concern etched on his face. "What happened? What was so important?" he asked, his eyes wide with curiosity. Maya took a deep breath. "I know this may sound weird, but I think I know where the fossils are."

"Where? How do you know they belong to the *Sinosauropteryx*?" Max inquired, intrigued. Maya handed him the fan she had bought earlier.

"Look at this! It's a map of Liao Ning, and the dragon is pointing to the exact opposite side of where we've been searching. The *Sinosauropteryx* is called 'The Red Dragon Bird' in Chinese, and the dragon in the picture matches that description perfectly!"

Max frowned, contemplating her words. "I guess it's worth a try... Call the team and let's start digging."

"Max, let's make history!" Maya exclaimed.

The next day, they set off to the location indicated on the fan. Since it was deep in the forest, they had to ask several locals for directions. When the team finally arrived, they began digging with renewed hope. To their astonishment, they soon uncovered fossils buried beneath the earth. An overwhelming rush of joy surged through Maya as she realised the magnitude of their discovery.

Two weeks later, after uncovering one of the biggest finds in palaeontology history, Maya and Max were awarded for their achievement and featured in the newspaper. Who knows what's the Dynamic Duo's next expedition.

Great Dinosaur Adventure

Korean International School, Choi, Adam – 13

Once upon a time in a village in China, there lived a little boy, Leo, who liked dinosaurs. He had plenty of posters of dinosaurs on his walls, shelves filled with dinosaur toys everywhere, not to mention dreaming almost at night about them. Leo often wondered how he would feel if he ever met a real dinosaur. One hot sunny afternoon, Leo was busy enjoying his backyard when suddenly something caught his eye off in the ground. It was just a small rock, but it shone like a diamond. Curious, Leo squatted down to finish digging the thing out. Once he pulled it free, he realized it was a fossil! It looked like a dinosaur claw! "Wow! This must be from a real dinosaur!" shouted Leo, jumping up and down with excitement. He ran inside and showed it to his grandpa enjoying his favorite chair, reading a book about dinosaurs. "Grandpa! Look what I have!" surprise Leo holding up the fossil. Leo's grandpa squinted at the claw and smiled. "This looks like it could be from a Sinosauropteryx. They lived in China a long, long time ago. Did you know they were actually the first feathered dinosaurs found?" Leo's eyes popped. "Feathered dinosaurs? That's so cool! Can we go find more fossils?" Grandpa laughed. "Well, we could. But we've got to be careful and do our research first. Let's hit the library and see what we can find out about dinosaurs in the area."

They had a quick snack then headed to the village library. Leo dashed towards the dinosaur section in the library and pulled out every book about dinosaurs. He discovered that many very exciting fossils had been found in his own hometown: feathered and giant dinosaurs. The books talked about how paleontologists were digging for new fossils every day. "Maybe we can be paleontologists, Grandpa!" he said, bouncing with excitement. "Why not?" Grandpa replied.

Centuries Ago

Korean International School, Fung, Lai Yan Fransiska – 11

Centuries ago, China had a dark time you may ask what made it so dark. Well hold on tight and grab yourself some popcorn because this is going to be an interesting story.

Long before humans existed dinosaurs used to rule over China there were over 10000 species of dinosaurs in all shapes and sizes (some had wings and some had sharp teeth). When I said they're were 10,000 species of dinosaurs I was not exactly telling the truth. Let me explain to you in a little bit more detail.

Not long after the dinosaurs came an archaeologist (named Mr. Smith) discovered an egg near the river bank it was a bit green with some sort of marks on it. He decided to incubate the egg to see if it would hatch little did he know that what was hiding in the egg could destroy China and maybe all of Asia.

Exactly 2 weeks later the egg hatched and what came out of it was truly unbelievable. What came out was a baby dinosaur it had marks on its back it looked like scars and it was green and had blue eyes it was truly unique. Mr Smith(the archaeologist) decided to name it the Alorex. Later he found out that the Alorex could do just about anything from flying to swimming and even fighting. He decided to keep it a secret and keep the Alorex away from the public eye because it was so powerful.

One day something unexpected happened the cage started to rot so it made it easier for the Alorex to escape and that is exactly what happened. It was terrible the Alorex killed every dinosaur left in China and the Alorex was still not satisfied so it made its way to more parts of Asia like Japan, Korea and many more.

It was a very very sad time but you are probably asking yourself how did this horrible time end ? Well not long after the ice age came and it spread rapidly killing everything in its way including the Alorex that was how the terrible time for China and most of Asia ended but a new era started...

The Museum

Korean International School, Kim, Jeewoo Stella – 13

There was something suspicious about this museum. There wasn't anything particularly notable about it, and there wasn't anything that stood out compared to other museums either; it just looked like a regular science museum. However, the more Minseo looked around the dinosaur fossils exhibition, the more a queasy sense of unease churned in the pit of her stomach. It was almost as if supernatural being was trying to warn her about something.

Minseo had come to Hong Kong during her summer break to meet her best friend Hana, who had lived in the country since she moved out from Korea many years ago. So now, here she was on a hot Sunday afternoon, sludging behind her overenthusiastic friend.

Minseo sighed and closed her eyes, trying to distract herself from the unsettling feeling. She let her mind roam, and her thoughts fixed onto an old bedtime story that her grandmother had told her almost religiously when she was young, about how Minseo was the reincarnation of the very girl who had been alive during the era of when dinosaurs roamed the earth. According to her grandmother, the girl had made friends with all the dinosaurs on the Earth, and she had therefore given herself the title of the 'Friend of all dinosaurs'.

Her grandmother had sounded so sure, and young Minseo had been gullible beyond comprehension. Minseo smiled softly as she remembered her excitement when she was a child about this old, nonsensical tale. She had boasted to Hana nonstop about it. Obviously, she had grown to know better. Dinosaurs lived millions of years ago. Humans didn't even exist back then, and Hana still teased her about it.

Back to reality, incoherent noise filled the air as groups of parents tiredly shuffled along the giant bright red arrows that were plastered onto the floor behind a crowd of hyper children that giggled and screamed. The crisp scent of the air conditioning blended with the musky smell of wood, and cold air pounded into the back of Minseo's dark blue jacket, which did nothing to help her ignore the nauseating apprehension about something she just couldn't figure out.

"Earth to Minseo!" Hana exclaimed, startling Minseo, "Hey, you okay?"

Minseo hurriedly put on a smile, hoping it didn't look too artificial. "Yeah, fine. Why?"

"Well, I actually have to run to the bathroom, so," Hana said sheepishly, "I'm sure you wouldn't mind standing right here and waiting for me, right?"

Minseo smirked and waved her hand dismissively. "At least this time you're letting me know before disappearing. If you pulled the same stunt you did yesterday, I would've just left instead of looking for you."

Hana giggled and flashed Minseo a toothy grin before swiftly leaving towards the bathroom.

