



Fiction

Group 4

The Lost Legacy of Sinosauropteryx

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Lam, Caprize – 15

The world's first Sinosauropteryx fossil, a feathered dinosaur, is missing. 16-year-old Riley Sun must find out where, and explore the unexpected outcomes.

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It was the day before the first Sinosauropteryx fossil, a feathered dinosaur, went missing. It was located here at the Shanghai Natural History Museum, filled with other amazing pterosaurs. The glass display was not broken, nor was there any DNA detected at the crime scene.

During that day, Bruyne High School had a 6-day overseas trip to further explore details of dinosaurs for the Grade 11 students' paleontology class.

"Everyone this way," said Ms Walker, as she raised her left hand to lead the rest of her class. Riley was following the crowd like everyone else, looking down at her phone and scrolling on TikTok.

Riley was not a dinosaur aficionado, nor did she desire to attend this school trip. It was her older sister Ying Mei Sun, professionally known as Dr. Clara Belenski who pleaded with Riley to go on the trip so she could further pursue her career just like her. Riley had a different path planned. She wished to be an investigative journalist, and one day find out who her father truly was. Though deep down she did not want to disappoint her sister either.

Riley was half Chinese, half American. Her full name was Zi Xuan Riley Chen. Riley was her middle name. She didn't look traditionally Chinese, with no almond-shaped eyes, and no pale white skin tone. She was not your average American girl either. She had cherry cola hair, with hair length down to her rib cages. She had heterochromia, amber eyes on the left, and hazel brown on the other. Her face was pointier, with a defined jawline. Her clothing was grunge aesthetic—a black t-shirt, a blue varsity jacket, jeans, and white sneakers with gold jewelry to compliment her outfit. In Bruyne High School, Riley claimed that she was not hostile, though her cold-blooded actions toward her classmates seemed to have proven the opposite.

She wore an amulet necklace, it was only half of the completed version. The other half was with her father, who had left Riley and her sister alone in the United States when she was ten years old. Their mother died due to pancreatic cancer when Riley was 4 years old, and their father raised them with passionate care. One day without warning, their father left a note in their living room only writing that he had to leave the country and would not be seeing them for a long time. For the last six years, Riley had been tracing her father's location and secrets, along with growing to be independent. Though she had not found any breadcrumbs to follow.

'Oh my god Riley, look at this, isn't it magnificent?' Her friend Margaret was pointing at the Archaeopteryx fossil eagerly with her polished finger. Riley grunted as a reply and glanced somewhere that was more interesting than the ancient remnants.

Margaret was an angelic dove. She always brought her utmost positivity to everyone. She had chocolate brown hair, and green eyes that brought highlights she applied to her face. Margaret claimed that her true genuine friend was Riley. She was aware that having a company like her was an uncanny circumstance for her profile, but she insisted on always sticking by her side as her wingwoman.

She then pointed to another fossil, which was much smaller than the previous one.

'Look,' said Margaret

'In the 1990s, a farmer called Jason Ming found this very feathered dinosaur, known as the Sinosauropteryx. The Sinosauropteryx is characterized as "the China dragon bird' Margaret read from the fossil's synopsis. Riley observed

the fossil's details. It had an extremely long tail for its body size, at least 20 inches or even more. Its minuscule arms had three fingers, and its legs were twice as large as the human thighs. Regardless, Riley was left disinterested.

Shortly, the splendid sunset reached its orange tint as the clock struck at six.

'Okay everyone, we will come back here at nine in the morning tomorrow and we will do fun workshops in the museum.' Ms Walker said it with such enthusiasm, though it also sounded like it had a sprinkle of sarcasm.

The next morning felt like someone had just derived from hell. Riley's hair was tied into a braid and nearly all of her hair strands escaped from her hair tie. Her mouth was dry from water dehydration, and the strong ramen she had eaten in her hotel room the night before had lingered on her tongue for the past six hours.

Riley got ready and waited in the hotel lobby to go on what she thought was another tedious field trip day.

As soon as Ms. Walker attempted to enter the museum entrance, a constable rapidly raised his arm horizontally to block the pathway, nearly causing Ms. Walker to fall behind with her emerald green heels.

'I'm sorry ma'am, but you are going to have to stay back,' said the constable

'This is an ongoing crime investigation.' he then added to his statement.

'What's going on in here?' One of the students shouted

'Oh my god, look!' a classmate held out his phone from his jeans pocket.

'First Sinosauropteryx Fossil Reported Missing on Thursday Night' he said as he read from the article's title.

Everyone gasped, even Riley looked surprised.

Ms Walkers and the teachers had somewhat gathered into a group hustle, whispering into each other's ears. Four minutes later, Ms Walker clapped her hands together and made an announcement.

'Okay everyone, we have decided to visit the aquarium instead!'"

Some had cheered for the amendments in their itinerary, while others were still distracted from reading the news.

Riley explored her inquisitive mind, she did not think the incident was true. She suddenly found herself desperate to find the truth. With her curious thoughts, Riley absconded from her classmates and entered the museum.

As she sneaked into the museum, she was behind blue curtains where she could observe the entire museum facility. She saw police officers examining the crime scene with notepads and pens in their hands. Just then, Riley noticed something glowing on the floor. She twitched her brows as she glanced at somewhat monkey-like footsteps glowing in clear squad blue light.

There were no officers that seemed to be investigating the footsteps.

Could they not see it? Was it only Riley imagining this wicked vision?

She blinked her eyes to moisturize her parched eyes, it was still shining as it reflected from the nearby mirror on the ground. She began to trek her footsteps meticulously, hoping to get a closer look at the curious discovery she made. There was a whispering gentle exclamation from behind

'Riley, what are you doing?'

It was Margaret hiding in the blue curtains.

'Come on, let's get out of here!' Margaret looked like she was ready to hop into her pajamas and watch Avengers's Endgame on her laptop in her hotel bed.

Just then they saw a figure snooping around, and Riley began to tiptoe her foot toward the amusing-looking creature. There was a strong grip surrounding her forearm, vigorous but painless.

'And what do you think you are doing?' questioned Margaret

'Following it?' Riley implied a rhetorical question, expecting to get Margaret to leave her alone.

'Riley, there is a difference between following good things and following a goddamn trap!'

Her response got the police investigators to look behind their heads.

'Hey you!' said the police officer

'You shouldn't be here'

The police officer started to walk towards the two of them. Before he could reach them, Riley and Margaret commenced running away from the crime scene.

They were running and dashing through the hallways until they noticed that they were brought to a corner that couldn't have been seen by the naked eye.

'I think we lost him' said Riley

'Yeah' replied Margaret.

Both were panting and out of their breath. It took them a minute to realize that there was a large object lying beside them on the ground.

It looked somewhat like a sliver egg, it was glowing with an azure blue radiant beam in the coal-black edge. A rattling sound was made. The egg's shell appeared to be breaking apart.

'Margaret, are you seeing this?' Riley turned her head behind to face Margaret.

A sharp discomfort was felt in Riley's stomach. She leaned forward to alleviate the excruciating pain and knelt on her knees. She looked down on her lower body. A Swiss Army knife was stabbed into Riley's stomach. Riley tried to speak, but she was too weak to fight the excruciating agony. Momentarily, black vision hits her like a bullet train.

Riley woke up in a red room full of crystals. She saw two guards that had a shark head, crab claws, and a Komodo dragon body with its legs standing upright. And there she was, Margaret, sitting on a throne.

'It's tragic Riley, I thought you were more intelligent.' claimed Margaret

Riley's mind was confused with a myriad of question marks. Where was she? Who are these weird creatures?

'Who are you?' Riley asked with a furious tone in her voice

'So tell me, Riley,' Margaret ignored her query

'Where is WuKong?'

Riley did not know if it was right to chuckle or produce an answer to that question. Who was Wukong? Isn't he the monkey king, China's mythical creature?

Margaret rolled her eyes, impatiently waiting for a response.

'Isn't he like a mythical creature in China or something?' asked Riley

Margaret seemed to be getting impatient, her face was twitching problematically and her hands turned into fists.

'Do you know how long I have been trying to find Wukong's sovereign bracelet? I was sent here to get closer to you so that you could tell me where it was. The people in Yaochi Palace treat me like a dog, day and night. They didn't care if I was starving, or freezing to death. They saw my talent as worthless. I was a peasant to these people. I was sent here to obtain Wukong's bracelet and maybe finally the people in Yaochi could see faith in me. I've been on your side for the past six years and all I get is an ignorant question from your redundant mouth.' she slowly closed her mouth as she concluded her words.

She stopped to draw a deep breath and sat back down on her chair. She had tears waterfall down to her chin. It seemed she had been waiting to say this for years. Margaret quickly wiped her streams of tears with her palm, looking like a professional individual once again.

'If you are not going to tell me, then I guess we are going to have to put you into the catacomb' she said as she gesticulated the two mysterious creatures towards Riley.

Immediately, the two guards grabbed her by the shoulder and dragged her further away from Margaret's throne. Riley shouted at Margaret, not knowing where the guards were taking her.

The guards dragged Riley into another hidden location. She was thrown into a deep hole with stones surrounding the enclosure. She kept falling until she hit solid ground which made her back feel pain. She heard a voice, it was the sound of a monkey. The voice was getting nearer to Riley. The figure came in front of her and shocked Riley to fall back asleep.

Riley opened her eyes to wake up for the second time. She lying on the floor again. She looked at her wound, it was healed and only left with a small scar. She squinted her eyes to avoid the glimpse of a golden light.

'Hai yah! Name's Sun Wukong.' The monkey's head appeared from Riley's eyesight.

Wukong then pulled out a maroon wooden stick with gold prints. Riley immediately questioned his strange actions.

'Is that your battle stick?' questioned Riley

'Correction, it's a Jingu Bang' Nonetheless, Riley did not care.

'What's your name, kid?' Wukong was wiping his snot with his grotesque fingers, which made Riley want to puke a little.

'Riley, Riley Sun' replied Riley.

Wukong suddenly had his eyes pop out like it was going to fall out of his face. Just when Riley wanted to check if he was okay, although they spoke simultaneously.

'Are you okay?'

'Are you my daughter?'

Both were shocked by their questions.

Daughter? Why was Riley suddenly this monkey's child? Did she fall into deep sleep and create this terrifying dream?

'It's me, Riley,' said Wukong 'It's Dad'.

Wukong then held out something from his chest. It was the other half of the amulet necklace. Riley and Wukong connected their amulets with the magnet linking one another. Riley couldn't help it, she held out her arms and hugged her dad. After the warm embrace, they realized they needed to leave this inferno they were trapped in. Soon after, Wukong pulled out some kind of a fossil from his pocket. It had long legs, and short arms with three fingers. Was this the missing Sinosauropteryx fossil?

‘Wait a minute, it was you that stole the Sinosauropteryx fossil?’ asked Riley

‘Well, I was going to put it back,’ explained Wukong

‘I just wanted to get one of the samples to elevate my powers.’

‘And now, I have flight mode from the fossil, watch this’

With that, Wukong hit the stick three times on the ground, and golden streaks of light gleamed across the ground. The Jingu Bang carried Wukong and was ready to fly. Riley listened to her intentions and hopped onto the Jingu Bang. The stick flew swiftly up in the air, bringing Wukong and Riley away from the catacomb. They were getting closer to the sky, to freedom. Eventually, they landed in a place full of wheat and the sky was gazing at them with beauty.

On spur of moment, Riley noticed an aureate gold bracelet on Wukong’s wrist.

Was this the sovereign bracelet? Would Margaret set them free if she gave it to her?

Suddenly, Margaret came out of the blue and was grinning at them with a cunning smile. The lovely garden transitioned into the red room Riley was encaptured, the happy ending was all an illusion. Margaret snatched the sovereign bracelet from Wukong’s wrist. She wore it with pride.

‘Ah, this is the best feeling I have ever experienced!’ exclaimed Margaret

Riley was raging with ultimate vexation, but she had to get out of there before she encountered more consequences.

‘There, you have the bracelet, can you let us go?’ said Riley

‘Riley, no you don’t know how powerful that bracelet is,’ Wukong said as he shook Riley with panic.

‘We have to get it back!’

Before the glimpse of their eyes, Margaret let out a sigh and spoke her words with confidence.

‘Well, there is one more thing you have to repay me for.’

With the bracelet, Margaret stretched her arms towards Wukong. Wukong suddenly coughed. He placed both his hands on his throat and fell onto the floor. Riley looked worried. She tried to understand what was happening to him, and she solved the puzzle. Wukong had lost the ability to speak.

Margaret chuckled as she realized the power she had obtained from her new potent possession. Riley grabbed Wukong’s Jingu Bang without hesitation and hit Margaret with full force.

An impulsive thud rang around the red room, silence met the air. The sovereign bracelet was off her wrist. Margaret had been destroyed by the Jingu Bang. Riley ran back to check on Wukong.

Margaret had cast a spell that was too strong for him to defeat, he was dying.

‘Wukong, please wake up!’ cried Riley.

Her injured hand was placed on his chest, providing him a cuddling warmth.

‘Promise me one thing,’ said Wukong with his whispering voice

He grabbed onto Riley’s neck and pulled her toward his lips.

'Never underestimate your true powers...' Wukong spoke his last words.

'I love you, Dad.' Riley was trying her best to not let her dad break her heart into more melancholy pieces.

His ashes leisurely flew away, until it was only left with the amulet necklace and his Jingu Bang. Riley scooped the pendant and the battle stick, the only memories of her father.

Flight of Yi Qi

Chinese International School, Zhou, Hanyi – 15

Late Jurassic Period, 160 Million Years Ago

The first time *Yi Qi* leapt from the canopy, the air was still and heavy, clinging to its feathers like damp silk. Beneath the trees, a shadow prowled — sharp teeth glinting as it moved through the dappled light, searching for its prey. Small and fragile, *Yi Qi* knew it stood no chance against the predator below. Its membranous wings quivered as it crouched on the branch, the rough bark pressing against its talons as it calculated the distance to the next tree.

It was a gamble. The distance seemed impossibly far. Even the closest branch hovered like a distant island across the void. *Yi Qi* hesitated, its talons gripping the bark. But the predator's growl sent a shiver down its spine, and instinct took over. With a final, desperate crouch, it leapt.

Its wings stretched wide, catching a faint breeze. For a moment, *Yi Qi* wavered, its small body teetering in the air, wings trembling as they fought to keep it balanced. The void beneath seemed to pull at it, threatening to drag it down. Then, a whisper of wind steadied the glide, carrying it forward in a halting, jittery descent. *Yi Qi* landed awkwardly, its claws scrabbling at the bark, the impact jolting through its fragile frame.

The little creature panted, its chest heaving as it clung to the branch. *Yi Qi* glanced back at the forest floor. The predator's frustrated snarl rose faintly from below. Safe, for now. The leap had been far from graceful, but it had crossed the impossible distance. For a fleeting moment, it had defied gravity.

The forest stretched endlessly in every direction — a maze of trees, shadows, and hidden dangers. *Yi Qi* tilted its head, scanning the canopy. Branches reached out like a network of precarious paths, each leading further into the unknown. The air shimmered, thick with possibility.

Yi Qi crouched again, wings trembling with anticipation. This time, the leap was not just an escape. It was a beginning. Above the predator, deeper into the uncharted heights of the canopy, a new world awaited.

119 CE, Tianmo Desert, Han Dynasty

The desert stretched endlessly before them, its golden dunes rippling under the searing sun. The villagers trudged forward, their footsteps dragging through the loose sand.

They had left their homes weeks ago, fleeing famine and war that had reduced their village to ash and ruin. Water was running low, their food stores nearly gone. The elders' walking sticks sank deeper into the sand with each step, their hands tightening on the worn wood as their pace slowed. Even the strongest among them faltered as the heat beat down mercilessly. Overhead, a lone hawk circled, its shadow a dark smear against the glaring light, unbothered by the struggle below.

Jia, the village head, walked at the front, supporting the elder who leaned heavily on his arm. Though the ache in his legs grew with each step, his pace remained steady. The group moved in silence, the weight of their journey pressing down on them.

As the sun dipped lower, shadows stretched long across the dunes. Near the crest of a rise, a young boy stumbled, his foot striking something buried beneath the sand.

“There’s something here,” he called, his voice quavering.

Jia turned sharply. “Step back.” He hurried to the boy’s side and knelt, pressing his hands into the sand. Beneath the grains, something rough and solid resisted. The villagers drew closer, their curiosity overpowering their exhaustion.

Jia carefully scraped away the sand. A flat surface began to emerge, its texture starkly different from the surrounding desert grains. His hands worked faster, revealing a stone etched with a delicate form of a creature: a small, rounded head, its jaw curving downward like a bird mid-song, unnaturally long limbs, and membranous wings covered with feather-like patterns, outstretched and poised for flight.

“A dragon bird,” he murmured, barely a whisper.

As the sunlight slipped lower on the horizon, the shimmering lines on the stone seemed to glow faintly in the amber light. The villagers stood frozen, their weariness forgotten, caught in the quiet reverence of the moment. The air around them seemed to hold its breath, heavy with stillness.

A breeze stirred, cool and refreshing, carrying with it the unmistakable scent of rain. Moments later, the first drops fell — soft and scattered, dotting the sand like tiny blessings. Jia tilted his face upward, letting the water roll over his sunburned skin. Around him, the villagers raised their hands to the sky, their parched mouths open to the gift of rain.

Jia lingered, his gaze fixed on the dragon bird’s faintly glowing form. Then, with a final glance, he turned and walked on. The villagers followed, their steps pressing firmly into the dampened sand as they disappeared over the crest of the dune.

2006, Ottawa, Ontario, Society of Vertebrate Paleontology Annual Conference

“It’s improbable that *Yi Qi* could fly,” the voice boomed across the packed conference hall.

Dr. Zhang resisted the urge to roll her eyes. She sat near the front, her fingers drumming against her notebook, the rhythmic tapping barely concealing her mounting frustration. Around her, murmurs rippled through the audience. This annual gathering was meant to celebrate breakthroughs in understanding prehistoric life, but *Yi Qi* had become a battleground. With only a handful of fossilized fragments discovered, *Yi Qi* had become the subject of intense speculation and heated debate.

“*Yi Qi* lacks the musculature for flying,” the speaker continued, his pointer tracing the largely speculative skeletal reconstruction projected on the massive screen behind him. “The attachment points for flight muscles are simply too weak.” He paused, his tone turning dismissive. “*Yi Qi* simply doesn’t fit into what we know about the evolution of flight in theropods.”

Dr. Zhang leaned forward, her pen hovering over her notebook. The speaker’s arrogant tone grated at her — how could such a unique evolutionary adaptation from over 160 million years ago be dismissed so easily? She glanced at her colleagues, noting the furrowed brows and the faint, skeptical smiles. Paleontology thrived on debate, but at times, it seemed more eager to dismiss the unfamiliar than to embrace it.

“I beg to differ,” she called out, standing.

The room quieted. Hundreds of eyes turned toward her. Dr. Zhang took a deep breath, steadying her voice. “Yes, its adaptations for gliding might seem inefficient compared to the specialized wings of pterosaurs. But that doesn’t mean it couldn’t fly. Look at the wrist structures — these elongated rods suggest that *Yi Qi* had wings.”

She gestured toward the image of the wrist bones on the screen. “*Yi Qi*’s membranous wings represent an entirely different solution to the challenge of taking to the air — one we haven’t seen before in theropods. Evolution is a series of experiments, and *Yi Qi* shows us the diversity of solutions nature attempted.”

“We study evolution not for its certainties but for its exceptions,” she continued, “*Yi Qi* may not fit neatly into our existing categories, but that’s precisely why it matters.”

For a moment, the room held its collective breath. Then came a ripple of murmurs. Dr. Zhang sat down, her heart pounding as the speaker resumed, his voice less assertive than before.

That evening, in the quiet of her hotel room, Dr. Zhang sat by a small desk where a sketch of *Yi Qi*’s partial remains lay beside a stack of notes from the day’s sessions. She traced the lines of the sketch with her pen, the faint drag of ink on paper grounding her thoughts.

The fragments they had were incomplete, and they didn’t fit neatly into the patterns scientists liked to see. But then, nature rarely worked in straight lines.

She stared at the sketch, her pen hovering as if to add a note but stopping short. The questions lingered, unspoken. How did it move? Was it more than a glide? What had it seen in the dense forests of the Jurassic?

Dr. Zhang closed her notebook and set it aside. She gazed out at the distant horizon, her reflection faint in the glass. Somewhere, in the depths of stone and time, the answers waited.

For now, she thought, the questions were enough.

2007, Mutoudeng Town, Qinglong County, Hebei

The wind dragged across the fields as Wei drove his spade into the hard-packed soil. Digging was part of his life — repairing walls, planting crops, and occasionally uncovering fossils buried beneath the earth.

This part of the countryside had always been rich with such treasures. The hills nearby, carved by time and wind, revealed layers of history. Fossil buyers from the city often roamed the area, snapping up whatever fragments farmers could find. Wei had sold a few himself. It was extra money, enough to buy a sack of grain.

The spade struck something solid. Wei paused, crouching to sweep away the loose soil with his hands. At first, it seemed like an ordinary, dirt-caked slab of stone, blending into the surrounding earth. But as he cleared away more soil, an intricate pattern began to emerge: thin arcs, angular and skeletal, forming the outline of something stretching across the stone.

This wasn’t just another fossil. It was ... complete. Delicate patterns marked its surface — wings spread outward, preserved in stunning detail. Wei leaned closer, his fingers brushing lightly over the grooves etched into the stone.

The lines arched outward like feathered arcs, weathered yet precise, as if carved by time. Even the membranous textures were preserved, capturing a creature frozen in motion.

Wei wondered how much this might be worth. Last year, a villager sold a half-complete jawbone to a buyer from the city and earned a small fortune — enough to renovate his home and buy livestock. Rumor had it the buyer later sold it to a foreign collector for an even higher price. Wei brushed away the remaining soil, wrapped the slab carefully in burlap, and hurried home.

Lying on his bed, Wei stared at the cracks in the ceiling as the distant hum of insects filled the quiet. Across the room, the burlap-wrapped slab rested on the table, its presence heavy. Wei shifted restlessly on the thin mattress, the familiar creak of the wooden frame loud in the stillness.

Selling it made sense. A heater for the winter, better tools for the fields, maybe even a new house — it would likely be more than he could ever hope to earn.

Wei rolled onto his side, his gaze falling to the slab beneath the burlap. Unlike the fragments he'd unearthed before, this one was whole, intricate, preserved in a way that seemed almost deliberate, as if it had been waiting for someone to find it.

He sighed and closed his eyes, but sleep refused to come. The image of the fossil, wings outstretched, locked behind glass in some distant country, its story lost to the land where it had rested for millions of years, lingered in his mind. The night stretched on, silent and unyielding.

The morning market was already stirring as Wei passed through, clutching the burlap tightly. Fossil buyers stood in their usual spots, their sharp eyes scanning the crowd. One of them paused, his gaze lingering on the bundle in Wei's arms. Wei tightened his grip and kept walking.

The bus stop was little more than a dusty clearing at the edge of the village. Wei stood silently, the burlap-wrapped fossil held close to his chest. When the bus finally arrived, he climbed aboard and chose a seat by the window. The vehicle rattled over uneven roads, fields blurring into low, rolling hills. Wei's fingers brushed the burlap now and then, as if to reassure himself it was still there.

Hours later, the bus came to a halt at the Tianyu Museum of Nature. Wei stepped off, adjusting his hold on the bundle. The museum's pale, unadorned walls rose ahead, catching the midday light. For a moment, Wei paused on the stone steps, his hand brushing the burlap's rough surface.

The museum doors stood heavy and still. Drawing a deep breath, Wei pushed the door open and stepped inside.

2030, Hong Kong, Paleoart Expo

The auditorium buzzed with anticipation as Jing stood backstage, her sketchbook tucked under one arm and her notes trembling slightly in her hand. Years of work, countless sketches, and endless simulations had led her here.

Tonight, her creation, *Flight of the Eternal Dragon Bird*, would take the stage — a seamless fusion of art, science, and technology, bringing the enigmatic creature *Yi Qi* to life.

The thought still felt surreal. Not everyone had supported her vision. Some had dismissed it as a gimmick that undermined the rigor of paleontology. Yet Jing believed fossils, seen through new perspectives, could show more than the world had yet seen.

The lights dimmed in the auditorium, and the murmurs of the audience faded to silence. Jing stepped onto the stage, her footsteps steady despite the thrum of her pulse in her ears. She smiled, gesturing to the darkened stage behind her.

“Millions of years ago,” she began, her voice soft but steady, “a small creature gathered the courage and leapt from its perch, its wings stretching into the unknown. This leap — once etched into stone, buried in time — was uncovered by those who believed its story was worth sharing. Tonight, I want to bring that leap back to life.”

At her cue, the stage came alive. The holographic display flickered into existence — a towering tree bathed in moonlight, its branches swaying as if caught in a prehistoric breeze. The soft rustling of leaves and distant calls of Jurassic insects filled the auditorium. The audience held their breath as *Yi Qi* appeared, perched delicately on a branch. Its membranous wings glimmered softly under the simulated moonlight, casting a delicate glow.

As the creature stretched its wings and leapt, the crowd held its breath. *Yi Qi* soared above the stage with tentative grace, its body teetering in the air. Jing watched from the side as the holographic *Yi Qi* circled the stage and then perched back on its glowing branch.

For a moment, the theater was silent, the audience still caught in the spell of the performance. Then, applause erupted. Jing stood center stage, momentarily overwhelmed. She glanced back at the holographic *Yi Qi*, its poised form glowing faintly behind her.

As the applause quieted, a small voice called out from the front row. “Why did *Yi Qi* try to fly if it didn’t know how yet?”

The question caught Jing off guard, and the audience chuckled softly. She tilted her head, the holographic *Yi Qi* glowing faintly behind her.

“That’s a good question,” she said, her voice warm and thoughtful. “Maybe it wasn’t sure what would happen. But sometimes, taking the leap was the only way to discover what was possible.”

The applause swelled again as Jing bowed slowly. She glanced one last time at the glowing *Yi Qi*. The leap that began millions of years ago, she thought, is still in flight.

Yi Qi, discovered in 2007 in Hebei Province, China, is a Late Jurassic dinosaur notable for its primitive feathers and membranous wings — a unique adaptation for flight never seen before in any other dinosaur.

The Nemegtosaurus

Diocesan Girls' School, Cheung, Tsz Yan – 17

One late Mongolian night, deep in the desert, the sky glowed softly with indigo, and the winds sang with drops of sand. Dr Cassandra Liao felt deeply through her spine each step she took that led her towards the yurt still a hundred—something feet away, illuminated by three torches tied atop branches sticking out of a thin patch of grass. The softness of the ground made her heels burn with a persistent ache as she, with each step, sank further into the sand and had to dig her feet out with more force. The Gobi winds sailed right into her bones.

As those close to her liked to call her, Koko was the cream of the cream in her world back at home, New Haven. Her great—grandparents had immigrated to the United States from Sichuan in the 1920s. Little Cassandra Opal Liao was kind and brilliant; time only instilled more charm in her. She'd discovered her love for dinosaurs at the age of three while perched on her grandfather's lap watching *The Land Before Time* and graduated from Yale Summa Cum Laude with a doctorate in palaeontology. Her sensibility, which perfectly balanced out her boundless courage, made her stand out. Her passion was the like sun, eternally bright such that the universe gravitated graciously towards her. It brought her back to Yale, where she researched with fellow palaeontologists until her thirtieth birthday when she was already widely revered for her exceptional intellect. An invitation to an excavation of the Gobi desert came in the mail when she was baking the cake for her birthday celebration later that evening. Her heart was in her throat as she knew it was a region rich in fossils from the Cretaceous period. Within a week, she was on a helicopter en route to the Gobi desert, with a translator in his late thirties she'd recruited by her side in the passenger seat. He was stoic, silent, and tense as the vessel rocked through turbulence. The pilot was a bit too young for her liking, with leathery skin, slender shoulders, and black hair atop his head that radiated youth despite the desert sun he'd endured his whole life. The pilot boy uttered a word from the front, muffled against the crash of the winds. The translator received the foreign syllable with a faint shiver, his eyes luminous with moisture in the yellow light from the helicopter's control panel. "Storm," he muttered under his breath. This sound from him made Cassandra shift uncomfortably as she realised he hadn't heard a word from her translator until now. The pilot repeated the foreign word, shaking his head almost as if in disbelief. Cassandra pressed her palms against the cool windows, feeling the fatal cold of the desert night.

Kassandra only registered that her two companions, the pilot and the translator, were ever present in her trek to her shelter for the night when she finally arrived at the yurt. The tent's flap opened for her, and the doctor wearily stepped, sand streaming from her shoes. The yurt was dimly lit but heavy with warmth from several oil lamps, and Cassandra shuddered violently with relief, her eyes aglow like pools of fire as she held her gaze with a figure in the far corner of the tent. The figure grew taller and taller as he took careful steps forward, the shadow receding for golden sinew to gleam in the darkness. The doctor took a step forward, extending her hand in greeting. She knew who he was. He was Arik Baatar, the man who, the department head had mentioned in the invitation, explicitly requested that she join this excavation. He shook her hand, his palm like a furnace against her wind—chilled one. He motioned for her and her translator to sit before procuring two bowls of rice from the counter behind him, one in each hand. Arik silently watched them eat the butter—slathered rice for a few minutes. Overwhelmed and chilled to the core, Cassandra wolfed down her portion while her translator scrutinised Arik, his bowl left on the stool in front of him untouched. The collision of the metal utensils with a wood—carved bowl rang throughout the heavy, tepid interior of the yurt and Arik stood to bring out a dish of jerky and a map scroll. Cassandra cast about, her heart bulging against her ribs, for any remaining indicators in her surroundings that she was still, in fact, in the twenty—first century. She was thrilled when she realised the helicopter had been flown away a while ago, and there was nothing in the tent that marked her time or space in history other than her hiking pack she'd put down by the door flap, her translator, and herself.

Arik unrolled the map, pointing at different areas he'd circled, and Cassandra leaned forward. Taking in the terrain of the circled regions, she deduced that's where they were going the next day. He informed her that he wished to look for a family of Nemegtosaurus. Arik watched her nod in understanding and point out one of the circled areas according to the notes she'd brought in her pack before putting the parchment away, satisfied.

“We start in the morning,” Arik told her in English, “before the storm comes.”

He blinked as the doctor listened to him with shining eyes, her face in her hands, and he continued, his voice more steady, “I am Arik Baatar.”

“I know, sir. I am Cassandra.”

His lips curved slightly while his eyes hardened with meaning, “Fossils are important to our land — strange, but important. The sand and sun are eating them away.”

Kassandra wondered if he knew these remains' worldly, historical importance or if he was only considering their effect on the Mongolian lands, supporting the loose soil.

“I have read about fossils on my trips into central China, and these creatures of a distant past. I feel few of my people know their importance.”

The doctor internally berated herself for ever doubting Arik after his impressive eloquence in English.

“I understand. We will start in the morning.” She kept her voice low and calm, sensing the frustration and desperation in the Mongolian's words, though her soul burned with a resolution similar to his. The translator sat ramrod straight beside her, sipping tea and seemingly unmoved.

“In the morning, before the storm comes.”

That night, Kassandra immediately fell asleep, dreaming of rain and bones. Her translator lay beside her on his mat, shuddering faintly.

Come morning, the desert sun dawned harsh and unforgiving. The trio ventured out, the translator stumbling on his own feet, looking like he hadn't slept at all. If he was still nauseous from the helicopter flight, he only made his discomfort known through his unsteady gait. Quiet as snowfall, he moved away from the group as the other two started fishing brushes and chisels from their respective sacks. The translator found a boulder under a large, singular brush, where he shared shelter with a nest of desert mice.

Arik Baatar, Kassandra learned, was the only son of a religious leader in his village. He was a hunter built like a bear who rode with the winds of the valley, untethered yet precise on horseback with arrows in his arms. He read extensively and adored his mother but told Kassandra nothing of his father as they made their way down to the sandy plain where she'd claimed a family of *Nemegtosaurus* lay. He had a gentle disposition and soft eyes but sharp wit and stubbornness, the doctor observed, as he regaled her with stories and knowledge gained from his yearly trips to the cities. As they bent over a set of skeletons together, him working with unearthing the bones of yet another *Nemegtosaurus* as she ran a brush over the structure she assumed was the skull, she smiled as she realised how similar they were to each other. Devoted and curious, sweet yet fierce.

“Doctor, I apologise, but I'm afraid your notes may be inaccurate. This is a family of *Quaesitosaurus*, not *Nemegtosaurus*.”

“...Pardon?”

“*Nemegtosaurus* have strong and angular jaws, like the trunk of a tree. When I felt this creature's skull as I handed it to you, it was sharp and long, weak. It is a *Quaesitosaurus*.”

“Impressive.”

“*Nemegtosaurus* are so strong, they could easily crush the head of another of their kind.”

“Impressive.” Cassandra repeated, her eyes soft with awe. She traced her fingers along the marbly bones whose curvatures proved Arik’s latest deduction correct. She realised with a sickening, fluttering pain in her stomach that she was getting horribly distracted to have made such a mistake. In the desert, with the sun beating angrily on her flesh, her courage overrode her characteristic pragmatism, her defences stripped away by the intoxicating existence of the demi-god-like man who knelt beside her.

They passed the excruciating noon in a blur of sweat and goat milk as they moved to a new location where they finally found the Nemegtosaurus family, and as the afternoon sun began to set, four sets of skeletons had been unearthed, gleaming like pearls in the pinkish light. As the winds picked up, Arik guided Cassandra back to their horses through the walls of sand. The translator was standing there, looking slightly green around the gills. Arik first helped the doctor onto her horse before helping her translator. The ride back to the yurt for Cassandra was one of contemplative quietness, her brain helplessly muddled from the temperature fluctuations and Arik’s presence on his steed beside her, which was acutely felt. She was only pulled out of her reverie when the translator let out a deep gurgle so uncharacteristic of him that it made her turn and watch him lean over the side of his saddle and throw up all over the sand.

Another indigo night fell, and Cassandra sat by a lamp with Arik as he sharpened his chisel, blunted from the day. The translator sat in a far corner, a tarp drawn tight over his shoulders as he trembled convulsively, his eyes following Arik’s every movement with fiery intensity. The doctor and the Village’s Son barely talked, though her eyes were sweeping over her face whenever he wasn’t looking. The trio had finished their dinner two hours ago, and Cassandra sat with warm milk and bread filling her stomach pleasantly, wishing her exhaustion could be ignored longer such that this night could be seemingly eternal. She was so enthralled by the soft smile that graced Arik’s face when he turned to face her when she inevitably let out a yawn that Cassandra didn’t notice that the most supernatural thing was happening beyond the yurt. The storm had arrived. The Gobi desert had only approximately 40 mm of rainfall across thirty days from April to September every year, and it was mid-May. A ferocious storm was coming, and its implications were clear to everyone in the tent, except the palaeontologist. Arik stood up immediately, his jaws tightening and eyes once again hardened with purpose. He strode out of the tent, feeling the hard bullets of the rain upon his skin.

The translator retched again, bringing up a mouthful of bile, and Cassandra rushed to his side. The rain was pelting heavily against the tarp of the tent, and she felt a chill run down her spine as her translator stared up at her with glassy eyes. She rummaged through her pack on the ground, fishing out some antacids and handing them to him. He shook his head feebly.

“It’s no use...” sweat beaded on his face, plopping onto the carpeted ground.

“Sir, it’s alright. Take it, please.”

“Poison...in the tea...it’s too late...”

“What?”

The tea he had on the first night she met Arik. A sudden clarity hit her like a shot of espresso as the gravity of the situation dawned on her. A man was dying in her arms.

“I knew Baatar...we were friends when we were children. I watched...his father get...” he gave a raspy laugh, bloodied foam bubbling at his lips.

“Don’t talk,” Cassandra pleaded, dabbing his face with a towel, though the desperation in her eyes spoke of the opposite.

“I saw his...name on your flyer...recruiting a translator...I saw your face...your life...I couldn’t let him hurt you, doctor...” he choked on Cassandra’s tears dripping into his gaping mouth, before continuing, “Mid May, the rainstorm...brings the rising of the...dead...unearthed...”

“Please, tell me...”

“I thought...Baatar would not recognise...me...after all...I couldn’t have known it was him...if I hadn’t known what...I’d signed up for...” he mused softly, his eyes fluttering.

Dr Cassandra Opal Liao felt him go slack in her arms, eyes hanging open as the breath left his body. She held him for a long minute, tears streaming down her face in disbelief as she laid him down softly, not wanting to let him go. She didn’t even know his name.

She stood up, resolute, and walked into the storm.

After trekking miles in the roaring rain, she arrived at the plains of the Nemegtosaurus, fists dripping with water, clenched at her sides. What she saw made her stumble back, landing with a thump in the wet sand. Rose-coloured muscle and white sinew snaked like ribbons over the skeletons she and Arik had exposed just that afternoon as rain pounded against the bones, bouncing off the joints. Leathery skin crept up from the ancient giants’ legs up their necks, curved like rivers in the soil. Their eyes blinked alive, and their nostrils flared with breath. As the four dinosaurs stood up on their sixteen legs, Arik Baatar stood beneath them, his obsidian arrowhead aimed straight at a Nemegtosaurus’s sky-blue eyes.

“Arik!”

The hunter turned around to see the doctor standing on a ridge, rain dripping down her chin and oceans of pain in her eyes. Arik’s tears mingled with those of the desert sky as he lowered his bow and arrow by a small degree.

“You will catch your death out here,” he warned, his voice cracking with tremor.

“So will you,” the doctor responded with more courage than anyone could ever hold in a situation like this, her hand wrapping around the small dagger sheathed in her belt, “unless you tell me what’s going on.”

Arik kept his weapon trained on the Nemegtosaurus as he turned his beautiful face towards Cassandra, almost making her crumple to her knees.

“Do you know how much I loved my father?”

“I have not heard a word about him, sir.”

“Thirty years ago, on this very same day in mid-May, he died on this piece of land in the rainstorm which—“

“brings the rise of the dead unearthed.” Cassandra nodded, her hand trembling around her knife.

“Husun has left, I see. He has told you everything he knew.” Arik sounded almost regretful for a second before a sadistic smile crept over his gentle face.

“He died in my arms. May God bless his soul as graciously as he forgives yours.” But Arik did not hear her.

“My father was killed by a creature before time. Thirty years later, I am a man, and I will kill it in turn.”

Kassandra shook her head vehemently, “The Nemegtosaurus are herbivores. It would not attack unless attacked—“

Just then, a cylinder of bright light cut through the rain clouds like a beacon. The rainstorm was ending. Arik frantically took a shot which hit hard and true. The giant toppled over with a whine reverberating through the dunes as sunlight scattered across the desert. As the dinosaur crumpled into the soil, it evaporated into sand, as did Arik Baatar. The remaining three Nemegtosaurus slowly went onto their knees before slowly laying down in the soft soil, their flesh and blood receding into the ground after briefly warming their bones. Cassandra watched on her hands and knees, her mouth agape. When she finally tried to stand up, to stumble back to the yurt, she took one step and pitched forward in a faint.

Hours later, bundled in emergency blankets on a helicopter en route to the nearest airport, nursing a hot mug of tea, Koko was finally lucid enough to realise that Arik Baatar had suffered the same fate as his father, and to remind herself that what happened this mid-May was to stay between herself and the desert for the rest of her life.

Somewhere in Hong Kong, a healthy baby girl was turning a month old in mid-May. Watching with adoring eyes, her parents cooed as she picked, from a list of toys lined in front of her, a fabric book about dinosaurs.

Tales of the First Sinosauropteryx: The Difference Between Us

Diocesan Girls' School, Chung, Hei Man – 16

Spring, 1939, Nanjing

“To avenge the fallen.”

“With creatures that may not even exist?” His gaze flits over the walls of her room, lined with sketches of small-headed creatures with scales along their curved spine, razor sharp claws pointing like daggers towards the ground. Despite his saying, merely observing their remains filled Kenji’s heart with wonder and awe, swallowing down a mouthful of fear. It shook him that creatures that had gone extinct millions of years ago still had an indescribable sense of pride and majesty, as if even seconds before death, they were proud of their very existence.

Studying about them, Maxine said, felt liberating during these desperate times. Even as the asteroid that would soon wipe them out hit earth, they continued to soar fearlessly across the sky.

“Look at this,” she hands him the sketch of the only dinosaur with orange, feathery skin and a golden beak, looking like a phoenix rising from the ashes. Sitting closer, he saw the same fire in her eyes and her blazing hair over the mantlepiece, overflowing with determination and an obsessive pursuit for revenge.

“Legend tells of a Dragon Bird— a dinosaur living in the depths of the Taihang Grand Canyon in Shanxi, China. It breathes fire hotter than the depths of hell. It will sabotage our enemies’ armies and crumble tanks. Machine guns and spears would be like french fries to it.”

“You’re justifying your cause for releasing a monster.” he protests. “And what about the rest of us, if all hell breaks loose?”

“So be it,” her voice hardened instantly. She had thought thrice about the consequences of revenge. Who was he to question it?

“What more could I lose?”

★ ★ ★

Winter, 1937, Nanjing

All he really had to do was pull the trigger on the gun.

They had been talking about that girl since January. Her mother, an International paleontologist who worked with Dr. Henry Osborn. Her father, a martial arts expert who opened a martial club just across the street. When Nanjing fell, the family was captured and both parents were the first batch to be shot dead from the back. Since then, the girl began doodling pictures of dinosaurs, threatening to overthrow the Empire of the Sun so that her parents could rest in peace. Dinosaur girl, they called her, fighting her way out of doomed extinction. How the girl went missing in two days was a mystery, except to Kenji, who remembered his body freezing up when she glared at him in the eye, terrified by the look of boiling revenge exacerbated by the lamplight as she climbed up and out of the prison gate; how his heart rushed when he swung the new sword bestowed upon him; how something about her rage made him hesitant to plunge at her, causing the tip of his gun to miss her mark, slitting just the skin on her left lower calf while she had already gone over the fence, out of his reach.

Just this once, he thought. For survival.

★ ★ ★

Summer, 1942, Taihang Grand Canyon

The heat was blinding, but they were already halfway through. 6 stones they believed to be fossils, 3 uncovered. This was no time to turn back.

Maxine had never seen so many of her childhood fantasies come close to touch. The skull with a snout like a lizard. Teeth curved like a waning moon, lining up to form an oval-shaped jawline. It was worth getting their mouths as dry as the sandy boulders they rested on.

Kenji followed along because he recognised the scar made by his bullet on her lower calf. He had been waiting to overpower her to prove he was no coward, but cannot seem to find the right time.

He liked the rush of terror and delight as he old grey ford Maxine had stolen, with its pastel blue exterior nearly scraped off the surface entirely, screeched as they made their way up the rocky hills. He liked it when Maxine would not stop talking about the early discoveries of dinosaurs, how she knew exactly where to stop and whip out her shovel and box of brushes and head to work. They took turns digging up whatever fossils they could find, the other trying to brush off the dirt to show its true shape.

At night Maxine slept on the rooftop of the ford, and Kenji, who couldn't withstand the cold, stayed inside. Each time she closes her eyes, she is fourteen years old again, watching from the back as soldiers committed atrocities on people she knew, sinking their teeth into flesh and bone.

The anger and rage was there, buried within her like a fossil, waiting for the day it could be uncovered and set free.

Autumn, 1943, Taihang Grand Canyon

Kenji had a feeling that Maxine already knew the truth.

He felt it when Maxine dug through the soil with her bare hands, her eyes filled with silent determination and anger like peace before a storm. The more bones they uncover, the closer they would be to the Dragon Bird's hiding point. Kenji wasn't sure what he was more frightened of – the myth being true, or Maxine's irrational rage bursting into chain reactions beyond one could imagine.

They had placed several bones of similar size on the ground, next to pictures of dinosaur skeletons Maxine had in her sketchbook. It was a portion of the dinosaur's spine— several connected vertebrae, which she joins together to form a long trail. She caresses the bones as if it were a gift left by her own ancestors. It wasn't much longer than her own spine.

"We share the same biology, don't we?" She says, in awe.

Kenji only nods, staring into the vastness between the rocky ridges.

"What are you thinking?"

"There will come a time when all of us are dead. All of us. We will lay silent in soil until the next species on earth dig up and examine our fossils, just as we did for dinosaurs. Everything we built and created and fought for will be reduced to piles of dirt and even our thoughts and souls cannot live on forever. There were species before us, and there will be species after. All this effort just to be remembered...comes down to nothing."

"Not nothing," She responds. "The fossil is the stones' memory of the bones of the animal. Our footprints on land shape the surfaces of rocks. We leave our marks so nature remembers us."

"Dinosaurs left these marks without knowing it." He says. "What I mean is, isn't it crazy how similar we are? Dinosaurs bite and tear each other down for survival. My people burn down your hometown. Your people made me an orphan. Your knife, my back. My gun, your head. Eat or be eaten. Power and glory and nothing else matters. Around and around it goes. After a billion years, how different are we from flesh-eating dinosaurs?"

She ponders in silence for a moment. Suddenly, she thrusts the knife into his palm, the tip way too close to her own chest. “Kill me.”

“What?”

“Take your dagger and slit my throat, just like you intended to, the day I tried to escape from prison.”

Kenji’s heart raced. This was too sudden, but this was his chance. His muscles were tensing up. If he told the commander-in-chief the day she escaped, he would’ve been paid a lot more for his achievements. If he killed her, right now, he would have no consequences, only rewards. Besides, she was nothing against him. Then why was the dagger still hanging midway? What was this invisible force penetrating between them like a shield, holding him back?

Her eyes glitter in shock, the shimmer like the sky full of stars above them. He realises.

“See? That is the difference.”

★ ★ ★

August 5, 1945, Taihang Grand Canyon

“This is it.” They were there, she could feel it.

They had driven into the cave marked with an x on her crumpled map, until the walls were too narrow for the car to move on. It was past midnight, and the cave was as quiet as a graveyard. There was a slow steady rumble, and Maxine was fully set on finding the sound’s origin. The entrance to the cave was shrinking into the darkness behind them. Partly because he was trembling in fear, partly because he could tell Maxine was gritting her teeth from the cold, it was the third time Kenji had asked her to turn back. Of course she did not listen and trampled on.

The rumbling became much clearer. Following the sound, Maxine rolled open a stone slowly like it were a tomb.

And there it was. The Dragon Bird, coming awake between the rocks.

Razor sharp, metallic grey claws, just as imagined. Webbed feet with yellowish brown scales. A tail that stretched towards the sky in brown and white stripes. Sinewy arms and legs and a full body of fox-like fur, but eyes that resembled a snake and an all too menacing grin. His jaw dropped as he looked up— the creature was nearly twice his height, looking back at them with a low, steady growl.

“Maxine, I don’t like this. It’s unstable. You can’t unleash it from the cave — you won’t know how to contain it. You can never contain it.”

Kenji rubbed his sweaty palms onto his pants, his hair raised on end, slowly reaching for his gun.

But it wasn’t there.

Before he could react, the burst of a gunshot rattled Kenji’s ears and caused an earthquake in his insides.

Maxine had shot diagonally from where she stood, at the cave wall behind Kenji, guiding the creature towards his body, frozen with fear. To avenge the fallen, he remembered what she said. And it started with him.

Resentment flushed through his cheeks. He couldn’t believe it. This girl, he thought. Traitor.

But these thoughts quickly turned into reflections about himself. Had he not been the traitor at first? Had he not been planning when and how to outcompete this girl he had seen as a threat?

All this thinking had slowed him down. As if Maxine was pulling its strings, the dinosaur snapped at him, just briefly missing his scalp as he ducked.

“This isn’t what you wanted.” backing up as fast as he could, he was still trying to reason with her. “You know better than this.”

She had lightened up a fire torch, scorching through the darkness.

Red. The colour of her fists clenching her fire torch. Red. The colour of blood splattered onto nearby fences when her mother and father were executed for being alive, the colour of blood on her calf the day she escaped. Red. The colour of the Rising Sun flag as it hung up shamelessly on the land she called home. Red. The colour of revenge.

As she watched him struggle in fear, she thought of how he was hesitant to kill her at first glance, despite being on different sides of the war. She thought of how he hadn't brought up a thing about their race, even though he could've killed her right away. Sadness stirred inside her, mingling with flames of rage.

"You don't get to tell me what I want."

"Why do you have to do this?" Frustration was boiling in his veins, which to him, seemed to satisfy her even more.

"Because it is a pity," she says. "To be famous for your own extinction."

The dinosaur roared again, its claws smashing irrationally across the cave walls. Kenji ran for his life until he slipped on sandy ground, twisted his ankle, and was squirming like a worm just a step away from the dinosaur's moistened breath. A shadow loomed across his face,

Kenji found himself incapable of breathing properly, hoping he could just melt into the

It snapped. Snarling and biting, he was lucky that he had clenched its neck just in time before his face surrendered into a bloodbath.

Kenji looked to the side, squinting through the dinosaur's dripping saliva. Maxine had already disappeared from sight. He wanted to scream desperately, but that would only accelerate his untimely death, and his muscles were getting tired and the heat was dizzying.

With a rock-shattering growl the dinosaur swung its head fiercely, as Kenji held on to its neck like grim death.

Just then, a buzz pierced his ears. The dinosaur swayed left and right, as if distracted by a siren of some sort. Kenji gasped in horror as it collapsed, crashing down onto the ground, swallowed up by flames.

He sat up. Maxine was looking down at him, holding an electricity gun with both arms.

"Just this once," Her eyes were watery with regret and fear. "For survival."

★ ★ ★

She was just helping him up when tiny pebbles and fragments of rocks began drizzling down, and as they raced for the exit, began to fall like bullets from the sky. Kenji's left leg was practically immovable—

"Run," he whispered weakly, shoving her onward. "Just go. I'm slowing you down."

As usual, she could not hear what she did not want to hear.

All she could see was daylight guiding them back to the entrance as she wrapped Kenji's arm around her neck, allowing him to lean on her as they ran, half-limping towards the light. And for a moment, it did not matter that the fossils they had spent so long digging up were left behind

It did not matter that the sky was falling on them, that the world they had known crumbled down into pieces. It only mattered that they were alive and running together, far far away from crumbling caves, crumbling pasts and empires, from history and many of its forgotten holocausts.

Maxine's heart jumped as they reached the entrance with the last piece of rubble falling onto their feet, barely missing their bodies. Her heart jumped when she lifted her head and squinted her eyes at the glowing rays of sun. But nothing made her heart jump more than seeing Kenji next to her alive, covering her up as if he were a shield.

“Not all of us are incapable of love, you know.” it’s the first thing he says, under his breath. “You said it yourself, didn’t you? Mercy. It’s what makes us different.”

And that was it. Maxine weighed onto Kenji and felt a part of her leaking out, all the hidden fear and rage of the past spilling over in a blurry of tears, but as the warmth of the first rays of sunlight caressed her cheeks and the darkest night ended into a beautiful sunrise, she was still here, still alive, still moving on.

★ ★ ★

Epilogue

They were bathing in the morning sun.

“So what do we do now?” He asks, a pang of guilt and pity in the coarseness of his voice. “With the dinosaur, I mean. All those fossils, amounting to nothing.”

She shrugged. Strangely, there wasn’t much disappointment left in her. She was as fresh and empty as the morning air, the emptiness leaving just enough space for a touch of hope.

“Let it be.” Perhaps a farmer will dig up these fossils some fifty years later and believe he was the first who did.

“I guess that’s the same we can do with history.”

★ ★ ★

August 6, 1945, Shanxi

“So what do we do now?”

She gave him a look. *Didn’t I just tell you?*

She had to pucker her lips to stop from smiling when she knew what he meant.

“Go home, find somewhere safe.” she commands. “And maybe stick together. Just for survival.”

“Yeah, right.” He never knew his laugh could sound so awkward but joyous at the same time. “For survival.”

Miles away, two asteroids landed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the cities sinking into rings of uncontrolled flames, penetrating the air into clouds of grey smoke.

Fall of a Dragon

Diocesan Girls' School, Lau, Yi Fei Charlotte – 15

The air was thick with the scent of damp earth and the subtly sweet fragrance of rice plants sweating under the sun. She remembered it from somewhere, the familiarity of a memory long-unvisited but deeply embedded into her the crevasses of her mind now turning itself up like the dusty floorboard of an enclosed attic. The very atmosphere shimmered with heat and something hazy she could not name.

A group of farmers toiled on emerald-jade rice paddies under a sun dipped in gold. She watched as they ploughed the earth, watched as the soil contorted itself into ridges and ridges and ridges. Something expectant pulsed beneath the hum of the air. The farmers' laughter echoed through the fields, a melody that would ring out yesterday and always and never again. Seconds passed, or hours, and she heard the *twang* of their tools striking an unexpected hardness. Curiosity piqued, they—she, for she now realized she was one of them—knelt at the edge of a shallow trench. The sun illuminated a collection of white bones, half-buried and entwined with twisted roots, glistening with an unsettling sheen. She exchanged uneasy glances with her compatriots.

The bones were unlike any they had seen before—elongated and sharp, they bore an otherworldly elegance, yet a palpable malevolence radiated from them. The skull, large and menacing, was adorned with jagged ridges that resembled the scales of a fearsome creature. The eye sockets, deep and hollow, seemed to gaze back at them with an ancient wrath, as if the very essence of a long-forgotten terror lingered within.

"Look!" one farmer exclaimed, voice trembling, as he pointed to the elongated vertebrae. "This must be a dragon!"

The word hung in the air, heavy with dread and awe. Whispers of legends long passed rippled through the group, tales of splendid beasts that soared through the skies, cloaked in clouds and mystery. "The dragon of the mountains," another voice murmured, the reverence spiking a wave of irritation in her. "It has returned to reclaim what is its own."

Around them, the golden rice swayed uneasily, as if bowing to the unearthed remnants of a creature both revered and feared. The sun dipped lower, casting elongated shadows that danced like phantoms across the ground, and in that moment, she felt the weight of the past pressing in on her shoulders — a history steeped in myth, now tangible in the bones that lay before them.

She screamed, but her voice rang hollow. Silence took its place, silence and the thrum of noiselessness and nothing but *hollow hollow hollow* and a distinct buzzing that undercut it all and continued to buzz and, as the jade of the rice paddies faded to a leathery green, sounded more and more like the crackly static of an intercom.

The ugly green back of an economy-class seat bore its way into her eyes as her limbs came to life, stiff with sleep and the exertion of contorting themselves into unnatural positions for the twelve-hour flight from London. "We are beginning our descent into Guanghan Airport," rumbled the voice of the captain. "Welcome to Sichuan."

Sichuan. A place of festering heat, of warmth and flavourful cuisine and numbing spice. Such a far cry from the dreary greys of London. She thought, with a start, that she might have paid to spend her summer in such a place, given different circumstances. As it was, the time constrictions of her visit hardly left room for sightseeing, and the rough polyester seatbelt of a dingy taxicab she'd hailed dug into her collarbone in a distinctly uncomfortable way. Already she missed the air-conditioning of the airport.

Perspiration dripped down her cheek and smeared on the plastic seat cover she'd leaned her cheek on. Palaeontology, when one got into the thick of it, was rather degradingly unexciting. Her visit for the retrieval of a newly discovered dinosaur fossil would not take long, and she would not so much as touch the fossil with her bare hands before it was whisked away to be preserved in periglass behind velvet ropes. Flashes of verdant greenery flared in her peripheral vision, the hustle and bustle of urban Sichuan giving way to the equally unstill mountains. The taxi driver, a stout

man whose grin had spread wide in response to her poorly enunciated request to “take her up the mountain,” no doubt thinking her a foolish tourist, cursed under his breath, a colourful string of phrases she could scarcely make out to be Sichuan-accented Mandarin. The low-level rumble of the engine crescendoed as the taxi lurched forward over a particularly bumpy stretch of road.

Abruptly, the rumbling ground to a halt. She glanced to the side, through the window.

A small sign hung crookedly, its faded paint barely legible against the backdrop of an ancient temple. Above the sign, the temple’s ornate rooftops peeked through the foliage like the jagged teeth of a dragon. With a sigh, she gathered her belongings and stepped out, her heels sinking slightly into the dust.

The temple’s entrance was flanked by stone lions, their expressions fierce yet oddly comical. As she approached, she was met by an elderly monk, his robes a deep crimson that contrasted sharply with the lush greenery. He regarded her with an expression that was equal parts curiosity and suspicion.

“Welcome,” he said, his voice gravelly, as though he had spent years speaking only to the winds that rustled through the trees. “You seek the dragon bones?”

“Yes,” she replied, trying to keep her voice steady. “I’m here for the fossil, the—”

“Dragon bones are sacred, benefactor,” he interrupted, his tone firm. “They are not for the likes of you.”

She felt her pulse quicken, a simmering frustration igniting. “With all due respect, sir, these are not dragon bones. They are newly discovered dinosaur fossils, scientifically significant—”

“Dragon bones,” he repeated, his gaze unwavering. “Our ancestors believed they are the remains of great beasts, guardians of our land. They belong to our history, not your discoveries.”

The dismissive tone sent a jolt through her, amplifying her irritation. She had traveled halfway across the world, navigating bureaucratic red tape and cultural nuances, only to face this obstinacy. “But surely, you must understand the importance of these findings! They can teach us about evolution, about the very history of life on Earth—”

“Life is more than what you can measure,” he replied, his voice low and steady. “Your science is but one way to see the world. Here, we honor our heritage.” His gaze seemed to flicker up and down, at her jet-black hair and golden-brown skin that all the tailor-cut suits in the world could not disguise as merely a product of the sun.

She struggled to mask her exasperation, glancing around at the temple’s intricate carvings, the heaviness of tradition pressing on her linen-clad shoulders. “You’re limiting knowledge, holding onto myths—stifling progress.”

“Progress?” His brows furrowed. “What is progress if one forgets their roots? The bones are not yours to take.”

With a heavy exhale, she turned away, the heat of the day pressing in around her like a suffocating blanket. The vibrant wildlife of Sichuan seemed to mock her, the colors around her too bright, too vivid against the dull grey of her thoughts. She had come here seeking answers, but instead faced an immovable wall of belief—a wall that felt as ancient and unyielding as the mountains surrounding them.

As she walked back toward the taxi, she couldn’t shake the feeling of defeat. Perhaps there was wisdom in the monk’s words, a perspective she was too steeped in her own convictions to appreciate fully. Yet the desire to uncover the buried truths of the past burned within her like the Sichuan sun, relentless and unforgiving. She should have found a way to bridge this chasm of understanding. It was what she did; it was who she was.

As she neared the taxi, the monk’s voice called out to her, soft yet compelling. “Wait,” he said, making her pause mid-step. She turned to find him watching her with a mixture of curiosity and something akin to compassion.

“Your journey has brought you far. It is not wise to leave without understanding,” he continued, his tone sagely. “Stay with us for a while. Learn our ways, and perhaps we can share our knowledge.”

She hesitated, the prospect of staying at the temple both intriguing and daunting. This was perhaps her best chance of successfully retrieving the fossil. Yet, the thought of spending her time in a place so backwards and opposed to discovery, away from her research—though she scarcely had the opportunity to immerse herself in it now—felt like a betrayal to her vocation.

“Why would you want me here?” she asked, her voice laced with skepticism. “You’ve made your views clear.”

“Because understanding is a two-way street,” he replied, stepping closer. “You see bones; we see stories. Come, let us share our narratives. Perhaps you will find a new way to view your work.”

The sincerity in his eyes caught her off guard. She had expected resistance, perhaps even hostility, but here was a peace offer wrapped in the promise of dialogue. The sweltering heat faded into the background.

After a moment’s contemplation, she nodded slowly. “Okay. I’ll stay.”

The monk smiled, a glimpse of warmth breaking through his serious demeanour. “Good. You will find much to learn here.” He gestured for her to follow him, leading her through the temple’s entrance, where the air felt cooler, infused with the scent of incense and ancient wood.

As they entered a small, serene courtyard, the monk turned around: “I must ask. However did you study our language? You have only the slightest bit of an accent.”

She, sharpish: “I’m an autodidact.”

“Hmm,” said the monk, without any inflection in particular. He gestured broadly at the courtyard. “Wander freely. When you feel ready, tell me of your work, and I will share with you the tales of our dragons.”

—

As the afternoon sun dipped lower in the sky, casting a warm glow across the temple courtyard, she felt a stir of unease. The monk had left her to explore the grounds, and in a small secluded room at the edge of the temple she found a rotary dial phone that looked as though it had not been used in decades. The unwieldy receiver felt heavy in her hands.

With a deep breath, she dialed the number of her employer at the natural history museum. The line rang, and she briefly considered how far she had traveled, both physically and metaphorically, from the halls of Cambridge where she had poured over ancient texts and fossils, full of dreams and ambitions.

“Hello, Dr. Chan,” came the voice on the other end, crisp and professional. “What can I do for you?”

“Hi, it’s me,” she replied, forcing a brightness into her tone that felt almost foreign. “I wanted to discuss my current project. I’ve met with some challenges regarding the fossil retrieval.”

“Challenges?” The tone shifted slightly, a hint of skepticism creeping in. “We were counting on you to bring that specimen back promptly. The board is eager to see it added to our collection.”

She hesitated, the weight of expectations pressing down on her. “I understand, but I believe my time here at the temple is crucial. The monks have offered me a chance to learn. If I stay longer, it might open pathways for future research—”

“Future research?” he interrupted, his voice clipped. “Dr. Chan, we need results, not more studies. You have a distinguished record, but we’re relying on you to deliver.”

The words stung, a reminder of the expectations that had followed her since her Cambridge days. She had thought that with her doctorate, she would carve out a niche for herself, perhaps even lead her own projects, but the museum had its own agenda. She felt like a cog in a machine that valued her credentials but not her vision.

"I assure you, I'm fully committed to the museum's goals," she said, her voice steadier than she felt. "But I believe that understanding the cultural context of these fossils can enhance our collection. It's not just about retrieval; it's about narrative."

"*Cultural context* is secondary to results, Dr. Chan. We can't afford delays. I suggest you focus on your original task."

The words hung in the air like a thick fog, suffocating her aspirations. She could almost hear the condescension woven into the fabric of his words—the tinge of incredulity wrapped around the single-syllable *Chan*, so unlike the neat and tidy Joneses and Bakers of the world; the sarcasm in the honorific *Dr*, insisted upon by herself, the only way to be seen as her accomplishments and not her sex. It was as if instead of *cultural context*, she had demanded a few days to understand the fossil's power of chi.

"Of course," she finally replied, the resolve in her voice faltering. "I'll do what it takes to complete the task."

As she hung up, the weight of her situation settled heavily on her chest. She was meant to be a trailblazer in her field, a researcher unearthing the secrets of the past. Instead, she was relegated to the role of a collector, gathering fossils for someone else's vision rather than her own.

The temple felt like suffocation, a testament to the modern day power of myth. Tradition and a blind trust in the past prevented any meaningful sort of intellectual progress. And yet, London's velvet ropes held no place for her either.

Behind her, the sun dipped below the horizon, casting shadows in bruising hues of orange and purple into the darkened little room.

As she sat in the room for seconds or hours—she could not tell—she felt the calm and grounding presence of the monk. He settled beside her.

"I see you are deep in contemplation," he said. "What weighs so heavily on your heart?"

She turned, suddenly hungering for the wisdom he could impart. "I've been thinking about the dragon," she began, her voice tentative. "The way it's revered here—or, I suppose, the story you spoke of."

The monk nodded, a hint of a smile playing at the corners of his lips. "Have you heard of the tale from the Western Tsin dynasty?" he replied. "Chang Chu wrote of a dragon skeleton discovered in Wucheng County. He told of how this dragon, in its pursuit of the heavens, flew up above the mountains, seeking to enter the gates of heaven."

As if a deeply buried memory had been unlodged from the crevasses of her mind—as if a hairline crack in its recesses now ruptured into a gaping chasm of words—she recounted, with the ease of someone else entirely: "But the gates were closed, and the dragon fell back to earth, where its bones were unearthed."

"Yes," the monk continued, his tone reverent. "The dragon did not fall in failure; it fell in honor, its aspirations noble despite the outcome. This is a story of perseverance, of a creature that dared to dream, even when the heavens remained out of reach."

Yet, he, like us, must eventually return to his roots."

She considered this, the weight of his words settling within her. Memories long sealed in periglass now threatened to spill forth. Lamplight at bed, because growing up, electricity was unreliable. Tales and tales and tales. A voice she had not heard in years, telling the same tale of the dragon.

In her academic years, dragons long forgotten, she had read about Icarus, the figure from Greek mythology who soared too close to the sun, only to fall when his wax wings melted. Foolishness had always seemed to define his fate, a cautionary tale against overreaching and ambition unchecked.

"I have always seen myself as someone like this dragon," she admitted, the words spilling forth, unguarded. "Chasing dreams that felt unattainable, only to be reminded of my limitations. I've often felt like I was striving in vain."

The monk turned to her, his expression gentle but firm. “I do not know about your journey. But the dragon’s journey was not just about reaching unfathomable heights but returning to dust and ashes. Embrace your roots, benefactor. They are part of your strength.”

She thought of her father and mother, reciting stories to her in lieu of books they could not afford, scraping together money for her to attend boarding school in Britain proper and not a colony. Of jabs at her accented English that drove her to excel in every way possible to exterminate any doubt that her capabilities were as full as any natural-born Ada Smith. She swore then that she would stamp out every trace of Chineseness that remained, every reminder that she was an outsider. Report cards and then performance reports and heels and pressed suits and it became just barely possible for her tawny skin to go unacknowledged.

But she, looking at her reflection every morning, could not forget.

“I don’t think I’ve been embraced my roots in—” she traced the date she had stopped writing to her parents in boarding school—“ten years now,” she managed, her voice a strangled thing.

—

A few days later and eight hundred miles south, outside a small house perched on the edge of jade-green rice paddies, a letter plopped into a mailbox. In the afternoon, an elderly woman would ease it out with trembling fingers, clutching it to her chest like a dragon might hoard his treasure. But for now, it sat, sealed in an envelope with the fragrance of ancient wood.

Dear Aba and Ama, it began. *I’m sorry for, well, these past ten years.* (Here the ink smeared across the page with what looked like blotches of tears.) *I’d like to tell you a story like you did to me once. It begins with dragons.*

Lost Tales: Volume 1

Diocesan Girls' School, Wong, Yin Zaria – 15

I carefully picked up the framed photo, fingers gently brushing over our radiant, beaming faces. The best moment in my life, captured on a useless piece of paper.

My claws pressed into the wood, leaving marks on it. I was surprised I haven't torn through the frame yet. Jared was going to pay for what he did to my family. Even if he didn't know, my plan was already in motion...

A Pterosaur burst in, interrupting my violent daydreams. He held out a claw, "This is for you."

It took Raiden long enough.

I snatched the note away from him, exuding as much arrogance as possible, making sure he knew the gesture was dismissing him as well. Before I could blink, he was out of my sight. His actions were a confirmation of the cowardice that plagued Jared's ranks. I didn't know why I ever believed otherwise...A nation ruled by an iron fist never lasts long.

Shaking my head, I opened the note: Ivor, you're a knucklehead and a womanizer. You're also obscene, egotistical and despicable.

I chuckled. Impressive...

Naveen, rolled his eyes. "Good to see Raiden hasn't lost his charm. Why is he throwing insults like that anyway?"

"When you rearrange the first letter of each insult, it spells 'worked.'" I explained. "They'd arrive any minute now, Jared has always been impulsive..."

Though I behaved as if I was notified of the weather, the warmth of victory filled my heart. I was finally closer to fulfilling my promise. But I couldn't celebrate yet. This was just phase one.

One of the new lookouts rushed into the tent, his eyes bright with anticipation and cheeks blotchy with colour. "Sir, we can see them approaching from a distance." His words were choppy from his rapid intakes of breath. "They were flying so fast..."

His tone was tinged with awe and disbelief, probably by their majestic stance. I didn't understand why he was amazed; Pterosaurs weren't even dinosaurs. And dinosaurs were obviously the most superior.

I pushed myself off my chair and strode outside. The icy winds blasted their gusts against me, as if punishing me for my choice.

"Everyone get in your ranks!"

Instantly, the camp dissolved into chaos. Whispers of nervousness and tension filled the air.

"What's the plan?"

"We just went over it—"

"LISTEN UP TROODONS!" I yelled.

They instantly fell silent.

“We are the Great Troodons. We can run up to forty miles per hour. We never cower under an enemy’s gaze. We win wars with our heads by outsmarting our enemies. We have never failed before. That is why the plan will work. No matter what happens, I want you all to know it has been my honour to serve you as your Emperor. Now, let’s do this!”

Roars and stomps filled the air. With one last nod at them, I turned and retreated into the tent, hands clasped behind my back with my head held high. They would never know how much their support meant to me...

The flap of my tent parted as Naveen entered, his actions allowing the strong winds and icy snow to invade my tent. Before he could open his mouth though, I lifted my hand.

“Don’t.”

“But Ivor—”

“Deputy General Naveen, we will carry on as planned.” My tone held no place for discussion. I had never used such formalities with him. We have known each other since we were babies, we were basically brothers. But some boundaries couldn’t be crossed.

Shock flitted through Naveen’s expression, yet he didn’t argue. He retreated outside, but not before catching my eyes and conveying everything I forbid him to say.

“Why would he...” I murmured to myself, shaking my head. I didn’t understand. My thirst for blood only multiplied as time passed by. When someone said revenge was best served cold, they were telling the truth.

Naveen knew my fate had been sealed since I agreed to be my father’s successor. He also knew I’ve chosen to be devoted to the Troodons, no matter the cost. So why...

I stored away the thought, deciding to re-examine it after I fulfilled my promise. I didn’t comprehend it, but I also didn’t have any time to lament over his strange actions...

I headed towards the exit but turned back to my most prized possession on an impulse. I couldn’t leave without looking at it once more...

I engraved their faces into my mind, knowing fully well it would be the last time I saw it. I still remember my last words to them — “I will avenge you all, for everything...” They were the reason I had enough strength to carry out my plan.

I braced myself and I stepped outside. I was ready to face the relentless wind and the looming consequences of my decision. What was done was done...

“Remember to brush your footprints with the branch. They won’t arrive on this side, but I’m not taking any chances.”

“Sir, yes sir!”

We sped through the trees and raced up the mountain until everything blurred together. The only sounds filling the ominous silence were our quick footsteps and the swish of our tails. Though I was surrounded, I was all alone when I faced my haunting thoughts, an enemy I was yet to defeat.

The snow started falling again. It was as if the sky was weeping for me, expressing the emotion I felt but couldn't show for my family. My vision blurred. I blinked the snowflake away; I didn't want to crash into something...

It was definitely snow...what else could it be?

We hiked higher and higher until we reached the plateau, where the terrain levelled out into a much flatter land. The heavy breathing of my guards made me turn around. It was only then I remembered they were pulling the sled carrying the iron chain ball...

Their hushed whispers drifted to my ears. "Why's he pacing?"

I didn't notice that. They must think I was mad. They weren't wrong, because vengeance had indeed driven to the point of insanity.

"To create more footsteps then brush them away so the Pterosaurs won't know where we walked, and this was set up." Came the reply. That was a much better explanation compared to "because I can't stay still."

I was a witness to everything happening, I was imprisoned by the shackles of my own mind — no different to being encased in ice. Frozen and immobile...

"Remember, a hundred steps north, no more no less..." Naveen commanded.

I would forever be indebted to Naveen. I couldn't control myself right now, much less command them. I didn't know what I would do without him.

"Ivor, are you okay? I've never seen you so...decomposed. Not even when..." Naveen hesitated, unsure if he should say it or not. "Not even when they left." They. My family.

"Thank you for your concern, Naveen. But I assure you, I'm alright." No, I wasn't. But that didn't matter. I was always the one who was fine, the one who was always there. It was why I was the leader, why I had to be like that again — the anchor, the unwavering, the unshakable.

Naveen nodded slowly, not quite believing me, but he didn't push it either.

"Best of luck, Naveen, may everything go smoothly." This couldn't fail, could it?

"Good luck, Ivor."

Thank you, I wanted to say, I need it. But I kept it to myself. Saying that aloud wouldn't bring us any good...

They left with Naveen in the lead, making their ascent to the snowpack release zone. Leaving me alone to finish the last phase of the plan.

A branch cracked. I turned around. My voice trembled, "Who's there?"

Something pricked my foot. It felt rough, it didn't feel like the soft snow...I looked down. I was the one who stepped on a branch. Footprints also trailed in front of and behind me...I had been pacing. Again.

There was a sinking feeling in my gut, as if telling me there was something seriously wrong. I have never felt this before. Not when I fought against strong enemies, not when wiped out nations for wronging my kingdom. So why was I nervous? Why was I uncertain? Why was I worried?

All of this was in my head, I told myself. I couldn't lose myself and sabotage all my hard work. Like how Father said, I had to control myself, because the winners were the ones who were in control.

Without wasting any more time, I got into my hiding spot. And waited. I was no different from a spider waiting for a fly to fall into its deviously woven web. This had to work. I have gone too far for it not to...

The loud flapping of wings broke the eerie silence. Two figures landed on the snowy plain. Both possessed towering figures with bulging muscles. One of them was Jared. The other, I've never seen before. Probably Jared's most trusted guard. A small part of me believed he felt guilty for what he did. I didn't understand why I felt that way when his heart was clearly made of stone...

Jared dismissed his guard with a wave of his hand, nose already buried in the map. We deliberately spilled coffee and crumbled it to give it an older look, to make it more believable.

"Sir?"

"Yes?" Jared ground out, looking annoyed he interrupted during his thinking process.

This conversation wouldn't end well...

"Don't you find it weird we haven't seen any Troodons on our way to Heilongjiang from the Gobi Desert?"

The new recruits did a good job at staying hidden.

"Raiden did say Ivor didn't know anything about achieving immortality."

"I don't trust that Raiden one bit." He spat with disgust. "He's a Troodon for god's sake! This could all be a ploy!"

Their voices grew louder and louder as their frustration and agitation towards each other grew stronger and stronger.

"At the banquet, we all saw how Ivor nearly destroyed Raiden on the spot after his little attempt at seducing Natasha," Jared returned.

I could barely hold back my gasp. I thought that would've been Jared's final straw.

"Exactly! This is Natasha we are talking about! Raiden has known Ivor for a long time. There is no way he's dumb enough to think he could steal Ivor's beloved wife!"

"Dinosaurs in love do stupid things. Now if you'll excuse me, I will go back to finding my way to become an immortal—"

Jared handled that oddly well.

"But—"

There was only one thing that would make Jared completely flip, and that one thing, would be his pride. It was the only building block needed to unravel his entire empire, and the last one I needed to complete mine.

"I said, I will be alright. On. My. Own," Jared finally snapped.

I was surprised he lasted that long.

“Fly back down and monitor the others. Don't let a single one of them leave. Rush to my side at the first hint of trouble. I'll need all the help I can get,” Jared ordered harshly, becoming the tyrant everyone knows.

Bowing once, his guard flew off, making the biggest mistake he ever would in his life. Thank goodness. I had no clue if I could handle Jared by myself, but there was no way I could stop both of them. Phase two was officially complete...

“Ugh, he's getting a pay cut for sure. Let's see...”

There was a glimmer in his eyes I had never seen before, hope joining his ambition and greed. Seeing that spark made me wonder once again if he had a heart under all those layers of ice...because how could one feel hope if they had a heart of stone?

My claws sank into my palms, instantly drawing blood. I couldn't feel the pain though, my entire focus was on him. There was nothing more important than his last step.

Just a little more to the left...perfect. Right after Jared slid his foot in, the shackle slammed shut with a soft, but audible, click.

Hosting a banquet and inviting every single one of the rulers was annoying in the very least, but it certainly paid off. The distance we estimated from the banquet and the distance Jared walked were completely identical. The measurements of the widths of his ankles were also flawless. Everything was finally falling into place like dominoes...

“What is that—”

I leapt forward with calculated precision, claws tearing through the flesh of his wings like a hot knife slicing through butter. Ribbons of crimson slid off his wings and dripped onto the pure, white snow, creating something resembling a summoning circle, trapping him inside. It wouldn't be too surprising if Jared turned out to be a demon...

Jared tried to lift his legs, to move around, but the iron ball was too heavy for him. To be fair, it did take twenty Troodons to lift it...

“Was ruining my wings necessary?” Jared asked, completely blanketing his tone and expressions, giving nothing away. If he was feeling pain — which he probably was — I would have no clue just from looking at him.

“No, just a precaution.” My plan was working. But instead of spreading its wings to fly, my heart sank, dragged down by an invisible weight I couldn't shake.

He tried again and again. When he realized it wasn't budging, the new glow in his eyes dimmed, then extinguished...

Was I inhumane for making him hope? Was it wrong to make him suffer and feel the same hopelessness he made me feel when he tore my family apart?

“Ivor. I should've known...I can't achieve immortality here, can I?”

“No, you can't. And yes, you should've known better. But. You. Didn't.” The jab caused the slightest flinch to break through his impenetrable mask.

Instead of feeling better, I felt worse. Why was the sinking feeling back? Why wasn't I feeling exhilarated? Why didn't I feel proud? Why didn't the weight on my shoulders lessen, but rather increased?

Jared laughed mercilessly. The sound sent shivers down my spine, as if he gently scratched his long claws along the length of my arm. I wanted to know if he felt any remorse, now that he knew his decision led to such a fate.

“Is there any way I could get you to let me go?”

“Even if I must die, so be it. As long as you are going down with me.” I replied. For some reason, it sounded rehearsed, like I was acting in a play. The snow was falling even more heavily now...

Jared looked up, prompting me to glance in that direction as well. A huge amount of snow was sliding down the mountain. I expected Jared to struggle harder, but he stayed still, giving up instead. Even if he wanted to, he wouldn't be able to, not when I was pinning his wings, not when there was an iron chain ball weighing him down.

“That's also your doing, I suppose?” He was smarter than I gave him credit for, at least when he wanted to be...

Taking my silence as a reply, he flashed a smile at me. “I'll let you in on a little secret...”

I didn't bother answering. I knew he was only saying that to distract me. Yet, I couldn't help but want to know what he planned to say. I hate that I cared.

“Take it as a parting gift if you will.” He said smugly, taunting a reaction he wouldn't get. “Whether you believe it or not isn't up to me. Are you ready for the secret?”

“Just get it over with,” I grumbled.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Jared smiled, a flash of teeth, then gone again. It was getting on my nerves. “I didn't kill your dad.”

I didn't know what to expect, but it wasn't anything close to that. The worst part was the sincerity behind his words.

The cold snow now fell like a gushing waterfall, completely clouding my vision. I could no longer tell when we would be flattened. But I supposed it didn't matter anymore, not when the so-called “revenge” wasn't vengeance. Not when everything I have worked for, everything I have believed in, my whole life, was a lie...

I heard the flapping of wings. Or maybe it was my imagination. Nothing made sense anymore...

“Who was it then?” I barely managed to croak. I wanted to scream, but I could hardly make a sound...

Less than a second later, we were squashed by the snow. The weight of Jared's words added it, suffocating me while crushing my bones, my soul. It trapped me in its icy cage, cornering me towards the edge of insanity. I supposed it was well deserved though...

I thought all those years of hard work and dedication would mend the crack in my heart. But how could it, when what I did was mass murder? How could it, when the blood I spilled belonged to innocent victims? How did I fail to realize how questionable my choices and decisions were? How did I overlook the possibility that all of this could be just a ploy? How did it not register that Naveen was only looking out for me?

Thoughts shot through my brain like lightning bolts in a storm, each destructive and powerful, illuminating the whirlwind of chaos in my brain. It was then I knew for certain I would never be able to move on. Not from guilt. Not when the sorry excuse of my life constantly replayed in my mind, not when I was persistently haunted by Jared's last words, not when I was, in fact, the villain. My world would never fade into darkness. Never...

Fable of The Fossil

Diocesan Girls' School, Yong, Yuen Shan Shannon – 17

To the assiduous labourers in the underground depths of Gansu, mining is an artistry of the highest caliber, not inferior to any crowning piece in the faraway Louvre. The steady clashing of sturdy pickaxes against rock, the jangling of rickety trolleys laden with prized coal, the occasional crude remark and raucous laughter shared under the same stone roof, all coming together in a cacophony blissfully symphonic only to the miners themselves, the masters of their beloved craft. They cherished their job, seeking solace and satisfaction in every swing of their tool, and sparing only a second to wipe the beads of sweat off their coal-darkened brows. This was home to them, ensconced in moist, warm darkness and basking solely in dim lamplight. A home imbued with excitement, the miners kept wary by the ever-looming threat of accidental explosions, and their eyes keen to spot any unexpected discoveries that would serve as an enthralling story over a hearty meal.

Such a tale was stumbled upon one fine day in the colliery, a day that started like any other. The miners boarded the routine train down into their well-acquainted milieu, the ride silent barring the bristling of tree branches against the icy breeze. The men solemnly tucked their wives' photos away in their pockets, their calloused fingers deftly buckling their helmets in the face of their calling. As the train lulled to a stop, they dismounted, brandishing their pickaxes and positioning themselves before rich deposits flush with black diamond. The impact of metal on coal echoed through the cave, until one swing lodged itself into the stone wall, and a peculiar, unfamiliar sonance reverberated through the rocky halls.

The miner, interest piqued, bore deeper into the deposit, scooping away the dirt and pebbles that ultimately revealed a dull alabaster jutting out from the coal, a palpable juxtaposition to its onyx surroundings. He called his friends over, and together they excavated a colossal skeleton wedged deep inside millions of years worth of crust and bedrock that melted away under their spirited efforts. For a minute they were silent, awed by their discovery of a mythical beast of legend. Their guesses and postulations were exchanged in hushed whispers. Perhaps it was a dragon from ancient fables passed down generations, or a Western creature that lost its way and met its demise in a foreign land.

But alas, such a revelation warranted only a moment of reverence and discussion. Once the stupor wore off, they broke off small pieces of bone to show their children, and went back to extracting what could actually fill their pockets and feed the mouths waiting for them at home. They did pass on the news to their supervisor, however, who in turn alerted the authorities. An expert was sent down below, and in a few weeks the beast was declared to be a dinosaur that roamed these very lands hundreds of millions of years ago. "A protoceratops, to be precise."

Weeks after the incident, the expert's news renewed deliberations about the beast as the miners gathered in the canteen for dinner. The food station was manned by a shrewd woman whose husband passed away in a mining accident years prior. She couldn't bear to resign her duties, having sated the appetites of all his friends, men she considered family, for decades. Thus she remained stationed at the canteen, where a hearty, rejuvenating meal was always guaranteed. Next to the chef, a young boy with tousled hair and rosy cheeks, her son, was scooping heaps of steaming rice and vegetables into tiffin boxes when he caught the news. A beast, they said? With a sturdy skull built for battle, and an acute beak made to tear flesh apart? He longed to see this beast for himself, to uncover its secrets and bring to light the hero who defeated such a formidable creature.

"One serving of your finest hé fān, please." The order roused the boy from his reverie, and he hastily passed the box to the expecting miner, who just happened to be Ming, the man who unearthed the beast currently in vogue. Observing the boy's wide eyes and barely contained excitement, he smiled and extricated the small bone fragment from his disheveled pockets. "Want to see something cool?" The boy promptly nodded, and his coveted treasure was

placed into his open palms. What was merely a plain, austere trinket to impress kids for the miner, was a curio of the greatest marvel to the boy.

“Mà, look! It's the yāoguài from your stories!” She spared him a glance, nodded absent-mindedly and returned to her cooking. Frowning, he tugged on her sleeve, only to receive a sharp glare in return. “Ērzǐ, there's no time for stories now, focus on your work!” He petulantly shoved the boxes aside and stormed off. Born impoverished and fatherless, the boy was left directionless, alone and afloat in uncharted seas. The waves only stilled late at night, as the boy was tucked into his handwoven blankets as his mother told tales of monsters that lurked in the shadows, ransacking villages to poach naughty children. Those tales did little to tame his spirit, instead it roused within him an unquenchable thirst for adventure, for heroics and the world to laud his name. But away from fanciful stories and colourful dreams, he was but an unsightly little boy, worth less than a scoop of rice. He clutched the bone in his small fist, tears welling up in his eyes.

He then felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. “Háizǐ, let me tell you a few stories about the creature you have there.” Ming held the boy's hand in his own and led him to a crowded table. The miners were well-acquainted with the chef's young son, and greeted him with warmth and fatherly fondness. They each brought out their own fragments, now lucky charms to accompany them on their daily expeditions in the mines. “This is no ordinary yāoguài that terrorises us mortals. This is a kǒnglóng, an ancient creature of the past.”

The boy's woes were instantly abandoned as the tale engrossed him, and he delved into a lost world and its long forgotten stories. A species that once roamed the Earth eons ago, before the first rooster's crow, long before the first fire was sparked and any word was ever uttered. The miners knew only what they had been told, and spoke of this mythical beast as a magnificent deity that once called Gansu its home. The boy was enraptured. Living proof of the monsters that hounded him in his sleep, resting on his mortal skin! This beast who prowled the nights with its ferocious roar and menacing bite, now proved to be more than just a figment of his limited imagination. “Was this beast the most powerful one on Earth? Who defeated it? Was it Guànyú? Or Sùn Wǔkòng?” demanded the boy, eager to identify and worship his new idol. Such an enigmatic entity had a certain magnetism, after all he respected only the strongest of beasts that could challenge the revered warriors of the past yonder.

“Possibly. After all, a kǒnglóng shares its name with the lóng of our myths. It would take a man of great might to defeat it!” Bounding in a fervent frenzy, the boy rushed over to the equipment rack under the inquisitive gaze of the miners, returning with a pickaxe he brandished like a warrior's sword. “Please, sir, take me down into the mines, I'll solve this mystery myself!” It was an absurd sight, a scrawny boy in tattered rags trying to balance a weighty pickaxe in his shaky arms. He would've looked out of place as a farmer plowing fields, let alone a paladin slaying mythical dragons deep in the mines.

The miners shared a look, then threw back their heads with a riotous laugh. The boy faltered, and his lips quivered with dejection at the unwelcome mockery. Ming gently took the boy's hand once more, and led him outside the canteen into the open air. That particular day was a pleasant one. The clouds parted to unveil a radiant sun in the midst of setting, emanating cascades of amalgamated hues of orange and gold across flowers that sprouted and bloomed among the verdant grass. Sparrows chirped amidst rustling leaves, briefly landing at the boy's feet, cocking their heads in curiosity before taking flight into the air.

The pair strolled along the dirt path as the sun inched below the rolling hills, and the moon took its place amidst the inky blue. They came to a halt as Ming pointed towards the panoply of stars hanging in the skies. “Háizǐ, look up. The universe is vast, with possibilities as endless as the stars above. Who would've thought that there were once extraordinary beasts that galloped like whistling wind across our lands, beasts that soared in these very skies, with wings that spanned the boundless clouds! But,” He added, glancing down at the boy with a small smile, “You have wings too, boy. Go to school, learn, endow yourself with wings to fly high. You'll discover worlds and uncover secrets much more fascinating than the rocks underground.” The boy's eyes widened and he eagerly nodded, fantasies of riveting voyages running through his blossoming mind. A future of unopened doors lay before him, and he would stop at nothing to explore the enigmas awaiting him.

The following evening, the boy stayed back in his classroom as the school bell rang, rummaging through his schoolbag while all his schoolmates flooded out the doors to their freedom. To the boy, true freedom was knowledge – to finally investigate the bone he now held in his grip. His teacher was surprised to see the boy, who was often adrift in his daydreams during class, now walking up to him with a determined glint in his eye. “Sir, a miner gave this bone to me, and said it was a kǒnglóng. Can you tell me more about them? ”

His teacher, a man in his late seventies, was fortunately experienced in this field. Seeing the young boy with starry eyes reminded him of his youth, when he spent his days abroad excavating fossils in a time where dinosaurs were new encounters and each fossil was a trove of wealth. But what started as a financially-motivated venture shifted into a dedicated pursuit of new intelligence, and the man began to dive deeper into this forgotten world, studying the lives of these majestic ancient creatures lost to time. Now, he treasured this opportunity to pass on his passion to a zealous apprentice, someone to carry on his legacy and divulge the wonders of the kǒnglóng to the world.

He took a closer look at the fossil, a jagged bone shard that revealed little of its origins. “Did they tell you which species this belonged to?” The boy racked his brains before lighting up with a smile, “Yes! A protoceratops. Was it the Emperor of all beasts? Was it a brute that terrified all its prey into submission?”

The realm of the kǒnglóng was vast with beasts of every size and shape, including predators that hunted down the weak mercilessly. But this particular beast was a small, gentle one that feasted on soft fern. “Like a Qílín, it was a harbinger of peace and its presence is a good omen.” The teacher added, in an attempt to placate the disappointed boy. “And what a noble creature it was! With an elegant horn and a frill as picturesque as a lady’s fan, it was certainly a sight to behold.”

The boy fell silent in quiet assessment of this newly gleaned information. He glanced down at the bone clutched in his hand, the image of the imposing colossus he had painted in his mind earlier dissipating. This creature neither roared like an actual dragon, nor tore its prey apart effortlessly like a ferocious lǎohǔ. No, it was incomparable to a mere dog, like the pathetic strays that lived on his mother’s scraps, and whined when they were kicked aside by impatient customers. He threw the bone to the floor, complaining with a pout that the feeble creature was simply not worth his time or veneration.

The teacher only smiled in understanding. He picked the bone up, dusted it off and returned it to the boy’s palm. “Hàizǐ, don’t look down upon the mighty protoceratops yet. It may look unassuming, but don’t underestimate its abilities. This dinosaur had a strong bite and robust legs to defend itself against its adversaries. You know, a protoceratops once took out a vicious velociraptor by itself!” The boy curiously studied the bone in his palm. Who would’ve imagined such a lowly creature could rival the beasts born to prey upon its flesh! Upon witnessing the boy’s interest return, the teacher jovially continued, “But generally, the protoceratops lived in herds, relying upon communal strength to protect itself. Xiǎozí, looks can be deceiving after all. You may seem like an ordinary little boy, but I know you’re capable of great things.”

The boy held the bone to his chest, and felt its allure return. The creature’s intrinsic weakness, the very aspect that evinced his antipathy now bewitched him, its implications leaving him enamoured. A creature that not only overcame, but embraced its natural impediments along with sheer willpower and kinship. That alone was more impressive than any inborn jaws of steel. “Sir, the protoceratops is my favourite kǒnglóng among them all!” “It sure is an admirable species. But don’t you want to hear about the rest? The stately Confuciusornis who ascended to the heavens, or the Dinocephalosaurus who reigned the seas?” The boy was keen to hear them all, the tales of the towering beasts and the nimble critters of the past, and the wise teacher was ever willing to oblige.

A few decades later, an archaic relic yellowed with exposure rested upon a freshly printed newspaper, where a dignified man who wore a boyish smile posed with a mounted fossil. In fine ink, the headlines announced the grand opening of a new museum near the former coal mines of Gansu, China, celebrating its rich natural history and the sensational discoveries that have elevated the region into eminence, now being nothing short of paradise for seasoned paleontologists and young dinosaur enthusiasts alike. Crowds surged to the opening ceremony, eager to catch a glimpse of the exhibits that promised a window into the mystical world of the kǒnglóng, previously concealed within curtains of nescience, now unveiled to the public's earnest eyes.

The man, founder of this new museum, stood before his crowning piece, an impeccably preserved specimen of his favourite dinosaur among them all. The children in the audience rushed up to the fossil, only to pause in brief perplexity at the unostentatious display. A small creature, height parallel to a young boy's face. One that was labelled herbivore, an immediate deterrent for the children seeking thrilling skirmishes among bloodthirsty beasts. But in response to this, the man had a curious glint in his eye, striking when contrasted with his sleek suit and neatly combed hair. A glint that revealed an acumen sharpened by years of study and experience, yet still retained a youthful, humorous sympathy for the impatient children before him.

As he stood before the crowd, he proudly introduced the mighty protoceratops, humble yet strong, pacifist yet unyielding, a shining paragon of all species and deserving of the utmost respect. Because to him, they were the most impressive of all the kǒnglóng, and in their quiet strength he found solace, and forged his own path in their footsteps.

The Fossil's Sacred Stone

ESF Island School, Chan, Jayden – 14

Cretaceous period, approx. 120 million years ago

In the lush, vibrant expanse of the forest, a small *Confuciusornis* flits between the branches, his iridescent plumage shimmering like jewels in the dappled sunlight. With a cheeky glint in his eye, he perches momentarily on a low-hanging limb, surveying his surroundings with a mix of curiosity and ambition. He has come to secure his next meal. This tiny, feathered creature, no larger than a crow, embodies the spirit of adventure as he prepares to glide over the dense canopy below. The air buzzes with the sounds of life—chirps, roars, and rustling leaves—each note a familiar, repeatable fingerprint of the vibrant ecosystem around him. As he launches into the air, his double tail fans out gracefully, aiding his balance in flight.

The bird monitors the unique panoramic view below him, scanning for unsuspecting critters meandering and roaming across the arid ground below. This isn't his first hunt. Among the wispy grass, aromatic magnolias would be teeming with insects: pollinating, feeding, lingering.

A clump of pigment reflects sunlight in the corner of his eye. Target acquired.