Minseo watched Hana's figure getting smaller and smaller, and let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. She bit her lips, scanning through the area, getting slightly irritated. She didn't feel anything until the moment she took a step into this section of the museum. What could possibly be causing her to feel this unease?

A piercing pain pulsed in her head. Her eyes were suddenly stuck to the head of a massive skeleton, and all of a sudden, her legs felt like they might give out under her.

Minseo shakily walked towards the panel that had the description of the fossils on display, not taking her eyes off of the hollow eyes of the skull for even one second. She was bumping into all the people, but she didn't stop walking. There was something about this particular display that pulled her closer... She couldn't stop advancing if she wanted to, although every step made her increasingly nauseous.

Pushing through the crowd, she finally arrived in front of the frail wood board. There was some sort of aura that fumed from the panel that entranced Minseo in a way she couldn't explain. She stood there for a moment, staring at the words but not taking them in.

Absent-mindedly, she noted that the sickening feeling had vanished completely. She felt dead calm. Then somewhere to her right, an abrupt cheerful voice asked about something along the lines of what she was doing, then if she could hear her. She ignored it and slowly lifted a fist above her head.

Her fist was pulled down. Minseo turned her head and squinted at a faintly familiar girl. The girl was saying something worriedly, but Minseo couldn't understand what she was saying.

She ripped her hand out from the girl's tight grasp and returned back to her previous position. Minseo now felt like she was just floating dazed outside of her own body. If she had any sort of consciousness of her surroundings, she probably would have noticed the swell of the background chatter evolving into a range of confused to terrified murmurs, and the no-longer-cheerful voice growing louder and more panicked next to her, pleading with her to stop, to put her fist down.

She brought her fist down. But not the way the girl wanted her to. With a massive bang, Minseo snapped back into her body, her vision slowly clearing and focusing onto a frightened face. It was Hana, wide eyes flickering between staring straight ahead to somewhere behind Minseo and glancing down at her. Her face was pale, her mouth hanging slightly open.

Minseo hadn't seen Hana this terrified before. A growl shook the ground. Minseo watched Hana's eyes harden with an unrecognisable emotion as she swept up Minseo and ran as far as possible from the threat. A shadow loomed tall over both of them.

Blinking in confusion and fright, Minseo whipped her head around and stared directly at the threat. She sucked in a gasp and wheezed. Towering over Minseo and Hana was a dinosaur. A real life, moving dinosaur.

The beast bent down towards the two tiny humans in front of it, assessing Minseo and Hana with its dark, beady eyes, snorting out air... and sank down to the floor.

It was bowing at them.

The Gorgeous Valley

Korean International School, Krishnan, Adithi – 13

The gorgeous valley, in the heart of China, a valley like the one that would appear in fantasies with lots of flowers, greenery and a huge waterfall connected to the mouth of a river where all species would get water to survive. The villages all in harmony with one another, and the animals, the birds would sing at the crack of dawn, signalling the jaguars, and wolfs galloping in the night to go back to their dens to go and sleep, as it was the humans turn to roam the land until nightfall.

Besides all the beautiful scenery, in the middle of the vast land, there was a huge 10, 000

pound egg, belonging to the last dinosaur on the earth. It had been 10, 000 years since the mother of this dinosaur died, but the new baby still hadn't hatched from the egg. The people of the land took very good care of this egg as they knew the importance that this egg carries, they took turns by family to wash it by taking average sponges to dip them in water and then scrubbing the egg's surface until people could clearly see the beautiful marble with beige and grey, the natural colour, this meant that the egg was clean. As they knew that they must take care of the creature even after it hatches from this protective shell of this egg, they started building shelter around this egg, to both keep it safe before and after hatching.

Even though they took care of this egg a lot even though it never showed any signs that it was going to hatch any time soon. Soon they called in the best archaeologists to look at the egg and tell if the creature inside was alive or not, but even they couldn't tell. Soon the people lost hope on this egg ever hatching, but regardless of it hatching or not they still cleaned it just to see the beauty that it holds underneath the dirt and muck that it accumulates every night.

After about 50 more years, when this family of 4 was cleaning it, they saw a crack. They alerted the village manager at once and the entire town gathered around the greenhouse-like structure around the egg. When it was confirmed by the best archaeologist that the egg would soon crack soon.

The people redeemed the excitement that they lost 50 years ago. Nobody could speak of anything but the crack on the glorious egg that stood on the earth, the local newspaper only had articles about the egg, and the family that discovered the crack soon became famous to tell all who wanted the tale about it.

It took about a month's time to have the entire city calm down about the egg. Families continued to take turns to wash the egg, some families even took the extra step to put homemade food and fresh water by the egg in case the creature hatched and was hungry. Others guarded the house during the night to be the first one to see the creature, every night there would be a 4km line starting from the door of the house to the edge of the village. Months passed by and nobody saw anything new about the exotic egg. The entire village was buzzing with questions that had no guaranteed answer yet.

Soon after the crack began to grow like a tree branch. People took extra good care of the egg and soon the greenhouse became a tourist spot. People from all over the world spend thousands of dollars to come to this tiny village and see this exotic egg found nowhere else starting to hatch.

After about 5 more months, the egg finally cracked completely, revealing a dinosaur, this dinosaur was a gorgeous baby blue colour, with green spikes all over the back. It was about 20 feet tall and took the amount of space taken for about 100 average people. The entire village was in the dark about how to take care of this newborn dinosaur but they provided it with the food and shelter it needed.

Few years later the village people actually found themselves connecting a bit with the dino. They came to understand it well as well. Since the dinosaur was hard to maintain they created a duty roster, on the day that your family has to take care of the dinosaur, they are excused from any other activities they have to attend that day. The only excuse that they can skip their day is medical reasons.

The town was very excited, and the news spread across the world, tourists from all over the world travelled to take a look at this exotic creature. Lots of countries were offering millions and billions of dollars to buy the animal and take it to their designated country. This village refused all offers, without any hesitation. Even though this money would help improve matters in the village, they thought of this dinosaur as family, nothing was ever going to persuade them to give it up for pieces of paper with numbers on them. To them This dino was worth more than all the money in the world.

Countries all gave up on this dinosaur and the hopes and dreams on ever bringing it to their land. And the dinosaur too started to fade from this world, the village acknowledged this starting to happen and started to cherish the 100years they had with it, from birth to its last moment on earth. It took the village about 1 year to accept the fact that they would never see 1 part of their family ever again. It took longer for some than others. The village all gathered around the green-house that their ancestors built to keep this now dead creature alive. All together they dug a huge hole in the middle of the green house, and buried the last remains of this now extinct creature. Everyday all would go at the same time to pray to the spirit of this dino.

The First Egg

Korean International School, Kshatriya, Yashica – 12

Saturday – 11/1/25

Dear Diary,

Today felt like a dream. My boss, Mr. Chen called me into his office with an opportunity to document a living dinosaur! He told me that scientists in China have managed to create one that is going to hatch in just a few days! Isn't that amazing? A living dinosaur on earth after 65 million years and I'm going to be there to watch it hatch! The breed is a Brachiosaurus.

I'm not sure if you know or not but I have adored dinosaurs since I was a little girl and have always wanted to see one in real life – even though I knew it was impossible. Now, what was once thought as impossible, will ensue. Why not just be a Paleontologist, you ask? Despite my love for dinosaurs, I'd rather document, learn and share with the world just what exactly is going on as a journalist rather than my whole focus being on dinosaurs.

I can hardly contain my excitement. The idea of meeting the scientists, learning about their groundbreaking work, and writing the story of a lifetime makes me feel so honoured and excited. I am a bit nervous, though. I'll just have to remain calm and focus on what I'm going to pack. Although, packing has never been my strong point.

China is so far away – 12 hours from Canada! It might be pretty nerve wrecking considering I know nothing about the language or the place. But deep down, I know I must and can do this. This is my chance to prove myself and to honour the dreams I've held onto for so long.

I'll document every moment, every feeling, and every discovery. This is only the beginning of a journey that could lead to something extraordinary.

I'll write again tomorrow.

Goodnight

Sunday – 12/1/25

Dear Diary,

Today was a whirlwind of emotions! I have finally arrived in China! The moment I stepped off the plane, I felt a wave of the vibrant energy of this place – the bustling streets, the mouth-watering scent of street food, and the warm smiles of the locals. After getting some rest and unpacking, I made my way to the research facility.

Once I had arrived at the facility, I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness. It's a sleek, modern building surrounded by luxurious greenery. I met some of the scientists, and they are just as passionate about dinosaurs as I am! But, there was tension in the air. Some of them seemed pretty sceptical about the project, whispering doubts as I walked by. I couldn't help but wonder and I still am: what if this doesn't go as planned? What if the dinosaur doesn't hatch? But then, I remind myself why I'm here. This is a chance to witness history, to be part of something extraordinary and document it. I can't let fear hold me back.

Tomorrow, I'll be interviewing Dr. Zhang, the lead scientist. I've been preparing questions all night, but I'm also curious about what he thinks about this whole project.

I'll write more after the interview. For now, I'm going to try to get some sleep – if I even can with all the excitement flowing through my mind.

Until tomorrow

Monday, 13/1/25

Dear diary,

Today was... how do I put it into one word? I guess I could say it was a jumble of feelings and interpretations. I finally interviewed Dr. Zhang, the lead scientist behind the project. Once I walked into the lab, my heart raced faster than Usain Bolt. The room was filled with high-tech equipment, and the air buzzed with the energy of discovery. I couldn't believe I was standing in a place where history was being made.

Dr. Zhang greeted me warmly, his enthusiasm evident. As he spoke about the research, I felt a mix of awe and inspiration. His passion for dinosaurs matched mine as well as the other researchers. He described the process of creating the dinosaur, the amount of care taken to ensure its health and safety. I could see the pride in his eyes. But as the conversation went on, I sensed uncertainty behind his words. He seemed a bit hesitant – as if he wasn't 100% confident on this project. I mean, bringing an extinct creature from millions of years ago back to life? It sounds surreal itself. Would this be a miracle or a mistake?

Then, Dr. Zhang showed me where the egg was being taken care of. I felt a rush of emotion. There it was, the culmination of years of research, doubts, failures, hopes, successes and dreams – a living dinosaur waiting to emerge. Obviously, I noted down quite a few details and took a few photos from different angles – all while trying not to harm the egg, of course. I couldn't help but think about my own journey. What if I had never pursued my passion? What if I had let fear hold me back?

As I left the lab, I felt a renewed sense of purpose. This story was not just about dinosaurs; it was about courage and the decisions we make that shape our future. I can't wait to share this experience with the world.

Tuesday – 14/1/23

Dear diary,

Today was the most bizarre day of my life. I woke up with butterflies in my stomach, knowing that today was the day the dinosaur would hatch. As I arrived at the lab, the atmosphere was tense but anticipating – scientists bustling around, checking equipment, and sharing excited whispers. I could hardly contain my excitement as I continuously fiddled with the strap of my camera.

When the moment finally arrived, I felt my heart race. The egg, so delicately placed under the heat lamps, began to crack. I could hardly breathe. The room fell silent, every eye fixated on that small miracle of life.

But just as the first glimpse of a creature emerged, disaster knocked upon our door and uninvitedly entered with a mischievous smile. The power went out, devouring the lab in darkness. My heart sank as I heard shouts and felt the rush of chaos. My dream of witnessing a dinosaur was about to slip away from my hands in an instant.

In that moment, I felt a rush of determination. I remembered why I was here – to tell this story, to share it with the world and respond to those who share my curiosity. I helped the scientists scramble for backup generators, my heart pounding with fear and adrenaline.

When the lights flickered back on, I could hardly believe my eyes. The small dinosaur had fully come out, looking up at us with wide, curious eyes. It was a moment I'll never forget. All the fear and uncertainty faded away, replaced by pure amazement. I knew then that this experience was more than a story; it was a turning point in my and everyone else's life. I carefully took photos, trying not to harm the adorable newborn dinosaur.

As I write this, I can still feel the warmth of that moment. I came to witness a miracle – and I did. And to answer the question from before on whether this would be a miracle or a mistake: It was most definitely a miracle of all the hard work put in from those countless days and nights. I will forever remember today until the day I die.

Goodnight.

Ancient Dinosaurs

Korean International School, Lam, Holus Hayden – 11

A Greek researcher named Dr. Hermus went to an ancient mountain to stay a long time to find the ancient creatures. In a warm autumn morning, the sun raised from an ancient mountain in eastern China, casting a warm glow across the landscape. Dr. Hermus was looking at the mountain today and suddenly he found something in the valley, it was the dinosaur! In the valley below, a group of Baryonyx were eating the prey they hunted. Suddenly, a thunder flashed across the hill. The leader of the Baryonyx raised his head, looked like he sensed the danger around this mountain. His eyes scanned the surroundings as a huge Batyrosaurus shown up, his jaws was wide open, sharp teeth sparkling in the morning light.

The Baryonyx screamed loudly, waking the other dinosaurs. They began to run, their thundering footsteps shaking the ground. The Batyrosaurus, charged at them, its powerful legs raced very fast. The chase is on, and the fight between the dinosaurs plays out against the background of the ancient mountain of China. The Baryonyx ran away in fear in their eyes because they knew that if they were not careful, they might die in the mouth of this hunting beast.

As the fight begins, Dr. Hermus saw it from a safe place of the camp, his eyes full with excitement. He came to this ancient mountain of China to study these ancient creatures, and now he finally discovered the ancient creatures, the dinosaurs. Quickly, he grabbed his notebook and began marking down his observations of the dinosaurs.