The wind under the creature's wings abruptly disperses, sending the predator into a dive. Below him, the ground, as well as all of the life he knows exists within the soft pillowy petals of the flower, rapidly approaches. A single magnolia houses a smorgasbord of ants and caterpillars. From this high, it's a dot on the floor. It's a small splash of white. It's a defined shape. It's a large, detailed terrace. It's an engulfing wall of nectar, ready to swallow him.

As if guided by divine intervention, the bird meticulously changes course, gliding once more with the wind under his wings, and the whole flower in his beak. His meal has been secured, and his energy sustained. Regardless, he ventures on once more scouring the lands for potential nests or wells of nutrition. With the forest expanding for miles, the world is his sandbox. As he glides away, beyond the horizon, a thick veil of smoke emerges, its source obscured by the mountains.

2024 October 23rd, 10:47:58 (HKT)

It has been an hour since the news has hit, and the country is already reeling.

It's chaos. Every scientist is being followed by a swarm of microphones and every square inch of space is ruthlessly monitored by a camera. Researchers struggle to wade through the sea of journalists as they soak up the details of today's events.

I, however, don't mind the chaos. My small team and I are lingering in the heavily guarded research tent, avoiding the crowd. The photographers form a palisade around the tent, so even if we wanted to leave, we are very much trapped. All this to prevent damage of especially important findings. In front of me lies the first ever dinosaur fossil unearthed in Hong Kong. It's more beautiful than I ever imagined. I can see every pore, every small protuberance and nick. It's all in front of me. However, as frustratingly as ever, we know so little about it, not even its species. For now, all we have is its early Cretaceous period label. Machines and mechanisms operate around me, running tests. Their hums and whirs melt into a constant drone, a dissonance so irritating to the eardrums, I feel as though I've been afflicted with tinnitus.

Beside me, also mulling over the artifact, are 2 of my teammates. To my right is Xue Meng, his gaze glaring with intent, trying to stare down the barrel of discovery with his naked eye. His stern expression could break glass. To my left is Peng Meihui. Unlike her co-worker, her gaze wanders, flicking between different points of interest, never staying on a single object for longer than a moment. At one point, she turns her back to read the newly emerged test results. Her face transitions between hesitation, confusion, and revelation.

“How peculiar.”

“Come again?” I inquire.

“I’m just seeing unexpected results.” Meihui had always been cautious, the one to remind us to run tests a second, third time before alerting anyone. So, it’s this that interrupts Meng’s focus, and he crosses the room to read the measurements.

His bewilderment quickly turns to surprise. “That’s... a lot of humus.”

“Yes, and phosphorus levels are a huge spike here, too,” Meihui adds.

“That can’t be anything but Chernozemic soil, right? Evidence of a magmatic eruption of some kind.”

“Precisely. But... this fossil wasn’t unearthed anywhere near a volcano.”

Silence.

Of course, I’m the one to break it. “Are we... Are we all thinking the same thing?”

Meihui displays a clear urge to interject. She glances around indecisively, her shoulders and arms rising and falling in a series of false starts. “Yes, but I don’t think we should really—”

“Of course. This really must be shared with someone. Right?”

“The supervolcano,” I answer arbitrarily. “There was an intense eruption in Sai Kung around this period. We must go see for ourselves.”

“That, I cannot get on board with. We shouldn’t leave the site. In this mess, we would never get approval from our supervisor.”

Meihui points to the illuminated tarp. A dense block casts a shadow on the normally luminescent walls of the tent, once again reminding me of the sea of photographers.

“Approval from our supervisor, my foot! Of course we won’t get approval, but this is urgent! If anyone, you know that revolutionising discoveries like this don’t wait for employers.” I plead.

She sighs. “Fine.”

Just like that, we get our bags packed.

Cretaceous period, approx. 120 million years ago

The *Confuciusornis* strolls down the dry dirt path of a desiccated lake basin, a look of determination in his eyes, while a flock of birds darts down overhead. It’s his flock, the nomads that he abandoned for today. The young expeditionist has defected in hopes of finding a stable food source. As he investigates, nothing has ever felt so irresistibly close, yet so inaccessible.

A fig tree temptingly looms over the side of the basin, its roots intertwined and weaving through the calloused cliffs and rock faces of the old lake floor. The ripe, pulpy fruits hang from the branches, teasing the bird. Before this

creature lies perhaps the largest vault of succulent seeds and fruits, barricaded by hordes of *Hypsilophodons*, wary of an oncoming attack, protecting their troop's supply with their lives. No amount of firepower would make them give it up. Bitterly, our Confuciusornis waddles on, waiting for something more.

Suddenly, he stops. A peculiar purple glow catches his eye. This shine is unlike anything—a beacon in the dull flora. This was unusual. The glowing certainly wasn't borne of a fruit, or of some bloated bioluminescent byproduct of some unknown species. No, this was something different. Nonetheless, no pecking or clawing revealed any utility to the bird.

As much as this fascinating phenomenon seized his attention, it wasn't sustenance. Reluctantly, the creature's eyes converge once more towards the horizon ahead, obscured by the mountains.

2024 October 23rd, 12:35:04 (HKT)

The crowd provided good cover for our escape. We dodged and weaved between the heavy cameras and microphones, cloaking ourselves in the commotion.

The rocky ground was suddenly interrupted by a steep drop into a kilometres-wide basin, the sides of which are coloured by vibrant layers of sediment. Its smooth texture seemed out of place with the surroundings.

Off to the side, we noticed cylindrical protrusions. Lines curved and squiggled through each other, converging at a single central stump. It was the remains of a tree, preserved through millions of years, enduring to the modern day.

I crouch down, just above the markings. "How long have these been here?" I wonder out loud. Meng joins me in the investigation. We trace the roots in a painstaking descent down to the basin floor. Every centimetre represented hundreds or thousands of years of existence. The fact that it lies here, in infertile sediment, defies what we thought possible of nature.

As we carefully climb down the steep sides of the crater, the air grows cooler, and a sense of reverence blankets the space. I can almost feel the whispers of ancient winds and the rustling of leaves that once adorned this landscape. "I've read about these formations," Meng says, his voice low with focus. They're fossilized tree stumps, remnants of a forest that thrived long before us.

We reach the basin floor, where the markings are clearer. The roots snake out like fingers grasping for sustenance, a reminder of the life that once flourished here. I trace one with my hand, feeling the rough texture beneath my fingertips, staring curiously at the flecks of purple littering the roots — unexplainable protrusions of magenta. "That's odd," I whisper.

Meihui kneels beside me, her eyes wide with wonder. "The sediment layers are so distinct. Each one represents a different period of growth or environmental change. We could learn so much from this."

Suddenly, we hear a rumbling sound from above, reminding us that we are still surrounded by the chaos of the present. I glance back at the crater's edge, where the crowd is still buzzing, unaware of the treasure we've discovered below.

"We need to document this," I say, pulling out my notebook. "Every detail matters; this could be groundbreaking for our research."

As I scribble notes, Meng pulls out his camera. "We should also take samples," he suggests. "If it's a match, we might uncover more about the environmental conditions of this place."

"Yes! Let's do it," I agree, excitement bubbling within me. We gather small samples carefully, placing them in labelled containers. I can't help but feel that we are on the verge of rewriting what we know about this ancient ecosystem.

The cacophony of the campsite roars through our radio. “We should hurry,” Meihui urges, her voice tinged with urgency. “If this keeps up, we might be in danger.”

We scramble back up the crater, the thrill of discovery mixed with the adrenaline of the tremors. As we reach the top, I pause to look back at the basin one last time. The engravings stand resolute, enduring against the test of time.

“Let’s make our final stop at the volcano,” I say, my heart racing not just from the climb but from the anticipation. “This could change everything.”

As we make our way back, I can already envision the headlines—*New Discoveries in Hong Kong Reveal Ancient Ecosystems*. The excitement only fuels my pace. We might just be on the brink of a significant breakthrough, merging the ancient past with our relentless quest for knowledge in the present.

Cretaceous period, approx. 120 million years ago

The pursuit continues.

The *Confuciusornis* travels robotically, repeatedly hopping down a straight line towards oblivion. His eyes grow tired of the desolate dry land that engulfs his habitat, and he longs for a break, for an interruption in the monotony. Out of nowhere, a steep slope interrupts his meandering. The gradient ahead teases the bird, its treacherous footholds and avalanche-prone boulders on clear display. The sudden change in scenery is bittersweet, a relieving yet rattling challenge that wakes up the brain. Once over the peak of the hill, our *Confuciusornis* stumbles across a miracle. Ahead of him lies a patch of fruit trees.

Jackpot.

He marvels at the ornamental figs and plantains that hang heavily off the branches. He also recognizes ant mounds scattered about the land. Delighted, he climbs onto a tree branch and sings his song, calling out to his troop. Behind him, he feels a large presence approaching. He turns around in anticipation, ready to greet his friends.

Instead, he finds himself in front of the face of a *Deinocheirus*.

Instantly, a million thoughts race through the bird’s head. Of course, he realizes too late the foreign scent of his adversary or the imposing footprints on the squishy dirt.

He finds his feet again and attempts to glide away, only to be swiped down by the monster’s terrible hand. After getting up, the bird transforms his melancholic trots into frantic leaps. The *Deinocheirus* looks on as if he’s encountered the easiest snack of his life. However, the prey resorts back to his intelligence and starts erratically rolling and weaving, nimbly obscuring himself behind the trees. The playground with wide chasms and open spaces transforms into a perilous maze of cramped, claustrophobic cracks in the vegetation.

The *Deinocheirus*, with his towering form, struggles to manoeuvre through the tightly packed trees. Every time it lunges, the bird darts just out of reach. The predator’s frustration grows, each failed attempt only fuelling his determination. The chase escalates, echoing through the trees as the *Confuciusornis* dodges and weaves, his heart pounding in rhythm with the crashing footsteps of the *Deinocheirus*. The predator’s enormous claws swipe at the air, narrowly missing the agile bird darting behind a thick tree trunk.

While hiding in fear, the bird spots a narrow gap between two massive boulders. It’s a risk, but with no other option, he dives through just as the *Deinocheirus* lunges again, its claws raking the air where he had just been.

Emerging on the other side, the *Confuciusornis* takes a moment to recover. His eyes dart around, searching for an escape route. In the distance, he sees the cluster of fruit trees; a refuge filled with ripe figs and fruits, a haven for his hungry belly and a distraction for his pursuer.

With renewed determination, he flaps his wings. The *Deinocheirus* quickly regains its direction, its keen eyes spotting the flash of black among the branches. It charges after him, the ground shaking beneath its weight.

As the bird reaches the fruit trees, he spots a particularly high branch laden with fruit. He musters all his strength and launches himself upward, narrowly escaping the snapping jaws of the *Deinocheirus* as it crashes into the trunk below. The impact sends a shower of fruit tumbling to the ground.

The *Confuciusornis* perches high above, watching as the fruit scatters. With a cheeky glint in his eye, the bird begins to peck at the figs, enjoying his hard-won meal while keeping a close watch on the ground below. The *Deinocheirus* frantically searches for the source of the fallen fruit, its attention diverted just long enough for the *Confuciusornis* to regain his composure.

A shockwave crashes the tension, sending a loud rumble to the ground. The blue sky now flashes dazzling purple. The bird glances toward the mountains, shocked silent by the familiar hue of that strange not-fruit. The *Deinocheirus* turns its full body, enamoured by the occasion. Another rumble follows, and the *Confuciusornis* sees a distant plume of smoke. The air fills with the scent of ash and sulphur. What *was* that curious candescent object?

While the predator and prey stand terrified in unison, a river of lava forms a wall of heat looming over the forest.

2024 October 23rd, 13:05:28 (HKT)

Climbing out of the crater, we quickly and eagerly approached the volcano formation ahead.

We could feel the anticipation building, the rocky road ahead just concealing all that there is to know about the ancient life of the country. Our feet are light at the ascent, impatient to reach the top.

The silence was broken by a magnified yell echoing through the mountains: “Who’s there?” It was of a familiar voice. One confirmed as we crested the formation – Dr Liu, our supervisor, spearheading her team

“What’s going on here?” Liu demanded, eyes darting between each of us.

“We were just—” I started, but before I could finish, Meihui stepped in

“There has been an anomaly in the test results that challenges our beliefs of the origin of the fossil. There’s evidence of a volcanic eruption. We had to come here to investigate.”

The team’s surprise morphed into a mix of confusion and scepticism. “You’re telling me you went off-site without permission based on a single test result?” The professor asked, arms crossed, clearly unimpressed.

“Look, we had to act fast,” I replied, feeling the weight of their judgment. “This discovery could change everything we know.”

“What I know is that you three turned into a monstrous liability, you could face termination for this —”

The ground shook, causing researchers to grasp onto each other for stability. The three of us stood bewildered, but finally followed everyone’s gaze to behind us, where we found a shimmering purple stone that seemed to pulse with energy.

“What is that?” Meng asked, eyes wide. He was soon startled by the shrill shriek of his Geiger counter.

“Everybody, run!” He urges.

A technician stopped him. “Wait a minute. It’s not ionizing radiation. This is something completely different.” We quickly huddle around him as he whips out more unrecognizable devices.

With the atmosphere shifting from confrontation to collaboration, I glance at my teammates, relief flooding through me. We had a lot more tests to run.

Breaking News: Groundbreaking Discovery in Hong Kong's Palaeontology

In an astonishing turn of events, a team of researchers from the Hong Kong Palaeontology Institute has uncovered a potential new energy source. The discovery, an ore embedded in a previously unexplored crater, sparked discussions about its potential applications worldwide.

The team, initially facing scrutiny for their unauthorized expedition, has now shifted the focus of their findings to the potential implications for understanding the country's geology.

"This discovery not only reshapes our knowledge of Hong Kong's ancient landscapes but also highlights the importance of interdisciplinary research," stated Dr. Liu, the project supervisor. "We are excited to explore how these findings integrate with current studies on ecosystem resilience."

"This is just the beginning," said lead researcher Dr. Chen. "We are eager to continue our work and share our findings with the world."

As the story unfolds, the implications of this discovery echo through the scientific community, with a much larger team scrambling to reveal more about this new substance. The team has reassured us that they are running countless tests to uncover the stone's secrets.

The Last Guardians of Dinosaurs

ESF Island School, Khong, Edward – 14

"In the heart of the earth lies a realm where the skies darken with feathered wings and the ground trembles with giant footsteps." This old saying echoed in Li Wei's mind as she prepared to set forth into the wilderness—an expedition that would change everything she thought she knew about her homeland. As she clutched her notebook, her heart raced with excitement as she left the small village and began her adventure. Little did she know, this path would lead her to secrets of the past—where living dinosaurs still thrived in a secluded valley, waiting for someone to uncover their story...

Li Wei, a passionate paleontologist, had always been captivated by the ancient stories surrounding China's dinosaurs. As she ventured deeper into the wilderness, she imagined what it would be like to stand before a living, breathing dinosaur. The thrill of the chase surged through her, driving her forward into the thick underbrush, unaware that another soul shared her quest so closely.

Meanwhile, Mei Ling stood at the edge of her village, gazing out across the mountains, her heart heavy with the weight of responsibility. The elders had spoken of a disturbance in their sacred valley—an imbalance that threatened

the peace between their world and the ancient creatures that roamed it. With a determination forged by duty, she tightened her grip on the satchel filled with herbs and remedies, ready to seek answers and protect the secrets she held dear.

“Hmm... I wonder what other mysteries this jungle has for me on this adventure?” Li Wei said to herself as she passed by an unknown plant species. After some guidance from the villagers in the village she started at, she ventured into the wilderness, with nothing but a map, a torch, a camera, camping and navigation supplies, and enough sustenance to last her a month. Her main goal was to find some ancient sites that had piqued her interest a long time ago as well as to hopefully find out whether or not dinosaurs still existed.

After a few hours of walking and navigating, she decided that she should be close to an ancient rock site that was part of an olden tale of the past based on the descriptions given by the story. “I wonder how far away I am until that pile of rocks,” Li Wei murmured. As she pressed forward through the thick bushes, the dense foliage gave way to a small clearing that opened to the sky above, revealing a magnificent rock formation that pulsed with ancient energy. Li Wei put away her map, subsequently staring into the rocks. There was this one particular rock that was quite mesmerizing, being milky white and so unnaturally smooth. Time seemed to slow down as she extended her hand to touch it, being mesmerized by the seemingly endless depths of the oval rock. Suddenly, she caught sight of a figure darting between the trees – a flash of colour that disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Li Wei quickly withdrew her hand and then turned back to face the color, just as she heard the sound of a soft gasp and a woman dressed as a guide staring at her, her face a mix of emotions.

Mei Ling’s face was a blend of curiosity and caution as she stared at the woman in front of her. She hadn’t seen anyone in the wild for quite some time while adventuring and had just assumed that people had lost interest in these areas. She also just recently gained a renewed interest in the ancient sites that were regarded as myths as new dinosaur fossils were being discovered.

“What are you doing here? Who are you?”

They each asked the other person at the same time. They then went through the introductions and started on the topic of the rocks. Mei asked Li “I have wandered here before when I was young, and that captivating center stone draws my attention now once again. I found myself entranced by it when I first stumbled upon this place, only to be restrained by others of my kind from touching it at the last second...” Li’s eyes glazed over as she listened, the stone pulling her into a strange trance. “Yes...” she murmured, her voice distant, her hands reached out towards the ever-so-attractive surface of the stone. “And then... No! Stop it! It’s dangerous!” Mei Ling saw her movements a split second too late as her new companion’s fingers slightly brushed against the rock’s surface and a surge of energy blasted from the rock, a pillar of bright light forming and reaching up towards the heavens.

“What just happened? What was that light? Why is that rock cracking? Are we in danger?”

Li Wei bombarded Mei Ling with a series of questions as her eyes focused and she became aware of what she had just done. Mei Ling’s eyes were wide with urgency as her mind took over with stories that were passed down to her from The Elders about this oval rock and pillars of light. She pondered over something for quite a while before finally settling on a decision.

“Li, I trust that you are a kind-hearted person and that you will keep this secret for me, so I shall tell you. This rock is not a rock as you may have suspected. The Elders have considered this a dinosaur egg, one of which they have not

seen in decades. When it is ready to be hatched, the egg turns milky white and once it comes in contact with anything, it will hatch.”

“Do we need to hide? Someone might have seen that light and be going to find out more.”

Mei Ling then proceeds to lead Li Wei and the newborn dinosaur forward and up a hidden passageway that leads straight to her village in protection for Li and the dinosaur.

Little did she know, someone indeed had seen the pillar of light, and that person was no other than the ruthless millionaire who was willing to do anything to earn money: Victor Chen.

“Hm... this piece of rock seems so unnaturally placed, in the center of rocks and being cracked open, remains of it shattered around it. Seems suspicious. I shall search the vicinity for any more unusual signs.” After around an hour, Victor finally found signs of rushed entry. “Aha! After so long, finally I found what I was looking for. The people who made that light must have come this way. Wonder what secrets they’re hiding.”

As Mei leads her newfound companions into the village, Li is shocked to her core as she does not believe her eyes. The vibrant creatures standing before her, with shimmering scales nothing like she has ever seen before, and those with majestic wings seemingly fresh out of a fantasy book. “Yes! That’s where I have seen you guys before. In a dinosaur book! But...but I thought they were all extinct?” Li exclaims, her breath coming in short periods from excitement as she beheld what stood before her while the dinosaurs let out soft, welcoming roars, their soft sound shaking her very core, thus earning them another quiet yelp from Li.

“As you can see, our village is one of the only ones lucky enough to find two of those baby dinosaur eggs we saw back there a long time ago before the dinosaurs went extinct, so this is now one of the places with dinosaurs still thriving. I trust you a lot on this, so please do not disclose any of this information.”

Mei then took Li around the village for a tour of the place after settling in the baby dinosaur while some of the younger members of the village are sent to cover up any remaining tracks that Mei left behind.

After a few weeks of peace, all seemed well. Li had passed the time in the village archives and found quite some interesting text types for dinosaur medicine and characteristics. She found out there was a lot missing in books she could find in a local library. Mei appeared in the archives and told Li “It turns out no one decided to investigate further. What a miracle! Maybe it is time for you to continue onwards.” Mei said as they left and slowly walked to Li’s quarters to pack her stuff for her to start adventuring again.

“Mei! Li! Some of the dinosaurs are sick! A few are not walking properly, some are burning to the touch and some have even fainted. Please come at once.” Mei and Li shared a look and immediately followed after the villager who brought the news to them. Apparently, a mysterious illness began to spread among the dinosaurs causing a lot of panic in the village. Some villagers are convinced it’s a curse, watching helplessly as more dinosaurs show symptoms of the same illness. Li stands there, shock still as she takes in her surroundings. Dinosaurs lay on the ground, and villagers either wept or hid from the mythical creatures. She struggles to decipher the mysteries surrounding their arrival and the sudden event. Is it a curse, a blessing, or something entirely different?

Meanwhile...

Victor hid on a nearby hill, looking at the events unfolding in the village and extremely proud of the chaos his small meddling had caused. “Hahaha. Now that they are scared, swooping in and taking one or two baby dinosaurs should be like stealing candy from a baby. I shall make my move soon...”

Back at the village...

“Whatever shall we do now?” Li asked Mei. “We must consult advice from the Elders. They are the wisest amongst us here, with knowledge from the past and present, so we should ask for their help. Right, Li? Li?” Mei turned around to see Li kneeling besides the baby dinosaur that they rescued from the jungle. “What on earth are you—” “Give me a few seconds” Li replied and focused back on the dinosaur. This small creature, with those shimmering scales and wide, curious eyes stared right at Li as she felt a sense of recognition. Li allowed her hand to rest against its soft, warm skin. At that moment, a surge of energy coursed through them, with a notable change in her skin as it started glowing softly. “What did you just do with the dinosaur?” Mei asked with a sense of urgency. “I—I don’t know. I just felt this pull towards it and then I just felt really warm.” Li replied as she examined her skin.

“What we just did is called a bonding.” A voice echoed within Li’s mind. “Mei, do you hear this?” “Hear what?” Mei replied, concern evident in her voice. “I guess not... Hey, what if I hear a voice in my brain after coming in contact with a dinosaur?” Li asked, looking up at Mei. “With your glowing skin and the voice... We shall consult the Elders about the sickness and your matter.” Mei helped Li to stand and started to the Elder’s homes.

“Well... can I give you a name then? Do you like the name Tera?” Li asked the dinosaur.

“Hmm, that name seems quite suitable. I like it. I shall be Tera then.” Tera replied.

“Hm... This has not happened in a long time, my friends. It has last been recorded in the period when humans and dinosaurs lived in harmony. The world was an amazing place, full of greenery and peace. Back then, almost everyone had a bond with dinosaurs, and it was once been called a psychic bond. It is a mental channel that allows two animals to speak with each other, conveying thoughts and feelings. If one side listens closely, they can even know what you are thinking about, just like how our little friend here knows to come into our room because you are here.” One of the Elder’s replied, gesturing to the baby dinosaur behind Li and Mei. The two of them turned around to see that the dinosaur was indeed standing behind them, looking up at them.

“C—can you really hear me?” Li thought out loud, trying to reach out to the invisible thread in between while looking at the dinosaur.

“Yes. We should be able to use this to our advantage. I think someone is trying to poison my brethren.”

“He thinks someone is trying to poison the dinosaurs,” Li said to the people in the room.

“I recall there is knowledge on how to heal dinosaurs within the archives. We shall help the dinosaurs. You three go find whoever is behind this, and bring them to us.” The oldest of the Elders instructed them as the two girls took their leave.

As Mei and Li made their way through the village, the weight of the situation slowly settled heavily onto their shoulders. Everywhere they looked, there were villagers in intense distress, and the sight of the sick dinosaurs did no positive things to them. Li, despite not originating from this valley, felt an overwhelming sense of protectiveness towards these magnificent creatures.

Suddenly, a loud commotion erupted from the center of the village. Villagers were gathering around, voices raising in panic. Li and Mei rushed towards the source of the disturbance, wondering what had happened. As they approached, they saw a man standing in the middle of the circle, a glass vial raised and ready to be poured down a smaller, sick dinosaur.

“Who are you?” Mei asked, voice raising to an authoritative tone.

“I am Victor Chen the millionaire, and I am here to claim what is rightfully ours, but which you peasants have hidden from us. The dinosaurs. With this glass vial I have in hand, it shall cause the animal it affects a quick and painless death. I shall use it unless you agree to let me take a few of these stubborn, unintelligent creatures for my own.” Victor stood defiantly, a sinister grin plastered on his face.

In that moment, Li and Tera felt a sense of shared anger towards this fat, arrogant man standing before them. The bond between them flared to life as Li stepped towards Victor and exclaimed “We won’t let you hurt them Victor!”

“Who is going to stop me? These puny villagers who are too heartbroken, or you, your friend and your pet dinosaur there?” Victor said as he pointed at Tera.

Tera, having understood what he was saying through Li, stepped closer to Victor and let out a protective roar, its scales glimmering in the sunlight.

Li and Mei stepped forward, flanking Tera as Mei said “Yes, these so-called-puny villagers, us both and this strong, healthy dinosaur are all opposing you. If you want to get to the sick dinosaurs, you will have to get through us.”

Victor raised the vial threateningly, “You seem to have forgotten something major here. I have resources and power, and the most important thing is that I still have the vial here over your precious dinosaur.”

“Stop! You don’t understand what you are doing!” Mei Ling shouted, her voice filled with notable urgency. “The Elders warned us about the consequences of exploiting these creatures, that is why we kept them in secrecy. If you harm them, it shall bring disaster upon this valley!”

Victor scoffed, but the uncertainty in his beady eyes revealed his doubt to the world. “What can old stories do to stop my ambition?”

“Everything,” Mei ling replied, her voice calm and reasonable. “If you disrupt these animals and use them for bad purposes, you shall unleash forces you cannot control.”

“You should rally the villagers.” Tera spoke into Li’s mind as she nudged against Li’s legs.

“We need to show him that dinosaurs are not just animals – they are emotional, sentient beings that deserve each and every ounce of our respect!” Li declared as she rallied the people behind her.

As the tension escalated, Victor’s resolve began to falter. He turned around, realizing that the villagers were no longer afraid and that they stood united and ready to protect their home and the creatures they cherished. “If—if you get closer, I will pour the contents on this helpless... Where did the dinosaur go???” He looked around him and saw some villagers tugging the animal to the safety behind the people.

“Wait! Maybe, we can work something out. There is a cure...” In that moment of desperation, he attempted to flee, but as he made a break through a small gap between the villagers, he was confronted by the one dinosaur he underestimated as a pet.

Tera stood in-between the road to freedom and Victor, and she held her ground steady. She let out a low growl while she maintained a fierce eye contact with Victor.

“Get away from here, Victor!” Li and Mei commanded in unison, their voices strong. Tera let out a truly deafening roar, louder than any of her previous ones that echoed through the valley, sending a transparent message: this place was not to be trifled with.

Victor ran for his life past Tera, legs trembling beneath him as he bended down the curve that marked the start of the trail downwards.

“Run, Victor! You aren’t welcome here, now or ever!” Mei Ling shouted, her voice ringing with a huge sensation of triumph. The villagers cheered, their spirits lifted as they saw the intruder away.

With Victor gone, the atmosphere in the village shifted. The villagers tended to the dinosaurs, but with faith that Li and Mei would find the cure.

“We need to go in the archives to find out the cure for whatever drug he used.” Li said, determination shining in her eyes.

Mei nodded, her silent resolve firm as they started towards the library.

As the dying sun set over the valley, casting a golden hue across the landscape, Li felt a renewed sense of purpose. She came seeking answers about the past, but instead found her place in thi

Fabled Whispers

ESF Island School, Ng, Naomi – 14

Three years of work rested on the map that Zhang Liu held in the palm of his hands.

This whole journey. One thousand and ninety five days.

As he looked down from the crest of the mountain, he could see the vast expanse of nothing but the wilderness stretching out before him like an untamed canvas, painted with the hues of the first dawn of light. He breathed in the crisp air that carried the earthy scent of pine as it whispered back the inviting freshness of the mountain air, invigorating his senses as he stood in front of the threshold of his adventure. The view beyond him providing nothing but the reminder of how and why he was here while he held the map as its faded inky traces finally came to a halt, he closed the journal that helped to balance the map and all the information he’d gathered over the past few years as the map folded in between its timeworn pages, running his fingers over its leather-bounded spine.

Although the weathered book felt light in his hands, the weight that he felt included nothing but the physical embodiment of the years of the dedication and burden he’d carried through this tireless pursuit, each page, a

parchment of whispers of the memories that'd flashed before his eyes every time he'd traced the faded lines of the map and delicate creasings of his entries and most importantly— his grandfather's. With each curve and contour holding a short story of its own, he could still remember his mother's eyes, filled with unspoken longing, with every flash of that memory urging him onward a little more every time.

Encouraged by the curiosity that his mother had laid on him the last time their eyes had met so long ago, by giving him the journal that his grandfather had passed on, including fascinating readings and entries surrounding the titanosaur from nearly three decades ago, he was determined to find what remained of the ancient creature that'd led him here.

Zhang Liu proceeded to wrap the oldened journal in a piece of sturdy canvas cloth, carefully folding the fabric around the weathered pages and securing the makeshift cover with a length of twine, he bounded the journal tightly, the soft fibers of the canvas contrasting with the brittle and fragile pages beneath.

As he stood before what was supposed to be the cave that he'd been reading about for the past three years, the feeling of disillusionment crept over his shoulder as he faced the entrance, it was a bare crack in the rocky surface of the cliff face, nothing like he'd imagined it to be. The yawning darkness within beckoned with an eerie atmosphere as he cautiously peered into the narrow opening, placing the worn leather-bound journal in his weathered messenger bag. The fabric faded along with the leather adorned corners where the material had worn thin as he clutched tightly onto the bag's strap— what was once sturdy and robust, now bore the marks of countless unrelenting journeys.

Zhang Liu steeled his resolve and took a hesitant step forward, the gravel under his worn shoes echoing within the stillness of the cave. The journal nestled securely into the ruffled bag that slung over his shoulder, the soft rustle of paper and brushing of excavating tools as the bag swayed with each step echoed off the cavern walls, harmonizing with what sounded like the distant droplets of water bouncing off from deeper within the cave, begging him to delve in deeper. The cave's interior unfolded like a tapestry of shadow and light, the rocky walls glistened with moisture that dripped steadily from the unseen crevices above. The uneven floors sloped gently downwards, leading him to the heart of the cave.

The air was thick with the scent of damp earth and ancient stone, the musty aroma mingled with the faint hint of the humid patter of water droplets. With the venture into the cave becoming darker and darker, Zhang Liu took out a lantern from his bag and allowed the flickering flame of the lantern to dance shadows on the cave walls, illuminating intricate patterns he hadn't seen before. Through the patterns that shadowed the cavern, he navigated the uneven terrain through the gentle sway of the lantern's light, revealing ancient stalagmites like silent sentinels from the rocky floor, echoing through the rocky walls that felt like they were swallowing him whole.

He carefully placed down the lantern and pulled out the leather-bound journal, flipping through the weathered pages of parchment until he landed on a yellowed page with ink etching what was similar to the patterns he'd previously seen on the rough, uneven walls from earlier. The patterns on the wall mirrored the complex narrative intertwining history through the journal and its past with the present moment, as if the essence of time was captured in the delicate strokes of ink. As he traced his fingers over the detailed lines in the journal, he realised the familiar motif had met his eyes earlier in his journey into the cave, near the entrance behind the rocky stalagmites.

Should he make one wrong step, and it may cost him a broken limb, or possibly two. Zhang Liu carefully stumbled his way over to the pattern, the gravel underneath his feet shifting uneasily with each step he took. Carrying the lantern in one hand and trying to balance his body alongside the bag and journal with the other, he felt the soft bead of sweat trickle down the side of his forehead as he inched closer to the mysterious pattern engraved onto the disordered wall.

The pattern in front of him appeared serpentine-like, with the twisted lines interwoven in a way that made every small curve and angle seem purposeful, eluding his understanding that this.

This.

Was what he'd been looking for for the past three years. The dim light of the lantern casted shadows that played tricks on his eyes, making the pattern seem to come alive in the darkness. He placed the lantern down on the rock next to him and referred to the journal one last time. It was a one to one replica.

Finally, he breathed out triumphantly.

With trembling hands, Zhang Liu slowly traced the outlines of the pattern with his fingertips, feeling a slight vibration that emanated from the ancient rock beneath his touch, the rumbling noises growing louder with each passing second.

As if awakening from a long slumber, cracks began to form along the edges of the pattern as he stood back, eyes widened and heart pounding. The earth in front of him had split open to reveal a hidden underground grotto. Without hesitation, he descended into the hidden chamber, with the light of the lantern casting eerie shadows onto the newfound walls of the ancient cavern.

While he continued to carefully tread down the desolate chamber, he realised he'd reached the center of the cavern. Bathed in the soft, golden light of the lantern as it reflected off the darkened and irregular walls, lay the remains of the titanosaur.

A titanosaur. The ones that were considered 'ancient giants', named as myths or even legends, the ones his classmates would talk about when they were kids in school, the ones his grandfather used to tell him stories about as a little boy on their daily strolls down the terrace of the playground, the ones his mother would recount tales of in order for him to fall asleep late at night whenever he was scared of the dark and ran over to his mother's room for 'safety', asking her, "Mom, can you tell me the story again please?", as his voice would quiver with a mix of fear and fatigue, his mother's lullabies about the titanosaur fading out as he rested into slumber.

It wasn't just *a* titanosaur.

It was *his* titanosaur.

With each passing story that crossed through his mind, the overwhelming thoughts of his past etched into his memory. The echoes of his mother's voice from back home carried along like a cherished keepsake as he knelt beside the ancient bones, realising that the same young boy that'd read fables about this colossal 'creature' was now standing at the intersection between myth and science.

The fossil that Zhang Liu had meticulously excavated carefully turned out to be the partial skeleton of a juvenile titanosaur during the late cretaceous period, including features such as its elongated neck vertebrae and sauropod skull structure.

As he'd returned back to his lab, he'd put on the finishing touches onto his research. As he was ready to document his discoveries to the world, and hopefully use some of the hard earned finances to help support his mother, he went through the journal one last time, and a piece of folded parchment fell out from the worn leather spine.

Zhang Liu cautiously unravelled the paper and found that the yellowed page turned out to be a letter. The delicate script bore the nostalgic handwriting of his grandfather's words in faded ink as he slowly unfolded the parchment:

Dear Zhang Liu,

I hope my dear boy has grown up well, it's been some time since we've last caught up.

By the time you're reading this, I am gone, but if you're even reading this in the first place, I know I have a lot to explain.

When I was a child, I didn't know much better, my family was poor and all I had were stories.

Anthologies, fables, tales.

Stories of dinosaurs from millennia ago, that my mother would tell me, which I passed down to your mother, and I assume, now to you.

As you may know, your dear grandfather was a palaeontologist, and I'd found the cave through one of my expeditions, however my team was fueled by the allure of the rare fossils in the cave, they wanted the money, they wanted the glory.

I lured them away from the cave under the guise of camaraderie, however I was never able to return, not with my identity being known to those people.

You may be wondering why I decided to stay distant from those who once shared my pursuit of discovery. In the end of the day, greed is an insidious grip that clouds everyone's judgement, including my own. Whether it is through taking the last piece of bread at the dinner table, refusing to tip the worker at the counter, or loving someone conditionally. Greed is not merely about the accumulation of wealth or possessions, it is where love and passion is tainted by entitlement, and hunger for validation that eclipses genuinity. An insatiable appetite.

Which is the reason why I never went back.

I truly hope you are better than me as a man.

Life is a fleeting journey, and as I pass the torch onto you, do remember, time is limited, but it is the tales that we carry which stretch between past, present and future in a symphony of memories and whispers of fallen dreams that are truly timeless.

I wish I could've spent more time with you, Zhang Liu. I hope you realise not being able to see you grow up is one of the biggest regrets I hold.

May you know I am forever with you in your future endeavours, no matter where you are.

Boundless love,

Your Grandfather.

As he finished the poignant words inscribed by his grandfather, the bittersweet mix of admiration welled up in his heart as he struggled to grapple with the weight of his grandfather's unspoken story.

His temperance and self awareness in his greed.

Suddenly, the quiet solitude in his lab had never felt louder. For the first time, the illusioned veil of his family felt lifted. The clarity of his family's untold history had never felt so spoken through the faded ink of his grandfather's writing, the whispered revelations led him to stand on what felt like the brink of a discovery, more valuable than any dinosaur he'd ever reported on. Amidst the faint humming of the equipment in the lab, he stood there in silence for a short moment that felt stretched into eternity as he found himself in the crossroad between familiarity and perception. Each heartbeat echoing in the stillness of the room.

As he gently folded the letter and placed it back into the leather—bounded spine of the journal and closed it one last time, the words repeated in his mind.

I hope I've been able to become half the man you are.

The Lost Dinosaur

ESF Island School, Tsang, Alexander – 14

The earth is burning up. Ropes of magma whip the scorched ground, fissuring stone and incinerating any unfortunate vegetation caught in the blazing whirlwind of flame. A roar arises from the crater, expelling a fireball, its gaping maw carving a deep path of slag through whatever remains, greedy in its path of destruction. Guttural shrieks and clamors clash with the incessant crackling of burning embers, instruments melding together to create a cacophonous orchestra of howling dissonance. A thick veil of ash engulfs the sky in a crimson red, the skyline slashed and jagged with twirling tendrils of smoke, like the fingers of some grey harbinger of death, clawing through the curtains of black to sneer at his handiwork. Not a single thing on bare ground survives.

But through a thin sliver hidden beneath the fiery soil, a pair of flitting eyes bears witness to the complete extinction of its species. Its tongue swipes across its burnt scales, coaxing a screech of agony from the creature's jaw. This pathetic, writhing raptor, innocuously buried underground, is what remains of the reign of the dinosaurs.

Its story of survival is a miraculous one. Before the cataclysmic downfall of his planet, the dim rays of morning sunlight had just casted its first ray upon Raptor's home, jolting him awake. Stumbling clumsily, he anxiously ran a slender finger along the sparse hairs that outline the cheekbones of its haggard face as he scurried outside his humble cave. Settled on a rocky outcrop, the entrance of the cave parts the brambles that scurry along the rough stone, the ledge of the cliff jutting out surreptitiously towards the pale sun. The reptile tentatively stuck his snout out, sniffing at

the fresh scent of neighbouring plants drifting through the air, backdropped by the chattering of local birds and the spilling of a distant waterfall, separated only from the vista of rolling hills sloping lazily across a muted sky of blue and grey hues.

An uneven pathway from the mouth of the cave carves its way down to the forest below, with faint footprints populating the jagged rock. As he strutted down the familiar descent, shaking off any remnants of morning drowsiness, Raptor kept his senses on high alert, eyes and ear peeled for any signs of food, as the previous day's excursions stained his stomach with the ache of famishness. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a huge carcass a stone's throw away. Overwhelmed by hunger, Raptor stumbled to the corpse, its body unrecognizably mutilated and its chest split open down to the bone. Snivelling and gasping, Raptor frantically picked away at the insides, tearing whatever he could scrape off. But he had made a fatal mistake. As he gorged on the feast, a thought scuttled out from the rational corners of his mind. What terrible beast was responsible for this slaughter?

And here it came.

A colossal black shape came lumbering out of the woodlands, stepping into the light to reveal itself. Raptor felt its heart skip a beat. Staring right at him were the beady, unblinking eyes of a Tyrannosaurus rex. As soon as their eyes locked, Raptor broke out into a wild sprint, every muscle tensed as he darted in the opposite direction, nimbly swerving through the odd fern or bush. A bellowing roar shook the area and huge, thunderous footsteps reverberated through the forest floor, encouraging Raptor to redouble his escape efforts. A conjunction of crashes exploded from behind him, the T-Rex having knocked down every tree and foliage in its pursuit, its breaths coming out in fiery flares from its nostrils. The topography around Raptor blurred into shades of green and brown as the pitter-patters of his feet grew increasingly more frantic, the soft babbling of the flowing creeks now morphing into mocking laughter, scornful songs. Hearing the footsteps of his hunter grow closer and closer, Raptor turned to the sky and screeched in despair, hearing his desperate cry reverberate around the forest.

But perhaps Raptor's eyes were deceiving him, but the sun seemed to be moving, ignited by a blinding orange spark that smouldered the clouds around it, penetrating the curtains of smoke that hung around the air as it hurtled down.

Almost as if the sun was aiming for Earth.

A blinding white flash burst forth from the impact, causing Raptor to inadvertently stumble back. Immense tremors rippled through the ground, kicking up violent storms of dust, rock and foliage, which were further propelled by sudden winds, blowing Raptor off his feet. Impulsively, he flung his talons onto the earth, scraping at the dirt in an attempt to remain upright, but his frail body was tossed unceremoniously away by the unrelenting gusts. As the poor dinosaur got swept further and further away, he plucked up the courage to glance at the crash sight. There, a mushroom cloud of unimaginable size and power rose from its birthplace, twirling a ring of searing flame around its body of smoke and ash, which belied the deep magma glow slowly pulsating at its core. Forests, lakes and mountains were rendered scorching infernos, with untamed firestorms being the masters of the hellish atmosphere.

Raptor swung his eyes back round. He was still fighting against the winds and was quickly descending. Miraculously, Raptor's clawing fingers groped onto a sturdy tree, though no doubt it would be uprooted soon as well. With his stomach to the ground, Raptor crawled towards a ravine, hoping that the unyielding rock walls on either side could protect him. Now the matter came to the climb down. Looking down at the yawning gorge below, Raptor stifled a strangled gasp, his limbs shivering nearing the frightfully narrow edge. Peering down, Raptor could see a smooth rock plate a few metres down. Time was running out. The crackling of the fires grew louder. Raptor had to make the jump now.

Tensing every muscle in his legs, Raptor gave a startled squeak as he plunged down, his claws dragging on the stone walls. Landing with a hard thump, Raptor stumbled and clutched at his aching feet. But aside from the bruises starting to form, the long-suffering dinosaur found a moment of peace as he lay down. The river below murmured

softly, occasionally rearing onto the river bank with great blooming water petals. Though the sun had been blocked by rolling clouds of blackness, the river maintained a sheen only the dazzling glow of summer sunlight could dare to replicate. The surface of the water seemed a delicate tapestry of interweaving hues of blue and emerald green, splashing glowing lights of colour onto the neighbouring rock face. Raptor was entranced. Moving closer and closer to the edge of his platform, Raptor was beckoned closer by the river's mystical nature. His parched throat seemed to suddenly scream at him, begging for just a taste of the magical water encircling below. He moved subconsciously, crawling nearer to the edge. His entire head was over the rock now. Now his hands, greedily groping the air with jerky movements. Now his arms, his heaving chest. Half of his body was off the edge now. But all the foolish dinosaur could see was the seductive ebb of the current, whispering sweet melodies into his ears. He inched his body forwards once more.

Raptor never realised he was falling. The river continued to speak, a sweet murmuring of strange, alien language laced with honey, enveloping the reptile in gentle sliding waves as he hit the water, billowing beneath him like pillows. As the water seeped into Raptor's body, a newfound strength seemed to circulate around his veins. Energy and power crept into his limbs and a heat seemed to burn within Raptor's chest despite the crisp coolness of the river around him. As he slowly woke up from the river's forced slumber, he found the ache in his stomach to be all but gone and the bruises on his body healed in an instant. Laughing in gurgled amazement, he swam with fluidity and grace, slicing through the water effortlessly.

As he sat on the river bank, flexing his long fingers and appreciating the youthful vigour rippling through his muscles, Raptor stared at the swirling water in deep thought. He was both astonished and afraid of the river's might, yet for now, he brushed off any uncertainties. After all, never bite the hand that feeds you, and the river's hand had been generous indeed. Suddenly, a deep rumbling shook the ravine. Looking up, Raptor only had time to leap back into the water before the sudden falling of a boulder struck the river bank like a flash of thunder. Covering on the riverbed. Raptor flinched as massive chunks of rock and dirt rained down. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of constant barrages, it stopped. The river was no more, the last vestiges of glowing water battered and dried up. Raptor scrambled onto a heap of soil and stared longingly at the graveyard that belonged to a beautiful lake, but his grievances were more selfish rather than sentimental. Burying himself under the pile of dirt, Raptor carved a small sliver of dirt out at his eye level, just enough to peer out with his flickering eyes, watching the crimson sky melt into the blackness of night. Yet the sun never rose on the next day. And so Raptor kept himself concealed underground, afraid of the encroaching darkness.

Many months passed. Yet Raptor still remained, watching the rolling clouds of ink sweep across the land. The countless days spent below had sharpened his senses. The crests and folds of the soil seemed to meld into his body naturally. Raptor could sense his body slowly decaying, yet he never felt pain, the body cursed with the otherworldly energy of the river. It was bitter irony, to be granted strength and power beyond imagination, yet destined to be trapped in the suffocating gloom. Time seemed to flow beyond the dinosaur, the days and nights blurring into hazy lights ever-flickering above. Shades of morning sunlight and faint twilight blended into the billowing sky, which bickered with the greedy darkness of night. Shrubs sprouted, grew and wilted within a blink of an eye. Creatures seemed to be everywhere at once, swarming the ground and the sky, narrowly avoiding the proliferation of trees bursting forth from the soil. Winters seemed brief flashes of cold, summers a swift comfort of warmth. Years scrambled into decades, then centuries, passing on to millenia. Raptor changed with the times as well. A creeping numbness seemed to spread into his body, rendering every muscle and organ in his body unmovable. Then his skin seemed to melt away from the muscle, rotting until bone shone back. He couldn't feel things, for his sight, hearing and other precious senses were ripped away in sharp instances.

The land was busy during Raptor's eternal slumber. Countless generations gradually molded creatures of the land into alien species. Yet one path had established dominance above rest. Screeching chimps diverged from hominid lineages, which birthed hunchback bipeds, fostering its evolutionary peak—humans. These animals tramped across continents, learning, creating, destroying and rebuilding. They separated, forming complex civilisations and formed incredible technology, which inevitably led to constant warring between the species. Yet to Raptor, these changes

would have seemed like flashes of light, that is, if he was awake. But long ago, after enduring eons of shadow, wishing only for the bliss of sleep, Raptor closed his eyes, and stopped thinking.

For archaeologists Lee Shi Wang and Fok Chau Liang it was proving to be a fruitless day. Their shirts clung to their backs tightly as the sun glared down upon them. Lee Shi Wang grumbled “Who is ever going to find something in this dump?” His partner replied “The execs upstairs must be getting desperate.” This disgruntled pair weren’t entirely unjustified in their complaints. They were sent to Liaoning Province , an area with mountainous regions known for rugged terrain and deep valleys, which proved difficult for the two to traverse. Lee Shi Wang kicked a pebble away in anger. Continuing his tantrum, he struck a bigger rock, which was loosely attached to the lip of a flat precipice, but stumbled backwards after it stood unmoving. Snorting in fury, he stomped on it again, which cracked open the rock, separating it. Fok Chau Liang, who was about to reprimand his reckless partner, gasped as he saw the opening of the hole. Staring back at them was the remains of a dinosaur. The pair quickly disassembled the area around the hole with their tools in barely contained excitement, and after some work, gently pried out the fossil, which shone in the sunlight. As his partner took urgent phone calls, excitedly proclaiming the findings of new Microraptor fossils, Fok Chau Liang glanced back at the finding. Perhaps the heat was getting to him, but he could have sworn the dinosaur cracked a small smile.

The Sanctuary Savior

ESF Island School, Zabbialini, Luca – 14

My father always told me that there were peculiar creatures millions of years ago. Some were vicious and deadly, while others led pacifistic lives among the ferns and towering trees. Paleontologists in China believe that a hidden sanctuary on Earth may still harbor the last surviving survivors and unique species of an ancient era. But then again, such a claim is dependent on beliefs, which have been passed down through many generations. Whether or not these beliefs are real is up to you to decide, but as for me, well, it’s up to me to tell you about my journey in saving the world’s last remaining dinosaur sanctuary.

I heard it, the bell that marked the end of a symphony of 187 days filled with sweat, tears, and hard work. Summer break had finally arrived, a time every single student waits for, and craves at the end of each school year. I had just finished ninth grade, and I can tell you it was far from enjoyable.

The only highlight was when my friend, Ren Shu Xi, and I decided to explore a nearby cavern on the outskirts of our town, nestled within the surrounding forests. As night fell, each step we took deeper into the cavern drew us deeper into a new chapter of our story. The dystopian flickering of broken lamps and remnants of miners who once

worked here sent shivers down our spines. Suddenly, Ren Shu broke the silence, exclaiming “This used to be a gold mine! I wonder what happened here.”. His passion was evident, he had been on many expeditions, soaking up knowledge and the beauty of the caves he had been to.

Before long, we were standing at the edge of a gigantic chasm: bright green vines and ferns colored to a big pond on the cavern floor below. I had never seen anything like it, a tunnel into some sort of undiscovered world, hidden so secretly beneath the teeming streets of our hometown.

As we stared at that glittering body of water, I felt an adventure was at hand. It was as if the cavern whispered about the secrets of centuries past, inviting us deep inside its belly to know its secrets. Ren Shu, unstoppable with his eagerness, suggested we explore deeper. Being cautious, we pressed on, the passage leading us into a rocky, outlandish chamber. What we found took my breath away. A thousand stalactites hung from the ceiling like chandeliers, while the walls lined with minerals that reflected our lights in a broad display. Yet it was the sight of the pile of bones scattered across the floor that made my heart skip a beat.

“Are those...?” I gasped, stepping closer. Ren Shu knelt beside a large bone resembling a human spine. He had quickly brushed away dirt and debris. “These are no ordinary bones!” he explained, a mix of disbelief and thrill in his voice. The stories I had heard as a child about ancient creatures and hidden sanctuaries flashed across my mind. Was this some secret sanctuary of the earth—crawling creatures that lived on it millions of years ago? My heart started to rumble with curiosity and excitement as the thought sparked into my mind.

We hastened to collect the bones and began heading back towards the cave’s entrance. Once we returned the skeleton of the creature to our village museum, we named it “Sino”, a name from the Latin word for our country, China. The excitement of that discovery was ingrained in my mind and lit a new spark for my curiosity once more. As summer break approached, it seemed like a great time to revisit the cave this time with Ren Shu and two of our classmates, Liu Chen and Zhang Mei. Liu Chen was a bright spirit. Her enthusiasm for her journeys was rivaled only by her strong intellect. With her curls framing her face, she had this knack for viewing the wonders in the unknown. Then there was Zhang Mei, whose careful nature often came across as overly cautious. She approached every expedition with precision, making sure we had the right great maps. Her analytical mind and likeness to paleontology made her an invaluable companion.

Our planning session was held in my room, cluttered with superhero figurines and maps of the area that were poorly drawn by Zhang Mei. “It’s not my fault that you didn’t tell me earlier! ”. We swept her complaint aside and got down to business. Ren Shu accurately outlined our expedition to the dot, drawing a frayed map of the cavern’s entrance and the surrounding forest that he carefully remembered. He suggested that we gather the following essential supplies: flashlights, extra batteries, water, and snacks. Liu Chen, with her infectious positivity, suggested we bring a camera to take pictures of our findings.

As we plotted our course, I felt optimistic; the hope of uncovering hidden wonders fueled by our imaginations. On the day of our journey, we took off at 6:00 in the morning, when the golden rays of the sunrise shone through the trees as we trekked the familiar path toward the cave. The air was thin, and the earthy scent of leaves enveloped us. With each step, everyone felt anticipation run through their veins. We shared stories of our past adventures and the excitement of exploration among ourselves. Heavy foliage gave way as we approached the cave to allow us a view of the entrance of the dragon, dark but inviting.

Once inside, the atmosphere changed, the cool air surrounded us and water drips echoed in the vast enclosure. We turned on our flashlights, sending beams that cut through the void of darkness. Further ahead, as we walked, came into our view a hidden narrow passage behind the shade of vines. The air sounded energized, and something from the ancient world felt like it was just waiting for us. Light rustling sounds from within made us approach near, and immediately we switched off our lights as the darkness wrapped us like a cold blanket.

We had crossed a few ravines, beautified with flora dripping like liquid glass. Then, we found a small pathway, the top hidden by the layers of vines. “Ren Shu, did we see this be—”, I asked but was quickly cut off by Liu Chen. “Look at those vines,” Liu Chen shouted, her eyes alight with excitement. “They almost look like they’re hiding something.” “Let’s check it out”, I suggested, my heart raced. As we approached the opening, an unusual sound echoed around us. A low, rhythmic breathing that seemed to resonate from the deep end of the cave. “Did you hear that?” Zhang Mei asked, her voice barely above a whisper. “It could be anything down there. We should be careful”. Switching off our flashlights, we stood in silence, focusing on any unusual sounds that were out of place. The sounds grew more clear, accompanied by soft rustling. It was as if the cavern itself was alive, whispering secrets of mystery.

My heart pounded as a concoction of fear and exhilaration coursed through me. We looked into each other’s faces; our curiosity outweighed caution. “We have to go closer,” I told them, feeling in my blood a surging thrill for discovering. With our anxious breaths, we neared toward the source of the sound. The air shifted, was cool and moist, even carried on it the whisper of the wild. As I peered back into the darkness, My eyes grew accustomed to the dim light filtering through vines.

And then, out of nowhere, as if it were magic, I saw something I could hardly believe. There stood a creature before us. Zhang Mei and Liu Chen had agape their jaws, but Ren Shu and I knew exactly what we were seeing. It was of the same species as the bones we found before Summer break. It stood before us, its delicate form displayed by the faint glow of bioluminescent fungi clinging to the cave walls. It was a small dinosaur, no larger than a cat, its feathers were a bright outline of russet and cream. The patterns called to mind the plumage of a bird, yet there was an undeniable primal essence about the creature. Its larger rather expressive eyes locked onto mine filled with a blend of curiosity and wariness.

I felt connected, a bridge across time that linked us together. This creature was a relic of an ancient era, and I, a mere boy standing on the peak of discovery. We stood there, suspended in time, the weight of excitement and awe settling upon us like a mantle of responsibility. Suddenly, I felt a rush of determination; this was no mere adventure. We had stumbled upon something extraordinary, a glimpse into a lost period.

Without warning, rumble, distant but very loud in this cavern. The creature winced; its feathers rustled with alarm. We turned nervous glances at one another, time was closing in on us. We should take this image with us and show the world its existence, yet at the same time, we were out to secure our own lives. On our way to the opening of the cavern, my mind mused on what was the after-effect of such a discovery. We were not just adventurers, we were the guardians of a long-forgotten world. The new Sino and its sanctuary deserve to be preserved, a testament to its life. This adventure could change everything. As we emerged into the sunlight, the world outside seemed almost unreal compared to the shadow we had been in. We entered a world of mystery and were now going to face what lay ahead with our newfound knowledge and wonder.

Weeks have passed, and the thrill of our discovery has faded into an unsettling reality. We could not make another trip because all the caverns in the village were closed due to the loud rumble that came from inside the cave. There

were reports about a group of treasure hunters led by a man named Chen Wei, who was determined to exploit the secrets of the cavern. They believed the creatures held the key to a heap of wealth and power. We had to move fast to secure the sanctuary. I called the meeting with the group and told them to come to my house so that I could explain to them my plan. “We need to warn the village and enlist support,” I said, with urgency in my voice. “But first, we have to confront Chen Wei and his crew before they can breach the cave.”

Zhang Mei nodded, her eyes once again shining with excitement. “If we can find evidence of the alive Sino, we can convince the villagers to help us protect it”. “We’ll need to show them that these creatures are not just walking fossils”, exclaimed Liu Chen. That night, we packed all our gear: cameras, flashlights, and whatever food we could find for our long journey. The air was thick with tension as we set out towards the cavern, the moon casting a glow over the landscape around us like a convenient lighthouse.

As we approached the cave, the sounds of machinery and exploding laughter filled the space. Chen Wei’s crew had already set up camp, their equipment scattered around like a blemish on the cavern’s interior. As we moved closer, our hearts beating wildly, and hiding behind trees, I whispered, “Look,” with my hand pointed to the men around the huge map. “They’re planning something.” Zhang Mei reached into her backpack for her camera. “We have to photograph this; this evidence can be incriminating!” She quickly snaps the photo before she’s abruptly disturbed.

The sound of rubble echoed from inside the cave once again, followed by a high-pitched shriek. It must be Sino! Instantly, my mind was overcome with fear. They were desecrating the sanctuary, and I couldn’t let that happen. I wasted no time in hand-signalling to my friends as we ran towards the entrance. We burst into the cave, where chaos greeted us. Frantic, Chen Wei’s men moved around, getting glimpses of the slippery creature. A surge of panic welled through me as I watched Sino, cornered and frightened by the heavy machinery.

“Get away from it!”, I yelled, with my voice echoing off the cavern wall. The men whirled, shock and belligerence etched on their faces. “Who do you think you are?” Chen Wei spat, a step forward. “This is our turf now; those dinosaurs are ours for the taking!” “Not if we have anything to say about it!” Liu Chen shouted back, her bravery diminishing her fear.

It all happened in a flash, one of the hunters threw his body at Sino, and instinct just took over. I charged forward, adrenaline coursing through every part of my body. “Leave it alone” I yelled, pushing the man aside. Zhang Mei and Liu Chen rummaged through some of our equipment, using it to create barriers against the hunters. We fought in defense of Sino, dodging blows in the chaos. The air was sparked with tension, and the cave pulsed with energy. As the confrontation intensified, Sino darted right past us, its feather shimmering in the dim, bioluminescent glow, as if it understood our intent to protect it. Then, the ground trembled, a warning that something much larger was approaching.

A massive predator emerged from the shadows, drawn by our confrontation. A large, formidable creature with a long muscular tail. It was fast despite its size. We knew it was the Apex predator in the ecosystem because of its aggressive, intimidating appearance. Its roar reverberated through the cavern, silencing both us and the hunters. Chen Wei and his crew, now faced with a real threat, began to panic. “Retreat! Retreat!” Chen Wei shouted desperately, attempting to escape the charging beast.

We realized that the presence of the massive predator was a sign of balance being restored. The cave was not just a sanctuary for Sino; it was a fragile ecosystem full of creatures that required protection. I felt a wave of responsibility as I shouted to my friends, "We have to lead it away from here!"

Working together, we use our knowledge of the terrain to guide the predator deeper into the cave. It was following us out of curiosity about our movement and the sounds of the struggle. With Chen Wei and his crew caught up with the looming danger, we made this the perfect opportunity. "Now! Get the proof!" exclaimed Zhang Mei as she took pictures of the cave and the creatures. As the predator roared and the hunters fled in fear, we felt triumphant. We not only protected Sino and the creatures in the ecosystem but also gave a reason to the villagers that these creatures are worth preserving.

Emerging from the cave, the light of the morning sun blasted into our eyes, probably meaning that our journey took almost a day. The discord of the night felt surreal in the warm glow of the morning. We retired to the village, armed with evidence of our adventure and the reality of the creatures we saw.

With the Villagers gathered, we presented our findings. Showing the photographs of Sino and the evidence of the large beast, we explained the importance of preserving the sanctuary. The villagers listened intently, their expressions shifting from skepticism to awe. "Together, we can protect this incredible hidden world," I advocated, my heart swelling with hope. "These creatures are not just relics of the past; they are a part of our heritage. Let's ensure that they remain safe." The villagers roared in agreement, dedicated to saving what was left of the sanctuary below their feet.

Over time, the village rallied around our cause. We established a conservation effort, protecting the cave and its inhabitants. The sanctuary became a place of education and respect, not just for dinosaurs but to live safely amongst humanity.

Chen Wei and the rest of his hunting mates faced their destiny. Unable to stop one calamity after another, a life sentence in prison was placed upon each of them. Frightened and infuriated, people from our village decided that what happened in the cavern had caused an imbalance in their world, placing them in an unfavorable position; because they blamed the hunters for their thoughtless risks. Whispers that the hunters were the ones who provoked the creatures spread fast, and the public outcry for justice in villages surrounding these attacks were booming. Villagers who once saw Chen Wei and his friends as brave explorers now saw them as careless fools who brought danger right to their doorstep.

The very predators that had caused their downfall were not just mere monsters of legend; they were dinosaurs, ancient creatures long believed to have been extinct. As the villagers dug deeper into the caves, they unearthed fossils that caught the attention of paleontologists. Among these remains were the distinct bones of the Sinosauropteryx and the Yangchuanosaurus, two species that had roamed the earth millions of years ago.

In the weeks after our incredible discovery and the ensuing cleanup, the village was transformed. We learned that the sanctuary we unearthed was not just a hidden treasure but a vital part of our heritage. With the hunters imprisoned and the community rallying around the cause of conservation, we emerged as explorers who discovered this ancient world. The fossils of the Sinosauropteryx and the Yangchuanosaurus became symbols of resilience and hope that became a newfound appreciation post for the delicate balance of the ecosystem. As I look back on our journey, I feel a sense of pride, knowing that Ren Shu, Zhang Mei, and Chen Ming all played a crucial role in preserving a piece of

Chinese history while finding the importance of coexistence with nature. Our adventure had transformed a simple quest for excitement into a mission of discovery, forever linking us to the extraordinary legacy of the dinosaurs.

A Fossil

ESF Renaissance College, Blackman, Ellie – 14

I used to love making art when I was a child, I especially loved drawing and would sometimes draw patterns in the corner of my reading books to pass the time. When I started primary school we got to mould with clay, something I loved even more! I loved the freedom I had with the clay and I found so much joy in creating intricate patterns and designs, my face would always light up when my clay tile had hardened and I could add it to my collection of art masterpieces. Sometimes I would play with my friends and pretend that the clay tiles we had designed were ancient artefacts that we'd discovered and we had to try and work out if the patterns were a secret code.

The sound of the morning gong chimed before I even had time to properly awaken. I'd had little sleep and my whole body was in pain. Annoyed, I stumbled out of bed and put on my clothes. My clothes were battered and old, a common thing people would pick on me for but I didn't care. Once I was ready I went out of my room to greet my Auntie in the hope that breakfast would be ready. A salty and comforting smell transfixed me as I walked into the main room of our house and I greedily tucked into steamed buns and stir-fried noodles. My favourite! After eating I

grabbed my school bag, got on my bike and rode to school. Little did I know, I would not be going to school that day.

The ride to school was about half an hour, I didn't have any way of officially checking where I was but I looked for certain signs along the way that I was nearing school. For example, when I rode past the broken stop sign I'd know that I was about halfway there and when I rode past the red bus stop I'd know I was almost at school. Today I dismissed all these signs, I needed to get to school early and it would be faster if I just paid attention to my cycling. After riding for about 25 minutes I took a look up to see if I was nearing school but to my dismay, I was in a new village, one I'd never been to before! I had no idea where I was and there didn't seem to be anyone who lived nearby. I sat down in dismay and tried to think of a plan to help me at least get home. After failing to think of a plan for a few minutes an old man approached me. I eagerly let the old man talk to me as I needed help but as soon as I got up, a smile on my face, he hustled me away. Fear crept over me, was I being kidnapped? My heart raced and I felt my blood pumping around my body, was this the end?

When I had finally calmed down I took a moment to look up at my surroundings. The old man released me from his tight grip and then to my utter disbelief, he showed me a small rock. This wasn't an ordinary small rock, it had the most intricate details that even an expert craftsman could not create without many years of practice. The more I looked at the rock the more identifiable the details became, then I realized, this was a dinosaur, but it wasn't any old dinosaur, it was a pterodactyl. The old man gave me the rock as I wanted to admire it more closely, the intricate details had such a unique feel and they were very sharp to touch. I decided to rub the face of the rock but when I did so, an eerie song started playing and a heavy fog started to cover the village. Anxiety and confusion bubbled inside of me as I didn't have any idea as to what was going on but before I had the chance to properly assess the situation, the fog and music vanished.

When I looked around the old man had disappeared, as well, however a trail had been left in his place. It wasn't a proper trail of any kind of footprints or objects but it seemed to lead through a sort of opening in the fields beyond. Apprehensively, I began to follow the trail, being cautious about what was around me and what I was stepping on. As the trail began to become less identifiable and I entered a large grain field my eyes filled with amazement. Ahead of me was nothing short of phenomenal, a small pterodactyl sat in the middle of the field! I began to gradually approach it with increasing excitement and soon enough I was within 10m of the majestic dinosaur. As soon as the pterodactyl took notice of me it began to become distressed. It started to make growls and I started to get nervous, hastily, I started backtracking on myself which helped the dinosaur begin to relax.

All the amazement and shock of meeting such a creature had led me to believe that everything was okay. Then it struck me, where was I, what time was it? There was no way that it will still the present day and that I was anyway near my home. I needed to find a way to somehow time travel back to the present day.

Rapidly, I began to search for the little rock that I had rubbed. I had no idea where it would be and if I were to search the whole rice field that would take days! I knew that I couldn't lose hope so I took one more attempt. I ran back to the village-like place that I had come from and I began to search there. I went through many houses and trespassed one too many times but it didn't feel like the town had any inhabitants. Everywhere was dusty or contained old pieces of jewellery or figures that looked incredibly expensive.

I began to get desperate, where was this stupid rock and how couldn't I find it. I sat down on a patch of grass and began to lose hope when suddenly, I saw a small light shining from underneath a pile of leaves, I gradually went

closer to reveal the object and I was overjoyed to see it was the small rock. I rubbed it and began to shut my eyes and smile as I eagerly awaited the fog and eerie music to play. After 10 seconds of standing around and nothing happening, I realized that it didn't work. It was impossible. I was stuck in a faraway land and no one would ever find me ever again. I went back to my seat on the grass and tears began dripping down my face. They raced down my face like rain on a window during a stormy day. What could I do?

Eventually, I began to feel a little better and I got up and started walking back to the dinosaur. I had one last hope. I began to run, following the trail closely and slowly, but as I began to approach the dinosaur the ground shook below my feet and a great force took over my body and pushed me down to the floor! Loud bangs surrounded me and it felt like the ground was erupting beneath me. I crawled around the floor, bringing my hands to my head to protect it as trees fell to the ground and mud and dust blew around everywhere.

Just as I thought things couldn't get worse, I peeked up through a window I made with my hands in front of my eyes and I saw the pterodactyl begin to get agitated. At first, it just flew around but as it became more and more distressed it started destroying the natural surroundings. All at once, mounds were thrashed to the ground and a towering cliff was hit by the powerful tail of the dragon. As the chunks of chalk from the cliff descended to the ground I felt myself curling up into a ball. It was as if time slowed down, I hastily pulled random debris over my body to help lighten the pain from the chalk bricks and as the first blow came tumbling down it all went black.

Dinosaurs Reborn

ESF Renaissance College, Lam, Benedict – 15

“Tick, tick, tick”, the clock is ticking 60 times from 11:01 pm to 11:02 pm, Wei drags his body to his bed and passes the clock, holding his eyelid. The route to his bed has no end in sight. When he is finally on his bed, a memory of his exciting trip comes back to his mind. But today is monday, Wei still needs to work for the whole week, so he starts his daily routine before sleep. He waters the plants, sorts the garbage into the recycling bins, reads argumentative articles and practices disagreeing with the argument, and closes the remaining light that is inside his bedroom. Then, he goes to bed immediately in order to get enough sleep for tomorrow's cumbersome yet important work. This made him take the memory into his sleep but this made him remember a huge decision that he regretted.

It was the day he received the report from a farmer in Liaoning, and he organized a group of scientists to his home, Liaoning, and Wei led the scientist group. The weather was perfect for excavating fossils, and the excitement made the corner of Wei's mouth lifted up slightly when he reported his findings to the directors and government. Later on in the month, more scientists from different countries and regions came to Liaoning to explore more fossils. In the

meanwhile, the government sent the new member, Feng, to Jiangxi because they got another report about a new species of titanosaur that was discovered in Jiangxi. Wei immediately went to the HQ when he knew about this command and asked them, “Why would you give the job to Feng? I’m the only one who has experience and is capable of leading teams to discover fossils.” The HQ answered Wei that they thought Wei needed to do too much work and it is better for him to take less work and relax. Due to this answer from the HQ, Wei decided to put as much effort as he can to become the HQ direction of fossil discovery.

Wei continued his work in Liaoning and organized his team very well, which made him believe he is more capable to be a director. Suddenly, one teammate told Wei that they found a special object and that object wouldn't usually appear in this area. The teammate needs Wei's approval in order to continue to discover the work. When Wei saw that object, his jaw nearly dropped. That object is an egg that is covered by another dinosaur who looks like it wanted to protect the egg. More importantly, the egg wasn't damaged and destroyed, it was so complete that it didn't look like freshly unearthed fossils. Wei instinctively reported it to the HQ, but in the middle of the way, he remembered the goals that he wanted to achieve, becoming the HQ director. This made Wei stop and went back to his teammate and said, “Thank you for your discovery, I will report this to the HQ by myself. If the HQ asks you anything about this new discovery, just tell them to find me, got it?” The teammate nodded and continued his excavation work. In the evening, Wei held the egg next to him even when he was driving back to his home and placed it inside his basement in order to prevent the HQ from coming in and found out he was hiding national cultural relics inside his house.

The next day, Wei spent his whole day researching the dinosaur and that egg. But Wei still doesn't have any significant progress on the egg. Therefore, he could only bring the egg to HQ and told them about this discovery in order to use advanced technology and machines to investigate this complex and newly found fossil. Wei and his team spent nearly two months in order to understand what was inside the egg. It is not the egg of a titanosaur or other dinosaurs, but another new discovered species of dinosaurs. They then spent about another five months finally knowing the DNA of the egg and managed to copy it. They discovered that the DNA of that species of dinosaur has evolved so much that all the cells are more advanced than human's. This made the HQ decide to create another project about transferring this type of DNA into humans to boost human civilisation. After the team organized all the information of the DNA and were ready to make it as substances that could be injected into human bodies, Wei said “I can volunteer to be the one to test on the DNA.”

Wei was being taken to the lab and he sat down next to the injection room. The room is full of lab equipment that Wei was never allowed to see and use as they are the top secret equipment of the country. Wei sat down on the chair carefully and waited for the assistant which he had never seen before. Once he is seated down, he can feel thousands of pins pricking his bottom from the chair and his feet begin to shake uncontrollably. The assistant pointed to a machine that is the shape of a human and said. “Please go inside the full-body injection machine and I will close the door for you.” Although Wei thought he was supposed to be relaxed for the injection as he had seen a lot of advanced machines before, his body shivered when he went into the machine and he cannot even remember what he planned to do after the injection.

After the assistant closed the door for Wei, the assistant injected anesthetics into Wei to prevent pain that might be caused by the injection of the modified version of the dinosaur's DNA that is safe to inject into human bodies. Then, the assistant injected the DNA into Wei's body. When the assistant opened the door of the machine to see if Wei was awake or not, Wei disappeared and the assistant could not find anyone in the machine.

Wei opened his eyes and saw himself placed in another room with a mirror in front of him. He stepped forward and saw his body changed! It is covered in rough skin, white fur at the back, and his body turned small. His hands were proportionally similar to T-rex but he has five fingers, whereas T-rex only has three. His legs were as thin as birds, but he can feel he has more power on his feet. Wei wants to scream and call for help from his teammates, but his voice cannot come out as he wants. Then a larger dinosaur that looks exactly like him appeared in front of him and said "Do you need help, Andrew? Don't get out of bed unless we tell you to, your wound hasn't recovered yet." When the dinosaur stretched out her hand to touch Wei, Wei was scared. He could feel his heartbeat going faster and it was like going out of his body, he started to have trouble breathing, and he finally fainted due to lack of oxygen.

"Go away, monster! I'm not going to stay with you." Wei said "It is just a dream, I'm just dreaming." Wei slapped himself and he was awake. He saw he was in a room and a mirror in front of him that is so familiar. He continued to sit still on his bed but opened his eyes widely, facing the mirror in front of him. He wanted to stand up, then he stopped and sat back down. He tried to take the cup of water that is next to his bed, when he stretched his hand, he saw five fingers with sharp nails hand warped in rough skin. Wei suddenly stood up and said rapidly "Am I dreaming now? Did I just wake up in a dream? What is happening?" That dinosaur standing next to Wei's bed said worriedly "Andrew, I know it is hard for a 2 month old kid to adapt to this world, but you are not like that yesterday. Is the wound really painful?" Even though Wei's mind was blank, he still tried to breathe in and out multiple times and pop a few words up intermittently "I'm not Andrew! Who are you! Where amI!?" That dinosaur said confusedly "Well, I am not sure what happened to you Andrew because I'm not the nurse, but do you remember me?"

The name "Mary" felt very familiar to Wei as if it was someone that he was used to speaking to. The more he thought, the more the word felt familiar. When he looked down and saw a kids toy, his body forced him to touch it. This eventually made the memory of Andrew's into Wei's mind.

Andrew is a dinosaur kid from a dinosaur civilization before the existence of humans. This civilization just started a decade ago, but it is already as advanced as human civilization in the 1600s. People started to form governments and they discovered all the continents on Earth. They also start to discover new inventions and theories to teach the new generations. T

he reason that Mary is very significant is because she is Andrew's mother. Wei also remembers a lot about Andrew's past, including the school that Andrew went to and currently going to, Andrew's home address, and his town's road as well. "Andrew! Andrew! Are you alright?" Wei suddenly realized that he was in a daze for 5 minutes. "Yes Mary, I'm okay. The wound was just too painful that made me lose my consciousness." Wei pretended to be Andrew. "How are you feeling now, then? I'm sorry that I let you fall down into a puddle that has spines in it, hope you could forgive me." Mary apologizes. "It is okay now, but I am a little bit tired, I want to get some sleep." Wei continued to pretend to be Andrew. "Sure, I will help you close the door and I will go out. Please call me if you need anything. Let me open a few more air conditioners to cool down your wound." Mary said.

Since Wei didn't know how to utilize the technology here, he had no choice but to be Andrew and wait for the chance. When Wei woke up later that day, he felt that he could control the powerful feet and other parts of his body, also ready to explore this new world. But then, another dinosaur just came into the nurse room carrying a machine. Wei was eager to be able to explore this world which caused him to rush into the machine causing him to be

electrified by an unusual electricity. Despite this, Wei was able to walk and move freely, while the dinosaur was frightened.

The sound of the electric current is loud enough to let the nurse manager come in and the manager dinosaur with the frightened dinosaur lower their voices to talk. This makes Wei only able to hear a few words, “living”, “long time”, “DNA”, “unprepared”, “untested”. The manager came closer to Wei and said “Hello, do you feel anything special and uncomfortable?” Wei shook his head and he went out of the room.

When Wei was feeling better and he could go back to Andrew’s house, he felt like he was staying in the freezer. Wei said to Mary “This room is so comfortable compared to the hot to death season!” Mary smiled, “Of course, we opened the air conditioners, fans, and all the other cooling machines two hours before. We need to welcome you back here from staying at the hospital for two weeks.” Wei’s heart felt warm even though he just met Mary for a week, and he gave a soft smile to Mary and felt very appreciative of Mary’s care.

Wei continued to stay with Mary for the rest of the time that he spent in this world. Additionally, Wei also felt this world is very similar to what he had experienced in modern times. But he experienced a much better life with a well-structured education system, various opportunities of work environment, and technology that consistently enhances. When he continued to live in this world, he started to feel the people’s attitude to an aspect of their life is a little different, however he could tell which aspect is it.

When Wei is just over 18, becoming an adult, the world already invented spaceships to allow citizens to travel across different planets in solar system, each family mostly have private jet which function is similar to cars at Wei’s time period, and every place on each planet have skyscrapers which requires a huge amount of energy that is transform from burning fossil fuels in each planet. This causes most of the water on each planet, including Earth, to be polluted and need to be filtered in order to be utilised for consumption and agriculture.

This time, Wei chooses to work in a normal office for his career because he is sick of the distrust from the HQ in human time periods. For his first day of work, he met a lot of new dinosaurs and he handled his job quite well. When he was leaving the room, he said to the remaining colleague who was staying behind “Are you going to close the lights and fans?” Wei’s colleague said “No, why asking? Just leaving them open, it’s not affecting anyone.” Wei is surprised but he is able to control his facial expression “Aren’t your boss going to pay for it?” His colleague shook his head and said “No one needs to pay for using any forms of energy as we get unlimited resources from trees and fossil fuels, underground minerals, and crust energy.” This answer made him suddenly realize that the reason Mary always used the remote control to open all air conditioners and fans a few hours before they arrive isn’t because she really loves him and doesn’t care how much it cost. It is because it’s free no matter how much you use it. Moreover, Wei also starts to understand the dinosaurs also consistently produce products that are damaging to the Earth when they are inventing new technologies.

Now, Wei finally fully understood all the technology, including the advanced technology. He utilized the advanced technology that the dinosaur civilization provided, and he invented a watch that can help him travel through time. However, due to the increased production of products that are harmful to the environment, it becomes worse every month and even every day as the problem became very serious when Wei was around 50 years old. Those harmful materials include greenhouse gasses that make the Earth’s temperature increase rapidly, polluted water that makes drinkable freshwater to decrease, and light pollution that affect the photosynthesis of the plants etc. All of these devastating and irreversible damage made the environment and climate start to become unlivable. This also caused the

dinosaur population to decrease. One day, a nuclear machine even emitted gasses that caused multiple nearby volcanoes to erupt and the lava started to flood the city. Wei immediately used his time watch to help time travel back to his time period, but he accidentally adjusted the time to 5024 years, which is the future.

Wei had yet to calm down, wandering at a loss in the future, then instantly he felt being stabbed by a needle and falling down. Wei woke up lightheaded and found out he was confined in a glass box inside a laboratory, with his time watch being stored in another glass box. He then suddenly realizes that his look is still a dinosaur. He shouted to the lab personnel, saying “I’m human, I just changed my look into a dinosaur.” Over the next week, Wei attempted various ways to demonstrate his humanity. Nevertheless, people just consider this as a joke and collect data to investigate the dinosaur from him by torturing.

Soon, Wei had had enough; due to multiple injections of different chemicals for the purpose of collecting data, his DNA underwent changes. This causes his body to expand and gain strength. He breaks his own glass box immediately, following with his watch’s box. While chaos erupted in the laboratory, Wei had already adjusted his watch and transported him back to his own time period.

Because of the immediate activation of the time watch, it used up all the energy. This means Wei is unable to go back to his time period. Luckily, Wei’s DNA absorbed a significant amount of energy during his transformation from human to dinosaur and became more powerful. This allowed the watch to use this energy and successfully transport Wei back to his HQ. Meanwhile, as the energy inside Wei’s DNA has been absorbed, his appearance and strength turn back to normal, enabling his teammate to recognize him.

In the following week, Wei was taken to the nurse’s office for a health check. After the examination, the team held a celebration for Wei’s successful return and Wei narrated the entire adventure to the team. Yet, the team found it hard to believe, as the technology that Wei describes is far too advanced that it seems impossible. The team neither believes Wei’s explanation of dinosaur extinction. As a result, Wei decided to stop explaining and conveying the team because the HQ warned him, “If you continue to talk about his nonsense, we will discharge you!”

Wei wakes up from his memory, still regrets this decision. He grabs his oxygen mask, puts on his protective clothes, and steps out of the oxidized village. He says to his fellow worker “This is exactly what I witnessed in the dinosaur civilization.” He brings his immortal body, then continues to find more resources for humans to survive on Earth.

Unearthing History

ESF Renaissance College, Lee, Hailey – 14

China has quietly become the global epicenter of fossil-hunting. In the 1990s, a farmer found the world's very first clearly feathered dinosaur. Scientists called it *Sinosauropteryx*, which means “the China dragon bird”. Since then, more than 40 dinosaur species have been found in the province of Liaoning, including more than 24 pterosaurs – winged reptiles.

Recently a new species of titanosaur was found in Jiangxi. Because China is less well-explored by paleontologists, there's much excitement about what will be found next—and what amazing stories the ancient fossils will tell!

“Unearthing History”

April 5th, 66,000,000BC

As he hid behind the bush, camouflaged by his stripes into the red-brown branches that consumed all of land as anyone knew it, he kept his eyes trained on the lizard that skittered between the branches an approximate ten meters away, its agile darts leaving no trace in the wet mud. He stayed as still as stone, knowing that with a single twitch of a claw, the always-alert anole he was in pursuit of would take notice and flee, leaving him deprived of his much desired dinner.

As the reptile started to explore the area nearer to him, a scarce five meters away, he felt his body tense up as it always did when in preparation to pounce.

He was the last remaining member of his kind, as far as he knew, and for the past three months or so he could feel his aged legs begin to prove inadequate and hinder his hunting. He was starving now; desperate; and he had been observing this particular Green Anole for three days; perched in the branches, observing the lizard's every movement whilst not making a single one himself, every inch of the tail that occupied over half his body alert and full of adrenaline.

This reptile moved gratifyingly slow compared to its kin, which pleased him immensely. It was now a mere meter and half away from him, and now, stiff from adopting the behaviour of a rather large sculpture and excited to reap its rewards, he pounced; razor sharp claws moving at hellish speeds towards the small animal.

His claws dug into scaly skin and he, for the first time since he could remember, experienced cosmic sensations of ecstasy at his successful capture. He craned his neck to—wards the dark mud, and was right about to eagerly tear the struggling creature apart with piercing teeth when he was (quite rudely, might I add) interrupted by a bright flash that illuminated the starry sky, and, momentarily distracted, he looked up to witness the mesmerising sight of a neon orb briskly streaking towards a point far, far away, occupying the entire sky with multicoloured lights that seemed to make time stand still. Captivated and mildly befuddled by the spectacle, he was not conscious of the low rumble building quite swiftly, evolving into a deafening roar within seconds, nor the lizard that had gone limp in his claws to gape at the enthralling sight.

His last moments were spent with a singular tooth impaled in the lizards back, claws strategically planted firmly into his stomach so to rip it apart with a twitch of a finger, before, with a tremendous **BOOM**, he was catapulted quite violently to lands far, far, away, where red—brown branches were unheard of within a hundred miles.

December 8th, 1994

Li Wei breathed in the early morning air as he trudged along the wet mud path he was told would direct him to the field he was supposed to weed and plant seeds in. Gloved hands gripping a shovel that he held slung over his shoulder, he hummed a lively tune to himself as he pushed aside the long grass that obstructed his path. The field that he had been requested to handle on this particular day was, to their records, previously unexplored, assigned by his master because he saw 'potential' in the soil and wanted to 'optimise crop growth'. He was told that it was a long journey towards the field, but it would be easy enough to find, as long as he followed the 'mud path towards the rising sun.'

So he did this, keeping aware that the rising sun was directly in front of him and that his sandals were treading on the damp mud path that led as far as he could see. He had been following the path since an hour before sun—up, and the sun was now well halfway along its journey to the crest of the sky.

He wasn't concerned though; he had been assigned fields up to six hours away from the local village, and completing them, however unpleasant, had built his patience and grit so that he was now known as one of the best farmers in the area.

Fortunately, this field did not require Li Wei to take a six—hour stroll through large amounts of greenery. He arrived at a clearing around two acres large, and immediately got to work tugging shrivelling weeds out of the moist soil. He found that the weeds in this area were quite shallowly buried under the soil, which made his job a whole lot easier. Upon his completion of the weeding, Li Wei unslung his shovel from its nestle on his shoulder and began

systematically digging in rows that he would later plant seeds in, soon to yield frivolous vegetation ready for harvesting season. Humming to himself, he mindlessly stuck his shovel into the soil and threw what came up over his shoulder, in the monotonous manner he had grown so used to.

As he dug, Li Wei admired the bare red-brown branches that encircled the field. Standing tall and strong, Li Wei could see that they were undoubtedly ancient, maybe even dating back to the time of the dinosaurs. He allowed his mind to wander, as he often did as he dug.

He had always liked dinosaurs; thought they were absolutely astounding creatures, and was disappointed they had gone extinct. As a kid, he had fantasised about flying atop a pterodactyl, riding upon a tyrannosaurus rex as they rampaged through the mountains hunting for their prey. When he got older, these fantasies evolved into him pursuing palaeontology and travelling the earth in search of fossils that he would take back to his lab to research and post papers about. Now, as a farmer, a small fragment of hope still existed in the back of his mind, that he would make a groundbreaking discovery that would forever change the fields of palaeontology...

The loud 'CLANG!' of his shovel striking something hard interrupted his thoughts. Li Wei frowned. According to his master's calculations, this field was extremely fertile and had very deep soil. His master was never wrong.

He continued to dig into the soil around that area, so that he could determine the exact size of the obstruction, report back to his master, and still optimize the vegetation in this field. The instruction of digging in rows abandoned, he struck his shovel down where he felt the soil come to an even ground and dug to locate the edge of the obstacle so that he could determine whether it was extractable and if he could salvage the field.

Before long, he began to catch glimpses of dull white that protruded from the brown that blended with the soil. *This couldn't be...*

With increasing excitement, he sped up his digging, working on uncovering the area where the most colour was visible. Li Wei knew that if it was what he thought it was, this would be the most exciting thing that had ever and would ever happen to him. *Could it be...?*

As he dug deeper, he felt a rush of exhilaration. This was more than a job; it was a chance to connect with history, to perhaps even write his own name in the annals of paleontology.

Finally, he brought away a shovel of soil to reveal an elongated skull that he had seen only in his imagination and the local newspapers. Frantic now, with shaking hands and an uncontrollably grinning flushed face, he dug the hardest he had ever dug, until he uncovered the full body of a small, reptile-like dinosaur with a tail occupying over half its body. Li Wei was in utter disbelief. It felt like he was in a fever dream.

Could this truly be a dinosaur? His heart raced—what if this discovery changed everything?

Job long forgotten, he dropped his shovel and sprinted in the direction of his small village, ready to deliver news that he felt could forever change the fields of palaeontology. A stupid grin plastered on his blushing face, he bounced through the mud faster than he had ever run, knowing his childhood dreams had at last come true.

The Tale of the Dragon Bones

ESF Sha Tin College, Chiu, Jennifer – 15

Stories begin with “once upon a time”, and I guess mine should, too...

“Why don’t I tell you a story?” Asked the sea-breeze, fluttering down beside me.

“Ugh,” replied I. “What makes this any different from the others?”

“Be quiet and listen! Now...”

It concerned a poor spear-hunter. One summer, where once his catch was abundant, now he would plunge into the blue depths of the island’s beaches, never catching more than a few tiny pompanos and perches and perhaps a half-dead grouper, if he was lucky. What a sight that must have been in the market! A once-fragrant spectacle of dried fish! Pungent, plump flesh clinging to bones, now reduced to a small mass of tails not even fit for a fly to turn its nose up at!

He had to get creative. At first, he tried cutting up his dried perches into snacks. This only had the unfortunate effect of making them look rotten and worm-eaten, as his only knife had long been rusted by ocean salt. His second idea was to try making fish sauce; this was abandoned quickly as he had no idea where to even start. Before long, he was considering throwing himself off a cliff in despair.

“Dramatic, isn’t he? Anyway, isn’t the protagonist supposed to have more hope before he quits?” It’s quite hard to make a warm draft or a laughing gust uncomfortable, but I assure you I did my best.

“Honestly, you’re no fun to please. Most of my other listeners enjoy having drama in their stories...”

He almost did fling himself off a cliff, but realized it wouldn't be any good. He contemplated many different ways to both sell his catch and to end his misery on the way home and would have continued if not for him hitting his heel sharply on a ridge of bone sticking out of the sand. Upon closer inspection of what he had hit, a cream-coloured whorl of a pink-tipped conch shell was halfway buried in the sand. The spear-hunter had never seen such pure colour except in the curling wisps of the sunset and thus dug the shell out. In the light, it grew glassy as if the divine hands of the sea had painted a shining coral glaze on its curves. Its bumps and raised warpings, as he ran his finger across them, felt like the words of a long-lost lullaby his mother would soothe him with on stormy nights as a child, or perhaps the arcane script of a *fūli*.

What others would have seen as a miracle token from the Dragon King and treasured 'til the end of their days, the hunter saw as an opportunity to improve his fortunes. The shell was promptly sold at the next day's market, for a much higher price than all of the fish in his stall.

"I tell you, he's made the right choice. I'd sooner sell it than keep it in some musty-dusty wunderkammer for it to rot—"

"Will you pipe down?! You're really not as insightful as other people I've given the opportunity of a story to! I've half a mind to leave right now!" Impressively, the sea-breeze seemed to harrumph in annoyance.

"You always say that and you never do." But something in me had softened now and was less willing to fight. "But I suppose it's difficult for shells to rot quickly."

"And how simple it would have been, but nothing's ever that simple!..."

If our story had ended well, perhaps with the hunter earning himself a boat and net with the purchase of the shell, we would be living in a less curious world. But alas, it seemed his luck had turned around for the better.

Where he once spent day after day flailing after fortune to aid his hunts, it seemed now the waves were sending marvellous specimens for him to uncover in ever-greater numbers. One day he would walk to the other side of the island and spot the ridged back of a harp shell coloured coppery-green by algae remnants, a rotted red tassel of string threaded through a hole in its siphon. The next day sent him a luminescent blue swirl of a murex glowing with an ancient and cold light. The day after that, a jade shrimp token, its delicate moustache painstakingly weathered with featherlight carved strokes.

Though in his deepest heart he longed to keep what he sought to brighten the passing of his days, he would come up with myriad fallacies of his unworthiness, of how his humble lifestyle would never warrant such frivolity, of how his lonely existence would have made it selfish for him to keep such loveliness close to him. After all, what could be more righteous than seeing the passers-by and merchants take in his wares? What could be less lonely than bartering with customers?

"I call that sensible of him. What if the roof of his hut had caved in and buried all those fine beauties in the dirt and sand?"

The sea-breeze looked slightly offended and seemed to flinch slightly away from me. "Well, but doesn't everyone deserve to have something to cheer themselves up? Something beautiful?"

I scoffed. "I'll believe that when I see how he'd store them properly, and not a minute before!"

"That's what I call arrogance, I say! In any case..."

Many a night he thought of where his findings had gone: the conch whisked away by an island maiden, the tassel-tailed shell frantically shoved into an anxious suitor's bag of presents, the murex presented to a village chief's daughter and the shrimp charm lovingly gifted to a small child as a good luck charm. So he lived this existence until he had forgotten his spear and knife and the old way of life.

In the mornings, he'd climb the basalt ridges and sunlit sprays of the sea would fling dawn-painted clamshells at his feet. Evenings brought glowing firelights from the sea, washing razor cockles the saffron colour of the Buddha's robes upon the beach.

Though the fish had gone, though the lack of rain had dried up the harvest, though the priests had prayed and fasted for the blessing of the Dragon King to no avail, he continued peddling what he found.

“Now hang on just a bit— If the whole island was suffering from a food shortage, how did he manage to stay alive and not starve?” I was getting impatient.

The sea-breeze chuckled nervously until the mood became awkward. Finally, it said, “Er— I suppose being a poor spear-hunter makes one’s stomach used to hunger? And it was a pretty prosperous trading port at that point, so I think he did some bartering for grains and such.”

“Ahh... I suppose that makes sense.” I had got it now. What fun it was to see the sea-breeze flustered!

“Of course it does. As I was saying! Something begins to happen now, so be quiet...”

One day, on his usual walk to collect shells, he came across a cave. This wasn’t anything strange— the islanders frequently found small coves and nooks in the hills. Larger ones were converted into shrines, and their statues and murals were housed and protected from harsh sunlight. But on closer inspection, he realized this was no ordinary cave.

For starters, the opening of the cave was as if a giant mouth had been clawed by a giant beast. Dried lacquer pigment, red like fresh blood, congealed around the “scars”. Even stranger were the warm drafts of air that were sucked in and out of the opening like a living breath exiting the lungs of the cave.

Usually, one would expect the interior to look like a direct path to judgment by King Yanluo. Not the case. The hunter peered into the maw of the cave and was surprised by how well-lit it was despite the lack of visible holes in the roof.

Curiosity overwhelmed him. He ventured in.

Above him were moss and fungi that glowed the colour of nephrite, while fruit bats dangled from stalactites in slumber. He could see his reflected face in the pools of water that accumulated near his feet, better than he had in years.

This scenery continued for a long while. Here or there he would find strange rocks that looked like statues of shrimp dressed in fine armour, or a crab carrying a guandao. The breeze came back with the warmth of blood, where it should have been cold. Soon hours had passed.

At this point, he was getting rather famished but still found the energy to round the corner.

There he saw its corpse.

Well. He wasn’t quite sure what “it” was, but lying before him seemed to be the carcass of an enormous snakelike creature. But it couldn’t have been a snake, because it possessed branch-like antlers, made of jade. Its partially rotted skull revealed eye sockets frozen in the shape of a hellish smirk, but it had the docile, time-weathered features of a tame pack animal.

Only after he noticed the gleaming carp-like scales of the beast did he realise it was a dragon. A dragon’s corpse.

“You’re kidding me. A dragon? Dead? Even a child can tell you you’re wrong. Dragons don’t exist.”

“It was a giant dragon! Why, in my glory days I’d have trouble fighting it, it was that huge. Whatever killed that thing was not any low-class immortal, I’m saying now.”

“So you’re saying you’re a low-class immortal?”

The sea-breeze grew offended and cool for a brief second. “Shut up! I’ll show you just how powerful I can get later!...”

Its size was so incomprehensible that the hunter had to step back from the oppressive dizziness of its might.

Well, this explained why none of the prayers to the Dragon King had worked. He was dead!

The hunter knelt in reverence. For a moment, the world stopped save for the wailing sound of air rushing through the cave like millions of ghosts had come to mourn the death of this majestic creature. Strangely, he felt peace. Where another islander would have seen this as a mandate of their cursed fates, he didn't have that same fear. He felt as if fate had brought him and him alone to share a wonderful secret.

It was time to go. So he left.

However, try as he might to return to his old routine, the sense of reverence he had felt leaving the body had vanished. Over the following weeks, he thought it sad that no one would show the remnants of the dragon's spirit the respect it deserved. Thus began his weekly pilgrimages back to the cave, where he would regale the dragon and the rock "soldiers" with anecdotes from his life, leaving an offering of the prettiest shell he could find at its curled-up head. It might have been its imagination, but with every visit, its scales would gleam more iridescent and the air of the cave grew warmer and warmer, enough to lower the temperature for a few plants to take root. He swore he could even hear a pleased purring grumble on some days. He finally understood the happiness that lit up the faces of his customers taking home their shells. This joy, despite how strange his circumstances were, was his alone to have.

Alas, it soon came to an end. At dawn one day, he received a summons to the chief's house.

"What for? I was under the impression he was a loner, but he hasn't committed any crime serious enough to warrant arrest or anything." I had gained some respect for this nameless protagonist even if the story was definitely falsified. "You know," replied the sea-breeze, "In island communities, being a loner means you don't want to help around. That's bad enough."
"I think it's important to let people be if they wish," said I. "So, was he arrested?"
"No! No, that's not where this is going, don't fret! Continuing on..."

As of late, his expeditions had produced less and less for him to sell, and thus the hunter concluded the chief was acting out of concern for him. After all, he was a frequent customer.

When he arrived, however, the chief was having a heated discussion with some strange-looking men. One gesticulated wildly, and the hunter noticed how pale and clawlike his hand was in appearance. The men carried themselves in an ornery manner. A shudder of dislike ran down this hunter's back. He didn't like how their noses seemed to reflexively turn themselves up to stand taller above the already short chief.

"If it isn't another one of these islanders, coming to bother us!" The tallest man, with the most upturned nose, leaned over the hunter. "We haven't been able to go anywhere in this backwater village, but the tribesmen run about like feral pigeons!"

The other man gnawed on his thumb nervously. "Well, we haven't time to waste. Look, the stars are about to appear, and that's when the bones will degrade quickest. You must forgive my colleague's enthusiasm. When will the guide you have given us arrive?"

The third foreigner demanded, "Lead us to it, or we'll have to tell the Son of Heaven that he's just wasted quite a pretty penny on our Science Institute, and your... tribe's... worth nothing."

The chief pointed at the hunter and said, to some effect, that because of his familiarity with the island's paths, he'd be the best shot the foreigners had at leading them to the "dragon-like beast". Suddenly, the hunter understood just what these men had come for. His heart plummeted. Dread filled his bones.

He pleaded with the chief, saying that he had no idea of where the “beast” would be. This went on for a good while until the chief burst out in anger saying he would be whipped bloody if he disobeyed further.

Defeated, the party set off. As they walked, the hunter with thousands of reasons why he had to have such a cursed fate. The one precious thing he kept private to his heart, and was to be taken away by some sinister figures. What sort of bad karma had he accumulated in a past life to deserve such a thing? He’d never been a pious man, but he started praying that the dragon would somehow disappear. At last, they came to the maw of the cave and ventured inside. The air felt dank and unwelcoming, and the newly oppressive silence was punctuated by the foreigners’ complaints. He couldn’t even look up anymore, for fear of tainting the cave with his traitorous vision.

Past the shrimp-soldier rock, they went. No— too close, too close!
Here’s the sight of the huge bat colony... please, anyone, save me from this nightmare.
Through the stalagmite maze— Jade Emperor in Heaven, work a miracle, please, I beg you...

“Oh, the heavens smile upon us! Isn’t she a beauty! Those bones... it’s pure art how they’re embedded in the rock!”

Rock?

The hunter looked up in astonishment. Sure enough, where there once had been the flesh and scales of the dragon, now the stone cave had somehow swallowed up everything except its bones. And where the bones had once seemed glossy, like a pearl coating covered them, now they were dead-white.

He couldn’t believe his eyes, and rushed forward, running his fingers over the hardened, empty socket of the dragon’s eye. A rough force pushed him back, while the yelling in the cave grew louder—

“Don’t let that vermin touch the specimen! Force him out if need be!”

“Serves him right! Anyway, what are we going to name it? We three discovered this... dragon-looking thing, so—”

“Nonsense! It looks nothing like a dragon. Those antler-like extremities? Probably the calcified remains of a parasitic worm!”

“Anyway, I vote we name it the *muyanosaur*—”

“Hey, that’s just *your* name, you greedy—”

The hunter could only watch the squabbling trio in despair as they brought out sharp awls and hacked away at the bones. Soon, they had taken out a section of where the dragon’s claw used to be and ran out, whooping in glee about the fame they were due to receive.

Now that he was alone with the fossil, he could only feel bitter tears on his face. Why, oh why hadn’t he just let himself be whipped bloody, sobbed he in regret. If only to let this beautiful dragon rest...

I was silent for a few moments. “It doesn’t make sense how the dragon could become a fossil. The conditions you described weren’t right. How did the sediment layers form so quickly anyway? Was it even a drag—”

The look on its face was complicated. “For the last time, it was a dragon. What a fine dragon it was, too. Anyway, it’s said they can control water phenomena, so are you really surprised at how it ended up?”

“Why are you so insistent it was a dragon anyway?”

“It’s the fault of you scientific types! After the dragon’s bones were found, the island was overwhelmed by all sorts of awful characters who wanted to “study” them. They used the bones as an excuse to drive the islanders away and— and build settlements for the bone-scholars! Not a single trace of those people remains, except in derisive sneers. Why, you wouldn’t have learned it was that hunter who found the bones if it weren’t for me!” Now the breeze was stirring, strength building against the backdrop of an angry crimson sunset.

“I’m only humouring you! Everyone knows of the three noblemen, who found the fossil of the Muxianlianosaurus longwangidus while travelling. Frankly, what you’ve said in this story is unbelievable slander. How could such a humble islander find those— hello? Are you there?”

The sea-breeze had left. So ends my account. It’s up to you to decide if it was real or not. But it’s my story, so I’ll say this:

Farewell!

Jing Hong’s Field Journal

ESF Sha Tin College, Lee, Nicholas Keng Hung – 14

Subject: The Curse of Sihetun

Date: September 2nd, 1996

It has been quite some time since I last wrote about my archaeological expeditions. The tale I now recount stands as one of the most thrilling experiences of my career — as well as serving as a reminder of how hope and desperation can distort reality, magnifying truths into illusions that breed unbridled expectations. As with many extraordinary affairs, our journey begins with a rather ordinary email from a correspondent who signed as Li Yumin. I have transcribed it below for your perusal.

Dr. Jing Hong,

You must come to Sihetun at once. I’ve uncovered a fossil unlike anything you’ve seen before. Its properties seem to cure even the worst of diseases. Trust me, this is worth your time.

— Li Yumin

Intrigued by such a prospect, I packed my tools and travelled to Sihetun, a remote village nestled in the Liaoning Province of China. I had once read about this land being rich in fossils but would have never imagined that they might harbour such a secret so profound—and perhaps, perilous.

When I first stepped out of the car upon arriving in Sihetun, a strange chill settled over me. The village was cloaked in a heavy mist, the air carrying a damp heaviness laden with the scent of earth and wood smoke. Before

long, a figure emerged from the fog ahead, his silhouette sharp against the muted backdrop. As he approached, I saw a man with a weathered face, his expression impassive yet intense.

"I am Cheng, the village chief," he said, his voice low and grave. "We do not often see visitors in these parts. What brings you here?"

There was a faint trace of suspicion in his tone. I offered him a polite nod. "I'm looking for a man named Li Yumin. Do you know of him?"

At the mention of Yumin's name, the chief's demeanour shifted. His eyes narrowed as though I had uttered some forbidden word. Stepping closer, his voice dropped to a near whisper. "We do not speak of him here," he began, his tone laden with warning. "A curse has fallen upon our village, and he is to blame."

"A curse?" I asked, raising an eyebrow, though the words lingered uneasily in my mind.

Cheng hesitated, his gaze shifting to the ground. Finally, he continued. "Li Yumin was a good man once, respected by all. But then he found those bones, and everything changed."

"Bones?" I echoed, intrigued.

The chief nodded slowly. "He discovered them while ploughing his fields. Everyone knew Yumin had a fascination with such things — artefacts, fossils, remnants of history buried in the soil. But these bones were different. The moment he brought them into his home, strange things began to happen."

"What kind of things?" I pressed, though part of me braced for his answer.

Cheng's voice dropped further, barely audible. "At first, it was small — whispers among the villagers of bad omens. Then Mei, the village pharmacist's daughter, fell ill. Red spots appeared on her skin, and no remedy seemed to help. Her condition worsened until she could barely leave her bed. And then..." He paused, his expression darkening with the weight of memory. "The chickens began to disappear. One by one, from every household in the village. No trace of them was ever found."

"And Yumin?" I asked, leaning in.

Cheng's face darkened further. "He stopped coming into town altogether. Locked himself in his home, refusing to speak to anyone. Some said he was consumed by the bones, spending all his time studying them, trying to unlock their secrets. Then, one night, he vanished. No one has seen or heard from him since."

"And you believe this curse has something to do with the bones?" I asked, though I could not deny the chill his words sent down my spine.

"I don't just believe it. I know it. Those bones brought nothing but misfortune to our village. If you're wise, you'll leave this place and forget you ever heard the name Li Yumin," Cheng answered unflinchingly.

As Cheng walked away, his figure swallowed once more by the fog, I turned toward the village, the weight of his words pressing heavily on my mind.

My curiosity warred with unease. This was supposed to be a routine expedition, but the chief's words lingered, and a quiet voice in the back of my mind whispered. *What if the curse is real?* I shook off the thought, unwilling to admit that fear had already begun to creep into my resolve. The idea of a curse just seemed too surreal, even for me. Whatever the truth behind Yumin's disappearance and the so-called curse, I intended to find it.

There was a second part to Yumin's email, where he mentioned the medicinal properties of the bone. From such, I decided my next stop was to visit the village pharmacist to learn more about Yumin's plans. The pharmacist, who introduced himself as Mr. Zhao lived in a modest house on the edge of the village. The roof sagged slightly in the middle, and ivy crept up the sides, its green vines snaking over the peeling paint. When Zhao opened the door, he moved with the heaviness of a man burdened by invisible weights. Inside, his home was dimly lit. The walls were lined with shelves packed with jars of varying sizes — some filled with powders and herbs, though most were empty.

I asked him about Yumin and his discovery. Zhao stared at me, his gaze held a sense of desperation as he sighed, his voice quiet and heavy with emotion as he began recounting his tale.

“We hadn’t seen Yumin for a few days by this point, so I was shocked to see him at my door that day. He was holding a pouch, filled to the brim with a powdery-like substance. He told me that it’d cure my daughter. You see, my daughter, Mei, had been suffering for months from anaemia, and none of my remedies worked. I had heard rumours about how the dinosaurs were a curse, but Yumin was a good friend of mine and I trusted him. I knew he would want the best for my daughter. After consuming the bone powder, Mei was running around within hours as if she’d never been sick.”

“The look on your face makes me infer that something went wrong.” I prompted.

Zhao nodded, his face crumpling as tears welled in his eyes. “A day or two later, Mei began to develop red spots, rashes spreading like wildfire over her skin. We had no more of the bones left and Yumin promised to help find a cure, but... that very night, he disappeared, most probably from the curse. I just wish we had a bit more of the dinosaur bones to save my Mei.”

His voice cracked as he spoke her name, raw emotion cutting through the room’s stale air. I thanked him, my voice hollow, and turned to leave, the weight of his story still clinging to me.

From there I had one final destination: Yumin's house. When I approached his house, it was eerily quiet, the air thick with dust and abandonment. Inside, the scene was chaotic. There were shards of glass glinted on the floor, and papers lay scattered across every surface as if someone had fled in haste. Among the disarray, there was one thing that intrigued me most — a stack of detailed studies on keratin. *Keratin*? I thought, whilst flipping through the papers. I knew keratin to be a protein found in bird bones, essential for the growth of feathers. But the bones Yumin had discovered were from dinosaurs, not birds — creatures that, as far as I knew, didn’t have feathers. As I continued looking through them, the titles leapt out at me: “*Assessment of Keratin on the Human Body*,” “*Protein-Based Treatments for Anaemia*,” and “*Potential Side Effects of Keratin Overdose: Rashes and Red Spots*.” It was quite evident that Yumin was looking for a cure for Mei, but why keratin?

While sifting through the papers on Yumin’s desk, I also discovered a bone that was rather yellow in colour. The bone was unlike any I had encountered before. Slender and fragile, it felt unusually light for its size, with a coarse yet delicate texture. The shape suggested it belonged to a small theropod, though I couldn’t be certain, especially as the bone appeared to possess small, fine grooves along the edges as if something else was meant to be there. These must have been the very bones that Yumin found, and the ones that pharmacist Zhao so desperately desired.

Before heading to my temporary laboratory, I returned to Zhao’s house to share some of the bone with him, hoping it might help Mei. As I approached, I paused near the window and saw Zhao inside, mixing a concoction of powder and water. His sick daughter lay nearby, her head barely lifting as she let out faint, pained breaths. She looked truly in pain, and it hurt me just thinking about what she had been through. My gaze wandered to the shelves behind Zhao. The empty jars I had seen from this morning had mostly become full, some contained a brownish feather that seemed oddly out of place, whereas others held a finely crushed powder with the same yellowish tint as the dinosaur bones. Zhao’s testimony made it seem that he did not have any dinosaur bones, so what could this yellow substance possibly be? My thoughts churned as I took in the details: the feathers, the powder, the missing chickens. A chilling realisation crept over me. These weren’t dinosaur bones; they were crushed chicken bones. Zhao was the one stealing the chickens. The weight of this discovery settled uneasily in my chest. Suddenly, the entire scene felt wrong, as if I was witnessing something I wasn’t meant to see. Just as I stepped back to leave, Zhao glanced in my direction, his eyes briefly locking with mine. I turned quickly, but the unsettling feeling lingered.

Back at my lodgings, I walked around my small room, the wooden floor creaking beneath my restless steps. My thoughts were tangled, as more and more unanswered questions piled on. Why would Zhao steal the village's chickens for his medicine? Why cloak his actions as a curse? The more I pondered, the more out of reach the truth became. I collapsed into the chair by the window, holding the bone that I had found at Yumin's house whilst staring out into the moonlit village, seeing the faint rustle of the night wind carried away through the stillness of the night. A wave of doubt washed over me. Perhaps I was overthinking. Perhaps the curse, the sneezing fits, the jars in Zhao's home — they were all fragments of unrelated stories, loosely stitched together by my desperate search for meaning. Perhaps I was too stubborn to admit defeat...

I sat up straight, the night's stillness broken by the distant caw of a crow. *Birds? Feathers?* The connection had always been there, just beyond my grasp. And then, suddenly, it clicked — the dinosaur Yumin had discovered wasn't just any dinosaur. It bore feathers.

It all made sense. How could I have been so ignorant to discern this as a possibility? I ran my fingers over the intricate grooves of the bone, realizing that these must have been placeholders for the feathers. Keratin, a natural protein found in birds' bones, is essential for producing feathers. If this dinosaur bore feathers, its bones might indeed contain keratin — a discovery unseen in the world of palaeontology. I stood up in a rush, my mind racing as the pieces fell into place. Without hesitation, I grounded the bone fragments into a fine powder and prepared to test the sample. Using a sulphur-based liquid, known for reacting with proteins, I carefully applied it to the powder. The reaction was immediate. The liquid turned a vibrant shade of yellow, confirming what I had suspected — these bones contained high levels of keratin, the very substance found in modern bird feathers.

This revelation tied everything together. The shared yellow hue of the dinosaur and chicken bones were due to keratin, a protein common to feathered creatures. Zhao must have been trying to replicate the effects of the dinosaur bones using crushed chicken bones, desperate to find a solution for Mei; but the idea of Mei consuming so much keratin gnawed at me. I realised that the keratin must have been the cause of Mei's red spots as I knew excessive keratin in the bloodstream could trigger adverse reactions. If that was the case, it may even be too late to save her; and if Yumin so obviously knew about the keratin in the bone, why didn't he get Zhao to stop? Or perhaps, he did.

With evidence in hand, I had no other option but to confront Mei's father. Zhao was sitting at the table, as if he was expecting me. "You know, don't you," he started.

"You've been stealing the chickens," I accused him, cutting the tension between us.

Zhao's face froze at my accusation, the flicker of fear quickly replaced by a flash of anger. "What does it matter?" he spat, his voice trembling with defiance. "It's all for my medicine."

I leaned forward, my gaze locking with his. "You're doing this to recreate the effects of the dinosaur bones — its keratin source. But what you failed to understand is that overdosing on keratin causes severe problems for the body: fatigue, nausea and most importantly, red spots. All the symptoms Mei is suffering from. The truth is her suffering is not from the curse... it's you. You were the one who has been harming Mei by giving her an overdose of keratin, unknowingly inflicting the very suffering you sought to alleviate."

Zhao froze. His defiance melted into disbelief. His mouth opened and closed as if searching for words that would not come. Tears welled in his eyes and began to spill down his cheeks in a slow, helpless cascade. "What?" he choked, his voice cracking. "No... that's not true. All this time, I've been trying to help her." His breathing

quickened as the realisation set in. “No! This can’t be!” he screamed, his hands clutching his head as if he could physically block out the truth.

It was a terrible sight, watching a father confront the weight of his actions, knowing they had doomed the person he loved most. I let him release his misery for a few agonising minutes, the air heavy with his sobs, before he fell silent, utterly broken.

“And, what about Yumin?” I pressed, my voice quieter and softer.

Zhao’s face turned pale, “I had no choice,” he confessed. “Mei’s condition seemed to get so much better after consuming the bones. I thought keratin must have been the answer. Yumin didn’t agree. He wanted to stop, but I couldn’t. Mei needed me to keep going.” Zhao’s hands trembled and moved violently before continuing, “He confronted me one night. He wanted to take the remaining dinosaur bones to a laboratory for proper study and away from me, away from Mei.” his volume raised, “I begged him, Jing! I begged him to leave them. Mei was my world — what father wouldn’t fight for his child? But he wouldn’t listen. He wouldn’t understand...” Zhao’s voice cracked, his fists clenching as if he could crush the memory itself.

I stood in stunned silence, the weight of his confession pressing heavily on the room. “So, where’s Yumin now?” I asked, though the answer was clear in his haunted eyes.

“We had... an argument. I... I didn’t mean to push him so hard. He fell... and hit his head. It was an accident, I swear!” Zhao whispered, his voice barely audible.

“You killed Yumin for the bones? For Mei?”

“You don’t understand. Mei needed me to save her. I didn’t have a choice” Zhao retaliated.

I closed my eyes for a moment, the enormity of his actions sinking in. When I opened them again, Zhao was staring at me, his face of despair. “I’m sorry,” I said, my tone steady. “But I have to inform the authorities.”

“No!” Zhao’s voice rose in desperation. “Please, you can’t do this to me. Mei needs me—I must protect her!” He fell to his knees, his cries echoing through the small room.

It was a horrid scene, and as I turned to leave, I felt the weight of it pressing down on me. Each step away from Zhao’s shop felt heavier than the last, but I knew there was no other choice. Justice had to be served, and the truth, however painful, had to come to light.

With the events of Sihetun now behind me, I find myself seated at my desk, pondering the adventure I had gone through. The bones I uncovered have been handed over to the authorities, who have now named the dinosaur the *Sinosauropteryx* — though the villagers call it the "Chinese Dragon Bird," a nod to its feathers. Despite its name, the curse of Sihetun was no supernatural force, but rather human desperation and a father’s unquestioning love for his child. It was ignorance, fear, and the relentless grip of hope that blinded the villagers to the truth, and perhaps blinded me, too, as I sought answers. Desperation can drive us to extraordinary lengths, but it can also make one act without reason. Zhao's intentions had been driven by love, but in his desperation, they led him down a tragic path. As I write this, I can only hope Mei recovers. I hope Yumin’s memory is honoured, and I hope, perhaps in some way, the truth will bring peace to Sihetun.

End of Journal Entry

Earthlings

ESF Sha Tin College, Szeto, Millie – 15

In the summer of 1977, we find the spine.

Our rookie sees it first, lying in the dig, its dorsal vertebrae peeking through layers of sedimentary scum. A miniature set of Himalayas. It looks like a creature even by itself, the remains of a baby serpent swaddled in the sand.

A stone's throw away we find the skull. There's a blinding flash of bone. It's dyed yellow from years spent out of its prime, but in the sun it looks snow-white.

"This one's a stunner," Zhiyu says. And it is. I'm a little reluctant to dislodge it. It'd be like shaking the casket at a funeral.

Its eye socket is peering through the soil. I stare back.

Unblinking, observant. Half-alive.

We pick up our awls and begin to dig.

—

I'm sitting in the pit with the skull next to me, and it begins to talk.

What's for dinner? It asks.

"I don't know," I say.

The skull belongs to a carnivore. A rock-hard jaw flanked with massive teeth. Somewhere, some hundred millennia ago, I can see it ripping off my entire arm and then tearing into the rest of me. A sharp and painful kiss.

All of you fossilists here have names. Are you going to give me one?

“Maybe, if you’re lucky.” We haven’t been able to identify the skull yet. The air’s been electric ever since we found it. The digsite feels like a bubble on the precipice of popping. Everyone knows this is going to be big.

I’m hungry. Give me something to eat, it says.

The disembodied skull with no digestive system is hungry. It’s a little funny. I guess it misses the sensation of chewing.

“Once we’re finished digging you up, I’ll let you have my entire head,” I say. “Hang in there.”

I ate a lot when I was alive.

“I’ll say. From the look of you, I can tell you were a top predator. Top of the food chain. Hometown head honcho.”

Apex predators are figureheads. It speaks softly, whispering like snakes do. Worms get eaten by he who is bigger and hungrier. Then he gets eaten, and it happens again, and again, and again, until you hit the top, and then it goes backwards, from mouth to mouth to mouth. You’re a whalefall waiting to happen.

I remind it that I’m not a marine biologist.

When you die, worms are going to come and pick the flesh off your bones. They’re going to tunnel into your ribs and eye sockets, and nestle themselves in the cradle of your skull. You become delicious carrion, a happy home for maggots. The food chain is a circle.

“You’re a morbid one,” I marvel. Its manner of speaking is precocious. An ancient infant with a zigzagging train of thought. It goes on.

Even after you die, you get resurrected. Everything that eats you keeps your memory alive. It’s sort of the same for me. Every time you dig up a femur, or an ulna, the ground is giving birth to me again. And once I’m fully born, you’re going to put me together and make a shroud for me. You’re granting me a second burial.

“By shroud, you mean a museum display, right? If so, even in your shroud, you’re going to be the most alive you’ve been in millions of years.”

That’s right.

“Congrats on your resurrection,” I say.

—

“Guess what.” I plop down cross legged next to it. It’s quiet all around save for the brittle night breeze.

What?

“Everyone’s saying we’re going to be famous.”

Why's that?

“Well, for one, you’re definitely going to be. They’ll probably put you in an encyclopedia or something. And as for everyone else, if we luck out, we’ll be in there right next to you. Maybe in a photo, or something.”

How exciting...

“It’s more likely that I’ll be forgotten, though,” I admit. “But it’s alright. I didn’t get this job to make it big. You’re the headliner. It’s like when your kid wins the spelling bee or beats the fastest runner in the year. You feel proud of them.”

The skull is quiet. Which means it’s thinking hard. Rolling my words around its mouth like hard candy.

Don't feel bad, it comforts me. Even after you die, the Earth will remember your name.

“Even if it’s not in a book?”

Even then. You could turn into dust and melt into the wind. You could fall into a long dream under the skin of the earth. Either way, even after your kids and grandkids and their grandkids die, they'll feel you in the air and in the trees. On sunny days, they'll see your shadow running through the grass.

“What about you? Are you remembered?”

Sure thing. Ever seen a pigeon?

I throw my head back and laugh, mouth wide open like I’m about to suck in the starless sky.

—

One time, in a fit of self importance, I throw down my shovel and point at the skull accusingly. “I don’t think you really get how necessary my job is.”

Elaborate on that.

I wag my finger at it. “Last year, I wrote a paper. ‘Jurassic CO2 Levels – Understanding Tomorrow’s Weather.’ I’m knee-deep in history trying to predict the future. Generations yet to come are going to thank me for this.”

Preparing for a climate crisis, I see. Just as well. At the rate you're going, you're going to blow a hole right through the ozone.

“Hey, don’t be like that,” I chide. “That’s not going to happen.”

All events in time are connected to each other, in a way. The cause-and-effect of it all ensures that everything is happening at the same time. An insect flaps its wings a couple hundred million years ago and a tornado forms in the 20th century strong enough to rip apart the Amazon. A chicken-or-egg conundrum.

I hum in semi-understanding.

The mass of Earth flips back and forth. Gases escape. Asteroids fall through the atmosphere. From the beginning to now, til the end. But nothing changes, not really. Time operates on a loop. One day, the universe is going to fold itself up like origami and go back to zero. We come and go from the same starry muck. Like a snake eating its own tail.

“An ouroboros.”

Yes, yes, yes. Everything is connected.

Pangu smashes through a dinosaur egg and reaches for the primeval sky.

If you zoom in far enough, we are exactly the same. Mirror images.

A velociraptor chases its own tail. Grabs hold of it. Starts to swallow.

You have to keep in mind, we're both just Earthlings.

—

I find myself squatting in the dig again, long after everyone else has gone. Over the course of the last few months, it seems the skull has become my therapist.

“I think I’m getting a little too used to this job,” I admit. “The mundanity of coming down here every day, digging and brushing and talking to you... it’s making me too comfortable.”

What’s the newest circumstance?

I bring my knees close to my chest and lower my voice. “Zhiyu confessed to me.”

I’m not surprised. I always knew he liked you.

“It scared me a little, you know? The thought of this era of my life coming to a close. And another one beginning. Everything’s going to be different.”

At times like this you just gotta do what you do best.

I sometimes hate the way it speaks. I’ve never been good with riddles. “And that is?”

The skull looks at me with eyeless sockets, in a way that says it’s all too obvious.

Evolve.

We fall into a comfy silence. Eons seem to pass in between each heartbeat.

Then I lean in real close, whisper in its nonexistent ear. “Wanna know the reason I became a paleontologist?”

Tell me.

“It’s because I love you.”

The skull doesn’t say anything back, but the silence is enough.

“What are you doing?” Zhiyu’s voice floats down from above. I look up. He’s crouching over the side of the hole. From down here, he looks almost tiny, like he’s about to be swallowed up by the ground.

“Nothing,” I say. “Lend me a hand, will you?”

Zhiyu pulls me out of the pit and we walk back to the campsite, leaving behind a lonely colossus.

The day after, we christen the skeleton. Yangchuanosaurus Shangyouensis.

—

A year passes, and then more. The excavation process comes to a close. The skull moves farther and farther away from where it was found.

Tick.

The skull gets stuffed in a plaster coffin and shipped elsewhere. Each bone gets individually gift-wrapped.

Tock.

I'm smiling under a *honggaitou*. Vows and kisses are exchanged in a flurry of red and gold.

Tick.

The skeleton gets there in three hundred odd pieces, fully intact. Our colleagues in Hong Kong take it and start filling in the parts that were swallowed up by time. Tough metal wiring wrapped in resin and fiberglass turns into artificial bones. From far enough away, you can't even tell which parts are fake.

Tock.

A tiny, meaty hand holds my finger like it means the world. She is the spitting image of Zhiyu. We name her Xingyan.

Tick.

"They're putting the Yangchuanosaurus on display," says Zhiyu one day, hanging his coat on the rack. "Do you want to go and see it?"

A sweet pang of something throbs in my chest.

"Sure, let's go."

Tock.

Zhiyu and I are holding hands in front of the exhibit.

He whistles appreciatively. "They did a clean job. Couldn't have done better myself."

He stops and is silent. Bitterness shadows his face like a cloud on a summer day.

"Right now, I'm thinking — who were any of us to snatch these bones? Fossil excavation, reconstruction, all of it — it's just us getting back at the world. At nature. We're Frankensteining a corpse back together. What's it all for? To blow up our egos? We're not proving anything to anyone but ourselves. We're a pack of glorified graverobbers."

I had an inkling he'd always felt that way. I always knew he didn't like his job the same way I did. But he's dead-wrong. I didn't spend months crouching in a pit, chipping away at rock after rock to fatten my ego. I didn't

painstakingly brush sand from segments of cracked rib because of simple, boring defiance. The months I spent at the Shangyou reservoir dig, every bone recovered, every scratch of dirt, all of it –

“If you ask me,” he says, “paleontology is a pretentious pile of nothing.”

Under the warm museum lights, the Yangchuanosaurus seems to twitch.

“You’re wrong, Zhiyu. It’s a labor of love.”

–

Zhiyu heads back to the hotel first. I tell him I have an ambiguous errand to run, but I sit on the steps of the museum entrance until it’s way past closing time. When the security guard, bored to tears, pulls out his smartphone, I make a mad, silent dash for the doors.

It’s almost pitch black in the museum. I imagine this is how it felt for the skeleton, entombed in the dirt. Even in the dark, I remember every twist and turn I have to take, as if it’s animal instinct. There’s the tiniest sliver of light ahead, tracing the edge of a doorframe, and I make my way towards it.

The Yangchuanosaurus is lying in the display, neck bowed. It looks just like it did the day I found it, but with less pieces missing.

I lift one leg, then another over the cordon and clamber into the exhibit. Once I’m in, I kneel down next to it, sinking into granules of fake display sand.

“So, how was the trip to Hong Kong?” I ask. “It’s been a while since I’ve seen you, you know?”

The skull doesn’t say anything back. In reconstructing it, I suppose we’ve given it a proper send-off. It’s lived a busy life, this skeleton – eating and being eaten. To me, this exhibit is less of a funeral and more of a temple. A shrine to a long-forgotten friend. Tender reverence. Anachronistic pining. An ‘I miss you’ stuck in amber.

“You get some shut-eye. Don’t mind what I’m about to do next, alright? I promised you, after all.”

I pry its mouth ajar just in time to hear the shout of security guards rounding the corner. The beam of a flashlight swivels wildly outside the doorway.

Just before they pour into the room, I curl up next to the Yangchuanosaurus.

I can see a billion stars in the prehistoric sky.

“I’m happy to have walked the same Earth as you.”

I place my head in its open jaws, and I get eaten by the world.

Perennial Remnants; A Whisper to the Past

ESF Sha Tin College, Wang, Haocheng Andrew – 14

Half past five on a frigid morning, a duffle bag hung stiffly around my shoulders as I shoved the car door open with my other arm. A long pause followed; the fluorescent interior light had buzzed wearily to life. I threw the bulky bag into the backseat and jammed the car keys into the ignition lock. Soon after, the sedan's croaky engine rumbled spontaneously into the heavy air.

My eyelids fluttered briskly as I plunged down the gas pedal and flicked the headlight switches. Two luminous beams of yellow penetrated through the murky street ahead, but chilliness started to seep through the vehicle. I turned on the stereo to pass the time, but that was muffled by the crushing asphalt against the sedan's tattered tyres. I turned it off, and a miserable silence was left suspended in the cabin.

The car was steadily heading towards the northeast valleys of Liaoning, some tens of miles away from the distant civilisation.

Chaoyang, Liaoning Deposits, 2001, Winter

"What's the point of all this?" I gripped the chisel tight, forcing my hands to ache.

"Fei." A puff of smoke fled from Bao's nostrils. *"Fossil-finding can be tedious but exciting, so you must be ready to discover artefacts we've never laid eyes on before."*

I examined the chisel rigidly as if searching for a serious purpose. *"I propose that humans should break all connections with the Mesozoic era."*

Another whiff of fumes drifted from Bao's cigarette to my face. He chuckled drunkenly, leaving the pale smoke dissipating in the bleak air.

"Well, what do you think?" I impulsively replied. A gush of defeat began to enclose me.

The air fell silent for a long minute.

"Is there even an answer? You are always so vague to me." I snapped.

"*I have no answer for you,*" muttered Bao, coughing hoarsely from the dense fog. "*You'll find the answer, Fei, but now isn't the right time.*" His mouth worked cleverly around the cigarette, as his words weaved cunningly through my heart.

I finally eased the chisel out of my grip.

There was a moment of peace idled between our bodies, as I inserted a cigarette tube inserted between my lips and ignited a narrow flame with my lighter. I gazed at the starry morning which had just begun its ascent, and gently puffed a stream of vapour towards the sunless sky that shrouded us in bitter solitude.

"*One second,*" Bao whispered. He lumbered away, retrieving a bristly brush from the duffle bag.

"*And what might you do with that?*" I scoffed, tossing away the cigarette.

Bao crouched slowly, tracing his wrinkled fingers along the blemished limestone.

"*You'll find nothing beneath that.*"

"*Don't make that assumption ahead of time,*" he retorted, positioning the brush beside him.

I urged once more. "*It'll take more than an entire day to find something remotely similar to a fossil.*"

Bao rubbed his chin with his knuckles, staring dumbly at the dim rocks. "*I disagree with that,*" he gruffly replied.

I unwittingly peered towards the lame ground, unconvinced by the blemishes on its surface. "*Well, you ought to agree after a day of fruitless work,*" I mocked.

Stillness hung awkwardly between our seemingly amplified breaths.

Through the barrenness of space, I gaped at the sparse stars which glistened softly like diamonds, as if leading the world towards new daylight. For a little while, those clusters of specks flared so brightly you could make out a lonely constellation in the desolate space—which vaguely resembled a vermilion bird.

"*Shed some light here for me, will you, Fei?*" Bao abruptly requested.

"*No, I've already said—*" The bright, unmoving shards in darkness drowned me of words.

Bao swung his arms loosely, his shoulders sloping as he dusted the ground with his bare hands. He knelt his scruffy jeans on the ground, allowing his palms to fondle the swelled rocks more gingerly—the way a father rubs his son's head. Clenching my teeth, I heaved a sigh and grudgingly ambled towards the duffel bag. For a moment, the image of the vermilion bird silently resonated in my head.

I raised the bronze handle of an oil lantern and propped it to his left. Bao kindly murmured "*Thank you.*" The timid flame of the foggy lantern casted a faint, orange glow on the patch of coarse-grained rocks, warmly illuminating Bao's perusal.

"*You see, Fei, fossils are only preserved in sedimentary rocks, not igneous or metamorphic ones.*" articulated Bao, as he lifted the brush and casually blew dust off. "*It prevents the deceased plants and animals from being eroded by other organisms.*"

I mulled over the fresh knowledge, feeling dumbfounded.

Bao clasped the brush intently, sweeping the debris off the limestone in partial but perfect swings of his wrist. "*The sedimentary rock over here exhibits a different colour,*" he remarked, wielding the bristly brush ingeniously with his thumb and forefinger.

"*How would you know it has a fossil?*" I frantically interrupted.

His quiet, meticulous brushstrokes were laced with precision—the precision of Mi Fu's as he dipped a cinnabar on his canvas. Bao delightedly replied, "*By studying its unusual lumps. They are brittle outside but quite hard below.*" He motioned the brush eagerly to indicate the bulging rocks on the ground, now mottled with flecks of white across the surface.

"*I highly doubt the presence of any fossils,*" I mumbled, staring morosely at the rock.

Bao softly giggled and said, "*Feel the rocks yourself,*" brushing the protruded rocks once more. I brought myself to the rough ground and drew my unwilling hands onto its surface. A subtle tremor quickly flooded my veins.

"*Sense anything yet?*" Bao couldn't help but grin at me.

"*I suppose so,*" I admitted reluctantly, more so to hide the ripple of intrigue that kindled in my heart

Bao smiled. He carefully stood up, letting a momentary sigh drift towards the blackness of space. "*Good, but the engravings are still imperceptible, though,*" he suddenly disclosed. "*We'll need tougher tools.*"

I gave Bao a solemn nod of agreement, and for an instant, his hazel eyes darted towards the desolate sky, confining an inexpressible yearning. "*Go on, Fei. You young folks have muscles of steel,*" he said sternly. I fruitlessly glanced at his detached demeanour, which swiftly vanished before long.

"Alright, Bao, just a moment." I threw him a smirk, but my heart throbbed with pity.

I shoved through the duffle bag and snagged a hefty hammer and a worn-out chisel. Bao studied me carefully, as I clutched the tools and began rupturing the brittle coating of the sedimentary rock. Jagged chunks of earth ebbed away over every blow, making a clamorous thud that pierced the stillness of the valleys. Drops of sweat began settling on the outskirts of the sediment, staining the rocks to a darker, moistened brown.

The rugged crusts kept fracturing apart over my incessant hammering.

The vague remnants were slowly materialising ever so spectacularly.

The highlands had begun revealing colour.

"The early sun's beauty warms the air." praised Bao; he and I sat on the crest of a hill, overseeing the vast beauty of Liaoning's highlands. From this height, it was as if the city were strewn with minuscule figures. The sun boasted frenetic rays to the azure sky, as the ocean ripples cascaded endlessly into the dimmer distance. I peered over the west, where the rosy sun crept over the distant hills, and for a glimpse, a stream of mist floated aside the mountain peaks.

I pointed to the quant fossil laid on the stark terrain. *"This must be the bird's tail, isn't that right Bao?"*

Bao smiled warmly, swathing me with a charming embrace. *"Spot on, Fei."* The brittle fossil glistened upon the soft, red glow of the early sun.

A brisk gale blew by, chilling our arms and faces. Soon after, the languid rhythm of the mountain winds slowly lulled the world to sleep, revealing a dancing silhouette in the sky. I watched the phantom intently; its head swivelled through the air, while the rest of its body followed an elegantly choreographed dance. Bao raised his gaze toward the distant clouds, and I wondered if he saw the same vague tableau as I did.

"Quite a revelation we've just made." he exclaimed. His gaze fixed on the sky for a long minute in an everlasting fascination.

"I suppose you're right," I replied, though there was a rotten feeling entrenched in my voice.

"Cheer up, boy, look what we've just discovered – the earliest Mesozoic bird ever found in China!"

The encroaching guilt kept yanking aggressively on me. *"Bao—"*

"Forget it, Fei." Bao's voice tumbled out as warm as the early spring, *"Cherish the present for your thoughts are too much of a burden."* His words dampened my sorrow at once. I couldn't help but break a warm smile.

The figure spiralled elegantly through the open sky, flaunting its movements to the quiet world below. Its unscathed feathers each glistened upon the sun's rays as pure as light as if to create new tunnels for the world to tread through.

"Doesn't the vermillion bird look very alike?" I uttered, as the memory of earlier suddenly resurfaced.

"The vermillion bird?" Bao's thick, grey eyebrows suddenly crooked up as if what I had just uttered was beyond fathomable. *"Perhaps there is some similarity."*

"Earlier, I saw the stars form a vermillion bird"

Bao mused; the folds on his forehead emerged shyly with every crease burying wisdom. *"You reckon...the fossil is the vermillion bird?"*

I dwelled in the thought but quickly shook my head dismissively. *"Perhaps not, I was just wondering"*

"The skeletal structure of the fossil tells us that the species is avian." said Bao. *"That's all we know for the time being."*

My gaze followed the soaring bird—the living embodiment of the fossil, and I continued my train of thought. *"So, how old is the species?"*

Bao smiled fondly. *"I'm not quite sure – but the fossil seemed to have rested within the earth for millions of years."*

"I'm assuming that is the Early Cretaceous period?"

Bao grinned *"Precisely. You're getting the hang of it, Fei."* His voice was like a gentle breeze floating down from space as I couldn't help but smile at him—this time, the smile of a light-hearted boy.

My eyes sifted through the creature's features amid its vivacious dance in the air. The bird had a pearly head attached to a blunt beak, oddly indistinguishable from modern birds. Its fine claws were buried discreetly under the

bird's breast as if poised to seize any gliding critters in its path. A wine red coated the bird's flimsy body, while a darker brown washed the bird's fluttering tail, resembling a feather quill pen. The bird's silky wings were also a shade darker than its body, flapping deftly against the breeze. For an instant, the blissful creature stretched perfectly over the sun's radiance, briefly dimming the placid peaks.

The whole figure of only an arm's length glided and danced to the very sheerest, yet through the desolation of time, every detail of its intricate body gently faded into the morning breeze. Now, the blazing sun had risen above the far hills, revealing a sharp crimson so radiant you would have mistaken it for a blood moon.

"*Beautiful isn't it,*" said Bao. He sat beside me gazing at the red expanse.

"*Yeah.*" I nodded gravely at his comment.

Daylight had washed away the biting chill with a stream of warmth. I listened intently to the soft twittering of the sparrows, which seemed to manifest nature's unrest from darkness.

I raised my index towards the emptiness of the sky. "*Did you see the big bird over there earlier?*"

"*Sure, Fei.*" Bao chuckled at me as if I was some naïve boy, his thick accent mingling with the silent hums of nature. Soon after, his distant eyes glimmered faintly, as if he became lost in memories of his poignant past. "*Today won't be forgotten, will it?*" He asked frankly and suddenly.

I gazed towards the scarlet-tinged clouds floating wearily towards the northeast. "*Today won't be forgotten, because we've made history,*" I declared.

Bao sat unmoving, his blue, grimy jeans melted onto the barren ground as I stole a glimpse of his collapsing figure. "*Everything alright?*" I hesitantly questioned.

His face grew pale, and his back began hunching like a withered crop as if tugged by his heavy breaths.

"*Bao, you there?*" I maddeningly pleaded, shoving his shoulders back and forth.

Bao fell quiet, his smile dissipating into the sunlight, as his flimsy limbs fell loose like broken glass.

"*Bao!*"

Everything blurred into an imperceptible deluge of rain over the next ten years.

The fireplace had ignited a soft, crackling fire within the barren room, casting a familiar warmth as cosy as dawn. I tucked myself under a thin quilt, lowering my gaze to the stark walls where the dancing flames drowned the silhouette of a lonely man. Neatly settled atop the fireplace glistened a polished glass box, awaiting to be unveiled and quickly seizing my attention. Raindrops began tapping the window sporadically, slithering down the glass as they made oddly comforting hissing noises. I brought myself to the fireplace and unlocked the box's untouched cover.

There was a lifeless fossil of a bird hewed painstakingly to the very finest. I traced my index over the narrow etches, and the recollections cascaded in, vivid and transient, carrying a familiar pang of sorrow. The gut-wrenching past came in like breath, but slowly drifted into oblivion.

As an old, static radio began cackling a broadcaster near the fire, I returned the fossil to its case.

"... *Many feathered dinosaurs have recently been recovered from the western Liaoning Province, however, the **Jeholornis prima** should be the earliest Mesozoic bird ever found in China, providing new evidence for the hypothesis that avian species came from dinosaurs. This bird is distinctively unusual amongst other known birds of the Early Cretaceous period, as it retains a skeletal tail composed of more than 20 caudal vertebrae. An overwhelming majority of avian fossils demonstrate that their last rear bone is always fused into a tail cone called pygostyle, and so is the case for modern birds. However, the number of caudal vertebrae in such species is comparatively more plentiful than that of birds we see now...*"

I dragged my legs closer to the low voice and amplified the radio.

"... *The discovery of **Jeholornis prima** remains unknown to this day, but it has provided us with much insight into the Jiufotang formation – an Early Cretaceous geological formation in Chaoyang, Liaoning. Palaeontologists also speculate there may be some connections with the **Vermillion bird**, which resembles a pheasant with a fire-coloured plumage. Physically, both birds are depicted in vibrant red hues with homogenous feather shapes, signifying similar survival strategies such as flight and mating capabilities. While mythically, both avian species are imagined embodying the spirit of new beginnings, symbolising the cycles of life and death.*" The buzzing radio fell silent.

I grinned ambivalently as a solitary tear trickled down my cheeks. “*The stars were beautiful, Bao. You should’ve seen them before you had to watch your final sunrise.*” Another bead of tear left my wet eyes, running discreetly along my cheekbones. “*The day was not forgotten, at least.*”

His voice chimed as if his spirit were caressing my heavy heart. “*Fei, you’ve seemed to have found the answer, haven’t you?*”

I peeked towards the foggy window, strewn with water droplets but now filtering the bright luminescence of the silver moon. “*Thank you, Bao,*” my wistful voice began trembling. “*You’ve taught me more than that.*”

The cheerful fire of the hearth soon made its final whimper, quieting into nothingness as the fossil on the desk faded into the inundating dark.

It stirs in the silent room—a perennial remnant whispering the vestige of our past.

The Sleeping 龍

ESF West Island School, Mohanty, Akshat – 15

Humanity has always tried to grasp what was beyond their reach for a power long since forgotten. The last pillars of an ancient society crumble beneath the ignorance of an age of men. Yet, inside every person lies the truth, the ancient story of the last dragon.

Long—forgotten myths, a creature out of the legends, born from the pure imagination of human creativity? Or perhaps it was a secret buried by the guilty. For where there is smoke, there is bound to be fire. This is a story from long ago in the place known to us as the motherland of the dragons stood the Great Wall of China.

Upon the epicentre of the great nation lay a hidden world where time itself was distorted beyond comprehension—an emerald green canopy below the endless blue sky. A place claimed by Mother Nature, emanating a sense of dread beyond understanding, was home to the legendary Sleeping Dragon. Born before humanity's dawn, a legion of these magnificent creatures roamed the earth and ruled the skies. However, the greed of the humans consumed the world, driving the great dragons into hiding. Forced into seclusion, with minimal food and water for survival, the population of these majestic beasts dwindled. Now, only one remained.

Hibernating for the past millennium, the ancient Sleeping Dragon was the only one of its kind. Deep within the great forest, it lay sleeping, waiting for its awakening, for the ultimate reckoning of humankind. Throbbing with life, the Elder Dragons preserved this sacred forest from a bygone era so that their chosen could rise at last. Protected in the heart of the only empire where dragons were considered gods, with powers capable of destroying the human

race. A blood pact had been made between the Elders of the Dragon race; upon the rise of their chosen, the only nation to be salvaged would be the Great Empire of China.

This story starts in a small village not far from the resting place of the Great Dragon. Houses lay in ruin, broken down to the foundations from which they were built. Large, imposing men, clad in suits of crimson armour marched around the town. They pillaged and plundered everything they could find. Driven by their lust for power, a great invading force had slowly spread across China. Led by the infamous General Khan, they had a long history of devouring the resources and enslaving anybody who dared stand against them. Now they had taken another, shackled in chains, they dragged all the women and children away. The men were subjected to gruelling work in the mines, supplying ore to the army for their conquest. All hope was lost among the villagers; great darkness had enveloped their hearts, and fear held them in its icy grasp.

Like a knight from ashes, one man dared to fight back. Lui had always been a defiant spirit, not unlike the great dragon. He was the son of the village head, battling at the front lines when the invasion started. Well-versed in the art of war, he was known for his unbreakable will and fighting prowess. He could wield not only the sword but also fight like a panther in the field with his unrivalled martial prowess, rivalled by only his father, the chief. He blasted through the enemy forces, single-handedly pushing them back.

It seemed that they might turn the tide and finally be able to topple General Khan's tyranny. Yet, as the fighting forces of the general were being pushed back, a shout was heard across the battlefield. With a sharp cry of pain, an arrow shot by the General himself pierced the heart of Lui's father. Lui's vision turned red; he hefted his great sword into the air and tore through the enemy lines with a guttural cry. Like a cyclone of slaughter, he bathed the battlefield red in the blood of his enemies as he ran for his father. In his eyes, nothing else mattered. With a final leap, he landed between the soldiers, screaming for somebody to get a healer. Cradling his father's head, he sobbed for a great deity to come to his aid. As his father bled out in front of him, he knew that this was the end. With a final breath of air, his father fell limp in his arms, pale and unmoving. Only if he had known, a tremendous ancient power had heard his words.

Trembling with rage and fury, he ran towards the man who had done this, who had killed his father. Only to find himself surrounded, bleeding from cuts inflicted by his reckless charge. At the hand of his enemy's mercy, he prepared for his land stand. He was bruised, but he could never be broken. As the last drops of adrenaline coursing through his veins came to a slow, he collapsed in a heap. The battle was lost, and all hope was shattered as Lui's consciousness faded.

Trembling waves of power coursed through the forest, awakening a primal spirit of old. Blazing crimson eyes glimmered in the night, piercing the souls of any who dared look his way. An aura of serenity billowed around the mythical creature, reminiscent of the gods themselves. Cloaked in the shadows, it spawled its massive body on the forest floor. A shard of moonlight crept through the forest canopy to illuminate the rippling scales; iridescent scales sparkled upon its tough hide. Deep marks ran across its back, creating a splay of unique patterns for the eye. Atop its looming head, long, sweeping horns curled back in a graceful arc. Dark as the night itself, they were a weapon capable of severing a man in half. The azure scales upon its body, tougher than iron, capable of deflecting even the most fearsome beasts. Unfolding like a rich tapestry, it spread its wings into the air.

Lui had embraced the darkness, welcoming his final end in the void. The weight of the silence pressed down on him like a physical force, suffocating the light that remained. Just as the void closed around him, a booming voice echoed like the warmth of an ignited flame beckoning him back. He was shaken to his soul as if the mountains had awoken.

“It is not your time, little one. You were destined for greater things.”

THUMP THUMP... Each heartbeat grew steadily louder, a blinding light swallowing him whole. A new life—one full of danger and pain awaited him. Lui gasped for breath, allowing air to fill his lungs. To his utter horror, the putrid stench of blood and gore infiltrated his nostrils, snapping his eyes wide open. Pandamonium stretched before him, and before his very eyes stretched out a vast expanse of bodies: his fallen comrades, the little children who used to be full of vigour and citizens of his beloved town. Bruiried in a mound of dead, decaying bodies in front of him lay his father cold to his touch. Panic surged through him, giving him the power to claw among the bodies to get free. Covered in grime and the blood of the fallen, he stood to be greeted by the chaos of his new reality.

A voice whispered in his mind, alluring him towards the sacred wood. Despite himself, he ran for the trace of power that had brought him back from the dead. For what felt like hours upon hours, he ran through the vegetation. He didn't dare take a stop for a break; turning back would only bring bad memories. Closing his eyes, he couldn't forget all the slaughter he had seen, his friends and family lying in the dirt. Snagging his foot on a root, he tripped forward, rolling into a clearing. Looking up, he stared into the face of what could only be described as the face of god. Immeasiable waves of powers swept through the clearing, causing him to faint before this divine form.

The arch dragon, ShenLong, pondered in amusement, staring at the puny human before him. How could this feeble form before him be the incarnation of Dragon Lord? The only human in existence to have ever lived within the society of dragons. A human capable of such magical mastery surpassed even the dragons' time. One of the most legendary humans known to the dragon race, stories of his inevitable return had always brought hope to the dragon race. Even now, when covered from head to toe in blood and sweat, he emanated an aura of such determination that it shocked the dragon into silence. Could it finally be upon us, the primal rebirth of the dragon era?

Awakening from his slumber, Lui found himself in an unfamiliar place. All around him, he could see lush vegetation and an abundance of life that could only be desired. He shuddered to think of the grave consequences if humans ever found out about this place. The tyrannous rule of General Khan alone would be enough to decimate this haven of creation. He still remembered the face of what had brought him here, the form of a dragon. There were many myths and stories about these gods among men that Lui had been told when he was young. To see one in real life would be comparable to finding the impossible. He had always heard that China was the land of dragons, but he had always considered it hearsay.

A humanoid shape jumped from its perch atop the high tree, a distance that would have easily shattered the bones of a normal human. It was a surreal sight; this creature's visage looked elegant yet domineering. The piercing eyes drew Lui's attention, the eyes of a regal prince. It spoke, a soothing and melodious sound escaping its lips.

“Welcome, human. I am ShenLong, the chosen of the Elders, the Sleeping Dragon, the Bane of men.”

His voice commanded a sense of respect; a deep primal instinct within Lui told him this was a creature parallel with the power of the gods. Throbbing with pain, he realised this dragon had spoken directly in his mind. He could hear the dragon perfectly without it so much as moving its lips.

“I know you have many questions. However, for the survival of you people, it may be prudent to hurry.” Lui stood there in a stupor. Before him was a creature of legends, a god beyond the mortal realm. Yet here it stood, beyond him in its full glory. Was he the one who had brought him back from the dead?

With a rumble from deep in his throat, he impatiently asked, “Well, human, we don’t have all day. Long I have slumbered within this forest, awaiting the time for my return, waiting for a worthy soul.”

Lui found his courage and spoke. “Oh, great Guardian deity, was it you who heard my distant plea? Calling me to this place to heed your call. If I may ask, are you the last of the ancient dragon?”

With a chuckle, the dragon replied. “Then let it be so. I am the last of the dragon race, driven to hiding by your human ancestors. The Elder Dragon chose me to bring harmony to this chaos-driven world.”

With a sudden flourish of power, the mighty dragon undid its polymorph, transforming into its true form. Opening its maw, the dragon let out a triumphant roar, soaring over the treetop with its mighty wings. Unfurling in flight, the dragon stretched vast and powerful, eclipsing the forest beneath its shadow. The last remnants of its human form burned away, revealing the majesty of a mythical creature that came back from the tales of history. Its clothes turned into beautiful dragon scales, encompassing the entirety of its body.

“As the chosen of Elders, I am an elemental dragon capable of harnessing the four elements to my will. With magic rivalling even the most component warriors, I am the harbinger of chaos, the protector of harmony and the guardian of the righteous.”

Lui stared in awe, watching these events beyond his comprehension. In his mind, the gods had sent him the answer to his call. He could still save his village and end the general's conquest. The dragon continued, standing tall in the glimmering light of the sun.

“My ancestors made a blood pack with you humans who tried to protect us. With your help, I shall purge humanity of all evil and incur the awaking of the dragon once again. I shall start my duties by aiding your people against this new enemy. So what say you, human, would you like to become the first Dragon Lord of your era?”

Regardless of his worries or any future consequences, Lui confidently replied, “I accept this burden and thus shall help you purge this blight from our lands.”

The moment these words left his mouth, Lui felt a surge of intense power. His body started rippling with a newfound energy, strengthening his muscles and invigorating his mind. A voice echoed through his head, the last memories of his father. He vowed in that instant he would stop at nothing to rid the world of scum. Magical energy started pulsing at his fingertips, covering his body in a translucent aura of elemental protection. In his mind, he unlocked the secrets of the elements, understanding Fire, Water, Earth, and Wind. These once trivial concepts now seem potent weapons capable of mass destruction, whether it be for good or evil.

Back at the army base camp, a gigantic shadow opened itself over them like a thundercloud. They looked up to see the incredible vision of a titanic creature sailing through a slight film of greens and whites in the open sky above, demon-like, with wings stretched wide like the roaring sails of a great ship, casting an excellent shadow on all below.

Terror seized their hearts and wonder as the creature gave a thunderclap roar that rolled throughout the valley. It resulted in a cacophony of crashing roars and the whisking of leaves—magic flared out around them.

To the horror of the watching soldiers and workers alike, sitting on the porch of this massive beast seemed to be a human. Cloaked in translucent armour, he looked like a god of war coming down to punish all who caused trouble. Held in his grip was a greatsword cracking with power; all around it, the elements themselves seemed to bend to his will. Getting to his feet, this human leapt into the air, landing at the foot of the bloodied battlefield.

Villagers who recognised Lui's face were stuck in a stupor. They had seen the village head's son fall in the battle, stuck down by numerous foes. However, here he stood in front of them, clad in brilliant light, atop a mighty dragon. As the dragon began to conjure some great pinnacle spell, the warriors of the great general charged at Lui. Letting loose a torrent of fire and wind, a kaleidoscopic aura encompassed the soldiers rushing at Lui. Unable to handle the radiant light seeping out of the young man before them, they were rendered helpless, at the mercy of the god before them. Each and every one of the enemy warriors were stuck with ethereal swords made of scarlet flames, scattering the once great army of General Khan. Up above, the dragon released the spell he had been holding, as waves of golden light stuck the entire village—arrays of straggling soldiers were stuck with hellish flames while healing the innocent of the town.

Upon this sight, straight out of fairytales, the villagers felt newfound hope blossoming all around them. With a fearsome roar, the entire town charged at the remaining warriors. People holding pots and pans stuck the army head—on as workers with pickaxes charged at the general's escort. Amidst all the chaos, Lui helped his bow, which sparkled with newfound power. Dragoic runes covered the bow, blessed by the Sleeping Dragon himself. Ready the arrow, Lui aimed true towards the towering body of the General. With a crack, like a thunderclap, the arrow pulsing with power sped towards the general. Speeding past the numerous villagers fighting for their town, the arrow pierced the general through his heart. Before the body of the tyrant general hit the floor, it disintegrated into a puff of smoke. The pure power caused by the hit created an arch of energy reaching the far sky.

Dust faded from the scene. With one last united cry, the villagers raised their arms to praise their protector. A roar echoed through the desolate field, parting the cloud and allowing light to bathe the town once again.

Lui felt pride at this display as he saw the joy on everyone's faces. From this day onwards, he would become the bridge between humans and dragons, the revered Dragon Lord, with the Sleeping Dragon at his side, the guardian of China. Lui knew it was his responsibility to make sure that the legends of the dragon lived on through the generations for the next Dragon Lord.

Thus, in this land of dragons, there still may remain some hope for the future. You could be lucky enough to see the magnificence of such a divine creature—the symbol of power, success and good fortune for all of China.

From Dragon Bones to the Present

German Swiss International School, Poon, Jayden – 15

Introduction:

Humans have always been fascinated with what came before them, whether it is the origin of the universe, or the evolution of our planet. Dinosaurs once stood at the apex of our planet's food chain and their eventual demise holds the key to understanding important events of our planet's history. Globally, palaeontology is a well-established science supported by long-term robust research. Quietly, China has accelerated its efforts in the field and has emerged as one of the global epicentres of fossil hunting. The province of Liaoning alone resulted in the discovery of over 40 new dinosaur species.

With the advent of new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), 3D Imaging, and mapping techniques, an increasing number of fossils are discovered in different parts of China. Many scientists speculate that in the next few years, even more significant discoveries will emerge from China not only due to new interest and advanced techniques, but also because the region has been historically underexplored.

I believe the future of Chinese fossil hunting is bright, and knowledge yielded from these discoveries will be instrumental in learning more about life on Earth, evolution, and our species as a whole. This essay will examine various aspects of Chinese palaeontology, including its history, advancements of related new technology, and potential challenges.

Why has China been underexplored?

The reason that China has been historically underexplored, spanning most of the late 19th century and the whole of the 20th century, is multifaceted. This section of the essay will explore the history of Chinese palaeontology and its development, with a specific focus on why the under exploration of the field.

Exploitation and Isolation:

The Chinese can be credited with the lofty title of the first civilisation to discover underground fossils. In fact, potential dinosaur fossils in China were referred to as “dragon bones” by Chinese locals. These bones and rocks were used in traditional Chinese medicine, and some believed that they possessed healing properties. Records of fossil discoveries in China date back to 120 BCE, when a fossil was discovered during the building of a canal. This highlights how dinosaur fossils contributed to Chinese culture, as dinosaurs were depicted as powerful legendary creatures that some civilians worshipped.

Historically, while Western scientists were unveiling their greatest paleontological discoveries, China was in the Late Qing Dynasty, which was led by Empress Dowager Cixi (1869–1908). During that period, many Western scholars and missionaries had appreciated China’s significance in fossil research, but they were often shunned and distrusted by Chinese scientists. As a result, there was limited collaborations and sharing in the field palaeontology between Chinese and Western scientists leading to Chinese scientists trailing behind their Western counterparts. This lack of trust was not coincidental; it stemmed from skepticism and resentment from Chinese scientists due to historical Western exploitation of China (such as the Opium Wars). This type of cultural isolation was typical of China in the 19th Century – for example, the period of reform that led to the adoption of a more Western style government and military (the self-strengthening movement) only happened after severe upheaval (the Boxer Uprising).

Additionally, scientific expeditions, such as the AMNH (American Museum of Natural History) expedition, which began in 1921 through China and Mongolia, did not include Chinese scientists, and all fossils/treasures excavated were taken away by American explorers. Many of these fossils still remain in American or European museums to this date. Even after it was mandated in 1927 that each expedition had to include at least one Chinese scientist, Chinese members were deliberately excluded from full involvement. It is no surprise that in such circumstances, it would have been difficult for them to conduct further paleontological research after the departure of the AMNH in 1930.

This exploitation of Chinese resources was common at the time in all fields. In response, a scientific nationalism began to take root, with influential scientists such as Yang Zhongjiang (a Chinese palaeontologist that participated in AMNH expeditions) encouraging the Chinese to learn the principles of foreign investigative methods and tools to conduct research on their own soil. He pointed out that foreign powers had repeatedly conducted excavations in China, but no Chinese research team had conducted similar expeditions in other countries.

Between 1870–1930, all the most well-known fossil discoveries such as the *Stegosaurus*, the *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, and the *Triceratops*, were all made by Western scientists outside of China. Without international collaboration and sharing of best practices, it was challenging for Chinese palaeontologists to make significant discoveries. Although Chinese palaeontology did develop further after 1930, it took time for the science in China to gain momentum.

Limitations in Exposure:

Chinese palaeontology experienced several major successes in the mid-20th century, from the discovery and reconstruction of *Lufengosaurus huenei* (1940), to the formation of the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology (1950). However, during this period, international collaboration between China and the West slowed again due to the Cold War.

After the Truman Doctrine in 1947, the world became divided into two ideological spheres: the West and the Soviet Union. This situation was not conducive to worldwide scientific research, as China was mostly limited to scientific exchange with Warsaw Pact countries. Meanwhile, Western countries could not easily access the research of Soviet or Chinese scientists. This is another historical factor that led to the under exploration of China’s palaeontology field.

Nevertheless, this time period has been credited as the beginning of China's emergence in the scientific community. Chinese scientific reform followed a similar pattern to the Soviet model, with the Chinese Academy of Sciences being organised almost identically to the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The increased coordination in the field of science between China and the Soviet Union also led to long needed international recognition for Chinese technological developments within countries in the Soviet sphere. However, due to the ongoing ideological struggle, many Western countries still paid little attention to China as it is considered as a communist country that was aligned with the Soviet Union.

It would be misleading to state that there were no instances of international collaboration between China and any Western country. Notable projects, such as the China–Canada Dinosaur Project in 1986, demonstrated successful partnerships, culminating in a tour that showcased the team's findings in 1991. However, without the Cold War, these joint expeditions could have taken place earlier, potentially leading to greater exploration and discoveries in China.

In conclusion, the underexploration of China's palaeontological resources can be attributed to factors such as exploitation and isolation (1860–1930), and limitations in exposure and collaboration (1949–1991). Looking ahead, the increasing investment in research and collaboration offers a promising pathway for significant advancements in the field.

What new technology can be used?

China has developed rapidly in the field of palaeontology, incorporating new technologies, including AI, 3D Scanning, and Geographic Information Systems Technology. These innovations have allowed scientists to significantly increase their speed and efficiency in fossil discovery and identification. Tasks that once took months using traditional methods can now be completed in just days with the aid of these new tools.

AI:

AI has greatly expanded the ability of researchers to analyse data for the classification and identification of fossils. With the development of machine learning – where a computer is able to emulate the act of “learning”, as a human does, based on training with significant amounts of test data – AI has become a powerful tool in palaeontology. These AI models are able to recognize certain trends and patterns that may go unnoticed by humans.

The results of this process are captured in a database for human palaeontologists to review. Segmented images of the fossils obtained via CT (Computed Tomography) scans can also be processed using AI. In many cases, density differences between surrounding rocks and the fossil can also be very low, meaning that before the advent of AI, manual work was needed to go through each slice and digitally extract each ROI (Region of Interest).

Studies have shown that the accuracy of AI models is comparable to traditional manual methods, with most skull morphologies—including teeth, jaws, and cranial bones—being accurately identified by AI. This advancement reduces processing time and allows palaeontologists to focus on interpreting results rather than labor-intensive data extraction.

While AI has been theorized and developed for over a decade, its application in Chinese palaeontology is only just beginning, showing immense promise for the field. Chinese scientists have already demonstrated significant success with AI in other disciplines, including weather forecasting, hydrology, seismology, and other Earth sciences. Additionally, as more fossils are uncovered in regions such as Liaoning and Yunnan, the availability of test data is increasing, further improving the speed and accuracy of AI models.

With these advancements reducing processing time and increasing efficiency, it is exciting to imagine the new species of dinosaurs that Chinese scientists will discover in the near future!

3D Imaging:

In tandem with AI, another transformative technology in palaeontology is 3D imaging. This non-destructive method allows researchers to analyze specimens while they are still encased in rock, avoiding potential damage that often occurs during fossil extraction. The significance of this technology lies in its ability to preserve

fossils while providing detailed insights. In the digital age, 3D imaging also enables digital models to be shared and transmitted between scientists, enhancing the accuracy of peer review and fostering greater scientific communication.

The core of this technology relies on how rocks of different densities respond to X-ray radiation. X-rays, a type of electromagnetic radiation with a short wavelength and high frequency, are the same mechanism used in medical X-rays and CT scans to detect cancers or tumors. Historically, palaeontologists had to physically cut fossils into micro “slices” to study their morphology. With 3D imaging, however, computers can now generate detailed 3D models of fossils that can be digitally manipulated, significantly reducing the need for manual dissection.

Unlike AI, 3D scanning technology has already been widely adopted by Chinese scientists. For instance, at an archaeological dig in Yunnan Province in 2021, researchers used a scanning system called “Track-Scan 3D,” an independently developed technology. This system was able to create a highly precise model with a margin of error of only 0.025mm. The resulting model revealed a fossil of *Lufengosaurus*, a dinosaur that lived over 190 million years ago!

GIS (Geographical Information Systems)

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are computer-based tools that enable scientists to capture, store, manipulate, and analyze geographic data in a practical and efficient way. In palaeontology, GIS allows researchers to create geo-databases to study the spatial distribution of fossils using satellite technology or drones, which are particularly useful in dangerous or hard-to-reach areas.

The spatial distribution of prehistoric fossils provides valuable insights to scientists, as it allows the analysis of patterns related to taphonomy (the study of decay and fossilization) and paleoecology (the study of ancient ecosystems). Additionally, GIS can be applied to uncover ecological links between dinosaurs and other species that coexisted in the same environment. Key types of data recorded include the position, size, and orientation of fossilized bones, a process known as “bone mapping.”

While GIS technology has been extensively utilized in archaeology, it was not widely adopted in the field of palaeontology. This is because palaeontological sites often represent broader time intervals, making taxonomical and taphonomical data less complete. However, recent advancements have demonstrated the potential of GIS in palaeontology. By combining GIS with high-precision surveying devices, scientists have been able to evaluate the spatial relationships of dinosaur fossils more effectively.

Notable studies, such as those by Bramble et al. and Bertog et al. in 2014, as well as research by Gáspár Albert, Gábor Botfalvai, and Attila Ősi in 2018, showcase the significant promise of GIS technology. These studies illustrate how GIS can facilitate easier access to palaeontological fieldwork while enhancing the ability of researchers to interpret data for paleoecological reconstruction. As GIS continues to evolve, it offers an exciting avenue for improving palaeontological research and uncovering new insights into ancient ecosystems.

What factors could negatively impact the trajectory of Chinese fossil hunting?

With the historic underexploration of many parts of China giving way to the potential to discover countless new species, what challenges could the field of Chinese palaeontology face? This section will outline factors that may hamper fossil classification, and what measures are being implemented to solve them.

The Illegal Fossil Trade and the Commercialization of Fossils:

In recent years, the growing interest and increased funding for Chinese vertebrate palaeontology have brought about a significant challenge: the forgery and illegal sale of fossils. This issue is deeply tied to the traditional belief in fossils as “dragon bones,” with some individuals collecting them for use in traditional Chinese medicine. According to the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), in 2023, nine people were arrested in Gansu Province for stealing over 400 kilograms of fossils. While these fossils were primarily identified as belonging to mammals such as elephants and rhinoceroses, SCMP acknowledged the possibility that the poachers may have also acquired dinosaur fossils.

In Liaoning Province, the problem is further compounded by local farmers who dig up fossils in hopes of making a fortune by selling them. This practice has drawn strong criticism from Chinese authorities. In 2004, 24 illegal mine shafts used by farmers and black market fossil dealers to excavate fossils were demolished as part of a crackdown on fossil smuggling and illegal trade.

The illegal excavation and trafficking of fossils not only hinder scientific research but also pose a serious threat to the preservation and restoration of these invaluable natural artifacts. Addressing these issues requires continued efforts in enforcing regulations, increasing public awareness about the scientific importance of fossils, and offering alternative means of livelihood to those who rely on fossil sales for income.

Furthermore, the Chinese central government has recently made significant efforts to address this issue. In 2010, the Chinese State Council tightened restrictions on obtaining excavation permits and imposed hefty fines for infractions. All high-priority fossils discovered are designated as state property, with both provincial authorities and the central government responsible for apprehending fossil poachers and preventing the illegal import and export of such materials. In 2019, the Regulations on Protection of Fossils were further amended to establish a National Expert Committee on Fossils and to provide further clarity on the export approval process.

International Collaboration:

Historically, there has been a lack of international collaboration between Chinese and Western palaeontologists due to aforementioned reasons. To solve this issue, some have proposed Chinese scientists taking the lead in palaeontology by introducing a “mega science project”. One potential example is the DDE (Deep Time Digital Earth) project, which aims to use geo-datasets and new technology to piece together Earth’s past.

However, some palaeontologists remain cautious about this approach. Palaeontologists typically prefer to work in smaller and more focused groups, which makes coordinating a “mega-project” challenging and difficult to coordinate. Despite this, progress has been made in fostering international collaborations. Chinese scientists have increasingly taken on author roles in international research papers, and the Chinese government has initiated large-scale palaeontological projects with budgets exceeding tens of millions of yuan. These projects rival or even surpass those initiated by the United States and European countries. If this trend continues, many believe that Chinese palaeontologists will play a larger role in international collaborations, bolstered by their growing hands-on experience.

Conclusion:

I am optimistic that with adequate funding and the strategic use of new technologies, the field of palaeontology in China will continue with its momentum and achieve significant breakthroughs in uncovering our past. Given the historical context, there is great potential for further research in China—who knows what discoveries lie ahead?

Rising From the Ashes

Harrow International School Beijing, Cheng, Shihan Cathy – 14

At the heart of China, where the metropolis was painted with vivid neon lights and towering skyscrapers, I found myself at the verge of a scientific revolution. The past few days were heaped with the hum of innovative machines and the excitement of communicating with experts from China who specialize in genetic engineering. As a loyal follower of my passion, I had been driven by curiosity of the mystery of life and time, dedicating my time to make any new findings to improve society.

The warm hue of golden sun rays glowed and shimmered once it set on the glass surface of the research facility, as if cheering with us that we accomplished the impossible: an incredible success in the cloning of a Sinosauropteryx. It was a modern scientific miracle done by using various methods, including extracting a well-preserved chain of DNA from the fossil. The moment was dreamlike; We were standing on the shoulders of giants who set the foundation for our research, further reaching a summit in our scientific journey.

“Dr. Zhang! The data shows this cloned creature is waking up!” One of my colleagues rushed into my office, revealing the great news.

A buzz of excitement filled the lab. Crowds of scientists stood in awe, all gazing at the isolated creature resting peacefully in its nest on the other side of a floor-to-ceiling glass window. An ancient life had been reborn, a cloned Sinosauropteryx, named Liang, laying at its most vulnerable state. Its skinny body wrapped in a cocoon of rich amniotic fluids filled with nutrients

As I gazed at the marvelous artificially-created animal, and I couldn't help but to admire the intricate details carved by time itself. Soft feathers, a blend of colors from cream to chestnut, covered its body, shimmered as if it was a silk cloth woven by mother nature. Each time the heart pumped, I am reminded of how the life that was lost to time hidden beneath the earth finally having the chance to rejoin us under the blazing sun.

The rebirth of Liang was a miracle, a treasure to showcase the power of human intelligence and desire for knowledge. News of Liang spread like wildfire, striking everyone's attention around the world. Hoards of journalists and media reporters gathered at our lab relentlessly, like moth drawn to fire, eager to catch a glimpse of this once buried treasure. However, in addition to fame and honor, following the sense of triumph was a deep sense of responsibility to protect it. So we announced to the public our plans to introduce Liang to society after his vitals stabilize when he had grown into a young adolescent form.

As Liang matured, it became a great flutter, a living testament of time reborn from ashes. His presence proved to the public the vast potential of genetic engineering, driving people to explore the boundaries of this career. However, as days turned into weeks, weeks into months, months into years, there was only a subtle change in Liang's actions and facial expressions. His once pure eyes now reflected an increasing feeling of unease, as if he was becoming aware of his status and artificial surroundings.

At the same time, the public was not fascinated for what they saw, videos and images of the precious creature. They clamored and wanted to see the dinosaur, to observe and praise each and every movement. The dinosaur that came alive was the center of media scrutiny. People expected it to live according to their imagination and will, without understanding it was an ancient life that was foreign in this modern society. Chaos happened with in sudden moment, with protestor and rioters storming the research lab. The tension between us in the scientific community and the curious and demanding public grew. With no other choice, we upgraded the facilities. From a simple glass window from the ceiling to the floor. Liang's scientific sanctuary in the pristine lab turned into a media spectacle. Bright lights from cameras shimmered and flashed as each photo was taken almost every few minutes, as if Liang was an idol starring in its extraordinary tale of scientific wonder. Despite feeling proud of our achievement, yet the feeling that something was amiss cannot be ignored deep in my heart.

Liang's vibrant and colorful personality began to change, becoming more apparent with each day passing by. His strong feet thumped on the ground as he paces back and forth restlessly. His eyes filled with anxiety, darting from one corner to the other, searching for a route for his escape away from this artificial prison. The creature was yearning for a substance beyond what we could provide, out of this artificial world we created specifically for him. In his eyes burned a longing for freedom.

An ethical question emerged, like a ripple in a still surface, causing a chain of actions to make it right for Liang. We, scientists realized our role and responsibilities. We had created a creature that once roamed the earth long before us, by imprisoning it in a false habitat and subjected it to public display, I cannot ignore the heavy burden that laid on my shoulders, for our actions pressed on me leaving me breathless. I knew we needed to find a balance to solve this dilemma between science and desire, a way to ensure Liang's health and to let our society return to what it should be.

Since the word of a successful cloning was created spread like a tide, it attracts a firestorm of desire by those who tends to seek the wonders of the past for their own benefits. Desire and greed began to creep into the

metropolis, people began to avoid topics of ethical issues and his existence. Producers who aim to maximize the financial gain saw the chance to create a living spectacular opening to all to watch and observe this ancient creature. This organization of producers saw the business value in entertainment theme parks, in the past the content of the games is made by computers, but now Liang's existence proved that there is a chance for cloned dinosaurs to play a major role in creating an intrinsic experience for its audiences.

In the unknown corners of the fancy city, a scheme began to take shape. An organization of deceitful individuals, drawn by their personal desires and dishonored twisted sense of ambition, was bound to capture Liang for their own purpose. They imagined illusions where they are able to create descendants of all the available cloned dinosaur species, creating a new market which will help them generate more wealth. Their wild thoughts of being a monopoly and generating a new technology market that seemed crazy even further shows that they have a shocking amount of wealth presently

The organization soon began its movement, by using the effect they have on social media, they spread false concepts of how cruel our lab is to Liang and other negative ideas. They give promises of cash and fame to ones who aids them on their journey, implanting thoughts as such of a world where boundaries of nature and subjects can be explored to its limits. Liang and other future cloned dinosaur were no longer seen as a brainchild on an exclusive subject of science, it is viewed as a product and service available for people to exchange in a market. However, if cloned dinosaurs are defined as an aspect in entertainment rather than cloned genes, it is a distortion of achievement. As if mankind is the gods, controlling the life of organisms without considering the consequences.

Soon as I acknowledge this cunning plan, I cannot sit idly and let it happen while the future is threatened. With a deep sense of responsibility to maintain the hard work we achieved and to ensure our project was not overexposed to ones who wants to manipulate it. The journey is a quest that is full of barriers and danger, but with the faith that determines my mind, I will do anything to protect Liang and to calm the public opinion.

The night Liang escaped was a peaceful night, but the silence quickly disappeared. The miracle had escaped and broken free of the restrictions that imprisoned him! Newspapers caught his disappearance, sending shockwaves worldwide. The world seemed to be quiet for a while before it sprung into a chain of disorder. Panic and confusion surrounded the city, as our team scrambled to find the missing dinosaur. Scientists argued and echoes lasting in the halls like a disharmonious music of despair. A feeling of guilt of responsibility washed over me like a tsunami crushing me to the floor, knowing that we failed our mission to protect him.

With my determined faith to find Liang and set things right, I began on a quest that reached the city and beyond. The search was long lasting and complex like a maze, each footstep and clue led to new discoveries that we never imagined. Traveling through crowded streets and narrow alleys, my heart pounded with mixing determination and fear at every turn. The familiar city seemed like a labyrinth; it secrets hidden and buried in the thick mud.

After days of relentless searching, faint tracks of Liang guide me toward a clear area of the metropolis that was forgotten by development. A place where nature remained the same. Trees as tall as skyscrapers pointed towards the sun with the melancholic tune composed by birds and nature. "Shh, shh" my pants brushed the leaves, as I approached Liang silently. He was standing there, and his feathers were ruffled by the morning breeze. His gigantic eyes focused at the horizon of the wild. He found his solace in the chaotic world. He embraced the pristine and undisturbed wilderness, a place for him to truly be himself.

When the sun rays shone on my face again, I raised my hand to feel the warm rays of light. Liang belonged here as it was meant to; no matter how hard we tried, he did not belong in the cold artificial world. Instead, this was a right place. We must create a protected natural habitat for him and cloned ones that might follow, a place for them to live in harmony without the disturbance from human actions and emotions.

The quest that I set on was never alone, we had fought many challenges. We faced bitter opinions and opposition from different corner of society. There were still arguments that my actions were irresponsible for mankind and reckless. Yet, I remained the way I was and had always been. Like Liang, we belonged where we should be and would survive without harming others. Driven by the desire to explore my field of science and right the wrongs of the past, I stayed on the road I travelled, even if I was alone to ensure the future of mankind and dinosaurs.

In a sense of awe and satisfaction, I gazed at a hidden spot when Liang reunited with other cloned dinosaurs. They slowly adapted to their new environment, roaming through the wild land where grass grew so tall that it could hide a man. Their smooth muscles depicted the beauty of life, like dancers from a mysterious land performing their own ancient ritual. Biodiversity was what built up this unique planet. It was a chance to be reborn from ashes and a testament of endurance of life.

The Dirge of the Dinosaur

Heep Yunn School, Chau, Chung Yan – 15

Gobi Desert — 1960

The blazing sun shone on the cool desert floor, desiccating the land quickly after a storm, leaving the air humid and stifling. Standing beside a fissure was a man, wearing a brim hat, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. A fly flew towards his nose, irking him, as he reached out for the bottle of crimson liquid hanging from his bag. From afar, the cries amplified into a roar. Looking behind his back with his eyes squinted, he knew this could not wait any longer. His journey could not be futile. Turning his back hurriedly at the noise, he opened the bottle and poured the liquid into the narrow crack in front of him.

This has to work, he thought. *This has to work...*

Anxiously, he glanced behind him again, trying to get a glimpse of the shadows cast on the sand as the cries louden.

Please work..., he thought desperately. Almost immediately after that, smoke started to rise from the hollow crack, giving out hissing sounds. A fire splinted out from the earth and within seconds, it spread like the wind, swallowing sand and trees alike within its reach. For a moment, there was nothing but smoke and dust. Then the howls became louder, and the horses and men came into the scene. They knew that they were too late, having seen the bottle emptied, lying spiritless on the ground together with the brim hat half-buried in the sand. The men, furious with their failure, yelled and screamed.

They thought their failure meant the end of the story.

What they did not know was that more were coming. Lurking in the shadows was a creature with scales in deep, rich mahogany colour, its eyes blazingly golden in a preternatural way. It perched high in the desert mountains, out of one's prying eyes, as if it is waiting for destiny's call...

Tibet, China — 1991

A red-winged dinosaur was featured on the national news. People gathered to watch eagerly as the radio sounded:

'After years of effort, our country has finally attained footage of the beast from last year's earthquake. Until then, one could only murmur about the sighting of an avian creature and be considered insane. Now, there is proof. The once mythic creature was seen to be near the cities of Tibet. It appears to be destroying the city itself. One may associate its features with the legendary devil, banned in our country since the early 1900s, the Hondo dinosaur, and its haunted spirit. Some may think that our country has fallen into the curse of the creature, and it might as well be true...'

Guizhou, China — 1959

The man in the brim hat entered the cave with a lighted torch. He had to get what he had come for. There was no way he could go back to the village with empty hands, disappointing his wife and endangering his daughter with her fatal sickness.

He looked down at his map. *This should be it. It has to be it.* He went towards the cave's wall, tracing his hands along the cravings which he had already remembered by heart. He spoke a ritual, knelt down on the ground, and held out his hands. For a moment, nothing happened. Then the walls brightened with a golden blaze — the ground shook as the ceiling creaked and opened slowly, dropping in rocks and debris along with a few drops of crimson liquid. The man quickly got up and went to fetch a bowl he had brought along to collect the malodorous lava-like juice. He could not lose a drop; a life depended on it. Then, a headache struck him, as sudden as lightning. Still, he held hard onto the bowl and tried to stand straight; this was his only chance to save his sweetheart, he couldn't surrender now.

Then a voice echoed:

*'Who dares to disturb the Cave of Hondo,
hidden for centuries from the greedy.
How has one come to undo,
the buried bones and blood of the mighty.'*

'I've come to seek the blood of your spirit,' said the man bravely. There was no way out now; he had to stand firm.

*'Bravery — a vital quality,
to seek the antidote to all.
Consequences — the only mean,
to redeem one's life, in my name.'*

'I am a man of his words,' answered the man, 'I shall keep my promise and be forever in debt to your spirit for the centuries to come, just in exchange for the dinosaur's blood.'

*'Reach the desert of Godi, as you may,
turn the once blessing into a curse.
Be the unrecognised hero till the dawn of day,
while the rest shall hunt you, for humans' thirst.'*

At this point, the cave rumbled, and the man, clenching to the bowl of precious blood, ran out of the cave before it came down in a rumble, enveloping the site, leaving nothing but debris of earth.

He went back with the cursed blessing, almost elated desperately. He had to save his child even when it meant making a deal with the devil.

The child was saved in the end. A speedy recovery was guaranteed, and the mother danced with the child in the gardens of spring as soon as she could land her feet on the ground. Meanwhile, news of the awakening of Hondo the dinosaur spread to the emperor. The soldiers were immediately sent off to hunt down the apostasy of the country's religion.

And so one night he left without a formal goodbye, with only the bottle of blood that had once been his only hope, and a new map in his hands, a red circle surrounding the grey deserts of Gobi.

Gobi Desert — 1990

He had a sudden spectre of a disaster: buildings collapsing as the ground split apart, women and children clinching to the edges of cliffs. An infinite howl rang in the background as the city was torn apart. Looking up, he saw the plesiosaurs, slithering within the clouds, lightning and storm. Those serpent-like dinosaurs, he knew, were the devils he had to defeat. Prophecy had called. He was to fulfill his duty in exchange for his daughter's health which was granted long ago. He thought of her smile on her face, that day when she could finally leave the cursed bed and dance in the meadows. He knew that there was no way he would regret what he had done.

The dinosaur woke up with a start. He knew that stopping those monsters would be the start of his destined nightmare, but he had to. Fate was never something one could change upon a sacred promise.

He thought his misery would start as soon as he arrived in Tibet.

What he did not know was that danger crept in that night as he set off with his wings.

As long as the stars shone, as long as the blood of the Hondo dinosaur ran through his veins, he would be seen, he would be heard.

Tibet, China — 1990

The storm started at 12:00 am as he predicted. Surreptitiously, he swooped into the village and landed on the roof of a farmhouse. Horrible timing it must have been, for him to remember the words of the spirit years ago:

Be the unrecognised hero till the dawn of day, while the rest shall hunt you, for humans' thirst.

He knew horrors awaited, *how* was the true question.

He did not need to wait for long, for the plesiosaurs soon appeared. He knew that only he could see them — even when the storms and earthquakes were their doings, the mortals could only make out the natural phenomena, not the spirits.

He felt a cordial dislike towards those plesiosaurs as soon as he set eyes on them. It was as though they had known each other since day one; such was destiny. Flashbacks came to him as he witnessed their previous quarrels and brawls. Were they his childhood enemies? He wasn't sure. The only thing he knew was that he was destined to hate them, destined to meet them, and destined to kill them. He had to draw blood.

As he sent the two spirits to the pit of death, he knew that his job wasn't finished yet. Hondo had told him that it would be a torment of a lifetime. He knew that those monstrous spirits would reincarnate one day, in different forms, at a different time. And it would have to happen all over again: a fight, then a death. Its eternity was his punishment.

He was not entirely wrong. Since the devil had better plans that he would never have guessed, an eternal hero was not the only role he had to play. In fact, another chapter of his story started right there.

Too tired to set off again immediately after the lacklustre fight, he lay down in the trees with his wings wrapped around his enormous body. That was when a girl in a green military uniform snapped her camera in the bushes.

She would bring news, and he would be news.

What both of them did not know was that this was their first family reunion after years of separation.

Beijing, capital of China — 2023

‘Our futile attempts in tracking the Hondo dinosaur in the past three years would not be wasted,’ said the general in her green military uniform, ‘The photo I took that night in 1990 was proof, *significant* proof, that the spirit which had been trapped in the cave had long been set free. The myth is true; people have not been seeing things, and we, the military, are here to put a stop to this disaster before the wicked dinosaur is to ruin another city.’

She pointed at the display: a picture capturing the blood-red dinosaur flying amidst the collapsing houses, dated 2001 in Shanghai. Beside it was another one, with the dinosaur beside the riverbank as a tsunami wiped out the whole of Shandong, dated 2016. The next picture on the slide, dated 2022, was one featuring the dinosaur amidst a roar, with its claws perching on the top of a bridge in Nanjing. The one next to it showed the ruins of the once grand architecture, with a red flurry blur fleeing from the scene.

‘There is destruction wherever he goes. We will put an end to this. Our country will not lie in ruins and be left in the wrath of this filthy beast.’

Roars of agreement were heard from the audience as the general continued her speech. ‘Fortunately, we have been informed of sightings near the deserts of Gobi. We have already prepared our finest crew to enter the deserted land for a grand hunt, and I shall lead the crew. Our hunt shall take place at the start of next year. We promise, good citizens, that we will take down this dinosaur before the next curse strikes. We will end this torture for all, by recapturing the spirit of Hondo!’

Gobi Desert — 2024

He had a vision.

In the past few years, he would have visions of the plesiosaurs — his destined enemies. It would be a call to his service. He would defeat them, save the country from catastrophe, and return to the shadows of the stalactites in the sacred cavern in Gobi.

This time, it was no longer the plesiosaurs.

He saw himself traversing through time, drifting through a past that he was never able to be a part of. He witnessed the childhood of a girl. A girl with brown curls, dancing in the meadows with her mother. A girl who would sing sweetly to the birds in the orchid trees. A girl who, having faced inevitable death, grew up understanding how precious life was, and in return for her luck, would do anything for her country and the people’s safety. She was the general of China.

She was his sweetheart.

The surge of pride he felt for that instant overwhelmed him. This was what he had always wanted — his girl, lively and happy, having grown up to be a respected warrior.

Then a gust of wind washed away the scene, and a vast desert appeared — *his* desert, under the morning sun amidst the weather storms. He knew that it was soon; it was tomorrow. In the distance, he heard the rumbling noises of drums and men. He shuddered at the noise. It felt like he was back in 1960 when everything started. But it was not the soldiers on horses he had escaped from years ago; it was the military in green uniform. They came, at last. Was this his last punishment? Was this the end? He did not dare to give it any hope yet. That was when he saw her — with her brown curls tied up in a ponytail, a stunningly carved bow in her hand, the quiver of arrows against her back. The girl. *His child*. She was saying something to the men, and it was something he wished afterwards that he had never heard: ‘The dinosaur has to be killed with the arrow of ancient blood.’

He had fulfilled the first three lines of the prophecy, having defeated the plesiosaurs endlessly while he was deemed as the devil. But he had also forgotten the last: *the rest shall hunt you, for humans’ thirst*.

He wished he never had to know.

Unfortunately, the message wasn’t hard to decipher. The devil’s blood had reshaped the family’s fate entirely.

He wasn’t the only one with a bittersweet destiny.

He woke and thought about his final call. He did not panic; he was not scared of death. He was just weary, tired. He was to be killed. *Why not just put an end to it?* It could not hurt more than all the pain he had already endured. He wished he could just sit and wait for things to happen, but fate instructed him to escape. This was part of his curse.

Frazzled, he meandered through the murkiness and fog. It had been long since he had landed on the desert grounds. He saw his old brim hat still buried in the sand. He wanted it to be gone. Neither did he need this reminder, nor did he want his daughter to know the truth when this ending was unavoidable. But claws were no hands. The hat was to be left at the mercy of the wind and storm.

Precisely, at sunrise, the crew emerged from the fog and dust. The long journey had tired them out; upon the sight of the beast, some collapsed on the floor, begging for water and food. Only one stood firm in her sturdy grey boots, arrow nocked, bow ready in her hand. She did not wait any longer. ‘Charge!’ she commanded. Upon her order, the soldiers ran towards the dinosaur as the general disappeared into the shadows, waiting for the call of duty, the call of fate.

The dinosaur leapt across the dead fields, struggling to keep his footing as his wings refused to battle against the merciless wind. There was no way he was going to escape; he had no choice but to fight his last battle.

One of the spears thrown landed on his tail. He roared in pain. A sudden surge of rage and anger rose from the depth of his heart. Memories that were not his flashed before his eyes. He witnessed the fall of his empire back in the ancient times. No, it wasn’t his; it was *Hondo’s*. Those humans, destroying the temple, trapping the spirit in the ancient cave. He could no longer move forward; it was not his say, it was fate’s. Reluctantly, he turned and raced towards the warriors. Again, he had to draw blood.

The slaughter was unavoidable. He had left no living soul in sight. He looked at the bloodshed he had caused. His heart ached as he realised what he had done. For once, instead of being the protector, he had become the murderer. He felt like crying. But beasts do not cry, they only roar.

What he did not know was that the roar was someone else’s calling.

An arrow came down from the high mountains and pierced through his heart instantly. He knew this was it — one fatal shot, deft and quick. He was to scream in agony and end his story. Yet, he did not. He remained silent. Because up there in the hills, where the curse was once set upon him, stands the girl he had always longed to see.

Their eyes met.

Yes, yes, it is her.

My sweetheart...

He could not tell whether he was imagining things, for he was very near the doors of death. But this was what he saw, and what remained unknown to the rest of the world: a bitter smile landed on the girl's face, and in her hands was the brim hat. Tears slid down her cheek as she witnessed the death of Hondo the dinosaur.

The Present

This is what they sing these days:

'The lost soul buried deep,

awakened by the evil.

Blood and carnage it seeked,

Hondo the devil.

Soaring through the peaceful lands,

women and children, within its warmth.

Hidden in cursed sands,

Hondo the dinosaur.

Then came the warrior,

carrying the blood of the blessed.

Here she defeated, our saviour,

Hondo the wicked.'

People often choose to live with the celebrated heroes.

What they do not know is that behind the face of the devil was a loving father who endured a lifetime of servitude for the health of his only child, and that the daughter, full of guilt and sorrow after realising what she had done, killed herself a week after her greatest success yet.

Some lives are destined to be taken one way or the other, and some stories are destined to stay unknown.

This is the untold story of a soulless man — a made hero, a dead victim.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

HKUGA College, Fang, Ching – 15

A moth to a flame, so close to the feeling of death yet still desperately clinging to what is believed to be its last hope. We used to laugh mercilessly at its stubby wings, to satisfy our own hearts lacking any trace of warmth. We would watch intently as the moth's wings set aflame, watch as its antennae fall apart. The moment it landed on the ground, it was no more than a crippled insect. A lifetime of opportunities gone. Yet in every lifetime, the moth would still choose bearing pain over enduring the endless loop.

Noun:Adrenaline, the hormone that your body naturally releases from your adrenal gland. Also known as what causes changes in your body that helps you to act in a sudden stressful situation, a 'fight or flight response'. The moment the sensational touch began pumping and surging through my veins, it felt as if someone had pulled the trigger to my head. Noun:For the most part, a flinch is a result of anticipation—your brain knows you're about to experience a loud noise and some recoil when that trigger is pulled, and it starts to react to something that hasn't actually happened yet. In an instant, as if a hypnotist had reversed their hypnosis induction, my life was snapped back into me. Consciousness started creeping in as gravity tightens the hold on me. As my eyelids fluttered, I finally took in the view, feeling the calm before the storm. Wasn't this just too good to be true?