The Baryonyx trying to escape their enemy and the Batyrosaurus chased with a pool of fire in his eyes. The earth was shaking under their thundering footsteps, playing the music of survival in this forgotten corner of the world. Dr. Hermus knew that he saw something truly remarkable—a super rare ancient dinosaur in this ancient land. One of the Baryonyx got lost in the mountain, and unfortunately, he got chased by the huge Batyrosaurus. And the Batyrosaurus was close to the little Baryonyx. The Batyrosaurus opened his huge mouth with the sparkling teeth. He was ready to eat the little Baryonyx. All at once, the huge Batyrosaurus got hurt by a group of Baryonyx. The Batyrosaurus got shocked and dazed by the hit.

This was a trap that was made by the Baryonyx. It was made a few minutes ago. Five minutes ago, the leader of the Baryonyx figured out that the Batyrosaurus is huge but he was dumb so he made a trap to let the Batyrosaurus to went in. But they need one of them to sacrifice himself to let the huge Batyrosaurus went in the trap. Then a little Baryonyx said that he will sacrifice himself. So the little Baryonyx acted like he had been lost to let the hunting beast chase him. The brave and smart of the Baryonyx let Dr. Hermus surprised. Because in the book, the writers always show that all the dinosaurs are huge but dumb. So he also marked that in his dinosaur notebook. It will be a impressive news to let the people know. Also, it will change dinosaur history too.

China's Hidden Treasure

Korean International School, Lau, Yui Yi Christian – 12

The piping hot Amazon Rainforest got on Jack as he went to his small riverside camp, checking his supplies and equipment one last time. After years guiding tourists and researchers through the dense jungle, he thought he'd seen it all. But the message he'd received a few days prior had piqued his curiosity like nothing else.

An urgent phone call from an old acquaintance, Jim, a renowned explorer Jack had worked with before. Jim was leading an expedition into the heart of the Amazon Rainforest, chasing the legends of a lost treasure, and he needed Jack's expertise to lead the way.

"A lost treasure, you say?" Jack had responded skeptically.

"You know those kinds of stories are usually nothing but tall tales," Jack continued.

"Not this one, my friend," Jim had insisted.

"I've been doing my research. This is the real deal – a prize worth risking life and limb for, and I can't do it without you," said Jim.

Jack had to admit, the odds were low, but he wanted to finally go on an adventure. After so many years of sightseeing tours, a true adventure was exactly what he craved. An opportunity to put his hard-earned jungle skills to the test, to uncover something truly remarkable. How could he say no? And so, here he was, packing up his gear and preparing to guide Jim and his team into the unknown. The first rays of dawn were just peeking over the treetops. It was time to begin the journey.

"All right, let's get this show on the road," Jack muttered, hoisting his pack onto his shoulders.

"Time to see if this treasure of yours is the real deal, Jim."

The first few days of the expedition, Jack led the way, machete in hand, cutting through the vines and bushes that seemed to close in around them at every turn. The rest of the team struggled to keep up, drenched in sweat and mosquito bites.

"How much farther is this place?" Jim huffed, pausing to wipe the sweat dripping from his forehead.

"Can't be more than a day or two at this pace," Jack replied, scanning the seemingly endless green landscape.

"If the tip you have is accurate, that is." Jim nodded, taking a long swig from his canteen.

"It's got to be. I've spent months tracking down every lead, cross-referencing dozens of historical websites and books. This treasure is out there, Jack, I can feel it."

His determination told Jack that giving up was not an option. Jim had come too far, invested too much, to turn back now. And deep down, Jack had to admit he was starting to share that sense of excitement and the thrill of the hunt, the feeling is truly remarkable.

As the sun began to set, Jack spotted a break in the trees up ahead.

"There, see that? Looks like a clearing. We'll camp there for the night."

The team stumbled into the small open space, dropping their packs with sighs. Jack set about gathering firewood and organizing their supplies while the others pitched their tents. Once the camp was established and a hot meal prepared, the group gathered around the crackling flames. Jim leaned in, eyes alight with anticipation.

"Alright, Jack. Tell us more about this treasure we're after. What exactly are we looking for out here?" Jack took a deep breath, feeling the weight of their expedition weighing down on his shoulders.

"Well, from what you've told me, it sounds like we're searching for the fabled lost city of La Ciudad..."

The campfire crackled as Jack recounted the ancient legend of La Ciudad, the fabled lost city of gold that had captivated explorers for centuries.

"According to the stories, La Ciudad was an entire city made of solid gold." Jack explained, his voice full of wonder. "Explorers have spent lifetimes and centuries searching for it, only to come up empty-handed time and time again." Jim leaned in; eyes gleaming in the fire's light.

"But you think we might actually have a chance of finding it this time?" Jack shrugged.

"The clues you've gathered certainly seem more credible than most and the location you've pinpointed is deep in unexplored territory, far from where the previous expeditions have searched." Jack added.

"So, what are we waiting for?" the crew piped up, already reaching for their gear. "Let's get out there and start finding the discovery of the century!" Jack held up a hand, silencing the eager crew.

"Not so fast. Even if this is the real deal, La Ciudad isn't going to be an easy find. The jungle is vast, and the ruins could be well-hidden, buried under centuries of growth. We need to approach carefully" Jim was already on his feet, practically shaking with excitement.

"This is our chance to make history, people. Tomorrow, we move out at first light. I want every inch of this area searched!"

As the others began chattering, Jack caught Jim's eye and gave him a knowing nod.

"Alright, you win. But just remember, I'm the one leading the way. So, try to keep up, yeah?"

With that, the camp turned quiet as the team prepared for their historic quest. Jack couldn't help but feel a thrill of anticipation building in his chest. After all these years, was the legendary La Ciudad finally within their reach?

The morning light filtered through the dense jungle canopy as the expedition team set out, hearts pounding with excitement. Jack led the way, machete in hand, guiding them deeper into the uncharted forest. After hours of trekking, navigating through dangerous terrain and cutting through an uncountable number of bushes, they emerged into a vast clearing. Crumbling golden structures peeked out from beneath the vines and moss, remains of an ancient civilization.

"There..." Jim breathed, his eyes widening in awe. "The lost city of La Ciudad."

The team stood in silence, taking in the breathtaking sight before them. Jack felt a surge of proudness that his expert guidance had brought them to the very heart of the legendary treasure.

"Alright, everyone, let's get to work," he said, his voice betraying his own sense of wonder.

"Dig out and start documenting everything you can. We need to be thorough – who knows what other wonders we might uncover."

The team sprang into action, the cameraman already filming furiously while the geologist and the explorers spread out to explore the ruins. Jim practically danced with glee, going from one find to the next.

"Look at this, Jack! Carved statues and what appear to be artifacts..." He paused, crouching down to brush away the dust and dirt.

"Is that what I think it is?" Slowly, Jim unearthed a massive, gleaming object – a golden vase, its surface glittering in the bright sunlight. The team gathered around, speechless, the weight of their discovery settling over them.

"It's... it's real," Jim breathed, his voice trembling. "We've found it. The legendary treasure of La Ciudad."