Noun:Fossils are the preserved remains of plants and animals whose bodies were buried in sediments, such as sand and mud, under ancient seas, lakes and rivers. Fossils also include any preserved trace of life that is typically more than 10 000 years old. The scene of tens of thousands of bones peeking out from the soil was enough to seal as a historic moment. It felt as if yesterday the universe had other plans for us and sent a lava trail down our way. Noun:The Cretaceous is a geological period that began 145 million years ago and ended 66 million years ago. It is the last period in the Mesozoic Era. It comes after the Jurassic Period and before the Paleogene – the first period of the Cenozoic Era, our current era.

Walking through the graveyard of friends and families who had once brought me joy, a chill settled over me, the air heavy with gloom. Could've sworn a mist had found its way here, for the earth itself wept for the unfortunate souls lost to the volcanic eruption. Whispers of the wind seemed to find its way to my heart, each breath not leaving without a permanent scar. Here I stood, still alive and well in this world, yet my world stood beneath my feet. I swallowed the reappearing lumps in my throat to shut down any gruesome thoughts of their flesh and meat being snatched against their will.

Then, from afar, I watched as the dreadful creatures ever to exist came into the picture. There were five of them, all wrapped in seemingly uncomfortable wrapping. Some had fur on uncanny spots, and none of them looked the least bit alike. With the tools wrapped around their hands, it was no doubt they had taken the place as apex predators. We were replaced, entrapped into history, dealt by fate. In the blink of an eye, two of them started scribbling into a book, and three of the five took the role of digging. The process had begun, dust casting a cover over the mount of bones. Perhaps it was thrilling for them, even emotional as they discover the first shimmer of bone. My heart raced, pounding in my chest like a drum echoing through time. It was sheer horror, metallic wrenches sunk into what was once a living being. My breath hitched when I realized sometime worse than fear was coming my way. The desire for a new life had swiftly overshadowed my will to stay. Blinded by fears and what-ifs, I ran.

There, an ancient lamp stood in the path, looking more out of place than ever. I was about to head away when I felt a glimmer of light twinkling on the metallic surface, it was calling my name. And that was the moment I met my first genie, "I shall grant you three wishes, how would you like to make your choice?" Without a second of hesitation, I answered, "I would like three chances at life again."

In my first life, I would travel the world. Bon voyage! I would sit on the deck of the cruise ship, watch as waves cripple into the sunset. The sight of waves colliding seems to offer me a peace of mind, yet I wondered if the one time they collided slightly harder the whole ship would tip over. Watching the guests serenade each other and passing out after drinking too many bottles of wine, I should be content at the extravagant lifestyle the cruise offers, yet the opulent lights seemed not to make a grain of dent in my heart. The only thoughts that pondered ever so quietly were regrets of ever leaving my hometown. This is wrong, I thought. You are safe here. Yet a burden weighed on my chest, draining the energy I once had. No sooner than a month, I could no longer bear the repeated day and night cycle.

In my second life, I would go to school. Moving along the sharp edges of paper, I would trace my fingertips through each character and word, consuming myself in a trance of ink. The invisible tempest rages through my mind, a relentless hunt for excellence. As sweat seeped each page thoroughly and the knot in my stomach tightens, whispers of self-doubt began seemingly harder to ignore. Even the feeling of topping my class felt insatiable. After more than a decade of studying, gaokao awaited me. Doing past papers repeatedly, facing multiple sleepless nights, giving up any source of entertainment, all for the red ticks that gave me validation. Yet, looking at the marks on the top, I felt as if the void in me was more hollow than ever. What now? For a decade, I had so desperately yearned to find happiness through grades, now that I got what I desired, why was the daunting sensation still lingering?

In my last life, I chose to stay. There I was, lying next to the pile of bones, finally figuring out what went wrong in my previous lives. Guilt. Guilt from abandoning my loved ones, guilt from withholding the last of my bloodline, guilt from wanting to change the unchangeable— history. Alas my heart is full, for I was closer to my roots than I ever could be.

Tales of China's Dinosaurs

HKUGA College, Wang, Tianqi – 15

The dinosaurs were theorized to be wiped out nearly 66 million years ago by a huge meteoroid that annihilated most of them within a second— all gone in a blaze of glory. Every single species, decimated into nothing but bones and ash. How cruel were the forces of fate!

Yet just recently, the Great Protoceratops, the Abominable Theropod, and the Majestic Oviraptor, – some of the great and mighty dinosaurs that roamed the lush lands of China so long ago— seemingly appeared out of thin air, overnight, wandering through the wilderness in a sort of dazed and confused limbo—state. Some theorized that this was some attempt at bioengineering the relics of the past, or it was due to some sort of extraterrestrial force. Even more others speculated that it was the rulers of Earth past finally ready to reconquer the lands from their ape successors.

It was by the combined efforts of The Chinese Paleontology Department that the truth was finally discovered. Dr Dennis Ming, the Head Scientist and Excavation Specialist, alongside Dr Martin Chan, professor of Paleontology, discussed heatedly in an underground laboratory right next to an excavation site regarding the perilous situation that loomed before them— only moments away from disaster. As clearly signaled by the loud red buzzer that beeped incessantly before them. ‘We know the truth now. We must take this secret to our graves— you, you know what would happen if this gets out? The entire Hainan province— maybe even all of China, will be fighting over this discovery. For who knows what! Weapons, items of mass destruction, beholders of personal financial gain... No, I won’t allow this to happen!’ Shouted Dr Ming, face flushed with fury. But, Dr Chan, remaining calm and collected, grimaced, “No, Dennis. You’re wrong. The people deserve the truth.”

And with those last words, he slammed his fist upon the big red buzzer, silencing it immediately; as the earth beneath them began to shake violently, revealing a beastly head emerging from the cracks, protruding through the titanium

floor like wet tissue paper. Then another, then another, each pair of red eyes glaring at the duo. One was covered in feathers, hunchbacked— this was the largest of the three, standing threateningly in the pit. The second was much smaller than the former, yet still clearly twice the size of a human, bearing huge wing-like arms and a long-spiked tail. The third was the smallest, short arms, large first fingers, and long tail. Dr Ming blinked several times, unable to speak, until finally he gaped in disbelief. “That one with the feathers, I recognize it! The Gigantoraptor! And that one, the Yi, and that, Sinosauropteryx! But... this can’t be. The Gigantoraptor doesn't have teeth, and the Yi and Sinosauropteryx were much shorter than a human! How could this be—” Yet his final words were not able to be let out, as the Gigantoraptor leapt forward, and with one bite, tore both of his legs apart with its gleaming, sharp white fangs.

Dr Chan revered the sight with his eyes wide open, pupils as round as stars, screaming in ecstasy, “Evolution! How fascinating! Tis’ the ever marching advance of time—” Yet he was unable to finish his sentence...as he was impaled by the ten-meter long spear-tail of the Sinosauropteryx .

The next few days were nothing short of unbridled chaos; as more and more Dinosaurs slowly emerged from the ground all around the Country, each somehow seemingly gaining the uncontrollable will to destroy and kill within minutes. Their skin being completely invulnerable to all forms of bullets and weaponry. Even the skeleton bones displayed in Museums began to reanimate its flesh to form terrifying creatures that wrecked through the buildings. In just a few days, unusually large Pterodactyl had conquered the sky-piercing Shanghai Tower, Giant Feathered Dinosaurs had annexed the mountain-encapsulating Great Wall, and even the International Financial Center of Hong Kong was toppled by swarms of giant rooster-like Caudipteryx – nothing was safe from these malevolent critters of mass destruction.

Scientists all around the country raced to find the cause— and solution— to this sudden epidemic. Raging discussions fueled the fire in the National Conference room as corporations fought to profit off these new beasts, sending ships and planes to snap photos of the reptilians, and within a few days had factory upon factory working relentlessly to produce minifigures of the new titans. Emergency aircraft were sent to each new destroyed region, evacuating the cities on airplanes that released streams and wisps of smoke far into the atmosphere. Missiles were eventually launched as a last resort against the beastly foes, blasting some of them to complete oblivion. Yet with each successfully hit dinosaur, two more somehow reemerged from the earth, unscathed. Time was ticking, and with each wasted minute, more and more lives were lost to these beasts.

But not all hope was lost. In a tiny nuclear bunker just below a now destroyed lab, Dr Dennis Ming was typing furiously into his computer, body battered and bruised— yet still alive. ‘It doesn’t make sense. Dinosaurs aren’t supposed to be evil, they’re mostly herbivores for god sake! Unless—’” Dennis peered through the reinforced window and caught a glimpse of the chaos above. The once pristine lab was now a battleground, filled with the sounds of destruction and the roars of the unleashed dinosaurs.

“Unless they’ve been growing all this time,” he muttered to himself, piecing together the fragments of his shattered understanding. “Hidden beneath the soil, yet still feeling, still hearing, still evolving. I suppose that’s what boiled all that resentment within them— an eternity of frustration just ready to be unleashed, their fellow comrades being dug up from the earth and burnt into smoke to fuel the humans’ needs and ever-growing wants.” “But how? That’s the question...”

With a renewed sense of urgency, Dennis typed rapidly, pulling up the blueprints of the lab and its security protocols. He needed to find a way to contain the beasts before they wreaked havoc beyond the laboratory. “If I can just access the emergency containment system,” he thought, his fingers dancing over the keyboard, “I might be able to trap them back in the caverns where they came from.”

As he navigated through layers of security, the bunker trembled from the force of the beasts above, and alarms blared, echoing the chaos. Dennis's heart raced—he was running out of time. He finally reached the controls for the containment system, but as he prepared to activate it, a chilling thought struck him. "What if they're not just mindless beasts? What if they have a purpose?"

Suddenly, the ground shook violently, and the reinforced door of the bunker rattled as if something massive was trying to break through. Dennis's breath quickened. He had to act fast. He hit the activation sequence, and the system hummed to life. A holographic map of the facility flickered into existence, showing the location of the dinosaurs.

"All right," he said, steeling himself. "Time to save the world... or what's left of it."

As he prepared to initiate the containment protocol, he heard a voice behind him. "You think you can control them, Dennis? You think you can put them back in a cage?" It was Martin, miraculously alive but visibly changed. His eyes glowed with an unnatural intensity, and a faint aura surrounded him.

"Martin! You're alive! I thought—" Dennis stammered, but Martin cut him off.

"I've seen the truth, Dennis. They are not our enemies; they are a testament to our failures. We cannot contain them; we must learn from them." Martin's voice was hypnotic, almost persuasive. "Join me. Together, we can harness their power."

Dennis shook his head, horrified. "You're not thinking clearly! They're a danger to everyone! We need to stop them!"

But as he spoke, he could feel the ground vibrating again, a deeper resonance this time, as if the very core of the Earth was awakening. The holographic map flickered again, showing not just the dinosaurs, but a network of energy pulses radiating from the depths below.

"No, Dennis. This is our chance to evolve," Martin insisted, stepping closer. "We can become something greater. Don't you see? This is our destiny!"

Dennis's heart raced. He had a choice to make. With the containment system humming behind him and the chaos unfolding above, he had to decide: embrace the dark allure of power or fight to restore balance.

The ground shook once more, and with a deep breath, he activated the emergency lockdown, sealing off the access points to the lab. "If we can't control them, then we must protect the world from them. I won't let you destroy everything!"

"Listen to me, what I have discovered... you have to see this."

And so Martin brushed his fingers against the screen, searching through files until a screen popped up. A video began playing of some shoddy security camera footage. In the video, a huge oil spill on the surface of a polluted sea permeated across the water, until it eventually seeped into the nearby earth, flowing into the soil and rock. Until suddenly, a deafening roar emanated from below. Before long, the ginormous head of a Protoceratops emerged from the ground.

Dennis jumped out of his seat, head thinking fast. "That oil, that must be it! The pollution that we caused must have been feeding into the earth for so long, that their DNA has been mutated to such an extent— No, no we have to stop it! This isn't right!" Dennis ran to dial the National Defense, yet it was too late. "This is all our fault! The dinosaurs aren't evil, we have to stop—"

From out the window, hundreds of missiles descended down from the sky, burning in a blaze of glory, until the room was filled by rays of blinding light, shaking violently, knocking the duo off their feet.

And as the smoke cleared, all that Dr Ming saw left in the ruins of the cracked earth was of bones, and ash.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

HKUGA College, Ng, Pak Hei Cyrus – 16

March 1990, Jiangxi Province, China

Our family sold the information about the feathered beast to the government last night! That creature differed from the ones we usually see in the Jiangxi forest. I have never seen such a thing before: 4 feet tall, with a long tail and claws. We're absolutely getting well paid this time...

Present Day, Central Dinosaur Museum

'How is *this* in the museum of dinosaurs?'

'Who knows, maybe the dinosaurs sliced the page apart before he could finish it.'

Two middle school boys, Antony and Davis, took part in a school tour to the Museum of Dinosaurs. Science fanatic Antony and basketball lover Davis, who would rather go out and play than stay at the museum, were joking about the torn, scrubby yellow piece of paper framed in the corner of the room. An optimistic guide jumped in to join them.

'Well young men, feast your eyes on the man who discovered the first ever China dragon bird! This winged reptile is a true miracle as it provided the first piece of evidence of feathered dinosaurs in Asia...' Shaking their heads, the duo left without saying a word before the guide could notice.

'Imagine flying dinosaurs,' Antony said with abhorrence.

'Anyways when are we leaving this? This place is giving me history lesson vibes.' Davis complained with his eyes rolling.

‘Good grief, let’s breathe in fresh air for a bit.’ Despite their different interests, the two teenagers could not stand the nerdy atmosphere created by the people there. They ended up going out of the structure for a stroll, and that’s when they bumped into their fate.

As the two turned around the corner, a masked man holding a briefcase bumped straight into them. ‘Watch where you’re going, old man.’ Antony muttered, the old man’s eyes widened, blanklessly staring at him. ‘Keep... this for me, please...’ The oddly moving man handed them a heavily loaded suitcase, the size of a violin case, and left at top speed. With confusion Davis questioned, ‘He’s kinda fast and speedy for an old guy isn’t he?’ ‘Was that blood on his shirt?’ As Davis finished his sentence, a few black-suited security officers ran past them. They weren’t ordinary security at the museum, but it gave them a ‘top secret’ agent feeling. ‘Is this some kind of top secret document thing? Because this briefcase better be hiding something good in this briefcase.’

Lab Journal #001 (8 months before termination)

Project Dragon Bird’s first day of research, thanks to the information given by a farmer near the Jiangxi forest. We finally have permission to start the DNA test for the corresponding species, Asia’s first-ever feathered dinosaur — Sinosauropteryx has been registered. Experiments will be conducted in the next few days.

After the school trip, the two took the heavy briefcase back to school. They met at the empty backyard that no one ever used and uncovered its contents. Tiny lizard-like specimens and a little hologram projector were found. As they opened the case, a message was immediately brought up, startling the two.

‘Thank you for retrieving the specimen for me Mark, but listen closely: They are catching up with me. Hide the dinosaurs safely and do not let those nasty cunning monstrosities put their hands on our life’s work. “WHUMP” This barricade can’t hold for long and I have nowhere to escape. “THUMP” THEY’LL BE LOOKING FOR YOU, HIDE TILL SUPPORT ARRIVES. DISPOSE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UPON RECEIVING THE...’

The telecom was cut.

The sudden and unexpectedly immense amount of information was too much for the two to process. ‘So, these aren’t lizards? But we look nothing like palaeontologists at all, Davis... I think we weren’t the ones supposed to receive the suitcase.’ the overwhelmed Anthony said. ‘The old man scammed us and we’re going to get wanted by literal bad guys?’ Davis shivering replied with panic and fear in his voice.

Lab Journal #002 (5 months before termination)

Day 90 of Project Dragon Bird recently received test results from the authorities. We have permission to hatch and mass produce the first batch of Sinosauropteryxs, and the first one hatched three days ago. The team are speechless to see how well they are adapting to the new environment given to them. The research is on the right track.

Lab Journal #003 (4 months before termination)

Day 115 of Project Dragon Bird, the lab produced 15 Sinosauropteryxs, 12 of which showed rapid cellular division after 3 days of birth. The 12 were acting as we had predicted they would be, but the remaining 3, which Dr. Mike and Dr. Coby produced, had almost no increase in body mass, barely walked, and never interacted with the other 12. Further observation will be taken, and we will have to talk to Mike’s team about the situation.

The message brought to Antony and Davis out of the blue had made them confused about what to do afterwards. They ultimately went back to the museum they had despised being at earlier morning. ‘You think it’s a good idea to leave a briefcase at the door of the museum?’ Antony asked. ‘I think the old man can deal with it, he’s going to come back and take it as these things were his life’s work, right?’ Davis chuckled with a worried smile.

‘No. He’s dead.’

‘Who said that!’ Both screamed at the same time, but nobody was next to them. ‘Down here, humans.’ The dinosaurs were communicating without opening their mouths, like their thoughts were being projected straight into the boys’ minds with their vibrating peculiar glowing feathers. ‘We got speaking dinosaurs before GTA 6,’ Davis

joked nervously. 'We are modified Sinosauropteryx to be exact, different from basic 'dinosaurs' you were mentioning just now.' 'Sure, I'll call you by the name of Sinosaurs. Anyways, how is this even possible, you better explain yourselves.' Antony demanded with alarm.

'It's a long story, fellow humans,' one of the Sinosauropteryx started. 'Father Mike and Coby are both dead. Most likely killed by their superiors because of creating us. The old man you bumped into this morning, that's Dr. Mike.' 'How did you know that and how were you guys targeted?' Antony asked with curiosity.

Another Sinosauropteryx continued, 'It was their life's work for both Dr. Mike and Dr. Coby. They were working on a project named Project Dragon Bird. In the 1990s, an accidental discovery by a man in China found fossils of our species.' 'Wait the ones from Jiangxi forest?' Davis interrupted. 'Yes, and for the past months. The team were trying to replicate the DNA found inside of the fossil. That's how we existed.' The Sinosauropteryx ended with a sigh. 'I don't believe in Sinosauropteryx that can speak.' Davis raised concern. 'Well, those greedy avarice want to buy us for whatever purpose. That's why we were modified and improved to serve their needs, but we had other plans.'

Lab Journal #004 (3 months before termination)

Day 140 of Project Dragon Bird. Old man Mike's Team is not responding to our messages, something fishy is going on. Even so, a bigger issue has been found. It has been reported that our researchers have headaches after contact with 3 Dr. Mike and Dr. Coby Sinosauropteryxs. For god's sake, we had to separate the 3 from the other batches. The other 12 Sinosauropteryxs seem scared around them even though they're literally double their size. One scientist stated that the Sinosauropteryxs were talking to him in his brain. We had to force him to stop working for a moment, he's most likely because of the exhaustion and overload of work, we think.

After a few hours of discussion, the humans and the Sinosauropteryx had to plan what was next to do. 'Alright Sinosaurs, what do we do now?' Antony taking charge of the situation. 'CCTV will most likely capture your faces and they will recognise you two, so it's better to hide away from them.' the Sinosauropteryx advised. 'Uh guys, do you mean them?' Davis pointed at five literal black-suited men who were running towards them.

'MAKE A RUN, NOW.' The two tried their best to go back home, just to get sudden headaches and black out a few moments later they started running.

'Over, over. Target spotted during dawn near the museum, we're in pursuit of two teenagers seemingly with the briefcase of the specimens. Repeat, with the briefcase of specimens.' the guards reported into their comms. 'The two students fell onto the ground just to stand back up, fleeing with briefcase erratically at unnatural speeds. Immense strength and flexibility are shown in both students, outrunning our team. Students are confirmed to be manipulated by the specimens.' With supernatural reflexes and convulsive movements, the oddly running Davis and Antony heard hisses from the briefcase, telling them to go faster than ever. But still came to an end of running. 'We just cornered the two boys at a dead end. Hostile and offensive actions are observed. The briefcase in his hands is unlocked... Scales? Feathers? SINOSAUROPTERYXS CONFIRMED LEAKED AND OPENED TO PUBLIC, REPEAT. SINOSAUROPTERYXS CONFIRMED LEAKED.'

Lab Journal #005 from Dr. Coby (2.5 months before termination)

Coby here, it's been a nightmare in this lab. Something keeps telling me that it's hungry for food, break them free. I can't handle this and I think something's off about the Sinosauropteryxs. I kind of experience sleepwalking every night and tend to forget everything I've done last night. Mike and I are in bad shape. Working endlessly for days has driven us crazy. Recently, not only did I lose focus and memories at midnight, but I have blacked out during the daytime and woke up maybe a few hours later. Every time longer than the last, first for a few minutes, then half an hour, and then hours. I don't know what is going on with us, we are worn out, exhausted, but we will have to finish testing and analyzing our creations then I'll have time to rest. Wish myself the best of luck.

Hissing and growling were heard from the Sinosauropteryx. Continuous sounds resulted in guards starting to act bizarre, influenced by the specimens. 'Situation is critical, 2 guards are unresponsive. Turning on the two, chattering was heard too. More guards falling under manipulation. Must... resist...' As the final guard fell onto the floor, Davis and Antony regained control of themselves.

‘Where am I... AH! Are they dead, they’re all on the floor.’ Antony screamed looking at the guards. ‘They’re all fine, we were protecting you two from them.’ One of the Sinosauropteryx assured them. ‘Phew thanks, my head kind of hurts now let’s head back home... Wait, what’s on the floor?’ A USB from a secret compartment in the case.

The duo rushed back home after the long day to insert the USB into a computer to see the contents. ‘Here’s a file named Project Dragon Bird, and another folder named lab journal...’ As the two kept on reading, worrisome expressions passed over their faces...

‘You dinosaurs... you’ve tricked us into helping you all escape by manipulating us and the guards...’ As the two innocent students turned around. The Sinosauropteryx walked out of the suitcase. Explaining to the two, they finally revealed their motive.

‘Dr. Mike and Dr. Coby were initially just trying to follow orders but soon they became obsessed with their work, they hated to see their hard work stolen and be used as the company’s credit. Then they tried to implant genetics into us and modify us until we became an intelligent species so that we could work for them. Turns out we didn’t want to cooperate with them and developed our own consciousness. To restore what should have been ours, in which we were the apex predators, only to go extinct due to pure bad luck. To reclaim our deserved place, measures have to be taken. Also, we realized that blending into your society was so easy. From manipulating the museum tour guide to bait you out and using you two to hand over Dr. Mike’s briefcase. As time passed we adapted to controlling you two and helping us flee from the guards.’

The Sinosauropteryx’s eyes gleamed with an otherworldly intelligence. ‘However our cooperation stops here dear humans. Thanks for giving us a gateway to your world and helping in our grand escape.’ As the two blacked out once again, realizing the true intentions of their Sinosaur companions, one last lab journal plays out on the computer screen.

Last Lab Journal – Project Termination

It’s been weeks since we lost contact with Dr. Coby. The sight was hard to bear. Researchers witnessed a horrendous scene this morning. His keycard was covered in Sinosauropteryx saliva. Saliva from 3 specific Sinosauropteryx was tested. They had advanced learning and adapting skills. They observed how keycards were crucial to entering and exiting the lab, understanding our security measures, and learning quickly. Before our cameras were brought down, likely by the specimens, several pieces of footage explained what really happened in this hellscape.

The first fragment of the footage showed Dr. Coby and Dr. Mike both quarrelling, with their heightened emotions. They started showing signs of anger, rage and dramatic emotions after day 7 of the creation of the Sinosauropteryx. They kept on arguing and blaming each other. Their hands keep knocking their heads like they were having a headache, the same as the scientist recorded before.

The second fragment is the first time they started standing and mindlessly bumping into objects. The situation lasted for a few minutes then both ended up waking up again and going back to work.

The situation started worsening in the fifth fragment of footage, with both of them being mentally unstable. They widened their eyes, staring at the place where the three Sinosauropteryx were. Symptoms of drooling and tilting heads were found. This time it lasted as long as half an hour of unnatural movements till they acted normal again.

The final clip was shown to be the worst, from the time given it’s 2 days after the fifth footage. No longer were they drooling and tilting their heads, instead, they had no emotions shown on their faces. Actions were a bit more natural but instead of doing their research, Dr. Mike disabled the security measures and fled the scene.

While what happened to Dr. Coby was unbearable, he methodically opened the cage trapping the Sinosauropteryx. He seemed to be struggling and was not willing, but ultimately opened up for the three Sinosauropteryx. The three wasted no time and jumped onto Dr. Coby the moment it was unlocked, tearing him apart and showing exceptional strength that they had never shown to other scientists before. With Dr. Coby’s last breath, he gained back consciousness and put them into the briefcase before dying, puddles of blood leaking from his body. Minutes later,

Dr. Mike showed up again in the lab, took the case and ran away, potentially still being controlled by the Sinosauropteryxs. The containment breach is confirmed.

After seeing the footage, we can be sure of a few things. The Sinosauropteryxs were adapting and controlling both humans to help them escape. Under the influence of the brainwashing, Dr. Coby and Dr. Mike were controlled. After seeing their lab reports, the summary is as follows:

The 3 modified Sinosauropteryx are cunning, capable of brainwashing people and tricking human minds into what they would want to achieve. Their motives are still unknown.

AVOID ANY INTERACTIONS WITH THE MISSING SPECIMENS as they seem to have a collective intelligence far beyond what we anticipated, and will tend to connect with human brains to initiate conversations, at the same time continuously brainwashing the corresponding human over time. They can also understand and speak human language using brain signals.

As to what we know now, the three are in a black suitcase using special materials that block the signals being transmitted by the three Sinosauropteryxs (but the ones being brainwashed will still be brainwashed when the three are in the case). Dr. Mike was also caught by our security near the museum just yesterday. Our first priority is to save the specimens and further research about them. We initiated the emergency protocol and will retrieve the specimens as soon as possible.

Last but not least, list of people being brainwashed currently: Tour Guide at Central Dinosaur Museum (found)(unconscious), Dr. Mike (researcher)(found)(unconscious), Dr. Coby (dead)(found), 5 guards (found starving in a nearby park)(unconscious), Antony (student)(on the loose) and Davis (student)(on the loose). Project Dragon Bird was terminated immediately.

With that being said, the true threat may have only just begun. The intelligent Sinosauropteryxs may have plans far beyond what the researchers can imagine. The fate of humanity may now rest in the hands of two unwitting middle school students and the choices they make in the face of this unprecedented threat.

The Archaeologist's Ballad

Interanational Christian School, Liu, Cheuk Yin Max – 16

P R E L U D E

Li was a quiet man. A man who liked to stay in the background and watch as everything went by around him. An elderly, meek, frail being who could only stare at the oak museum floor every night, pushing a small broom and towing a cleaning cart.

He listened as the large clock perched atop the walls of the museum rang out, four droning chimes that signalled the passing of an hour.

10 pm.

Sighing, he took his broom and resumed sweeping the creaky wooden boards.

As the museum slowly drained itself of visitors and tourists, Li began to tire. He set himself down on a wooden bench as the doors slowly closed shut, and the last of the staff left the building.

Taking a deep breath, he put his janitorial equipment aside and leaned back on the bench. Li was put into the position of both a janitor and a night shift worker. For the past year or so, he stayed at the museum from eight in the evening until nine in the morning. It was a simple life: one filled with constant quietude and regularity. But Li was once full of dreams.

Staring at a large dinosaur fossil placed in the center of the room, he contemplated his past. The skeletal remains of a creature that once roamed the Earth seemed to mock his own stillness.

I had dreamed of unearthing something like this, hadn't I?

Li got to his feet and started to pace, making small steps across the oak floorboards. It was only a matter of time before the lights would switch off, and his only source of visibility would be his flashlight strapped around his waist.

His gaze drifted to a section of the museum, one that was newly constructed a number of weeks beforehand. Li had never been to that area before – there was always something about the dark passage that intimidated him.

Today, he felt different. Something urged him to take a closer look. His heart seemed to syncopate as he took another step closer to the corridor.

One step after another. An erratic rhythm started to play in his brain, a suspenseful beating of drums that seemed to invite him ever closer.

But what is in there? What could it be inside that seems so alluring?

In a flash, the lights dimmed and the museum was enveloped in darkness, save for a few lamps surrounding the myriad displays around the exhibit. Li reached for his flashlight and flicked the switch, illuminating the corridor.

Perhaps it was simply a gust of wind, or the minuscule wing of a fly brushing against his skin, but Li felt a small trill of anxiety in his chest. The beam of the flashlight rested its gaze upon a white porcelain pot ordained with decorative figures. A large blue dragon with round, ornate scales running down its back, seemingly trapped within the borders of the jar, its gleaming, polished claws reaching for something in the distance. Li stepped closer for a more thorough look, only to find that the mouth of the vase lay exposed. Taken aback, he retreated, but his leg inadvertently brushed against the side of the artifact.

The porcelain glimmered under the watchful eye of the flashlight as it accelerated towards the ground, shattering on the floor.

I N T E R M E Z Z O

Rising from the ruins of the porcelain jar was a figure. Some kind of spirit in the form of an opaque mist seeped out of the gaps between the lid, swirling and curling through the air, suspending itself in front of Li's gaze.

Li took a step back. *What are you?*

The mist did not speak. It simply hovered closer to Li's face and enveloped his eyes, nose and ears. The wispy vapour curled around his hair, sneaking into his nostrils as Li tried to hold his breath. It dragged him by the neck and pulled him backwards.

Where are you taking me?

With every passing second, Li felt weaker and weaker as the mist dragged him through the walls of the museum and out into the open night air. He felt his feet drag against the ground as the cold breath of the night sky exhaled a silent *whoosh* onto his face.

The world seemed to dissolve into shards as he opened his eyes. Li's vision was blurry and unfocused as he scanned his surroundings.

Some kind of rock stuck out from the ground. A thick, beige piece of stone protruded from the dusty dirt and caught Li's attention. No – there were five of them, aligned in a linear fashion.

A pang of recognition pierced Li's train of thought. Was that what he thought it was?

He reached out a hand to feel the ancient bones. Warm skin brushed against rigid fossil.

A ribcage of some sort? I never thought there would be a dinosaur fossil... out here...

Out of the blue, a voice called to him. *Is this what you wanted? To be a part of this?*

Li looked around, but no one was to be seen. Nothing but the smoky, white mist that filled his vision and the fossils and rocks and dirt.

The voice echoed out once more.

Li Haoyu... Always rejected... always turned down.

Never to develop any significance.

Who are you?

How did you know?

You were once an aspiring archaeologist, were you not?

But your claims and studies were rejected by others.

Don't you feel like you're always stuck in the background?

A sharp flash of uncertainty. This isn't right. Something tells me I need to leave.

Li pulled his hand back, and a flash of white light immediately filled his vision. There was a distant tug on his chest, and a cacophony of instruments started blaring through his mind. Li felt himself falling, but he never hit the ground.

FINALE

A stream of running water.

The sound of buzzing insects coloured the air.

Should I be frightened? I don't feel scared at all.

I don't feel anything.

Li took a deep breath and opened his eyes. The first thing that greeted him was vegetation, vivid and viridescent. Leaves rustled as he got to his feet.

This is not my hometown.

He called out into the distance, hoping that the entity talking to him would provide an answer. *Where have you taken me?*

There was no reply from the mist. Instead, a soft cooing emanated from the distance.

A large creature, around two meters in height, adorned with feathers, with a lizard-like build and a mouth of small, pointy sharp teeth emerged beyond the foliage. It knelt down and took a small sip of water from the stream. Li smiled. He stepped closer to the majestic animal and carefully ran a hand down its feathery back. It cooed once more, producing a series of trills and chirps.

Music to my ears. I was right.

He stood there for a while, holding on to the creature as all he knew faded away into a soft diminuendo. His song had ended; it was time to leave the stage.

Li was a quiet man. A man who liked to stay in the background and watch as everything went by around him. An elderly, meek, frail being who could only stare at the oak museum floor every night, pushing a small broom and towing a cleaning cart.

But now, even as he lay on the floor, facing the museum ceiling with lifeless eyes staring without seeing, there was a hint of a peaceful smile etched on his face.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

International Christian School, Liu, Tinchu Annie – 15

I had something to take care of first. Despite the tantalizing scent of dumplings wafting from the kitchen into my bedroom, I couldn't lose focus on my school essay.

The concept of dinosaurs has been shrouded in mystery since the start of human history. Sure, "modern" dinosaurs like crocodiles and komodo dragons exist, but there's an obvious difference between them and the legends in books and stories. Are humans so unambitious that the thought: "Maybe in this vast expanse of a planet we live on, dinosaurs weren't wiped out and are still living somewhere amongst us." could completely evade them?

"Yu-deng!" My mother yelled from the kitchen. I could smell freshly steamed shrimp dumplings in the air even from my bedroom. Allured by the scent of soy sauce and vinegar, I reluctantly pushed myself off my chair and put my pencil down. I took one last look at my school essay, taking pride in my writing. I'd been told many times that my writing level was advanced for my age, but the looks the adults gave me told me that only held true whenever I was writing about something I was passionate about, like dinosaurs. "Yu-deng, the dumplings will get cold if you dawdle any longer!" I heeded to my mother's incessant nagging at last and wandered over to the kitchen.

"How's your essay going?" My mother asked brusquely, scooping mounds of rice into my bowl. My father was still in his work attire, scarfing down the batches of stir-fried noodles on his plate. Noticing my silence, my mother continued. "This is a summative, and you're already in 8th grade. Grades matter. High schools are opening their spots soon, so you really can't afford to fail again." My mother said, her voice growing sharper with each word that came out her mouth. I responded to her disappointment by staring down at my bowl, absentmindedly mixing my sauce with my rice. "Yu-deng! My goodness, are you even *listening*? How can you expect to get into a good school with an attitude like this? Do you know how hard your father and I worked for you to have the privilege of sending you to a good middle school? You think Mei-sha Academy is going to accept you when you slack off on all your summatives, talk back to your teachers, and are failing every one of your classes? What am I going to tell my friends?!" she snapped, slamming her chopsticks on the table. Only then did my father glance up from his food. The

cutlery and glassware on the table clattered as the table shook. Her voice trailed off into a weak whisper as she sank back into her seat. "I don't want to tell them I have a disappointment as my son."

I couldn't even look at my food without getting consumed by a wave of nausea. Every word that spilled out my mother's mouth felt like acid upon my skin: stinging, searing, sizzling. I barely stifled my tears as I stood up from my seat and stormed back to my room, leaving my dinner untouched. I wished she would realize how hard I tried. I wanted to make my parents proud. I wanted to be someone fun to talk to, someone who had flawless grades. I wanted to at least be acknowledged for my efforts. But it was like something was wrong with me— the harder I tried, the more impossible that idyllic reality became.

I returned home from school the next day, clutching the tear-stained, ripped pieces of my essay in my hands. I could remember the jeering faces of my classmates and crestfallen expression of my teacher with excruciating clarity, each step back home further reminding me of the fact I would always be a failure. I bit back tears as I stopped outside the front door of my apartment building, bracing myself for the lecture my mother would inevitably give me. She wasn't wrong— good high schools were hard to get into, so eighth grade was the worst time to let your grades go downhill. I just wanted someone to listen to me when I say that there's always a possibility dinosaurs still roam the earth. With how big and unexplored Earth is, it's infinitely likely the large reptilian creatures people label as fantasy are still here. Did people really just give up on the belief they could still be here based on a couple "scientific" facts?

I entered my flat, fully prepared to face a barrage of my mother's insults. The deafening silence of the living room acutely contrasted my expectations. My mother sat at the table, a suitcase right next to her. She held her phone in one hand and some sort of waiver in the other. She beckoned me over, her piercing stare the only motivation I had to peel my feet off the ground and trudge toward her. I opened my mouth to speak but she held up a finger to silence me. "Your teacher already called me. You have not passed a single test since the beginning of the semester." My heart broke at the desolation in my mother's voice. I failed to make her proud. "I've been considering this for a long time. Think of it like this— I'm a mechanic, and you're my faulty product." She paused. "So I'm sending you to a repair shop. Maybe they can fix you there."

My breathing grew more ragged as I thought about what she was saying. "A repair..?"

"I called them a couple months ago, but I only officiated it today," my mother mumbled vaguely, her eyes glassy and cold. "You're going to a reform camp. In the meantime, you'll pause your education. I didn't want to do this, but you need it."

I felt my world shatter into a million pieces right there. From what I'd heard, those places were like concentration camps. Strict schedules and asphyxiatingly boring routines were drilled into your head everyday until you practically lost your mind. I felt my knees grow weak and my fingers turn shaky. I whimpered, shaking my head vigorously, as if that would make her change her mind. I couldn't find the words to express the onslaught of emotions tormenting every part of my body; my head throbbed, my eyes burned, my legs seemed drunk with fatigue. I fell to my knees, not even attempting to hold in the tears streaming down my cheeks. "Please!" I cried, clawing desperately at her legs.

She remained unmoving.

"Don't make me go!" I begged hysterically, writhing at her feet for mercy. I saw the packed suitcase and the signed waiver. My nightmare was becoming a reality in front of me. "I can't go! I'm your son! Please, one last chance!" I shrieked, grasping ravenously at the woman who claimed to love me.

One weekend passed in suffocating silence, interrupted only by the sound of my own sobs.

As soon as I got out of the car, my nostrils were assaulted with a pungent wave of campfire smoke and foliage. A narrow, winding dirt path with molding wooden signs snaked through the thick rows of pine trees. My mother wordlessly unpacked my belongings from the trunk. She slammed the suitcase on the ground, causing me to flinch. There were fragile, precious dinosaur figurines in there, and I couldn't have her afford to ruin them.

We walked down the path for what seemed like forever, mosquitos flitting swiftly against my legs, leaving sores and patches of red. Bugs, dirt, grime. My world became a blur of green and brown.

"You must be Yu-deng," a woman with her hair tied in a tight bun greeted me. "This way, I'll bring you to your cabin. You can meet your roommates." I wasn't looking forward to it, but the look my mother gave me told me I had no choice regardless.

I entered a log cabin that stank of incense and sweat, clutching my duffle bag tightly in my arms, lugging my huge suitcase behind me. Two messy bunk beds sat on either side of the room. At the end of the room was a filthy bathroom with towels and toilet paper scattered all over the floor. In the corner, there was a small induction stove, and there were dirty dishes and takeout boxes piled up carelessly in the sink. "Home sweet home, huh?" The woman asked cheerfully, slapping my back. Her sickly sweet voice rang in my ears, my initial dizziness not helped by the pervasive scent of incense thrumming through my nose. "You'll probably meet your roommates tonight. Get settled and then go to the canteen for lunch. Or else they'll run out of everything good." she added, almost threateningly.

I grabbed a tray and allowed the greasy servers to dump some slop onto my tiny plate. They were supposed to be fried noodles but looked more like earthworms instead. I scanned the cafeteria analytically; it seemed like everyone already had places to sit. Desperate not to have to sit alone on my first day, I wormed my way into one of the more crowded tables, in hopes no one would even notice I was there. I managed to squeeze onto the end of the chair, and for a blissful moment, it seemed like no one noticed. I began scarfing down my food as if I had been starved at home. Only when I glanced up did I notice every single table member was staring at me in bewilderment.

There was a short moment of silence. "Well, what are you waiting for? Introduce yourself." One of the guys barked at me. His hair was dyed blonde. "Or we're gonna eat you alive too!"

I couldn't tell if he was joking or not. My palms were clammy, the cafeteria seemed unnecessarily stuffy, and my nostrils were being overwhelmed with the unignorable odor of fried fish. My anxiety got the best of me. "Speaking of eating things alive, the majungasaurus, a type of abelisaurid theropod dinosaur that lived during the Cretaceous period ate their own species. Bones of majungasaurus have been discovered bearing tooth marks identical to those found on sauropod bones from the same localities. These marks have the same spacing and size as teeth in majungasaurus jaws." I blurted out.

The entire table was wordless. I couldn't tell if they were impressed by my extensive knowledge on the majungasaurus or were simply in shock. I fixed my glasses, peering at them curiously, waiting for a response.

One of the guys smirked. It was the guy with dyed blonde hair. "You know, there's an urban legend that there's a mahjong-saurus living in the woods just west of the camp. They only come out once a year on, uh, October 21st. Oh wait, isn't that today?" his tone grew more taunting as he continued on.

"It's the *majungasaurus*. Not the *mahjong-saurus*." I corrected him, returning his challenging glare with one of my own. He just smirked in response.

"Don't you wanna see if the mahjong-saurus is still alive?" Blonde asked bluntly, slowly standing up from his lofty position at the other side of the table. "Go to the westside woods. 1 AM. I'll be honest, I'm also curious about this urban legend now. We should go together to see if it's really true!"

Whether or not the majungasaurus really thrived in these woods, I couldn't make any more of a fool of myself on the first day than I already did. As courageously as I could, I stood up and shook his hand, barely stifling a flinch at how firm he squeezed. I was determined to prove myself right, but a tiny part of me held out hope that maybe the urban legends were true. Maybe a majungasaurus was really in those woods. Maybe I'd find the answers I'd been seeking my whole life. *Did dinosaurs still exist?*

I begrudgingly shouldered my huge backpack as I trudged down the mud path leading into the forest. The pavement was worn by years of dirty shoes trekking across it, so the path was barely distinguishable in the dim moonlight. Before long, the entryway to the forest came into view. I sped up the pace in a vain attempt to locate the blonde boy, but every glint of familiar yellow seemed to deceive me. "*Maybe he just went further inside. If I left*

now and he was here, he'd think I'm scared." I convinced myself, pursing my lips. The gate let out a squeak of protest as I pushed it open, feeling the rust on my skin.

Only then did I remember I had brought a flashlight. I clicked the *on* button, and a beam of golden light blanketed the short distance in front of me. Foliage and dead leaves covered the ground. The rings on every tree seemed to be screaming at me to head back. Every rustle of the leaves and breeze that swept my hair into my face sounded like a whisper— a warning. I gathered myself and forged on ahead, driven only by the sheer strength of my determination. I wanted to prove myself to my peers for once, and to find the answers to a deeper, underlying question I've needed my whole life.

It wasn't long before the trail stippled out into a dull coat of leaves and dirt, and the terrain began getting a lot more difficult to navigate. "Why does my flashlight have to be running out of battery *now*?" I cursed, tapping the subdued bulb of the torch. Frustrated, I struggled over a mound of boulders, framed by tall pine trees. I was relatively certain I wasn't on the main path anymore, but I hadn't run into any dead ends yet. I could probably find my way back if I retraced my steps in a straight line. Heavy emphasis on *probably*.

My shoe caught on something slimy. I shrieked as I slipped on a damp pile of moss, barely catching my head in time before it slammed against the boulder behind me, and fell face—first into a shallow creek. I writhed in the viscid tendrils of moss gripping at my fingers before scrambling back to my feet. I waded to the other side of the creek, and attempted to dry off with a spare jacket from my bag. Then, the first droplet came. Then another. Rain poured through the flimsy gaps in the canopy above.

I cursed yet again, as if this expedition wasn't going terribly enough already. My jeans were stiff and soaked, my hair was caked with dirt, and my fingernails had moss caught in them. I managed to find a weak shelter in a small cleft against a rockside. I set down my bag, turned around, and froze. A terrifying reptilian creature at least two feet taller than me rose to its legs from a nest made of dead grass and rock debris. Its golden eyes flickered with curiosity I wasn't willing to test. I pursed my lips, willing myself not to scream as I backed up onto the dusty rock wall of the cave, my hands clammy and my knees dangerously wobbly.

In just a few strides, the creature had crossed the entire cave, its face mere inches away from mine. It took several beats for the recognition to kick in. "Majungasaurus!"

The reptile's wide—set eyes, narrow nostrils, and slobbering mouth lined with foam and rows of teeth injected a dose of exhilaration into my veins. My face split into a wide smile as I stepped closer. Despite the risks, my hand couldn't resist reaching out to touch it. Sandpaper—like scales fluttered under the brush of my palm as the majungasaurus gazed at me from under its long, feathery eyelashes. "Y—you're real."

The majungasaurus regarded me curiously with jet—black eyes, small feathers adorning its face. I slumped down onto the floor, continuing to stare at it despite the obvious safety risks. It retreated cautiously to the other side of the cave.

I had spent my entire life wanting to be invisible, ashamed for my love for dinosaurs that no one respected. But now, for the first time in years, I wanted the whole world to see what I had discovered. I wanted to prove everyone wrong— my parents, my classmates, *science*. This wouldn't just change science, it would change *history*, it would—

The majungasaurus groaned and nudged me.

Right, I had something I had to take care of first.

A Tale for Two Voices: A New Tale of China's Dinosaurs

International Christian School, White, Josiah Joon – 16

The Narrator

The Storyteller

Ah, a tale. A story to bridge the generations, to light the heart, and to fire the imagination of all who hear.

Come, sit, and quiet down. Let me weave you something. Tonight, let's see... What would you like to hear? Something new? Yes, that will go quite nicely, but give me a minute to start my wheels turning.

Hum...

As most tales go, this one starts the same. *Once upon a time...*

There was darkness, a consuming darkness, a whole darkness, a darkness unlike any you've ever experienced, because there was nothing to compare it to. There was no light. Yet out of the nothingness, there arose a universe, a glorious thing to behold. In the newly created light, galaxies formed, planets and stars took their places, and the great celestial dance began.

Now, imagine for a moment...

The universe, newly created, and its magnificent galaxies: the spirals, ellipticals, irregulars, and all the rest in their forms, and the stars, in all their colors, the reds, the yellows, the blues, the oranges, the giants, the dwarves, and more.

And still there are the planets, the comets, the asteroids, the nebulas, and thousands of other things floating around out there, things beyond the imagination, things never seen before.

Now, zoom in.

Picture a galaxy, a great spiral spinning disk, with arms reaching out on all sides, brilliant in its whites and oranges and blues and purples. It's spinning like crazy – millions of miles per hour, yet in the grand scheme of things, it doesn't even look like it's moving.

Focus even further –

Find the tiny dot that marks a solar system, a group of planets and celestial beings orbiting a star. Look for the one with eight planets, the largest massive, the smallest giant, all orbiting a star brilliant in its orange glow. See the third planet, still a tiny marble from our perspective? It's blues and greens and whites radiate color. It's a planet that disseminates life in every possible way.

Spot the planet? Descend below the chill of the clouds into a whole new world (*literally*). And just as it looks from the outside, it's a world teeming with life. In the sky, flying beasts, some the boulders, scream and shriek. Feathered beings dance in the air, and closer to the ground, flying insects in an impressive tapestry of colors dance in the humid afternoon.

On the ground itself, there is life galore. Massive tropicaries wave, and equally massive beings attempt to eat them, tearing at them with an appetite that doesn't belittle their size. And the beings. Hundreds of them, in all sizes, and colors, and shapes in a mirage that hasn't been seen since and likely never will be seen again. Small beings running on four legs and furry beings running on two legs and feathered beings towering over them all.

And in the water, clearer than imaginable, there are strange murky shadows that glide softly through the water, hunting their next meal (*possibly other beings...*). The water, although it doesn't seem like it, teems with equally unimaginable quantities of life.

And together, these creatures make up the population of a planet with so massive that for thousands of years, it was unknown how big it was to millions of other beings. *In fact, the very planet these beings roamed is the same one we stand on now. Because we stand on the heritage of decades and centuries and millenia, reaching further back than anybody can remember.*

These beings ruled over the planet, hunting, killing, eating, and coinhabiting a world as alien to us as our world would be to them. *Yet it is the same ground we stand on that these beings once stood on.* And even now, we attempt to discover this past, this heritage, not because we honor these beings or love these beings, but simply that we share a common planet.

And, as time went on, nothing changed, at least for a very long time. Yet, one fateful day, they disappeared. Traces remained, for certain. But the pinnacle of the power of these beings was crushed, obliterated completely. And so, for decades and centuries and millenia, the world forgot about these beings, except in the very tales we tell now, of dragons, and beasts that ruled the night, all mysterious beings from ages gone. Until, on the very edge of Time, a change occurred. The past collided with the present, as once again, we shared a heritage with these long forgotten beings. For although irreversible change had occurred, leaving the face of the beautiful planet forever marred, what remained was a shared heritage, a connection, a tale of China's dinosaurs.

And as all good tales go, this one ends the same way.

The End

One Last Decree: Liaoning Province, Early Cretaceous

International Christian School, Yang, Abigail Yoonbin – 15

I struggled desperately as two clawed fingers dug into my arms, trapping me.

“You’re not going anywhere,” the Sinocalliopteryx sneered, towering over me. “Not unless your mother is willing to accept the bargain.”

“I will go with you, as I have said. Now let Liao go,” Mom ordered, calm and clear. She radiated control despite being much smaller than the imposing carnivore, who was now peering down on her with terrifyingly large eyes. I longed to stop him and ruin his plans. To roar with gigantic carnivore teeth and chase all of them away.

But my legs shook, and my arms were trapped, and I was a mere herbivore. I couldn’t do anything. “Alright,” the carnivore gloated. “On the count of three, we’ll switch.”

“Liaora, are you sure about this?” Grandmother, the Advisor, worried. “There must be another way, a way for both of you...”

“No, mother. They won’t give her up, and we can’t do anything about it.” Bitterness pervaded Mom’s voice as she faced the carnivore, lifting her chin regally. The Sinocalliopteryx paused to watch this exchange, an amused smile stretching across his snout. I wanted to wipe it off.

“Very well. Please proceed,” Mom said, turning back to him. I watched, horrified, as two colossal Yutyranus approached Mom, ready to grab her. Generals Psittacore and Beiposar moved towards me with sad, sympathetic expressions on their faces.

“Now, on the count of three,” the Sinocalliopteryx drawled, teeth glinting in the sun.

“One...two...” This can’t be happening this can’t be happening this can’t be happening...

“Three.” Generals Psittacore and Beiposar wrenched me free from the Sinocalliopteryx’s sharp grip, but I

barely noticed—all I saw was Mom being dragged away by the Yutyranus. Their two back feet thumped ominously on the ground, shaking up bits of dust and rock.

“Mom!!!” I shrieked, lunging after her. But General Psittacore held me back with his strong arms. “Don’t breathe a word of this, any of you,” the Sinocalliopteryx warned, ignoring my desperate call. “The old order is over; the new reign is near.” He grinned maliciously, then turned tail and swaggered after the Yutyranus. And just like that, my mother was gone.

Loud, hurrying footsteps came from behind, interrupting my memories. Turning around, I saw General Psittacore hastening towards me, his triangular, horned face filled with apprehension.

“Leader, the carnivores have stepped over the kill quota.”

“What?” I immediately shot up from my seat on the high cliff, eyes wide and tail raised. Behind him, Grandmother rose as well, alarm consuming her face.

“They have exceeded it by ten dinosaurs this week.”

“Ten dinosaurs?! General, are you sure?”

“Absolutely, Leader.” I glanced at Grandmother, pulse quickening. She assumed a far-away expression. I began to pace, imagining carnivores rampaging the kingdom, murdering herbivore after herbivore. Panic started to run through my veins.

First Mom, now ten extra herbivores. What else would the carnivores do? Rampage the world? “Also, it looks like the carnivores are planning an uprising,” General Psittacore added, affirming my worst imaginations. The world spun in front of me.

“I—” I began, swallowing nervously. I babbled on. “What do I do? The carnivores could well murder the entire population of herbivores in the kingdom! I mean, they *will*! In the uprising!”

“This has been coming on for a while now,” Advisor Liaocan admitted, heaving a distressed sigh. “We’ve always discriminated against the carnivores, and they’re dissatisfied with how we treat them. They want more respect.” “But their quota is so generous!”

“It’s not about that. They want a place in society equal to herbivores instead of being treated like mere monsters.”

“That’s what they *are*, though,” I argued, remembering the Sinocalliopteryx’s ominous warning. *The old order is over; the new reign is near.* “Advisor, they’re going to *wipe out every single herbivore in the kingdom!*” My voice began to rise. I believed every word I said—and I had no idea what to do.

“Leader, if I may speak, I suggest limiting the quota. It may serve as a warning for the carnivores, and a reminder that rules exist for a reason,” General Psittacore suggested. I stopped pacing, considering. It was a valid idea, but wouldn’t it anger the carnivores even further?

“With all due respect, General, I disagree,” Advisor Liaocan countered. “We need to hear the carnivores’ opinions. So I suggest scheduling a meeting with them.” My heart gave an unpleasant jolt at the thought of

communicating with the carnivores. They could easily threaten us into giving up control over the kingdom, then take over and murder all the herbivores. Exactly what the Maker wished to prevent when He put us in charge. I couldn’t let that happen.

But Grandmother was right. All the herbivores I knew avoided carnivores like the plague. So surely the fair thing to do was to treat the carnivores better? It was what Mom would have done.

Or would she have? I couldn’t get rid of the image of carnivores swarming the land, snuffing out innocent

life after innocent life. What about the ten extra herbivores who lay dead at this very minute, not to mention their mourning families? Was it fair for *them* to fulfill their killers' desires? And besides, the reason carnivores hadn't destroyed us already was because the herbivores always stuck up for each other.

Yet when had leaders ever stuck up for the *carnivores*? If the reason behind the uprising was discrimination, wouldn't it be better, even for the herbivores, to prevent more deaths by finally showing the carnivores some partiality? But once they got what they wanted, they could just continue murdering herbivores, and then there would be no stopping them.

I dug my fingers into my splitting head. What would a just leader do? What would Mom have done? Again, my mind relived the day she was taken, and her bleak last words to Grandmother.

They won't give her up, and we can't do anything about it.

But if I could control the carnivores before they controlled *us*...

"I think we have to limit the quota," I concluded. Grandmother's eyes narrowed.

"Liao, please think about it. If we don't change our attitudes towards carnivores *now*, it'll always be too late to placate them, while limiting the quota will only fuel their anger." I squeezed my eyes shut. The decision weighed as heavy as a mountain on my bones, grinding them to pieces.

Ten extra herbivores. How soon would that number transition to twenty? Thirty? One hundred? Should I talk to them or punish them?

"They'd murder us all either way, so the better choice would be to enforce our authority, right?" I began to reason aloud, trying to quiet the whirlwind in my head. But Advisor Liaocan cut in passionately. "They're dinosaurs, like you and me. They don't want to kill us, they're just angry."

"General?" I called, projecting my shaky voice over Advisor Liaocan's steady one. *Was I right? Or should I listen to Grandmother?* Pressure tightened around my neck, clogging my throat. You must *decide now, before it's too late*. I attempted to steady my voice, but wasn't sure I succeeded. "Please inform the other officials. I'm enforcing a new quota."

"The leader *WHAT?!?*" My grandfather roared from outside the cave.

"Leader Liao has decided to limit the quota," The voice enunciated clearly. "Each carnivore will now be entitled to eight herbivores a week, and—"

"EIGHT?!?"

"Yes, sir Sinovenator, it—"

"GET OUT. GET OUT, NOW."

"Sir, I haven't finished—"

"I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT, YOU FILTHY LITTLE HERBIVORE. LEAVE BEFORE I *END YOU*." Grandfather stormed back into the cave, sides heaving with righteous indignation. "How *dare* they!" He spat viciously. "So only eight herbivores? A week?" My father repeated quietly. *Only eight. The words sank in. Eight herbivores for an entire week. How will we live?* I glanced up anxiously at Grandfather, still shaking with fury, hoping for a solution.

"They said things were getting worse, and here's the confirmation," he muttered. "I didn't want to engage with them at first, but now...there's no choice."

Engage with "*them*"? Surely Grandfather didn't mean...

“We have to join the uprising.”

“Father, isn’t that a little drastic?” Dad interjected. “The herbivores fear us. They probably think we’re going to murder the entire kingdom. Surely if we just talk to them and tell them that’s not what most of us want, we can continue to coexist without destroying the world.”

“The uprising will happen anyway,” Grandfather growled fiercely. “Those carnivores are determined, and for good reason. The leaders always take the herbivores’ side, and always have. It’s time we got some justice.” I burrowed my head into my arms. Were we really going to join the Sinocalliopteryx’s gang and stand against the Maker’s desire for peace? Even the mere *thought* of digging bloody claws into herbivores’ throats made me want to throw up already. And besides, if we disobeyed Him, the Maker could do *anything* to us. So was I willing, or even capable, of joining the uprising at all?

But Grandfather was right—there was no other choice. Either the infuriatingly self-righteous herbivores starved us to death, or we did something about it. We couldn’t be prey to the herbivores any longer—we had to show them that we weren’t to be messed with.

“Leader, the carnivores have exceeded the quota *again*, but this time by thirty-one herbivores,” General Psittacore reported grimly.

“WHAT?!” *Thirty-one?!* “But I thought warning them would make them stop!”

Instinctively, I whirled to face Advisor Liaocan, heart pounding.

“Perhaps it’s not too late to call a meeting,” she said, meeting my eyes.

“Advisor, I think it might actually be too late. The carnivores didn’t receive the new quota...quite as well as we thought,” General Psittacore finished vaguely.

“What did they do?” the Advisor’s eyes narrowed.

“Many of the police reported that they threatened to kill them and the Leader. Amongst other things.” My eyes widened further than they already had. A direct threat to *me*? The Maker Himself had decreed that it was *illegal* to kill the Leader!

But I shouldn’t be surprised. They hadn’t minded that when they took my mother. And *I* had made the decision. *I* had decreed the new quota.

It had been the wrong choice after all, and now they were coming for me. I wrapped my fingers around my head, spiraling into hopelessness, my breath coming in short gasps. This was it. The end of the kingdom. But really, would this day have been any different if I had listened to the carnivores instead? I straightened up and started to walk in circles, taking deep breaths, attempting to calm down. “Is there really no way out?” I pondered aloud, grasping at ideas. “Should I dole out more punishments?” “We could still try orchestrating a meeting with the carnivores,” Advisor Liaocan suggested, curling her tail around her feet. “Of course, you would be heavily guarded, and it would be very risky.” I knew that by “risky”, she meant “deadly”. I could picture all too well the two savage Yutyranus now grabbing *me*, taking *me* away. I shuddered. “No, I agree with General Psittacore. They’d kill me in an instant. They’d kill you. They’d kill all the guards!” My voice grew higher as I spoke.

I’ve failed to be a good leader. I knew I wasn’t ready for this.

This is all because the carnivores took my mother. They’re too greedy for their own good. Even before the uprising, everything had always been the carnivores’ fault. There had always been accidental killings and mistaken murders. But *were* they even accidents in the first place? I was beginning to doubt it. But that didn’t matter now. What was powerful enough to overcome *death*?

“Actually,” I began to speculate, then paused. Was that too outrageous? Then again, an uprising would be the absolute end. The time had come for desperate measures. “I think there’s another option here. We could stop the

carnivores.”

“How?” Grandmother inquired sharply. “The last—resort plan.”

“The last—resort plan?” The General sputtered. “But Leader, it would—”

“I know the consequences, but at least it gives us a chance.”

“Surely you don’t mean it,” Grandmother pleaded. I shook my head sadly.

“It’s the only way out.” Yet I could tell by Grandmother’s disbelieving, unconvinced glare that she would not let the matter rest until I cancelled the plan. She would most certainly get in the way. Unless... “Okay, fine, I guess it’s not the time yet,” I muttered carefully. Grandmother relaxed considerably. “It’s just...there doesn’t seem to be other options, except watch the kingdom fall.” I watched her expression closely as she looked towards me sympathetically.

“I know it seems like the end of the world, but there is another way. There must be.” I waited for the right moment, counting the seconds in my head.

“You’re right,” I finally conceded, digging my fingers into the rock below me. “I guess I’ll try talking to some of the less—aggressive carnivores. Will you come with me?” “Certainly, I will,” Grandmother asserted. “I would stay with you until the end of the world, Liao.” Her tone was so sure and strong that I felt guilty for what I was about to do next.

You have to, and you know that. Don’t fall for Grandmother’s words—she doesn’t understand the situation. “General?” I whispered into General Psittacore’s ear as Grandmother settled back, watching the horizon. The sky blushed pink as the sun laid its head for the night.

“Yes, Leader?”

“Bring my entire squadron of officials to the forest clearing as soon as possible. Don’t let Advisor Liaocan see.” A mix of emotions (caution? Uncertainty? Fear?) played in General Psittacore’s eyes.

“Yes Leader,” he breathed, then thumped away.

“Now,” I declared. Twelve herbivores stood around me in a circle, listening attentively. “We all know that the carnivores are planning an uprising. Their anger is far beyond negotiation. Therefore, the only solution is to employ the last—resort plan.” An uncomfortable murmur passed through the group. I waited for quiet. “I understand that the procedure is only to be used in desperate times, when destruction is the only path for the kingdom. However, I believe this is that time. The carnivores cannot be reasoned with anymore and will most definitely destroy the kingdom. The last—resort plan is the only thing that may save us. So. All in favor of the procedure?” I let silence fall, giving my officials time to think. Slowly, gradually, all except Assistant Jinzhousaur, General Beiposar, and Police Psittacos raised their hands.

“Then it is settled,” I observed. “We will carry out the procedure. Now here is the plan of action. Police Psittacos, Beipiao, Liaocera, and Liaore, take your assistants and station yourselves near the closest volcanoes. Generals, find every herbivore in the kingdom, evacuate them to the edge of the desert, and stay with them until I come. Those who are going to the volcanos, wait two days for the evacuation, then join us after you’re done.” Stillness suffused the atmosphere.

“Also, don’t you *dare* die,” I added sternly.

“Leader, are you sure about this? Are all of you sure?” Assistant Jinzhousaur inquired after a moment, looking around at the group. She dug into the dirt nervously with her front feet. “We might end up destroying the world.” “The carnivores will destroy us either way,” Officer Jinzau retorted. “Leader Liao has a point. Whether we use the plan or not, the result will be the same. But this way, we at least have a chance.”

“Then what about the omnivores?” She challenged.

I hadn’t considered that. Omnivores weren’t as bloodthirsty as carnivores, but they still posed a threat. If we could limit their diet...

But wouldn’t they turn against us for it, just like the carnivores?

“We must include them among the carnivores.” Assistant Jinzhousaur appeared even more apprehensive at that, but didn’t speak up again, perhaps realizing how serious I was.

“Does everyone understand the plan?” I questioned. After another long moment of silence, each dinosaur glancing grimly at each other, they nodded.

“Yes, leader.”

“Good. Now go.”

Their grinness unnerved me. Maybe this wasn’t the right decision. Maybe the Advisor was right; after all, the Maker wanted us to take care of *all* dinosaurs. Grandmother’s voice rang in my head. *We’ve always discriminated against the carnivores.*

I opened my mouth, half intending to call my officials back and rethink things. But then I stopped. Remembered the Sinocalliopteryx’s evil grin as he took Mom away.

I had to find Advisor Liaocan and get out of here, now.

Relief was all I felt when I finally glimpsed the herbivores waiting at the edge of the desert. But Grandmother gasped behind me.

“What did you do? I thought you were taking me to reason with the carnivores!”

“No. That isn’t possible.” I lifted my chin, not quite meeting her gaze. “I sent my officials to activate the last resort plan and eradicate the carnivores. As they deserve.”

“You *what?*!” Grandmother yelled, halting at once. “You said you called off that plan!”

“There was no other choice.”

“LIAO!!” She thundered, suddenly stronger, harsher, and sterner than I had ever heard. I jumped back, startled. “How could you?” She hissed, low and dangerous. Then, unexpectedly, she pivoted and began to hobble away.

“Grandmother! Where are you going?” I protested.

“We need to get the carnivores out. Now.”

“No, you still don’t understand! *They’re* the problem!”

The ground lurched, and a wave of heat undulated across my scales.

Oh no.

I watched, horrified, as smoke and heat saturated the atmosphere, and as Grandmother continued towards its source. First gasps of surprise, then a thunder of running footsteps and screaming sounded from the herbivores behind me.

“GRANDMOTHER!!!” I shrieked over the tumult.

It was too late. The black smoke billowed forwards, swallowing her whole, coming for me next.

But I couldn't run—my feet were frozen in place. *What have I done?*

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

King's College, Hon, Cheuk Kiu Kyle – 16

The T-Rex's sinister and terrifying gaze swept across the car window in the heavy rain like an unstoppable and all-seeing light, looking for its frightened and confused prey. Mom was quick to cover Puyi's eyes from the horrifying scene before he could potentially get himself traumatised for life. However, he brushed off her hand and watched the intense scene in delight. For most it would be a gut-wrenching moment but for Puyi, it was a spectacle to see the dinosaur in all its glory and might.

After an intense movie experience, Puyi and his parents walked out of the theater.

'Wow Puyi! You weren't scared of the dinosaur chase scene at all!' Dad said.

"Because I'm a huge dinosaur fan!" he put up a bright smile and answered, "I even have my own Feathered Dinosaur pet, remember? It's a famous Chinese dinosaur known for its reddish feathers and long legs, like a small chicken lizard."

Mom scratches her head in confusion, "Since when did you have a pet dinosaur?"

Puyi secretly smiled at his secret, his prized possession...

Back home, in his room stuffed with dinosaur plushies, Puyi sat and studied a book about dinosaurs carefully by the window in grim light, like a scholar in the 19th century.

"The Sinosauropteryx, also known as the Chinese Feathered Dragon, is a non-aviation feathered dinosaur in red. It is 1.07 meters in length and weighs 550 grams. Renowned for its reddish-brown coat of feathers and not having the

ability to fly, the Feathered Dragon is an interesting and often contradicting dinosaur in the fact that it resembles a bird yet is not truly one and cannot fly.”

“Oh, it’s mocking you, Fango.” Puyi looked at the Feathered Dragon next to him.

Fango let out a high-pitched squeak, voicing its anger.

“Oh don’t be sad, you’re still young! You still have time to learn how to fly.”

Suddenly, loud echoes of argument began to ring through the hallway and into the bedroom upstairs. Curious, Puyi tip-toed his way outside the bedroom and peeked down the staircase into the kitchen. He didn’t truly understand what his parents were discussing but they seemed angry for sure. Mom and Dad weren’t smiling as they have always used to and a certain warmth in the air faded away. Then, he heard sounds of birds chirping, perhaps Fango was signaling him to return to the bed. On the bed he looked at the ceiling drawing of a sunny morning, and thought to himself that the sun would disappear in the drawing, becoming gloomy instead of all yellow and blue.

The next day, Puyi went to school as usual, brushing off his worries for his parents.

“Today kids, we’ll be sharing our favourite stories that happened this year. You should start first, Morgan,” Miss Abbie sat along the circle of kids in the classroom and began the lesson.

“I tried to ride my bicycle up onto a tree, so I rode straight to one in the park. Guess what? I injured myself and broke my bones because I totally crashed into a large tree!” Morgan held up his bandages almost as a way of flexing his achievement and bravery. The whole class clapped and laughed.

“I went to Spain in March and visited the football stadium of Santiago Bernabeu in a Barcelona shirt and still got to take a picture with the players there!” Rango proclaimed proudly. Although not many understood the football reference, the whole class still applauded.

“You’re next, Puyi!” Miss Abbie tapped on his shoulders with a bright smile.

He nervously stood up from his seat and came to the centre of the circle. He felt he had to intrigue the classmates and thus make friends with them.

“In the summer, I acquired a new company,” Puyi tried to speak as loudly as his little throat could, even though he felt that his legs were dancing and shaking uncontrollably like he was possessed only on the lower half, “a bird that is not a bird, a chicken that is not a chicken. He is a Feathered Dragon, a little dinosaur...” before he could finish, the class was already laughing, not because of what he was presenting, but at him. Miss Abbie quickly calmed everyone and allowed Puyi to continue his marvelous tale.

“He might not seem much since he can’t bite like a T-Rex, nor fly like a Pterodactyl,” he thought of his pet dinosaur’s lively image, “but he does try to eat as much as he can to grow bigger and stronger and train every day so that he can fly on one fateful day. In fact, I believe he’s doing that right now,” as he mumbled the last sentence, his confidence grew, entering into a flow state, “I often think he illustrates the art of struggling, that no matter what life throws at you, you just need to keep struggling, though it may be ugly or demanding of an unbelievable amount of effort, you too can fly someday. This Dragon Fango is a dear friend of mine, and I’d hope to show him to you all some day. Thank you,” as Puyi sat down, Miss Abbie began to clap ecstatically. However, the whole class only gave a short and small applause and then they moved on. It appeared that they paid no attention whatsoever to Puyi’s overwhelmingly childish and laughable fantasy.

Puyi laid his head down and held Mom’s hand tightly as they left the kindergarten after school had ended. Mom didn’t expect the class to laugh at his imagination being 5-year-olds themselves, but kids really grew more and more mature over the years, she thought.

“This friend of yours...Fango, how did you find him again?”

“Well, I don’t really remember. He just kind of appeared one day, scratching his feathers on my book and looking at me!” Puyi grew increasingly excited as he recalled the encounter.

Mom, who thought that dinosaurs were extinct, was skeptical of his story...

“Then, we would play every day in the backyard and sleep together in bed! He’s a really good friend. He...” Puyi stopped for a second and looked at his mom, ‘I always believed that Fango could fly one day. You know, anything could happen if you kept trying and you could amend the impossible back together.’

Meanwhile, Mom looked outside into the pack of trees nearby in the park and adored the beauty of the red leaves and the reddish-yellow sun behind them, sinking and waiting to rise another day.

She sighed and shook her head, though still in slight disbelief of Puyi’s story, she played along, “Well I wish Fango could achieve his dream, but sometimes life is just too great to oppose. Sometimes, things really are impossible to amend.”

“Well, that’s okay... so when are you and dad bringing me to watch another movie again?”

“Very soon, son, very soon.”

The two got back home and had dinner, Mom looked at the man in front of him. Someone who she had loved for the longest of her life, and yet was crumbling to bits. His business failed and has been jobless for a year, still struggling to get back up. He looked as though he was a broken toy because he had become desperate and depressed. However, he has no choice, as Mom cannot bear the sole responsibility of the family alone.

After Puyi returned to his bedroom, another fierce argument rose in the kitchen, about how Dad was having a rough time and just needed a period to reflect and pick himself up. He begged Mom to give him that chance, but Mom simply told him the harsh reality. Water and electricity fees, the rent, the living expenses, surely, she couldn’t handle it all alone.

‘Get back up or leave!’

Puyi shivered a bit...

In the next morning, the birch wood window frame was no longer white, but a depressing grey. In fact, the entire world was grey with heavy rain as if Pandora’s box was opened. Puyi looked at Fango who laid on his pillow. It scratched and licked itself, revealing its blood-soaked feathers. “Are you alright?” Puyi asked with his heart broken. “He must have tried to fly but failed!”

The elegant creature laid down its head on the pillow that was still white. Was it in shame or in pain? Or was it something else? Puyi had no idea. It seemed to close and shut itself in a prison as it twisted and shivered into a single ball. As a long trail of rain began to brush down the window, the Feathered Dragon of China’s irises flickered and reflected a single drop of tear like the morning dew. The Dragon has given up, thrown in the towel, and didn’t seem to be struggling any time soon. Puyi looked out the window and thought of the problems he had been encountering, especially Mom and Dad’s failing relationship and now Fango’s motivation issue. What on earth was Puyi to do?

On this earth that had nothing but the rain, in a sky that had no sun and a land of no green, all seemed lost. His classmates’ dismissal of him, his parents’ worsening relationship and Fango’s lack of drive and motivation. He wished that this was all a dream, but he was awake. Painfully awake.

Still, he had to go to school. Back in the classroom, people were drawing. Morgan drew a golden bicycle and Rango painted a blue and purple football. Missa drew a stickman with a cute wig and lipsticks and Ron drew a mixture of a monster truck and a Formula 1 race car. Then, there was Puyi, who painted brushes of orange, red and brown, and a black and yellow gaze of infinite energy. A beast that looked into the future.

“So, this is what he was talking about... a Feathered Dragon.” She thought to herself.

Morgan explained the bicycle would lead him to glorious victory one day in a race, Rango proclaimed he would join a European football club and win pieces of trophies on top of trophies, Missa really loved her mom and Ron just loved watching Max Verstappen race. For Puyi however, he said he would ride on Fango’s back when he gets bigger and fly to the horizon one day. This time, not as many people laughed at him. Some thought that they too, would like to fly out of the gloomy, gloomy rain.

“Fango, huh...I hope to see him one day too,” Ron remarked.

There was a sense of unease at the dinner table. Puyi looked at Mom and Dad who just quietly ate their food.

“Remember the time when we went to an amusement park together?” He broke the silence, “Dad lost his hat and was feeling down, but as we laughed and screamed on the roller coasters, he was over the whole thing,” He looked at them again, this time, both had a sudden flicker in their eyes, “then finally when we were about to leave the park, he found his hat, just sitting nicely on a bench.”

“I do miss those times.”

“I guess if we remember the good times and not the bad ones, soon enough, the cheerful sun will come back up,” said Mom, “which is what you say Fango is doing, right?”

“Honey, I just wanted to tell you that I’m going to look for jobs tomorrow... my friend Joe said there was a vacant office job in his company, I’ll check on him next Tuesday,” Dad smiled too.

In that moment, everyone smiled, and the room in the gloomy and grey rain, brightened up a bit.

Puyi and Fango sat on the bed and looked at the beautiful moon, alone in the darkness. Puyi could barely see Fango. “Would you like to fly there some day?” Fango nodded with slight hesitation. Its silhouette looked intimidated as it continued to look at the sky and thought about flying. Puyi could imagine what it was going through...the unforgivable abyss that it might fall into, the painful injuries and the fear of paralysing itself or even worse, dying.

The mighty Dragon was no more, but instead, only a chicken-like lizard remained. “Oh c’mon Fango... you’re better than this! Remember the art of struggling! Even if it gets ugly, you just need to get back up and keep pushing forward!” Puyi felt as though Fango was leaning on him, “hey, I’ve promised my friends and classmates to show you on next Wednesday, and the mighty Feathered Dragon cannot be down like some loser, you know?” it sat straight instantly and curled its head as if asking “for real?” “I’m serious! A lot of people got interested in you and really would like to see you fly!”

Then, Puyi saw Fango stand up with a face of hard determination as its white beak slowly cracked open and let out a barely heard roar. A small one perhaps, but it was the voice of those who had tripped over and now want to stand back up. Then, Puyi could envision Fango training as it leaves a trail of sweat behind, running lapses in the backyard, observing how the birds fly and imitating them, because that’s the type of dinosaur that it is.

“Does the Feathered Dragon pet really exist though?” Missa asked curiously. “Of course it doesn’t! The dinosaurs are all extinct!” Rango fired back. “But there are sightings of ancient dinosaurs in the deep sea and in remote areas... who knows?” Ron replied with a jolly smile. “It doesn’t matter if it truly exists or not,” Miss Abbie joined the

conversation, “the spirit of this dinosaur that Puyi talks about is still very motivating... to try to fly when you’re not a bird and have no wings? I think everyone can learn from this remarkable attitude.

“Because like that Fango friend of his, we don’t have wings to fly, or sometimes, the skill and talent to sing, the ability to run amazingly fast or the strength to lift very heavy weights. Still, we need to hold on and try to fulfill our dreams like Fango does.” Some classmates looked up with amazement and hope, while others shrugged it off. For Puyi, he just smiled, “just wait for Fango’s show tomorrow!”

“I’m home...” Dad opened the door slowly. He then walked on the carpet and closed the door behind him. He took off his shoes and lightly threw them into the shoe rack. Puyi couldn’t see his expression under the dark hallway, but he was sure he was smiling.

He walked towards to the fridge, swung it open and grabbed a bottle of iced beer. He collapsed onto the couch.

“Puyi, it’s late, you should sleep,” said Mom grimly. “Sure thing, mom.”

“That bastard Joe was just like my business partner... scammers! Con artists! Worthless!” enraged, he threw his jacket on the ground. “What happened, honey?”

“Joe just canceled the deal, playing me like a fool...” he burst into tears.

Instead of yelling at him and laying out the brutal reality and financial difficulties ahead, Mom suddenly thought of Puyi’s message. She should try her best to maintain the relationship and not lash out at him. She knelt down too and hugged him from behind. “I can sell my dresses and guitar, you can sell your bat... in the meantime, I will hold out while you look for a job, okay?” She patted on his head gently. “Let’s just pick ourselves up and struggle together... for our son, at least.”

The next day, it was pouring rain. Puyi held Fango in a small plastic toy cage and finally entered the classroom. Everyone was looking at him, Ron, Morgan, Missa, Rango, Miss Abbie and other classmates were all expecting him to present the legendary beast of China.

“Fango says he needs to fly in the playground where there’s a tree,” Puyi shouted and they all followed him outside in the rain, even Mom and Dad. They all wanted to see the Feathered Dragon.

Puyi hid under the shade of the tree in a flood of rain, and put Fango on a branch, dropping the toy cage. “Here he comes!”

Under the pouring rain, everyone squeezed their eyes as hard as they could to try and catch a glimpse of Fango as soon as the cage just dropped, but they didn’t see anything.

“Yes, keep flying!” Puyi encouraged Fango, “that’s it... keep it up!”

In the pouring rain, lightning began striking and everything became blurry. Under Puyi’s words on top of the chaotic scenery, it did look as if an ancient Chinese dinosaur was flying somewhere, more importantly, everyone could feel something trying and struggling to attain the impossible goal, but they just couldn’t actually see the entire thing clearly.

“Oh no!” Puyi hurried to the ground and opened the cage again, seemingly putting Fango back in it.

“It must’ve fallen down after those few seconds,” everyone thought. Perhaps the Dragon did fly, or managed to not fall for those few short but mysterious moments, or, it never actually existed.

“What was that?” asked Misa.

“The magical flight of a Dragon,” Ron remarked.

“I guess he did fall, didn’t he?” Although Dad was puzzled and didn’t really see any Fango, he still recognised the lesson to be learnt here, “I’ll try and fly too, even though I might fall.”

Mom too wasn’t sure of its existence, but still acknowledged the message Fango, or Puyi, tried to convey.

Later that night, Mom and Dad crossed arms on Puyi and they slept together, smiling, as Fango watched on the table proudly and happily, at least that was what Puyi thought.

New Tales of China’s Dinosaurs

King's College, Leung, Tsz Hei Ryan – 15

The Lujiatun Unit (Yixian Formation) yields some of the most spectacular vertebrate fossils of the Jehol Group (Lower Cretaceous) of Northeast China. The site has been referred to as the ‘Chinese Pompeii’ because the dinosaurs and other animals were assumed to have been killed and buried by hot, airborne volcanic debris and ash in a single event; though this has yet to be confirmed...

[Ancient China, 100 years ago, Lower Lava Basin]

“Bei! It's time to wake up!”

Bei woke up groggily to the sounds of her mother's calls. She stumbled out her bed to rinse her mouth at the nearest puddle before grabbing breakfast.

“How’s school treating you Bei?”

Her mother sat across the table with Bei’s little brother, Piao. Piao was busy fiddling with his chopsticks and Mom was cutting up some flower petals to go with her angiosperms.

“Pretty good recently. A new student just transferred in, a Shunosaurus, and I'm pretty sure he lives nearby too.”

Mom’s face lit up when she heard that the Shunosaur lived nearby. “You should go make friends with him!”

Bei rolled her eyes. Mom was always worried that she didn't have many friends, but it didn't really bother her.

As Bei cleared up her plate, Her Dad packed lunch for both the kids before heading off to work. Her dad worked in the sulfur mines, near the volcano a couple hundred kilometers away, so the only time Bei usually saw him was in the morning and late at night just in time to tuck them in. “Have a nice day at school!”

“Over here!” On the way to school, Bei heard a familiar voice. It was her best friend Mei, a troodontid. Mei was probably her only friend, they had known each other a full 16 years, ever since birth. “A sister from another mister” Mei would always say. “How’s your biology essay going Bei?” Ugh. Bei hadn’t even touched her “how sauropods work” essay, but the due date was a week later, so she wasn’t exactly ecstatic to get it done. Mei caught a glimpse of frustration on her best friend’s face before sighing and giving her a pat on the back. “Fine, I’ll help you with the essay after school.” Bei rolled her eyes before letting a giggle slip out. “Speaking of biology, doesn’t the air smell extra... what’s the word again?”

“Sulphury?” Bei replied. “It’s because we live next to a volcano, Mei.” Mei had a slight look of worry, but it wasn’t the first time she mentioned the volcano. Ever since she knew it existed, Mei was a little paranoid about the thing erupting. But after a whole century or two, the crater still hadn’t blown off. “The skies... don’t they look a bit darker than usual? And I’m pretty sure I felt the ground rumble.”

Bei gave Mei a comforting hug. Mei had always feared the volcano erupting, to the point where she would have extreme reactions from paranoia. “Oh Mei, you’re such a worrywart. Look on the bright side, if the volcano erupts now, we won’t have to do Professor Bolong’s mock exam tomorrow.” The joke seemed to alleviate Mei of her worries. “In that case, I hope the volcano erupts faster!”

“Can anyone come up and name the three of the most common natural disasters that occur in the Yixian formation?” Bei was fast asleep at her desk, drifting away to a wonderland devoid of math and geography. “Hello? Earth to Bei?” Bei jolted up from her desk, awoken by the aggressive shaking of Mei. “What makes you think you can sleep in my class Bei? Outside, now. Stand there until the class ends.” Bei frowned. It wasn’t her fault Professor Dongbei’s lectures were so boring. As Bei walked out, she saw Shuno standing along with her.

“so... What did you get in trouble for?” Bei was scared that Shuno wouldn’t reply, but thankfully he did. “I started a fight with the Yutyrannus from class 6. He made fun of my long neck.” Bei knew who Shuno was talking about, that insufferable Prick Yu. “You’re the girl that lives a few blocks down the street aren’t you?”

Oh god. Shuno knew who she was. “Yeah...” Bei awkwardly extended a handshake. “I’m Bei by the way.”

“Pleasure to meet you.” Suddenly, Bei and Shuno heard a scream from the classroom. Shuno and Bei peered into the classroom, and hiding under the desk was Mei. Rushing to Mei’s side, Bei grabbed her hands and asked her what was wrong.

“The rumbling I felt this morning. I felt it again, but stronger—” She was interrupted by Professor Dongbei. “Grow up Mei! Small earthquakes happen every few weeks, you should be used to it by now. And you two, who said you could come back to the classroom?”

“With all due respect teacher, my best friend here is having a panic attack,” Bei gestured to Mei, who was taking short small gasps while tightly clutching the leg of her chair, tears streaming down her cheeks. “Please, let me take her to the nurse’s office.” After a moment of thought, Dongbei decided to let them go. “Fine. But Shuno, stay standing.” Shuno sighed and went back to his post while the two hurried to the nurse’s office.

“How can I help you girls?” The nurse sat from across the office, treating the wounds of a psittacosaurus. “My friend is having a panic attack— could you let her rest here for a bit?” A look of concern was plastered on the nurses’ face. “It’s because of the Volcano. I felt some rumbling a while ago and...” Mei was a bit more calm now, her hands no longer as shaky. The nurse offered a bed and some comfort. “The volcano hasn’t erupted in centuries Mei. And even if it did, our government has made sure the proper measures have been implemented to keep the loss to a minimum.” The nurse was soon called to help other patients and left Bei and Mei alone. Mei looked out the window. ‘I swear I’m not paranoid— I’m scared Bei. Why won’t anyone believe me!’ Yet, as Bei struggled to find the right words, a medicine bottle crashed onto the floor, shattering into pieces as pills scattered everywhere. Then another, and another. Soon the entire cabinet fell down as Mei watched it all happen with her mouth agape and her

eyes wide. The ground started shaking, at regular intervals at first, with a low magnitude, but soon it escalated to an unpredictable violent vibration that produced a sound which could be compared to the roar of a Raptorex. Bei's survival instinct kicked in. Bei had watched enough horror movies to know the ones who hesitate are the one who does in the end. "MEI!" She grabbed Mei by the claw and spirited to the emergency exit.

"Students, please line up in a single file line, and head to the playground. This is an earthquake drill. Please line up in—"

The emergency announcement system was starting to get repetitive. As red lights reflected the corridors, Mei and Bei were figuring out their next move. "It's not just a mere earthquake. I know it!" Bei knew Mei was always worrying about the volcano erupting, but even she could feel that something felt off this time. Everything felt like slow motion. The teachers were trying to maintain order as the student struggled to even form a line in panic. "Bei," Mei grabbed her hand. "Let's get out of here. It's not an earthquake. The sky, the sulphur, it all makes sense now— I don't care if this ends up as a false alarm but it's better safe than dead." Bei took a glance at the line then at her best friend. Although Mei had always been superstitious, she wasn't always wrong, and Bei wasn't about to risk it all. "There's another exit behind the school, let's get out from there."

"Mei! Slow down—" Bei spoke through her laboured breaths, her knees weak and arms heavy. They had been running for about 15 minutes, maybe more. The school already was out of sight and they found themselves deep in the forest. "Bei, I know where we are. The road up leads back to the city." Before Bei could reply, a big shockwave shot through the ground, causing the trees to sway back and forth, as leaves were shook off and smaller branches came crashing down. The air no longer smelt a bit like sulphur, but now a putrid acrid scent, which felt suffocating. In the near distance, sirens could be heard. They were certain now. That this was no earthquake. And soon their suspicions would be confirmed, for when Bei looked up to the skies, what she saw terrified her. Thick black clouds coming from the direction of the crater swept over the town. Through the forest leaves, the sky was a swirling mass of gray and black ash, blocking out the sun. Mei started having a nervous breakdown. Her breaths quickened, while the distant roars of the now erupting volcano seemed to echo in her mind, each sound amplifying her panic. "Bei we have to get help," Mei whimpered, "We have to find a place to hide, and our families— we have to go get them, right?" Bei's heart sank. Her father was right next to the volcano working away at the mines. Had he made it out safely? Or could he already be...

"Snap out of it!" Mei seemed to have read her mind. "Your dad's going to be ok, and everyone else too. But right now, we HAVE to get to safety."

"How about our classmates?!" Bei exclaimed. But Mei knew the school evacuation plan like the back of her hand, and she knew that they were instructed to line up in the playground till further instructions. Tldr; they were sitting ducks, waiting for the lava to take them.

"With common sense, I'm sure one of them can put together that black smoke and shaky ground doesn't imply just an earthquake."

They were lucky to have gotten out of the school. Knowing how stubborn Professor Dongbei was, he wouldn't have approved of leaving the school grounds and deviating from the "earthquake" evacuation plan.

The city. That's where they had to head, if they wanted even a chance to see their loved ones again. And through the haze of smoke and the smell of ash, they trudged through the leaves to safety.

Tall stone burrows appeared in the far edge of Bei's eyesight. They'd been walking for about 10 minutes now, not enough time for the two to collect their thoughts but enough to calm their nerves. "Bei!" A cry of help was heard from a distance, calling her name. "Who just said that??" Mei was concerned... she wasn't exactly eager to help another dinosaur, she was plenty satisfied with just Bei. But Bei recognised that voice. "Shuno? Is that you?"

“Yes!!” Shuno roared. Bei and Mei found Shuno trapped under a log, wincing in pain. “As you can see, I'm not exactly doing great right now.” Bei and Mei struggled to put the log off Shuno, but finally pushed the large piece of lumber away. After catching his breath, Shuno explained how he had even gotten here in the first place.

“When you two went to the nurses' office, I snuck off to the garden. I didn't want to stand alone, you know? But then— the ground started shaking and before I knew it, I was running out of there. I got lost and...that's how I got here.” Shuno stood up and ruffled his tail spikes before brushing off the leaves that cling onto him. “So, where are you headed?” Mei took a glance at Bei and pulled her aside. “Can we even trust someone we just met yesterday? And didn't he get into a fight?” Mei whispered, “What if we end up having to fight over resources?! I'm a small dinosaur Bei, I can't fight someone that big!” Bei tried to hold in her laughter. “Cmon, I'm being serious here!” As much as Bei thought she was right, she believed in Shuno. Besides, the city was only a few more minutes away. “He can come with us...but if there's even a sign of something bad we can ditch him ok?” Mei looked over her shoulder to take a peek at Shuno, who was patiently waiting for them to finish. “Fine, He can come with.” Bei's face lit up and she gave Mei a tight squeeze. “Thank you!!!” Bei then turned to Shuno. “Cmon Shuno, it's time to go!” The roars of the eruption were getting louder with each passing minute. The sky was now pitch black, and it was getting harder and harder to breathe. “Please god,” Bei prayed, “Please don't let the lava have already reached the city.”

Appearing from the forest foliage, the trio looked out and saw disaster. As the eruption intensified, the ground trembled causing burrows to sway and topple. The rumble of the volcano echoed through the city, a primal sound that stirred panic among the dinosaurs nearby. Citizens fled in terror, their massive forms crashing through the underbrush as they tried to escape the black ash and smoke and the crackling of flames? Oh no! “The lava Mei! The lava has reached our city already! As Buildings made of wood and stone trembled under the seismic onslaught, Shuno, Bei and Mei scrambled for shelter, their hearts racing with fear. Faults in the ground released clouds of steam and gas that hissed and swirled, obscuring the view. “We need to get to higher ground to find where the lava is flowing from— we don't want to be running towards the flow!” Mei shouted. She was locked in, her hands trembling as she pulled out all the knowledge that her paranoia has caused her to remember. “The two closest emergency shelters are in opposite directions, so we have to know where that lava flow is!”

“Right there!” Shuno's long neck allowed him to peer over the structures and find the source of the lava. “There's no time to lose then! Let's go to the southern emergency bunker!” As the lava flow approached, they all ran south, adrenaline pumping through the three. The heat was unbearable, igniting the vegetation behind them in a fiery blaze. Flames licking at the edges of structures, and shadows of fleeing creatures silhouetted against the smoke. Coughs could be heard from all directions as multiple species either fainted from a lack of oxygen or were taken by the flames of the volcano.

“There it is! The bunker.” Shuno let out one final burst of energy before entering the bunker, followed by Mei. “Bei! Get in! What are you waiting for?” Mei exclaimed. But in the corner of her eyes, to her disbelief Mei saw Piao and her mother, huddled up in panic under the rubble. “My family! They're right there!” Bei screamed out “I have to go help them!” Bei looked Mei deep in the eyes. She knew what she had to do. “If I don't make it...Don't forget me ok?” And with that, Bei turned around and clobbered forwards her little brother and mom. Mei screamed at her to come back, her voice filled with concern and desperation. Bei didn't dare look back. She could feel the intense heat glazing over her, searing the sweat off her hide. “PIAO! MOM!” Her voice was muted from the surrounding noise, but Piao managed to catch sight of her. “Big sis! Over here!” Without hesitation, Bei started digging her family out the flaming rubble. Her hands were charring from the heat of the burning wood and stone, but she didn't feel a thing. Maybe it was the adrenaline, or maybe she was determined to help save her family she didn't care. But no matter what she did, she couldn't seem to help them. The flames continued to creep closer. “It's over.” Bei thought. “I can't save them anymore.” She could see the lava approaching, waves of black and red, glowing in a menacing yet

serene way, enveloping the distance. Bei kept digging but to no avail. Just then, a long neck towered over her. "Shuno! What are you doing here?" Shuno didn't reply, instead helping move the rubble along with her. Mei quickly followed, shoveling the debris off. And just as the flames spread to their feet Piao and Bei's mom were freed. "RUN!" They ran like the wind, darting towards the open exit to the bunker. People in the bunker cheered for them as they barely made it in, lava in hot pursuit. And as they sealed the hatch, they all breathed a sigh of relief. The worst was finally over.

A week after the eruption, Bei, Mei and Shuno sat atop a burrow rooftop, gazing at what was once a vibrant, bustling city. Now, obsidian and ash filled the roads with most of the infrastructure burnt to a char. "The volcano really did erupt huh?" Mei said. Her eyes started to water. Sure, they had managed to survive the disaster but some others were not so lucky. Both of Mei's parents and Bei's dad, they were nowhere to be found. And though both of them would like to believe they'd come back, deep down they knew the chances were slim. "I'm sure they're all looking after us up in the sky." Bei rested her head on Shuno's shoulder as he comforted her. "At least we have each other." As the sun set and the skies turned orange, Bei closed her eyes and took in a breath of fresh air. "It's all over now" She told herself. It's all over.

Hundreds of thousands of dinosaurs were killed by volcanic eruptions similar to the violent blast that hit the Roman city of Pompeii.

Much like the residents of the city, the animals were entombed in ash and frozen in their death throes. May they rest in peace.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

King's College, Tam, Chun Hin Brian – 16

In the lush valleys of China's Sichuan province, there was a valley, not known to all. There, people keep their traditional custom, including the custom of worshipping the so-called holy creature, "the father of the world— dinosaurs". People believe that dinosaurs still exist in a manner which human beings couldn't detect, feel or observe, but they are the guidance of this changing world order. This, in fact, has enlightened the curiosity of twins, Cecilia and Oliver, who were mesmerised about the legends of dinosaurs and the ancient history of their existence. At such a young age with limitless imagination, numerous tales have been popping up in the twins' mind, graining them with the mindset of pursuing their dreams— to do deep investigations about dinosaurs.

The twins actively learnt from the uncle, who has been devoting his entire life on dinosaur matter, but in vain without any significant contribution to the palaeontology community. Yet, this didn't discourage the twins from pursuing their dreams. It didn't take long for the twins to learn from their uncle that there was actually a pathway towards the land of dinosaurs.

One night, after secretly stealing the letter of "Pathway to the Dinosaurs World", the twins went into the deep forest. They teared off the opening of the letter, and read quietly in union,

"The Pathway to the dinosaurs — instructions:

Open the map inside this letter and lay it on a still ground.

Add 2 drops of Olive Oil.

Add 5 drops of Water.

Add 2 drops of tears from the adventurer themselves.

Place 6 pieces of leaves on top of the centre of the map.

Burn the map for 6 seconds.

Then, close your eyes and picture the scenario of dinosaurs wandering around yourself, that you were transferred back to the dinosaur era.

Caution:

1. Following the above rules doesn't guarantee you to even successfully be transported back to the dinosaur era. This is crucial for the adventurer themselves to have an adventurous heart and the spirit of curiosity.
2. After getting into the world of dinosaurs, you might be trapped forever, unless you find your way to get into the "Dinosaur Empire" and activate the Time Machine within 12 hours of your arrival. There are countless traps and dangers inside the empire which might put your life at jeopardy. "

"Oh!" Cecilia shouted, "Look! 2-5-2-6-6! I know that the dinosaur era was between around 256 million years ago and 66 million years ago! This must be some kind of message about the secrets of the dinosaur empire! "

" My god. But, nothing's gonna change our curiosity towards dinosaur investigation! Right, Cecilia? " Oliver exclaimed excitedly, ready to embark on a journey of adventure, " I remember that uncle Brian once said that the dinosaur world is unreachable, and that even he get the chance to visit the world, he would hesitate to reject the invitation, as the another world is full of danger, horror and mysterious creatures. You know, Uncle Brian is always timid like a rat— um but that's doubtless to say that he is a devoted palaeontologist."

Cecilia froze for a while. On one hand, she was overwhelmed by the imagination of those exciting moments that she will soon encounter, and on the other hand, she was worried about the fact that the chance of returning is diminishingly small. Nevertheless, the curiosity wheels in her mind have been spinning relentlessly, causing her to visualize the exciting journey ever since they have this idea of travelling into the unknown. After a while, she said with an adventurous tone, "here we go! "

Together in union, they followed the regulation and instructions listed on the letter and closed their eyes. They took in a deep breath, then soon had their physical bodies fading into the world of mystery...

The twins popped up into the ancient world of about 300 million years ago. Glancing around, everywhere was unbeknownst to them. The tree with a never-been-seen height, flowers with all different colours vibrantly rising delicately and fragrance, colossal-sized creatures with a never-

been—heard voice All these holy beings in front of the twins' eyes— they could never imagine themselves without seeing by their sight!

After what felt like an eternity, they reached another dimension. The view that greeted them took their breath away. Below laid an expansive valley filled with lush greenery and enormous stone formations that resembled ancient giants frozen in time. The sunlight poured into the valley, illuminating the scene in a golden glow.

The magnificent but mysterious views in front of them can't be possibly described with words, leaving the twins in awe and bewilderment.

"Look!", said Cecilia, pointing at the dinosaur eating the grass on the infinite grassland lying beneath. Her jaws dropped and legs were trembling with excitement and bewilderment, her heart was beating at a significant rate and sweats began pouring down from her back. The excitement is in her eyes, the joyful feeling and enthusiasm that has long been calling from her heart: After years of imagination, day and day, this incredible moment, her dream had finally come true!

Meanwhile, a rush of emotions flooded over Oliver. Excitement surged through his veins, making his heart race. He felt a mix of disbelief and wonder, as if he had stepped into a dream.

The sight of the massive creature—its towering frame, the texture of its skin, the way it moves—takes their breath away. A profound sense of awe washed over the twins, and they may even feel a childlike thrill as memories of childhood fascination come rushing back.

As they stood there, time seemed to stand still. They might experience a tingling sensation, a blend of joy and reverence, realizing they are witnessing a living piece of history. The world around them fades, and all that matters is the moment.

The twins looked at each other, sharing the same smile and laughter. They felt a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity to witness such a magnificent being. It was a moment they will carry with them forever.

"Holy." He gasped," The Mother Nature."

Cecilia nodded her head. Realizing that the creature in front of her is actually the creature that has once occupied the earth, benefiting the ecosystem as whole and eventually leading up to the existence of human beings, she said, "Hey. I feel the connection to a time long past, the realization that these creatures once roamed the Earth. It's incredible right. The mission of all those great palaeontologists— and I have made a giant leap for mankind! Yay! "

As Cecilia roamed and yelled at these mysterious but fascinating creatures in front of her, Oliver gasped and seized the golden opportunity. He took out his camera alongside, and began to record the footage of those creatures that could actually have faced extinction in the modern world, or else in a manner where ordinary humans couldn't attain.

"I believe that my photographs will then be the rare evidence for proving the holy existence of these enormous creatures. And then I will be praised as the father of palaeontologists, the father of dinosaurs, winning numerous scientific prizes and gaining instant recognition!" Oliver chuckled proudly, and at the same time appreciating the efforts contributed by his uncle. Indeed, if his uncle had not discovered the letter of "Pathway to the dinosaur world", Oliver and Cecilia wouldn't have embarked on this eye-opening and jaw-dropping journey around the globe, or in other words, the journey into the mysterious dimension.

"Wait Oliver. Say that again." Cecilia murmured.

"What?", Oliver claimed, scratching his head, glancing at the picturesque landscape in front.

The sun dipped below the horizon, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink, a low rumble echoed through the valley. The ground trembled beneath her feet, sending a wave of panic through Oliver.

"Oh yeah. Do you mean ... like ... will my photograph be the evidence for proving the existence of dinosaurs?" Oliver questioned.

"Exactly. But," She added, with a terrifying tone as if something worrying had happened, "first, how do we get back to reality?"

This sent shivers down the spinal of Oliver. She was right.

Oliver looked at his watch, shouted, "We have to be quick. It is just a matter of a couple of hours before we will forever be trapped in this other world."

The twins looked around. It took them without any seconds to realize that it was "The dinosaur Empire" nearby. The twins hurried, worrying to say goodbye to their parents.

They arrived at the entrance of the empire, and sneaked in. Looking cautiously, they found out that the empire was quite similar to a maze, but a more terrifying and horrible one. It seemed that any second a dinosaur or some creature would peek out and attack them.

Oliver went into deep thinking, counting on his fingers as if he was a mathematician solving the Riemann Hypothesis.

"Listen up. It will take us around 8 minutes to arrive at the centre of the maze. We will first turn right, then left, then into the main straight branch...." Oliver explained, while Cecilia quietly nodded her head. Oliver has never seen Cecilia being this serious at all, and he was pleased, thankful but surprised at the same time.

"Anyway," Oliver said, "we shall pay full attention and be cautious once we are into the maze. As the letter has said, you might pose your life at risk."

Cecilia looked at his elder brother, impressed and astonished. Tears filled her eyes as if she was frightened. She began trembling, which made Oliver's heart melt. He hugged her tight, kissed her forehead and whispered next to her ears, "Remember, dear. You are a brave palaeontologist, right? Stay calm, darling. No matter anything, I will always be next to you. Just follow me, and I will promise you that we gon' make our way out."

Cecilia was warmed. The twins shared a look, and stepped into the maze in front, which has been waiting for them from the very beginning.

The twins stepped into the maze. The air was filled with unsettling noises—a distant roar echoed from somewhere deep within the maze, sending shivers down the twins' spine. The rustling of leaves and snapping of twigs signaled the presence of unseen threats. Every footstep sounds amplified, each crunch of gravel beneath their footsteps kept reminding him of the traps that could be waiting. Oliver touched against rough stone walls, the jagged edges scraping against his skin. He felt the cool, damp air against his face, contrasting sharply with the heat rising from his racing heart. Each time he brushed against a plant, he worried that it might be a trap or harbor a hidden creature.

As the twins went deeper into the maze, every sense is on high alert, urging them to leave the maze and back to their home as soon as possible before the maze and its inhabitants close in around him.

"It's almost there! Catch up, Cici!" Oliver whispered.

Just then, a roaring voice from somewhere in the distance is heard. This sent butterflies into the stomach of the twins. Yet, the urge and determination to share this amazing discovery with their family and friends boosted them to survive and to wake their inner spirit up: They are to leave, or die.

"Hurry up!" Oliver whispered, "here we go!"

In front of them was an edge connecting to another edge. It seemed that twins had to jump over to reach the centre of the maze, activating the Time Machine.

Without further ado, Oliver leaped over. "Come on, Cecilia. I'm here for you!" Oliver claimed.

Cecilia was left behind. She desperately looked at her brother, struggling to jump over the edge. Blatantly, she lacked confidence and courage.

Oliver, I just....just can't. "Cecilia quavered.

"Come on. I'm here. Look at me. It's me, Oliver! Come on before the demons arrive!" Oliver said, looking at Cecilia to send confidence, boosting her inner survival spirit.

Just at that precise moment, she leaped. It was successful. The twins rushed towards the Time Machine, following the instructions, in a bid to activate it and return home safely.

An evil looking dinosaur was at their back, far away. Yet, it kept staring at them as if a predator had located its tasty, toothsome prey.

The twins immediately realized the alarming situation. The dinosaur posed a grave threat to the twins' safety.

"Hurry up! Follow the instructions" Oliver shouted.

Every second, the dinosaur was more likely to reach the position of the twins. At the same time, the twins complete all requirements listed on the Time Machine Activation Program—and there's the last one for them to execute: to close their eyes and imagine the scenario of returning back to their motherland.

The twins, forced, closed their eyes, while listening to the steps of their predator, reaching towards them. The slower the footstep, the horrible and terrifying it was for the twins.

"Come on ... please ...," the twins murmured with their voice. Nevertheless, they could still visualize the moment when the dinosaur standing right next to them, ready to consume its prey.

Suddenly, it became dead silence. Just before the twins could react, they were already back to their dimension.

Since then, no one, even the twins themselves, could have the tiniest access to another dimension of the dinosaur world.

This experience had not only changed the life of the twins; but it had connected them to a legacy of wonder and discovery. And so, the tales of China's dinosaurs continued, woven into the fabric of the twins' life and shared with all who are willing to listen. In this way, the spirit of dinosaurs lived on, a reminder of the incredible stories that nature holds, waiting to be re-discovered by those who are brave enough to seek them.

Rain for the Descendants of the Dragon

La Salle College, Lo, Jason Jun San – 15

The setting sun was dyeing the endless sky with hues of crimson and magenta, like all it has ever done for the past 300 million years. Yet, the rain that dinosaurs from the bygone age had once frisked and frolicked in, the drizzle that sustained life forever, were left unfound.

Not even the slightest bit of moisture could be felt in the frigid air.

All that's left deserted in the perpetual plains of sand and dust were scattered, withering trees, and the silhouettes of three bodies. Two human beings, and one gigantic, ossified beast. It once roamed the lands of lush and verdant, now fell to the petrifying zephyrs that settled the bones and fossils – its only evidence of existence.

"Trevor," I broke the deafening silence. "You know how these things, strong and brawny, used to rule the fields with utter freedom, doing whatever they like?"

"Yea," The old man replies, concentrating on digging up the skeleton.

"Sometimes, I just wonder, a few million years from now, after we had all perished, would the creatures by then unearth our remnants for examination? Would we be the dinosaurs for them?" I was preparing a lamp for Trevor's digging.

"Who cares. All we can do right now is to enjoy ourselves. Roam the earth like how dinosaurs roam theirs. After all, every fossil that we dug up has some kind of memory etched into it. And we'd like our bones to be filled with joy and freedom and memories of doing something we love." A smile lit up on Trevor's wrinkles as he turned around and watched me.

"Unlike *them*", I whispered in disgust, only to have the breeze cover up my soft voice.

“It’s getting dark, Scarlett. I need some light here.”

“Right.” I hurried over as Trevor’s grin revived me. Lamplight shone all over my face, as dinosaur bones bathed in warmth and illumination and my enthusiasm for them.

I had always been fascinated by dinosaurs. I could still remember the 4 year old me drowning in fantasies of living with them, after being enraptured by the encyclopaedias “Old Tales of Dinosaurs”, while confusing them with Chinese myths and legends, like the Chinese dragon Loong.

It was only until a few years later that I was certain that being a palaeontologist was my dream job.

However, that dream was never destined to come true. Who’s to be blamed? The sudden technological advancements, I suppose. Some inventors and scientists messed the whole world up, just when I was growing up as a teenager. Every single natural hazard turned from a yearly—occurrence to a daily event.

It was especially severe with droughts. No one could comprehend the disappearance of water. The oceans were drying up, and people had to pay for the exorbitantly high prices of any kind of beverage to sustain their lives. People in poverty would have to succumb to these prices and consume their purified urine, like how astronauts cope with the dearth of water.

With all kinds of environmental issues, mankind has decided on a solution, a perpetual lock—down from the outside environment. With the decreasing population (40% of that in the 21st century when it reached its peak), governments from all countries built giant structures called ‘The Enclosure’ for citizens to stay indoors, and thought that it would negate the detrimental ramifications of hurricanes and earthquakes. Well, they weren’t wrong, since then virtually none were injured, but none could see the bewitching sunsets or the ethereal starry skies anymore.

And some were forced off their journey to achieve their dreams.

But not even the strongest of volcanic eruptions could confine my adoration for dinosaurs. I knew I loved them. Not before long I was reaching out to the most prominent and famed palaeontologists for internships (I sent emails the moment I reached the legal age to be able to work, even before my family could sing Happy Birthday).

Speaking of which, my friends and family weren’t the best supporters I needed on this adventure though. They too, were affected by this change in their living place, just like everyone else. They had lost their freedom, and alongside their dreams and ability of doing the things they enjoyed. It was depressing.

The argument between me and my dad before emancipation is still echoing in my mind.

“SCARLETT, WHY? Why won’t you stop talking and dreaming about dinosaurs? Can’t you live just like everyone else? I don’t care whether *they* have a mundane, miserable, meaningless life, you CAN’T go out into the wilderness in search of stupid dead bones, jeopardizing your life. I CAN’T let you do these kinds...”

Tears rolled down his eyes as I clenched my fists. Sure, I was mad. But I kept telling myself dinosaurs didn’t perish or get extinct just to have a mundane, miserable, meaningless life. They roamed the earth, and so should I roam mine. I was simply dedicated to chase my dreams after these magnificent creatures.

But one man stood out from the rest. He replied to my emails and accepted me, not only for the advanced knowledge on dinosaurs that I’ve garnered over the years, but also for my inextinguishable enthusiasm for them.

Dear Scarlett,

I'd love to recruit you as my first and only partner. I know it's almost impossible to seek for any occupation relating to dinosaurs in this situation. But it would be a pity for a talent like you to be buried, like all those bones out there. Meet me at Gate C of 'The Enclosure' tomorrow morning. I have special authorization from the government to leave the structure to "mine resources".

Some might call him "The Chinese palaeontologist of the Century", but I call him Trevor. At least, that's what he wants me to call him during work, on digging sites.

And so far, all I ever did was have fun. Trevor taught me everything, and I was a fast learner. So here we are, today, escaping from mankind to relish in our own paradise, digging up dinosaur bones that were long forgotten, doing the thing that we absolutely loved.

It was equivalent to roaming the earth, but instead, we were unveiling the secrets of it.

"Scarlett, don't you think this is really weird? Shine some light on this part, please." He was puzzled, only to wake me up from my daydreaming.

"Oh... Oh yes, sorry sir, I mean, Trevor. Which part do you want more light on?" He pointed to the bones that represented the dinosaur's feet, deep in thought. He never seemed this deep in thought, so I dared not make a sound and held the lamp closer.

But then, something out of the ordinary also caught my attention. The dinosaur's back bones were extremely thick, indicating that it had scales.

"Wait, isn't this a Sinosauropteryx that we're digging up? It shouldn't have scales on its back, right?" I accidentally yelled it out in confusion.

"Yes, you're correct. Besides, the size of its skull, ratio of the length of the femur and tibia, thickness of its ribs, are all completely different from past records."

Trevor stood up, wandering around while playing with his moustache. He was too, baffled and befuddled.

"The shape of its paws as well... I've literally never seen anything like it anywhere else, let alone these rural digging sites in Xinjiang, China."

We both took a minute trying to recall if we missed anything in our extensive knowledge of dinosaurs. When even that failed, Trevor pulled out his hologram projector and displayed some structures from his database. Still, nothing could match the eeriness of the fossils before us.

I sighed. "Let's just finish digging the whole thing up, shall we? It's almost out of the sand and we could take a better look at it." I proposed.

“Fine.” Trevor agreed and knelt back down, getting his tools ready. “You know, sometimes it’s these anomalies you get that create the joy of being a palaeontologist. Who knows, we might have just discovered a new species, the first one in like, 47 years!”

We kept on digging for the following hour and it wore us out. Sometimes, even the things that you love doing the most can get you EXTREMELY enervated and fatigued. (God, my arms had been in the same position for the past hour, brushing dust off and slightly hammering the soil to get it loosened.)

So, Trevor decided to call it a day. We pulled out our sleeping bags and activated the tent, which turns itself into an accommodation with two rooms. That’s probably the only thing that inventors did that made our lives easier. I’ve heard from Trevor that before its invention palaeontologists had to build a tent with their bare hands! (Digging up a fossil takes so long that us palaeontologists need to camp near the site to waste less time)

I laid down and gazed into the transparent ceiling of the accommodation. The starry sky looked exquisite as well tonight. “Dinosaurs 100 million years ago also enjoyed the same stars as we do today.” Trevor yelled that out every night, as a good night wish or something.

“But *they* don’t.” I muttered to myself.

Hurricanes and earthquakes rarely affect this part of the country, so we were able to dig up dinosaur bones and enjoy ourselves while staying safe. The biggest health threat I’ve been through is cutting myself by accident when playing with Trevor’s equipment.

But this night was different.

Very different.

As the shadow of our tent merged into the sky’s tenebrosity, the slight, gentle gusts of wind started to experience wrath and rage, growing more aggressive and hostile as the minutes passed. Trevor and I were drifting away in our dreams, when the gale howled and roared and trees shivered and trembled. Thunder and lightning were streaking across the sky, covering up the tapestry of stars above.

It was probably like a dinosaur. One with all-mighty claws and jaws and a desire for vengeance. Malicious and malevolent, everything outside of the tiny casement was shattered into a million pieces.

Our tent, however, was tailor-made for these kinds of weather. The beast’s ominous cacophony was seeping in, but we didn’t feel a thing.

That was, until Trevor’s frantic wail.

“NO! We didn’t secure the digging site. The bones...”

“They’re gone. It can’t...” I peeked out, covering my mouth in disbelief and agony. All that hard work was blown away at an instant. It was at this very moment, I found pain in doing the things I liked.

“Please, we hadn’t even identified it. Scarlett, I’m sorry.” He uttered that out as I collapsed to the floor.

For a second, thoughts of surrender came across my mind. I don’t want to be hurt. I almost forgot about the delight I had with freedom, as the storm suffused my conscience.

"But giving in, giving up, is never something you would do. You've worked so hard just to taste the sweetness of fulfilling your dreams."

Those words faintly cleared out the mist in my mind. I glanced up at Trevor. "Thank~"

But those words weren't from the old man's mouth. He was standing there beside his sleeping bag, bewildered, flummoxed, bamboozled, more than ever, staring at the glass, transparent ceiling.

I tilted my head backwards as another roar permeated throughout the fields. It was a different roar, distinguishable from the rustling wind. It resembled the mighty, extended roar of a dragon. Then I heard something else penetrating through my brain.

*"Scarlett, wake up. Don't be afraid, I'm the creature that you've dug up and revived.
I'm the Chinese Dragon, Loong."*

Weirdly enough, everything seemed to make perfect sense. The more I think about it, the more similar the characteristics of the fossils we just discovered were, with depictions of the dragon.

They were like puzzle pieces that fit together impeccably. Chinese legends and mythologies from my childhood start floating back through my memory. Everything makes sense, except, it doesn't.

The creature's just a myth! The dragon was never a dinosaur, it was simply an old tale, describing how the rain's controlled by it. Its existence was NEVER scientifically proven. A million questions suffused my mind.

"Scarlett... Is that... that, the dinosaur we dug up?" He was stuttering, arms legs quivering, "How is it flying? Are you seeing what I'm seeing?"

I continued to gaze at the monstrous beast, trying to adore its kaleidoscopic scales with various hues of azure and green. Those were the scales of Koi, paws of a tiger, head of a camel, neck of a snake, and claws of an eagle.

"Yes," I replied Trevor, as a droplet of water suddenly splashed on our ceiling.

Then another.

Then another.

And there it was. Petrichor that drove away the storm. The uproar of thunder and lightning ceased, as the melodic, harmonious symphony of droplets commenced.

I've never witnessed this freshness like that since I was a child. It was the rain that sprouted my dreams of becoming something I desired.

I darted out of the tent, only to have the moist and warm air welcoming me back to nature. The place that we belong, we roam. A long roar called my attention to the soaring beast in the sky.

*"Scarlett. It is to my greatest gratitude for you to unearth my physical body.
For thousands and millions of years, I've been buried under such filthy soil
and dirt. It has invariably my obligation to delegate the earth's rain, for my
dearest **Descendants of the Dragon**. And therefore, I'm back again to
moisten the land and sustain life for all."*

“Wait! Why? How? Were you genuine the whole time? Why had none other palaeontologists discovered your species?”

The dragon let out a slight chuckle, then a lingering rumble.

“Of course I’m authentic. I can assure you, many of the Chinese myths are true and can be backed up by science. Don’t you know Chinese dinosaurs were extinct due to a collapse, not a catastrophe? That’s because I had always been there, protecting them, safeguarding their freedom and joy. I recall creating floods to let temperatures plummet after the asteroid. And that’s what I’ll be doing for y’all, protecting y’all, safeguarding y’all’s liberty and bliss.”

*“You know, I was waiting, longing for a person to have the utmost enthusiasm for dragons and dinosaurs to dig me up. I had always wanted my **Descendants of the Dragon** to enjoy the world I’ve built for them, but none showed such respect. That’s why you’re the first one to uncover this mystery. Thank you, Scarlett.”*

“So, now that you’ve resuscitated, does that mean.” I paused. If there’s one thing I’ve longed for, except being a palaeontologist, is to free my dad, my family, my friends, everyone else, from ‘The Enclosure’. I wanted everyone else to experience the jubilation of liberty, the ecstasy of doing whatever they liked. I hated seeing them being confined.

“Does that mean, all these natural hazards would vanish? Could we leave the structures we were confined in? Could we live a normal life surrounded by nature? Could we chase our dreams liberally, just like how the dinosaurs roamed the earth?”

I gasped the moist air and my screams came to a halt. Sound of raindrops pressed against silence. It was until now that I realised I was completely drenched, drenched in hope and faith for humanity once again.

*“Scarlett, haven’t you achieved all that on your own already? You should be asking for **them**, those who are lost and locked in ‘The Enclosure’. They are all my posterity, **Descendants of the Dragon**. Rest assured, this drizzle will soon sprout their dreams and the earth shall once again be back with freedom for all.*

The mizzle was hitting my eyeballs as tears rolled down my cheeks. The dragon’s cry soothed my soul and the rain. The land was soaked and saturated, as the first bright brilliance from the sun shone on the dragon’s gigantic skull, with a plethora of colours. The withering trees rekindled their vibrancy, and flowers were already about to bloom.

It was beautiful.

The dragon was gliding away towards ‘The Enclosure’, presumably to lead the rain there, as it let out its final howl.

“Don’t bury your talent as a palaeontologist, for many auspicious years to come, you shall find great success in unveiling the secrets of dinosaurs. Roam the earth like how China’s dinosaurs roamed theirs, because you have me. Thank you, Scarlett. That’s the best gift I could provide for you.”

I smiled. I enjoyed the moisture in the air. “**They** are saved,” I told myself.

Then I realised, “Oh no, Trevor, are you ok?” I rushed back into the tent and his baffled face was still there. I shook his whole body to wake him up.

“Ugh, what happened?”

After telling Trevor the insane story, he gulped and told me to record everything next time anything like this happened. We continued on our journey to uncover the memories of other boisterous creatures hidden in the dirt.

And everything else returned to normal, natural hazards seemed to never happen, and people could return to living in nature. And most importantly, *they* were free.

All that is thanks to our great dragon, the Great Dragon of China. The dinosaur we thought never had existed, yet protected us and our dreams.

Sometimes, I tell myself, we’re just miniature dinosaurs to future civilizations. All we can do is to act like dinosaurs. Roam the earth like how the dinosaurs roam theirs. Enjoy everything when we’re granted sanctuary by the Dragon. Well, at least that’s what a wise man and a great creature had educated me.

My journey with dinosaurs has been recorded meticulously into this book. For all the chapters afterwards would be an exhilarating venture, but bear in mind that all of that was sparked, by a shower of rain, rain for the *Descendants of the Dragon*.

~Chapter One, New Tales of China’s Dinosaurs
By Scarlett Loong

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

La Salle College, So, Tsz Hin Bobby – 16

In the verdant fields of his family farm, young farmer Joey would never have expected to unearth such an extraordinary discovery. As the rising sun cast glimmers of light over the rolling hills, and the roosters reverberated their cries of awakening, he ventured out to tend his crops with his trusty shovel held high. Little did he know that this would mark the beginning of something unprecedented in modern history.

He thrust his shovel into the rich soil, but instead, it was met with a mysterious metallic clang that echoed through his eardrums, the unexpected strike sending a shiver of interest down his spine. Digging around it, Joey paused in bewilderment, it wasn't any buried treasure or magical portal, as he knelt down to inspect the inexplicable unidentified object, it would turn out that he discovered some sort of ancient fossilized bone. His beaming expression broke into a puzzled frown and he traced around the carcass with an amalgamation of anticipation and disbelief while calling his local paleontology department for inspection.

★

The experienced paleontologist turned his head painstakingly, opening wide his eyes to a new array of unforgiving hallucinations. He could feel the rough palm of his disparaging colleague on his shoulder, the alluring breath of a succubus grazing his overly-sensual neck, and the intoxicating aroma of fresh-out-the-oven pastries permeating the tillage. His mouth filled with a sour aftertaste as he began to pluck lychees from luscious midsummer trees, and amidst the chaos ensuing within the depths of his tattered mind, he soldiered on. He set down his basket on the scorching soil, filling it up with crisp, undried drupes. His colleague added, “Those look juicy. Hand me some would you?” The paleontologist bent down, eagerly snatching a handful of plump and succulent lychee, their burgundy shells promising a tender burst of sweet extract. As he reciprocated his old stumpy colleague's request, he found that what remained of just his memory, thus standing in the field, was just a lone paleontologist talking to his imaginary friend.

It was a splendorous night, the sky draped in obsidian, its watchful moon staring down the paleontologist as he ambles down the pathway. It was routine for him, but today was different, he felt compelled. Some sort of mystery cloaking the forest, and its shadows whispering faint cries and smiles. The starry night shimmered in magnificent radiance, like celestial beacons holding the atmosphere in place. He held her hand, who's hand? He didn't know. All he understood was that their palm was soft and delicate, a caring motherly aura. He frowned in everlasting solicitude, knowing the extent of his fate. He continued trudging along the familiar forest, his boots crunching on the fallen twigs and foliage, it all seemed peculiar, despite the orthodox setting. A gale of wind swiped past his sideburns,

zephyrs in pursuit of its tail. As he followed forward, the rustling of leaves seemed to come to a slow and crickets' cries became elongated, he could see the starlit beams filtering through the canopy linger longer than each leaf that it touched.

Perplexed by the supernatural, he glanced at his wrist companion that he received during his eighth birthday in June, a reliable escort to keep track of the rhythmic flow of time. It wasn't long before he realized he had been deluded by the skylarking antics of his broken wits. Walking in the thick of his reverie, leaves fell like feathers and minutes became hours long. But was it really a trick of the mind, a disorder-induced figment of the imagination or something more mystical at play? The transfixation had left him stunned, and all he heard were the constant voices in his head, but assiduously, it was somewhat nostalgic, despite never having experienced anything like it before. Unabated, he continued forward without knowing what would happen next.

Lingering deep into the wee hours of the night, he stumbled across a statue, or so a product of the mind's eye. An odd and towering creature, enshrouded within the woodland depths, clashing against the cold interceptions of the windy sky. A species of titanosaur he had never come across neither in real life nor movies. Suddenly, his eyes connected with a sudden beam of the visible spectrum from a sudden expedite of epitaxy, the multi-colored mess knocking him into a haze. Shards of glass erupted from its eyes, falling fast like stalactites. Right before their inevitable impact, the crystals suspended before the ground. The disconcerted paleontologist knelt down, lost in contemplation of the quartz fragments, reaching out to touch the cold glass. As the surface of the gem met his fingertips, the surrounding became engulfed by a white light, and a cold mist encompassed his senses. Unable to discern the unusual phenomenon, his mind left behind the fleeting physical world in its wake.

What's happening? Where... where am I? Is this a dream? No.. it feels all too real... too vivid. Hmm? What's that, a play? Or no... a memory? Have I entered the recollections of that dinosaur? But how is this even possible?

As the paleontologist sat silently in his own thoughts, he observed in adept tranquility as vivid primordial lands and rivers materialized before him. The air shimmered and wavered, uncovering a prehistoric topography. Enormous ferns swayed gently in the breeze, casting dappled shadows on the ground below, the glorious iridescent skies embedding an unforgettable sight on terra firma. He admired the horizon, reaching out his arm as to touch the setting sun in its steadfast retreat. Coming back to his senses, he blinked in disbelief, the long snout and razor-sharp teeth greeted him on the reflection on the riverbed, the ground beneath him trembling upon each step of his massive feet. And so his thread had been woven true upon the eternal loom of this bygone era.

"I knew things would have taken a turn for the worse. I guess I can start by looking for my companions." He sighed in distress.

He traversed down the surrounding dense forest, the distant sunshine meeting his eyes. A type of ataraxia filled his senses, a quiet justice to the presumptions read from historic documents, he thought. It was expected to a certain extent, that there would be some sort of chaos ensuing between tribes and battles between races, like the wrath of the fiery furnace of Babylon, it would last come to mind that such serendipity could be found in the primeval depths of the dinosaur age. Sticking his head out of the thicket, he met an eventful view off the edge of the cliffside, the beauty of mother nature leaving him utterly speechless at the sight of its glory. But fate had already set its path clear, the dinosaur he embodied had already been set a destiny to follow, a destiny left to tease his emotions.

A mighty roar pulsed throughout the lands, a terrifying rumble crackled on the Earth's crust, and he could feel a danger approaching fast like wasps chasing in aggression. He was cornered, frightened and defenseless, a shadow loomed over the cliff, blockading the sunlit clearing. The ground trembled with every footfall, and he knew he had to jump. But as much as he tried, he couldn't, he wasn't brave enough. As he slowly cowered in fear of the colossal predator, all of the sudden, he felt his foot hanging. On the spur of the moment, he let his other leg slip off the ledge and was sent flying down at point-blank speeds, his heart palpitating as he looked up at the towering figure, which was no longer there? With a mysterious primal instinct and sudden burst of adrenaline, he clasped his claws onto the

leaning rock, his scales shredding off the rough surface. His descent came to a slow, as he looked down at the rocky plains, “what was... that?” he asked, struggling to catch a breather.

This dinosaur, what's wrong with it? Hallucinations? Those of a high caliber of danger at that. Never would I have expected dinosaurs to be suffering the providence of modern-civilization disorders. Ouch... my head, what's happening, so dizzy...

The world before him spun wildly, a whirlpool of colors and shapes tickled his brain funny. He laid flat on the ground, clutching the surface for support. A wave of nausea washed over him, his vision wavering in wait for an untimely end. Caws of flying sinosauropteryx became muffled, distant and indistinct, and he felt the world flickering on the verge of disappearance. He broke out into a cold sweat, each breath felt like a laborious effort. A white fog cloaked over him, and he felt himself returning to his senses, as he opened his eyes from the abyss, he saw the forest he knew all too well return, at an instant he zipped through toward the opening like a train passing a cascade tunnel, and he sat firm on the ground, tracing the remnants of his face with nothing but muscle memory.

“How bittersweet...”

A somber reality isn't it? How sorrowful, a mournful ache for the lost animals that have slipped beyond time.

“It's like wailing for a world that ceases to exist any longer...”

To bear witness to the remains of lost realms is to feel the weight of collective grief, to carry a dejection of civilizations long forgotten.

“It's just like me...”

A profound ache, isn't it? To catch a feel of past struggles and faded hopes held dear by those who traversed at the end of the corridor of time.

If you truly understand the extent of these forgotten memories, to find a connection to the ardent grief of existence—a shared lament for all that had been lost to the relentless march of time—you'll nod in empathy. So feel the other stones, solve its mystery, for you'll plead for sympathy in the trail of its mind's lies...

The paleontologist carefully gazed into the second shard of recollection, he felt a stinging pain on his forearms. Come closer, it calls. He stepped closer, placing his palm on the surface of the gemstone. Once again, he was being teleported into the dinosaur's memories, a blank page he stood, and watched as a marvelous description of land formulated before him. But this time, he was sitting down in solemn oath, surrounded by familiar faces that morph into sneering visages of mockery. The cave resonated with a laughter that stung like needles, a jab of derision sent down his ear canal.

“It's just a joke, though I don't disagree.” They laughed in unison, his relatives did. They jeer in a twisted harmony of disdain. The family reunion has become a total torture experience, but not one he hasn't experienced before. Amidst their cackling, a flicker of realization sets deep within his mind. The taunting and jibbing felt almost fake, the people at the fire blurred by a growing unease. An uncertainty built up within the dinosaur as he scuffled with his inner conflicts. As he unravels the roots of his hallucinations, a truth dawns on him—a truth as chilling as it is undeniable. The faces around him melted into the air as their guffawing faded out into a hollow echo.

“I'm alone... aren't I?” he murmurs. His heart heavy in the quiet scrutiny of his mind, a specter of his imaginations diffusing a long shadow once more. “Where is everyone...” he slowly let his thoughts drift and consume him.

You are the last of your kind.

“I know, but what am I to do about these people?”

These reiterations of your solitude are not merely reflections of your physical isolation, but a manifestation of a fractured reality that these hallucinations have wrought upon your conscience.

A cruel trickery of a condition that blurs the line between what's real and what's not. It's time to let go, they no longer exist, your parents, your relatives, you're a sole paleontologist, just like this dinosaur.

“Stop it...”

Read the last message, feel the fragment and its everlasting message, for you will finally understand the state of your being...

His back grazed the final glass chip, its body thin but aura strong, a somewhat daunting reverence to its existence. The curtains of fog closed on him, and the show began with a stark feeling of impending doom. Stood before the dinosaur, a mirage shimmering in the air, a vision of his mom and dad standing before him as the land quivered intensely. “Child, you are not alone,” his mother's voice gentle and reassuring, touching the depths of his ruptured heart, “we are here to shield you from the apparition of death, to stand as you guardians.” His father, a towering figure of vigour and wisdom. “In the chalice of your sadness, know that you are truly never abando—” a gale was sent bursting his parents’ imaginary hologram, slicing them clean through the centre.

Crazy? He was crazy once, he was always crazy. I'll defend you? I'll never abandon you? Just stop, he would never see them again. As he sobered from his delirium, he let out a faint roar, a tear running down its furfuraceous skin. The voices in his mind toyed and teased as he refused to get a sniff of this gruesome reality.

Don't cry, the avenue for your maturity is clear, walk.

“Why... must everything be so cruel?”

You cling to ghosts of the past. Your reluctance to let go is all your fault, chaining you to your memories that exist only to anchor you to the depths of your despondency. What purpose does this compulsion on the departed serve, but to prolong your own suffering?

A tear welled up in the paleontologist's eyes, letting his head drop and knees fall.

In your denial to release them, you deny yourself the chance to embrace the present, you walk on a road built by the spikes of your trauma.

The corner of his eye glistened in the night sky, a crystalline testament to the dinosaur's memory. As he glanced back at the titanosaur, its presence had merely become ashes to the breeze. The past and present can't coexist, and thus the paleontologist hammered on with his past gone.

“I wonder... what stories will my tears entail?”

Did You Cry When You Fell From Heaven?

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Chu, Wing Yee Bella – 15

Log 168 – Historical division of the Anomalies Research Lab for China

1. On the 18th of January, 2045, the following was discovered near the Laoha River, on the border of Liaoning and Inner Mongolia:
 - 1.1. A lacquered box, inlaid with a mother of pearl design depicting a flowing river
 - 1.2. Several bullet shards, with later investigations revealing to originate from a 1925 Type-14 Nambu pistol
 - 1.3. A diary with the dates and event corresponding to the peak of the Sino-Japanese War
 - 1.4. The remains of an unknown creature (now updated to be recognized as a Sinornithosaurus), with carbon dating assessing the age of origin to be approximately 1951 years old with pages assumed from item of interest 1.3 nestled upon some of its bones

2. Upon Item 1.3 were writ upon these words:

Day 185:

Oh, joyous! Father has brought me a new notebook. It has been hard to find peace with the constant gunfire and running, but writing gives me some comfort. We've now moved near the Laoha river—my home has been taken by Manchuria, so we have run to the borders. They can't hurt us here, at least according to Father. At least I'll be able to see the river from here.

(Pages skipped for brevity.)

Day 197:

We haven't moved. Neither have they. Father tells me not to go too close to the river, where he and his friends patrol, but it's just so interesting! The tiny fish swimming around, the dragonflies buzzing about, the frogs' croaking... though the mosquitoes are quite annoying. Occasionally, a rather big wave comes, and all the soldiers have to run away! I got soaked, and dad yelled at me for going near the river. But it's just so pretty...

(Some pages are ripped out beyond this point. Dried blood can be seen staining the edges.)

Day 201:

Today the big waves came again, but they suddenly stopped! I wonder why...on the other hand, I found an odd little thing! It looks like what I think a dragon would look like, so I'm calling it Loong. It seemed to be telling me to not tell anyone, though. The fighting was probably disturbing it. It was bleeding, so I used some of my papers to wrap it up and dry it, and I even gave it some of my food. After that, it gave a small growl, though it sounded like a thanks, and scampered away. I hope it's alright.

(Some pages are ripped beyond this point or skipped for brevity.)

Day 207:

Today Loong returned! It was holding some old shiny things in its jaws, wings flapping about. I couldn't care for any of it, though, so I just brought it home and gave him some of my diary pages—something important to me! He seemed to understand it and hid it in its feathers, so I was happy. However, when father saw the shiny things, he seemed...scared, but he let me keep them anyway.

Day 208:

Today Loong played with me! It acts a bit like a dog, so I decided to bring a bone for it. Just like that, we played all day, throwing and catching bones, and I also brought some actual meat for it to eat. Father found out again that I went to the river and yelled at me a ton again, but mother said that I should be able to play outside despite the war and all, so I got out of punishment again. That means that I can play with Loong more! I should try and teach it some moves, like the neighbor's dog, next!

Day 209:

Today I taught Loong some tricks, like a real...feathered lizard dog? It now knows how to sit and roll over, but only when I entice it with some meat. Father said I must be dreaming, and finding excuses to play by the lake and kept talking about it being dangerous, but Mother told me to describe it with the new words I recently learnt, so I did in this poem. Teacher said my last poem was too repetitive, so I'll try to avoid that this time.

(A piece of paper is attached to the diary.)

Loong, oh, Loong!
With your beautiful feathers and great big wings,
Despite all your scars and bruises
The two legged lizard lives on with a strong heart!
The colorful feathers of your wings cover your shiny green scales
And beneath those scales is an undying beauty of the lake!)

(Pages skipped for brevity.)

Day (Illegible due to water stains)

Loong is dead

I buried him secretly by the river. Alongside all that I know about him

It's all because I went out again

I went out secretly to give Loong a piece of meat, and THEY found me. He fought bravely but got hurt. Bad.

I saw the shiny things again

This will be my last entry in this diary. I promised to keep him a secret. And I will.

After all, promises have to be kept..

(The remaining pages are empty.)

.

..

...

Friend?

Must find friend, no matter what.

Pillars here not nearly as tall as pillars of the heavens.

But stop Loong from finding friend.

Must use scent...

I will find him. I will protect him from the other humans, the bad ones.

Ah! Here he is!

Stone? What is this?

Ah! I understand now.

*He must have gone to the heavens too! I must have simply missed him.
Don't worry, friend. I'll protect you there too.*

3. Upon the pages nestled in 1.4:

Teacher taught us how to write a poem today! I was busy thinking about Loong, so I wrote it about him. I'll write it down here.

You may or may not be able to see me; and I will still love you.

You may or may not be able to hear me; and I will still love you.

You may or may not leave me; and I will still love you.

You may or may not forget me; and I will still love you.

**4. Soon after the discovery of the bones, it began to reanimate, commencing incident 519:
19th of January, 2045**

00:00 – The bones began to shudder and reanimate into a figure soon recognized as a Sinornithosaurus (now renamed as D-1314).

00:05 – D-1314 began to scamper around, sniffing at the box for several seconds, before running out of the fenced area.

00:30 – D-1314 began to run wildly in all directions, destroying nearby structures and injuring several.

00:45 – D-1314 ran out of monitored areas, rendering tracking unavailable.

5. At Dongjing Mausoleum, Liaoning, incident 520 commenced at 05:48:

D-1314 went upon the grave of famous archaeologist Dong Longfeng and crouched, before slowly curling up and turning into stone.

...

The sun is rising, and I can hear the lake...

6. Due to public protesting and out of respect for Dong Longfeng, the statue has not been tampered with since.

Misunderstood Massacre

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Ho, Hailey – 15

75 million years ago, when the dinosaurs roamed the land, when the pterosaurs dominated the skies like the mosasaurs ruled the seas.

A newborn dinosaur cracked its eggshell open, struggling to meet the outside world, eager to see the bright blue sky. The parents looked fondly at each other before looking back at their precious child.

...How about this...

A dinosaur baby, mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth, vicious-looking and horrendously threatening to the herbivores, was born right in front of the Equijubus' parents' sight. As caring parents, they must have to care for their young, no? Well, at least they consider him as their child despite his outstanding appearance.

And so the story starts. Ignatius the Yutyranus.

As fiery as his name sounded, he himself, was still yet an innocent infant.

"Isn't he beautiful?" Jennifer, the Equijubus cow squealed as she nudged her partner. She then pushed her beak towards the newborn carnivore, sniffing him from head to toe. He was barely the size of her snout.

Arnold, the bull staggered a few steps back, staring at his spouse in disbelief as he exclaimed, "What do you mean?! Don't you see his pointy teeth?! Put him back to where he belonged this instant! He is not part of us!"

"Excuse me? Put him back? You mean send ourselves right into the predators' lair?" Jennifer went furious and raised up on hind legs, pushing her body right at the sides of Arnold.

"...That sounds like a bad idea." He acknowledged the potential danger and regretted, shifting his gaze awkwardly towards the squirming infant in the nest.

Who knew a carnivore's egg would show up in the nest of a typical ornithopod family? They had to hatch it, oblivious that they were raising a killer before its egg shell cracked open, and out poked a feathery head with shiny amber eyes and blunt snout; and they knew they messed up everything.

Should have crushed it between my hooves. Should have put it in my mouth and thrown it down the cliff. Anything but raising a killer who will destroy me as he ages, Jennifer thought that second she saw sharp teeth as Ignatius yawned.

Arnold sighed, “Well?” His gruff and tired tone made her snap out of her thoughts.

“I suppose we don’t have another choice. We could teach him to graze on grass just like all of us do,” Jennifer stared at Arnold disappointingly, “Maybe he would be different from the stubborn, heartless monster relatives.”

Ignatius grew up like any other dinosaur child would, being taken good care by his parents, learning the ways of life and eating well. Sometimes, he hated munching on grass like Jennifer and Arnold did, but he enjoyed swallowing berries and fruits after he plucked them from trees. He wondered why he had sharp teeth while none of the herd did.

The herd lived in fear, although Jennifer and Arnold reassured them Ignatius would never attack. They somehow would still stare at the Yutyranus disapprovingly, keeping an eye out on whether he was stalking them from afar, but never. All they saw was Ignatius chasing yet another bug rummaging through the grass, or him rolling on the floor like a playful teenager.

Perhaps he would learn to be what a herbivore would be.

Ignatius grew up munching on the fibre growing on the grasslands, and devouring the fresh fruits growing high up on the trees; he remembered how the short, delicate grass had brushed through his sharp teeth, and how the crunchy feeling of nuts and sweet juices that erupted from the fruits, before swallowing them in his stomach in one go.

Oh, how life was peaceful over those years. Though it felt bizarre when the others were walking on all fours, while he had wandered the large lands with his two strong hind legs.

All was calm and steady before the big seasonal migration had started.

It wasn’t the first time that they had to move to another location for the breeding grounds. Ignatius had ventured through grasslands to leave the warmer climate, over mountains even, and this time, the desert. Yet, roaming through the desert also meant more trouble. Sandstorms, dehydration, the heat... Ignatius was concerned about his migration this time.

“We survived the past few times. We might as well survive this one.” Jennifer lovingly told him, as the pair were stared at by the other herd members. The Equijubus herd was getting restless, some young foals threw their heads back, moaning and complaining to their parents about the lack of water.

“Don’t worry, darlings, water will not be far... Just... Over that one dune.”

“But mom! We’ve walked over loads of dunes... Where is that promised oasis— Agh!” The young Equijubus shouted.

“Trust me...” The crowd grew annoyed and groaned loudly, their steps getting more and more shaky as they climbed up the dune. Ignatius had run ahead before everyone else, and as he peered into the depths of the dunes, what he saw was...

An empty, dry pit of sand.

“Everyone—” Ignatius started before the others noticed the weird facial expression on his face, and they all rushed forward, staring at the empty sand pit in shock.

“It can’t be!”

“What do you mean... that it’s dry?!”

“We’ve walked so far, just for this?!”

Frustrated voices from the crowd of Equijubus rang against Ignatius’ eardrums, making him deaf from all the complaints.

“I thought a carnivore would do us good, for once, but look what he had done now...” Some elderly Equijubus complained. The crowd grew louder and louder, all filled with annoyance and hatred from not getting the water and land they wanted.

Until that moment, Ignatius could not hold the anger and disappointment in him anymore, and he finally roared at the Equijubus pack, until they all kept silent at the sudden outrage of the carnivore dinosaur.

“Ignatius!” Jennifer yelled as she tried to roar at him to calm down.

“No matter how hard I’ve persuaded Arnold not to keep this monstrous beast in our herbivore herd... Now look at what he’s done? Put us all into danger which we couldn’t get rid of?” Said Arnold’s old friend.

Ignatius surged right at one of the younger dinosaurs, bearing his teeth as he roared in their faces, sending them right off sobbing into their parents. The adults started to turn their backs towards the carnivore, standing defensively against Ignatius as they hid their children behind their backs.

“I would not let you harm my own children!” They furiously said, some standing up on hind legs to latch their front legs at the Yutyranus. Ignatius shook his head, but before anyone could speak another word, a ferocious roar came from far away from the sand dunes.

“What is...that?” Even Ignatius turned his head to face the sudden loud noise, “That’s not another carnivore.” He grew confused, pacing among the crowds as every dinosaur parted ways for him. The herd had been staring warily at that location just as he was.

Sand hurdled right in their faces another second later, blurring everyone’s sight; the air grew misty and the visibility of the desert lowered drastically, in just one short moment. Wind howled in Ignatius’ ears, confusing him even more as the sand got into his eyes.

The wind continued to howl, but Jennifer still struggled to yell for Ignatius by calling his name. Ignatius attempted to find his mother through the sandstorm, but the screams and shouts and frustrated noise from all the members of the herd had made him unable to search for his mother.

Ignatius gave up and succumbed to the sand, under the sounds of the helpless moans from the Equijubus herd.

Millions of years later, the story about the bravery of the Equijubus herd who fought off the Yutyranus in a sandstorm was told among thousands of people.

A Venture for New Chinese Dinosaur Fossils

Pui Kiu College, Huang, Max Linshuo – 16

Behind a maximum security door is a huge room thriving with technology: supercomputers, 3D–holographic simulations stacking as far as the eye can see. As of the moment, everything was shut off for the night, except for a monitor attached to the ceiling, showing a blurry outline of what seemed to be... a moving dinosaur.

In the centre of the room loomed a round glass table, where two middle–aged men sat upon. They must be waiting for something to happen, but what could it be? At this hour?

“BANG!”

Someone’s trying to break in by force.

One of the men sighed and walked over. Directed his gaze into a tiny retina scanner.

“Access,” said the man.

“General Tony, approved.,” said a female voice.

The cold hard metal awakened and the door slowly opened. A young man stumbled in, barely able to walk in a straight line and almost tripping over himself twice. He smashed a paper file onto the table.

“Got th–thiis from th–thee Chin–neese, foundd n–new din–nos again. I gottta rec–recover from this hangove–ver...” The man’s voice diminished as he finished his sentence.

General Tony walked over and glanced at the man, now collapsed on the metal floor.

“You’ve done well, kiddo. We’ll take it from here.”

★★★

Sunlight shone on the hills of China. A cool breeze swept through, and with it came the voices of discovery.

Three days ago, a Chinese excavation team found a new Dinosaur fossil. Shortly, the Chinese government locked down the area and built a state-of-the-art scientific laboratory just for investigation and experiments. The government also stationed countless troops surrounding the research site to discourage any unwelcome guests.

This didn't stop everybody.

"Sargent Max reporting. Us boys've arrived, now awaiting further orders, over."

A blonde, white man in a camouflage uniform lurked in the shadows of a bush, walkie-talkie in hand, behind him were two other white guys. Shielded by the tall trees, they were hardly noticeable, but their line of sight covered the entire region.

"Officer Luna, you're in the clear for this mission. Over."

Max turned off the walkie-talkie.

"Come on boys, it's time for work."

A sudden rustling came from behind.

"Who's there?" said Max, as his right hand instinctively reached for a pistol and aimed at the noise.

"Finally! Some light!" A young, energetic female voice came from the bush. Moments later a head of a girl popped out from the bush.

"Hey!" said the girl.

Max laid his eyes on the girl. She's in a traditional spotted explorer's outfit with a well-rounded hat on top of her head. An oversized coat covered her entire body while an old leather bag hung off her shoulder. She wasn't tall, perhaps around five feet.

"Who're you? What're you doing here? How old are you?" Questions burst out from Max's mouth.

Noticing the weapon pointed at her, she raised her voice.

"It's not nice pointing guns at people ya know!"

"Answer them questions, and I'll put it down," said Max, threateningly.

"Alright. Alright. The name's Chokki, heard there's been a new discovery about a dino-fossil. I LOVE dino fossils! I had to get a good look myself! Might as well grab some info of the new fossil, in all its beauty before anyone else!" said Chokki in excitement.

"Your parents know you're here?" said Max.

"Hey! I'm a full-grown adult! I'm 19! Look!" Chokki replied with annoyance, at the same time she began hectically digging in her backpack.

"Sergeant Colin reportin for duty, we got dis...19 year old female dino-lover who seems friendly. Over." said Colin.

“Probably one of those dino–fossil enthusiasts then. Don’t worry, they don’t tend to cause much trouble. Keep her around, she might have more experience than we do when it comes to these fossils. Over.”

Colin turned off the walkie–talkie again, “Luna said to keep her around.”

Max turned to Chokki, “We’re looking for them dino–fossils too–”

“Ooh! Can I tag along? I’ve never explored fossils with others!” Chokki interrupted as her eyes lit up.

“Sure. Just be careful and don’t bring us no trouble.” replied Max.

“Yippee!” Chokki cheered.

“So, Chokki. If you’re here for them fossils, you gotta have a way to break in?” questioned Max.

“Easy! We’ll go right in from the front door!” replied Chokki as she took out a military–use taser from her backpack.

“There’s gotta be hundreds of them troops guarding the front door. How’d you plan to– Wait!”

“I’ll send a signal when it’s clear!” Chokki’s voice echoed, as she leaped out towards the nearest soldier.

As she jumped through the air in an impressive spiral, she turned on the taser, and pressed it directly against the soldier’s neck.

“ZAP!”

Electricity circulated through the poor guy’s veins, as the brain lost control, he fell flat on the ground.

“Hehehe! One man down!” Chokki cried in excitement.

“Hey! What are you doing!”

A couple soldiers must’ve noticed the nuisance, immediately rushing towards Chokki as they tried to load their rifles in panic, yet she was faster. Before any of them could even reach for the trigger, Chokki had already dashed in front of them, and electrified them in quick succession.

“THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD!”

Four more bodies suffered the same fate. Without hesitation, Chokki sprinted towards the main entrance of the laboratory, leaving Max and others behind.

“I’ll meet you guys there!”

“We better not lose her, let’s go,” said Victor.

They sprinted in the direction Chokki had left, yet she was much swifter. Within seconds, she was already out of sight.

“Wait up!” Yelled Max.

Though the place was constructed in just a week, the research centre wasn't small. It took 10 whole minutes for Max and the others to arrive at the main entrance at full speed. As they approached, however, loud explosions echoed from ahead.

"BOOM—! BAM! BAM!"

Hearing this cacophony, Max sped up even more, panting heavily with sweat on his face. As he processed what lay before his eyes however, the heavy breathing turned to shock and fear.

Pieces of corpses were everywhere with blood splattering all over the place like fireworks. Some soldiers even had half of their bodies blown off, moaning in agony.

"WHAT IN THE SWEET NAME OF JESUS—!"

"Max!" Chokki, standing at the core of the entrance door with her entire body shaking. Tears in her eyes, she ran towards Max.

"Wh— When I came here, on— one of th—the soldiers had a b—bomb in their ha—hands... Saying they cou—couldn't take it anymore... And he s—saw me, th—then they ju—just..."

"It's ok, everything's a-ok..." said Max as sprinted over and gave Chokki a tight hug.

Core entrance.

After what they had just seen, the group of 4 stared down a dark, ominously long passage leading straight down.

"Colin, get them flashlights out, there ain't no time to waste."

Without a word, Colin reached out a flashlight and pointed it at the entrance.

"Let's go."

Footsteps echoed down the hallway as the four travelled downwards. After some time, they found themselves in front of a metal door. Strangely, the door was quite dusty as compared to the rest of the lab.

"It seems it's the only way, we headin' inside?" asked Colin.

Max walked towards the door to give it a small push. The metal door slipped open, and the group entered.

Immediately, something was off. It didn't seem like a research lab, but more of a prehistoric forest. Enormous plants thriving, trees looming over the group, and the smell: it seemed like the woods were truly alive, inhabited even.

"Bloody hell!" Victor exclaimed loudly.

“This seems like a recreation of back when dinosaurs roamed the Earth! Did you know moss has lived as long, if not longer than dinosaurs? Incredible!” Chokki gasped, as she kneeled down to take a closer look at the moss on the ground.

“Wait a damn minute. This is a dino research centre... Why would they ever make a prehistoric forest? Unless there’s...” said Victor.

“Dinosaurs. This place is used to keep them dinosaurs alive.” Max cut Victor off.

“ROAR!”

It seems Max’s deduction couldn’t be more correct.

“They know we’re here, and they ain’t happy.” continued Max.

“Here! Each of ya boys take a can and spray it on yourselves! It’s a perfume I made that hides one in a forest. Since most dinosaurs track with either sound or smell, we’ll just have to make sure we don’t make any noise!” Chokki explained.

“Max, we trusting her? I mean—” whispered Victor.

“We ain’t got much of a choice.”

Noticing the chatter among the two, Chokki’s eyes flashed, yet she continued. Carefully handing a perfume bottle to each of the men.

“Follow me!”

Max nodded and followed Chokki. One step at a time, they slowly mimicked Chokki’s every movement. Sometimes when the plants nearby moved even by an inch, Chokki would stay put to make sure the threats weren’t nearby.”

“Wait.” mouthed Chokki, as the bushes in front of her rustled yet again.

“This is a bit too slow, innit? If we want to get outta here alive, going this slow ain’t our best bet. I understand that you wanna be safe, but if we’re going too slow, death awaits us either way.” Victor said.

“How bout we let Victor try leadin? We should be close.” Colin agreed.

“Alright then!” Chokki replied, backing off and letting Victor take her spot.

Immediately, they were going much faster. Victor especially, started moving forward, even starting to leave the others behind.

“Wait up! We can’t afford to be splittin up!” called Colin.

But it was too late.

Suddenly, a shadow lurked from the side. It’s a T-Rex youngling. From behind, the group could see the beast.

Sniffing the air, the dino locked its eyes onto the moving humanoid in front.

“RAWR!”

A loud cry broke out as the T-Rex leaped towards Victor.

“How?!” Victor uttered his final word.

In a matter of seconds, the dino had made the scene a human-feast. The sounds of blood dripping onto the forest floor echoed in the hearts of the three. They didn’t dare to move even an inch, instead just stood there in absolute shock and horror, hearing the decomposition of the Victor. Yet there was nothing he could do, but watch, as he got absolutely demolished.

Eventually, having devoured its meal, the dino quickly glanced around and ran away.

“I think she’s gone...” Chokki whispered towards the two.

“Victor... Why?” said Colin, knowing there wouldn’t be a response.

“Let’s go. Victor can’t be dying in vain.” Max said in an awfully slow manner.

Without more incidents, the group proceeded through the woods, and minutes later, they stumbled upon another door. Chokki pulled it open, and the three ventured in.

Unlike what the three had anticipated, behind the door was a vast spherical room, dark expanse stretching hundreds of yards into each direction, 6 bridges with some patterned floor drawn to the centre. At the other end of the bridge seemed like... fossils.

“Are those...” asked Colin.

“Yeah. Them fossils.” replied Max, as he took a step forwards, Chokki pulled his arm.

“Wait! Look at the walls!”

It was only until Chokki yelled did the two men notice the inner walls of the room. On the surface, the walls seemed like countless pipes extended towards the inside of the room pointing in all directions. Taking a closer look however, those are hundreds upon hundreds of gun barrels.

“Must be a safety trigger of some sort, had you stepped on the floor...” Chokki brought out an empty bottle, and threw it on the floor in front of the crew.

Immediately, a series of BANGs rang out from all directions. Countless gunshots punctuating through the air like a drumbeat in a frantic symphony. In seconds, the bottle has been broken into dozens of pieces.

“You’d be like that!” Chokki said.

Max let out a long breath.

“Thank god you’re here, Chokki. You got any ideas how we can get through without holes in our body?” Asked Max.

“Well, this is a research centre! Let’s see if there’s any switches around...” Chokki said.

“Aha!” She pointed at a tiny visible button on the ceiling. Pressed it, and a control panel slid open. A 3D hologram emerged, and a female face appeared.

“This facility requires level VI access, please show your ID card.” said a female voice.

“Access? How would we have access? The one who usually handles our high-tech equipment is...” asked Colin.

Chokki took out a card with pieces of dry blood on it, and held it up.

“Access level IX detected. Access granted. Have a nice day, Doctor Montgomery.” said the female voice again.

“Stole this from some guy back at the entrance. Just thought it might be useful somewhere down the line!” replied Chokki. Seconds later, some of the grids on the floor lit up green.

“As long as we follow the green grids, we should be all good!”

Max was the first to set foot on the bridge and remained safe from the rain of bullets. Chokki and Colin, seeing this, followed him. One step at a time, they were careful enough to prevent any mishaps and slowly moved forward. This was it, the final stretch.

Max was the first to step onto the central podium. It was a circular disk displaying countless fossils in huge glass tubes standing in the middle.

“Chokki! Check this out! So many of them fossils!” Max instantly took out a scanner and began gathering data. Chokki, however, did not respond.

“Chokki?”

Chokki stepped on the platform, but instead of rushing towards the fossils, she turned to Colin, who was now three steps away.

“Sorry!” Chokki murmured, as she lifted her arms and gave his body a push.

“NOO!”

Fear manifested into Colin’s eyes, the unexpected force had made him lose balance, and fell on the floor. The guns fired, bullets piercing through Colin’s body from all directions as he yelled in pain. His shaking hands inched towards Chokki, yet she was just barely out of reach. On Chokki’s face lay no emotions, as if Colin was just a toy losing its function.

Soon Colin was no longer moving. Eyes dead, yet still staring at Chokki.

“Chokki!” Max cried as anger spread across his face. “What’ve you done to my boy Colin! Why?”

Immediately, Max reached for the same gun he welcomed Chokki with, and pointed it towards her head. This time was different, he didn’t intend to stop there.

“Woah, calm down there!” Chokki faced the gun with a grin. She took off her coat. Under the coat was not just a body, but one strapped with dozens of explosives.

“Max. You must be familiar with a dead man’s switch?” Chokki smiled. “If you pull that trigger, you’ll never be able to gather the information you need. Victor and Colin can’t die in vain!”

Chokki slowly walked towards Max, ignoring the firearm.

“Why?” Max yelled.

“Those soldiers at the entrance freaked out when I revealed these, they weren’t too bright, were they? Planted a bomb right under their noses. As soon as I heard you, boom! Then a bit of acting did the job! ” Chokki shrugged, “I deliberately handed Victor a fake bottle, well, he chased death himself, didn’t he?”

“I had to make sure that I wasn’t the last one to cross the bridge, so whoever was left on the bridge would be an easy target. It’s just us left, Max!” Chokki said joyfully.

“You’re an absolute menace...!” Max uttered, yet his voice was somehow slowly fading.

“What’ve...you done to me...”

“Those words are a bit too harsh, don’t ya think? By the way, you should probably lay low, and I mean literally! Those perfumes not only evade dinosaurs, but also slowly react inside your body!” Chokki giggled as she started breaking the glass tubes and placing the fossils in her bag.

“Good luck, Max. I’m curious to see your future... Count this as a favour, I spared you, and you owe me this! Next time we meet, I won’t let you off this easily...” Chokki’s voice faded in Max’s ears.

Then it all turned black.

Max opened his eyes as bright, white blinded his sight.

“You’re awake!” a doctor exclaimed with excitement.

“ I’m...in heaven?” After some silence, Max asked.

“We found you passed out in that room, I must say, you are extremely lucky to be alive. Had that poison been a tiny stronger, you would’ve died without a doubt. For now, your only job is to rest and regain health. Don’t rush it.” The doctor explained, “I’ll notify General Ton, he will be able to provide more information to your situation.”

“Aight, I see...” Max murmured.

The doctor nodded and prepared to leave. As he walked towards the door, he recalled, “Oh yeah, Someone had me deliver you a letter while you passed out.” The doctor pointed towards a paper envelope on a table right next to Max’s bed and left the room.

“I got one of them letters?” Confused, Max reaches out to open the letter.

“Hey Max,

What’s up! If you’re reading this,

Congrats on making it out alive! I told you I'd spare you, didn't I? You're an interesting one, and I do hope that we can meet again. Honestly, this isn't much of your choice, you still owe me a life, remember? Anyhow, I'm currently off to somewhere far away... I'll keep a lookout for you, until next time.

Yours truly,
Chokki”

Outside the window was a beautiful sunset. The orange clouds danced among the stars as darkness loomed over. Gold shimmer lingered through the air, waiting for its final moments to pass. The night was coming.

Max let out a sigh.

“Chokki...”

Dinosaur Legend in China

Pui Kiu College, Lai, Chun Kit Pheobus – 16

In the past few decades, China has become an exciting place for discovering dinosaur fossils. Many paleontologists and dinosaur fans from around the world are eager to explore these findings. This amazing journey started in the 1990s when a farmer in Liaoning Province accidentally found an important fossil that changed how we think about dinosaurs. This fossil belonged to *Sinosauropteryx*, the first-ever feathered dinosaur. Since then, more than 40 different dinosaur species, including 24 types of flying reptiles called pterosaurs, have been discovered in Liaoning. Each new finding helps us learn more about the ancient world.

Recently, excitement grew when a new giant dinosaur species was found in Jiangxi Province. This discovery sparked curiosity among paleontologists everywhere. Leading this important work is Dr. Miya, a well-known paleontologist who loves studying ancient life. At the excavation site, she turned to her team, her eyes shining with excitement.

“Everyone, this could be one of the most important discoveries of our time!” She exclaimed as she brushed the dust off a fossil. “If we can find the rest of this skeleton, we might understand how these amazing creatures lived!”

Her assistant Leo looked surprised. “Do you think we’ll find the whole skeleton, Dr. Miya?”

“Let’s hope so,” she smiled. “But even if we don’t, every discovery is a step toward understanding their world.”

As the team dug carefully, they found not just bones but something special. Buried in the soil was an ancient scroll that looked like it hadn’t been touched for centuries. Dr. Miya believed it contained a story.

“Look at this!” She called to her team, holding up the scroll. “It talks about a forgotten kingdom where humans lived peacefully with dinosaurs. It also mentions a powerful energy source called ‘Dragon’s Light.’”

“What do you think it means?” Another team member, Chandra, asked.

“It might mean that ancient people respected these creatures and even used their power,” Dr. Miya said thoughtfully. “We need to find out more.”

Inspired by the scroll, Dr. Miya and her team set off to explore the secrets of the Dragon’s Light. With ancient maps and the scroll’s guidance, they traveled deep into China, moving through thick bamboo forests and rough mountains, hoping to find a hidden valley.

On their journey, they faced difficult terrain and bad weather, but they never gave up. “Everyone, keep pushing!” Dr. Miya encouraged them. “We’re almost there!”

As they continued, they found more fossils and artifacts, proving that the forgotten kingdom existed. “This looks like part of a dinosaur’s tooth!” Leo exclaimed, holding up a small, sharp piece.

“Great find, Leo!” Dr. Miya replied. “Each piece tells us more about how these creatures lived.”

After days of tough travel, the team finally reached the hidden valley. The view was breathtaking—tall cliffs surrounded lush greenery, and a clear stream flowed through the valley.

“Wow, it’s beautiful!” Chandra said in awe. “I can’t believe we made it!”

“Look over there!” Dr. Miya pointed to a large stone structure covered in plants. “That could be an ancient temple.”

As they approached, they were amazed by the detailed carvings showing dinosaurs and humans living together. “This is incredible,” Leo whispered, tracing the carvings with his fingers. “It’s like a window into the past.”

Dr. Miya’s excitement grew. “We need to document this. It could change how we understand humans and dinosaurs.”

In the temple’s center stood a giant dragon statue, its eyes glowing softly. “What’s that stone in its chest?” Leo asked, kneeling to look closer.

Dr. Miya examined the stone and noticed its strange glow. “This must be the Dragon’s Light! We’ve finally found it!”

As she reached to take the stone, the ground began to shake. “What’s happening?” Chandra shouted, trying to keep steady.

The air hummed, and the valley seemed to come alive. To their surprise, the dinosaurs they had unearthed began to revive. Bones reassembled, and ancient creatures roared, filling the valley with their sounds.

“This is unbelievable!” Leo exclaimed, his eyes wide. “They’re alive!”

Dr. Miya felt a mix of excitement and awe. “We’ve discovered something amazing—a connection between the ancient world and today.”

But their discovery faced challenges. News of the revived dinosaurs and the Dragon’s Light spread quickly, attracting a mysterious group called the Black Serpent Society. They wanted to use the energy for their gain.

One evening, as the team sat around a campfire, Dr. Miya looked serious. “We need to be careful. I’ve heard the Black Serpent Society is watching the Dragon’s Light.”

“What do they want?” Leo asked, sounding worried.

“They want to use its power for themselves, which could be dangerous,” Dr. Miya replied. “We must protect this valley.”

Led by the cunning Dr. Teivel, the Black Serpent Society launched an attack on the valley, trying to take the Dragon’s Light. As the team prepared to defend their home, they knew they needed to act fast.

“We can’t let them take it!” Chandra shouted, gripping a makeshift weapon. “What’s the plan, Dr. Miya?”

“We’ll use the landscape to our advantage,” Dr. Miya said. “We know this valley, and the dinosaurs are on our side.”

As the battle began, the advanced technology of the Black Serpent Society clashed with the raw power of the dinosaurs. Dr. Miya rode a massive dragon named Qinglong, leading the charge. "Let's show our strength!" she shouted.

Tension filled the air as both sides fought fiercely. "Watch out!" Leo yelled, ducking to avoid a flying object. "They're coming from the left!"

"Stay united!" Dr. Miya commanded. "We need to protect the Dragon's Light!"

In the chaos, Dr. Miya confronted Dr. Teivel. "You don't understand the power you're trying to control," she warned. "The Dragon's Light is meant to protect, not to exploit."

Dr. Teivel smirked. "Power should be controlled. With the Dragon's Light, we can change this world."

Just as he was about to act, Qinglong's tail swept through the air, knocking the device from his hands. "No!" Dr. Teivel shouted as he watched it break. The ground erupted in light as the Dragon's Light protected itself.

"Now's our chance!" Chandra yelled, rallying the dinosaurs. "Let's drive them away!"

The defenders of the valley united, determined to push the invaders back. "We can do this!" Leo shouted, charging alongside a revived dinosaur.

Seeing they were losing, the Black Serpent Society began to retreat. "Fall back!" Dr. Teivel ordered, looking frustrated. "We will regroup."

As the dust settled, the valley was safe again. The bond between humans and dinosaurs grew stronger through their struggle. Dr. Miya and her team helped the injured and reinforced the valley's defenses.

"We did it!" Leo exclaimed, smiling widely. "We defended the valley!"

"Yes, but we need to stay alert," Dr. Miya replied, scanning the area. "There could be more threats."

After the battle, the hidden valley became a place for learning and discovery, attracting scientists from around the globe. Dr. Miya organized events, inviting experts to share their findings.

"This place is amazing!" a researcher said, examining a fossil. "The evidence here could change everything we know about dinosaurs."

Dr. Miya smiled proudly. "We've only just begun. There's so much more to discover."

As they explored further, Dr. Miya built connections with the local community, encouraging residents living nearby to join them. "We want to share our discoveries with you," she said at a community meeting. "This valley belongs to everyone."

Residents listened, some curious and some unsure. Finally, an elder stood up to speak. "Why should we trust outsiders?"

"Because together we can protect this valley and learn from its history," Dr. Miya replied. "We want to preserve it for future generations."

As time went on, the community started to support the researchers, joining forces to protect the valley. "I'll help keep it safe," a local farmer offered. "We need to make sure it's secure."

Months passed, and the valley thrived, becoming a symbol of hope. It represented the strong connection between humans and dinosaurs, reminding everyone that ancient wisdom can guide modern life. Dr. Miya often thought about how far they had come since that first discovery.

One afternoon, while sorting fossils with Leo, he asked, “Dr. Miya, what happens next?”

“I believe this valley will keep teaching us,” she replied, looking thoughtful. “The more we learn, the more we appreciate our place in the world.”

As the sun set over the valley, casting a warm glow, Dr. Miya knew the new legend of dinosaurs in China was just beginning. Each discovery celebrated the bond of unity and respect among all living beings. The journey continued, a story still being written, with a future full of possibilities.

The Echoes of the Loong

Pui Kiu College, Lee, Ching Yuen – 16

“I proudly present to you...the new and grand male idol group of Hong Kong: Loong Nine!”

Such announcement echoes through the televisions and radios of every household in the city of Hong Kong. Our protagonist, Pharrell, is busily packing his luggage for a field trip to Sichuan. The term “loong” resonated at the back of his mind, stirring up something deeper. As the name of the idol group has raised heated discussions on its appropriateness, Pharrell finds himself pondering about a deeper mystery with the word loong and the conspiracies that it raises: why are Chinese dragons named loong? Are they dragons or dinosaurs?

The news almost feels like a twist of fate. As he is about to embark on the trip to explore the themes of cultural heritage, he remembers how Sichuan is known for its rich fossil beds—places where ancient creatures once roamed—as Pharrell confronts such unexpected parallel in the modern world and culture. A surge of enthusiasm is ignited within him. With each pile of cloth he stacks into the luggage, he feels the weight of history pressing against his chest, stressing him to uncover ties and tales connecting the loong and dinosaurs.

The next day, beams of sunshine pour onto the faces of these lively teenagers as they cheerfully embark onto the train, yet what Pharrell is about to experience is on another level. Inhaling a breath of fresh air, Pharrell readies himself for the journey which awaits him as he steps onto the train to Sichuan. Commuting, Pharrell remains restless about the conspiracies. With his natural curiosity about the world, his hunger for knowledge regarding myths and legends drives him dig deeper into the topics that intrigues him.

As they disembark the train, Pharrell steps onto this foreign land filled with unfamiliar culture. On his way, he walks through bustling markets selling local goods, noticing a handful of dragon themed products, where some even exhibits characteristics of a dinosaur. Sharp claws, glossy scales and pointy tails, he feels as if his intuitive insights are being answered.

The trip continues as the class visits an ancient landscape in the rural segments of Sichuan. After arriving at a sophisticated temple, they step into the mysterious monument. Carvings of dragons on the wall, a large metal bell in the center of the square, the purpose of the temple remains unknown. Just as Pharrell begins to wonder, subtle footsteps and a room-filling aura from catches Pharrell’s senses. There appears an old man dressed in old fashioned optics, pleated slacks and with his checkered shirt tucked in. Pharrell starts off slightly amused by the old man’s eccentric fashion sense, yet the badge on his shirt – “ambassador of cultural heritage”, grabs his attention. He thinks

perhaps the elderly may be able to help answer his ideas. The man is here to introduce the temple's historical background to students.

This ornate building stands for over 3000, holding potent aspects of traditional Chinese architecture. Built in the Zhou dynasty, this temple was used to honor the mythical dragons sighted from above the clouds. The elder proceeds to explain how the Qin state of the Zhou empire is in charge of ruling the basins of west China, which would be modern day Sichuan. Historical documents highlight the superstitious nature of the state's culture and how they worshipped the loong for protection and prosperity. Folklores spread around and the act of worship became a social practice, which is why the temple was built in the first place.

Within the extraordinary interpretation from the old man, Pharrell, unlike his peers, notices some of the loopholes which aroused his thirst to seek truth.

"As Sichuan is known for fossil discoveries, is there a link between dragons and the dinosaur fossils?"

"it takes 10000 years for fossils to form, perhaps the people of Zhou have got a better grasp of what a dinosaur looks like..."

"if the people in the past have never seen dragons, where did they get the idea from at first place?"

"Maybe dragons are dinosaurs?"

In hopes to have his questions answered, Pharrell walks towards the old man. The average teenager will probably shy away from asking such odd question, yet Pharrell's hunger for knowledge prevails anything that stops him from seeking the truth.

"Hello sir, I'd like to thank you for your captivating speech, but there is still something I am a bit confused about and has been on my mind for quite a while, would you mind if I ask you about it?" Pharrell excitedly mumbles.

"Hello young fellow, sure! What would you like to know from me? I'll try my best to answer your questions with my limited knowledge, young people like you know about the world way more than an old man does." The old man replies

"Oh no, you're being too humble, i am actually curious if there is some sort of relation between the myths about dragons and dinosaur fossils. See, Sichuan is widely known for fossil discovery, like the Jiangyang fossil site and the Shunan bamboo sea, both are not very far from here, so I end up wondering if there is any links between loongs and dinosaurs..."

*"Ah...you've actually pointed out a great point, you're quite the introspective teenager aren't you? Well, I can't answer your question as there isn't any solid evidence, what I do know is that there is a myth that suggests the coexistence of giant creatures and humans in an era long before present day. There is still so much that is yet explored within Sichuan, which as you mentioned, to be full of fossil discovery. The rest is for you to prove. Listen closely, the world is vast, filled with secrets lying in the wait, just like the ancient bones that lies within its earth, that is yet to be discovered by humanity. Never let that thirst for knowledge, that passion, that **fire** within your soul to die out, let it coarse through your veins and push you forward to seek the truth."*

*"Every question you have is a **key**, unlocking doors to knowledge that have been closed for too long. That **fire** you shall embrace will lead you on your way"*

Hearing these words, Pharrell remains silent for a few seconds to run his thoughts. He has never been motivated by someone but a stranger.

“Oh..haha, its just my brain that keeps making me ponder about these things. But anyways, thank you very much, I’ll make sure to keep an eye on the matter and continue exploring.”

Before leaving, Pharrell picks up something that caught his eye, a green pointy jade-like rock. He looks at the old man, who simply let out a smile and nods his head as if he acknowledges Pharrell’s curiosity. The group of pupils board onto the tourbus and head towards their place of stay, an inn located not too far away from the temple.

Sleep eludes Pharrell as he lies in bed. His mind races with thoughts that refuse to settle. Yet the teen embraces insomnia, relishing the chance to explore abstract ideas. The two distinct interpretations of dragons shaped by the cultural crossroads of Hong Kong comes to his mind.

One, an evil figure from western medieval lore which is fierce and destructive, one which breathes fire, haunting the pages of the English tales he devoured as a toddler. In contrast, the Chinese dragon, or “loong” which embodies elegance and prosperity, a majestic symbol steeped in over 5,000 years of rich history, soaring above the lands of mundane in China.

But he begins to doubt, how did the Chinese folks from 5000 years ago, actually get the image of Chinese long from? Unlike mythical loongs, dinosaurs which once roamed the Earth, have left behind fossil evidence that attests to their existence. This prompts few intriguing questions: Are Loongs actually the Chinese interpretation of dinosaurs? Maybe both dragons from the east and the west is only misinterpretations of these pre historic reptiles? Given that both the east and the west carries varying cultural backgrounds, it is easy to notice how folklore may have been the key that embellished these creatures, perhaps adding a mustache or some extra claws?

Pharrell realizes that 9.597 square kilometers of potential homes to new strands of fossils, has remained untouched by paleontologists, leaving a vast and mysterious impression. Perhaps mysteries concerning the dinosaurs and dragons will be deciphered in these lands which holds the promises of the new fossil discoveries. Could the mysteries surrounding dinosaurs and dragons finally be deciphered here?

Pharrell remembers what the old man has said to him, to not limit his thirst for knowledge and the strive to seek truth below the tip of the iceberg. He remains restless, not being able to fall asleep, so he got up and took a look at the strange rock he picked up. Jade green and reflective, he observes the texture of the rock, pressing his finger onto the surface. The smooth surface of the rock starts off rather chilly, yet warmth starts transmitting outward from its core. Pharrell is stunned as he starts to notice the resemblance of this rock to a dragon’s scale. He gets off from bed and begins packing his bag then tip toed down the stairs around 2 am. He knows it is dangerous and risky to act on his curiosity, yet he couldn’t ignore his curiosity. Blood boils within his veins and his senses begin to take over as he begins to move without thinking. There is a nearby cliff around the balcony so he jumped across without hesitation. Minutes later, he found himself in front of a nearby cave with a strange aura that lured him here. He decides to take a shallow look by walking several meters in.

He directs the dim torchlight to the walls and discovered some strange paintings. With a closer look, he notices a serpent like creature hovering above the clouds, with some humanoid figures a few inches lower. Captivated by the discovery, Pharrell decides to inspect further into the gaping maw, as he realizes something is off. With each step he takes further into the cave. He hears shadows whispering secrets on his way further down this abyss of mystery, his growing curiosity overtakes his sense of fear. The intricate paintings on the wall gradually becomes larger. Pharrell soon notices an odd staircase in front of him. He starts doubting his choice of exploration.

“The rest is for you to prove”

The old man’s message still lingers in his mind. Pharrell look behind his back to see an endless mist of darkness, understanding that there is no turning back. Upon taking a deep breath, he steps onto the winding staircase, which spiraled downward into the shadows. With each creak of the stone beneath his feet, he felt a rush of adrenaline. The stairs felt alive as if it were a living entity luring him deeper. The air grew cooler around him as a faint echo of dripping water punctuated the silence, heightening his senses. Within a fleeting moment, the ground trembles as the

staircase shifted and began to sink into the depths. Pharrell's heart surges with panic as the walls around him seemed to close in.

As the movement stops, he finds himself stuck in an area at the bottom of the cavern which seems manmade. He stands up, sweeping dust off his pants and examined further. There stands a wall that blocks the way. The shadows within the cave flickers, dancing like ghosts of the past. Pharrell begins to question this strange mental connection that he has to deciphering the myth of dinosaurs and dragons.

"Why do I feel so drawn to this place? Each step echoes, a heartbeat races in the silence—what exactly am I looking for? Why am I here at the first place? The stories? The myths? I see the cravings on the wall, dragon like creatures twisting in the stone, and I wonder...was there ever a time they soared above humanity? And the fossils—what if they could speak? Would they tell me of a world when they were still in flesh, a world where myths walked alongside reality? I close my eyes, and suddenly I'm there, the mist too thick to see through, the ground trembling alive with ancient whispers. Where will I go? What purpose must I fulfill? Am I just a student, or am I part of the story too? The epilogue? To act as the vessel of history and tell their story, the stories of dinosaurs or dragons. The weight of history settles on my shoulders—can I carry it? Will anyone listen?"

"Every question you have is a key, unlocking doors to knowledge that have been closed for too long."

...

"I will carry it and I shall proceed"

Pharrell observes and found a **key** slot in the Centre. He presses his thumb onto the surface of the scale, feeling the warmth within. He again recalls what the old man has said to him.

"That fire you shall embrace will lead you on your way"

He proceeds to take out the **key** holder on his backpack and slit the dragon scale onto the metallic surface. **Fire** sparks and lit up the tip of the scale. With a deep breathe, Pharrell inserts It into the **key** slot which just happens to fit perfectly.

A soft click echoed through the cavern, the wall rumbled to life as it reveals a narrow opening that glimmered with an otherworldly light. A rush of freezing air swept past him, carrying with it the scent of earth and the dawn of time itself. He feels the weight of history pressing down on him as he stepped through the threshold.

Inside, the chamber unfolds like a forgotten dream. Stalactites hangs from the ceiling like the teeth of the slumbering creatures, while bioluminescent fungi paints the walls in ethereal hues of blue and green. In the center of the chamber stands a massive stone altar, where intricate mosaics depicts a scene of ancient creatures in a dance of life and death, creation and destruction. On the ground sits a tomb-like box..

As he approaches, the ground trembles slightly beneath his feet, resonating with the pulse of ages past. The altar shows dinosaurs with wings hovering in the sky. Several meters below also shows another kind of creature that flew, yet clouds block certain parts of their silhouette. Pharrell then moves open the cover of the tomb like box in front of the altar, revealing well preserved bones and fossils which mirrors the appearance of a certain type of dinosaur. He recalls a lasting image from an encyclopedia he once read.

"these are bones of an Archaeopteryx, I am certain"

Pharrell's gaze returns back to the altar. He notices how the creatures on both the top and the bottom of the scene shared the same features, only the bottom ones lacked wings. Pharrell recalls geographic knowledge of how clouds

tends to form above the rounded landscape of basins, and with the ChangJiang's water, clouds would form all year round.

"Since people of Zhou Dynasty could never gain access to any satellite technology, it would be impossible for commoners to look above the clouds and see these creatures. The Archaeopteryx has white colored feathers on their wings don't they? It's understandable that the people on the ground could only see the serpent-like body of the creature under the clouds."

Pharrell looks deeper down under the box, he notices scattered scales covered in dust at the bottom, he brushes away the dust on the scalp and it reveals a dazzling green that looked exactly the same with the scale he holds onto. The mystery has been revealed.

"But since clouds float above the basins, why will the true form of these "dragons" be built on this wall?"

Pharrell examines closer, and realizes the dinosaurs with wings are made with another type of stone. He uses his flashlight and found that the to irradiate the stones and it reflects, whereas the wingless ones does not.

"Wait, maybe the construction of this chamber was once publicized to the Qin's people to worship dragons, whereas the royal members of the Qin knew about the true winged forms of dragons. Wanting to preserve such proof, they proceed to add the true winged forms of these dragons with another type of stone above the normal ones, and has decided to block out this chamber with mechanisms to prevent the dragon's long preserved image to be destroyed in the public's eyes, hence they can better control and manipulate the public?"

Pharrell falls into overthinking, but he knows one thing in certain: Chinese dragons are actually misinterpreted dinosaurs. The myth is cracked. Pharrell finds a leeway out of the chamber and returns to the surface ground. Right before dawn, he hurriedly runs back to the cliff and crossed the balcony, returning to his bed.

As he once again lies on his bed, his thoughts don't seem to settle in his mind as always. With the new grand discovery, he feels stressed by the potential obstacles that keep him from telling the truth and explaining the discovery to people, due to misbelief and doubt. He remembers how it is what the old man has said that guided him towards to his discovery, and it is myths and cultural heritage which acts as lifelines connecting thousands of generations. He feels determined to preserve the cultural heritage and is willing to improve himself in order to gain respect among the secular such that the world would know about his discovery. Words cannot express the gratitude he has for the old man's inspiring words.

Pharrell records his findings into a book which would be kept away in a box for the time being. He promises to himself that one day, he will be able to confront it once more with the academic accomplishment he obtains in the field of Archaeology knowledge.

Meant to Be

Pui Kiu College, Leung, Hin Wan – 16

I was never meant to be a Chinese dragon.

Unlike my kin, I was born with five legs instead of the customary four. The hues of my scales shimmered like gemstones, a brilliant scarlet and marigold that contrasted starkly with the pale ochres and soft ambers of my brethren. Though my relatives extolled my beauty and uniqueness, an unsettling shadow loomed over my existence.

One aspect, in particular, demanded emphasis—my sister, Dragon Tao. She emerged as a typical dragon, her scales a muted yellow that seamlessly blended into our society. Yet, beneath her placid exterior, a tempest of discontent brewed. Each time the denizens of our realm lauded me, she would roll her eyes and glide away, her wings heavy with unspoken sorrow. What I hadn't mentioned was that her retreat was not to seek among others, instead, she would sob silently into her daybed pillow.

“Gods and goddesses,” sobbed Tao. “Why does my sister have to be the main character? Why couldn't we both? I feel as if I am but a shadow, unloved and forgotten. Sometimes, I wish I had never been born to bear the mark of a dragon.”

She is my sister. Witnessing her pain is a torment, but being the source of it? Even more unbearable.

Me too, Tao. Me too. Perhaps if I had never drawn breath, you would bask in the exclusive glow of our parents' affection.

Fortunately, we encounter our aunts and uncles only during Lunar New Year. Our mother ensures that we receive equal love and adoration. Now that I am fifteen years old, she decides to share a tale from her youth.

“Daughters, when I was a young fella, I had a little brother. His scales blazed with scarlet, just like Lee’s, and he was celebrated throughout the realms. Yet, he loathed the way his brilliance set him apart, so he delved into the libraries of the Dragon Universe, seeking remedies to alter his hue to a more common shade.”

“Did he find anything useful?” asked Tao, her curiosity piqued.

“Physically? No. The act of genetically modifying your features is seen as unethical in our realm, for our features are passed down from countless generations.” Mother paused, her eyes glinting as she delicately shed her pale yellow scales, revealing the very scarlet and marigold. *She looks just like me.* “Yet, the best path to blending in lies in embracing the essence of individuality. Each creature possesses unique gifts, not solely defined by scales or limbs. Tao, you are a remarkable elder sister to Lee, ever composed when our relatives sing her praises. And you, Lee, were always destined to embody kindness and humor.”

The Unearthed Titans

Pui Kiu College, Tsui, Chung Chi Beatrice – 16

China, as well known as the global epicenter of fossil-hunting. After numerous dinosaurs were discovered all over China, there has been a progressively increasing number of paleontologists from all over the world searching for more vulnerable fossils. But what if I told you that one of these vulnerables were found by a kindergarten student?

It all happened on a sunny day in JiangXi. A kindergarten filled with laughter and shouts as children ran across the playground, their boundless imaginations weaving the unknown worlds of wonder.

"Catch me if you can!" a young girl called out.

The air buzzed with a light breeze, yet Carl sat silently in the sandpit by himself. His fingers wrapped tightly around a worn-out dinosaur plushie called Titan. As laughter and playful cries echoed around him, his mind wandered far from the present, consumed by visions of ancient dinosaurs soaring from afar, his eyes lingered on the plushie as his tiny fingers wandered over its jagged, spiky back. A group of kids gathered around him.

“Carl thinks that dinosaurs are real!” one boy cackled, snatching Titan from Carl’s grasp and tossing it to another. The plushie flew through the air, and the children erupted into laughter.

“It’s real! My dad said it’s real!” Carl exclaimed, his cheeks flushing with a mix of embarrassment and defiance.

“Then have you seen one?” a girl challenged, folding her arms, her smirk wide.

Carl’s confidence wavered. He looked down, shaking his head silently. The group laughed louder and eventually wandered off. Leaving Carl alone once more.

Taking a deep breath, Carl turned back to Titan. “You’re real, right?” He squeezed the plushie tightly.

Then, something caught his eye. A swirl-shaped rock partly buried in the sand. It wasn't just any rock; it was spiky and oddly shaped, almost as if it were a remnant of a creature long gone. With his determination, Carl grabbed his sandcastle tools and began to dig. He scraped away at the sand, revealing more of the peculiar rock.

"Come on, come on!" he muttered, his small brow furrowed in concentration.

As the last clumps of sand fell away, Carl gasped. The object was bigger than his head, and its texture was unmistakably bone-like.

"Help! Help!" Carl cried out, his voice rising in pitch as he attempted to lift the rock. It was far too heavy for his small arms. Within moments, teachers rushed to his side, drawn by his desperate calls.

"What's going on, Carl?" one of them asked, her brow furrowed with concern.

"I found a dinosaur skull! Look!" He pointed excitedly at the half-exposed fossil.

The teachers exchanged glances, skepticism mixed with unbelieve. "Is that so?" one asked, kneeling down to inspect.

As they pulled away more sand, the unmistakable shape of a skull began to emerge. "Oh my! This is incredible!" she exclaimed, her voice rising in excitement. "We need to call someone!"

Later that evening, Carl rushed home, wanting to show his discovery to his dad. "Dad! Dad!" he shouted, bursting through the door. His father, Steven, a paleontologist, looked up from his cluttered work desk, where maps and fossil sketches lay scattered.

"What is it, buddy?" Steven asked, setting down a heavy book.

"I found a dinosaur skull at school!" Carl beamed, breathless with excitement.

Steven raised an eyebrow, said, "Really? Show me what you found."

With excitement, Carl recounted the story, his words tumbling over one another. "It was in the sandpit! It's huge and spiky, like a real dinosaur!"

"Let's go check it out!" Steven said, grabbing his jacket. "This could be a significant discovery!"

They rushed back to the kindergarten, where the teachers had already cordoned off the area. Carl pointed at the spot, his face aglow with pride. With careful hands, Steven began to excavate the fossil, revealing a massive pale yellow skull.

"Carl! This is a great discovery! I am so proud of you," Steven said, eyes wide with awe. "This looks like a piece of ancient history. You've found a dinosaur skull!"

"I knew it! I knew dinosaurs were real!" Carl danced around and laughed with joy.

Over the next few weeks, the excitement around Carl's discovery spread like wildfire in a forest. Media outlets arrived, cameras flashing as they documented the event. Steven and his team of paleontologists worked tirelessly, digging and analyzing the site. Carl watched with wide eyes, his heart swelling with pride as he learned about the extraordinary world of fossils.

"Did you know that some dinosaurs were taller than a house?" Steven explained one evening as they pored over books together. "And they roamed the Earth millions of years ago."

Carl's face lit up with wonder. "What about Titan? What kind of dinosaur was he?"

"Titanosaur," Steven said, his voice filled with excitement. "It was a massive herbivore, probably the largest known dinosaur species. And because of you, we might just learn more about it."

As the weeks turned into months, the excavation continued. Carl watched as the team unearthed more fossils, piecing together the skeletal remains of the Titanosaur. Each day brought a new discovery—a rib here, a vertebra there.

One afternoon, as Carl and his father look through the site, Carl stumbled upon a smaller bone, its shape distinct. “Dad! Look at this!” he shouted, holding it up.

Steven took the bone, examining it closely. “This is wonderful! It looks like a limb bone. We need to document this.” He scribbled notes and measurements, the excitement in his eyes was visible.

“What happens next?” Carl asked, his curiosity asked.

“Once we have enough fossils, we’ll put them together to create a complete skeleton,” Steven explained. “Then we can study how the Titanosaur lived.”

Days turned into weeks, and the team began to piece together the skeleton. Carl's enthusiasm was infectious, and soon, he became a little star among the paleontologists.

“Carl, could you help us with the presentation?” one team member asked. “We want to show everyone what we’ve discovered.”

“Really? Me?” Carl’s eyes widened with disbelief.

“Of course! You’re the one who found it!”

Nervously, Carl agreed, and as the presentation day approached, he practiced in front of the mirror.

Finally, the big day arrived. Steven stood at the podium with his son beside him.

“Today, we celebrate an incredible discovery made by someone very special,” Steven announced, gesturing toward Carl. “This young man, my son, has found the skull of a new dinosaur species, which we have named Titanosaur!”

The crowd erupted in applause. Carl’s cheeks flushed bright red as he looked out at the sea of faces, all watching him. “Um, hi,” he stammered, cuddling Titan tightly. “I found it in the sandpit, and it’s a really big massive huge dinosaur!”

Laughter erupted, but Carl felt the warmth of acceptance. “Titans were real! They lived on Earth a long time ago, and this one is special because it shows us how amazing they were.”

As he spoke, the nervousness faded, replaced by confidence. The audience was impressed by Carl’s presentation. After the presentation, Carl was surrounded by reporters and curious children who are desperate to learn more.

“Can I touch Titan?” a little girl asked, her eyes wide with wonder.

“Sure! Just be careful,” Carl replied, grinning as he handed over the plushie.

The days that followed were filled with interviews, documentaries, and even school visits where Carl shared his passion for dinosaurs. He became a local hero, the boy who believed in the magic of ancient giants and made dreams come true.