Jack felt a surge of pride rushing through his body, knowing that his expertise and guidance had led them to this mind-blowing discovery. After so many years of leading tours, he had finally played a role in uncovering something truly remarkable.

"Well, my friend," he said. "Looks like your hunch was right all along. This treasure is the real deal." Jim laughed, his eyes shining with joy. "I never doubted it for a second, and we couldn't have done it without you, Jack. This is our discovery — our legacy."

Xu Xing's Journey Through Time

Korean International School, Mak, Wing Lam Myra – 12

In the heart of ancient China, there was a mysterious valley in which dinosaurs lived: the Valley of Echoes. This valley was full of greenery with high mountains and crystal-clear rivers. It was home to many different types of dinosaurs, each having a unique story or adventure to tell.

The Mysterious Egg

One day, a curious young Oviraptor named Kafka stumbled upon a large, shimmering egg while exploring the edge of the valley. Unlike any egg he had ever seen, it sparkled in the sunlight, displaying colors of blue and gold. Kafka was fascinated and decided he had to protect it.

Maybe it's a treasure!" he thought. He carefully moved the egg to a cozy nook in the shade of a giant ginkgo tree. Kafka gathered leaves and soft moss to create a nest, resolved to keep the thing in safety.

With each passing day, Kafka visited the egg regularly, talking to it and telling it stories of his adventures. But one evening, as the sun went down behind the mountains, a loud crack echoed through the valley. Kafka watched in awe as the egg began to hatch.

A New Friend

From the egg emerged a tiny, vibrant dinosaur with feathers of emerald green and wings that shimmered like the stars. Kafka gasped. "You're beautiful! What are you?"

The little dinosaur chirped excitedly. "I'm Steven, a Skywing! I'm here to help protect this valley!"

Kafka was impressed. Skywings were known to be a myth, told to one-up another when it came to high flying above the clouds. Kafka and Steven became fast friends and went on many wild adventures across the valley.

The Rising Threat

But it wasn't long before peace was restored amidst the rumors of a terrifying predator: a huge Allosaurus, which had entered the valley and started terrorizing small dinosaurs. Riona was feared for her ruthlessness, and the inhabitants of the valley were terrified by her presence.

Then, determined to chase away this intruder, Kafka and Steven drew a plan. They summoned their friend, a cunning Velociraptor, Ena. Both formed a team and set out to confront this female monster.

"We have to outsmart her," Kafka told them. "Strong she may be, yet this is where wits and teamwork come into play."

The Clever Trap

The next morning, Kafka, Steven, and Ena put their plan into action. They spread the word about a hidden treasure deep in the valley, knowing Riona's greed would eventually lead her into their trap. As Riona approached, they led her on a wild chase, expertly making their way through dense trees and rocky terrain.

Finally, they led her into a narrow gorge, the sides of which were steep and the ground rough. In a resounding bellow, Riona charged forward, but lost her footing over a rock, falling into a pit they had surreptitiously dug before.

"Now we can keep her trapped until help arrives!" Ena said, relieved.

Dusk and A New Dawn

With Riona contained, the trio summoned the guardian of the valley: a huge and wise Brachiosaurus named Akito. When Akito arrived, he calmly lifted Riona out of the pit, reminding her of the coexistence with life.

"Strength is not about fear," Akito said. "It is about protecting those weaker than you."

Humbled, Riona promised to leave the valley in search of a new home where she could learn to coexist with others.

With the peace restored, Kafka, Steven, and Ena celebrated their victory. They just didn't save their home but had made a forever friendship with each other. Kafka noticed that the real treasure wasn't the egg or the adventure itself, but the bonding they all shared.

And from that day forward, the Valley of Echoes was filled with laughter and tales and the bright colors of dinosaurs living together. And high above them all, Steven would soar through the skies, the most hopeful symbol of friendship to those below.

Ancient Guardians: The Majestic Guanlong

Korean International School, Saha, Debansh – 12

In the mist-covered mountains of Ancient China, where the Guanlong wandered. Named for its crown-like crest and its dragon-like presence, the Guanlong is a magnificent creature and part of the wide diversity of historic creatures that once existed on this Earth.

The story of the Guanlong begins in the rugged terrains of the Shishugou Formation in north-western China, where paleontologists found the remains of this remarkable dinosaur. Discovered in 2006, The Guanlong has unique features like the shape of its teeth and its skull.

The name “Guanlong” carries deep significance in Chinese culture. “Guan” translates to “crown” and “long” translates to “dragon,” it was the perfect name for a creature that wore its royal crest.

Standing around three meters high, the Guanlong has a slender figure, a feathered body and a long tail that provides balance during its hunts.

In the lush forests of Ancient China, the Guanlong ruled as the top predator, its sharp teeth and keen eyesight helped it during hunting against the deep foliage. Agile and swift, the Guanlong had precise timing during hunting and succeeded every time.

The Guanlong exhibited a social structure that hinted at complex behaviors and interactions within its pack.

As the Guanlong moved through the ancient landscapes, it met many other creatures, like huge sauropods in the far-off fields and fast ornithomimids in the bushes. These interactions influenced the ecosystem's balance, with each species playing a crucial part in the complex cycle of life and death over time.

The Guanlong vanished into history, leaving faint traces in fossils. Yet, its legacy lives on in the hearts of those fascinated by prehistoric wonders. As the dinosaur era ends and new stories unfold, Guanlong remains a symbol of resilience and adaptation, a reminder of ancient times in China.

New Tales Of China's Dinosaurs ...

Korean International School, Varshney, Aarvi – 11

'A long time ago , there was a beautiful species of dinosaurs ... the Alxasaurus, which was found in deep China ' . Ms Kate showed us all pictures of the Alxasaurus . It was a 10 feet tall dinosaur , with sharp deadly fangs , and its small dimmed eyes. I was intrigued by the picture and wanted to learn more about the Alxasaurus . When we had our lunch break , I went to the library to explore more about the dinosaur . There were several books about the Alxasaurus , most of them non-fiction , but there was 1 beautiful book which was ' Alxasaurus , and the legend . ' I borrowed that book , and started reading it...

Legend says, if you go to China's Yixian Formation, you will find the Holy Sphere, and if you say the written words correctly, you can teleport to the olden ages where dinosaurs were alive...

Later in the day, my parents and I went to China's Yixian Formation, where the dinosaur fossils were kept. The further I walked in the building, the bigger the place got. The place was *humongous* and astonishing. There were 11 floors, each filled with information about dinosaurs . A young man with dashing blue eyes came up to me and my parents, and said ' Welcome to China's one and only dinosaur museum, The Yinxian Formation!! Up ahead, you will find the dinosaur themed snacks, but if you want to first look at the dinosaurs, then it's on the left!'. Thank you,' I replied politely. 'But can you tell us where the Holy sphere is?'. ' Of course! You go straight and turn on the 1st left.' ' Thank you!' I replied . ' Dad, Mom , can we go to the holy sphere first? I'm really interested in that .' ' Sure darling , but aren't you hungry . Maybe you can go to the holy sphere while me and your mother go to the snack bar?' I looked at the snack bar . There was a long line for the dinosaur themed french fries. ' Can you get me the fries ?' I asked , innocently. ' Sure darling ' my mom replied . ' Just wait at the holy sphere for us , okay ?' I nodded , and started running towards it.

There were large statues of dinosaurs, some found in China , and some from abroad . The T-REX statue was *humongous* . It was 5 feet tall, and 4 feet wide.

There were about 7 large statues, and in the middle of all of them, was the Holy Sphere. It was a large circle , with old ruins written on it. I took out my book, and stood in the middle of the circle . I said the words and closed my eyes. At first, nothing happened . But then a large swoosh of wind went fast past my face . I suddenly opened my eyes. I wasn't in China's Yixian Formation anymore . I was in the middle of a forest !! I gazed upon the forest. All I could see was dark green trees , and a lot of mist. I took a deep breath . Everything was so peaceful, since there was no pollution. Suddenly the ground started to shake . 'Earthquake !!' I screamed. But there was no earthquake . A few miles away was the mighty T-rex running wildly. But the real T-rex was much bigger than the statue . It looked like it was 12 feet tall and approximately 5-6 feet wide .

The T-rex was running towards another dinosaur . That dinosaur was the Alxasaurus !! ' Oh my god !! ' I squealed . ' I've got to take a picture.' But as soon as I lifted up my digital camera , a baby dino came,snatched my digital camera and started to run . ' Oh no you don't ! ' I screamed,running towards it . The baby dinosaur ran through the woods and I followed him . The woods let out to a turquoise coloured river,which looked really , really deep. I had finally caught up to the baby dino, but when I did, it was too late. The mother of the dinosaur was the T-rex , which had been fighting with the Alxasaurus . So that means the baby dino is a baby T-rex !! ' Sorry ' I said, and a second later I started running away. The mother T-rex roared and started chasing me . The chase let me to the other part of the woods . It had been dark , and there was mist all around me . As I was running , I saw at least , a dozen of large figures up ahead. I ran towards them. When I got closer , I saw that those figures had unusually long necks and were very very slow . Thankfully , the T-rex took a turn, and went the other way. 'Thank god', I said with relief .

After I got out of the woods , (thanks to following the dinosaurs) I saw the figures. Those were dinosaurs . But I researched all night , and I never saw those kind of dinosaurs . I took a picture of them . Suddenly the ground started to shake again . I looked back . The T-rex was running behind me , in full speed aiming for me .

' *Seriously* ' I thought . I kept on running , and running until my shoe broke . ' Owwww ' I screamed. I tripped and banged into one of the weird dinosaurs leg. The dinosaur kicked its leg , and I flew in the air . ' Ahhhhhhhhh !!!!!' I shrieked . I landed on the dinosaur's back , and started riding on it . As the wind crashed through my hair , I was really enjoying this . I might never ever get this experience again . So when I go home, I'll write a new story . And that story will be named...

NEW TALES OF CHINA'S DINOSAURS , and a little girl's journey ...

A Titan of a Tale

Korean International School, Vilk, Isobel Olivia – 13

We've been living here for seven years already, alone, isolated, deserted and most of all barely surviving though we would feel the sting of living remote so much more if we were alone. For my friends I'm grateful, for the birds that still show up every day, for the books from the dusty old library still intact after all these years and for that one lifeless pond thanks to which we're here. Not going to live in a deserted city on our own after watching everyone, well not exactly everyone, and practically everything we love perish in a horrible town fire isn't the best outcome in the world; but we make do with what we have.

"So, what's for lunch?" Rory asks as he gives a curious look to everyone in the room.

"Hmm, let's see... water with a side of sand" Sarah gives the biggest sarcastic smile as she tilts her head staring him down from the other side of the room.

"Heh good one" he chuckles imitating her sassy hair flip. One thing we were sure of is we all knew each other like the back of our hands, every single one of our secrets were spilled, every memory we recall is a memory we all share, you could basically call us one big happy family; I guess seven years stranded together will do that to you.

"You find anything new to read today, Liv?" August asks, sitting on a half-broken chair that could tell traumatic stories if it ever were to speak

"Yeh, actually," I respond, pulling out a large but delicate book out of my rugged satchel as Violet shifts herself to my side to get a better look at what I was holding

"Looks like some mythical dinosaur crap" she explained.

"Hey!" I say nudging her playfully.

"I think I remember my mum telling me something about these dinosaurs." I say my voice softer, though it had been almost a decade, the violent sting of watching the people you loved the most turn into ashes wasn't something easy to forget. Violet wrapped her arm around me saying everything I needed to hear with no words at all, she was the type of person that could do that.

Everybody's heads stayed down as we all took ourselves back to that moment so many years ago when everything changed. Our parents had urged us to go out and play because we were disturbing their adult conversations, our parents had all been best friends and all us kids grew up so close to each other that we learn to love and care for each other like family; we still do. We would fight like siblings, cuddle like siblings, cause chaos like siblings. We were inseparable to the point where people would turn concerned if we weren't seen together. So back to the story, it was Thanksgiving dinner that's why everyone was gathered together at August's house, the biggest of them all, as we played outside, we ended up drifting far out of town bounds into the forest. As we ran around, we suddenly heard people shouting and screaming and massive orange and fiery lights engulfing the town. We all stood there paralyzed not having any idea what was happening or how we could possibly help as it became clear that our beloved town was turning to ashes. We broke our silence and started running towards the scene crying out for our parents, holding each other and sobbing like you've never seen anyone sob before. It was like we had just entered the gates of Hell. The worst part is some of our parents managed to make it out of that house and were running frantically towards the forest where they could find us and possible shelter. They called out our names screaming, crying, sobbing and then...boom.

Crash. Screeches. Sob. Tears. As our parents had just been demolished by the old bank building that collapsed. And that's how we ended up in a deserted town. Still in shock jumped into a lake near the forest to protect ourselves. Some of the older kids had to stop the younger ones from running out into the flames. Unfortunately, the forest had been engulfed by the time the fire was over and all that remained was a handful of buildings and a bunch of trees spread out toward the north side. I guess you could say we've had our fair share of trauma.

"I'm gonna take a walk," I announce, breaking the tension in the room as I push myself off the ground.

“I’ll come with” Violet says as she starts to get up.

“No, no stay” I say shaking my hands.

“Oh, okay” she says breathy. As silence strikes the room I walk out breathing deeply.