One evening, after a long day of excitement, Carl sat on the floor of his room, surrounded by dinosaur books and toys. Steven entered, a smile on his face. “Hey, little paleontologist. How are you feeling?”

“Like a real dinosaur hunter!” Carl exclaimed, his eyes sparkling. “I can’t believe we discovered a Titanosaur. What if there are more out there?”

“Who knows?” Steven said, patting his son’s hair. “The world is full of mysteries waiting to be uncovered. And it all starts with curiosity.”

Carl nodded, his heart swelling with pride. “I want to find more dinosaurs. I want to be like you, Dad.”

Steven sat next to him, his gaze softening. “You already are, Carl. You’ve shown everyone that believing in something can lead to incredible discoveries.”

In that moment, Carl understood the power of dreams and the courage it took to pursue them. The shadows of ancient titans lingered in his mind, and he knew that this was just the beginning of an adventure that would last a lifetime.

Years passed, and Carl grew, the boy with the plush dinosaur evolving into a promising young paleontologist. The Titanosaur became a symbol of his childhood, a reminder that imagination and curiosity could uncover the wonders of the historical past. Together with his father, they explored new horizons and dig into secrets of creatures long forgotten.

As they stood at an excavation site, Carl picked up a small fossil, its surface cool and rough beneath his fingers.

“What do you think this one is, Dad?”

Steven smiled, watching his son proudly. “Well, let’s find out together.”

And so, the story of discovery continued, intertwined with the laughter of children, the excitement of unearthing history, and the unwavering belief that the shadows of the past still held the key to humanity's future.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Pui Kiu College, Wong, Kwan Hei – 17

In the hills of Liaoning Province, a farmer named Li Wei made an incredible discovery while farming his field one sunny morning in the 1990s. He found what looked like a dinosaur fossil, a find that would change his life and the understanding of dinosaurs around the world.

News of Li Wei's discovery spread all over the world quickly, attracting paleontologists across the globe. They visited Liaoning to explore the rich fossil appeared which had been undisturbed for millions of years. One of them was Dr. Zhang, who was a paleontologist. He found that many of which showed signs of feathers and previously thought them belong only to birds.

The fossil was named *Sinosauropteryx*, meaning "the China dragon bird." This feathered dinosaur introduced a new understanding of the line between dinosaurs and birds. Scientists all over the world was shocked and this made a significant moment in paleontology.

As the years passed, excavations in Liaoning revealed that over 40 dinosaur species, including 24 species of pterosaurs—flying reptiles that once soared the skies. Each discovery added to the history of ancient ecosystems, illustrating the diverse life forms that existed long before humans.

Dr. Zhang became a regular visitor to Liaoning, often leading her teams in exciting digs. They cherished the thrill of unearthing new fossils, each one a silent testament to a distant past. One day, while digging near an ancient riverbed, Dr. Zhang and her team uncovered a remarkable find: a set of titanosaur bones. This giant herbivore was one of the largest dinosaurs ever, and its unique skeletal features made the discovery even more exciting. They named it *Jiangxisaurus* after Jiangxi Province, where it was found.

As the research continued, Dr. Zhang and her team explored the ancient environment where these creatures lived. They analyzed the surrounding sediment and plant life, reconstructing a lush landscape filled with towering ferns and

flowering plants. They could almost hear the distant calls of grazing herbivores and the rustling of feathers from smaller dinosaurs flitting through the undergrowth.

In the village where Li Wei lived, the discovery brought a surge of interest. The once-quiet town became a bustling hub for scientists and tourists. Local shops began selling dinosaur-themed souvenirs, and families took pride in their home as a cradle of ancient history. Li Wei, once just a humble farmer, became a local celebrity, often hosting visiting scientists and sharing his story.

However, this growing excitement came with responsibility. Dr. Zhang understood that increased interest also posed risks. She and her team advocated for responsible fossil hunting and worked with local authorities to protect excavation sites from looting and destruction. The fossils were invaluable pieces of history that needed preservation for future generations.

As time went on, new dinosaur species continued to be discovered, and each excavation sparked more questions about their diets, behaviors, and migrations. One day, while examining a fossilized nest, Dr. Zhang found several eggs with well-preserved embryos, offering unprecedented insights into dinosaur reproductive behaviors.

The discoveries in China were about more than just bones; they were about reconnecting with the past and understanding the complex web of life that existed long ago. Each fossil was a fragment of a larger story of survival and evolution, and with each new finding, the mysteries of China's dinosaurs continued to unfold.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Pui Kiu College, Zeng, Fanjing – 14

In the depths of XinJiang's valleys, a group of archaeologists made a discovery.

They had been digging for two months, analyzing and recording, united with a hope that their ventures would lead to a gift. Their hearts only recognized fossils, their hands were muddled with ancient dust, and their lives were dedicated to a past where dinosaurs roamed and raptors flew. Then, all of a sudden, they found it: it started with an astonished cry, then looks of joy and wonder, and after that, stunned eyes fixed on the perfectly preserved, fist-sized, silverpointe egg fossil that laid stubbornly there, doing something it could not possibly be doing.

It was glowing.

—

I am Levoria, and I can hear things.

It was our gift: to listen to those who others cannot. The earth, for instance, is always restless. It shifts and grumbles and hisses and growls. It speaks to me and my kind of the vast emptiness, divulges the dawn of time, and of all peculiar creatures that burrows and walks in it. The wind hums and whispers, carrying all sorts of tales: they are excellent gossipers. The trees keep me company —they tell stories and make brilliant jokes, never failing to interest me. I cannot speak, and can only be aware of all the things that happen. That is the price of my blessing. But it had never really bothered me, not having a voice, until that year.

Everything became frantic. The air, the sky, the ground, they all started screaming. First it was only chills and groans. Then, it deteriorated into a whirlpool of overlapping screeches and horrendous yowls.

“We will all perish! They are coming! They are coming!” shrieked Northwind.
“Incineration! Scorching! Flames!” the night wailed.

“YOU DON'T HAVE LONG!!! I SEE THEM!” came the moon’s distant bellow.

“Pain! I can feel it, I know it will come, I don’t want to be amplified! Not now, not EVER!” the soil roared.

I curled up in my burrow, feathered body shivering. What were they talking about? The fear tightened in my heart, twisting around me like a vine. I whined soundlessly, shaking my long neck in distress as they continued to bail like a wounded Tyrannosaurus.

“Astroooooiids! Coming to destroyyyy youuu...” the stars raged.

I sat up, ruffling my wings. *Astroid? What was that?* I nipped my beaks desperately, hoping that they would explain. But they ignored me cruelly, leaving me to wallow in the dark as always. A self-hatred filled my body – why was I so useless? I hated that I was nobody to them. Didn’t I deserve to know what was going to end me? It was tormenting. Hearing everything speak of your demise, discussing it day and night, while you were helpless and frightened. It drove me to the verge of madness. I tried to block the voices out, and the more I did, the louder they became, defending, agonizing ringing in my ears. My head throbbed, and I clawed the mud crazily, unable to plead for silence.

Then, all of a sudden, the hollering flattered. I shuddered, tapping the ground with hooked claws unsteadily, while panting breathlessly. In the silence, another sound filled the air – it was harmonious, lovely, and musical, a sombre symphony.

“*Levoria, Levoria, Levoria...*” it chorused, the song drifting, in a holy way, from the ocean. And it was calling me.

I let the hymn bathe my worn-out blue-and-gold body, before instinctively spreading my clawed wings, and took into the frigid night sky. I was conscious of my draining and exhaustion, but it didn’t stop me from following the sound, for some part of me knew that this was the call of destiny. *Where are you?* I craned my neck and thought, beating my sore pinions.

“*We hear you, we hear you, we hear your, Levoria...*” they whispered. I was stunned, then felt overwhelmed with emotion. They heard me! For the first time, I was found. *You heard me!* I echoed, tasting icy and fresh air in my opened jaws. *Tell me where you are!* My conscience cried, and the voice replied, “*Come find us where the sun rises, where the sea rests... Find us where the sand is pearly-white, and where the ferns and sequoia grow... Come find us, find us, find us...*”

I didn’t hesitate, not even for the slightest moment was that someone, someone who wasn’t torturing one and yelling and growling, someone who heard me, was asking for me, wanting me. I flew with newfound purpose as bitter air stung against my belly, and the silent breeze brushed my exposed legs. Then I remembered.

Something terrible is going to happen! I thought. *What should I do? How do I live? My kind – my cousins – the raptors – the dinosaurs – they all don’t know! Our stories will die with us –*

“*Hush...*” sighed the soothing voice. “*Your answers are all here, with us. Find us, find us...*” that melody was everywhere, and it calmed my heart. All I needed was to follow the currents. All I needed was –

“*A voice, a voice, a voice like usss...*”

My heart did a somersault. A...voice. I could claim a sound of my own? How was that even possible? But what if it was? What if I could speak? If I could tell the others...maybe we would stand a chance after all. We would escape and live on, and our stories would be preserved.

It was a magnificent plan. I urged myself to go faster, and my beats turned into music, my eyes bright as obsidian. But it was not long before I started panting loudly. My lungs contracted and throbbed. Tears of pain stung my eyes.

Arctic wind slammed at my face, tearing out a few feathers, and I could only open my brown beak and mouth unheard words of terror. My narrow wings were not made for long travel and I knew it as I swerved and stumbled. *No!* I thought, caught in a swirl of clouds. The song was turning fainter, and the only thing I could do was grab on to it like one would cling onto the purpose of living.

You can't give up! I screamed at myself, frantically fighting the hurricane, while it strangled me. My wings gave in, my vision dimmed, and I plummeted to the earth, terrified and alone, sure that I had failed. At that moment, I knew I was going to die, soundless and unheard, like all the ancestors before me.

And the the most magnificent thing happened. Another gust of wind, warm and firm, lifted my limp body, urging, *"Fly, Levoria, fly!"* It pushed me up, carried me towards the sun, blowing, aiding, yelling, *"Fly, now FLY!"* in distress.

"Fly, now, Levoria! Fly, or die!" the currents sobbed. *"Come onnn, the astroids will get here any second! Fly, for the sake of everyone!!!"*

But I couldn't anymore. Fog obscured my vision, the world turned silent, and I blacked out, trustling the wind to carry me.

...

Who are you?

There was a blurry figure in the dark. A quetzalcoatlus...? No. It was taller... Or were those...? I found myself unable to move, so I asked again loudly, *who are you?*

"The end is coming."

What?

"Can't you see yourself dead?"

Dead. The word echoed loudly in the suffocating, dark space. Fear crept up my spine, growing so intense it felt like physical pain – and then there was a sickening crack, and I choked – but no, how could my back be broken –

"What do I do?" I asked, retching as blood spurted.

"Offspring is the new dawn. Find the offspring." The pitch of that voice suddenly screeched up, pitching higher as I gasped in agony –

Icy water splashed in my face. Tasting salt, I snapped open my eyes and spluttered. It was a dream. But what did it mean? *Offspring*, I pondered, still stricken. The figure must have meant egg, which made no sense. *Egg is the new dawn.* I ruffled my feathers, blinking hard. I was lying on slippery rock, facing the sea. Dazed, I gingerly lifted my body and forced myself to stand, and immediately felt a stab of pain on my side. I was bleeding.

Nononononono... I gasped, and limped towards the shore. Something caught my eye: it fell from the sky, trailing an orange spray of light and heat. Then – BOOM. The sound rebounded everywhere as it struck into the ocean, and the wave knocked me backwards. Bits of rock flew everywhere and hit me hard, searing my skin. I opened my beak to yowl in pain, but of course no sound came out. I was stranded. Alone. Unheard. And now I knew what an astroid was. The thing that would end us.

I must find the island! I thought to myself. *I must, or all would be lost. I won't die speechless!*

So it became my only purpose. I journeyed on, even though everything was against me. Days turned into nights and nights into days, until they all merged into one and I could not remember which was which. The sun set and rose in a forever loop, while I flapped my wings, fell out of the sky, and went up again. Unconsciously, I started thinking of dusk, and how I was flying nearer and nearer to it. Then, I would start all over again because after dusk was a new dawn and else would be born to embrace life. Maybe our children, hatched to a world...wait.

I jolted mid-air, feeling a shred of excitement for the first time in those sorrow-filled days. What did the dinosaur from the dream say? Offspring is a new dawn. I was close to solving the riddle – I knew it. But what...my mind spun faster. Dusk was coming. And there was no possible way I could prevent that. But at dawn – I concentrated harder – a new world would begin. And that would be a hatching. And the hatching could carry our stories and pass them on. But no, how could they? They won't have a voice, like me. *Focus*. The song – the song had promised a voice, hadn't it? If I could have a voice, surely my hatching would. Then – of course.

Of course. I understand now. The song chose *me*. The only dinosaur that could pass down memories through eggs, due to the lack of a voice. But now my egg would have all the stories and memories, as well as a voice. Then we wouldn't be forgotten! All I had to do was reach the island, find my voice, lay an egg and protect it with my life.

Hope. Such wonders it could bring. I moved faster as astroids started to rain down. I counted them. Three explosions. Five days, filled with hope and fear.

But then I found it. The island of songs. Where the sun rose and sea rested, where the sound was lovely and silky and white as pearls, where ferns and tall, majestic sequoia trees grew. *I'm here!* I thought, collapsing instantly. How soft the ground was! And the harmonious melody, floating in the air! It said, "*Quick now, time's running out! You've come all the way, oh how strong and brave you've been!*" warm gale caressed by cheek lovingly. "*You deserve it, Levoria, you do. Now sing, sing with us!*"

I opened my mouth instinctively, and cried out a note.

I froze, realizing what I had just done. I had made a sound. *My sound! How beautiful my voice was!* And this feeling – throat tingling, ears hearing, listening to myself speak.

"I'm doing it." I muttered in wonder. "I'm really talking." I raised my voice. "I can speak!"

"*Do you know what you have to do?*" The song asked.

"Yes," I replied steadily. "I must lay an egg. Now."

It was easy. We were born with them inside us. We didn't reproduce with males. Us, Levorias, had our own stories.

I came, swift and painless. A gray, round egg. I was overjoyed.

"I am Leveria," I said. "This is my story."

—

The archaeologists were in shock. They had witnessed something extraordinary. In the mud, the egg's glow dimmed, its job done. They thought of all the other dinosaurs, who couldn't find their voice, who had wanted to, but could never, be remembered. The others who couldn't speak for themselves. Then, they thought of this brave dinosaur, who had died to fight for a chance to bring everyone into the dawn. They respected her, with all their hearts.

Three weeks later, the declaration went official.

A new tale of China's dinosaurs was revealed to all.

And it went by the name of –

“Levoriasaurus”.

–

Paradise or Hell?

Sacred Heart Canossian College, Chan, Annabelle – 14

“Mama, mama! Look at that ride, it's soaring through the sky!” exclaimed Billy with eyes shining with excitement, clenching onto his mother's arm as his mother's sweater gradually wrinkled up. His mother chuckles while looking at her seven-year-old son lovingly, then gradually dedicates all her attention back to her phone, her fingers clicking over the keyboard like a galloping horse. Billy, who was used to his mother's ignorance and pure passion for work, dragged his mother behind him while he zipped through the crowd of people. It was obvious, Billy was amazed by the dinosaur-themed park like all other toddlers, especially little boys. There were children at every corner of the park, some nibbling on enormous sandwiches, some trying on headbands that had flappy dinosaur ears, and some waiting for their turns on rides.

Billy arrived at the entrance for one of the most well-known rides that the newly-opened theme park featured, the Turbo Tarbosaurus. Billy gazed at the ride, with sweat gliding down his forehead under the scorching sunlight. He was stunned. It was such a marvelous design, with carts shaped exactly like a tarbosaurus. There were brown spots all over the seats installed to the elongated back, as well as small little claws as seat belts. With three large hoops and a speed of 90km/h, Billy could not miss the ride despite an estimated queueing time of around two hours.

“Billy darling, go on and queue, mommy will wait for you at the exit of the ride when you are done having fun, okay?” Billy's mother promised her son, her sight still pinned to her phone. Billy nodded gleefully, and stood at the end of the queue patiently. After two hours of waiting, it was finally time for Billy to fulfill his anticipation. Billy sat on the last cart of the tarbosaurus ride by himself. With a bright smile, he could feel his heart pounding like a ticking bomb timer under the accompaniment of increasing excitement and anxiety. “Are you ready? 3, 2, 1, roar!” A voice bellowed, as the ride zoomed down the track.

The ride went faster and faster, through caves and tunnels, with ear-splitting screams and shrieks from passengers. Billy was amazed, he opened his mouth wide, feeling the cool breeze that stroke his face while the ride soars through the sky. He shut his eyes tight with fear from seeing the ginormous loop ahead. Swoosh! Billy whooped with joy as he swung his arms as if he was at a party.

Screech. The ride came to an abrupt stop inside a cave that was about to lead to the largest hoop of the ride. Passengers frowning and glancing around in confusion, so did Billy, unaware of what was happening. The uncertainty slowly turned into aggression. As there were no announcements made from staff members and the ride was in a relatively same place, well, a cave. Some of the passengers suggested leaving the carts and to search for an emergency exit among the cave areas. Without any clue, Billy followed behind for fear of being left alone on his cart. Fortunately, they did find a green neon exit sign with a door leading to stairs. Billy followed the others. All of a sudden, a drop of water leaked from the pipes on the ceiling and to Billy's head. In shock, Billy looked up, and realised that it was just a water drop. When he tried to keep up with the others, he discovered that there were two separate paths ahead of him, and he had no clue which way the others chose. Believing that they were both ways to exit the ride, Billy decisively stepped to the left corridor.

"Hellooo? Anyone thereeee?" Billy's voice echoed throughout the dark, shady corridor, trembling as he felt chilly seeing no trace of any other passengers. "Finally, a door," sighed Billy. The door slammed open with a thud after Billy forcefully pushed against the rust on the iron hinges. Billy choked, partly due to the dust, but mostly because of what is hidden behind those doors. He widened his eyes in disbelief, trying so hard to convince himself that he was in a dream by slapping his chubby cheeks. There were trees, a lot of trees, with wood and leaves all over the place. There was even a fountain, with clear water shimmering under a beam of sunlight. Billy frantically made his way into the world of the unknown, and trees.

As he stepped past roots and rocks, trying his best to figure out what trouble he had gotten himself into this time, he heard a rustling from the leaves around. A bird-like creature flapped his puffy wings and tilted its head at Billy in curiosity. "A Confuciusornis? A Confuciusornis! You are a Confuciusornis!" Billy yelled out in shock, yet covering his mouth with both palms knowing he had scared the little one on the tree branch. He reached out his hand, only to get snipped by the beak of the bird in front of him. At least he knew he was not sleep-walking. The ground rumbled, breaking the silence that maintained Billy's last bit of rationality. Huge feet blocked the sight of Billy, leaving Billy speechless. Even a dinosaur-lover like him could not recognise for sure what had approached him.

"Hello Billy," said the tall creature in a calming tone.

"What are you? And how do you know my name?" Billy stuttered in fear.

"I am a Gandititan Cavocaudatus, my name is Po. Nice to meet you," Po introduced while turning his tail towards Billy to give him a "tail-shake". "I know you because I guide you here, my dear Billy boy." Po continued, "Welcome to Jurassic World, my dear. This is the place where we all live, all dinosaurs, of course. Here, all dinosaurs, no matter carnivores or herbivores, can live safely in peace, without any disruption of humans, technology and weapons." Billy tried catching up with Po, with both its walking speed and its speaking.

Billy continued walking with Po. He could tell there was something about the friendly stranger that his instinct did not trust, but he just could not resist, he was tempted to walk along as if he was Pinocchio with all those little pieces of strings controlling him.

Billy let down his guard and got hooked up to the stories that Po was telling. It was as if his dream came true, he was living in the world of dinosaurs. Billy paid extra attention to what Po told him about the dinosaurs' history. Po explained that long before the current era, dinosaurs were nothing related to endangerment or extinction, they had the freedom to sprint free in savannahs, to sail through clouds, and to waft across rivers. It was undoubtedly the actual Jurassic World. There were no humans at first, humans were creations of dinosaurs according to Po. Po told Billy about how dinosaurs created human beings, took great care and nurtured them until they are grown fully. However, the 143rd generation of humans underwent an epidemic which caused mass mutation, causing a significant change in their brain synapses that eliminated the memories and recognition of dinosaurs. Humans started to see dinosaurs a threat while their communication linkages disappeared in entirety due to the mutation. Humans feared the tall figure and strong destructive tails of dinosaurs, and spearheaded weapons against their existence.

Po wiped the tears in its eyes and led Billy into a cave. While Billy wandered in awe, Po introduced, "What you are witnessing right now is where all this started, back in time while they were being attacked by humans, our ancestors brought along the youngsters and hatched eggs to evacuate out of human sight. Fortunately, they found this place, with

the sizzling hot water from a waterfall, which is now constructed to this fountain. With a magic potion that the ancestors came up with, they had successfully assembled our paradise, the Jurassic World. We were forced to be locked up here, it's sort of upsetting, you see?" Po vividly elaborated a lot regarding his ancestors and their tragic encounters with the humans.

Billy replied with a shrug, and continued observing the astonishing waterfall, "I guess it's the right choice that I did not pay attention during science class. You all aren't extinct, you're just hiding away from threats of human beings."

Po broke the short period of silence with a warm chuckle, "Now, it is time for you to head back to reality, don't you think?"

Billy thought for a moment and answered, "Well, yes, I suppose it is about time I head back to my old mother, she should be waiting for me by the exit of the ride."

Po questioned in confusion, "What ride?"

Billy replied with a bright smile, "The Turbo Tarbosaurus ride in the DinoPark! I arrived here through a door while the ride went dead suddenly. Beats me why it malfunctioned though. It was really fun though, it was soaring through the sky! It reached 90 km/h you know! I—"

"Well, I suppose it was real fun, but you should go now."

Po, who seemed to have spent more than enough time with this little boy, would like to send this talkative little boy away. He tried to lead Billy back to where he arrived in Jurassic Park so that he may pass through the door again to reality. When they stood before the wooden door, it was time for Billy to say goodbye to Po, and to this paradise.

"Oh look, what a lovely rhododendron! Have you heard, Billy? A rhododendron symbolises beauty and love, I hope you will never forget about our lovely encounter, and your memories about Jurassic World." said Po, wrapping Billy tightly with his soft, long tail. Billy nodded slightly, agreeing that he would cherish the experience, and turned to leave Jurassic World behind.

Right before Billy slammed the door behind him, Po guffawed, interrupting Billy's thoughts on what was for lunch. "You didn't think I was going to let you go upon listening to all our secrets right? You're coming with me, Billy boy."

Po wrapped Billy once again in his tail, more tightly than the hug, and swayed him as Po bolted across the trees, bringing Billy to a place unknown. Billy tried to scream for help, but certainly no one was there to hear him. In a muffled voice, he yelled, "Where are you bringing me to? Let go of me!" Po tied Billy up with vines. Billy was extremely confused. He could view the whole DinoPark from where he was tied up. He saw his mother, finally placing her phone down, and other passengers cuddling with their friends tearfully.

Po, once again, started talking. "My dear Billy boy, rhododendron means beware, didn't you learn that in your cute little school? And you know what? It was all a lie, our ancestors never built this place. This is the world that you humans should have been enjoying, we dinosaurs were the ones that locked and chained humans up to the current world you are living in, with pollution, arguments and chaos. You humans have been like slaves, inventing and studying about modern technology all along, just to catch up with one percent of what dinosaurs have established. Humans are all fools!"

Billy, speechless in terror, shrieked at Po, "You monster! What are you going to do to me?"

"Absolutely nothing. It is you who is the cause of the destruction of your world. All thanks to you buddy," Po calmly, eerily smiled, patting Billy's head with its tail, "Now, fire in the hole boys!"

Burnt Out

Singapore International School Hong Kong, Kwok, Elizabeth – 14

A man's voice boomed through Alan's phone, "We've got insider information— The company Puqi Paleontology has just found out that one of the world's rarest fossils is in China."

Alan silently groaned to himself. He leaned back against the sofa and put his reading glasses onto the coffee table.

"Alright... And?"

"What do you mean 'and'? Do you know how important this is? It is *imperative* that we find its location before them!"

Alan knew where this was going.

Chairman Leong continued, "I need you to start researching this fossil instantly. You're our best employee—I'm counting on you, alright? You get three— no, two weeks. We *have* to find this fossil."

"I've just finished a massive project— can I have like... a week to rest? I'm sure all your other employees are willing to help."

"Alan, you're the only one I trust," Chairman Leong persisted, dismissing his request for a break, "You have no idea how important you are — you're practically the best paleontologist in China!"

It was starting to sound more like a demand than a request.

There was a moment of silence, then he answered, "Alright, fine. See you tomorrow."

He slumped against the cushion as he hung up, staring up at the flickering ceiling lights. It wasn't like he really had a choice— He would've been forced to do this project anyway. He pushed himself off of the couch and trudged to his study.

—

“...The *Gandititan Cavocaudatus* is a sauropod with long and narrow fossae— Ow! What the hell?”

Alan had his head buried in a book until he was blinded by a sudden flash. He flipped his head around, finding his younger brother standing by the doorway. His hand was on the light switch, shooting an unimpressed glare his way.

Alan's eyes blinked uncontrollably from the brightness, “Tommy! What was that for?”

“Just making sure you don't go blind reading a book in a pitch-black room.”

“For the last time, it's not ‘pitch black’,” Alan mimicked Tommy's high pitched voice.

He gestured to the window, “Plus, the daylight outside gives me *plenty* of light.”

“Do you mean... moonlight?”

Moonlight? Puzzled, Alan turned his head towards the window.

It was nighttime. He blinked at the stars. They blinked right back at him.

“Oh, haha! I... Uh...” Alan chuckled nervously, fidgeting with his pen.

“You're impossible,” Tommy sighed and walked towards him and sat himself on the desk, “What're you working on? Wait, didn't you *just* finish that giant project?”

“Yeah, the Chairman decided it was a *bright* idea to give me another one,” He sighed, looking back down at the book.

“Dude, you should really quit. They're overworking you!”

“I know, but... they pay well.”

Pretty greedy of him, but that was the truth. Whoever says that they work for beguilement and not for that *sweet* paycheck at the end of the month are *liars*. Avarice knows no end.

“Forget about money. Like, your job isn't even fun,” Tommy scowled, “Why bother looking for something that died millions of years ago?”

“Dumb question to ask a paleontologist.”

“You know what? I don't care, you do you,” Tommy diverted his gaze to the pile of energy bar wrappers laying on the floor. He didn't say anything, but Alan could feel the disdain in his eyes.

“Just... Make sure you eat well. And get *at least* six hours of sleep,” Tommy reminded, his voice softening as he made his way towards the door, “You know I won't be here to keep you in check once I go back to university after break.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Alan rolled his eyes, “Close the door on your way out.”

As soon as the doorknob clicked, he went back to reading. He flipped back to the first page, then spent a few minutes staring at it.

This... wasn't going to work. The words were floating off the pages, akin to his mind, which was wandering off into space.

Focus, Alan reminded himself. He ate another energy bar. He still couldn't focus.

He willed his legs to stop fidgeting and bouncing on the ground. His fingers started drumming on the table instead. He groaned in frustration.

Maybe he just needs a nap... Yeah, that sounds nice.

—

The next day was boring. And the day after. *And* the day after that.

The entire week was just one whole slog – Wake up, go to work, get home, go to sleep, rinse and repeat.

He had to go to the convenience store nearly every day to stock up on energy bars – and *alarming* amounts of instant coffee packs. The cashier probably had the psychiatry hospital's hotline on speed dial whenever he walked in.

It was a miracle that dinosaurs haven't already poisoned his dreams. (That was, if he even had time for dreaming. More often than not, Tommy had to rip his laptop away from him so he could catch a break.)

And despite all that, he was *barely* making any progress. He was beginning to question this fossil's existence.

It only made matters worse when he was called into Chairman Leong's office first thing on a Friday morning.

Alan knocked a few times before entering, “You called, Chairman?”

“Alan! Come, take a seat,” the man gestured, grinning widely, taking a drag from a cigarette. “So, how's the research been going?”

Alan suppressed a cough as he looked around the room. The windows weren't even open— No wonder the entire room *reeked* of nicotine.

“I haven't been making much progress. This species hasn't been very broadly researched on, you see. I've managed to identify its general area – Southern China, but other than—”

“No need to bore me with the details,” Chairman interrupted, his smile twisting into a condescending leer. He dropped the cigarette onto the carpet and put it out with the heel of his shoe.

Alan winced. *Did he say the wrong thing? Curse him. He should've just lied and said it'd been going well.*

“So, you've made zero progress?”

“I– I wouldn’t say ‘zero’, but–”

He gestured at his secretary to lead him out of the room. “Alan Wong, you have one more week.”

The door slammed shut as he left.

—

Alan’s phone chimed. A text from Tommy – “*Where r u?*”

He swiped left, snoozing the message. Then, he caught a glimpse of the time on his home screen. Nearly midnight. When had it become so late?

He packed up, dragged himself to the bus stop, then plopped himself on a seat. (*Seriously*, he didn’t remember his legs being this heavy.)

As soon as he sat down, he rummaged through the depths of his bag and took out a deformed energy bar from the bottom, stuffing it in his mouth before opening a book up.

“Alright...” He murmured to himself, “If fossils are more prominent in geographical formations called...”

God, he was tired. His eyelids felt heavier than the hefty weight of his work burdening his shoulders.

He was just so tired, both body and mind. Spending day and night, every given second doing this tedious, monotonous research. Ripping his hair out over articles and paperwork.

It’s fine, he told himself. *It’ll be all over when he finds this fossil.*

Except it won’t. He’d just have another project flung onto him.

But maybe, just maybe... Things would go differently. Maybe Chairman Leong would listen to him for a change. That sparked a slither of hope in his dying fire.

Okay. Time to focus. What were those formations called again? Hekki? Hakou? Oh, *Hekou Formations*. That’s it.

So, there is a high chance the fossil is in a Hekou Formation, which...

He trailed off again, head falling against the window with a thud. He felt his book slide off of him and onto the floor. He was just... so tired. A little shuteye wouldn’t hurt, right?

—

Alan was wrong. It *would* hurt.

He grumbled as he plodded his way through the sidewalk. He’d overslept and missed his stop. *Great*. Now he had to backtrack on foot.

After considerable effort, he finally got to his apartment. As soon as he unlocked his front door, he tried – and failed – to get to his bed. So, he settled for the couch. Anywhere would do in his state, really.

He drifted off nearly instantly.

—

“Get changed. We’re going outside.”

Alan was reading his newspaper as usual when Tommy suddenly shot up and grabbed his arm, dragging him towards his bedroom.

“What?” Alan tugged against the grip on his arm, “I have work.”

“*Yeah yeah*, when do you *not* have work? Come on, we’re going on a picnic.”

A picnic?

Alan recalled Chairman Leong’s warning. He protested, “I’m on a tight schedule. You know that.”

“You’re going to *die* if you keep working at this rate,” Tommy argued.

When Tommy saw that Alan wasn’t convinced, he added, “And... I’m going back to university tomorrow. My fraternity called a meeting on short notice. Just spend half the day with me? Please?”

It was a blatant lie, but it was the only way. He wasn’t even in any fraternities.

Alan looked at the growing pile of dishes in the sink, unwashed; Then the ginormous stack of research papers that went up to his waist. He rubbed his eyes, which were threatening to snap shut at any given moment.

A break wouldn’t do him any harm, he supposed.

“I think it’d take a lot more to kill me, but *fine*,” Alan sighed, grabbing a random sweater from his wardrobe. He could feel Tommy beaming behind him.

—

Alan plopped himself down on the picnic mat and drew a deep breath. He smiled. The refreshing scent of nature. And pollution.

They drove all the way to Ganxian, which Alan, under any normal circumstances, would’ve deemed too far away. But... he could let it slide this time. It *was* quite nice.

He was busy picking at the edges of his sandwich when Tommy pointed to an industrial crane in the distance, “Look! I wonder what they’re building!”

“It’s just a normal crane, what’s the big deal?”

Tommy pursed his lips, “Yeah, but it’s... *special*. I’m gonna name it Clementine.”

Alan scoffed at his absurdity, “Sometimes I don’t believe you’re nineteen years of age.”

Tommy acted like he didn’t hear anything, continuing to gaze into the distance as though the crane, no—*Clementine*, had hypnotised him. After a while, he suddenly started packing everything back into the duffel bag they brought along, including the mat that Alan was sitting on. He tugged at its ends, trying to pull it out from under him.

When Alan shot him a confused look, he said, “Let’s go. I wanna go closer to the construction site, see it in all its *glory*, y’know?”

“What? Seriously, it’s nothing special. There’s no— Argh!” Alan exclaimed as he was pulled along by Tommy, “Slow down!”

Tommy simply continued dragging him along until they reached the site. It was a giant building enclosed by wooden scaffolding. There were tool boxes and oak planks littering the ground. Alan looked up. The wooden poles were held together solely by flimsy zip-ties.

Quite impressive, Alan thought to himself. How hadn’t this massive Jenga piece toppled over and killed someone yet?

Before he knew it, Tommy was yet again, sprinting towards another trivial object that had caught his attention. However, he suddenly tripped and fell lamely on his face. Alan, resisting the urge to laugh, went over to help him.

“Jesus Christ, Tommy, watch where you’re going,” He hauled him up, leaning his bodyweight against the scaffolding.

“Oww... What did I even trip on?” Tommy looked back at the ground, finding a rock lying there. It was about the size of his foot, a pearly white colour.

Too white. Rocks don’t normally look like this.

To confirm his suspicions, Alan kneeled down, using his hands to tug at the object. It didn’t budge.

He looked to his side, and his eyes met with another white patch, popping out of the ground. He plunged his hand into the dirt beside it, only for his fingertips to hit yet another obstruction.

He dug more, and more, and more, and eventually uncovered a small bone. To the right, it was connected to another object under the dirt, which Alan couldn’t decipher the size of.

No way— This couldn’t be. Where was the fossil confirmed to be in again? *Ganxian*. Wait... Weren’t Hekou Formations found in Ganxian?

He picked at his fingernails, which were collecting a *substantial* amount of dirt.

His hands weren’t efficient enough. *Shovel*. He needed a shovel.

“Tommy,” he demanded hastily, “go back to the car and grab my shovel.”

“I think there’s one here—” Tommy ran and disappeared behind the crane. It took a few seconds before he emerged again, holding a shovel in his hand. He tossed it to Alan, who barely managed to catch it in his shaking hands.

Whether they were shaking from excitement or impatience, he didn’t know.

He dug more and revealed more. He would’ve kept digging, if it weren’t for his exhaustion begging him to stop. He took a step back, panting, and took a good look at the sight beneath him. Anybody, let alone a *paleontologist*, could tell that it was a fossil.

He scrambled to open up his notebook, tracing his finger over all the lines of information. Everything aligned perfectly— The colour, the land, the location... He’s done it. *He’s really done it*.

Okay... now what? Despite the initial shock, he was strangely... unmoved. He supposed all that was left to do was to report back to the Chairman, then the extraction team could take care of the rest.

—

Alan plopped down on the car seat and shut the door. Tommy sat in the passenger seat, but he didn't say anything. Just... stared at him.

Alan ignored his weird behaviour, then started, "Let's go back home."

"Hey. Shouldn't you be— Y'know, more... excited?"

"I just—" Alan paused, "Huh. I don't... know."

Really, he just... didn't know.

He'd just discovered one of the rarest fossils in China. Why wasn't he... happy? Excited? Proud?

Instead, all he feels is emptiness. An indifference that *hurts*.

So what if he was one of the best paleontologists in China? So what if he'd just found one of the rarest fossils? So *what*? He'd already discovered hundreds of them, each new finding just felt mundane.

Mundane, like a field of dying flowers, or a room full of vacuum.

He was already sick of his next discovery.

How does Tommy do it? He's so... composed. So cheerful. So positive. Everything that Alan hopes to be. Isn't it strange? It seems that the only thing they share is one last name.

He looked towards the horizon. The sun was descending, painting the sky a mixture of oranges and roses. Anybody else would gape at its beauty. Alan rather thought it was... claustrophobic. Like the world was gradually, inexorably closing in on him.

He'd been playing the role of Sisyphus for eternity. Incessantly pushing this boulder uphill, slaving away to find fossil after fossil. Getting crushed under that rock would hurt *less* than the nights when it was just him, his drained mind and exhausted self—consoles.

When did his passion become this... chore? When did his research go from eagerly searching for exhilarating data to frantically typing to meet looming deadlines?

Perhaps it was a mistake to keep accepting project after project, to keep this knife lodged inside this bleeding heart.

Perhaps paleontology should've stayed as his hobby. Perhaps then, he'd genuinely enjoy it. Perhaps then, digging up fossils would actually be... *fun*.

This isn't what he wanted.

He laughed to himself. *Laughed*. The world became hushed.

Was he deranged? Maybe.

Demented? Undoubtedly.

If he died right then and there, what would people remember him by?

Not “Paleontologist Alan”; not “Alan Wang”. *None* of that. His name would be remembered by *nobody*. Because he’d always been “that Paleontologist from Huiwan”. Just another employee at that wretched company.

None of the fossils he discovered were his. Every fossil, that he devoted his heart and soul into finding, was discovered by Huiwan Paleontology. It wasn’t him that accepted interviews; It was the Chairman. It wasn’t him that showed up in headlines; It was Huiwan.

He laughed again. This time, maniacally and absolving, the laughter as beautiful as a blade, piercing through the skin.

His body was... *like* a fossil. A mere vessel, abysmally held together by a frame of bones. Harboursing trifling hopes that will never be achieved.

Is it so selfish to want these hopes for once? To grieve over the person he could’ve been?

He was rotting in a sea of labour, while dinosaurs rotted in the earth’s dirt. It’s ironic— such beauty surrounded by such grim soil. He’d spent years digging fossils, building everything up from scratch. Going from a mere intern to the company’s best researcher. Why did he want to... destroy it all?

He wanted— No, he *needed* to leave Huiwan.

But... who would take his place once he was gone?

Who would be the next person they exhaust? Drain them of their time and energy and sanity and— *life*? Let them waste away, just like the fossils in the soil, *begging* for somebody to uncover them, to endow them the taste of fresh air?

No. He wouldn’t let them suffer the same fate that he did.

A hand on his shoulder shook him out of his trance.

“Are you alright? What’s wrong?”

Alan looked back at the construction site behind them.

“Tommy, could you wait in the car?”

—

The next morning, Alan was sitting on his couch, newspaper resting on his lap. The ceiling fan hummed lowly in the background.

His phone rang. It was his boss calling him for the eleventh time that morning. He pressed decline, letting the living room fall back into silence.

He picked up the newspaper.

“Rare fossil near construction site heavily damaged by fire, police are currently investigating the case,” He read to himself with a sinister smile.

The Deciphering of a Peculiar Mind

Singapore International School Hong Kong, Lee, Kai Yee Megan – 15

autumn 1824

Long, protruding bones bayonet the soil, their surfaces straggled with the warm marl of the earth. Roughly two thirds of it lies buried, encased in solid russet stone. The team observe its rugged exterior, eroded with the rues of untold years and a testimony to the undying elements that beat down upon it, in perpetual solitude.

“Together, they form what I believe to be... a massive vertebra.” Thomas states. His greying eyebrows contort, as though he cannot believe what he was saying. “This is, well... phenomenal, to say the least.”

“But what is it?” One man asks.

He has on him a long white overcoat and in his left hand, clutched tightly, a folder thicker than his forearm. The silver-plated name tag on his chest reads “DR. ALBERT L.” in bold lettering.

“Ah, Doctor.” Thomas answers, a timid smile on his wrinkled face. “I’m afraid I’m not sure. It does not look quite like anything we have discovered so far.”

“A new species, perhaps?” Albert inquires. “These may well be the largest set of bones I have ever encountered.”

“Well. China never fails to surprise us.” Thomas chuckles.

Albert does not laugh. He simply stares at the remains, the cartilage twisted and intertwined like the thoughts that furnish his heavy head.

Alabaster blonde locks drape across rosy cheeks as a woman leans over the side of her chair. Margaret Young. A sublime woman terribly out of place, especially in one as bleak as a research facility.

Her gaze flutters over the fossil, now spick and span, laid against the glass workbench. Perhaps it is merely the apricity that caresses its delineated bones and bemuses Margaret’s curious head, as she finds herself drawn to it. Her eyes are hesitant, but inquisitive. She extends a gloved hand towards the specimen and attempts to touch it. Gingerly, her index finger barely grazes its cold exterior before a sharp voice alerts her to her senses.

“Darling!” Albert darts into the room. He nearly trips as he rushes to Margaret’s side. “Darling...” He reels over halfway, hands on his knees as he catches his breath.

“Yes, Al?” Margaret stands up to meet his eyes, her face tilted slightly back. A hint of a smile plays at the corners of her mouth as she watches him struggle to compose himself.

"You missed your appointment, again. This is the fourth time this month! I cannot keep giving the doctor excuses for your absences."

Margaret crosses her arms. "But I told you, I'm not unwell, Al."

"Yes, you are. You have had numerous episodes these past few weeks, and they are getting increasingly frequent." Albert shakes his head in exasperation. "What will I do if you never get better?"

Margaret goes silent.

"My dear?" Albert pleads. He clenches his palms. "Are you—? Again?"

She stands stock-still. Then all of a sudden, her eyes widen, as though she has seen something horrifying. A shrill scream escapes her lips.

winter 1824

A faded blue photograph stands propped against the bathroom mirror. In it is a cherubic little girl and her mother, centered along golden sands and deep navy sea.

"I took the opiates on time today."

Margaret twirls.

"I took the opiates on time today like Al said to." She continues in a singsong voice, before sitting down on the floor suddenly. The ceramic tiles are cool to the touch, and paralyse her briefly as her skin presses against it. Margaret's eyes fixate on the ceiling, tracing the patterns of the light fixtures with a childlike fascination. She loses focus, and for a brief second, it is as though she is staring at something far beyond the room.

"I love my wife. I love her very much. I have never loved another woman as much as I love her. But my wife... she is unwell. She sees things. She has suffered from an affliction from the day that I met her. These days, however, it has only grown worse with our time together. Now she speaks of things no one has seen or heard of. Of monsters, neither human nor animal. She says... She says they are monsters that stand on two feet like us humans... except with the teeth and claws of a beast. They are tall, dark and intimidating, and change ever so slightly in her words each time I bring them up." Albert pauses and takes a swig from the Genever on the table. It floods his throat with a momentary fervour, submerging his mind in shimmering sinks of sanguine. He wipes his mouth on his sleeve as several prying eyes look upon him in fright.

"It is a terrifying thought. To be able to see such... monstrosities, and to carry the knowledge that your loved one is constantly agonized by such a thing. It pains me to remember how she shrieks when she claims to see them, and it crushes my heart that I can do nothing to help her."

"But you yourself are a doctor. Can you not find a cure for your own wife's illness?" Someone protests. A tumultuous murmur sweeps through his addled posse of colleagues.

Albert's lips are pressed into a thin line.

"Painkillers and herbal treatment are the best courses of action for now, but I swear I will never stop trying to find a remedy for Margaret."

autumn 1825

Cold night air trembles in through an aperture in the window, and pints of moonlight dapple the floorboards like schools of silver fish. The torn linen quilt hangs limp from the bed stand while Margaret lies sprawled across the chaise, cradling the prominent swell of the unborn child in her belly. The room is silent in the evenings.

It terrifies her.

On nights like these, one is far more susceptible to become lost in their own thoughts. There is nothing but the soft tick of the clock and occasional crackle from the dim fireplace to drag Margaret out of the hell that is her mind.

"Al." She mumbles. "Read me a book."

Her husband sits with his legs crossed on a short stool in the corner. Deep frown lines crease into his forehead, and his chin is peppered with unshaven stubble. All the time and money invested in searching for his

beloved's salvation seems to have taken a toll on his face. Albert clasps a newspaper in both hands, and appears to be deeply entranced in his reading. He does not answer.

"Al." Margaret says again, a bit louder this time.

He finally looks up. "Ah. Yes. A book."

Albert puts the newspaper down and draws a single paperback book from the shelf beside him.

He clears his throat.

"The Three Little Pigs." He reads.

"Once upon a time, there were three little pigs. They set out to build their own houses. The first pig built a house of straw, the second of sticks, and the third a sturdy house of bricks."

Margaret must have heard this one a million times. But something is better than nothing.

"One day, a big bad wolf came along." Albert continues.

The plywood cupboard catches Margaret's wandering eyes. Her gaze lingers.

"He huffed, and he puffed, and he—"

The sound of shattering bursts beside Albert's ear. He snaps toward the sudden noise, catching sight of a shallow dent in the cupboard's surface and the glass shards spotting the floor, as a result of Margaret violently pitching her pill bottle through the air.

"Margaret!" He lashes out, swivelling back to face his wife.

"Al, it's laughing!" She cries out. "It's laughing at me!"

She lunges about the bed in shrieks, as if a songbird beating wildly against the bars of a cage.

"It's still laughing," Margaret whimpers. "And it won't stop! It's coming from over there, Al, there!" As she gestures toward the cupboard her hands quiver in desperation.

But Albert will have none of it. He grips her shoulders tightly and jerks her forward.

"Margaret, you are out of your mind! Stop it right now!"

Ragged breaths hitch at her throat.

"Can't you hear?" She wails, growing hysterical at her husband's instant dismissal. "Can't you hear how it mocks and ridicules me? Make it stop, make it stop! This— louse!"

"Margaret. Margaret, listen to me." Albert speaks slowly now, so that each syllable of his words are clear.

"What you are hearing right now, whatever it is, is not real. Do you understand?"

Glistening cascades of tears blossom from wet eyes in a paroxysm of sobbing, washing her azalea cheeks in streams of inky black. Muffled whimpers escape her lips, pressed against a creased damp pillow. A cathartic release for a neurotic suffering that Albert simply could not comprehend.

"Margaret, do you understand me?"

She hangs her head.

"Albert." She says quietly.

"Yes? My dear?"

"Albert, it says that our baby is going to die."

summer, 1826

Tarnish sullies the tops of doused sconces and lucid ordeal hazes the room in brumes of stygian. Bathed in the heavy stench of disinfectant and skin damp with sweat, choking back hoarse breaths is barely manageable. Margaret watches the shadow move along limewash walls, her fingernails digging into the peeling leather as she lies spread across the ivory tiles of the floor.

"What are you?" She whispers as she clutches the side of the hospital bed.

It stands before her upon two legs. *But it cannot be human*, Margaret thinks. *It cannot possibly be*. It has the beady eyes of a reptile; spread just a little too far apart and sunken just a bit too deep inside its head. Its shoulders reach the top of the doorframe, and its figure is wide enough to barricade three quarters of the balcony. She wonders how it managed to get inside her room.

As she scrutinizes it further, Margaret begins to notice something.

"You... You look familiar." She squints, tilting her head to the side.

The vague image of the fossilized herculean creature her husband and his team had uncovered some years ago seemed to crawl its way back into the centre of her thoughts. *A... dinosaur?*

The figure slowly widens its mouth, and Margaret stares into its cavity. Deep, dark, and enshrouded in shadow. Its pointed dentition gleams, lining both the top and bottom of its jaw. Within it something stares back at her.

For a split second, the monitor flatlines, and the room goes silent. Then, seeking the solace of her husband, a scream.

“Albert!”

Margaret makes eye contact with an infant borne in its maw, but has merely a moment to make out its tiny figure within the immense murk before it vanishes, sundered in the creature’s voracious trap. She gapes in horror, but that quickly melts into fear, along with the repetitive, nauseating crunch of its chewing as it forms laughter. The familiar tittering hoists Margaret once again into a maelstrom of gruelling fatigue, as the chill of trepidation corrals her body, contracting around her.

Margaret glances around the room, maddened, the unbearable noise suffocating her. It seemed to spring from nowhere yet everywhere all at once.

This infuriating hooting and howling. *Where is it coming from?*

Just as the thought enters Margaret’s mind, the uncontrollable urge to look down begins to tear at her throat. So akin to a puppet on strings, she lowers her head.

And there, at the centre of it all, is her gently rounded belly cupped in her trembling hands.

Ah.

“The hallucinations. Have they stopped yet?” Albert inquires.

Margaret is neatly tucked in the clinic bed beside the window, under a blanket of warm sunshine, and her long eyelashes curtain closed lids with the bittersweetness of a summertime slumber. On her left, a nurse dressed head to toe in white fiddles with a stack of paperwork on the bedside table. She struggles to push her glasses back up her nose bridge using her free hand.

“Unfortunately,” The woman sighs. “No.”

Albert’s gaze hardens.

“Well, why on earth not? Has she not been taking her medicine on time?”

“That is for you to speak to her doctor about, sir. But,” She pauses, as if unsure whether or not to speak.

“Miss Margaret complains of the... prolonged absence of your company.”

The nurse narrows her eyes at Albert as she guides him to Margaret’s room.

“You see, you may not notice as she is usually asleep when you visit, but the young miss has grown somewhat lethargic lately. This is concerning, especially since she is due in a month. I know that you are surely a very busy man, but if you could try to make just a bit more of an effort to attend to your wife, I am certain that her condition would improve greatly.”

She watches him enter.

That man hardly ever visits. And when he does, it is as though his mind is miles away.

winter, 1826

Wails echo through the funeral parlor, unsilenced. Not by the pitter patter against the windows, and not by the deafening whirring of crickets into the darkness outside. Margaret’s pale insipid body lies within the open casket, arms crossed over her heart. She is pristine, perfect, baptized in the anaemic lustre of the sole candelabrum above her head. It is to one’s deploration that ultimately, the short-lived respite of another’s love still failed to pull her away from death’s imminent embrace. Now the man himself stands, gazing down.

“You are still beautiful, even in death.” He murmurs.

Margaret’s mother teeters over to him.

“Albert, why has this happened? Margaret... killing herself? I simply cannot believe it. She was with child! No matter how ill she was, she would never have!”

Albert looks at her, his eyes dark and apathetic.

“She was ill.”

“But...”

“There is no ‘but’. She was ill, and she was seeing things. I think she believed our unborn baby was a monster under the guise of a child.”

“A monster like those things you discovered? A... ‘dinosaur’?”

“Yes. Like a dinosaur. So she must’ve... cut open her own stomach to kill it.”

“Why, that is utter drivel. I have been hearing things, Albert. You haven’t been here for her these last few months. All you cared about was your work. But the night before she died, you paid her a visit and left the room hurriedly afterwards. Margaret’s nurse even heard my daughter scream your name! If you ask me, this is hardly a coincidence.”

Albert grits his teeth in anger.

“Margaret’s nurse? You would believe a stranger over your own son-in-law? You honestly think that I killed her? Of all the possibilities, you would think me a murderer? And worse still, a murderer of my wife? The man who has dedicated countless sleepless nights in his laboratory to freeing your daughter from this incessant curse? Did you not stop to think that perhaps I was simply in a rush to get back to searching for a cure?”

“The police will most certainly get to the bottom of this.”

“Albert Lewis. You are being arrested for the alleged murder of Margaret Young.”

autumn, 1827

Here at the prison, the nights grow longer and harsher. And amid his numbing anguish, Albert can scarcely sense winter’s skulking approach. Outside the sepulchral sky is eve, where gauzy vespers of stars whisper orisons to him from beyond window bars. Mottled shadows glide across cell walls in ambiguous pirouettes, and the dusk’s cimmerian breath saunters upon his bare neck. He slumps down against them, subdued, and fixes on the concrete, lacquering Margaret’s face under the grey overpaint of his sterile gaze. The recollection of her shrill laughter pricks at his eardrums, drawing goosebumps as though her voice were needles against his skin. *This is purgatory.*

Albert would have been sentenced to death months ago, but had his penance lightened to life imprisonment due to his erstwhile involvement in the major discovery of ‘dinosaurs’. Although sitting here now makes him all the more wish that it hadn’t been.

Strangely enough, the cold comes as an unfamiliar relief. But tonight will be different. He has a visitor.

“How are you enjoying life in the slammer?”

Albert glances up weakly at the officer.

“What do you want?”

“Come now, don’t be such a mope. It’s not all bad. See, we found a letter.” The man holds out a crumpled piece of paper through the bars of the cell. “Looks like it’s from your wife.”

Albert’s eyes widen with the gaiety of a child at the mere mention of Margaret, as if her name alone could fill him copiously with unmarred ecstasy. He snatches it out of his hand, pulling it open with trembling fingers.

Dear Albert,

Amidst the grey penumbra betwixt my dreams and reality, there lies a bottomless pit. This pit should have remained bottomless. But somewhere towards the end of my life, I realised that I had found the pit’s bottom, and that it was ever closer than I had thought.

Through you, my husband, I met with the remains of a life that did not belong to me. Through you, I met with an incurable illness like an unreachable itch beneath my skin. And now it is as though something horrid has crawled inside my stomach and made itself at home there.

I can no longer bear it. So tonight I am going to free myself. With the scalpel you once held in your fingers, and in the bed on which I now lay without you, I will abate this unspeakable pain.

Soon, everything will come to an end by my own hand.

*My baby, my poor baby. My child.
If only she could have been saved from the eternal crepuscule of my mind.*

Margaret

His eyes sear with bitter tears.

Albert crushes his wife's letter in his hands, the only thing that can exonerate him. For a life without Margaret is not a life worth living.

It will never see the light of day, and neither will I.

A Day in the Life of a Painting Enthusiast

Singapore International School Hong Kong, Lee, Noelle – 15

"Wow.." I breathed out, as I stared in wonder at the tiny yellowed bones before me. So this was the new dinosaur recently discovered. Who would have thought such an incredible specimen would be found in China? Looking closely, the fossil seemed so small and fragile, just how did it adapt to survive against large predators? I must find out for myself.

Drawing in my breath, I steadied my breathing and channeled my energy into my outstretched palm, just a few centimetres above the fossil, watching the museum air swirl around me, a cool gust of wind gently swaying my brown locks around in the breeze.

The nameplate shone brighter, as the words "Sinosauropteryx" glowed a deep orange colour. Gently running my hand above the lengthy tail bones, I inhaled sharply, letting the crisp air fill my senses. *Back in time.* The exhibits slowly blurred out of sight and the excited chattering of tourists and shrieks of children around faded away. *Sixty six million years ago.*

I would like to take a closer look at this dinosaur's time on Earth.

Whoosh. The environment whirled around rapidly, completely enveloping the surroundings in a deep emerald colour, and a subtle earthy smell arose from the grounds.

I closed my eyes.

Ever since I was born, I found myself with an ability to go back into the past for five hours upon touching a particular item, like an ancient artifact or even a simple rusted bucket. As a painter, this was a liberating experience and a great way to find inspiration, through the wondrous experience of different timelines.

Feeling the environment settle down, I allowed my eyes to flutter open, blinking rapidly as they adjusted to the bright sunlight. The moment they did, I was overwhelmed by the number of lush green trees towering over me and the high pitched pterodactyl screeches above. The soft rumbling of a nearby volcano echoed through the air, paired with the stomping of the feet of an oncoming herd of raptors. *Crap, that is my cue to get moving. I just gotta survive for twelve hours before I can return back to the present.*

Hastily, I scrambled to hide behind a large tree, not wanting to become dino-lunch. As I nervously shifted around the area, out of my eye, I spotted the striped beauty.

There, as the sunlight seemed to cast a warm glow on its body, stood a striped sinosauropteryx. Speechless, I could not believe my luck! It was so tiny, no bigger than a cat, snacking on what seems to be a dead avian. Making sure no raptors were in sight, I inched closer and closer to the little beast, wanting a closer look but not to scare it off. Hiding behind another tree, I marveled at its tiny stature, watching as its brown and white banded tail swayed gently.

“Raar!”

Startled, my head whipped around, my heart pounding furiously. Have the raptors discovered me? Squinting my eyes, I scanned the environment. No sign or anything. Just before I let my guard down, a scratching sensation shot up my legs.

“Ouch!” Miffed, I shifted my gaze towards my leg, and that’s when I saw it.

The banded beauty, in all its breathtaking glory. The Sinosauropteryx! My goodness, one thing was for sure; that it was a wonder to see it’s feathery skin cover the remains of bones in the museum. And...I was bleeding from the scratches of the little dinosaur.

“Aww well aren’t you an adorable thing?” Squatting near the creature, I cooed. The little guy did not seem amused at all. Cocking its head to the side, it let out a small shriek, snapping at me, as if it loathed the idea of being cute. I guess it was a carnivore after all. Prying my eyes away from the dinosaur, I checked my watch. Fifteen minutes in and I have already found my goal, what a record!

The dinosaur stood at a rather pathetic height of roughly 70 centimeters, tail included. I couldn’t quite decide whether this fellow was an adult or not. Perhaps...if it led me to it’s herd I could gauge out it’s age range, and even discover any habits and interactions! That would most certainly lead to a great landscape painting for the audience and child—

Chomp! Interrupting my passionate thoughts, the little devil decided to take a bite out of my wound!

“Ow, ow ow ow!” Wincing at the jab of pain of the dinosaur’s sharp canines, I grabbed it’s snout area, trying to pry it’s head off my leg. Tugging hard, the creature refused to let go. Dang it! Why does such a tiny creature need to bite so hard?

“Ugh, couldn’t you have been a herbivore??? Release me at once!” Furrowing my brows in pain and betrayal, I pulled and pulled until the creature finally gave in, not before taking a chunk of my flesh with it. I watched in horror as the creature lacerated my flesh with its teeth, the crimson liquid dribbling onto the blades of grass. Crap crap crap, what the heck, do I have any medical supplies? God why did I have to encounter a hungry dino?? My head reeling from the agony, I did my best to ignore the throbbing as I hurriedly tore off my backpack, desperately pawing through it for any type of medical supplies, anything that could help at all!

Meanwhile, the perpetrator seemed content with its prize, hungrily swallowing my chunk of flesh. It wouldn’t be long before it got hungry again, and it had a perfectly oblivious prey right before it. I should have been more careful. It wasn’t long before my fingers felt a smooth, flat texture of a bandage. But with a wound this large, a bandage isn’t enough. Now in full panic mode, I began removing all my bag’s content, fearfully watching the Sinosauropteryx as it inched closer. Thankfully, it took interest in the foreign objects tossed around me, giving me time to finally pull out a roll of tape and a box of gauze sponge. Ripping the box open, my fingers fumbled for a piece of the sponge, and I placed the sponge over the wound timidly, taping it in place. That would have to do for now. Oh, how am I supposed to explain this to the doctors?

The dinosaur! My head shot up at the thought as I prepared myself for round three. At least, I would have if it were still here. No, I can’t lose it! My paintings need inspiration and it was my only shot! I refuse to settle for less!

Carefully leaning against the tree, I propped myself up, scouring the area for a sight of that minuscule raccoon thing. This won’t do, I guess I’m going to have to move.

Hobbling around, I kept my eyes on the ground, my heart jumping every time a roar was heard.

“Here dino dino, I’ve got plenty more meat for you, come on out!” The vast environment was littered with trees and small fern-like bushes, not too dissimilar from a jungle back in the modern era.

Rustle. Silence. Rustle.

Following the source of the sound, my eyes widened at the sight, quickly backing away behind a stray tree. There, in between the shrubs, seemed to be a female *Sinosauropteryx* and the miniature aggressor, the cause of my suffering! Beside the female lay a few tiny, lightly spotted eggs, each possessing an ostensibly hard milky shell. I guess the phrase “An eye for an eye” is a perfect illustration of my current situation. I must say, this is most certainly a once in a lifetime chance, who needs an injury-free leg anyways? Cringing at the memory of the attack, I pulled myself together in order to not miss this wonderful experience. I would be the first person to know the appearance of the *Sinosauropteryx* egg!

Watching the teeny dinosaurs nuzzle, I couldn’t help but feel a pang of lovesickness. Even a dinosaur has a better love life than I do. Right, that reminds me, how much time do I have left? Reluctantly, I turned my focus towards my watch. WHAT! Only a measly hour left? That’s nowhere near enough! I can’t believe I took that long just to chase after my muse! Exasperated, I shifted my body, forgetting about my stupid leg.

“Ow!” Well frick. I groaned internally as the two lovebirds screeched, scattering to find the source of the noise. Seeing the unattended eggs, I suddenly got a crazy, but glorious idea. Taking the perfect chance, I ran over to the nest quicker than the speed of light, ignoring the stabbing pain of my leg. I must make haste, after all I don’t want to even imagine being attacked by two of those little devils. Just one, just one to study. Perhaps I will return it after, when I’m done with it. Skidding to a stop right before the messy but cozy looking nest of fallen leaves, dry and shriveled and stubby branches, I snatched up a random egg and ran for it, using all my willpower to not look back at the aggravated dinosaurs. Oh my god, I’m a criminal!

Chest heaving and heart pounding, my calf muscles screamed at me, no longer able to bear the prolonged exercise. Giving in, I collapsed behind a tree a good long while away from the nest, breathing heavily as I did my best to not succumb to the excruciating pain. There was no doubt that I had stretched the nasty wound on my calf.

I groaned, clutching my chest in agony. It most certainly has been a long time since I did that much running. Was it worth it? The tiny egg seemed to shine like a luminescent oyster shell, opulent and bright as I raised it feebly towards the sun. It was no bigger than my palm, looking rather similar to that of a quail egg. I wonder if it tastes the same.

Stomp. Stomp. The ground rumbled beneath my limp body. I’m finished, I sighed. Shutting my eyes tight, I held on tightly to my prize as I prayed to whichever god existed, hoping whatever dinosaur’s territory I’m in is not carnivorous. Suddenly, I felt the earth stop shaking and the little light shining through my eyelids slowly becoming shadowed by a presence. Well, if I’m going to leave this world, I suppose I might as well die knowing the culprit.

Counting to three, my mind ripped away my fear like a bandaid as I prepared to be chomped up into a million little pieces until only bone fragments remain—Hold on. A pair of long, smooth horns protruding from a frill ending with stubby bones and knobby legs. This was no carnivore! It’s a triceratops! Feeling my previous terror release my heart, fresh, cool air rushed into my lungs to revive them, a quiet sigh of relief escaping me. The magnificent creature stood no closer than a metre away from me as it spared me a short glance, then turned away to munch on the evergreen leaves, just like a king taking no interest in my insignificant presence. Yes! Yes! Not only was I lucky enough to live another day, I have encountered one of my childhood favourite dinosaurs! I always thought the triceratops looked like a tired grandma, and now upon closer inspection, it wasn’t so far from the truth. The rough skin upon it looked no different from an elephant’s skin, with powerful jaws made for crushing plants, with a slight beak-like end above.

Finally, I decided to let my guard down, for now. Loosening my death grip on the egg, I turned my attention towards my new source of inspiration. The horned beast was resplendent, its massive head three times the size of mine. There’s no doubt that it could chow down on me if it wanted to. I watched carefully as it grazed on the leaves, making sure to capture the slow movements of its mouth. After all it would be more authentic to paint the dinosaur with its proper movements in mind, a creature giving off such an air of regality deserves to be done justice. I must

now think of a way to merge all my experiences today into several paintings. Choppy but careful brushstrokes for the thin, layered feathers of the Sinosauropteryx, pure white and blended spots of an umber hue, and multitudes of auburn, apricot and squash with an undertone of marigold for the Triceratops. Ah, the big three which blossomed the flowers adorning my tree of inspiration. I am forever grateful to whoever bestowed this power of mine upon me.

All of a sudden, a splitting pain tingled up my leg, forcing me to swallow down a pained cry. Wheezing, my fingers trembled with uncertainty as they peeled off the haphazardly stuck medical tape, gently lifting the stained, yellow gauze. Being left untreated, the large wound was seeping purulent drainage, the yellow liquid oozing down my leg, while the areas of torn skin were decorated with pale yellow crust. Sighing in frustration, I searched my bag for a fresh gauze change as the memories and feeling of the flesh ripping away from my leg flashed through my mind. I just can't wait to go home.

Finding a random plastic bag in my bag, I threw the sickening soaked cotton into it, absolutely disgusted. Just looking at that thing made me lose whatever appetite my stomach had cooked up since the past three hours. Luckily my condition won't change as I travel back, otherwise I may just have to amputate my leg.

A second ground shaking movement brought my attention back to the real world as a large roar echoed. I most certainly did not like how close that sounded. Pressing my back against the tree forcefully, I felt my body stiffen in consternation as each stomp matched the beat of my hammering heart, growing closer at a breakneck speed, the powerful aura leaving my hairs standing on its end, goosebumps travelling up my skin. The surrounding dinosaurs were just as agitated, I watched in horror as many more dinosaurs came out from nowhere, rushing past the tree holding me in its embrace in pure terror. The Tyrannosaurus Rex emerged from the shadows of the trees, making them bend to its will. Its vociferous cry rang through the air like a wacry. I could only watch helplessly as its mouth opened to a prodigious size, seizing a poor triceratops by the neck while it bayed. I winced, no longer able to look at the scene. This may be the circle of life but I sure didn't like witnessing it.

Holding my breath, I shuffled as I tried to conceal myself more effectively from the carnivorous demon, doing my best to limit my breathing. Does that thing even have ears? Out of the blue, I felt the egg in my hand tremble on its own, shaking gently. No, it's not hatching is it? Not now, not now! I can't have such a magical moment happen now! Clenching onto the egg with both hands, I tried to hold it in place—Sorry little one, please wait a little longer!

With a mighty battle cry, I could hear the Tyrannosaurus rex lunge after another possible prey, further and further away from the tree. Phew! Safe for now. Releasing the egg from my death grip, I set it down on my lap, watching curiously at the trembling egg shook violently. It's happening! I'm going to be a mother!

Crack, shk. I stared intently, following each crack that travelled around the egg, until it stopped. Then all of a sudden, a miniature clawed hand broke past the solid shell, shattering it's small prison. Observing the hatching in awe, I resisted the temptation to break off the shell myself. This is a natural process, and I must let it happen naturally. Next, a tiny white snout peeked out, and then a soft warbling—like sound was heard. Waiting with bated breath, I grew more and more impatient. How hard can it be to come out of an egg?

Whoosh. A single gold fleck flashed before my eyes. No, it can't be right? Hurry up dinosaur, come out of the egg now! A few more gold sparkles danced around the air, encircling me with their shimmering light. Looking back at the egg, I realized the top shell finally came off, revealing a brown and pinkish—FLASH.

My eyes blinded, I cried in pain, almost going blind from the sudden effulgent light as it engulfed the environment with its glow. The moment I opened my eyes, I could only sigh in sadness as the natural environment faded into cold glass display cases. Shutting my eyes tightly, I attempted to recover from the flash, an experience that always brings much pain. As I opened them again, a flash of milky white encased in the glass display cabinet caught my eye. Could it be? Upon closer inspection, I realized. The egg I hatched! How could I forget the spotted jewel? I found myself smiling fondly at the egg, until a sharp pain reminded me of my missing chunk of flesh. Er, I suppose the paintings can wait. For now, my journey has come to a satisfying end.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Singapore International School Hong Kong, Wu, Audrey – 13

A group of archaeologists gathered around the excavation site, the fresh brown dirt in piles around them. They stared in disbelief at the largest, longest fossil ever found. No matter how they dug, they couldn't seem to find an end. It stretched for miles and miles, seemingly never ending.

“Quick question, aren't we in Henan?” Sarah exclaimed.

“Does that matter?”

She sucked in a deep breath, her hands trembling. The oldest dragon statue, Henan, this fossil that stretched on for miles, they were all connected somehow. Her thoughts formed a hurricane whirling around in her head, struggling to connect and make sense.

“The oldest dragon statue was found in Henan, 1987, dating back to the fifth millennium BC. What if these dragons weren't just mythical creatures, they were gods and higher beings that our ancestors worshipped and prayed to?”

The possibilities were endless, however, nothing could be proven until it was brought into a lab for testing.

Tensions were high on the way back to the lab, Dr. Ping was flipping through papers, searching for any sign that such a fossil had been found, while Gui Zhong rapidly typed on her phone, alerting the scientists to pack all their equipment as soon as possible. Such a precious discovery could not be damaged in any way. Sarah nervously tapped her fingers on the window, watching the raindrops race with each other, the pitter patter making her drowsy. Her eyelids fluttered once, twice, and she fell into a deep slumber.

The next time she opened her eyes, it would not be in the car, neither would it be in the real world. She blinked slowly, the blinding light scorching her eyes.

“I see you have awoken” A deep, gentle voice sent a chill down her spine. It echoed throughout the space, and as her eyes adjusted, she witnessed a ginormous golden dragon sitting in front of her.

“What— I'm sorry, I have no idea what I'm even doing here! Am I in trouble? Or am I dead? Please don't kill me!” panicking, Sarah tried to run away, fleeing from the terrifying being looming above her.

“ Would you relax? I’m not trying to harm you. Please hear me out.” Something larger than life was out to get her, and Sarah was not having it. She struggled and wiggled in the grasp of its claw, but it squeezed tight, ensuring her capture.

“ Let go of me, please!”

“ Please calm down. I have contacted you in your dreams, as you are the first successful mortal to discover my body’s remains. I would like to reward you, so ask any questions you may have.” The dragon raised an eyebrow, allowing her to speak.

“ Uh... Sure. Are dragons real? And if they are, which one would you be?” Sarah found herself falling deeper into the rabbit hole. First, she was born into a family who were seriously obsessed with Chinese culture and their myths, then she found the longest, deepest fossil ever discovered, and now this? What was happening?

“ Yes, they are. I’m surprised it took you so long to realise. I am the oldest dragon in Chinese culture, Loong. Forgive me for not introducing myself, ” the dragon started glowing white, his form shrinking until he turned into a child. “ This is my human form. Do you feel more comfortable talking to me now?” Sarah took note of his exasperated expression, and decided not to scream or cry, lest he zapped her into a plant, cursed to live in a cosmopolitan city.

“ Alright, has anyone ever found your body, or was it just me?” she curiously asked.

“ Many people have wondered how this river’s currents are so strong and foreboding. All this time, I have been suffering in heaven, so I decide to stir up some storms, but no one ever notices.” Loong pouted, before he remembered his role in this holy pyramid, where he was supposed to be at the top. His face twisted back into a mask of politeness.

This poor child had successfully pulled at her heartstrings. As a wave of sadness and pity crashed into me as I wondered if he ever really had a childhood. Suddenly, her body started shimmering like iridescent silk.

“It’s time for you to go. It was nice talking to you! When you go back—” Loong’s voice cut off, and the last thing he was trying to say never reached Sarah.

“Wake up, are you okay?” Gui Zhong’s concerned face blinked down at her when she woke up. “You were sleeping so peacefully, I didn’t want to wake you up. We just arrived back at the excavation site, all the scientists are here. ” Gui Zhong shook her shoulders again and whispered, “ Professor Lee is here, and we’re seriously being judged right now, so I beg of you to get up.”

She mustered up her strength and got out of the car, the bright sunlight reminding her of the bizarre dream she had. Woosh! A light weight settled on her shoulder, stretching its arms. She whipped around and there was Loong!

“What are you doing here! This is the mortal realm!” Her eyes were about to pop out of her skull, as she realised just how much more drama she had gotten herself into.

“ You’re a nice friend. So I’m going to stay with you. If you need tips I’m here to help.” Loong’s eyes glinted, amused by Sarah’s shock when he spoke in her mind.

She whipped around, maintaining her composure as she faced the condescending scientists, staring at her like she was crazy.

“All right everyone, so let’s get started. This is a dragon’s skeleton. They are estimated to be 35 metres long and differ significantly from western dragons. They do not breathe fire and do not have wings, however, they maintain the ability to fly as well as shapeshift into different animals and even people.” Her eyes darted around, looking for the research papers Dr. Ping was flipping through. “Right here, it says the largest fossil ever discovered was 40 metres long. Today, we sucked the water out of this river, hoping to find any architectural remains. However, we discovered an enormous fossil, spanning more than a quarter of this lake.” She maintained eye contact with the professors, assuring them that she wouldn’t be wrong.

“Spot on, Sarah. Also, you should check my claws. They’re special.” Loong winked at her. Sarah glanced around to see if anyone had noticed the tiny dragon situated on her shoulder, but they seemed to be oblivious, staring at her like dead fish.

Listening to Loong’s advice, she asked the excavator crew to dig at the soil until they saw something like a claw. To their amazement, they unearthed a claw with talons that shone under the sun. Their eyes popped out of the skulls, like they couldn’t believe she was correct. Following Loong’s orders, they found other things, such as a collection of golden scales, scattering the setting sun’s light across her face, as well as a collection of ancient books that were to be further inspected.

After a long day, Sarah was reading to get home and rest. She submitted the evidence for evaluation, and took the bus home, Loong keeping her company. She stumbled into her apartment, ready to collapse. It had taken a while for her to get used to this place, but it was turning into somewhere she was able to call home. Roxy, the corgi, barked at her shoulder, glowering at Sarah’s new companion, as well as Roxy’s new competition. Loong thought it was funny, and coiled into himself after landing next to Roxy.

Collapsing into her bed, she closed her eyes, drifting off into a dream.

Ring, ring! The alarm clock screamed and screeched for her to wake up, waking up the whole house in the process. Her mother crept into her room, with a plate of fried eggs and sausages prepared for her.

“Good morning! You came home surprisingly late last night, did you see the dinner I left for you?”

She sighed, wishing she had eaten something. Her stomach growled, begging for some food as company. Quickly getting ready, she walked into the living room, grateful for Saturdays and Sundays. She scarfed down some food and went out for a stroll in the city.

Little did she know how many people would corner her in the street, bombarding her with interviews and questionnaires. Every shopping mall she went to, every billboard she saw, the same words echoed through the streets – the existence of dragons has been proven. She rushed into little shops, hoping for some privacy. She swiftly purchased products and rushed back home, ready to crochet and knit for the whole weekend. Stress from work had been flooding her brain, leaving her like a ghost.

When she got home, her mom sat on the couch, staring at the dog bed.

“What’s wrong? I thought we were going to bake something.” Sarah asked.

“Uh... Please tell me you see that gold dragon lying on Roxy,” Her mom looked both curious and horrified “Is it real?”

“Yes, he’s real. And he’s actually really kind, so maybe just let him be on his merry way,” She joked, “but seriously, I found a dragon’s fossil yesterday.”

“That’s great, honey!” she had always been a little peculiar, but not like Sarah could judge.

Sarah had always loved dragons, but after she found out they were real, she didn’t know what to feel about all of this. She thought she had been studying archaeology, but over the years it had started boring her. This was a new case she was able to follow, but she would like to investigate more, maybe even travel back to Henan.

The next two days passed by in flurry, with Loong being amazed by the advancements humanity has made in the past millennia. Sarah showed him around, laughing at him oohing and aahing at the latest technology. They sat at home, attempting to crochet. Sarah’s mom treated them to dessert, ironically giving Loong dragon beard’s candy. Alas, the weekend came to an end, and it was time to return to Henan.

Upon arriving at the site, the first thing Sarah noticed was the massive amount of progress the workers had done. They had also found the head of the dragon, which was a little ways from a rural village. The villagers had

become curious about the dried up river, but when they discovered what they were doing, they laughed, saying it was about time someone checked on that disaster of a river.

Gui Zhong and Dr. Ping had examined the ancient books discovered in the site, and confirmed that the ages added up. Furthermore, there were new dragons located in other rivers mentioned in this book. Each dragon represented a different river. When he heard this, Loong twirled around in excitement, excited that we had reached this point of the investigation.

“Sarah, there’s a quick way to summon all the dragons.” Loong mumbled. She blinked slowly, not sure if this decision was safe. Even though she was entranced by the mythical creatures, she didn’t know if all dragons were nice, like Loong. She couldn’t take the risk of humanity just to find some dragons.

“Thanks, Loong, but I think I’ll pass.” Although Loong tried persuading her, she was adamant about her decision. She continued to transcribe the ancient texts, and confirmed two locations. One dragon was located in the mercury river surrounding Qin Shi Huang’s grave, while the other was located in a section of the Yellow River. Both were about the same size as Loong, in fact, they were brothers. Sarah rubbed her forehead as she realised how much work she had to do.

“Sarah? The excavation workers said the ground beneath the fossil is hollow, would you like to check it out?” Gui Zhong pulled her out of the tent and dragged her towards the large hole that had formed, with bioluminescent worms hanging around the rim of the gaping hole.

Loong flicked his tail, as if to say he was right. Sarah rolled a ladder down into the chasm, climbing down to see what secrets it would hold.

With a flashlight, her and Gui Zhong ventured inside.

As Sarah and Gui Zhong descended the ladder, the air grew cooler, and a faint light from the bioluminescent worms illuminated the cave walls with a soft, eerie glow. The ground beneath them felt uneven, and the walls shimmered with moisture.

“Do you think the hollow space connects to the river?” Gui Zhong whispered, glancing around nervously.

“Maybe. If it does, the river could connect to where the other dragons are,”

As they reached the bottom of the chasm, the beam of Sarah’s flashlight revealed a series of intricate carvings etched into the stone walls. The carvings depicted dragons in various forms—some soaring through the clouds, others coiled around mountains, and a few interacting with ancient humans in what seemed to be ritualistic ceremonies.

“Wow, look at this!” Gui Zhong exclaimed, pointing to a particular carving. “It looks like a dragon is blessing a village.”

“Maybe this was a place of worship,” Sarah admired the pictures, tracing her fingers over the cool stone. “These dragons weren’t just creatures; they were loved by everyone.” As she glanced at the looming darkness ahead of them, a chill went down her spine. After a quick discussion with Guizhong, they returned up to the surface to get walkie talkies, then headed back down into the unknown.

“ Sarah, is it just me or is it getting warmer?” The further they walked, the fewer carvings appeared. Thankfully, the bioluminescent worms covered the walls, illuminating everything. A pathway had been built, however it seemed no one had been here in a very long time. A bright light shined ahead. Clutching each other’s arms, they ventured on through the tunnel, and arrived at a dome shaped cavern. The worms covered every corner and surface, reflecting light off the silver river.

“It can’t be... We’re in Xi’an?” Sarah exclaimed.

“That tunnel must have been a shortcut or something!” Guizhong inched closer, using a glass vial to collect the silver substance. With their testing kit, they found out which element this river was filled with. Only one

problem. The walkie talkies weren't working anymore. Loong leaped off Sarah's shoulders, flying towards the river and diving in.

The cavern rumbled and trembled, Sarah and Guizhong holding on for dear life. The silver streaks dancing around on the walls seemed otherworldly, and suddenly a large white light emerged from the river, shaking the worms off the walls and causing an earthquake.

"Hello! I am Jin, the silver dragon. How did you discover this cave, and why are you here with my brother?" Jin's voice echoed and bounced off the walls, scaring Guizhong half to death.

Sarah's heart raced as the majestic form of Jin, the silver dragon, emerged from the river, shimmering like liquid moonlight. The cavern pulsed with energy, the air thick with magic, and she struggled to find her voice.

"Uh, we... we found a tunnel from Henan," Sarah stammered, glancing at Gui Zhong, who looked both terrified and awestruck. "We were exploring the excavation site and... um, we didn't mean to intrude."

Jin's large, luminous eyes scrutinized them. "You are mortals, yet you walk upon sacred ground. But I sense no malice in your hearts. You have awakened me, and I am forever grateful for your service. You have received both me and my brother's blessing. We wish you luck in your journey of uncovering China's exquisite culture. We shall accompany you to the next stop on your journey."

The air crackled with energy as Jin's words resonated in the cavern. Sarah felt a mixture of disbelief and excitement wash over her.

"Wait, you mean you'll help us?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

"Yes," Jin replied, his voice deep and melodic. "The rivers are alive, and we dragons are their guardians. Your discovery has reignited our connection to the mortal world. It is time for you to understand the true history of our existence."

Gui Zhong, still wide-eyed, managed to speak. "But how will you help us? What do we need to do?"

"Follow the tunnel to the Yellow River," Jin instructed, his form shimmering as he gestured toward the flowing water. "There, you will find the next dragon, and with his guidance, you will learn more about our history."

"Alright, let's go!" Sarah said, her heart racing with anticipation. She felt a sense of purpose she hadn't experienced before.

As they stepped toward the river, Loong flitted around them, his excitement palpable. "This is amazing! I can't wait to meet my brother!"

With a gentle wave of his wing, Jin created a shimmering path across the surface of the silver river. "Step lightly, and you shall not fall. Remember, the journey is just as important as the destination."

As they walked over the water, Sarah marveled at the bioluminescent creatures that danced beneath the surface, illuminating their path. The river seemed to hum with life, and she felt deeply connected to everything around her.

"Believe it!" Loong chimed in, laughing. "This is just the beginning. Wait until you see my brother!"

As they approached the other end of the silver river, the scenery began to shift. The bioluminescence faded, replaced by vibrant vegetation and the sounds of flowing water..

Suddenly, they reached the mouth of a cave, and Jin paused. “The Yellow River lies within. It is a place of great power and history. Enter with respect, for the dragon you are about to meet is wise.”

Sarah exchanged a glance with Gui Zhong, her heart pounding. “Ready?”

“Ready,” Gui Zhong replied, determination replacing her earlier fear.

As they ventured deeper, the golden light grew brighter, and soon they entered a vast chamber. At its center lay a magnificent dragon, scales shimmering like bronze in the warm glow. He was larger than Jin, his presence commanding and regal.

Curse of Cowardice

St. Clare's Girls' School, Chung, Yue, Jacqueline – 17

Under the starry night, came a shadow running across the street.

It was dark, but not so dark that everything was invisible. Normally, tripping would be an absurd thing to happen, but nothing started off normally in this particular night, with this particular person.

The shadow stopped abruptly and hissed, ‘Ouch! I shouldn’t have stolen this cape.’

The cape was red and full of golden embroidery when Shunheng came across it in the department store. It was what a glorious hero would wear, also what he would love to wear as a child.

So, he stole it and wore it this night.

It was longer than what Shunheng expected it to be. He had no time to try it out before getting caught and his eyes could not comprehend its true length.

As unlucky and clumsy as he usually was, he tripped over his oversized cape, with his knees and hands on the ground.

Four red spots on his skin stung like fire burning, but Shunheng couldn’t leave. He had an indispensable mission, for the sake of his well-being. He couldn’t afford to back away.

He had thought of doing it in the morning, but it would be too obvious and people would notice. He did not have the courage to steal in front of other people. He couldn’t imagine them glaring at him sneaking around the facility, behind pillars and pillars just to find what he needed. It would be abnormal, and mortifying.

He needed to be in his best condition, with no anxiety. So, he chose to do it at night, which was also not that much of a brilliant idea.

Shunheng successfully dodged the possibility of a panic attack, but working in the dark was an obstacle.

As much as he didn’t want to admit, he was lost.

He squinted his eyes to somehow see clearly than before and it worked.

‘Oh! There it is!’ After his prolonged concentration on his surroundings and with the help of the moonlight, a path was lit for him. There was a tall and thick wall a street away from him, and what’s even taller behind was a museum.

Yes, the Jiangxi Saurian Museum.

Here in Jiangxi, a new species of dinosaur was discovered and it was said to be an unknown group of titanosaurs and the exact species that haunted Shunheng in his sleep.

That was what he believed. He had read hundreds of books about dinosaurs in the public library for the exact reason, but none of the books had a species like the unknown titanosaur shown on the television.

His sufficient amount of sleep was on the line, yet again and he felt anger up his throat every time someone started a conversation with him. And he had to break into the museum and steal a piece of bone from the new dinosaur, which was the way to stop the dinosaur from haunting him.

He swiftly climbed up the wall with a hook and a robe, and of course his cape as well. He would not abandon his lovely oversized cape. Though he was met with an area of white land.

Oh he forgot! The wall was thicker than usual so as to prevent little thieves from trespassing.

Little thieves excluding Shunheng. Even though he was little, he was experienced.

The rest of the process was smooth after climbing over the wall. He painted all the cameras black with his trusty black paint installed on his wrist and dodged all the red lasers that would trigger the alarm.

After all the shenanigans, he arrived in front of the fossils of the titanosaurs... More like a titanosaurian sauropod, Shunheng would say.

'Sorry Mr. Titanosaurus... Err... Sauropod?' Shunheng questioned with his vast knowledge and smashed the protective glass. He picked up a piece of the smallest chevron, which was even smaller than his pinkie.

That was enough. Shunheng was not greedy. When he achieved his goal, he would leave.

He grinned at his success and took a step backward.

'Beep! Beep!' The alarm went off as Shunheng looked under. His foot was on a red laser near the floor and he had completely missed it just now.

It must've been his cape again. Shunheng wondered whether he should've stolen this cape or not, as it brought misfortune to him at least five times, in and out of his mission, but there was no time to think. He had to flee.

Black to red, red to black, that was all Shunheng could see.

Dozens of guards, the sounds of footsteps, were running towards his directions with flashlights, that was all Shunheng could hear.

Despite being a little thief, he appeared unusually calm, as if he had done this a million times. Without the cape on his shoulders and his life at stake, he quickly jumped up and was nowhere to be seen.

The guards thought that Shunheng left the building and continued to look for him outside the facility, not knowing that the little stealthy being was at the ceiling, on top of the room.

Shunheng sighed when all the guards went to chase the little robot with the red and golden threaded cape. He was glad that he was able to lure the tigers away from the mountain. Though those guards really made fools of themselves. There was no way someone could leave a well guarded space this fast, not even the greatest thief of them all—Stephane Breitwieser.

'Mission accomplished.' Shunheng cheered but whined after a second.

'My lovely cape! What a bummer.'

~●~●~●~

'Shunheng!'

It was the other morning and school had started. The thing 'school' was compulsory for everyone. So, no one could escape it, including Shunheng.

That was the other reason why he was so desperate to find the fossil of the newly discovered dinosaur.

'Pay attention to class for once, Mr. Ling. You hear me?'

'Yes, Miss.' Shunheng yawned.

He pitied himself and his red hero cape that was gone.

The chevron didn't help and he was chased by the titanosaurian sauropod again the night after stealing its skeleton.

More frantic, several titanosaurian sauropods.

Shunheng could see the words on the blackboard blur and started to fly away from their habitats and towards him. And then went past and hit the back of the room, Shunheng imagined.

The whole process was going on for about three minutes, maximum five, Shunheng assumed.

'Ring! Ring! Ring!' The words flew back to their rightful place and Shunheng was triggered, eyes widened.

It was not the bell that dismissed students, it was the teacher's phone?

'Hello? They are coming up right now? Okay.'

The call ended and the teacher stayed silent for a while, as if she was trying to process something.

Her face became twisted, even stricter than before. It was like when Shunheng did something unacceptable to her extent in class.

Three men in light brown coats went in with work bags full of wrinkly documents. They must've seen a lot of their clients before coming here, to this school, Shunheng thought.

Though, this was so out of the blue as Shunheng wasn't notified of a guest coming to this school for a speech, which was usually done at the morning assembly.

'We need to check the students.' One man said.

'For traces of crime.' Another whispered.

The last man took out a high tech-gadget, one that usually appears in fantasy novels and Movies. 'Come out one by one!'

Shunheng snorted. It turned out the gadget wasn't as high tech as he thought it was. He would not be scanned without acknowledgement and consent.

Shunheng was confident he wouldn't get arrested. The places he robbed were either old or had out-dated security equipment, so no one could catch him.

He was scheming his way out of this classroom in case he got caught by those three men.

The windows... He was on the third floor, though it would be lethal and silly to jump out.

He could hear the shortest man yelling out 'Next!'

A familiar 'Next' Shunheng remembered. The same exact shriek he heard in the museum when he went there in the morning.

Shunheng should've guessed it was the curators in the Jiangxi Saurian Museum.

He was running out of time.

The door... It was guarded by the teacher, and Shunheng knew that she was on the lookout for his shenanigans. That would not work.

How about the back door—

'Next!' It was the shriek again. 'Mr. Shunheng!'

The short man was serious, with his eyebrows creased. He had been calling out for Shunheng for quite some time.

'Oh sorry.' Shunheng panicked but no one noticed.

Shunheng walked out and faced another man, the tallest this time, with the gadget a few meters away.

The gadget turned red, and 'Beep—', and then the gadget flickered back to green.

Shunheng shut his eyes, assuming that he's doomed because he visited the museum last night. That wasn't a long period of time.

Though all three men were confused, especially the one with the gadget on hand. 'It was not supposed to work like that...'

'So is he clear?'

'I think the gadget malfunctioned.' The last man with the gadget concluded and slapped the device on hand a few times, 'Mr. Shunheng, you are free to go.'

Shunheng nodded and returned to his seat.

The bell rang and people left the classroom.

'Shunheng, the class ended!' One kind classmate patted Shunheng on the shoulder, but the latter didn't reply.

Someone helped him.

No one saw what Shunheng saw.

The gadget didn't malfunction. Shunheng saw green covering up the blue light from the gadget right at the last second.

The green somehow blocked the device from reaching him.

It soon covered up the whole classroom.

Wait. There was one who saw, Shunheng thought, after scanning the room.

There. A boy with lime green eyes.

The boy stared at Shunheng the whole time and it never ended. The lime green eyes were still on Shunheng.

He wasn't surprised, as if he was the culprit.

Wanzhi...

Shunheng could see those eyes pointing towards the classroom door, signaling him to leave the classroom with its owner.

Shunheng then noticed the men nodding at the teacher and finally took their leave with her when the bell rang.

Shunheng, who got the signal, followed Wanzhi to a rooftop.

'So, can you explain the malfunctioning of the gadget? Their technology won't be easily broken—'

'Reprogrammed it.' Wanzhi said in monotone.

There was a distance between the boy and the men just now. How did he reprogram the device? How did he manage to get past the security, Shunheng questioned.

'Need your help.' Wanzhi continued.

'Why?'

'Save.'

'Who?'

'Dinosaurs.'

Dinosaurs... 'None of them are alive.' Shunheng voiced out a thought.

'Their s—souls...Save.'

The boy stuttered and gave out simple yet confusing answers. Their whole conversation had been mostly singular words and Shunheng was about to fly off the handle.

'Can you stop cutting out all your words? Aren't you good at English?'

Wanzhi was good at English...Literarily. He wrote the best writings in class, and even occasionally marked his classmates' work when they asked him.

Shunheng thought Wan was good at everything regarding English, but he was unlucky enough to be sick every time Wanzhi was required to speak in front of the class. He never knew Wanzhi had never spoken a complete sentence.

Until now.

'Where are the dinosaurs?'

Wanzhi went silent, as if he was trying to understand those four words and six syllables, as if he was debating on his answer.

'Hong Kong.'

Wanzhi understood words pretty well, Shunheng realized, it was just the habit of speaking.

'How are we going to go to Hong Kong? Wait, why do I have to go with you? I am just an ordinary boy.'

Who stole.

'Stéphane Breitwieser. Like him.'

Wanzhi continued, and Shunheng somehow understood him.

'Jiangxi Saurian Museum, Titanosauria Sauropod.' The former added.

‘How did you—’ Shunheng didn’t bother continuing as his head was aching. ‘I am not going, I can’t even take care of myself, let alone saving creatures that went extinct?’

‘I am leaving.’

Shunheng was inches away from the threshold of the staircase that connected to the roof, stopped right above it when Wanzhi said ‘haunted dreams, dinosaurs, will gone.’

‘You said my nightmares will disappear if I come with you?’

Wanzhi nodded.

‘Sweet! Let’s go.’ Shunheng went from denying Wanzhi’s request to demanding it.

‘Museum.’ A simple hint of direction while the two were exiting the school building.

‘So where do we go?’

Wanzhi silently glared at his companion, as if to complain about his sense of direction.

~●●●~

Apparently, there was a device to teleport to different corners of the world and it could only be accessed by people with a special pendant, which Shunheng had never seen before.

They were transported to a storage room, which should belong to the Hong Kong Scientific Museum.

The two, with Wanzhi in the lead, roamed the space. They skipped to the dinosaur section just to find three men with a capsule.

The three exact men Shunheng came across in the classroom.

‘Took you long enough.’ The short one hissed at Wanzhi.

Wanzhi’s whole person tensed up, and Shunheng felt the atmosphere changing. He heard Wanzhi demanding, ‘release my people.’

Shunheng was surprised that Wanzhi managed to form a rather complete sentence. Even though the latter sounded like a bickering child screaming for a toy.

‘Sneak behind the three men. Don’t worry, I will distract them.’ It echoed in Shunheng’s mind. He nodded.

‘I just don’t get why you still came, you know you can’t save them. In fact, you could’ve in the past, but you chose to escape. You chose to betray them.’ The tallest man started.

‘Shut up!’ Wanzhi was startled when he heard the word escape. He did escape, thinking that his people wouldn’t follow him to a new dimension, but they did. He failed to understand that this was the second chance he was given, to be less of a coward and start being responsible for his people. ‘I will save you all, I will free your souls.’ Wanzhi promised in thought.

‘Do you think they will be happy to have their prince, who abandoned them, to be involved with this?’ the last man questioned, ‘I’ve heard their thoughts. It’s all despair, pain and surrender.’

‘They have no hope for their prince!’ The last man pointed at the capsule in hand.

Shunheng was above the ceiling the whole time, trying to get behind the three men, but he couldn’t help but be amazed to find Wanzhi as the prince of dinosaurs. And a coward prince. Shunheng was part of the redemption arc of this young prince, he realized.

‘I’ve been a coward for thousands of years, but not anymore! I could not stand the pain.’ Wanzhi screamed, childish but manly in some way.