I shudder as I descend the jagged stairs of the scruffy building we were staying in. I try to hold back tears as I walk towards what previously was the forest. The air was dry, like it always was, deserted, like it always was but it wasn’t as quiet as usual. There was a slight rumble, a loud noise, a subtle roar? I ran towards where I think the roar was coming from but nothing, dead end after dead end. I feel like a lunatic running around looking like I’m chasing an imaginary dog. At this point I feel like I’ve searched every inch of the former forest but nothing. And just as I’m about to give up and convince myself I’m hallucinating but as I crouch down about to plop my head in my hands. I hear it again, this time louder, urgent, deafening. My head raises itself as I peer 3 meters in front of me, a hole and just appeared. I crawl toward it careful not to get too close, as I carefully look over the edge I’m flabbergasted. Green. Pink. Blue. Orange. A beautiful rainforest met my eyes, who knows how long it’s been left undiscovered till now. It’s beautiful and lively. There are exotic birds flying around, ones you would only dream of, and fish swimming in crystal clear lakes, ones you only see in the movies and dinosaurs, big robust, ancient dinosaurs. Gorgeous red scales bless my eyes and fire so pure shooting out of their mouths, they’re stunning in every possible way that something could be, they look straight out of a poem. But how? How is all this life living under a rugged old town? How are the dinosaurs still alive? They look just like the ones in the book I found earlier this morning.

“The Tales of China’s Dinosaurs!” I exclaim to myself recalling what my mum had said about them.

“They live where no one has ever been!” I say to myself as all the memories are rush back to me, what she had said, the book, the tales

“I found them” I shout out as I may have just found my proudest moment

“I found them” I scoff to myself, as I get up and start running towards my friends in the city bounds

“Guys I did it!” I exclaim walking up the stairs

“I did it!” I say out of breath as I bend down

“What? You found what?” Merely asks excitedly as they all stand up in curiosity

“The Dinosaurs! The Tales of China’s Dinosaurs! Ring any bells?” I ask

“Nope but you did just show us that book didn’t you” Violet points out

“Yes, yes but I saw them, a whole underground world,” I say stopping to catch my breath once more.

“I saw it and it all came back to me,” I add.

“What came back to you, ”Jack asks.

“All of it, my mum said something about it a while back, something about them living where no man has ever been,” I explain standing up proudly.

“Well, it sounds bloody important to me,” Rory agrees in his British accent.

“Yeh,” Jack chimes in “well show us then.”

Violet sits up and marches towards me.

A Minor Student with a Major Discovery

Korean International School, Vilk, Cecilia May – 11

Being a Paleontologist isn't very popular, so I'm stuck alone in an Outcrops office with no friends. Anna (my best and only friend) and I were talking in the noisy cafeteria. Since we're in different classes, we're talking about the job experiences we picked. We'd promised to pick the same thing but, of course, being Anna, as soon as she saw the architecture trip, she stabbed me in the back and as soon as she told me, I could feel it sinking in. It's afternoon since the bus driver and Mr. Belladonna had an argument because I'm the only kid that wanted to come here (aka the weird kid) and I've been assigned to Dr. Wylie, who was the only person who wouldn't dump me in the field, tell me to look around and call it a day.

" First things first Asteria. In case you couldn't tell, no one wants a kid here to mess around" Dr.Wylie starts the conversation out like I'm her seven year old daughter on bring your kid to work day. We're already heading outside into scorching hot rock mountains where my lungs fill with dust, but as I look around I manage to spot someone holding an Alectrosaurus print which I'm guessing because I can barely see anything.

" This way" Dr. Wylie's leading me to the group of Paleontologists who are all wearing glasses, white coats and holding their clipboards to their chests and the girls with sleek buns and ponytails like stereotypical nerds. Being a teenage girl I'm over thinking what they see in me looking like one of the popular girls, except I'm not.

" Alright let's get started today people!" Dr. Costa says nicely and smiles at me with a nice smile you'd expect everyone would give me.

" Today is a serious day, people. Get your pens ready and don't forget we have Ms. Booker joining us today" a man who I'm assuming is Mr. Lawton announces and I smile awkwardly as everyone slowly turns to face me. Now Dr. Costa's going on and on about their recent discoveries of tracks of Amargasaurus along the trails right behind me. Oh no. Everyones looking at me but this time all their eyes are saying is *move*, so I do and whisper 'sorry' so quietly that only the girl next to me hears and she gives me a quick side eye before looking past me, where I see a shorter, elderly woman using one of her brushes, from the big collection she seems to have, to clear up a more recent print. She looks up and her confused face turns into a warm inviting smile, and I'm the only one to smile back and I fight the urge to go over to her and ask what her name is and how she's doing. She seems happy to be here but at the same time beyond her smiley face she seems lonely and lost in her thoughts.

" Ms. Booker, please pay attention" Dr. Lawton's voice makes me shiver and I turn around and say once again, 'sorry' in my quiet voice. I look down at the rocky ground and force my eyes to stay there and as he goes on and on about a Beipiaosaurus all I think about is the fact that the way he's saying everything makes it sound complicated, to be honest from what I'm hearing I probably know more than him.

Dr. Claverhouse. The woman behind me is just as I thought. A sweet, nice and chatty elderly woman. I crouched by her for at least fifteen minutes, observing the Tarbosaurus print she'd found, while she went on about how she got here and her family back in Shen Zen.

" What about you dear, where are you from?" She asks and I'm assuming I look surprised since while she was talking I had forgotten I had my own voice.

" Well I'm from England but I grew up in Shanghai," I explain and start talking faster than usual.

" Oh well that must be wonderful! What school are you from dear?" She is so sweet it makes me feel like a nice person that I bothered to come over to her.

" Well I'm going to Nord Anglia and we're having the job experience trips..." I start to trail off ; as I continue talking I notice that I feel like I've seen this woman before. That any Paleontologist 'wanna be' would know who she is.

" Are you alright dear?" Her face turns concerned.

" Can I ask you a question?" I ask before I can process my words, " well of course!" She smiles back and so I ask.

" Are you *the* Madeleine Claverhouse?" I can feel the smile creeping up my cheeks as she nods slightly to indicate that I am in the presence of *the* Madeleine Claverhouse.

" It's such a pleasure to meet you!" I blurt out but she stops me.

“ Now come on. We were having a wonderful conversation! No need to complement me or tell me how much of a fan you are! I’m a normal person like you! Now get on with your experience and go explore!” She explains nicely and so I stand back up and walk toward Dr. Wylie. Sometimes you're scared that when you'll meet your hero they're not as they seem, but Dr. Claverhouse is the nicest person I’ve ever met and even better than I’d expected.

We're in a circle again, discussing the Amargasaurus prints from earlier again since no one's seen anything new. *WOOSH...* I turn to see nothing but the field full of fossils. I’m sure I've heard something. I turn around and someone has moved in front of me. I held my breath hoping they didn’t notice. Of Course they didn't. *You know what?* I tell myself *no one will notice if the kid is gone. Right?*

It doesn’t matter because by the time I finished that sentence I’m already 50 meters away. *CRICKLE...* I hear again, louder as I get closer. It’s coming from behind the smaller yet still large rock (the biggest ones are taller than me). I tiptoe quietly in case it’s just one of the robot-acting stereotypical nerds and as my head turns to see behind the boulder...