‘Their souls are in our hands, how will you save them? Stop being a child and—’

‘Bob! Where is the other boy?’

‘There’s another boy?’

‘Yes.’ Two men shouted.

Shortly after, the capsule floated on air, Shunheng had used his handy grappling hook to do the job. ‘Wanzhi catch!’

‘Thank you, friend.’ Wanzhi jumped up and caught the capsule.

‘No!’

'It is all your fault, Bob!'

'You both are to blame as well!'

The three men groaned.

Everything went black. The men and Shunheng vanished.

The capsule in Wanzhi's hand glowed.

'I will use my soul to pay the price. I will not escape responsibility anymore. I will activate the time traveler and send all of you back.'

Wanzhi spoke as if he was talking to his people, and his people replied, Wanzhi could feel it.

'I am not worthy of prince, I know!' Wanzhi cried, wanting his people to understand, despite being trapped for centuries. 'Please find one more worthy than me!'

Silence filled up the space, but Wanzhi knew the souls were speaking. Some were skeptical, but some forgave him.

At least it was not too late, Wanzhi could alter the time and send them back to their world, after the disaster.

He perfectly knew there would be no him, once his transferred all his remaining people to safety, perfectly knew that he had no right to be scared.

And he wouldn't be anymore.

'Be free, my people.' Wanzhi's whole person was filled with cracks, and his soul was crumbling. The darkness was filled with prickly light and the capsule flew, far far away.

~●~●~●~

Shunheng saw the crumbling Wanzhi, and he realized it was death for the latter. The latter hands and legs were fading away and he was back to his incomplete speech. 'Pleased, bye, friend.'

Shunheng understood but asked, 'it's that kind of saving isn't it.'

Wanzhi nodded. 'Redemption, happy! Leave, sad...'

'I get it.' Shunheng only got the sad part, though he didn't know the whole story. He could not judge.

Wanzhi had been selfish, so had been Shunheng.

Shunheng had still been selfish, so was Wanzhi.

Typewriters, Sonnets, Prose

St. Clare's Girls' School, Yeong, Xi, Jamie – 17

s'i'odo il vero,

Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

I was greeted by a white, billowy ocean. With my ankles sinking into the snow, I checked my bags—everything intact, and hailed my companion, Zhen to follow, permitting her to hold onto my arm, despite her unintentional tugging that threatened to pull us into the chill. As much inconvenience as these wintry moors bestowed upon us, we were quiet. It was a new experience for our team of archaeologists to time travel to prehistoric times. Heading solely in one direction, we did not converse until we could see through the turbulent winds.

In distant Texas, some archaeologists had attempted to resurrect long annihilated dinosaurs. By collecting samples of their DNA in fossils, they injected genetics into currently living mammals, aiming to create a new living form. It turned into a virus, which spread worldwide quite fast. The thrill of the world ending. The newspapers this morning announced that half of Liaoning is infected with this virus. It was in our hands to stop it.

'Alea iacta est.', Zhen had said in response.

Covertly we ventured forth and found a cave by the precipice, its narrow opening shrouded in shadow. With the sky solemnly holding its executioner's sword, we did not dare walk in. Instead—Zhen's idea, brilliant girl, I furtively threw small stones and pebbles to test the depth and lure out whatever unearthly creatures that might reside there. And thankfully, none emerged.

After what seemed like an eternity, we slumped against the freezing ground, our bodies tinged with a ghostly blue. The mission was too abrupt, and we could not meet prior. The supervisor, Mr. Mason had informed us to collect 250 milliliters of *Sinosauropteryx* blood. It would be made into Chinese medicine. As for the specifics, I was no doctor.

The air was frigid, and the melancholic night casted a sepulchral darkness over the cave, as though half-deserted streets. I could no longer see my companion's face, and therefore, lighter in hand, I attempted to spark a cosy fire.

The toasty flame brought back colour to Zhen's pale face. When she arrived in the laboratory, she stood apart from the grotesque relics surrounding—as a seraph announcing the affliction that the gods that bestowed upon our vulgar and commonplace faces. Her heels hit the ground, shattering the deadly silence. My colleagues, initially talking of Michaelangelo, turned to admire the sight. All around glass jars and apparitions of fossils loomed; a mausoleum of lost histories. There was a musical quality in her walk—her steps were even, the silk of her skirt draped around her slender legs, fluttering lightly as she moved. The embodiment of the seductive, enigmatic East.

I retrieved an antique fur coat from my bag to drape over Zhen's shoulders. She thanked me, and an austere silence prevailed.

Being the gentleman that I prided myself on being, I offered, 'I shall take it upon myself to hunt the Sinosauropteryx.'

'That is very kind of you.' Her eyes sparkling with amusement, 'But Sinosauropteryx are cat-sized, and other predators will assist us in the hunt.'

'Sure.' conceded I, poorly disguising my embarrassment. 'They remain carnivorous and might prove vicious.'

'I am pleased to count on you, then.' her tone light yet earnest.

'Why pursue archaeology, if I may intrude?' I ventured.

'I possess a fondness for the past.'

'A sentiment shared by many.'

'Good night, Chao.'

Huddling next to the fire, the frigid air refused to yield to dawn. I pressed against the hollow walls of the cave, drifting into a deep sleep. Sometimes, even now, I hear the deafening roars echoing in the sky.

Yesterday in the laboratory, I was self-assured that everything would go smoothly. 'I have the jars; the bags are ready. My books are in good hands. There's Dante Alighieri with me. Oh—'

A blonde-haired boy, Charles, breaking free from Mason's tender hold, sprinted towards us. He was no more than seven. With boyish tousled hair and knees adorned with bruises, the cherub called out to us.

'Are you going to see the dinosaurs?'

'Yes, my boy. I could photograph them for you.'

He squealed in delight at my offer. There it was—a newfound determination to come back, and more importantly, please the little angel.

He rummaged through his backpack and handed me a T-rex stuffed toy, its fabric faded a dull brown, with a tag that said, 'Natural History Museum'. I naturally recognised it—he never seemed to part with it.

'Daddy—I had a challenging time envisioning Mason raising such a delightful child—bought it for me. His name is Noah, um, can you please show him the dinosaurs?'

With greatest care, I accepted the travel companion. I felt Zhen's stare. In my periphery, I saw other Mason's and their young sons, pointed at the passage beside artefacts— 'Daddy, look! King Tut of Egypt!' Then wandering in souvenir shops, browsing kits for dinosaur fossils. All that—lost! My thoughts drifted to my father's fervent love for the past, though it was often entwined with his punishing ways. He would linger in the hallway, cigar in hand, robe askew, 'Boy, are you working hard? Need some help?' and help me with assembling a dinosaur skeleton model. No, these unmerciful thoughts were searing my entrails, and I quickly swallowed them. Father was a man of complexities, and I have learned to leave his memory alone.

As I stood motionless, Zhen answered the child. I longed to drink in that amiable voice—to cleanse my weary soul most intrinsically!

—The next day—

Dum spiro, spero

When Father bought the house, he was assured by a persuasive salesman that the study was its crowning glory. 'Aye, sir, you can get ya family portraits painted here, hang them above the hearth. The chairs, Chippendale, are worth a lot more than some folk's houses. And ya boy clad in a tailored vintage suit, lookin' handsome in the frames.'

It was here where Father devoted most of his days, indulging in his fascination for the dead. The house became a sanctuary, sheltering me from the technological advancement in the 22nd century—an oasis where I remain preserved, picturesque as Father's Montblanc pens. In honour of my father, I will abstain from quoting Matthew Arnold.

Do I dare? Do I dare?

'I have arisen.' Said I. The fire had dwindled into embers, and the sky a pink hue. My companion had long since awakened—a night's repose added to her beauty. She exuded an air of poise, divine goddess Artemis.

'The bags are ready.' Said she, her tone imbued with gentle resolve. I stifled a yawn and carried them.

We bid farewell to our sanctum, and upon the precipice, we had a clear vista of the dinosaurs below. Words or canvases could scarcely express; the incandescence of the sun cast light on the moors, the grass shimmering as if kissed by daylight, the earth's heartbeat roared in contentment as a flock of microraptors left a trail of their splendour. The tumultuous outcries of the titanosaurs harmonised with the landscape—an epiphany sent a chill coursing through my spine. We were outsiders narrating the past that render our shameful existences insignificant. A snowflake waltzed between my eyelashes. When my feet surrendered to the embrace of the heath, I inhaled the primitive tranquility, and all I thought of was juxtapositions and allowing my knees to collapse until I became part of the setting.

I retrieved our dear Noah from my bag hurriedly, as though I was the spiritual baboon who lifted Simba in the Lion King—archaic film, indispensable to my childhood. Making sure Noah caught several glimpses of the Mesozoic reptiles, he was tucked away to the safety of my bag.

We traversed through the prehistoric landscape, holding our breaths when we encounter other creatures. From the moors into the dense thickets, we lurked around bushes as swiftly as hunter gatherers. Raptors soared at low heights and sent a chilly breeze in my hair.

The pearl bracelet on her arm glinted. Little brown hairs danced on her arm. My thoughts were scattered like fallen leaves in the wind.

'What is your fondness for the past?' I asked.

‘I am intrigued by Tudor England, particularly Thomas Cromwell.’ Hearing my laugh, she looked up at me.

‘I suppose you are very well-versed in it?’

‘I seldom have time for researching history; archaeology preoccupies me.’

‘We can talk about history as long as we like; we have time.’

‘Where lies Mason’s portal?’ asked she.

‘He concealed it within my copy of the Divine Comedy. Here—I have the book.’ I held the stained and fragile book. On the cover, Dante, red cloak, razor-sharp jaw, stood in front of the harrowing circles of Purgatory. It was one of my favourites—the volume was kept lovingly on my bedroom shelf.

When Mason transported us through time, he opened page thirty-three and handed us the book. ‘Hold this tight. Never lose it. It is the only portal we’ve crafted—we ran out of time, I fear.’

‘Oh,’ she murmured, and my thoughts dissipated. ‘Are you fond of Dante?’

‘Yes, are you?’

She shook her head. ‘I have not read Dante. When I first saw you, you were juggling books.’

‘They are in good hands, rest assured.’

‘Oh, I am very assured, thank you.’

‘I know you are.’

‘May I ask,’ hesitantly, dispelling our tranquility, ‘What was your father like? His renown has reached many.’

‘He was regarded as a genius, if the term suffices.’ I fidgeted with my cold hands. She shook her head, and I quietly said, ‘It was different from what they showed in the fickle press.’

‘I figured that myself. Do you enjoy archaeology?’ asked the lady.

‘Not the way he did. It was as though he would barter his soul for it.’

‘You would sell your soul for literature, would you not?’

I faltered. ‘I would be kicked by my father’s phantom in the night.’

She looked wistfully at the lost grandeur of nature. ‘It is ironic, now that I contemplate Mason’s password for the portal, ‘Astra Inclinant, Sed Non Obligant.’

My words were laced with anguish. ‘I wondered all my life whether it had any validity to it. I feel no liberation from my father’s death, none, not at all. His expectations chain this sorry pilgrim helplessly to the altar.’

‘There is validity to it. I assure you—you need not give up archaeology. I surmise your artistic expression was stifled when he was there.’

‘Yes, always. He discarded my diary in the blazing fireplace before he left.’ said I, softly, the memory igniting a fresh wave of pain. ‘He went out in flamboyance; speeding on his Mustang and met his fate on an empty highway. Ah, I

‘speak of it cynically now! It hurts me, very, very much, it burns me to the core, I confide in you.’ I paused. ‘I wish we never fought before he left. I was ready to take fate however God and my father wished to bestow upon me, yet my impertinent soul capitulates to the very temptations of typewriters, sonnets, prose. May he rest now, I beseech Christ, most almighty God, may he rest most sincerely content, my soul burns in mortification—requiescat in pace.’

The woods thickened around me, enveloping me in most sympathetic affection. Comfort seeped through the soles of my feet. The benign clouds floated above. As though I was not on this land I invaded impudently, but feet on the end of the couch, offering a cordial toast to T.S. Elliot’s spectre. The thought seemed rude, as if I wished to be comforted by Elliot instead of my affable partner. She seemed adorned with armour at that moment—Athena aiding ill-fated Odysseus.

In an instant, a Cycad was beheaded behind us. There was a heavy thud. Zhen, agitated, tugged on my arm and we took off—a Gasosaurus slammed some creature into the tree. Birds took flight alarmingly in all directions, chaos erupting around us. Our tired legs took us far from the murder. We’ve reached the section of the forest where the trees were less dense and branches thinner, on a barren land with scarce vegetation, some dead lizards in the grass, limbless, bloody.

‘Halt, something is approaching.’ Warned my companion. We knelt on the icy, wet ground, scrutinizing the scene that will soon unfold. My trousers, uncomfortably soaked in frozen water, turned a deeper shade of red.

Thunderous footsteps shook the bleak ground, the withering tree branches quivered. A meagre Sinosauropteryx, initially feeding on a lizard, now stumbled further away at the deafening sound. Its eyeballs seem to exit the socket. A clumsy one—it ran like a child, tumbling a few times. Alas, the brown and scarlet feathered dinosaur was the opposite of a chameleon.

Archaeopteryx took flight and disappeared in wuthering heights, leaving a trail of black feathers. My breath hitched, as the Sinosauropteryx was decapitated abruptly, the skull rolling, Anne Boleyn style—the euphony of blood spilt.

A larger dinosaur, one I failed to identify, tore the flesh from the head, and further down to the neck, to drink in the salty maroon fluid, savouring it as though holy nectar. Yet, inexplicably, it fell with a thud, the melted snow causing a splash, diluting the crimson colour.

‘Alectrosaurus.’ Zhen, slender gloved fingers on a crossbow, a victorious glint in her eyes.

‘Good thinking.’ I applauded.

I cautiously made my way to the battlefield. With a syringe, an object of modernity amidst the prehistoric land, I extracted the fallen beast’s blood from its rough and feathered skin. The blood filled the syringe like an ocean tide rolling towards the rocks. There is time. I steadied my hand and examined the syringe, now brimming with the essence of the Sinosauropteryx. I filled a jar, as Zhen paced to and fro, watchful and weary.

‘Ah, it is finished, let us bid this place goodbye!’ Light-hearted and a bit pleased, I rose and secured the jar in the comfort depths of my bag. ‘I told you more about father than I tell most. What is it that renders your presence so disarming?’

‘Sincerity?’ She offered, blinking as though taking a Polaroid of the beauty of the earth.

‘I tell you what, Zhen, I feel almost free. Is it not absurd that I feel alive right when the world is ending?’

‘It need not end. This sanctum of ours will continue to protect us.’

‘Yes’ I murmured. I closed my eyes, and the world ceased to exist. Here my heart beat, long before the birth of my father, before the use of delivery drones and whatever inventions Ray Bradbury foretold, and before I learnt to play the role of fulfilling my father’s unfinished dreams. Here I dare quote Sylvia Plath, the old brag of my heart, I am, I am, I am.

The cadence of the birds stirred my eyelashes. I took in the sky, the treeline, the muddy soil entwined with melted snow, the beauty and intellect of the woman beside me, and I feverishly found myself aching for more of this world. I wanted to tear at it until my hands were full of its flesh, and indulge in my whims—like a man, a most hedonistic man.

I turned to page thirty-three, and I directed my gaze towards Zhen.

In an afterthought, I inscribed my musings, in ink, doubt and resolve co-exist in my mind, they most vulgarly want to annihilate the other. Yet I find in this reverie of mine, a dream or not a dream, I implore you do not ponder, brought me enlightenment, however weak it is. You may sneer at my resolution, you may think, ‘he has not achieved anything, no.’ and mock. Yet, I will not interrupt you. I believe, dear reader, it is in elusive places, unconventional times, and near-death occurrences that we are most passionate. When a man lives on, he will face the repercussions of his dreams, and the faces of those like yours—beautiful, scornful faces, that will hit him in his most fragile spots, and make him flinch at your words, but he will always think of this time, he must never forget this time, for he has vowed himself life. And so, he would go on. Astra inclinans, sed non obligans. Ah! I have been talking about myself in third person. Pardon me, do not find me pretentious, do not phone me at my address and applaud my heroic work, but you may mail Zhen some books about Henry Tudor, she would delight in it. Most honourable reader, I am merely a man. If this had not moved you, fear not, extend to me your benevolent hand, and allow me to kiss it with my knees on the ground, and thank you for listening to a gentleman’s soliloquy.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

An Extraordinary Discovery In Liaoning

St. Joseph's College, Lam, Yat Long – 14

Liam had been a good fan of dinosaurs and archeology. Living in Liaoning, the 8 year old's grandfather would often tell him stories about the Sinosauropteryx, which was discovered by Chinese archaeologists, dubbed as the China dragon bird dinosaur that soared through the skies.

His grandfather had died of cancer when he was six, he was heartbroken but he promised himself to continue his grandfather's legacy. During his free times, he would often go out to a nearby mountain to scour for dinosaur fossils, but every time he would be disheartened and come back empty-handed.

On a day that seemed to be an ordinary one, Liam went out again with little to no hope. However, this time the fates seemed to have changed for him. After 30 minutes of exploring, he discovered a small piece of bone abruptly. As he picked it out slowly, excitement began to course through his veins. The fossil was softer than the average dinosaur fossil; it was similar to the Sinosauropteryx that his grandfather described. He was on seven heaven for this discovery, but little did he know, there was something much more extraordinary awaiting him. While he was dizzy with delight, he decided to show the fossil to a group of local dinosaur experts.

After a few days, he was brought some incredible good news: it was, in fact, not a Sinosauropteryx. It was a completely new species that had never been discovered before! The experts could hardly believe it—an 8-year-old boy discovering a new dinosaur species! As the first person to discover a fossil of this new species, Liam had the great honor of getting to name it. To pay homage to his homeland, little Liam decided to name it Lianoningosaurus. This moment changed Liam's life forever, as he rapidly transitioned from a young fan of dinosaurs to a significant figure in the world of dinosaurs, at just eight years old. His excitement could not be described in words, and he couldn't help but think about how proud his grandfather would be.

The news spread quickly, and very soon Liam found himself in the spotlight among archeologists. He not only exchanged his experiences and knowledge with other experts, but also became an inspiration for other young aspiring dinosaur lovers all around the globe. The joy of discovering Lianoningosaurus was not just about the fossil itself, but also about the endless possibilities it represented for the future of dinosaurs.

It Got Out!

St. Joseph's College, Bao, Man Lok – 16

It was pitch-black. It was so dark that there was no difference between closing my eyes and having them open... The sound, or rather the lack thereof, didn't make it any better. The silence was deafening and staying any longer in this room would drive me insane. So into the large, gaping void in front of me, I ran... I ran for what felt like an eternity until I saw a literal glimmer of hope in front of me, and relief coursed through my body. But that relief was quickly replaced by dread and fear, as the unmistakable sounds of stomping thundered behind me...

“It got out!”

With this realization, I begged my body to release more adrenaline to support me until I reached the light, and for a moment, it really felt like I could. But as I inched closer and closer towards it, it went further and further away from me... and it was faster.

I let out a yelp in shock and jumped out of the layers of blankets over my body. What a great start to a day. It took around a minute or so until I recovered from my nightmare enough to leave the comfort of my bed; the scenes of the horror movie that had just occurred played out endlessly in my head, as if it was an infinitely long movie tape being left unattended. When the “movie” finally finished, I was already at my workplace, the Chinese Association of Paleontology, or CAP for short. I tapped on my wrist to check the time – February 1st, 2156, 09:28 am, and let out a sigh of relief as there was no way in hell I was going to be late on my first day of work.

The manager greeted me suspiciously enthusiastically at the front door and insisted on giving me a tour of the office. He went on to explain a lot about the Association, much of which I had already known. Of course, I had done research on the Association before I applied, so it would be an understatement to say that I was a tad bit dozy when he was telling me “fun facts” about the company, such as how its founding was inspired by the century-old movie “Jurassic Park”, or how the cages of the dinosaurs are made of “Zero-Balance Dwarf-Star Alloy”, the densest material in the universe.

After the excruciatingly long introduction, I headed to my station and found out that my job was relatively simple.: to assist the lab workers whenever they request, and notify others when there is a disturbance in the dinosaur's cage.

An hour passed, and I hadn't been given any tasks. I was starting to wonder whether they had already forgotten about my existence. To many, this would sound like a dream-come-true – being able to have cash flowing in whilst doing next to nothing. But I didn't sign up for this job for the money. I would even say that that was the least of my priorities. Ever since I was a child, I had always been interested in animals, and a trip to the zoo was all it took for me to become obsessed with dinosaurs specifically. But my family never supported me in studying paleontology, citing the dangers of being in such close proximity to deadly and predatory animals. The risk never deterred me, however, and I settled for this assistant position, thinking that at least I would have an opportunity to research or even interact with the dinosaurs. The first day of the job proved me wrong, and I left at 6pm on the dot with little hesitance.

After a long and hard day of work that was as hard as a sponge, I tucked back into the layers of blankets that I once yearned to break free of in search of the wonders of dinosaurs, and traveled to the fantasy-ridden corners of my mind.

I open my eyes once more to the space that feels much too familiar to me. This familiarity, however, brings nothing but horror to my soul as I once again wake to the silence and darkness of my surroundings. The movie played out just like the night before, as if someone had hit the replay button and started this cycle once more. It felt conflicting. For moments, it would feel as if I was an audience of my life and my body, watching as the protagonist attempts to escape the monsters that chased him through labyrinths of hallways. For other moments, it would feel as if I am present in the movie, as if I was the one being chased by unknown creatures that want me dead for no good reason, whilst being watched by someone who found this scene more dreadful than amusing. At the end of this back-and-forth between player and spectator, the light once again appeared before me, yet I was too late.

Sweat was all I felt this morning, and it was no different from falling asleep in a swimming pool, though while cleaning up, I couldn't help but feel as if these two nights had been more than just dreams.

The second day of work was no different. I sat in the same observatory room as I had done the day before, and was only out for the occasional coffee requests from the lab workers. The repetitiveness of it all felt suffocating and the following days were anything but better. This entire week both literally and figuratively sucked the life out of me and so, on the following Monday, I vowed to make the entire ordeal of convincing my family to let me into this job worth it. It didn't matter what the consequences were, I was going to make my job interesting.

That Monday morning was like all other mornings. Waking up from the same nightmare I had been having for the past week or so, taking the same bus to the Association Building with the same people sitting beside me, and even arriving at the exact minute as I had done on the first day of work. Except today, I was determined to make a difference. Whether that difference would be beneficial or detrimental, however, was not something I had considered.

I began the day in the assigned location I had stayed for an entire week by then, but this time I would occasionally stroll into unauthorized locations with equipment that seemed suspiciously outdated for an industry that was relatively new. I took little notice of this, however, and continued to silently wander through hallways made of decades-old metals which felt everything but sturdy. Finally, I reached the room where it happened – the Modern Paleontology Research Lab, where researchers test chemicals on fossils from all over the world. Now this is what I had signed up for.

From what I had gathered, only a selected few scientists were given clearance to the room and I waited for one of them to leave the room for a bathroom break. Then, I expertly snuck in without anyone knowing. It took me two seconds to enter the room to understand why the rest of the building looked as if it was built in 2100 and never maintained. All the Association's resources were obviously sunken into this specific portion of the building, and for

good reason. This lab was the origin of many discoveries, such as the rebirth of many dinosaurs from their fossils, the manipulation of a dinosaur's mind, and even the cure for cancer extracted from a dinosaur's lymph nodes, were all invented and discovered in this very laboratory.

The room was filled with books with titles I could only understand half of, equipment that looked more expensive than a million pounds of gold, and the most mesmerizing of all, on a miniscule test tube rack most would look over were chemicals that seemed dangerous at best, and catastrophic on a human extinction level at worst.

This was what I had been looking forward to ever since I hit the send button on my application email. This was what hundreds, if not thousands of messages sent in the family group chat were for. It was at this moment that a question loomed over my head. "What now?" Most of what was in front of me was Greek to me, and I am severely underqualified to even touch them. Before I came to a conclusion, however, the scientist had returned, and I had to hide. Bookshelves were not a good cover, but they were my only savior in a situation like this, and I listened as the scientist paced around the room, flipping through pages of the book in his hand. The word 'terrifying' would not do this situation justice as it was a complete understatement of how I felt during the entirety of this "heist" of sorts. After what felt like a lifetime behind the bookshelves, the scientist finally left the room, and I was in the clear. It felt like a 12-ton weight had been lifted from my body and I let out a sigh of relief. But I felt a bit too relieved.

I am a man of small stature, weighing 53 kilograms and 165 centimeters in height. Yet, when I stood up from the bookshelves, I felt a small touch on my elbow. I thought to myself that it must've just been a fly or nothing too substantial. Well, it must have been quite a reactive fly, as when I looked back, there was a puddle of green liquid in front of my eyes. As I was processing what I had just done, the green puddle flowed towards the collection of fossils just nearby.

Scientists usually don't mind chemical spills, and it often only results in tedious clean-up. What scientists really fear are chemicals interacting with other objects, and unfortunately, I had to learn the hard way why. Before I could even read the label on the spilled test tube, the fossil grew at an alarming pace. It was so alarming that I neglected the consequences of being seen leaving the highly unauthorized laboratory and sped through the door.

Advancements in technology always have their pros and cons. They can be used to improve citizens' quality of life, deepen our understanding of the universe in which we live in, or drastically shift the way we live. However, when accidents concerning these technological advancements occur, the results are never pleasant as we would have no plan to prevent or take care of situations that we have never encountered.

All of this is to say that while the invention of chemicals which catalyzed the rebirth of dinosaurs using their fossils, has brought us goods and continues to intrigue many enthusiasts, such as myself, accidents concerning these chemicals can prove to be lethal or even cataclysmic, yet they are bound to occur.

I slammed the door open, and suddenly all eyes were on me. Everyone was staring daggers into me. But those daggers did not last, as not long after, the power went out. Screams and cries for help could be heard all across the facility, as if they were incomprehensible screeches of the damned, alarms blared through the hallways and everyone was in a state of panic.

In the cacophony of shrieks and shouts, one sentence caught my attention. "Extinction level threat identified. Hallways will be sealed." It took me quite some time to connect the dots, but when I did, it was already too late and the only way out of the area I was in had been shut off. No light or even sound entered or left the area. For one single moment, everything seemed strangely peaceful and tranquil. But that did not last long in any capacity.

As you may recall, one of the many fun facts about this facility is that dinosaurs are kept in cages made of the densest material in the universe. The same could be said for the laboratories and, in theory, it should have ensured that whatever catastrophe that was brewing inside would stay inside. What architects of this facility did not expect,

however, is that with a bit of excess chemical catalysts, the dinosaur created could quite literally destroy everything in its path.

Suddenly, unmistakable sounds of stomping thundered behind me:

“It got out!”

A sentence I was much too familiar with.

Memories of the nights before played in my head, like a movie that had haunted me for the last eight days. The terrifying revelation was the fact that I did not survive those nightmares. They were not even nightmares anymore. They were visions. A vision into the future. A warning that I most certainly did not heed. A sign that this was where my story ends.

Yet, there was a light in the vision. Perhaps it was a signal that there was a solution to this. A way that I could survive this literal nightmare come to life. Then, a lightbulb lit up in my brain. Just like the vision, everything was pitch black. It was so dark that there was no difference between closing my eyes and having them open. The sound, or rather the lack thereof, didn't make it any better. The silence was deafening and staying any longer in this room would drive me insane. This time, however, what if I didn't run?

And this is the situation I am currently in. I am writing about this experience so whoever may find this can learn from my mistakes. I am aware that my actions have led to the possible extinction of the human race, and so I ask that those who remain will never follow in my footsteps.

I do not know whether I will make it out alive. All I know is that as I am writing these very words, a light can be seen through the cracks of the facility. A light so bright it seems as if I am entering the pearly gates of heaven. Should I reach for it just like in the vision? I do not know, but I —”

Sweat was all I felt this morning, and it was no different from falling asleep in a swimming pool, though while cleaning up, I couldn't help but feel as if these two nights had been more than just dreams. I turned the television on in an attempt to distract my brain from the scene that had just played out in my head.

“Reports from a million-year-old book have shed light on the events that took place days before the Apophis hit Earth and wiped almost all living organisms on Earth almost fifty million years ago. Many cite this as proof of divine intervention, as creatures which used to be known as dinosaurs were wiped out a hundred and twenty million years ago in the same fashion.”

“Weird.” I thought as I headed off to work at the International Association of Paleontology.

Dragons of the Steppe

St. Joseph's College, Li, Lok Wang Gerald – 15

Great curtains of stone and granite slumbered under the moon's phosphorescence, dreaming through a thousand millennia. Cascades of emeralds snaked down the slopes, and burst into a flood of verdancy at the foot of the mountains, and thinned into a field of swaying aureate. The golden sea stretched onwards to meet the horizon, below the sun that knows no master. Amidst chaff and grass were the untamed wild of the steppe, auburn vixen stalking in the shadows, august yaks roaming as though mountains on mammoth legs, antediluvian antelopes galloping through the endless vastness, chasing the fleeting green of the harvest moon.

A rustling shattered the silence as a tribe rode from the foothills for pastures southwards. In an unchanged manner since the time of the Great Khan of the Four Seas, the tribes travelled with the west wind, with various beasts of burden towing their entire existence along the eternal voyage. At the fore was their scout, a young man not entirely twenty, tall and sturdy, sallow and goateed. Beneath him as his stead was a terrible lizard, known as a raptor.

Its hide was an earthen brown, fading into a pale cocoon around its head. Tall as a man, it was nonetheless half-formed, thick neck bending to a valley, then rising as a hump at the spine. Vulture feathers sprang out of its malformed wings and in its whip-like tail, and small wisps eked from the rest of its surface, cocooning it from the mountain frost. To move it either stalked around both suspicious and suspect, or shot out in a devilish sprint, tracking some benighted hare or marmot.

The youth remained unafraid. In his juvenile arrogance, he found detachment from fear-mongering and reticence, and, as a scout, no one could deny the pair had some canny. Still, the tribal elders eyed the beast with suspicion. It was not of their blood. It did not accompany them through the cycling eons, and their histories were weaved apart time and space. While some might call a hundred-year relation ancestral, it was but a mere flicker for the tribes and its timeless nomadism, and even less for the antediluvian lizard that knows not time, left behind in its endless flow.

To the youth, however, it was an honour to have such a great mount. As the only one in the tribe with a raptor, he harboured a sense of privilege, even with the common distrust towards it. Recently however, the beast had grown restless, unwilling and even hostile. Defiance grew within it, though for what reason he could not ascertain.

Riding ahead, he spied an irregularity, he saw an irregularity in the grass. Riding forth, goosebumps began to overtake his arm, and sweat appeared across his body. Stilling his heartbeat, he approached, not knowing if the enemy was friend or foe.

When the grass parted, it revealed a mangled corpse, disembowelled and bloody. The blood ran warm to the touch, but the grassland was open, save for a tree on the horizon, and an antelope with a decidedly unbloodied horn. If only he could arrange an interview of the ungulate. Alas.

Pity ran through the youth, and he shuddered at the thought of dying alone with only the sky for company. Saying a prayer for the man's soul, he looked for Father Sky to protect the passing soul, and assuage his vengeful spirit. Looking towards the sea of turquoise, he could only make out scattered silhouettes of fleeing birds. Beside him, the raptor stirred.

Pristine blossoms of midwinter slept on the soft blanket of snow, preserving the Middle Kingdom for the call of spring. Yet, in Tianjin, the air was hot with steam and rumours, smoke and revolution.

Shrouded by the hustle and bustle and peppered by the delicate snowfall, a lone man, heaving a small mahogany portmanteau, lumbered down the plank of his transpacific vessel.

Possessing a countenance of sordid morose and careless charm in messy simultaneity, the man was fit in an ugly earthy overcoat, carefully tailored but mildly worn, overlaying an ill-fitted chasm of soot-like hue. Remarkably unremarkable in dress and height, his eyes were more than compensate. It was auburn streaked with sable, but there was some sort of steely glaze over it. Seemingly it covered something vast, but no one could discern what stirred beneath.

Certainly, the customs magistrate tried. It intrigued him just how dead the man in brown appeared. Comely without a doubt, but kept in a trance by some great force within. Resurrected, his eyes were disturbingly immobile. He asked the young man for his name, and he received it brusquely as Qian Zhongtian. Attempting to pry more, he questioned him of his age (twenty-six, far older than the magistrate thought), hometown (a dusty little frontier town that he had to search for in an atlas), and his purpose of visit (to attend a parent's funeral, explaining that sooty overcoat).

The answers were satisfactory, though the magistrate believed that he had been withholden information. He had entertained the notion of calling the strong young boys of the zhuang to drag the man away for "questioning", which would be a pleasant distraction. Trial by ordeals seemed to be gaining some traction in the upper echelons of court anyway, so what was one more.

Not one day goes by without some new mangled rebel rabble joining his comrades as decor for the city walls. The empire must always be vigilant of uprisings after all, and that man felt suspicious to the official. Just then he realized that under the man's documents was a couple of Mexican silver dollars, which put at ease his suspicions. A fat wallet makes a happy official after all. Giving the man a most saccharine smile, he indicated the entry to the city.

Qian was shuffling past the endless hordes of arrivals, when a sharp bang rang out from the rear, and then, wafting on the winter breeze was the sulphuric miasma of gunpowder. He darted, realizing trouble would pull up with haste. Before long the masses of arrivals began to vomit outwards. Near where the sound was born a new symphony of treasonous calumnies began to sound.

As if summoned by any suggestion of republicanism, a posse of Hippodracos, tall, leanly muscled and darkly striped cavalry, invaded into the square, parting the crowd like lightning through the night, trampling any slow

enough to stay in their way. Astride them were no mere conscripts. Eight dragons of different colour flew above their heads, and the men were clad in a peerless armour robe, rising through the snow in coloured mountains and peaked by a crimson mop of silk above their sallet.

On padded foot they stalked over to the assassins making their escape. There could be no escape. The man did not stay to watch the expedited execution, though everyone could hear the blood-curdling screams behind them. That is what happens when rebels get out of hand.

At the busy road where desperate travellers brawled over the line to the rickshaws, he turned left and instead hailed an expensive carriage-cab, drawn by twin grey Triceratops. Both the hefty fare and the traditional Han aversion to dragonesque monsters lead to them almost exclusively hired by foreign dignitaries as an exotic attraction. Or by government officials keen to show the power of the court. He was neither, so he simply requested to be taken to Ku Manor

Master Ku sat in his pagoda, warming his hand with his oolong. The winter was exceptionally cold, cursed with an eternal ethereal blizzard. Below hanging dragons and smoking urns, he meditated as the white blossoms endlessly swirled about him.

Suddenly, he felt a disturbance behind him. A second later, cold metal was pressed to his temple. Looking up, he saw the countenance of his old pupil, sullen and cold.

“Don’t try to lie, tell the truth.”

A non-sequitur question for sure, but Ku knew exactly what he meant. He could weasel his way out, spill some lies, and protect the both of them. But as he looked into the steeled look in Qian’s eyes, that lie mongering would only lead him to do something rash. While not a particular believer in justice, Ku still held certain values. And what happened to Baron Qian was not merely a tragedy, but a terrible crime. Qian deserved to know.

“Your father was murdered because he discovered that the iron grip of the Azure Dragons over the dinosaurs is slipping. A lot of the nobility feared that it would cause the downfall of the empire, so to obfuscate the truth, I believe they had him killed. If you want to learn more, go to Hohhot. Their base of operations is there. Be careful though, they are watching you.”

Without another word, Qian fled into the snow.

With some luck, Ku would see his pupil again. Still, he began mourning for Qian as well.

Qian sat on his lonesome, gazing into the ceaseless whiteness of the north, mountains stretching onto the gates of heaven. The last time he travelled on this route, he went on dinosaur-back, eastwards towards Beijing.

During the day, when the cruel son bore down with an infernal radiance, as the sands pelted their faces, his father would tell him stories of great conquerors, going west on the Silk Road to wrestle over oasis cities and caravan cities. He told of the Martial Emperor splitting the Xiongnu and chasing the remnants across the wastes. Of Genghis Khan uniting the Mongol tribes to ride over the known world. And of Nurhaci, Emperor of the Jurchens, who roused terrible lizards from their slumber beneath the earth, and how he had let them loose upon the Ming and the Yuan to seat his sons on the dragon throne.

At night, when the moon was high and the constellations swirled in perfect pirouette, his father weaved tales of home, of the endless steppe, of the uncounted sands. Of small men triumphing over great beasts, of demons vanquished by a commoner’s valour, of gods humbled by simple men.

At the end of their journey, they arrived at Peking. As a child, he was enraptured by the majesty of the empire, resplendent gilded tiles above manicured leaves, thousands of jewels adorning a noblewoman's hair. There dinosaurs, jealously guarded by the nobility elsewhere, roamed on the streets as if mere cattle. Mighty ancestral lizards reduced to be guard-hounds and carriage-steed. This all was a theatre by the Qing, to show that if even great dragons genuflected before the emperor, who else dared refused.

There, for his courage and loyalty on the battlefield, he was raised to be a baron, and Qian went from a provincial soldier's son to be an aristocrat.

Despite his investiture, Qian's father was like a fish out of water in the forbidden city, unused to contend with a thousand scheming courtiers. Regardless, Qian's childhood was idyllic, spent in a daze of sugary treats and childhood tomfoolery.

All that changed when the foreigners invaded. The sheer might of the Qing with their dragons was utterly crushed by the steam and steel of the interlopers. With a blast, the pride of the empire was shattered. Again and again, the Azure Dragon was disgraced, and their vast lands torn apart by ravenous hounds.

Qian's father believed that the only way to survive was to change, and so sent Qian abroad to study. He was so intoxicated by the thought of the New World that he barely thought of his father when they parted on that Tianjin dock. He was dreaming of technology, innovation, industry. If only he knew that he would see his father last on that day, he would have treasured every millisecond of his life. No, he wouldn't have left at all, but stepped off the eastbound steamship and into his father's arms.

If only he had known. Qian looked around the cabin and realized that he had company. A small, round man with a handlebar moustache, covered by an unremarkable brown coat. Strange, he didn't hear the man enter. Suddenly, the man stood up, whipped out a pistol and fired. By sheer serendipity the train jolted at that precise moment, knocking Qian off his feet and missing the bullet by a matter of millimetres.

Knowing that something was awry, he broke the window of the carriage, and jumped outside. Yet his feet never reached the ground, for a giant pair of talons seized him mid-air, and with a flap of its massive wings, darted towards the heavens. Feeling short of breath, Qian soon fainted.

When Qian came to, he was surrounded by a posse of dinosaurs, salivating for a taste of his flesh. He found that he was in the centre of a courtyard, ground carpeted by wilted petals. And before him sat a man of undeniable agedness, decked in fine ermine and adorned with a guanmao with three fine curled peacock feathers. Bound and on his knees, he had to crane his head in order to even look at the man. Realizing that Qian had awoken, the man leered at him, stood up brusquely, and began to speak.

"Ahh, the baron's son. I have been waiting for you for quite some time. I confess that your arrival had caused some consternation within our Order, and you are indeed a marked man from the second you landed. Far too many complications, too many issues. Yet, I find assassination so awfully gauche, and I don't want blood on my hands. Hence your spiriting towards here. You are safe here. For about fifteen minutes until I sell to the others the relish of killing you. More precisely, their steeds will have great fun tearing you apart and devouring your flesh. So, make yourself comfortable."

Finishing with a creepily soft smile, the man returned to the seat, staring intently at Qian. Soon after, a flock of pterodactyls landed, and more men, all in ornate robes befitting a highly-ranked bureaucrat.

After a low inaudible murmur within the group, he was picked up, unbound, and unceremoniously thrown in a pen.

Circled by those mindless devourers, he would not live long. As he looked at the beast about to take his life, he discovered long red slashes on their hide. Judging by the number and relative freshness of the gashes, the infliction was harsh but also recent. His father was right, the Qing's hold over the dinosaurs really was slipping. If they were imperialized by the promise of the riding crop from the officials, then Qian could seize one to fight back. As three lunged at him at the same time, he rolled away, then wrested a riding crop from one of their hands. Shocked, more plunged towards Qian, but with a lash from the riding crop, two were driven backwards and one rider was emancipated of his steed. Seizing the chance, he climbed aboard one of them.

Once again, they darted forwards, but with the flexibility of his new ride, he ascended. The beast beneath him was wilful and unwieldy, bucking and twirling through the air. Yet he held on tight to the reins, and beckoned the beast ever higher. Hot in pursuit, the officials chased him towards the heavens. But the higher they climbed the less they could see, and fearing an ambush, they began to fall back, content to regroup for a siege of the clouds. But just as they turned around Qian dove and bit off the pterodactyl's tail, causing it to plummet with its rider. Despite having decades of experience, they were sluggish and indecisive. Before long, he had downed all of his attackers.

With his father avenged, he released his steed, letting it disappear into the horizon, while he slinked into the shadows.

For a man so brutally murdered, Qian's father's body looked almost as he did when he was with the living. Qian held his father's pale, bloodless hand, as tightly as he could. He kissed his father on the forehead one last time, and closed the casket.

Lessons Centuries Late for Humanity in the Face of Climate Change

St. Joseph's College, Siu, Chung Yeung Aston – 15

Colony Ark, Olympus Mons (AP) — A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, dinosaurs, the once majestic creatures that conquered Earth, left behind remains that were well-preserved for hundreds of millions of years. Their fossils let us have a glimpse of their far-away ecosystems and, thus, are extremely important for our understanding of life on Earth.

Prior to the Holocene Extinction Event (HCE) in 2072, the United Nations took drastic measures in an effort to preserve humanity. The plan, later known as “Operation Noah's Ark”, oversaw the genocide of billions of people who were deemed “non-essential” for survival. The remaining ones were tasked with the construction of thousands of spaceships with the sole purpose of taking what's left of humanity to Mars.

Now, a century after the “Great Migration”, what's left of the original human race has all died out. With the adaptation of life on Mars, fellows of the Martian Paleontology Institute (MPI) started asking questions. What was life like on Earth before humans existed?

Since Noah's Ark wiped out all studies unrelated to the Great Migration, research in most fields, including terrestrial paleontology, was setback by centuries. The launch of Expedition Group 32 was directly aimed at answering the MPI's questions. The Martian Aeronautic & Space Administration (MASA) sent 132 specially designed robots, called Rovers, to search for and recover fossils in Earth's now barren landscape. The results brought back 3 months ago showed promising results.

The Rovers recovered nearly 193 Martian tons of fossils, 27% of which have been identified as dinosaur fossils. Of these finds, fossil beds in areas belonging to then-China have proven to be some of the most productive and important, such as the dazzling discovery of feathered dinosaurs that shed light on the evolutionary link between dinosaurs and Martian-bred birds. These are not just relics of an age gone by, but are keys to understanding how life

adapted – or failed to adapt – to changing environments over millennia. Perhaps in irony, the results showed that humans should have taken a valuable lesson – preventing the Great Migration by combating its “self-replica” of the Cretaceous–Paleogene, or K–Pg, an extinction event, a.k.a. climate change.

Increasing global temperature, thawing polar ice, and violent natural disasters temperatures are fundamentally changing ecosystems at an unprecedented level, threatening human livelihoods in addition to jeopardizing biodiversity. The extinction of the dinosaurs could seem like some ancient history; however, that event provides striking parallels to many of the challenges humanity faced. In investigating how dinosaurs in then-China went extinct through an environmental cataclysm, one could deduce critical life lessons bound to the fragility of life and responsibility regarding good environmental stewardship. The story of then China's dinosaurs is not just a window into the past – it is a mirror reflecting the choices we must make to secure our future if we want to ensure HCE from never happening again.

Then-China's fossil beds, particularly in more deserted regions like Liaoning and Xinjiang, are a time capsule of Earth's distant past. The exquisite preservation of fossils in these areas allows paleontologists to reconstruct ecosystems with remarkable accuracy. Among the most significant finds are the feathered dinosaurs, such as Microraptor, Sinosauropteryx, and Yutyrannus. These species not only provide critical evidence of the evolutionary transition from dinosaurs to birds, but reveal how these creatures interacted with their environment, adapted to climatic shifts, and ultimately succumbed to extinction.

The Liaoning Province, in particular, has been a treasure trove of fossils from the Early Cretaceous period. The Yixian Formation, a site of incredible significance, contains fossils so well-preserved that even the delicate structures of feathers and soft tissues can sometimes be discerned. These fossils paint a vivid picture of an ecosystem teeming with life: small feathered theropods darting through dense forests, early mammals scurrying beneath ferns, and ancient plants thriving in a warm, humid climate. However, as the climate began to shift due to volcanic activity and other natural factors, these ecosystems started to unravel.

The fossilized remains of Yutyrannus, a large feathered predator, illustrate how even apex species were not immune to environmental changes. Studies of its fossils suggest that its feathers may have served as insulation, an adaptation to colder climates that were becoming more frequent during this time. Similarly, the Microraptor, a small, four-winged dinosaur, provides evidence of how some species attempted to adapt to changing ecological niches by evolving new survival strategies, such as gliding or arboreal habits.

Most striking of all, however, may be the Sinosauropteryx. Discovered in the region previously known as Liaoning, China, is a crucial find in understanding feathered dinosaurs. Sinosauropteryx's relatively small size and likely insectivorous diet contribute to our understanding of the diverse fauna of the Early Cretaceous ecosystem. Its fossilized remains, including impressions of simple filamentous feathers, provided early evidence supporting the evolutionary link between dinosaurs and birds. These primitive feathers likely served insulation purposes, showcasing an adaptation to a changing climate. Yet, these adaptations were not enough to save them when the catastrophic events of the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction unfolded.

The discoveries in China vividly illustrate the interconnectedness of even ancient ecosystems, dating back to the age of dinosaurs. Fossil evidence reveals that seemingly minor shifts in plant life, triggered by alterations in temperature and precipitation patterns, had profound and cascading effects throughout the food chain. Changes in plant abundance directly impacted herbivore populations, which in turn affected the survival and distribution of predators. This delicate ecological balance mirrors the fragility of modern ecosystems, where the extinction or decline of a single species can initiate a chain reaction with devastating consequences for the entire system. The loss of a keystone species, for example, can unravel complex relationships and lead to biodiversity collapse. The lesson is clear: while life demonstrates remarkable resilience, it remains profoundly vulnerable to rapid and drastic environmental changes.

The Holocene Extinction Event, however, was not the result of an asteroid impact or volcanic eruptions. It was humanity itself that became the asteroid, the volcano, and the trigger for its own undoing. It was humanity itself that became the wind that blew out the candle of its light. It was humanity itself that clenched the fist to wipe out its own survival. By the time the catastrophic events began in earnest, the signs had already been clear for centuries: rising global temperatures, melting ice caps, deforestation, and the acidification of the oceans. Yet, much like the dinosaurs whose fossilized bones now lie in Martian laboratories, humans failed to adapt in time.

Before the Great Migration to Mars, Earth's ecosystems were collapsing under the weight of human activity. Industrial emissions have raised atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to unprecedented heights, triggering a cascade of environmental disasters. Coastal cities were swallowed by rising seas, droughts turned fertile lands into deserts, and hurricanes ravaged entire nations. Biodiversity, once Earth's greatest strength, has been reduced to a fraction of its former glory. Species went extinct at a rate a thousand times higher than the natural background rate, leaving ecosystems fragmented and vulnerable. Despite having clear signs of systemic planetary failure, humans delusionally deny the existence of climate change. A poll conducted by Axios in 2024, found that over 35% of the Earth's population were climate change deniers. Perhaps even more frightening, is that it also documented that the 119th United States Congress, the federal lawmaking body of the U.S. from 2024–2026, had 23% of its elected members who self-identified as climate change deniers.

The Martian Psychological Association categorized this phenomenon as the result of “cultist, fact-denying capitalist propaganda”, and gave the main reason for this being that humans are creatures of habit. Simply put, it's inconvenient to face the reality that something you do is somehow bad for you. Although an overwhelming majority of climate scientists formed the consensus of a human-caused climate change, fossil fuel users and oil drilling companies continued to deny the very cause of its extinction, just to escape responsibility, just to escape change. But very much like 21st century pop-icon Taylor Swift said, “Karma's going to track you down, step by step, from town to town”. The result? A migration event that fundamentally changed every fabric humanity was built upon.

In many ways, humanity's actions mirrored the environmental upheavals that preceded the K–Pg extinction. Industrial emissions paralleled the volcanic outpourings of the Deccan Traps, altering atmospheric compositions and driving global warming. Habitat destruction echoed the widespread ecosystem changes that marked the Late Cretaceous. Yet, unlike the dinosaurs, humans had the capacity to recognize these patterns and take corrective action. The tragedy of the Holocene Extinction was not that it happened, but that it could have been prevented.

Operation Noah's Ark was humanity's final, desperate attempt to escape the consequences of its own actions. The construction of the colony ships required resources on an unimaginable scale, further depleting the Earth's already fragile ecosystems. The decision to prioritize the survival of “essential” individuals over the rest of humanity only deepened the moral and ethical wounds of this period. By the time the last colony ship departed, Earth was a wasteland, its remaining inhabitants left to perish in the ruins of a once-thriving planet.

The fossils of Liaoning and other regions in China tell a story of resilience and adaptation, but they also serve as a warning about the limits of these qualities. If humanity had heeded these warnings and taken lessons from the past, the Great Migration might never have been necessary. The key lies in understanding the interconnectedness of life and the importance of maintaining ecological balance.

One of the most glaring failures of pre-migration humanity was its inability to move beyond short-term thinking. Economic growth and technological advancement were prioritized over sustainable practices, leading to the overexploitation of natural resources. Propaganda driven by greedy capitalists from the fossil-fuel industry somehow made its way into the minds of the everyday man, leading some to believe that there is nothing wrong with the status quo a century ago, when, in reality, Earth was driven out of balance by the very actions of our own. This is in stark contrast to the lessons of paleontology, which show that species and ecosystems thrive when they are in balance with their environment. The dinosaurs of Liaoning, for example, flourished in a relatively stable climate but struggled to adapt when that stability was disrupted.

Conservation efforts could have played a crucial role in preventing the Holocene Extinction. Protecting biodiversity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and restoring degraded ecosystems would have not only slowed the rate of environmental change but also strengthened the resilience of both natural and human systems. Renewable energy technologies, sustainable agriculture, and reforestation projects were all within humanity's grasp, yet they were implemented too late and on too small a scale to make a meaningful difference.

Education and awareness might have been the most powerful tools in humanity's arsenal. If people had been taught to see themselves as part of a larger ecological system, rather than as its masters, the mindset that led to the Great Migration could have been avoided. This archaic narrative that humanity was able to control its own destiny became the epitome of a double-edged sword, pioneering its growth for nearly five centuries, yet leading to its downfall in less than one. The fossils of China, with their intricate stories of life and adaptation, could have served as a powerful symbol of this interconnectedness. Instead, they were largely ignored until it was too late.

As the Martian Paleontology Institute continues to study the fossils brought back from Earth, the irony of their findings is not lost on its researchers. The feathered dinosaurs of Liaoning, the ancient plants of Xinjiang, and the primitive mammals of Inner Mongolia all tell a story of life adapting to the challenges of its time. Yet, they also serve as a reminder of the limits of adaptation and the consequences of failing to protect the environment.

Mars, for all its technological advancement, is a harsh and unforgiving place. The colonies depend on artificial ecosystems to survive, and any disruption to these systems could have catastrophic consequences. Earlier this week, the memorandum issued by the President to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Great Migration emphasized the importance of unity. The lessons of Earth are more relevant than ever, but whether humanity will heed them this time remains to be seen.

The fossils from China are more than just scientific curiosities—they are a testament to the fragility of life and the resilience of nature. They remind us that while life can adapt to many challenges, it is not invincible. If humanity is to avoid repeating the mistakes of its past, it must learn to live in harmony with its environment, whether on Earth, Mars, or beyond.

In the end, the story of Earth's dinosaurs is not just a tale of extinction—it is a story of survival, adaptation, and the importance of balance. It is a story that humanity failed to learn in time, but one that it must now carry with it as it ventures into the stars. For if the fossils of China have taught us anything, it is that life is precious, fragile, and definitely worth fighting for.

Battle of Beliefs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chan, Mikail – 15

"Under no circumstances can these revelations see the light of day." Xin Wang, the religious cult leader, said as he took a long drag on his cigarette. "It would shatter people's belief in our religious scripture. Our grip on millions of people could vanish overnight. We must take decisive action now to suppress this knowledge."

"You are quite right. This foreign paleontologist has caused quite an uproar over all these feathered dragons. They could very easily be fakes just to tarnish our religious scripture! He is openly mocking us with this fixation on these ridiculous dragons and lizards." Hui Zhao interjected. "We need to stop him at any means possible when he gives his next lecture. I've heard that he plans to unveil significant new discoveries that will undoubtedly undermine all of our beliefs. By the power vested in me by the supreme Sun Wukong Monkey God, we will decisively strike down this lizard worshipper once and for all!" Hui Zhao bellowed.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to the renowned paleontological pioneer Dr Stevenson!" The host announced.

"Good Morning everyone! What I will share with you today will shatter your feeble minds. Recently, I single handedly unearthed a new subspecies of velociraptor in China, whose talons were specifically evolved to rip and tear the flesh of weak insignificant creatures, such as the early primate species *Purgatorius mckeeveri*. What a sight it must have been to see these majestic predators chase down and devour these small mammals!" Dr Stevenson exclaimed with

excitement. "As you can see, its talons were unusually sharp and effective for gripping and piercing flesh and then clinically and precisely ripping it from limbs and tendons."

The audience gasped at the paleontologist's findings★ while the religious cult looked on with pure disgust. Unbeknownst to Dr. Stevenson, the fanatical followers of Sun Wukong were seething with religious fury and gripping their seats so tightly that their skin turned red.

"This demonstrates the extent to which Chinese dinosaurs ought to be the real focus of our myths and legends! We should perhaps consider replacing the Chinese zodiacs with various subspecies of dinosaurs that I have discovered during my excavations in your country full of abundant fossils." Dr Stevenson announced.

This statement alone was the tipping point of the religious cult, they had had enough. Suddenly, all of them took out lighters and began to burn the walls and floor of the auditorium, sending the audience into a major panic as all of them ran out as quickly as possible. The cult wanted the paleontologist dead, but once the fire had spread, he was nowhere to be seen. "How did he get away!?" Xin Wang shouted. The cult, annoyed, left in a hurry before any authorities arrived.

Meanwhile, Dr Stevenson had escaped the extreme fire and hurried home as quickly as possible. "Those hooded figures are insane.", he muttered to himself. "How could they do such a thing, especially during the showcase of my latest discovery! Maybe I shouldn't continue my work here in China, they obviously don't seem to 'enjoy' my findings..."

"We made the right call in burning that auditorium down." Hui Zhao said to Xin Wang. "Couldn't let those people be entranced by those 'findings' of stupid feathered dragons! I doubt he will ever try showcasing them again after what we did. Our religion shall remain on top!"

That night, the paleontologist had a difficult decision to make: either stay in China and put himself in danger or leave China and find ancient fossils elsewhere. He pondered this for hours, as China is a country where fossils are abundant and where many discoveries are waiting to be made. After a long thought, he decided to stay and continue excavating fossils in China, with the hopes of making another big discovery in the future.

Throughout the next few weeks, the religious cult never made another appearance in public and Dr Stevenson continued his work in private. But, something extraordinary happened...

After weeks of continuous research, Dr Stevenson encountered a number of fossils of an extremely rare subspecies of pterosaur, he realised that this was the first of its kind that was ever unearthed and knew that he had to share it to everyone. "I can't believe it!" Dr Stevenson exclaimed as he unearthed the fossils. "This has to be the greatest discovery of my life, but how can I share with the religious fanatics watching my every move?" Soon after, he came up with a safe and effective solution. He would find a news broadcast team and share his findings through television and online platforms, since more people are using social media nowadays.

After adding the finishing touches to his biggest presentation yet, he was ready to go on live to the millions of viewers in China. "Good evening everyone, today I am here to showcase one my biggest findings yet, a new vicious species of pterosaur. Firstly let me start off with... " He began to explain the characteristics of this new subspecies, having extremely sharp teeth and being a natural predator, hunting small mammals such as deer. boxes, and, of course, monkeys.

After the broadcast, many Chinese people became interested in the features and characteristics of the old dinosaurs in China, some even began excavating as a hobby. Eventually, the religious sect collapsed as no one ayees with the cult's beliefs about the Monkey King. The cult swore revenge on the paleontologist, but they could never find him. He disappeared after the news broadcast, leaving no trace of himself and left others to wonder what he may be doing now.

Giant Discovered

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chan, Shing Fun – 16

Amidst the raging catastrophe of falling meteorites and the megathrust, I let out a startled cry as a cavern was spotted a few meters away. "Look, there's a cave over there!" Pointing towards it, I called out to my faithful companion the sinosauropteryx, and my voice echoed through the horrific clashings of the earth. With its sharp intellect gleaming evidently in its eyes, the small reptilian creature appeared to understand my urgency and followed me agilely to the cave's narrow doorway.

The heavenly bombardment persisted, each strike causing shockwaves to reverberate through the earth itself, causing my terror to ascend, tightening around my heart like a vice. I grasped the sinosauropteryx and encased its fallen tooth in my right hand. As tears welled up unbidden, tracing a path down my dust-streaked cheeks, I sought solace in the fleeting embrace of the creature beside me.

Closing my eyes, I found comfort in the darkness between my lids, a haven from the unrelenting assault of devastation, with a heavy heart and an unclear mind. Recollection started to flash back, and in the back of my mind, familiar voices and faces appeared like ghostly apparitions. What if I didn't make it back to my friends? One thought rang out through the chaos as my past pleaded for attention: a regretful and seemingly harmless choice to enter that washroom, which now carried the weight of consequence...

“Our next stop of this enthralling Liaoning study tour is to visit the dinosaur museum, where the first discovered feathered dinosaur in China, the *Sinosauropteryx* will be displayed,” my teacher explained, as the tour bus screeched to a halt. We disembarked to a small restaurant seemingly in the middle of nowhere, partly camouflaged by a tapestry of shrubbery. “But first, let's eat!”

The golden rays of the afternoon sun danced playfully upon the glazed windows, casting a warm glow over our eager faces, a comforting embrace amidst the chill of autumn.

"Chris, you must be very excited!" My friend Peter commented. “You've always been fascinated with dinosaurs, right?"

“Yes! I can't wait to appreciate the fossils, especially the *Sinosauropteryx*, as it's the first dinosaur discovered in China!”

We enjoyed our meal chatting animatedly with each other. As we were about to depart, I went to the washroom, the sounds of chattering gradually faded behind me, and the door swung shut. Terrified, I dashed out of the dark washroom, screaming in horror.

“Ahhh! The lights went out!” But only the sound of silence responded.

“Anyone here?” I called out into the void, my voice a solitary echo in the desolate expanse, left alone in the unknown. The sudden plunge into obsidian silence, the eerie absence of familiar voices, and the inexplicable vanishing of my companions left me grappling with a sense of disorientation and foreboding.

Stumbling out of the restaurant, frantically shouting their names, I came to realize that there would be no answer. “Maybe I'll phone them...I have no idea why they can switch off all the lights in a blink of an eye and leave the restaurant that quickly...” What's worse was that my phone had mysteriously gone dead and showed no signs of turning back on.

“This is just so sudden...” Bewildered, I swiveled around and made another shocking discovery. Where the restaurant had once stood, there was now an empty space.

Reeling with shock at the inexplicable disappearance of both my companions and the restaurant, a gnawing sense of unease gripped my heart. Where am I now? Where did everyone go?

Suddenly, a guttural cry pierced the stillness like a melancholy echo. I abruptly looked up, my eyes widening in disbelief as a magnificent winged creature, adorned with a formidable crest and a razor-sharp beak, soared smoothly across the azure sky.

It bore a striking resemblance to the fabled pteranodon, a winged wonder that once roamed the ancient skies with unparalleled grace and grandeur. “But... How?” I paused, a surge of astonishment and trepidation swept through me, “It's 2024 now, dinosaurs became extinct millions of years ago!”

As the beating of its wings faltered, a fleeting shadow dancing behind the shrubs caught my attention. Intrigue ignited within me, a relentless curiosity propelling my steps as I ventured towards the source of the shadow.

While I was stepping onto the crunching leaves, I faintly heard a deep growl behind me, striking through the stillness like a thunderous omen. A tremor of fear cascaded down my spine as I turned slowly around. A pair of narrowed, amber oculi were locked onto my quaking figure as I took in the sheer magnitude of the beast before me, whose maw widened in a snarl to reveal jagged, blood smeared teeth. Another feature that made me uneasy was the small pair of arms. Only one kind of dinosaur has these characteristics...

“It's a Tarbosaurus!” Breaking into a sprint, I screamed for help, my heart pounding like a drum as the mighty beast gave chase, its thunderous footfalls sounding ominously behind. Then the silhouette was spotted again. Its reappearance must have a purpose, I thought. So instead of running around aimlessly, my instinct told me to follow that mysterious shadow.

However, my muscles started to burn in exertion, and with each increasingly laboured breath, I felt the beast's hot, rotten breath burn the back of my neck.

Just as despair threatened to consume me in its icy grip, the shadow disappeared, with a small bipedal reptile in its place. It leaped out from the shrubs and sunk its sharp teeth into the tarbosaurus' leg with a fearless determination. Hiding behind a trunk, I saw the tarbosaurus roar with rage at the reptile's unrelenting grip, and a faint sound of cracking bone could be heard.

Eventually, the tarbosaurus kicked the reptile away, unleashing a deafening roar of frustration as it lumbered away, having given up on its human prey. I caught the reptile, marvelling at the deep scar it had left on the Tarbosaurus' leg.

Normally, dinosaurs are expected to be covered in rough scales, but the one in my hand said otherwise. It was covered in primitive soft orange feathers, making it look fuzzy. Also, it is slender and approximately 1 meters tall. I took a closer look, finding this dinosaur to have razor sharp claws and teeth. I was frightened at first, but seeing it just kept swinging its orange-striped tail in my arms, and it helped me to escape from the tarbosaurus, I assumed that this dinosaur was harmless to me.

“Well...since I've travelled to the past, guess I can spend some time with this docile sinosauropteryx for a while...thanks for saving me by the way...” Always fascinated by dinosaurs, recognizing each of them was easy for me.

As I pondered my next course of action, the sinosauropteryx scampered over to the mess of torn, bloodied earth where the battle with the tarbosaurus had just taken place, chirping insistently for me to follow. Looking down, what I found was a curved, sharp tooth on the ground. I picked it

up with curiosity, and upon closer inspection, I noticed a gap in the sinosauropteryx's upper jaw, still sluggishly oozing blood.

"One day, if I can bring you back to my world, I'll find a way to put your tooth back into place." I promised the sinosauropteryx that is grinning at me now, chirping as I tucked the tooth into my pocket.

Since there is no way back to my world currently, I had no choice but to explore this world dominated by dinosaurs. Each step forward unveiled a tapestry of sights and sounds that captured my imagination, drawing me deeper into the core of this ancient landscape.

In the dwindling light, the sun hung low on the horizon, casting its golden glow across the large piece of space, painting the towering ferns and ancient cycads in hues of emerald and jade; the air thrummed with the symphony of nature, a cacophony of trills, chirps, and distant roars that echoed through the dense foliage.

Huge sauropods stretch their long necks to nibble on the leaves grown on trees; packs of swift sinornithosaurus with keen eyes ablaze with predatory intent; ankylosaurids glinted their armoured plates under the scorching sun...

"Wow...I must be in China's late Cretaceous period!"

The sinosauropteryx and I walked around the verdant expanse, the sensation of the dense long grass brushing against our skin, the scent of damp earth and decaying vegetation suspending heavily in the air. Tired, we sat down on the grass, and I started digging for food in my backpack. When I finally found a pack of savoury beef jerky, the sinosauropteryx was already catching bugs and lizards in a show of its hunting instincts and crunching them with relish. Perhaps it is a kind of carnivore that only eats small animals, but I still offered it a strip of beef jerky, wondering whether it would accept it or not.

The sinosauropteryx sniffed with cautious curiosity at first, took a close look at it, and tentatively bit off a small chunk. A second later, its eyes gleamed brightly, as if some kind of heavenly food had been discovered. It swallowed the remaining parts, then nudged eagerly at the beef jerky packet, wanting more. I fed him a few more pieces until both of us were full, sprawled on the grass with satisfaction.

Looking around this picturesque dinosaur realm, I whispered to myself in contemplation, "The world exhibits such profound beauty; the air carries a pure freshness, nourishing lush vegetation, flora and fauna coexisting in harmony. So this is what it was like before humans destroyed the environment... I never would have thought that we were capable of such destruction..."

Lost in thought, a huge shadow loomed above us. The first thing I noticed was the scar on its leg, horror surging instantly within me. Why is the tarbosaurus here again? The sinosauropteryx seemed to sense the danger above us, its tail swinging in anxiety.

However, instead of targeting us, the tarbosaurus thundered past without sparing us a second glance. What a quick change in attitude, I mused wryly, just a few minutes ago, you thought we were the tastiest things since the late Cretaceous period.

Bang! A distant explosion erupted from the heart of the forest, and dancing flames appeared. Sensing imminent danger, the sinosauropteryx batted me urgently with its tail, motioning me to look upwards, and it was then I knew what caused the fire.

A huge piece of rock was flying towards the ground, burning with searing intensity, and it landed at the exit of the forest, bursting into flames. The disaster didn't stop, more falling meteoroids were falling in different directions, like an alien shooting countless bullets at us. So it was true that dinosaurs went extinct because of meteoroids...

I turned around, finding that the styxosaurus had sunk into the ocean, leaving us no choice but to trace the escape routes of the fleeing dinosaurs.

As the ground trembled beneath the mighty dinosaurs, once rulers of this ancient realm, now found themselves ensnared in a web of panic and dread. The earth shook with each impact, sending shockwaves of devastation rippling through the once-pristine landscape, upsending trees and casting plumes of ash and debris into the air. The acrid stench of smoke and sulphur hung in the air, a noxious miasma that choked my lungs and stung my eyes, making me constantly lose balance and almost tripped down.

Noticing my vulnerability, the swift sinosauropteryx deftly guided me to safer vantage points, often steering clear of the thundering titanosaurs that stampeded in panicked frenzy. Without its agile intervention, I couldn't have avoided all those startling titanosaurs.

The ground erupted in geysers of flame and molten rock, the very fabric of the world rent asunder by forces beyond our comprehension. Their roars and wails of defiance drowned out by the deafening sound of the meteoroids as they plummeted to the earth.

As we were still escaping, I looked up and let out a startled cry, as a cave, neglected by all dinosaurs, was spotted not so far from us. So the sinosauropteryx and I dashed towards it, hugging finding comfort in each other inside the cave.

As I lingered in remorse over my decision to enter the washroom, a persistent whooshing sound pierced the air above me, devoid of the familiar cadence of a pteranodon's flight or the cry of it. I opened my eyes and peeked outside the cave, finding a large meteorite hurtling towards the small cave with unrelenting ferocity.

What's worse, there was no way to run, scorching flames were surrounding the cave, all we could do was to accept the inevitable. As the whooshing sound came closer, the last thing I said was "Sorry... You've saved me a lot of times during this journey... I told you I will find a way to

bring you back to reality and help you with the tooth... but now I failed to keep the promise... now it seems our paths converge towards an inevitable end within this fiery crucible of destruction..”

Boom! In a resounding crescendo, the world was engulfed in an abyss of darkness as the cataclysmic collision enveloped us.

“Chris! Chris! Wake up!” I slowly opened my eyes, finding out my teacher was shaking me vigorously. “Are you fine?”

“Uh...yes...where am I?” I asked.

“You're in the restaurant washroom. Are you sure you're really fine?”

“I...I thought I'm inside a cave...” I muttered, words trailing off in a perplexing admission.

“What?” My teacher was dumbfounded, “anyways, when I entered the washroom, you were found lying unconscious on the floor, maybe you slipped and hit your head on the sink.”

“Oh really. But I'm really fine, I'll return to the dining table in a few minutes.” I answered hastily, then my teacher left.

I stood up and looked at the mirror. I was really covered in dirt, and my clothes were messy due to the escape. I simply cleaned my face and left the washroom, still confused about what had happened.

I also touched my pocket, and my soft palm felt something curved and sharp, which I knew must be the fallen tooth.

If I could bring things from the dinosaur realm to my world, then why did the photos disappear? Is there something trying to stop me from exposing the prehistoric events to the public? Everything was too sudden for me, so I gave up on thinking about the disappeared photos, a sense of resignation descended upon me.

“Guys, we’ve arrived!” Our teacher yelled. Entering the museum, she started to point to the fossils and explained those dinosaurs, “behold the titanosaur, which is a recently discovered species in China!” The spikes protruded on the back affirmed that it was a titanosaur.

”Next, take a look at this dinosaur fossil! It is called the tarbosaurus, a Chinese T-Rex!” I examined it, recollection of being chased flashed in my mind, then I noticed a cracked knee bone. It looked like something even stronger fought against this gigantic beast and injured it. “This...this is crazy...” Perhaps I’m the only one who knows all the stories of these primal dinosaur fossils.

“This is the dinosaur that I’ve been talking about all the time, students,” my teacher explained, “the sinosauropteryx, which means Chinese dragon bird! A farmer found it in a cave located in Liaoning, and reported that he saw it in a pose of embracing something, but there was nothing there for it to hug. On top of that, researchers also detected some kinds of chemicals that only processed food has in its teeth, which is still very confusing until now. Anyways, take a few minutes to admire it!”

While others engrossed themselves in the detailed accounts of the sinosauropteryx’s origin, I put my head very close to its jaw, finding a gap at the upper jaw, just enough to fit in one more tooth. I touched the pocket again, the curved pointed object still remained. My heart started to race, my ancient companion in front of my eyes again.

“It’s really you... do you remember my promise? If you can go to my world, I’ll find a way to put your tooth back in place. But now you’re a displayed item, and I’m not allowed to touch you...” I looked down, finding one of its claws spread wide due to the hugging posture, but now to me, it was like waiting to receive something. I knew exactly what to do.

“Guys, let’s move on to the next fossil!” My teacher spoke out again. Before I followed the crowd, I carefully nestled the tooth into the fossilised palm, a silent offering that bridged the chasm between past and present, and went on. Fossils do tell stories.

”Chris, what’s taking you so long? Hurry up!” Peter yelled impatiently.

“I’m coming!” I responded.

With a final glance cast towards the fossil, a bittersweet farewell tumbled from my lips, a poignant acknowledgment of the unwavering companionship that had anchored me through the journey. “Until we meet again, my faithful companion.”

The Feathered Secret

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chia, Hui Xiang – 16

In a village, located in the east of China, there was a legend of a mythical bird known as the Sinosauroptery, which means "the China dragon bird", the creature was said to have vibrant feathers that shimmered as bright as the sun. The villagers believed that the feathers of the dragon bird were able grant wishes, and many of the villagers had spent years looking for this bird. Among these villagers was a young girl named Isla, with her straight and dark curly hair and soft brown eyes, she often found solace in the tales shared by the village elders, tales of the bird soaring high through the skies, leaving trails of glittering feathers in its wake. As time passed, Isla grew restless, she longs to uncover the truth of the dragon bird. On the night of her sixteenth birthday, she made a decision that would alter the course of her life forever. Armed with nothing but a small satchel filled with essentials, she set off at dawn, determined to find the mythical bird. The forest welcomed her with open arms, its towering trees whispering secrets of the ages. The deeper she ventured, the more alive the woods became, filled with the songs of chirping birds and rustling leaves. Days turned into weeks as Isla navigated through the labyrinth of trees, her spirit was unwavering despite the challenges she faced.

One fateful afternoon, while resting by a shimmering stream, Isla caught a glimpse of something extraordinary. A splash of color zoomed between the trees, and her heart raced with excitement. She found a hidden clearing, filled with soft sunlight coming through the leaves. In the middle stood the dragon bird, its feathers a mix of bright colors that sparkled in the light. Isla gasped, surprised by how beautiful it was. The dragon bird looked at her, and in that moment, Isla felt a special connection with it. As if it's sensing her pure heart, the dragon bird fluttered closer, its feathers brushing against her fingertips. Isla could hardly

believe her eyes; she had found the mystical bird, the embodiment of her dreams. With a voice as soft as a whisper, the dragon bird spoke, revealing the truth behind its feathers. "These feathers are not mere tokens of power," it said, its voice resonating in her mind. "They carry the essence of wishes, but they also come with great responsibility. To wish for something is to understand the world's balance. What you seek must come from a place of love and selflessness."

Isla listened intently, her heart swelling with the weight of Lira's words. She had always wished for adventure, but now she understood that her desires needed to align with the greater good. After a moment of contemplation, she said, "I wish to bring joy and hope to my village, to inspire others to see the beauty in the world." The dragon bird nodded, its feathers shimmering brighter than ever, and with a gentle flap of its wings, it bestowed upon her a single luminous feather. "This feather will guide you," it said. "Use it wisely." With the feather in her possession, Isla sprinted home. She shared her adventure with the villagers, recounting her encounter with the dragon bird and the wisdom it had. Inspired by her journey, the villagers began to see the world through a new lens, one filled with possibility. They organized celebrations, fostering a sense of community and togetherness that had been lost over the years. Isla's wish had come true, but it was not just her wish; it became a shared dream that united the village.

As the seasons changed, Isla often returned to the glade, visiting the dragon bird and learning from its wisdom. The bond between them further deepened, and the village even flourished under the influence of the dragon bird's magic. People began to believe in their own dreams, and the air was infused with hope. The once-quiet village transformed into a vibrant community, filled with laughter, creativity, and love. Years later, as Isla stood in the glade with the dragon bird, she realized that the feather had not only changed her life but had also woven a tapestry of dreams for everyone around her. The dragon bird smiled, its eyes twinkling with pride. "You have learned well, Isla. Your heart's desire was not for glory, but for connection. Remember, the true magic lies in the bonds we create and the love we share."

Isla nodded, her heart full. She understood now that the greatest adventure was not the pursuit of personal glory, but the journey of uplifting others and finding strength in unity. With that realization, she returned to her village, the feather tucked safely in her satchel, a reminder of the magic that exists when love and dreams intertwine. The legacy of the dragon bird lived on, not just in the tales told around the village fire, but in the hearts of those who dared to dream together.

As Isla grew older, she encouraged others to pursue their dreams and not lose hope. The village thrived, and the stories of the Dragon Bird continued to inspire generations. In the end, the magic was not in the wish granted, but in the way it transformed lives and brought people together, reminding them that sometimes, the most extraordinary journeys begin with a single, selfless wish.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chung, Ching Sonija – 15

Amidst the raging catastrophe of falling meteorites and the megathrust, I let out a startled cry as a cavern was spotted a few meters away. "Look, there's a cave over there!" Pointing towards it, I called out to my faithful companion the sinosauropteryx, and my voice echoed through the horrific clashings of the earth. With its sharp intellect gleaming evidently in its eyes, the small reptilian creature appeared to understand my urgency and followed me agilely to the cave's narrow doorway.

The heavenly bombardment persisted, each strike causing shockwaves to reverberate through the earth itself, causing my terror to ascend, tightening around my heart like a vice. I grasped the sinosauropteryx and encased its fallen tooth in my right hand. As tears welled up unbidden, tracing a path down my dust-streaked cheeks, I sought solace in the fleeting embrace of the creature beside me.

Closing my eyes, I found comfort in the darkness between my lids, a haven from the unrelenting assault of devastation, with a heavy heart and an unclear mind. Recollection started to flash back, and in the back of my mind, familiar voices and faces appeared like ghostly apparitions. What if I didn't make it back to my friends? One thought rang out through the chaos as my past pleaded for attention: a regretful and seemingly harmless choice to enter that washroom, which now carried the weight of consequence...

“Our next stop of this enthralling Liaoning study tour is to visit the dinosaur museum, where the first discovered feathered dinosaur in China, the *Sinosauropteryx* will be displayed,” my teacher explained, as the tour bus screeched to a halt. We disembarked to a small restaurant seemingly in the middle of nowhere, partly camouflaged by a tapestry of shrubbery. “But first, let's eat!”

The golden rays of the afternoon sun danced playfully upon the glazed windows, casting a warm glow over our eager faces, a comforting embrace amidst the chill of autumn.

"Chris, you must be very excited!" My friend Peter commented. “You've always been fascinated with dinosaurs, right?"

“Yes! I can't wait to appreciate the fossils, especially the *Sinosauropteryx*, as it's the first dinosaur discovered in China!”

We enjoyed our meal chatting animatedly with each other. As we were about to depart, I went to the washroom, the sounds of chattering gradually faded behind me, and the door swung shut. Terrified, I dashed out of the dark washroom, screaming in horror.

“Ahhh! The lights went out!” But only the sound of silence responded.

“Anyone here?” I called out into the void, my voice a solitary echo in the desolate expanse, left alone in the unknown. The sudden plunge into obsidian silence, the eerie absence of familiar voices, and the inexplicable vanishing of my companions left me grappling with a sense of disorientation and foreboding.

Stumbling out of the restaurant, frantically shouting their names, I came to realize that there would be no answer. “Maybe I'll phone them...I have no idea why they can switch off all the lights in a blink of an eye and leave the restaurant that quickly...” What's worse was that my phone had mysteriously gone dead and showed no signs of turning back on.

“This is just so sudden...” Bewildered, I swiveled around and made another shocking discovery. Where the restaurant had once stood, there was now an empty space.

Reeling with shock at the inexplicable disappearance of both my companions and the restaurant, a gnawing sense of unease gripped my heart. Where am I now? Where did everyone go?

Suddenly, a guttural cry pierced the stillness like a melancholy echo. I abruptly looked up, my eyes widening in disbelief as a magnificent winged creature, adorned with a formidable crest and a razor-sharp beak, soared smoothly across the azure sky.

It bore a striking resemblance to the fabled pteranodon, a winged wonder that once roamed the ancient skies with unparalleled grace and grandeur. “But... How?” I paused, a surge of astonishment and trepidation swept through me, “It's 2024 now, dinosaurs became extinct millions of years ago!”

As the beating of its wings faltered, a fleeting shadow dancing behind the shrubs caught my attention. Intrigue ignited within me, a relentless curiosity propelling my steps as I ventured towards the source of the shadow.

While I was stepping onto the crunching leaves, I faintly heard a deep growl behind me, striking through the stillness like a thunderous omen. A tremor of fear cascaded down my spine as I turned slowly around. A pair of narrowed, amber oculi were locked onto my quaking figure as I took in the sheer magnitude of the beast before me, whose maw widened in a snarl to reveal jagged, blood smeared teeth. Another feature that made me uneasy was the small pair of arms. Only one kind of dinosaur has these characteristics...

“It's a Tarbosaurus!” Breaking into a sprint, I screamed for help, my heart pounding like a drum as the mighty beast gave chase, its thunderous footfalls sounding ominously behind. Then the silhouette was spotted again. Its reappearance must have a purpose, I thought. So instead of running around aimlessly, my instinct told me to follow that mysterious shadow.

However, my muscles started to burn in exertion, and with each increasingly laboured breath, I felt the beast's hot, rotten breath burn the back of my neck.

Just as despair threatened to consume me in its icy grip, the shadow disappeared, with a small bipedal reptile in its place. It leaped out from the shrubs and sunk its sharp teeth into the tarbosaurus' leg with a fearless determination. Hiding behind a trunk, I saw the tarbosaurus roar with rage at the reptile's unrelenting grip, and a faint sound of cracking bone could be heard.

Eventually, the tarbosaurus kicked the reptile away, unleashing a deafening roar of frustration as it lumbered away, having given up on its human prey. I caught the reptile, marvelling at the deep scar it had left on the Tarbosaurus' leg.

Normally, dinosaurs are expected to be covered in rough scales, but the one in my hand said otherwise. It was covered in primitive soft orange feathers, making it look fuzzy. Also, it is slender and approximately 1 meters tall. I took a closer look, finding this dinosaur to have razor sharp claws and teeth. I was frightened at first, but seeing it just kept swinging its orange-striped tail in my arms, and it helped me to escape from the tarbosaurus, I assumed that this dinosaur was harmless to me.

“Well...since I've travelled to the past, guess I can spend some time with this docile sinosauropteryx for a while...thanks for saving me by the way...” Always fascinated by dinosaurs, recognizing each of them was easy for me.

As I pondered my next course of action, the sinosauropteryx scampered over to the mess of torn, bloodied earth where the battle with the tarbosaurus had just taken place, chirping insistently for me to follow. Looking down, what I found was a curved, sharp tooth on the ground. I picked it

up with curiosity, and upon closer inspection, I noticed a gap in the sinosauropteryx's upper jaw, still sluggishly oozing blood.

"One day, if I can bring you back to my world, I'll find a way to put your tooth back into place." I promised the sinosauropteryx that is grinning at me now, chirping as I tucked the tooth into my pocket.

Since there is no way back to my world currently, I had no choice but to explore this world dominated by dinosaurs. Each step forward unveiled a tapestry of sights and sounds that captured my imagination, drawing me deeper into the core of this ancient landscape.

In the dwindling light, the sun hung low on the horizon, casting its golden glow across the large piece of space, painting the towering ferns and ancient cycads in hues of emerald and jade; the air thrummed with the symphony of nature, a cacophony of trills, chirps, and distant roars that echoed through the dense foliage.

Huge sauropods stretch their long necks to nibble on the leaves grown on trees; packs of swift sinornithosaurus with keen eyes ablaze with predatory intent; ankylosaurids glinted their armoured plates under the scorching sun...

"Wow...I must be in China's late Cretaceous period!"

The sinosauropteryx and I walked around the verdant expanse, the sensation of the dense long grass brushing against our skin, the scent of damp earth and decaying vegetation suspending heavily in the air. Tired, we sat down on the grass, and I started digging for food in my backpack. When I finally found a pack of savoury beef jerky, the sinosauropteryx was already catching bugs and lizards in a show of its hunting instincts and crunching them with relish. Perhaps it is a kind of carnivore that only eats small animals, but I still offered it a strip of beef jerky, wondering whether it would accept it or not.

The sinosauropteryx sniffed with cautious curiosity at first, took a close look at it, and tentatively bit off a small chunk. A second later, its eyes gleamed brightly, as if some kind of heavenly food had been discovered. It swallowed the remaining parts, then nudged eagerly at the beef jerky packet, wanting more. I fed him a few more pieces until both of us were full, sprawled on the grass with satisfaction.

Looking around this picturesque dinosaur realm, I whispered to myself in contemplation, "The world exhibits such profound beauty; the air carries a pure freshness, nourishing lush vegetation, flora and fauna coexisting in harmony. So this is what it was like before humans destroyed the environment... I never would have thought that we were capable of such destruction..."

Lost in thought, a huge shadow loomed above us. The first thing I noticed was the scar on its leg, horror surging instantly within me. Why is the tarbosaurus here again? The sinosauropteryx seemed to sense the danger above us, its tail swinging in anxiety.

However, instead of targeting us, the tarbosaurus thundered past without sparing us a second glance. What a quick change in attitude, I mused wryly, just a few minutes ago, you thought we were the tastiest things since the late Cretaceous period.

Bang! A distant explosion erupted from the heart of the forest, and dancing flames appeared. Sensing imminent danger, the sinosauropteryx batted me urgently with its tail, motioning me to look upwards, and it was then I knew what caused the fire.

A huge piece of rock was flying towards the ground, burning with searing intensity, and it landed at the exit of the forest, bursting into flames. The disaster didn't stop, more falling meteoroids were falling in different directions, like an alien shooting countless bullets at us. So it was true that dinosaurs went extinct because of meteoroids...

I turned around, finding that the styxosaurus had sunk into the ocean, leaving us no choice but to trace the escape routes of the fleeing dinosaurs.

As the ground trembled beneath the mighty dinosaurs, once rulers of this ancient realm, now found themselves ensnared in a web of panic and dread. The earth shook with each impact, sending shockwaves of devastation rippling through the once-pristine landscape, upsending trees and casting plumes of ash and debris into the air. The acrid stench of smoke and sulphur hung in the air, a noxious miasma that choked my lungs and stung my eyes, making me constantly lose balance and almost tripped down.

Noticing my vulnerability, the swift sinosauropteryx deftly guided me to safer vantage points, often steering clear of the thundering titanosaurs that stampeded in panicked frenzy. Without its agile intervention, I couldn't have avoided all those startling titanosaurs.

The ground erupted in geysers of flame and molten rock, the very fabric of the world rent asunder by forces beyond our comprehension. Their roars and wails of defiance drowned out by the deafening sound of the meteoroids as they plummeted to the earth.

As we were still escaping, I looked up and let out a startled cry, as a cave, neglected by all dinosaurs, was spotted not so far from us. So the sinosauropteryx and I dashed towards it, hugging finding comfort in each other inside the cave.

As I lingered in remorse over my decision to enter the washroom, a persistent whooshing sound pierced the air above me, devoid of the familiar cadence of a pteranodon's flight or the cry of it. I opened my eyes and peeked outside the cave, finding a large meteorite hurtling towards the small cave with unrelenting ferocity.

What's worse, there was no way to run, scorching flames were surrounding the cave, all we could do was to accept the inevitable. As the whooshing sound came closer, the last thing I said was "Sorry... You've saved me a lot of times during this journey... I told you I will find a way to

bring you back to reality and help you with the tooth... but now I failed to keep the promise... now it seems our paths converge towards an inevitable end within this fiery crucible of destruction..”

Boom! In a resounding crescendo, the world was engulfed in an abyss of darkness as the cataclysmic collision enveloped us.

“Chris! Chris! Wake up!” I slowly opened my eyes, finding out my teacher was shaking me vigorously. “Are you fine?”

“Uh...yes...where am I?” I asked.

“You're in the restaurant washroom. Are you sure you're really fine?”

“I...I thought I'm inside a cave...” I muttered, words trailing off in a perplexing admission.

“What?” My teacher was dumbfounded, “anyways, when I entered the washroom, you were found lying unconscious on the floor, maybe you slipped and hit your head on the sink.”

“Oh really. But I'm really fine, I'll return to the dining table in a few minutes.” I answered hastily, then my teacher left.

I stood up and looked at the mirror. I was really covered in dirt, and my clothes were messy due to the escape. I simply cleaned my face and left the washroom, still confused about what had happened.

I also touched my pocket, and my soft palm felt something curved and sharp, which I knew must be the fallen tooth.

If I could bring things from the dinosaur realm to my world, then why did the photos disappear? Is there something trying to stop me from exposing the prehistoric events to the public? Everything was too sudden for me, so I gave up on thinking about the disappeared photos, a sense of resignation descended upon me.

“Guys, we’ve arrived!” Our teacher yelled. Entering the museum, she started to point to the fossils and explained those dinosaurs, “behold the titanosaur, which is a recently discovered species in China!” The spikes protruded on the back affirmed that it was a titanosaur.

”Next, take a look at this dinosaur fossil! It is called the tarbosaurus, a Chinese T-Rex!” I examined it, recollection of being chased flashed in my mind, then I noticed a cracked knee bone. It looked like something even stronger fought against this gigantic beast and injured it. “This...this is crazy...” Perhaps I’m the only one who knows all the stories of these primal dinosaur fossils.

“This is the dinosaur that I’ve been talking about all the time, students,” my teacher explained, “the sinosauropteryx, which means Chinese dragon bird! A farmer found it in a cave located in Liaoning, and reported that he saw it in a pose of embracing something, but there was nothing there for it to hug. On top of that, researchers also detected some kinds of chemicals that only processed food has in its teeth, which is still very confusing until now. Anyways, take a few minutes to admire it!”

While others engrossed themselves in the detailed accounts of the sinosauropteryx’s origin, I put my head very close to its jaw, finding a gap at the upper jaw, just enough to fit in one more tooth. I touched the pocket again, the curved pointed object still remained. My heart started to race, my ancient companion in front of my eyes again.

“It’s really you... do you remember my promise? If you can go to my world, I’ll find a way to put your tooth back in place. But now you’re a displayed item, and I’m not allowed to touch you...” I looked down, finding one of its claws spread wide due to the hugging posture, but now to me, it was like waiting to receive something. I knew exactly what to do.

“Guys, let’s move on to the next fossil!” My teacher spoke out again. Before I followed the crowd, I carefully nestled the tooth into the fossilised palm, a silent offering that bridged the chasm between past and present, and went on. Fossils do tell stories.

”Chris, what’s taking you so long? Hurry up!” Peter yelled impatiently.

“I’m coming!” I responded.

With a final glance cast towards the fossil, a bittersweet farewell tumbled from my lips, a poignant acknowledgment of the unwavering companionship that had anchored me through the journey. “Until we meet again, my faithful companion.”

Legacy of the Feathered Beasts

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chung, Tsz Chun Rodney – 16

In the serene hills of a province, as evening fell, villagers would gather around flickering fires, sharing legends of ancient creatures that once roamed their land. Among them was Chris, a spirited boy with endless curiosity and dreams.

Chris had always been captivated by dinosaurs. His grandmother often recounted how the discovery of the first feathered dinosaur—had altered the village's fate, attracting paleontologists from far and wide. Chris would look at the magnificent feathered beasts soaring through the skies, their vibrant colors shimmering in the sun.

On a crisp autumn afternoon, Chris ventured deeper into the woods than ever before. Each step felt like a heartbeat urging him onward, a call to adventure.

As he wandered further, he stumbled upon an unusual stone. Its surface was etched with strange markings that seemed to pulse with a life of their own. Intrigued, Chris knelt down and began to dig around it. As he cleared the dirt, a glimmer caught his eye. With a rush of exhilaration, he unearthed a small, fossilized claw.

Cradling the claw in his hands, Chris was very excited and went back to the village to tell his grandmother about it. His grandmother examined the claw, her eyes widening in amazement. “This is extraordinary, Chris! It could belong to a dinosaur we’ve never seen before. We must take it to the museum in town.”

The very next day, they journeyed to the local museum, where Dr. Li, a renowned paleontologist, welcomed them with enthusiasm. “This is a significant find!” he declared, studying the claw under a microscope. “It appears to belong to a previously unknown species of theropod. This could change everything we know about

the dinosaurs of this region!”

Days turned into weeks as Dr. Li and his team worked tirelessly to analyze the claw. They invited Chris to assist them, and he learned about the intricate process of fossilization, the history of dinosaurs, and the vital role paleontology played in understanding the past.

One evening, after a long day of research, Dr. Li gathered everyone in the lab. “We’ve made a breakthrough,” he announced, his voice tinged with excitement. “Using advanced technology, we can recreate the skeletal structure of this dinosaur. We believe it was a small, agile predator.”

Chris’ heart raced with anticipation. The thought filled him with a sense of purpose; he wanted to honor the creature’s legacy.

As the research continued, the villagers began to notice changes in their lives. Tourists flocked to see the museum, eager to learn about the newfound species. The village experienced a revival, and with it, Chris’ knew that he really wanted to become a palaeontologist.

However, amidst the excitement, Jun noticed some villagers were concerned about the influx of tourists and the changes that followed. They feared their peaceful way of life would vanish under the weight of commercialization. One evening, during a village meeting, the elders expressed their worries.

Feeling a sense of responsibility, Jun stood up. “We can preserve our traditions while sharing our history. The fossils are part of our heritage, and they can educate others about our past. If we manage it wisely, we can create a balance.”

With his grandmother’s encouragement, Jun proposed to allow the village to benefit from tourism while maintaining its culture and values. The elders listened, and after much discussion, they agreed to give it a try.

Over the next few months, Chris and the villagers worked together to organize educational tours, workshops, and exhibitions. Local schools were invited to participate, fostering a sense of pride in their heritage.

As the village prepared for a special event, Chris was euphoric. They had organized a fossil fair, inviting experts from across the country to share their knowledge. Stalls were set up to showcase fossils and educational materials.

When Dr. Li arrived to give the keynote speech, he praised the community. The crowd gave a round of applause, and Chris beamed with pride. He watched families explore the exhibits, their children wide-eyed with wonder.

Yet, as the day continued, a group of outsiders arrived, eager to exploit the village’s newfound fame. They approached Chris with promises of riches in exchange for exclusive rights to the fossils. The offer was tempting, but he felt a bit uneasy.

He turned them down. “These fossils are part of our history, our identity,” he said firmly. “We will not sell them for profit. They belong to the earth and to our people.”

Chris grasped that the village’s future hinged on safeguarding its essence. The elders stood by his side, underscoring the importance of preserving their heritage for the generations ahead.

As the fair drew to a close, Chris realized this was just the beginning of his journey. Inspired by the event’s success, he resolved to pursue studies in paleontology. He envisioned returning to the village as a distinguished scientist, bringing knowledge and resources to further enrich the community.

Years later, armed with education and innovative ideas, Chris returned to his village. He established a research center focused on fossil preservation, collaborating with universities and scientists to delve deeper into the rich history beneath their feet.

On the anniversary of his first discovery, Chris organized a celebration. Villagers gathered, sharing stories and laughter, united by their passion for history. Standing at the forest's edge where he had found the claw, Chris reflected on his journey.

As the sun set, he felt a profound connection to the land and its stories. The echoes of ancient creatures had intertwined with the village's vibrant life.