An egg. A greenish, vomit coloured egg as big as my two fists sits there inside a Huaxiazhoulou long shouwen footprint half underground . Someone must have not seen it. As I’m processing this my body's one step ahead and is moving closer. Have I just discovered something?

“ Asteria! Come back!” I hear Dr. Wylie call from far behind, out of breath running towards me.

“ I found something!” I shout in reply and lean closer to the discovery. While I’m inspecting the supposed egg I hear two, no three? I’m not sure but they're coming to find me.

“ Over here!” I shout; sure enough Dr.Costa, Dr. Wylie and Dr. Lawton show up behind me. Dr. Costra fixes her glasses as she approaches me.

“ What have you found?” She asks with the others close behind her. My eyes turn back to face the vomity green article I’ve found. She crouches beside me.

“Come!” She says quietly and gestures for the others to come observe the egg beside us.

“ Is that...?” Dr. Wylie starts but is too stunned to speak.

“ Yup! Pretty sure I’ve just found the very first dinosaur egg shell in history! Pretty cool right” I say in reply with a grin.

“ Ms. Booker” Dr. Lawton starts, “ You’ve just made history!” He exclaimed and we all chuckle.

Now I’m going back to helping them clear up the shells so they can take tests just for me to find out I’ve discovered a potential mixed breed between Huaxiazhoulou long shouwen and maybe Abdarainurus. In two days I will skip school once again since I’m called in to be interviewed by a couple newsletter writers with the same questions so I give the same response.

“ I came here for a job experience all alone. I wandered off and found the first ever dinosaur egg ever! Making history can be that easy, you just have to look for it”. Teenage girl makes a discovery, gets a place in the Museum in Chengdu, China dedicated to her and her work only.

“ Hello” I pick up the phone just as I’m heading out the door to get to school. “ Job interview. 10:30. Don’t be late.” And the call hangs up. I squeal and jump up and down because it’s not everyday Dr. Lawton offers a random 17 year old a job.

I run into the kitchen “Mom! They offered me a job!” I tell her with the biggest smile on my face.

“ That's amazing honey! I’ll call the school and we can do whatever you want to celebrate afterwards!” She replies. I do a happy dance and head outside.

“ Hey! Where are y-?” I hear Anna's voice as I answer the phone.

“ I’m getting a job!” I interrupted her.

“ Well then why are you still on the phone? Good luck!” .

I’ve never been more grateful to have her.

The Gunpowder Recipe

La Salle College, Chau, Cheuk Chun – 15

A candle flame was lit up, revealing the crooked structure of the tiny hut. It was old and mouldy, its walls filled with cracks and moss, some furniture were roughly tossed around the room, which now lay broken in pieces, the small pieces now created a small cave like structure, where rodents now call their home. An old man walked into the room, his troubled face slowly floated against the light, his eyebrows curled so horribly inwards like a dried up tea leaf, teeth gritted, he walked further into the room.

A small, soft glow emanated from the cracks of the wooden planks on the floor. The old man finally showed a small sense of relief, he took out a bronze axe from his toolbox, “CLANK!” , “CLANK!” , with all his might, he thrust his axe harshly on the innocent, lifeless planks/ Shards flew, nails burst from below, but the old man was unharmed, his shakiness gone, replaced with a look of determination, with one last blow, the surface was obliterated, revealing a beautifully carved, jade dragon engraved, golden rectangle box.

“Chen! I hear horses coming our way, have you found the box yet?”

Chen grabbed the box, he hurried out the hut, outside were 2 others, Lee, Zhou. “Chen—, is this it?”

“Yes, Lee. We need to go now, give this to the Emperor, we’ll go separately, Zhou will inform the Brotherhood about our successful attempt, we must get this secret back to KaiFung — ARGH —” Chen screamt in agony, he fell to the ground, clutching his chest, from there an arrow peeked out of the open wound.

“IT’S THE MONGOLS!” Zhou yelled, “GO, LEAVE ME!”, Chen said,

“But Chen—” Ming blurted,

“GO OR YOU’LL DIE!”

The three remaining men ran to their horses, a group of Mongols spawned out of the bushes around them, Zhou pulled out his sword, “Get this to the emperor, notify the Brotherhood, I’ll buy you time to escape.”

Lee tearfully nodded, he pulled up the horse, took hold of the box and rode. A small group of Mongols had them surrounded, but Zhou swiftly eliminated the group. He rode away from the area, war cries and screams echoed in the forest, but he didn’t dare to stop, he didn’t dare to

look back. There were sounds of sword clashing, bodies thudding on the ground, he could just hope it was not Zhou.

He rode day and night, he couldn’t stop, he dared not stop. Lee rode to a small gazebo. He stopped abruptly. Lee sat inside the gazebo, he took out the shiny golden box, he caressed the jade dragon engraving, it was the Brotherhood’s symbol.

He opened the box, inside of it was a scroll, he rolled it out, lines of words in golden ink appeared in front of him. “The Protectorate of the Beast” he scrolled down, “ is our brotherhood that stands in front of mankind against its fate of total destruction. What we guard is a malicious device that would bring chaos to our existing world. Gunpowder. Since it has been invented in the Han Dynasty, royal inventors have used it to create powerful weapons that could allow the Han Dynasty to become perpetually inevitable, the sheer power this device brings? Absolutely unimaginable! But then, Li Shen, a high ranking official took note of this powerful device, he knew of its potential harms and saw it as a threat to humanity. For the sake of our kind, Li Shen created The Protectorate of the Beast, where its members, all from elite blood, could help safeguard this dangerous secret. If our protectorate has been infiltrated or exposed, or the world is faced with unprecedented danger, the box shall find its way to who that is worthy. May no one ever find this scroll.”

Lee, overwhelmed by this sudden message, finally knew why the box needed to be delivered to the emperor. This was their last resort to save China from a complete Mongol Invasion! He shuffled around the box, and there was a formula, “The gunpowder recipe.” . Lee’s eyes glittered, for once in these months, he felt that hope had finally shone back on these barren, war torn lands, the agony of death and her despicable accomplices suddenly disappeared, replaced with Lee’s ever new determination to deliver this important information to the emperor. To save his country.

Lee got on his horse, he rode through the deserts, jungles, mountains, nights and days until finally he rode to a cliff, gazing under him was a large plain, in the middle stood a mighty castle. The emperor's home — KaiFeng City.

In the city, he contacted the local Protectorate brothers, where they used their power to help Lee to meet the emperor.

Lee was brought up the marble stair, he entered the grand hall, the emperor waiting for him.

“Your Majesty, I have something that I believe would change the course of our war with the Mongols.”

And it did, not just that but the whole world history, the rise of gunpowder, shook the world stage it brought fireworks, and also modern weapons. It is a celebration of the delicacy of the finest human minds. A celebration that was paid in blood.