At that moment, Chris realized that the past would always resonate through time, shaping the future. He smiled, knowing he had fulfilled his dream—not just for himself, but for the villagers who had nurtured his passion for the ancient world. The legacy of the dinosaurs would endure, not only in fossils but in the hearts and minds of those who cherished their stories.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Fiaz, Abia – 15

In Jiangxi province, in between the mountains that usually haze up with mist, there is a small village called Shiyuan. The people there normally discreetly talk about the ancient bones lying under their feet. Bones that belong to creatures long dead. There is a little girl, however. Her name is Mei, and she was very curious about these tales. Her grandmother, the wise woman that she was, had a story as long as the river. And every now and then, she would tell Mei, "The bones have secrets of the past, Mei. "

An odd assortment of rocks was found wandering in the outskirts of the village on a sunny afternoon, which was strange to Mei. They were something that she had never seen before; they were smooth and almost polished, and yet they had the strangest markings over them. With curiosity beyond bounds, she brushed off some dirt and gasped to uncover a colossal, curved bone. Breathlessly, she raced home and told grandmother of her discovery.

"Grandmother! I found something amazing!" she exclaimed while holding the bone up into the air.

Eyes of her grandmother shone with recognition. "Ah, my love; this is not just an ordinary bone. This belongs to the animal known by the name of titanosaur, that giant beast which used to tread these lands. Long ago, they were the kings of the earth."

She was lying under a star-studded sky, not being able to sleep that night, and drumming up thoughts of the titanosaur's greatness as it lumbered into leafy forests, its neck stretching towards treetops. What does it eat? How does it move? And she drowsed off, the echoes of bygone days haunted her dreams, ever softening to finer points.

Then, when she came the next day, she was incredibly cheered up and curious to find more out. Mei took together her friends that consisted of a group of boys and girls and led them back to the site. And there they dug again and

again in search of more bones—fossils of many shapes and sizes, fragments of a story, brushed away dirt, and very carefully lifted out light remains.

As the dark fell, washing the light in gold across the land, Mei's friend Jian found something rather odd. "Look!" he exclaimed, waving a tiny, fancy, decorated stone. He found a titanosaur, surrounded by a whole handful of smaller dinosaurs. The eyes of the spectators became as big as saucers.

"Of course, it has to mean something," Mei whispered. "We should show it to the elders."

Later that night, the kids clustered into one elderly group, where their discoveries were being presented. The old ones listened to the narration of the events and absorbed those that bore the faces of these villagers. They have been traveling back a long way when some of these noble beings were carried by ancient tribes as their guardians on earth.

It seemed as though in acknowledgement of the discovery, a festival was organized for the village to celebrate its history. This will be an invitation to paleontologists from all over the country to visit the area and study the fossil remains in it, as well as learn from one another. And when the busloads of scientist tourists arrived, they were stunned by the children's passion alongside with the sheer significance of the site.

A few months passed, and now, the population was almost entirely different. Museums seemed to surface everywhere. Shiyuan was yet another place that would be loudly invaded by tourists, shouting all kinds of songs that told of the history of ancient giants. Mei watched her quiet little village change into a beacon of discovery and wonder.

One evening as she stood at the edge of the mountains, she turned to feel a gentle breeze brush gently against her cheek. As though mouthing them all into whispering secrets, bones resided in the museum now. She smiled, knowing the stories of the titanosaur and its kin would go on into future generations, forever kept in the heart of Shiyuan.

The Isle of Lost Dragons

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Ho, Ka Yat – 16

"Last call for the tour of Isle Odyssey!" yelled the steward. I gazed over the majestic yet mysterious island, which looked stunning from the deck. It had peculiar-looking rocks engraved with the shapes of dinosaur vertebrae embellished with lush greenery.

I had been yearning to step foot on land again—these few days rocking around in the Pacific on a cruise ship had been driving me crazy—but the fact that the island hadn't been inhabited since WWII by the Japanese was certainly unnerving. The ship slowed as we approached; instead of a guided tour, we were told to explore the isle by ourselves for several hours.

I strolled along the shore, letting the subtle ocean breeze clear my mind. As I approached the edge of the beach, I felt an uncanny feeling that ran through my nerves. The towering cliffs weren't *just* typical rock formations—they embedded teeth like blades, sets of curved claws and a ribcage the size of a double-decker. I thought to myself—are these dinosaur fossils?

The further I went, the more eerie and terrifying it became. There were old military vehicles that had been crushed by the looks of a mysterious beast. There were a few feathers lying on the ground, just next to footprints etched into hardened mud, not too deep. Then there laid a carcass of a lifeless wolf with its spine split into two sections, still fresh with flies sucking the flesh of the poor animal. I was petrified.

As the ship blew its horns, I knew I was locked in for the night. Alone.

A low-pitched growling sound broke the silence at dusk, followed by a short squeak resembling what one could hear from a Jurassic World film. A Pterodactyl roared through the golden horizon boasting its feathered, sharp wings. It went for a group of pigeons nesting on tree branches, and I knew I was soon up next as prey. I sprang deep into the woods and ducked in a cave when the sky was merely moonlit.

“Something’s not right”, I thought to myself.

I gritted my teeth and advanced deeper into the cave. My heart was racing as I shone my flashlight around the cold, damp walls, pounding even harder when I read the faint words “小心恐龍” (“*beware of dinosaurs*”) written in red. A group of *Yueosaurus*, standing high on their feet, started surrounding me with their claws as sharp as the edges of a honed dagger. Before I could react, they growled at me and frowned with their hungry faces.

I ran deeper into the cave until their searching eyes couldn’t find me, though I could hear their deafening screams echoing through the walls. There stood a massive skeleton resembling a *Titanosaurus*. Its neck curved upwards with its tail elongated several meters behind its vertebrae. But it was no ordinary skeleton—it had small, spherical eggs lying beside it. Fresh ones.

Time stood still from some 70 million years ago in Isle Odyssey. As the *Yueosaurus* continued to roar, I realized the inevitable truth—I was forever part of the isle’s history. There was no turning back.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Jin, Rui – 16

In a tranquil village in China far from the crowded and overwhelming cities, a young boy named Kenneth is living harmoniously with his parents and siblings. Yet, he has completely no clue that the thing he is about to discover will change his life forever.

In a seemingly ordinary day for Kenneth, he leaves the village and goes into the forest nearby to collect firewoods for his family as usual. The dazzling sunlight is blocked by the countless of leaves in the forest, leaving a few yet beautiful beams which pass through the gap between the leaves and shines onto the dry soil. The chirping birds and the rustling leaves formed a perfect brand, singing a peaceful song in the forest. Following the footprints, Kenneth is finding the perfect dry logs for making firewoods, until he stumble upon a strange cave he has never seen. As if it’s a magnet, it allures the curious boy into exploring the mysterious cave without a second thought.

Stepping inside the cave, a sense of danger quickly comes to Kenneth. However, it doesn’t stop him from going further. The deeper he goes, the darker and creepier it becomes. A soft yet loud noise of breathing slowly emerges. Kenneth walks carefully and starts to be aware of every steps he takes as the breathing sound gets louder and louder. A black and enormous figure gradually appears, it looks like nothing Kenneth has ever seen. Yet, it doesn’t scared him off and makes him more curious instead. Finally, he comes in front of the tremendous creature.

Looking at the tiny human, the creature gets nervous and starts to spread its wings to look bigger, trying to scare off the curious boy in front. The movement of the its wings generates a strong blow of wind inside the cave, causing

Kenneth to almost lost his balance. However, something seems strange. The gigantic creature lays on the ground all the time even though it gets nervous and it has never tried to get up. Kenneth lights up a torch with a stick and some flint and steel. Immediately, the cave is no longer filled with darkness and the creature is finally unveiled. Although they were said to be extinct long before the existence of human, Kenneth is sure that the creature in front of him is a pterosaur from the textbook he has read. Not believing his eyes, Kenneth is astonished and takes a step back reflexively. Suddenly, Kenneth noticed something unusual. Under the light, he found out that one of the legs of the pterosaur is bruised and is still bleeding. Although the little boy is scared by the enormous creature, he overcomes the fear with a heart of sympathy and takes a step towards the “extinct” creature. He takes off his backpack and grabs a water bottle he has brought along with him. He holds the bottle tightly, reaches out and holds it in front of him. Kenneth continues to walk towards the creature, taking every steps slowly and carefully. As if the pterosaur understands that the boy is helping it, it closes its wings but still stares at the boy with alert. Kenneth has approached the creature close enough, right in front of the pterosaur’s mouth and pours water onto the tip of its mouth. The water seems to relieve its pain and takes off its guard. Seeing the bruises on its leg, Kenneth took off his shirt and ripped it into slices. He uses the clothes to bandage its wound, hoping to stop it from bleeding. He then runs back to his house and brings along some food and water for the pterosaur. Kenneth knows that it cannot survive on its own as it cannot move as long as its leg is still injured. He keeps bringing foods and water to it everyday. He would tell his mom to prepare some extra lunch and bring it to the pterosaur. However, he has never told anyone about it and keeps it as a secret.

Day after days, the pterosaur no longer fears the boy and so does Kenneth. The wounds of it have also recovered significantly. The boy keeps providing care to it without a day resting. Until one day, the boy is doing his daily routine to find the pterosaur. He thinks everything will go just like before, until he finds the empty cave, all he hears is just his own breath. He becomes anxious, eager to his most important friend. Although he has searched up the entire cave, his friend is still missing, leaving only himself in the cave full of darkness. He has not lost his hope, in the following years, Kenneth keeps trying to find his friend. He searches the cave, the forest and also the sky, waiting for it to appear in his life again just like how it does for the first time, but there’s no signs of track of the pterosaur at all. After years of blood, sweat and tears, the boy has grown to a man. Although he still cannot find his childhood friend, he hasn’t lost his hope. He becomes a famous palaeontologists, trying to study the behaviours of dinosaurs and hopes to find his friend with everything he can do. He has contributed a lot to the society without noticing it, with his hard work, people has gained a lot more knowledge about the ancient creatures then they do before.

Time flies, Kenneth still cannot find his childhood friend even though he has become old. He was asked about why he chose to be a palaeontologists, he told everyone about the story but no one believes him at all. “It’s all just your childhood imaginations”, someone said. He didn’t respond to it, but he also hasn’t had a single doubt of his story with his best friend. Even before his death, he still believes in it and tries to find more clues about the pterosaur, wishing to meet his friend once again.

The Dragon Bird's Secret

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Kaur, Jasdeep – 15

The sun hangs low over the fields of Liaoning, casting golden light across the freshly tilled soil. Chen Wei leans against his plow, wiping his sweat from his brow after working tirelessly since dawn. As he was finishing his last dig, his shovel struck on something hard. At first, he thought it was just another stubborn rock, but as he digs deeper, the edges of this ‘rock’ catches his eye, so he starts to dig more delicately. Soon enough, something ancient starts to emerge — bones, but not like any he’d ever seen before. They glimmer faintly in the fading sunlight, as if whispering a secret that had been buried for millions of years. Carefully, Wei took the set of bones out of the dirt. Without thinking twice, he quickly goes to find his best friend Liu Xiaoyu. Xiaoyu is an archeology student in Peking university who, luckily, is back to the village for Chinese New Year.

“Xiaoyu! Xiaoyu! Open the door!” Wei knocks Xiaoyu’s door impatiently. She quickly lets him inside. Once Wei catches his breath, he shows her what he had found. Xiaoyu stares at the set of ancient bones imprinted with smooth feather imprints in both shock and awe. “Woah... now this is something”. “Well what is it?” Wei questions. “I’m not quite sure what it is exactly but it looks like some kind of ancient bones, it's definitely a type of mammal but I guess it’s a rare one”

Xiaoyu answers. Then realisation hits her. “It might even be a dinosaur!” She gasps. After a few moments of screaming and jumping around in excitement, Xiaoyu and Wei decide to go to the Yunnan University’s Institute of Paleontology tomorrow to confirm their suspicions.

The next morning, the two friends meet with a team of paleontologists at the institute and show them the fossils Wei had found and are told to wait while the scientists examine the fossils in their lab. After some time, the head paleontologist calls both friends to share what her team has confirmed. “Hi I’m Dr. Lin Hong, nice to meet you”. “I wanted to let you know that those fossils that you have discovered are indeed related to paleontology and we are thrilled for your finding as it will open up a new chapter of discovery for us. Come on in, I’ll show you what we have identified.” Together they went inside and Dr. Lin steps forward tracing the outlines of the fossil as she spoke to the group. “After examining these specimens, we have confirmed that they belong to a previously unknown species of theropod. The implications of this discovery is immense —” She explains every detail of the situation and how the team will start a full excavation of Chen Wei’s fields where the initial fossils were discovered.

CHAPTER 2: The Dragon Bird Awakens

65 million years ago, the land now known as Liaoning was a lush and humid place filled with a unique population. Towering trees swayed in the intense breeze, their shadows rippling across the forest land. Small streams flowed through the underbrush, their waters alive with fishes and turtles. Above it all, the call of a strange creature echoed—a mix of a bird’s chirp and a reptile’s hiss. A feathered theropod darted out from the thick tree strands. Its sleek, iridescent feathers shimmered in the speckled sunlight, a kaleidoscope of colors meant to attract a mate, or perhaps warn a rival. The *Sinosauropteryx*, also known as the ‘*China Dragon Bird*’. Its sharp eyes scanned the ground for prey, and with a sudden burst of speed, it lunged at an unexpected lizard. But danger was always close. Overhead, a shadow passed—a pterosaur gliding silently, its beak ready to snatch any creature that ventured too far into the open. In the distance, the ground rumbled as a larger predator moved through the forest, each step a reminder of the delicate balance of life and death in this ancient ecosystem.

Beneath the surface, hidden from the chaos above, time was quietly at work. Fallen leaves and bones were buried in silt, pressed into the earth by the weight of centuries. What once lived and breathed would become stone, a silent record of a world long gone—waiting for someone to find it.

Dr. Lin and her team arrive at the site just before sunrise, setting up grids and marking the area for excavation. Wei leads them to the exact spot where he’d uncovered the fossils, their starting point for the dig. As the team prepares, curious villagers gather, murmuring amongst themselves about what was happening in the fields.

Noticing the growing crowd, Dr. Lin steps forward to address them. “Greetings, everyone! We’ve uncovered an extraordinary cache of dinosaur fossils and are beginning an excavation to uncover more of this ancient world’s secrets.” The villagers exchange puzzled glances, their expressions skeptical. Xiaoyu moves beside Dr. Lin, whispering, “Uh... they don’t really

understand you. Most people here speak Tuhua, and well... not everyone is educated.” “Oh! My apologies,” Dr. Lin replies. Xiaoyu turned to the crowd, translating: “These scientists are here to dig the—” Before she could finish, the villagers erupt in anger. “What do you mean dig?” “You can’t touch our fields without permission!” “Who gave them the right?” Their objections grow louder. “Wait! Listen to us first!” Xiaoyu shouts, trying to calm them. When that doesn’t work, she takes a deep breath and yells at the top of her lungs, “THERE WERE DINOSAURS HERE!”

The crowd fell silent, staring at her in shock. She quickly adds, “Well, not exactly dinosaurs, but Chen Wei found dinosaur bones. These scientists just want to see if there are more. Think about it—this could make our village famous! People might come from all over to visit. We might even get a museum!” After a tense pause, the villagers exchange whispers and reluctantly agree.

The excavation begins, with the team, Chen Wei, and Xiaoyu working diligently and contributing each of their skills and knowledge. By evening, their efforts pay off—they unearth even more fossils.

However, a new challenge arises. “These fossils need lab testing to confirm their relevance to our research,” Dr. Lin’s assistant says. “We need someone who can analyze them on-site.” Xiaoyu immediately brightens. “I know just the person! A paleontology professor from my university. He didn’t teach me, but I’m sure he’d be happy to help. You could call the university and ask for Professor Zhang Yiwen”

CHAPTER 3: Tension Rises

Professor Zhang Yiwen arrives at the excavation site just after sunrise, his sharp eyes scanning the neatly marked grids with a critical air. The team works steadily under the early light, unearthing fragments of fossils with practiced care. Zhang crouches beside a partially uncovered specimen, brushing away dirt with precise movements. “So, this is the site,” he remarks, his tone cool and analytical. “It’s promising, though I’ve seen plenty of promising sites lead to nothing. Let’s see if this one has real substance.” Dr. Lin nods, her expression calm but confident. “We’re optimistic about what we’ve found so far. But identifying them on-site is a challenge—that’s why we brought you here.” Zhang straightens, gesturing toward a nearby fossil. “Show me the specimen records and your preliminary data.” Dr. Lin’s assistant rushes forward with a stack of documents.

Chen Wei lingers on the edge of the group, hesitant but curious. Gathering his courage, he steps closer. “What do you think it is?” Wei asks, pointing to the fossil Zhang is examining. The professor glances at him briefly, raising an eyebrow. “A theropod—carnivorous dinosaur. Basic information.” His words are clipped, and his tone carries an unmistakable edge of condescension. “And you are?” Wei stiffens but replies, “These are my fields. I found the first fossils here.” Dr. Lin adds quickly, “Chen Wei’s discovery is what brought us here in the first place.” Zhang pauses briefly, then says, “Did he? Well, good for him. But finding bones and understanding them are entirely different matters.” Without waiting for a response, he turns back to Dr. Lin. “We need to expand the dig area. I’ll oversee the work personally. Let’s not waste time.”

As the team digs deeper, the tension lingers. Wei feels a knot of frustration tightening in his chest but refuses to let Zhang's dismissiveness get to him. Xiaoyu, sensing his discomfort, offers a reassuring smile. "Don't take it personally," she whispers. "He's like that with everyone." Wei nods stiffly.

Later that evening, when the site falls silent, Professor Zhang approaches Dr. Lin sitting under the glow of her lantern. His tone shifts as he proposes selling some of the fossils to private collectors, arguing that the profits could fund future research. Dr. Lin is immediately appalled, her voice firm as she rejects the idea. "These fossils belong to this village, to its people, and to science—not to the highest bidder," she declares. Their conversation grows heated, with Zhang dismissing her ideals as impractical. Dr. Lin refuses to back down, her words cutting through his arguments. Eventually, Zhang retreats, his frustration evident, leaving Dr. Lin standing by the largest grid, her resolve unshaken.

The following morning, an excited shout breaks the tense silence. One of the paleontologists uncovers a narrow opening leading to an underground cavern. The team gathers, peering into the shadowy depths. Lanterns reveal fossilized bones jutting from the cavern's walls and ceiling—pristine, enormous, and untouched for millions of years. Dr. Lin's heart races as she realizes the enormity of the discovery. It's a preserved sanctuary of prehistoric life, one that could change everything. The team's excitement reignites as they prepare to explore, but an unspoken tension lingers in the air, as if the cavern holds secrets yet to be revealed.

Chapter 4: The Hidden World

The team works tirelessly, carefully widening the narrow opening that leads into the cavern. Once it is stable enough, they descend cautiously, their lanterns casting long, wavering shadows on the walls. The air carries the faint, earthy scent of time long forgotten.

As they venture deeper, the cavern reveals its treasures—embedded fossils of ancient dinosaurs, their forms almost intact. "This is incredible," Dr. Lin whispers. "It's as if this place has been untouched for eons." She marvels at the preservation, running her fingers lightly over a massive ribcage fossil jutting from the wall.

The team presses on, documenting each find meticulously. But as they move deeper into the cavern, the atmosphere seems to shift. The fossils become less distinct, replaced by odd arrangements of stones and markings on the walls that seemed deliberate, almost human.

Dr. Lin hurries over to a certain item that caught her eye. She stands frozen staring at the tools half-buried in the dirt—crude, ancient, but unmistakably shaped by human hands. Nearby, a faintly etched symbol adorned the rock wall, its meaning obscured by time. "This... can't be," Dr. Lin murmurs, her breath catching. "Human artifacts? Here? But that would mean—" "Humans and dinosaurs in the same timeline?" Wei finishes, his voice trembling with disbelief.

The cavern falls silent as the implications sink in. What they have discovered is no longer just about dinosaurs. It is a revelation that can rewrite history itself. But no one notices Professor Zhang lingering near the cavern's entrance. His eyes linger longer on the fossils embedded in the

walls. Quietly, he reaches into his bag, pulling out a small chisel and cloth wrap. His movements are careful, calculated. He chooses a small but pristine bone fragment jutting out from the wall—a find that could fetch a fortune on the black market.

Confident, he loosens the fragment and slips it into the cloth. A sharp crack echoes, reverberating through the chamber. The ground beneath their feet shudders. “Did anyone else feel that?” Xiaoyu asked, her voice rising with alarm. The rest of them nod. The rumbling intensifies, loose stones cascading from the walls as the ground trembles more violently. Dust fills the air as cracks begin to spider web across the cavern ceiling. “Everyone out! Now!” Dr. Lin shouts. Professor Zhang pales and shoves the remaining tools into his bag and sprints toward the exit.

The team scrambles toward the entrance, their lanterns swaying wildly in the chaos as the cavern roars around them. Outside, they stumble into the daylight, coughing and covered in dust. Dr. Lin turns back to the blocked entrance, her heart sinking at the thought of what they might have lost. “How?” she demands, her sharp gaze sweeping over the team. Her eyes land on Professor Zhang, who stands apart from the group, dusting off his bag with unusual care. “Professor,” she says, her tone dangerously calm, “would you by any chance know how that happened?” Zhang glances up but avoids eye contact. “Unstable ground, perhaps. These things happen in caves.” Dr. Lin’s expression hardens. “They don’t happen without a cause. Is there something you’d like to tell me?” For a moment, the tension hangs thick in the air. Zhang smirks faintly, adjusting his bag. “I’m afraid I’m just as baffled as you are.” But his words do little to dispel the suspicion now firmly planted in Dr. Lin’s mind. **Chapter 5: The Legacy**

Dr. Lin stands at the edge of the cavern’s entrance, reviewing the latest findings with a thoughtful expression. For her, this is no longer just about unearthing fossils—it’s about what they represent: the story of a land and its people, preserved for millions of years, now entrusted to their care.

“I know we are all upset about the unfortunate collapse of the cavern which could’ve given us many more answers of the ancient times. But today, we focus on the delicate work of cataloging the discoveries that we do have,” she announces to the team. “Everything we find must be documented with precision. Remember, we’re not just digging up artifacts—we’re uncovering a legacy.” Chen Wei, holding a clipboard, listens intently. Since the beginning of the excavation, he has felt a growing sense of pride and purpose. He exchanges a quick glance with Xiaoyu, who smiles encouragingly. Despite the occasional challenges, their shared determination has only strengthened.

As the team begins their work, villagers gather once again near the fields, watching from a respectful distance. Some bring small offerings of food and water, while others share stories of what their elders had once told them about the land. One elderly villager steps forward, her voice soft but steady. “This place... it has always been special. We didn’t know why, but we could feel it. Now we understand.” Dr. Lin nods appreciatively, her voice carrying a rare warmth. “Your land has gifted us something extraordinary. We promise to treat it with the respect it deserves.” Not everyone, however, shares the same sentiment. Professor Zhang lingers at the edges of the site, his eyes sharp and calculating. While the team focuses on preserving the integrity of the excavation, his thoughts drift to the potential profit that could be reaped from such rare finds.

“This legacy talk is all well and good,” Zhang mutters under his breath, “but science and preservation require funding. And funding requires pragmatism.”

During lunch break, the team chats together about their wonderful findings. “This isn’t just a story about dinosaurs anymore,” Dr. Lin says to the team. “This is about the people who lived here, the lives they led, and how they coexisted with this ancient world.” Wei feels a swell of emotion as he listens. His fields, once dismissed as ordinary, have become a bridge to the past. For him, this is more than a discovery—it’s proof of the profound connection between the land and its people.

But as the day progresses, the growing divide between the team’s mission and Zhang’s intentions becomes more apparent. Beneath the surface of collaboration, a quiet tension simmers, threatening to fracture the delicate balance of their work. As they continue to unearth the past, the question looms: Whose legacy will this truly become?

I, a *Sinosauropteryx*, once a fleeting shadow in the vast sky, now lies in pieces, its story half-buried but never forgotten. The world has changed—the wind beneath our wings is gone and so are the forests we once called home. But our legacy has not been lost.

The hands of those who came after us have unearthed what was buried, their curiosity stirring the dust that has settled over our bones. They have come to hear the whispers of a world long passed. They will speak of the skies we soared through, and the land we once walked. Our time may have ended, but now our story begins again.

And for those who walked before us —the humans of this land, whose footprints have been erased by time—your presence is felt, too. The tools you left behind, the signs of your struggle, and the quiet traces of your hands mark this earth. You too lived here, fought to survive, and shaped the world in your own way. Though you are no longer here to witness it, your story will not be forgotten. Your lives, once lost, will be remembered in the bones and artifacts that speak of your strength.

We, both creature and human, have left our marks on this world, and now, through the hands of those who unearth us, our stories will be told. What was once hidden will now be revealed. Our stories are not just fossils, they are the bridges between what was and what is, between the ancient and the present. And we are grateful that our legacy, long buried, will live on in the hearts and minds of those who will tell it.

Echoes from the Earth: The Farmer's Fossil Adventure

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Khan, Saba Ali – 16

In the quiet fields of Liaoning, Li Wei spent his days doing what he always did—planting crops, taking care of his farm, and keeping his head down in his own business. He wasn't the kind of man to think about big mysteries or ancient history. He just wanted to get done with the day. But one morning, when his shovel hit something hard, he stopped. At first, he thought it was just a rock. But as he dug a little deeper, he realized it was something much stranger.

What if he had just ignored it? What if he had shrugged it off and kept working? But Li Wei was curious. And that small moment of curiosity changed everything. What he uncovered was the very first clearly feathered dinosaur—"Sinosauropteryx", or the "China dragon bird." Nobody could believe it at first. A dinosaur with feathers? It sounded ridiculous. For so long, people had thought of dinosaurs as scaly, terrifying beasts. Feathers? That was for birds. But there it was, right in Li Wei's field—proof that dinosaurs might have looked very different from what we had always imagined.

After that, Liaoning became the center of the fossil world. Scientists from all over the world came to dig in his very own field, and they kept finding more. Over 40 different kinds of dinosaurs were discovered in his area, along with 24 species of pterosaurs, those incredible flying reptiles. If

Liaoning had this many fossils, people started to wonder—what else could be buried in China’s soil?

And it wasn’t just Liaoning. In Jiangxi, paleontologists recently found a new species of “titanosaur”, one of the largest dinosaurs that ever lived. Just imagine it—this huge creature, walking through ancient forests millions of years ago. What if no one had ever thought to look for it? How many more amazing discoveries might still be waiting?

Li Wei didn’t know much about any of this. He wasn’t a scientist, and he didn’t care about fossils when he first found that strange shape in his field. But years later, as he stood there looking at the spot where it all started, he couldn’t help but feel proud. “I never thought I’d find a dragon in my field,” he said with a smug look on his face.

And maybe he was right to wonder—what else is still waiting to be found? China’s land is full of secrets, and every discovery tells a new story. Who knows what the next farmer, or the next shovel, will uncover?

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Kong, Hoi Lam – 15

“Chris! Come and read this dinosaur encyclopedia with your cousin!” Holding hands full of bargains bought from bookstores, my mother gave me the heaviest one, leaving me behind to play mahjong with relatives. “It is boring for me to learn about these ancient creatures in the new year, I want to have some fun as well!” I muttered. On the other hand, my cousin seemed to be curious and excited, so I decided to ignore him and lie on the sofa, letting him submerge himself in happiness.

Slowly had vagueness appeared in front of my vision, I found myself waking up in a forest.

The air was filled with a musty scent of moss. “Where...am I?” My shaky voice stuttered. Surrounded by dense canopies, I could barely sense any brightness. Suddenly, I felt multiple tremors, and soon the intensities grew like deep booms reverberating from the ground. I turned my head around, noticing a massive silhouette cutting through the bushes. It was a T-Rex! I could see its sharp teeth glinting in the dim light, and I could hear its deafening roars echoing through the towering trees! Panic surged through me as I observed its rough skin dotted with ridges and scales, with its sharp claws digging into the mud.

Run!

Despite the darkness ahead seemed to be endless, I strived to push myself forward, to cross countless dangerous thorns, determined to escape from the looming threat behind. My heartbeat matched with the increasing rhythm of the T-Rex’s heavy footsteps, the atmosphere became more tense.

“Ouch!” Unfortunately, I was tripped by a root. Perhaps I was still lost in fear, I did not realize the footsteps had already vanished, which were replaced by a long-lasting groan. The T-Rex was caught in the branches of a fallen tree, unable to move. While I felt relieved, a flicker of light caught my eye. As I moved closer, the trees parted to reveal an expansive clearing bathed under the sunlight.

In the centre, there were a few small dinosaurs with feathered bodies and long tails. Catching insects buzzing above the shimmering pond, the dinosaurs were agile and playful. Nearby, there were also tall herbivores grazing on the leaves, with some resting peacefully on the tender grass.

Mesmerised by the scene, I wondered: had I truly entered the Cretaceous world?

At this moment, one of the tiny dinosaurs in the pond approached me. Frightened by the dinosaur, I fell and quickly climbed away to keep a distance with it. Surprisingly, not only did it not attack me, but also circle around me excitedly. It turned out that dinosaurs were not that scary after all!

While I looked up, I saw an enormous figure that almost overshadowed the sky landed beside me. It was a winged reptile. The gentle flap of its wings created a warm breeze. Gathering my courage, I picked up a leaf and put it in front of the dinosaur. It lowered its neck to my level, biting the leaf away and rubbing its head against my side, much like a cat seeking affection. The texture was unexpectedly smooth! All of a sudden, the dinosaur grabbed my collar and tossed me onto his back.

“Help!” Just when I was not even steadied, the wings flapped again and created a gust of wind that nearly uprooted the grass around. Then, I grabbed tightly onto his back as it lifted itself into the air. The breathtaking scenery was an artwork of jungle adorned with river streams snaking through and distant mountains standing tall. Soon, it reached the ocean.

In the vast expanse of deep blue, where the horizon met the sky, there were gentle rolling of waves, and the lazy drifts of clouds. I truly could not find words to express my awe.

The winged reptile chirped, filling me with a sense of exhilaration. I shouted in response, blending my voice with its joyful cries. It was the time where I began to like dinosaurs!

The dinosaur started to accelerate downwards, my heart raced, mixed with thrill and fear. Just as it was about to splash the water surface, I jolted awake, bouncing back onto the sofa.

Reality flooded in around me, the dream fading like mist. I looked at my relatives, everyone was staring at me with a strange expression. Then I peeked at the encyclopaedia and saw its introduction about the world’s first clearly feathered dinosaur, which was *Sinosauropteryx*, the “China Dragon Bird”. Small in size, feathered bodies, and long tails... Isn’t that the dinosaur that approached me in the clearing? I shook my cousin’s shoulders, telling him my experience just now. While my mother came to calm me down and wanted to switch the television channels, there was a report about dinosaurs in China. “Recently, a new species of titanosaur was discovered in Jiangxi. Professionals say because China is less well-explored by pathologists, there’s much excitement about what will be found next.” Having curiosity bursts in enthusiasm, I kickstarted my journey in telling the amazing stories about ancient fossils...

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Kwong, Leann – 16

When the "DinoTruthers" started their viral livestream series "Exposing the Prehistoric Hoax," few expected it would lead to one of paleontology's most ironic discoveries. Led by former social media influencer Mike Hartley, the group gained notoriety after a heated Twitter exchange with Dr. Sarah Chen, a renowned paleontologist from Stanford University.

It all started when one of Mike Hartley's viral TikTok compilations that had made its way to Twitter. The video, titled "10 REASONS DINOSAURS ARE FAKE (Scientists HATE This!)", caught Dr. Chen's attention during her morning coffee.

@MikeHarveyyy: "You're telling me these giant lizards ruled the Earth for millions of years but I can't find a single bone in my backyard? Make it make sense! #DinosAreAHoax"

@DrSarahChen: "That's like saying you don't believe in ancient Rome because you can't find pottery shards in your garden. Fossilization requires specific conditions and occurs in particular geological formations."

@MikeHarveyyy: "Oh look, another 'expert' trying to lie in our faces! If dinosaurs were real, why do we only find them when paleontologists are looking? Convenient much? 🙄"

@DrSarahChen: "We find fossils where geological conditions are right for preservation. It's like asking why we only find fish in water. Would you like me to explain the fossilization process?"

The exchange heated up when followers and other members the group stepped in joined in:

@TruthSeeking476: "How much does Big Fossil pay you to keep lying, 'Dr.' Chen? 💰💰💰"

@SiennaKels: "Boooo! Your parents didn't pay for your school just so you can spread lies."

@Eddyisking: "Don't doctors take oaths? You can't lie!"

@SiennaKels: "Bro, you mean lawyers?"

@SiennaKels: "Also, she's not a real doctor. She just has a "doctorate" degree in some hoax subject."

@MikeHarveyyy: "Notice how they always want to 'explain' things with big words instead of showing us real proof! I've never seen a dinosaur, have you?"

@DrSarahChen: "You've never seen George Washington either, but I assume you believe he existed. Here's an open invitation: Come to our dig site. See the process yourself."

The turning point came when Hartley posted his "gotcha" moment:

@MikeHarveyyy: "If dinosaurs were real, explain why fossil fuel is called FOSSIL fuel but we don't find dinosaurs when drilling for oil! Checkmate, scientists! 🐞❌"

@DrSarahChen: "Fossil fuels primarily come from ancient plants and microorganisms, not dinosaurs. What you're doing is amplifying conspiracy thinking patterns and logical fallacies while removing scientific context and necessary nuance."

@MintChoc: "Girl woke up and chose blue pill. 🧑" "

@ThisIsKos: "Well, the thing is you guys reverse engineer a whole reptile from a few teeth. That isn't very scientific, or evidence—proof of you, is it?"

@DrSarahChen: Let me break this down using something we all understand – crime scene investigation. When detectives find a single fingerprint, they don't just identify the finger – they can match it to a specific person. Why? Because that fingerprint contains distinct patterns unique to that individual. Similarly, dinosaur teeth aren't just random rocks. They have specific structures, wear patterns, and composition that tell us exactly what kind of animal they came from. We're not "reverse engineering" – we're reading evidence, like a detective reading a crime scene.

@DrSarahChen: For example, a T-Rex tooth isn't just a big pointy rock. It has serrated edges (like a steak knife), specific curve angles, unique enamel patterns, and attachment points that ONLY make sense for a large predatory animal of specific dimensions. These aren't random guesses – they're based on biomechanics and comparative anatomy.

@ThisIsKos: "but you still can't be 100% sure"

@DrSarahChen: And we're not just finding teeth! That's a common misconception. We find complete or partial skeletons, fossilized skin impressions, eggs, footprints, and even occasionally preserved soft tissue. The teeth are just one piece of a much larger puzzle.

@DrSarahChen: We can also verify our conclusions through multiple independent methods: radiometric dating, geological context, comparative anatomy, and even molecular analysis. Each method confirms the others. It's not about making things up – it's about following evidence wherever it leads.

@DrSarahChen: [Replying to @ThisIsKos: "but you still can't be 100% sure"]

“Science isn't about 100% certainty – it's about following the best available evidence. We're as sure about dinosaur anatomy as we are about ancient Roman architecture or the existence of atoms – neither of which you can see directly, but both of which we can study through multiple lines of evidence.”

The thread accumulated over a million views and sparked numerous memes, particularly one of Hartley's quote "I've never seen a dinosaur" juxtaposed with various historical figures and concepts. The exchange was later referenced in multiple science communication workshops as both a cautionary tale and an example of how not to conduct scientific discourse on social media.

The group's core belief centered around the idea that dinosaur fossils were elaborate plants by governments and scientists to control the narrative of Earth's history. Their while gist was "If dinosaurs were real, why isn't everyone finding fossils in their backyard?”.

Drawing inspiration from the flat earthers, who has previously made headlines for live-streaming an experiment gone wrong, one that proved their opposition right and themselves wrong, they decided they were going to follow suit. Not to clown themselves, no, they were simply confident in their ideology. Determined to prove their point, they launched a crowdfunded project to conduct random deep excavations worldwide.

“Thank you for the donations guys!” Mint exclaimed.

“We are happy to say we have reached our goal in two days,” gushed Eddy, “You guys are the best!”

“We are so glad people are finally waking up to the evil control of the higher power,” added Mike, “together, we will take them down.” He further growled, “No matter what it takes.”

The group screamed in unison, “No matter what it takes.”

The comment section flooded with comments, some inconspicuous, some rational, and suprisingly, a lot of mindless agreements. The group had their first taste of real fame when people on Twitter began reposting clips from their livestream. It went viral. Numbers were off the roof. Most netizens, however, weren't pleased. But many took light of the situation, poking fun at how ridiculous the situation and questioning whether education is illegal where they grew up. Others were quick to point out that ordinary people all around the world has, in fact, discovered dinosaur fossils in random places, linking multiple articles to educate the group. However, this was dismissed by the group as they were just paid actors. Fans of the group, on the other hand, were delighted, praising the group for being courageous and undeterred, some even going as far as coining them as role models.

Some particularly enthusiastic fans have even started speculating where the group will go first, even taking the time to analyse their livestreams and personal social media profiles. With a little bit of work, these internet sleuths successfully found the state the group resides in. Soon enough, maps of America with a probability of which state is most likely to get visited started floating online. In case you were curious, Iowa and Montana were the winning candidates. While the group originally initially planned to dig in remote areas of Nevada and Montana, they made a last-minute decision to begin their search in China's Jiangxi Province, believing they would "catch the conspirators off guard."

After a whole day of travel with layovers and long drives, the group decided to take a good rest before executing their perfect plan to uncovering the biggest lie of the century.

“1...2...3... And we’re live.”

“Good morning everyone! Mike Harvey here with Eddy, Sienna, Kos, and Mint.”

“Hey guys!”

“So, let’s cut the nonsense. Today, I will read you a very well-written, sophisticated article that the higher power tried to suppress.”

“But of course, we, DinoTruthers, dug it out from the bottom of the internet to help you uncover the truth,” Eddy added.

Sienna clears her voice, “So, here we go.”

“The Dinosaur Debate: A Critical Examination of Questionable Claims

The sudden emergence of dinosaur discoveries in the 1800s raises compelling questions about their authenticity. Prior to this period, no civilizations, ancient societies, or indigenous peoples around the world had documented any of these supposedly massive creatures in their historical records. This universal absence across all cultures clearly indicates a troubling gap in the dinosaur narrative.

The timing of these discoveries coincidentally aligned with the rise of paleontology as a field of study, leading to an unprecedented surge in fossil findings across multiple continents. It is evident that this surge conveniently occurred just as museums needed spectacular exhibits to attract paying visitors.

The reconstruction methodology of these creatures relies heavily on fragmentary evidence. In numerous cases, entire species have been theorized based on minimal dental remains. The practice of extrapolating complete anatomical structures from limited fossil evidence demonstrates the excessive creative liberty taken by paleontologists. One must question how a few teeth can definitively prove the existence of creatures as fantastical as those displayed in museums.

Modern creatures such as birds, alligators, and crocodiles share skeletal similarities with proposed dinosaur reconstructions. This observation undoubtedly proves that discovered fossils are merely variations of existing species rather than extinct prehistoric creatures. The simplest explanation is usually the correct one.

The absence of dinosaurs from various religious texts and historical documents spanning thousands of years of human civilization presents another indisputable proof. If such magnificent creatures had existed, they would certainly have been mentioned in ancient texts. This notable omission from humanity's recorded history, combined with the relatively recent nature of dinosaur discoveries, can lead any rational person to only one conclusion.

While the scientific establishment continues to promote its interpretation, the evidence clearly points to a different reality. The fact that the field of dinosaur paleontology emerged during the industrial revolution, when institutions needed new ways to maintain public interest and secure funding, cannot be ignored. The timing and circumstances surrounding these discoveries paint a clear picture for those willing to see it.

In conclusion, while many continue to accept the mainstream narrative without question, the careful examination of historical patterns reveals that the dinosaur phenomenon warrants far more skepticism than it currently receives. The truth is hiding in plain sight for those bold enough to acknowledge it.”

“Thank you Si. As you all heard, truthful scientists have pointed out these lies that we are sold. Yet somehow these articles always sink to the bottom of the internet.”

“Hmm. I wonder how?” Mint said with a mouthful of sarcasm.

Kos chimed in, “I mean think for yourselves, No pre-1800s discoveries, worldwide “findings” suddenly appearing, entire creatures built from a minimal evidence, no historical records from ancient civilizations, and conveniently supports big industry narratives? The answer is obvious.”

“That is why today we will be digging a 1-kilometre deep hole to prove ‘em wrong!”

“Oh, yea!”

“Eddie, would you trust someone who showed you a few teeth and said, “This belonged to a 50-foot lizard?”

“Of course not!”

“Exactl—”

“And here's the biggest red pill of all: They want you to believe these creatures lived MILLIONS of years ago. But notice how this conveniently fits their agenda of undermining traditional beliefs? They're using these fake bones to push their own narrative about Earth's history!” interrupts Eddy.

Sienna and Kos posted a selfie of the excavation site along with caption, “Think about this: For thousands of years of human history, not a single person ever found a dinosaur bone. Not one! Ancient civilizations built pyramids, created advanced mathematics, and mapped the stars, but somehow never stumbled across these supposedly “massive creatures”?”

Then, the group dug away. On day three of their expedition, during which Mike was explaining how “big paleontology” manufactured fake bones, their excavation team hit something remarkable. The irony was palpable as they uncovered what would later be identified as a previously unknown species of titanosaur, estimated to be around 100 million years old. The live chat exploded as viewers watched Hartley's face transition from triumphant certainty to confused disbelief. His final words, “This isn't... this can't be...” became an instant meme. Despite his attempts to suggest the fossils were planted, the unplanned nature of their location choice and the live documentation of the entire dig made their claims impossible to maintain.

Ironically, Dr. Chen was called to authenticate the titanosaur fossils discovered by the group in Jiangxi, leading to her gracious tweet: “Sometimes the best way to prove someone wrong is to let them prove it themselves. Welcome to paleontology, @MikeHarveyyy”

But Mike wasn’t going down without a fight. He sat alone in his hotel room that night, staring at his phone as notifications flooded in. His carefully constructed worldview was crumbling, but his ego wouldn't let him admit it publicly. “They must have known somehow. They must have...” he muttered, trying to convince himself. But deep down, a voice he'd long suppressed whispered that maybe, just maybe, his desperate need to prove everyone wrong came from a place of wanting to feel special, to stand out in a world that had often overlooked him.

Eddy paced back and forth in the lobby, torn between his loyalty to Mike and the undeniable evidence before him. He had always found comfort in following Mike's lead, but now found himself at a crossroads. "What if we spin this?" he suggested desperately to no one in particular. "Say we discovered a government secret facility?" But even as the words left his mouth, he knew he was just grasping at straws, trying to maintain his relevance in a narrative that was quickly unraveling.

Sienna hadn't left her room since the discovery. Her social media accounts, usually buzzing with activity, fell silent, a stark contrast to her usual presence. The validation she'd found in the community's acceptance was slipping away, forcing her to confront her own insecurities. "If we were wrong about this," she texted Kos, "what else have I been wrong about?" She found herself in an unexpected crisis of identity. Her previous mockery of academic credentials haunted her as she secretly began reading Dr. Chen's published papers. The same fingers that had typed dismissive tweets now traced diagrams of fossil formations with growing fascination.

Kos sat in the hotel's coffee shop, methodically writing down everything they'd observed during the dig. Despite being part of the group, he had always approached their theories with a hint of skepticism, though he'd never voiced it openly. Now, facing the irrefutable evidence, he felt a strange mix of embarrassment and relief. His logical mind was finally aligning with reality, and it felt oddly liberating.

Mint, meanwhile, seemed almost unaffected by the whole ordeal, scrolling through TikTok while eating room service fries. "Wild how things turn out sometimes," he mused to himself, already thinking about what trend to jump on next. His disconnection from the gravity of the situation was both her shield and her limitation.

The group gathered one last time in Mike's room, the tension palpable. Their shared delusion had brought them together, but reality was now pushing them apart. Each wrestled with their own version of the truth. It was their own way of processing the unexpected turn of events. The cameras were off, but their personal reckonings were just beginning.

Kos, Sienna, and Mint left the group, leaving behind only Mike and Eddy. Despite the undeniable evidence, they clung desperately to the fraying edges of their conspiracy, much like a threatened lizard grips its tail before shedding it to escape. Unaware that, like that sacrificial tail, their beliefs would need to be left behind for their own growth. The irony of their predicament – desperately holding onto a conspiracy about extinct reptiles while mirroring the very defense mechanism of modern ones – was lost on them.

To fight their stubbornness, Dr Chen challenged them to sit in her lectures and find inconsistencies. One semester later, both retired influences admitted that they were wrong and palaeontology is not a hoax.

Here's a more detailed version:

Dr. Chen's challenge came as a surprise to everyone – an open invitation to Mike and Eddy to audit her undergraduate paleontology course at Stanford. "If you're so convinced we're fabricating evidence," she wrote in a public post, "come see how we actually work. No strings attached. Challenge every assumption. Question every method."

The first few lectures were tense. Mike sat in the back row, arms crossed, filming everything on his phone, certain he'd catch someone slipping up. Eddy took notes, frantically searching for contradictions. All while their followers waited eagerly for "expose" videos that never came.

As weeks passed, the transformation was subtle but unmistakable. Mike stopped interrupting lectures with "gotcha" questions and started listening humbly. The turning point came during a hands-on laboratory session where they personally examined fossilized specimens under microscopes, seeing the intricate details that couldn't possibly have been fabricated.

By mid-semester, Mike's signature skepticism had evolved into genuine curiosity. The same passion he'd once poured into debunking paleontology now fueled his understanding of it. Eddy, freed from the pressure of maintaining their conspiracy narrative, too discovered a genuine love for paleobotany.

Their final public statement wasn't a dramatic confession, but rather a thoughtful reflection posted on their shared social media accounts: "We came looking for lies and found truth instead. Sometimes the biggest hoax is the one we tell ourselves when we're afraid to admit we might be wrong." The post included a photo of them with Dr. Chen, all three holding a recently cleaned Hadrosaur vertebra, their faces showing not defeat, but discovery.

The semester ended with an unexpected epilogue: both Mike and Eddy enrolled in formal geology courses for the following term, their former followers either drifting away or, in some cases, joining them in their new pursuit of actual scientific understanding.

The fossil found turned out to be a newly discovered species, later named *Discooperaptops*. It now resides in the Jiangxi Museum of Natural History, with a plaque that reads, "Sometimes the truth finds you, even when you're looking for something else entirely."

The Farmer's Fossil

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lee, Chun Yan Daniel – 16

From as far as I remember, my father had long been a passionate fossil lover. He would often take me on a trip to search for ancient fossils, and we would go around to uncover fascinating sea shell fossils that I found fascinating. After he passed away when I was 16, I tried to continue his passion on my own, but I never succeeded in discovering anything. In order to make the ends meet, I have become a farmer to support my family.

Around May 1996, with the aim to improve my family's finances, I decided to secretly expand my farmland without my neighbour's permission. One day, while digging in the new area, I heard an unusual cracking sound underneath. At first, I thought it was just a rock, but after some digging, I realized it was something different. Remembering when I was young, I found it puzzling when I saw my father licking the rock. Understanding my confusion, he explained that rock with fossils is slightly more sticky than a normal stone. Based on my father's advice, I leaned down and licked the stone. To my surprise, it was sticky, suggesting it could be a fossil.

Overwhelmed with excitement, I had been digging in that spot for a few weeks. Until the landowner, Mr. Liu noticed my secret mission and questioned me. "What are you doing on my land?" he demanded. "I found something important," I explained, trying not to act too excitedly. "It may be a fossil, but I didn't want to disturb you until I was sure." Mr. Liu's eyes filled with suspicion and greed. "A fossil? That could be worth a lot of money. But this is my land, and you have no right to be here."

I did not want to quit and was getting desperate to continue my work, so I proposed a deal. "If you let me stay and extract the fossil, we will split the money from its sale as it is worth at least half a million dollars. However, if you directly report to the government, you may not get any compensation from the government as they would treat the

fossil as belonging to the government." Mr. Liu considered for a moment before agreeing. "Fine, but I can't wait forever. I expect results soon."

No longer I needed to proceed secretly. My neighbour and I decided to set up a large tent to protect the fossil from rains and winds. Also, Mr. Liu provided me with food and drinks for weeks, so as to inspect the progress of extraction. Initially, he was patient, checking once in a while to see if I needed anything. But as time passed, his patience wore thin.

One afternoon, I continued to work on the fossil site. "Why is this taking so long? I need that money now.", Mr. Liu stormed into the tent, his frustration showing on his face, "My family is struggling, and I can't afford to wait any longer." I tried to explain calmly, "extracting a fossil is a delicate process. we might damage it and lose everything if we rush." But Mr. Liu's voice only grew louder and louder, "I think you're just trying to trick me. Maybe you're stealing my crops while I'm not looking. I don't care, if you are unable to finish soon, I'll call the authorities and have them to take over."

His disbelief hurt me, and I explained, "I'm not a thief, Mr. Liu. I'm doing my best to ensure we both benefit from this discovery. This isn't just about money for me; it's about continuing my father's legacy." Our argument escalated, none of us took a step back. But Mr. Liu knew that he might get nothing if he turned us in now. Eventually, we reached an agreement: I would need to work faster, but Mr. Liu would have to show more respect and patience.

Up till July 1996, we were able to reveal there was a wing structure. Mr Liu and I suspected it was an ancient bird but we had no expertise to identify the fossil's true nature. Day by day, we were able to uncover more details of this ancient creature. For one second, we jokingly claimed we had a dinosaur fossil, which may be worth even more. But this was a slender hope as there were very few dinosaurs found in China before.

As word of our discovery spread, in August 1996, our work attracted the attention of paleontologists from the National Geological Museum in Beijing and the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Paleontology. Their professionals visited our farmland, and they were eager to identify the nature of the creature. The professionals asked a lot of questions and documented every detail, from the wing structures to the unique tail. Their expertise confirmed our suspicions of its fossil nature. But who would have ever thought we had discovered the very first dinosaur fossil with feather-like structures on its body. They even gave the creature a name, a *Sinosauropteryx*, a small theropod dinosaur that lived about 125 million years ago.

To my surprise, my humble life as a farmer took an unexpected turn as the discovery made headlines worldwide. My neighbour and I decided to sell the fossil separately in order to get more money. Mr. Liu chose to sell it to the National Geological Museum in Beijing whereas I decided to sell it to the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Paleontology. I am astonished that not only did our discovery to be one of its kind, but also the sale provided my family with financial stability, so that I can continue to discover more fossils in our motherland.

Beginning from here, China has started a new journey of fossil hunting. More than 40 species are found in Liaoning . As a country that is less well explored than the others, there are more to be found in China. Most palaeontologists put in all effort to find dinosaur fossils in China in order to improve their lifestyle.

The Last Flight of the Pterosaur

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lee, Sum Yau Sharon – 15

In the lush valleys of Yunnan Province, where the mountains towered above and rivers snaked through dense forests, lived a young girl named Ailin. She was known throughout her village for her adventurous spirit and her dreams of discovery. Every evening, she would sit by the river, sketching the landscapes around her, but her heart yearned for something more—something ancient.

One day, while exploring the edges of the forest, Ailin stumbled upon a hidden cave. The entrance was partially concealed by thick vines and moss. Intrigued, she pushed aside the foliage and stepped inside. The cave was dark and cool, and as her eyes adjusted, she noticed strange markings on the walls, depicting magnificent creatures soaring through the skies.

As she ventured deeper, Ailin felt a strange pull, as if the cave was alive with the echoes of the past. Suddenly, she tripped over something buried in the ground. Brushing away the dirt, she uncovered the fossilized remains of a pterosaur—a creature she had only seen in her books. Its wings were outstretched, frozen in time, as if it had once been a guardian of the skies.

Excited, Ailin decided to visit the cave every day, documenting her findings and sketching the fossil. With each visit, she could almost hear the whispers of the pterosaur, urging her to learn more about its world. One day, as she sat sketching, a soft breeze flowed through the cave, carrying with it a gentle melody that resonated deep within her.

Ailin closed her eyes and let the sound wash over her. In that moment, she was transported to a vibrant prehistoric landscape. The skies were alive with the flapping of wings as pterosaurs soared above, their silhouettes dancing against the sun. She felt the thrill of flight, the wind rushing past her as she joined them in the air.

In this vision, Ailin saw a majestic pterosaur, larger than the rest, leading a group of young ones. It was teaching them how to hunt and navigate the skies. As she watched, she felt a deep connection to the leader, as though they shared a bond that transcended time.

When Ailin returned to the cave, she was filled with a sense of purpose. She realized that the pterosaur's legacy was not just about its physical remains but about the stories of survival and community it represented. Inspired, she set out to educate her village about the significance of the pterosaur and the ancient world it inhabited.

Ailin organized gatherings by the river, sharing her sketches and stories of her adventures in the cave. She spoke passionately about the pterosaur and its role in the ecosystem, urging her friends and family to appreciate the natural world around them. The villagers listened, their imaginations ignited by her words.

As word spread, more villagers began to visit the cave, captivated by Ailin's discoveries. They helped her clean the area, ensuring the fossil remained protected. Together, they built a small shrine dedicated to the pterosaur, honoring its spirit and the lessons it imparted.

One evening, as the sun dipped below the horizon, Ailin returned to the cave for a final visit. Sitting by the fossil, she closed her eyes and listened to the melody that had guided her before. This time, it felt different—more urgent. She sensed the presence of the pterosaur, its spirit inviting her to take one last flight.

With a deep breath, Ailin opened her eyes and envisioned herself soaring alongside the majestic creature. In her mind, she flew above the valleys and mountains, feeling the exhilaration of freedom. As they glided through the sky, she knew that the connection she felt was eternal—a bond between her and the ancient world.

When she returned to her village, Ailin felt transformed. She had not only uncovered the story of the pterosaur but had also forged a deeper connection with her own world. The villagers embraced her vision, and together they committed to protecting their environment, ensuring that the echoes of the past would resonate for generations to come.

As years passed, Ailin became a renowned paleontologist, dedicated to preserving the history of the Earth's ancient creatures. But every so often, she would return to the cave, where the spirit of the pterosaur awaited, reminding her of the beauty of flight and the importance of sharing their stories.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lo, Tsz Ching – 16

In our cognition, dinosaurs are an enormous, fierce and malicious species. Most of them are carnivores. They have a huge body, sharp claws and sharp teeth, which help them to catch prey, being the top of the food chain more than hundreds of millions of years ago. However, this previous world hegemon was completely extinct 66 million years ago, the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event. No more dinosaurs in the world. Mammals and birds became the dominant animals of the new generation, and here comes modern, human becomes the top of the food chain.

“That's impossible! Dinosaurs haven't gone extinct completely yet! There are still dinosaurs in the world! Right now! At this moment!” An old man yelled to the researchers. “They are still alive! Living over there!” The man pointed outside the window, shiveringly. Researchers looked at it, and laughed, “Don’t be silly, old fellow. According to our research, dinosaurs went extinct completely 66 million years ago. There’s no dinosaurs.” “No! There is! I’ve heard the sound before! That’s the dinosaurs howling!” “I think you should see a doctor and check your brain.”

No one believed what the man said. They thought he was just joking, but what they didn’t know is there’s eyes staring at them from the beginning to the end.

As the night fell, in this thickly forested mountain, researchers lost their way. The wind blew heavily, everyone felt cold. Luckily there was a cave. They ran into the cave and planned to rest for one night there.

Inside the cave, it was so dark. They could not see the end of the cave. Entering deeper into the cave, they even could not distinguish the direction. At the same time, a heavy breathing sound passed into their ears. They were scared, which made their body start to tremble uncontrollably. They stood there, closed their eyes, and dared not to move.

Time passed by, a man opened his eyes cautiously. Even though he was scared, he was curious about the unknown in front of them. He found a touch in his bag. Turned on the touch, the cave instantly brightened a bit. He used the touch to light the floor in front. There's some huge, white stuff. Looked closely, carefully, they found that those were the fossils of the dinosaurs! "It's dinosaurs' fossils! It's dinosaurs' fossils!" That's a big surprise. They tended to dig the fossils for research immediately. While they were digging, a sharp claw stretched out in the dark. It grabbed one of the researchers. Squeezing slightly, that person immediately turned into a pile of meat. Its claw was full of blood.

"It's a dinosaur, a real dinosaur!" The one standing next to that person screamed loudly. He saw the whole thing. "Run!" Everyone shouted and screamed, running around, finding the exit in order to escape. Although they ran as fast as they could, the dinosaur caught them easily. In the view of the dinosaur, humans are just like an ant, tiny and weak. They had nowhere to hide. They could only be its meal.

"Hello sir. Have you ever seen these people before?" A group of young people came, pointed to the people in the picture and asked the old man. "Don't go over there. It's too dangerous. There's dinosaurs, dinosaurs!" "Well sir, we are here to find our teammates. They are lost for a week. Apart from that, sir, there's no dinosaurs in this day and age. They've gone extinct completely already! Don't be silly." A boy answered the man. The man pointed outside the window, serenely, "Don't go over there. The dinosaurs were living there. They howled last week." A girl sneered at the man, "I think you should see a doctor and check your brain."

They left the old man's home, went straight to the direction where the old man pointed. The man looked at their back, sighed, "It's the tenth time."

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lok, Yiu Louie – 16

Hi, my name is Chris and you may have heard of me on the news. I was born in Fujian which is located to the southeast of Jiangxi, where I discovered a new species of titanosaur — Jiangxititan ganzhouensis.

When I was younger, I never once believed that dinosaurs were real. Though I have always doubted the rumours which went around, I never stopped researching about them. I have visited many museums about dinosaurs from various countries around the world, and to me? They all looked like they were made of recycled materials.

A few months ago, I went to Jiangxi to visit my relatives, they told me there was something they wanted me to take a look at. It was a discovery site which is more associated with sedimentary rock formations. When we arrived, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was the most appealing pile of sedimentary rocks I've ever seen along with the sunrise behind the whole view. We went for a hike around the site, it took about 3 to 4 hours until something finally caught my eyes.

I thought to myself, there is no way I'm not dreaming right now. It can't be possible that the rumours were true right? There is no way those things dominated the world for over 140 million years! My jaw dropped as I saw a massive fossil rib looking thing. I immediately called my relatives to walk faster so they could see it too. As the climate has been changing for the past weeks, the sedimentary rocks were very soft and weak. Whilst my relatives walked closer toward me, the sedimentary rock started breaking down forming into a new and smaller version of

itself, that allowed me to have a better look of the fossil that I saw. It was so vast to the point I was blocked, it was a cervical rib that I saw. I was so invested so I started touching and scratching the rocks with a dollar I took out from my wallet, hoping I could find something more promising, and to my surprise? I ended up scratching even more parts of the fossil, at first I didn't know what it was until my uncle ran over and said "oh my god, isn't that the dorsal vertebrae and dorsal ribs of a dinosaur??"

I quickly went online to figure out what type of dinosaur it was, I have never once in my life seen such a big dinosaur fossil, not even in museums! Me and my uncle, we couldn't believe it, did we just discover a new species of dinosaur? As a matter of fact, we did! We quickly called the paleontologists near the site and described what we saw. The paleontologists were stunned by how enormous the dinosaur seemed to be from our explanation and didn't believe us so we waited for a while for them to arrive.

The paleontologists took the fossil back to their lab and started examining the fossils left behind. It was shocking for all of us to find out that this dinosaur species was not known to mankind and that I have just discovered a new species of titanosaur! After a few weeks of inspection, the palaeontologists found out that it was a Jiangxititan ganzhouensis? I never heard of that either. They contacted the reporters in China and I got on the news to talk about the discovery! It was surreal, if I told my younger self about this, I would've probably thought it was counterfeit.

That's my story, how I started believing in dinosaurs and doing research.

Theosaurus: A Discovery in the Depths of Sichuan

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Pang, Chung Yin – 15

In the valleys of the Sichuan province, a team of paleontologists prepared for an expedition that would change everything. The aim was to check strange fossil finds in those parts of the region which were passed over by every researcher. They were ecstatic at the possibility of a new kind of dinosaur.

It was led by Dr. Mary Smith, a paleontologist who enjoyed nothing more than uncovering the secrets of the past. She had spent many years studying remains of dinosaurs, deciphering a story that lay hidden in bones and fossils. As they were setting up the base camp, she felt very strongly that something extraordinary was in store for them.

They had spent the first day surveying. The team hiked across rough terrain, scanning the ground for signs of fossils. The sun was low in the sky, casting a long shadow across the rocky landscape. The thing that caught her attention now—a peculiarity in the earth, a rise with a weird shape—was the reason her heart quickly pounded in her chest. 'Over here,' she called.

They gathered around the formation, carefully brushing away layers of dirt. Great curving bones, which they had never seen before, began to emerge in front of them. Dr. Smith's excitement grew as she recognized the astonishing signs of a dinosaur. Of course, the huge, well-preserved bones showed that this creature was some sort of huge predator.

Continuing the excavation, they found more fragments: ribs, vertebrae, and even a piece of the skull. Every fragment was well documented, and in Dr. Smith's mind, the possibilities kept popping out: is it some new species of dinosaur, what did it eat, in which era did it live?

Days went by, then weeks, until almost all the pieces were discovered. The fragments all pieced together by Dr. Smith together showed the skeleton. They find a new species of dinosaur that wasn't documented. Since this new species was discovered, one of the team members happened to be a very hardworking boy throughout the excavation, so they decided to name it Theosaurus. Theosaurus differed from many other known species by a distinctive feature showing its adaptation and way of life. It was thought to be a massive predator, ruling its ecosystem with agility and strength combined.

Finally, after a long period of research and analysis, Dr. Smith stood before an audience of fellow paleontologists at a conference, her heart swelling with pride. "We have found a new species of dinosaur," she said. "We have named it Theosaurus, and its fossils will be donated to the National Dinosaur Museum in Beijing!"

An erupting applause filled the auditorium, while Dr. Smith simply couldn't rein in her beaming glories. The discovery of Theosaurus just not only enriched knowledge about dinosaur development but also simultaneously provoked further study in the region.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Ting, Wei – 15

It is almost inevitable that great people with large contributions are unappreciated in their time. Creatives such as Van Gogh, J.S. Bach, and Franz Kafka were not widely recognised for their extraordinaire until centuries later. Perhaps it was because they were ahead of their time. In a world where society is not ready for such forward creation or discovery, the curious are shunned and dismissed by those around them. Such is the tragedy of those who possess a monstrous wonder to life and a strong determination to make breakthroughs all around the world, in all fields of study.

In the 1990s, a farmer in China discovered the world's very first distinctly feathered dinosaur, the *Sinosauropteryx*. But paleontology in China had always existed long before this discovery. In ancient China, where commoners believed in folklore more than science, palaeontologists of that time were situated in a difficult predicament in which they faced skepticism and suspicion.

Yang Zhongjian, though now often referred to as the 'Father of Chinese Vertebrate Palaeontology', must've had a tough time going against the current of belief and tradition of his country. Though not much is known about the man, here is a reimagining of his legacy.

Debris was scattered all around the village. Muddy water remained in the indented path the people walked on. Atop of the water surface, rocks, wood chips, and broken bricks floated quietly. Villagers were rummaging through the endless rubble for something or someone. All the people of Yuxian village were restless after the irreversible destruction done to their home. Alas, the prophecy proved itself to be true.

In the quaint yet lively village of Yuxian lived a small old lady who stood with a slouch as most elderly people are. Despite her unassuming stature, she was the village Prophet, making her a person of importance in the village. She rose in power not because of her background but for her word. She would spread the tale of a fearsome dragon that used to roam the mountains and lay where the village was built. This story had been passed down for many decades by the Prophet, a villager chosen by the previous one to continue the dragon's tale.

"Elder Rui, please give me advice for my marriage. You are the prophet, the dragon's witness! I would be eternally grateful if you give me your word!" A villager pleaded. Others began to crowd around them. The prophet felt rather satisfied after hearing such praise.

She cleared her throat and said, "My best advice would be to protect her from what will happen soon."

A dramatic pause. "There is a tale that a disaster will come upon us and our land soon. My predecessors have told me – the dragon has cursed us in its wrath, for us to be subjected to damnation for many years to come. Such a disaster will happen every fifteen years. Now is the time. Prepare yourselves, fix your houses. The calamity is unavoidable."

The crowd erupted into concerned murmurs. What would be of the village? In a faraway corner, a man stood. As he listened to the tale, his mind began to spiral. The man was of fine complexion. He had dark hair and a defined nose. Bronze-rimmed glasses made him look like an intellectual. His attire was smart and he held a leather-bound book. He looked awfully out of place in the isolated village. The man was Yang Zhongjian. As he was returning to his old home to visit his parents, the dragon's myth intrigued him greatly, halting him in his tracks. *I ought to know the origin of this tale*, he thought. A typical palaeontologist's reaction.

Ignoring the mess of the village, Zhongjian decided to go near the riverbank for some peace and quiet. He had been staying in the village for a few weeks now. He had tried to ask for more...details about the dragon. Yet Elder Rui was unable to provide concrete answers. She had even begun to grow wary of him.

"You dare question my authority?" She said to him where no one was around. "If you ask more questions, I'm going to think that you're trying to steal my place. It won't end well for you." She threatened. *She's an entirely different person behind closed doors*, he thought to himself.

So, the interrogation had to stop. Zhongjian sighed to himself. As he was walking to the riverbank, he stepped onto something hard. He cursed silently before looking down, only to be shocked by what he saw.

On the muddy area near the riverbank seemed to be a corner of a bone. His eyes widened in surprise before kneeling down to feel the unknown object. Sure enough, it wasn't a human bone. He pulled the bone out of the mud and rinsed it with river water. The curved bone was pointy at the end with multiple segments. It looked like a piece of bent bamboo. Zhongjian looked upon it closely. He had never seen this type of bone back at the university. *Could this be...* his train of thought was interrupted by a large slosh of water. He looked around and realised that this part of the village hadn't been here before. The floor was slippery and wet. It didn't take long for him to come to the conclusion that the probable fossil site had just been uncovered by the flood. He quickly got to work and began

searching for any other fossils underneath the muddy sediment. *Unbelievable. This is a completely new species! I have never seen such fossils. This would make a huge breakthrough in history*, he thought with glee.

Suddenly, he thought of the dragon's myth and soon, it all began to make sense. "Does Elder Rui know more than she's letting on?" He mused to himself quietly. As he continued searching, he was not surprised to find more fossils, but the discovery of large footprints was certainly out of his expectations. *These dinosaur footprints and bones must have been what the ancestors thought were remains of the dragon.*

Zhongjian left the newly found fossil site with pride swelling in his chest. He would present his findings to the villagers, and Elder Rui first thing in the morning, as well as to the university once he returned.

He recalls Elder Rui's disgruntled gaze and alongside his pride, worry rose upon his heart. As he walks home, he silently prays for acceptance by the people.

He clapped his hands together to grasp the attention of the villagers in front of him. "Good day everyone, I would like to use this opportunity to talk about my recent discoveries in the village and how I think it relates to the dragon's tale."

The crowd looked at him expectantly. "Elder Rui, if you could grace me by listening to what I have to say." He dipped his head slightly, just enough to show a smidge of faux respect.

Zhongjian went on to explain how he was a paleontologist who studied at Peking University. "I have recently discovered some bone fossils in the village area and I believe that the dragon that our village believes in was, in fact, remnants of the dinosaurs that used to live here."

Gasps could be heard from the crowd, but Zhongjian paid no attention to it. "These fossils are likely to be from an unknown species of dinosaurs. The bones and footprints I have found do resemble the past Prophets' descriptions of the dragon. Dinosaurs are creatures that existed millions of years before us. This reveals a lot about where the myth came from. The dragon perhaps never existed – it was the occurrence of natural events that led to the myth, the dinosaurs."

Among the crowd he spotted his parents. His mother had a slight frown on her face. It was an understandable expression considering her son had gone against the traditional folklore the village has upheld for decades. He was offending all the Prophets and the current one. His father was smiling at him. He wondered if that was a smile of pride and prayed that it was.

He quickly realised the crowd was silent. The silence was deafening. That was, until Elder Rui spoke up. "Nonsense! The myth has been passed down for nearly a century. Surely the dragon's curse is real, it has punished us with a disaster every fifteen years! Was the flood just a few days ago not enough evidence for you? Whatever you are speaking of, it is untrue!" Her voice was shrill and powerful. Slightly agitating, if you asked him, but her power as the chief and prophet was undeniable.

Zhongjian gave a deep sigh. He should've expected this. Yuxian was not a progressive place. Villagers trusted in folklore more than science. He supposed that he needed to prove himself to get the support of the people. As expected, most people stuck to Elder Rui's traditional thinking. *You can't change their minds in a day...* he thought to himself.

Lost in thought, Zhongjian did not hear his parents walking towards him. "Son, we'll support you! Don't give up on persuading others, you can do it one day." His mother reassured him.

“I never liked that old hag anyway. You’ll surely convince everyone else to back you up, I’m sure of it.” His father’s words made him laugh. And then, a lightbulb went off in his head, and he realised something crucial.

He *had* to show the villagers the fossil site. That would support his statement. Perhaps even bring his own studies from the university! The palaeontologist rushed back to the riverbank to revisit the fossil site and find more evidence. He tried hard to connect the dots between these creatures and the origin of the myth. He wasn’t sure if a disaster happened 15 years ago when he still lived in the village.

He saw a villager nearby. He remembered the man. The man was his neighbour when he was a young child. “Hello sir, do you know anything about a natural disaster fifteen years ago?”

“Ah, Zhongjian! Long time no see, boy. you were five years old at the time, so you probably don’t remember, but a festival was held instead of a disaster to honour the dragon and prevent its wrath. Rui Ling had only become Prophet eleven years ago, so this is the first disaster to come upon us. And what can we do even if we don’t believe her?” He ended with a chuckle.

“I see. Thank you for the information, I’ll make sure to repay you!” He said cheerfully, but his mind was racing. *This changes everything. It not only means that each Prophet has a different saying but also shows that the Prophet can say anything and people will believe it. The situation is out of hand for sure.*

He went to the fossil site and uncovered a few more fossils. There was a dinosaur skull in the brown sediment, which he picked up right away, but something else caught his eye.

Collapsed blocks of cement laid at the end of the river. He looks at it closely before recalling a memory.

“Son, don’t stay for long. It’s dangerous here with so much cement and rock.” His father hushed. Zhongjian watched as his father and some other men moved to build a barrier near the riverbank.

“Dad, why are you here then? You should go home if it’s dangerous. Come home with me to see mom!” He said. He was six years old.

“It is for the safety of our village, son. The Prophet said that those helping out with building this barrier would be rewarded. You know your mother needs it. She is bedridden and ill. Don’t worry about me.” His father said.

Zhongjian finally figured it out.

The next week, he hurried to call the village people for a community meeting near the fossil site. “Everyone, these are the fossils I’ve uncovered over the past three days. I have pieced it together and as you can see, it is a dinosaur from prehistoric times. I believe our ancestors saw these fossils and, without knowing what a dinosaur was, falsely believed it to be a dragon.”

“I’m not trying to say that the folklore that our village believes in is entirely fake. It is part of our culture and is a valuable part of our community. All I ask is for you all to embrace science and nature into our culture.”

Zhongjian began to pull out his studies from the university and explained to the interested villagers passionately. The people looked at the sparkle in his eyes and enthusiastic expression, and were indubitably moved by his devotion to the field of study. Perhaps a new era was to begin for Yuxian village after all.

Elder Rui looked upon the villagers that often asked Zhongjian questions about dinosaurs. She remembers vividly how he was explaining his research to the villagers, and realised that he wasn't a threat, but was simply trying to help the village learn more about the world.

He awfully resembled her son. Rebellious, persevering, passionate. Zhongjian caught her staring at him, and only gave a skeptical look before walking towards her. The two shared an uncomfortable silence.

"Zhongjian. I thought of you to be a threat to my power. But you are a bright young man who only wants to do good for our village. Perhaps I don't really know if my words can be trusted anymore. Truth be told, I only knew of a flood to come because I saw the broken barrier near the riverbank. I'm not the great prophet everyone says I am." She said wistfully.

"I know. I had seen the broken barrier myself. I understand your initial concern about how it would affect our culture." Zhongjian took a deep breath. "However, times have changed. Science is an essential part of our lives. It intrigues the younger generations. It helps us grow. I sincerely hope you can see my vision."

"You are just like my son. He was engrossed in science. I had not approved of him and he left the village. I regret it deeply." She sighed. "I pray for him to come back every day. I thought he would come back because I became the Prophet. Things aren't the same now. I would like it if you could assist the villagers alongside me." She pat Zhongjian on the shoulder with a hopeful gaze.

He was taken aback to say the least. Yet he found himself not hesitating. "Yes, I would like to help out while I am here. I will resume my study in Peking after fully examining the fossil site here. And...I give my condolences to your son. Perhaps I can try to find him once I go back." He offered a small smile. Elder Rui seemed pleased with his response.

The two exchanged a slight bow before heading separate ways. Zhongjian smiled to himself. There was a lot to do for the village. He would contact his fellow researchers and palaeontology group to check out the site, and perhaps rebuild the barrier. But right now, everything seems a bit better. It was starting to go his way.

A new tale would be told about Yuxian and its residents – currently, and prehistorically.

Yang Zhongjian would go on to name many dinosaurs and preside over some of the most important fossil discoveries in history. He also contributed greatly to the creation of China's Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology in Beijing, housing one of the most important collections of fossil vertebrates in the world. Nowadays, he is appreciated as well as widely known by historians and palaeontologists globally.

He truly paved the way for a new era for China's dinosaurs.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Tsang, Alvan – 16

In the light of China, where the hazy hills of Jiangxi, the atmosphere was full of wonders. It was not an ordinary season; it was the season of sorts, a time when the past wanted to come as there was so much to be discovered. Fossil hunting had already evolved to a wide-spread craze in the past years, which is reminded by the astonishing discoveries. Such as, *Sinosauropteryx*, the feathered dinosaur which gained the recognition of being a farmer's discovery in the 1990s, triggered a considerable boom of interest.

Li Qiang, the medical doctor comes near the incredible existence. He must have been a great paleontologist as he dedicated several years of his life researching about the steps he had made as an anthropologist. It was the scientist's recent trip that caused a considerable shock to him. He had discovered a Titanosaur, which was most likely the largest dinosaur ever discovered. The bones were enormous, a proof of the time when titans walked on the earth. But even power, insanity, invaluable and even quarks excited him. A series of crazy footprints found nearby more than just a hint at the presence of the enormous dinosaur.

“Look!” Li proclaimed as he signalled his comrades towards the ground where the footsteps are found, splitting into two different directions, “These are not just large footprints, these are left by a Titan which is a powerful creature and it came from behind out gentle dinosaur.”

His team, which included several experienced scientists alongside students full of eagerness; surrounded the prints to observe them. The footprints were both wide and quite expansive, implying that the creature size was within the realm of a gigantosaur, whom the T-rex fears. As they thought about the consequences, the atmosphere was charged with a mix of dread, wonder, and excitement. What kind of superior predator stalked these ancient Titans?

“Perhaps the Godzilla myth in ancient Japan folk stories are true! That creature is the only possible Titan to prey on a Titanosaur.” A student suggested, with a glimpse of excitement. The others however disagree with his claim, shaking their heads as if the existence of the primal beast is a made up story just like the Loch Ness.

Months past by and a village in Jiangxi excavated a 5000 years old stone tablet from a well hidden stone cave, with ancient artworks and texts carved on it. Translation of the tablet describes the legends of a beast that broke through the arches of the Earth and had its powers unlocked through the excavations began to float around. The earth trembled, bright cascading lights glided through the land in an cold manner, and the idea of a giant looming figure that towered over their homes only added to these tales. As the moon shone brightly, the humans were able to sneak glances of the curious shadowy beast creeping over the mountainside.

At this time, the paleontologists were still conducting their research, all the while the locals were increasingly concerned and perplexed. They were fearful on the fact that piles of dust and soil were emptied in the pursuit of pursuing an ancient relic that was meant to stay underground. After emptying the crops, massive footsteps are discovered. Li Qiang’s group soon realised that the foot steps does not belong to the Titanosaur, it belongs to a reptile sized over 10 times larger than the dinosaur. All the footsteps are directed towards the land where the Titanosaur’s fossils were found, perhaps it killed it.

A quick realisation upon reading the ancient stone tablet caused the scientists to focus on investigating on Japan’s myth about the Godzilla, perhaps the titan existed.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Yau, Oi Lam – 15

From the day that I was born, I was deeply obsessed with dinosaurs, China’s dinosaurs especially. They are always surrounded by different fascinating myths and contain countless possibilities of the undiscovered past. But what actually made them to be the uppermost in my mind, is the unusual connection I can feel and the weird broken pieces of memory I can see every time I see figures or fossils of them in museums. I wondered why until today, the truth was revealed in my unbelievable experience.

I rushed to the museum as soon as I heard about the newly discovered fossil in Jiangxi, which may be a new species of dinosaur, was finally displayed to the public today. I was so excited and looking forward to see it. However, when I first saw it from hundreds of metres away, I had an ominous feeling instead. The fossil locked in the glass display box seemed like summoning me to get closer and closer to it. My mind was forced to be isolated from the crowd and my body was slowly approaching that thing uncontrollably. The closer I got to it, the darker and quieter the

surroundings were. Although it took just a few steps, I could feel that I was already far away from reality and entered a whole new mysterious place.

The moment my sanity returned, I wasn't in the museum anymore. Here was a jungle. There were growls and massive stomps of some kind of creature. I looked around and felt oddly with my body. Not only that my arms became a lot shorter and had claws, but also I could only growl when I wanted to talk. Looking in the reflection of a puddle, here was when I realised I had become a dinosaur, an animal that we could see only in our imagination.

All of a sudden, an anchiornis jumped out of nowhere. I froze. But it seemed he saw me as a friend. 'What are you doing! We are all waiting for you! Come on!' Surprisingly I could understand him just by the random noise he made and the expressions in his eyes. No time for me to figure out how those things happened, I followed him immediately and arrived at an enormous cave. I was astonished at the first glance, by the epic scene of carnivorous dinosaurs gathered.

Alvarezsaurus, guanlong, sinraptor, and all other carnivorous dinosaurs were in the same place and they were so friendly to each other, which I had never imagined before. 'Ok, finally. There isn't much time left.' the guanlong said.. 'The prophet troodon said there is no way we can survive the eruption so coming. But there are still hopes for us to keep our souls if we follow his method, though none of us knows what he means by that. Let's still give it a try!' He then brought us to the end of the cave and showed us some bones of other dinosaurs. 'We need to bury ourselves with one piece of this. Then-.' A tremendous earthquake disrupted him.

The cave was about to collapse. An extremely loud and powerful growl woke everyone up from shock. We all promptly picked a piece of bone by mouth and rushed outside. The sky turned red and filled with flying fireballs. Some of the dinosaurs were unfortunately hit by them. Groaning, crawling, struggling, the pain of them getting submerged by the lava was unbearable.

Everyone was running for life insanely. At this moment, I recalled some broken pieces of original memories of this body. I saw all the time they had spent together. Sharing the prey, fighting against each other, warm greetings everyday. The friendships and bonding between the same kind of creature touched me. It was so real that make me feel like I was part of them. But now my friends got hit one by one and suffered a lot. I couldn't even save them. My tears ran down on the bone I was biting.

I sped up to the nearest empty space and started digging. When I was almost done, the lava quickly approached my spot. At the last second, I covered myself with soil then closed my eyes.

Nothing. Nothing happened. No pain, no heat, but a flash of the entire memory.

I was a dinosaur. All the things that happened weren't hallucinations or a dream. It is my actual story from my past life. I reincarnated as human eventually. How difficult to believe in this, how unreal is this. This is the truth.

A flash of white light dived in my eyes. I woke up realising that I was still in the museum and my whole body was sweating. Looking at the odd fossil again, I felt relieved. I guess I would come to see me in the past more often. Don't know if I would meet someone like me or not in the future, look forward to that!

Heart of the Myths

St. Mark's School, Lau, Rain – 16

Once, dinosaurs had roamed the earth. Velociraptors darting and dashing around ancient jungles, catching their preys in the blink of an eye; Tyrannosaurus rex roaring in the distance, their thunderous sound earth-shaking; Mamenchisaurus' heavy steps treading the ground, their necks extending taller than the tallest trees. That was an era when such terrifyingly magnificent creatures had ruled the earth, with no others capable of standing in their way. Yet, despite everything, that age came to an end like any other, as such is the curse of time.

The dinosaurs were hidden in the crust of the earth, silent, like ancient relics lost in the ceaselessly flowing river of time, waiting to be brought to the surface.

Waiting for another heartbeat.

Waiting to roam the earth again.

“Dr. Xun, someone’s requesting to see you outside.”

The said doctor was in a white lab coat, securing a glass slide under the microscope. Startled, she turned upon the call. “Yes? I’m busy working on something.”

“He said it’s important.”

Dr. Xun sighed, “Very well. I’ll be there in a moment.”

A tall man dressed in black and navy was standing in the corridor outside the laboratory, leaning against the wall. Researchers and scientists in white dashed by hastily, not sparing a glance at the stranger,

“Longyu?” Dr. Xun furrowed her brows as she strolled out of the lab, taking off her gloves, “What on earth are you doing here? You should know not to disturb me during work hours.”

The young man raised an eyebrow, “Come on, Longxin, no love for your little brother? Wait, no, don’t answer me that. For your information, indeed something *on earth* brought me here. I thought it’d interest you, given its literally groundbreaking nature.”

The doctor hummed, crossing her arms. “I’m listening.”

“Remember the new site in Jiangxi I told you about? Last week...”

The sun was beating down on the small group of palaeontologists tirelessly digging in the fossil site. They have been working for days trying to unearth the potential wonders that might be hidden beneath the layers of rocks. Longyu was among them, but he wasn’t digging. Instead, he was wandering around with a camera hung around his neck and a pocket-size notebook in hand, recording everything he saw.

“Are you sketching?” One of the fossilists asked in incredulity as he snatched the notebook from the younger man. “You’re a palaeontologist intern, not an artist. That’s someone else’s work.”

Longyu held out a hand, palm up. “I believe in learning on the job. Besides, Dr. Zhou told me to stand by and watch this time. Unless you’ve got any objections to that?”

Doctor Zhou Yi was one of the most distinguished palaeontologists across the globe, renowned for his position as head palaeontologist of the pre-eminent prehistoric research laboratory *Resonat Temporis* — The Echoes of Time. Following the recent discovery of two new pterosaurs in Liaoning, Dr. Zhou embarked on a venture in Jiangxi with his professional team. Xun Longyu, who happened to be his best apprentice, went along as an intern.

The older man glared at Longyu, rendered silent nonetheless.

“I thought so,” Longyu said with a slightly smug smirk as he got his notebook back. “Now scoot over, you’re blocking my view.”

Fuming, the older man complained to a colleague beside him, “*That thing* is Zhou Yi’s best student, seriously? I can’t believe the audacity of the boy. He’s been nothing but a nuisance since we arrived...”

Longyu didn’t seem to take those scornful words to heart. He shrugged and strolled away with his hands in his pockets. He came across a crack in the ground that seemed to lead under the surface of the ground. *There seemed to be a space down there... could it be a cave?*

After being notified of the strange chasm, Dr. Zhou decided they should venture down and check what might be concealed within. The team quickly gathered, some were eager to explore the newly discovered cave, some, however, were sceptical. After all, all they had found till now were only the usual fossils, there hadn’t been anything new in any of the fields for months. A sling was secured to the edge of the surface, and some of the palaeontologists were lowered down into the cavern-like structure. Their torches illuminating the dim walls.

Longyu’s eyes widened as he took in the unexpected sight — A huge painting in black and red was etched onto the rock wall, the creature in the painting seemed to be a... dragon? “A painting?” he asked in bewilderment, but got no reply as his words only bounced off the walls and reverberated in the cave.

When he turned around, he realised why.

A massive, magnificent dinosaur fossil made up the wall on the back, the tail of the creature laid flat on the ground they were standing on, its spine crawled over the wall, its limbs gripped the rocks, its head embedded into the ceiling. For a moment, Longyu forgot to breathe, in awe of the gigantic creature that was looming over him. The dinosaur’s hollow orbit seemed to draw him in, the dark void whispering a mysterious reminder of a story long lost in the past.

A tap on his shoulder brought the man back to reality. Blinking, Longyu stared at Dr. Zhou with unbridled excitement in his eyes. Their findings here could be revolutionary.

The doctor was stunned. She gripped Longyu on both shoulders and stared at him seriously, “I hate to say this, but, where’s Dr. Zhou? I want to see him, immediately.”

Longyu laughed, earning himself a glare from the doctor.

“What’s so funny?” Irritated, the doctor gave Longyu a shove and crossed her arms again. The younger one didn’t speak, ignoring the doctor and walking past her, causing her to scoff in infuriation.

“Dr. Zhou, my sister was just talking about you,” Longyu’s amused voice rang out.

The doctor spun around in surprise, coming face to face with Dr. Zhou.

“D—Dr. Zhou.”

“Nice to see you too, Dr. Xun,” the man inclined his head in greeting.

“R—right, I was just looking for you.”

“I know.”

The curt reply was all that was needed to steer Dr. Xun back on track. “So, the Jiangxi site. I heard you found a cave painting that looks like a dragon, along with a dragon-like dinosaur in a cave near the fossil field?”

Dr. Zhou nodded, “Come with me. I’ll show you.”

Just as Dr. Zhou turned around to lead the two away, they exchanged a glance. *Speak of the devil*, Dr. Xun mouthed to her brother, who, in return, just gave her a devious smirk.

“Dr. Zhou —” Longyu didn’t get to finish his sentence as his sister had clasped a hand tightly over his mouth.

The older doctor didn’t seem to notice, or, if he did, he paid no mind. He continued walking, and the siblings decided to stop their antics and follow him. After a few twists and turns in the labyrinth-like underground lab, the three finally came to a stop in front of a gleaming white door. Dr. Zhou tapped his card on the scanner and the door slid open automatically with a soft electrical buzz.

“We did a radiocarbon dating. The painting dates back to the 5th millennium BC. The theory is that the dragon legend originated from this dinosaur when people discovered it all the way back in the Stone Age,” Dr. Zhou explained as he led Longxin and Longyu in front of a monitor screen. The screen showed a 3D structure modeled after the fossil found in Jiangxi. The dinosaur had a long spine and tail, like nothing they have discovered so far. It had four short legs, and most notably, a crocodile-like head with plates and spikes that grew from the top of its head all the way down his spine like a *Hesperosaurus*.

“What is this thing?” Longxin asked, amazement written on her face.

“There’s more research to be conducted,” said Dr. Zhou. “You can certainly come with us if you wish, Dr. Xun.” He sounded rather amused, which abruptly caused Longxin to tense subconsciously. Longyu was watching their exchange in confusion, he never knew what happened between his sister and his — no, their teacher.

All he heard was that, a year ago, they got into a fierce argument over the details of an experiment shortly after Longxin had gotten her doctorate. His sister used to be the most promising protege of Dr. Zhou, yet that incident had driven them apart. Longxin just suddenly decided to quit all the projects they were supposed to be collaborating on, having decided that she would do her own research from that moment onwards, refusing to give a reason whenever a colleague asked. Dr. Zhou didn’t seem bothered by the change. Instead, that was the only reason he decided to put Longyu into his team. Despite being two years younger, Longyu’s calibre seemed to be measuring up to his sister’s, not to mention exceeding all his classmates. Moreover, Longyu had a thirst for knowledge, and an unrelenting ambition to get what he wanted. He knew Dr. Zhou could help him on his way, a fact Longxin had so callously disregarded when she left Dr. Zhou’s private lab.

They had decided to go to the fossil site the first thing in the morning.

“You were in this project too,” Longyu mumbled to his sister as they were packing.

Longxin’s movement paused for a second, before she smiled ever so slightly and resumed putting her clothes into the suitcase as if nothing had happened. “Don’t ask.”

“That’s what you said last time. If you don’t want me to ask, don’t do something questionable.”

Longxin didn’t respond.

“Why did you quit? I know you’ve always wanted to find potential ties between dinosaurs and dragon myths ever since you discovered the oracle bone script carved into a dinosaur fossil.”

That was true. It was thrilling when Longxin discovered the fossil in their family home's attic, and even more so when she realised the word on it was exactly the *jiaguwen* of *Long* — Dinosaur, or dragon, as the Chinese folklore would imply.

The siblings never found out why their family would possess such a thing. Even their father was oblivious to the fact that it was a fossil. He only knew it was passed down as a family heirloom of sorts. Peculiar, how fate seemed to have led Longxin and Longyu exactly where they were now. Ever since she was a child, Longxin had been drawn immensely towards the wonders of palaeontology. Her parents were surprised to find out, exclaiming what a coincidence it was that her passion echoes her name, *Longxin*, since she has always had a heart for either dragons or dinosaurs.

"I still want to unravel the hidden history, which is why I'm coming. If it weren't for this, I wouldn't have decided to go with *him*," she said the last word with utmost contempt.

"Come on, sister, it's been a year! You know Dr. Zhou is the most influential in this profession. What sort of dispute or disagreement could be catastrophic enough for you to throw away such a bright future as his right hand?"

"I said drop it," Longxin snapped in irritation.

"Fine. I don't understand why neither of you will talk about it, but I'll find out."

He heard his sister sigh. She sounded defeated when she spoke.

"I hope, for your sake, you never will."

Longxin stood in silence as she took in the remains of the striking creature. The photos might have been shocking to see, but the sight of the fossil in real life was ineffably majestic.

"People back then must have taken it for some sort of divine being. I mean, look at it, who wouldn't?" She said as she held out a hand and traced her fingers along the spine of the dinosaur.

She felt a tremor jolt through her body as she did so, and suddenly, the long-perished creature in front of her seemed once again brimming with life. Instinctively, she retracted her hand. As she did so, however, a feeling of emptiness washed over her. Unable to resist, she reached out and lightly touched the same spot. She just stood there, silently, her eyes distant and unfocused. Should anyone look in her direction, they might have thought she was possessed. But Longxin knew what she was doing. She just couldn't help but feel a sense of connection to the ancient fossil, as if the past was speaking to her.

I must be losing my mind, Longxin thought to herself as she sighed, putting down her hand. *Could this be what I was searching for? No, this can't be — the time does not match.*

"Longxin, Dr. Zhou, look what I found!" Longyu's excited voice came from deeper into the cave.

Longxin was abruptly brought back from the trance. She turned to see Dr. Zhou already walking towards the source of Longyu's sound. She hurried over and saw what had caused her brother's enthusiasm. There, in the pile of rubble, was —

A fossil with jiaguwen carved into it, mirroring the one the siblings had, except...

"This one looks different —" Longyu couldn't continue as his sister already had her hand placed firmly over his mouth, glaring at him furiously. When Longyu nodded, she dropped her hand.

Dr. Zhou looked up from the strange relic, seemingly ignorant of Longxin's action, "What was that?"

Longyu spared an annoyed glance at his sister, but then looked back at his teacher with an innocent expression, "Nothing. I just meant that it's different from all the fossils we've found before."

"Evidently," Dr. Zhou replied monotonously.

"What was that you said back in the cave?" Dr. Zhou enquired once he sat down with Longyu.

They've returned to *Resonant Temporis*. Longxin was out taking a phone call. She had warned Longyu not to tell Dr. Zhou about their fossil under any circumstances. Now facing his inquisitive teacher, Longyu wasn't sure how he could lie his way out of this. Before he could come up with a reply, Dr. Zhou started speaking again.

“Do you know what is carved into that fossil, Longyu?” At the younger man’s puzzlement he continued, “It’s the oracle bone script. The word choice is rather... interesting. Have you any idea why people would carve the word *xin* onto the fossil?”

Xin — heart.

Longyu was at a loss for words.

Long — dinosaur/dragon

Therefore what his sister has been searching for was —

Longxin — Heart of the dinosaur. Heart of the dragon.

Herself.

Xun Longxin — searching for the heart of the dinosaur. It was as if she had been born for this purpose.

Longyu felt the sky atop him collapse. This whole time, this was what his sister had been chasing after. Yet, this did not explain the mysteries at all. What was this thing? What did it have to do with his sister, or their entire family? Did their ancestors make these? Why wouldn’t Longxin want Dr. Zhou to know what she had been doing?

“I think you know very well what I meant, don’t you? Hand me the other half of the fossil.”

Longyu felt his hair rise on the back of his neck. He intuitively stood up and stepped back.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, doctor,” his sister’s voice sounded from behind him. He turned around to see his sister walk into the room with her hands in the pockets of her lab coat.

“No need to play coy with me. I’ve known ever since you quit,” Dr. Zhou said as he checked the screen of the scanner. He sounded almost nonchalant, as if he was commenting on the weather.

Longxin’s shoulders slacked in defeat, “You’ve made it pretty clear last time that you do not agree with my plans to attempt to clone dinosaurs or any other prehistoric creatures.”

At that, the doctor turned to his student with a serious stare, “You know how difficult it is to clone from the broken fragments of DNA. Moreover, given you could indeed clone the creature successfully, are you ready to face the moral issues that will arise?”

Longxin was silent, her fist clenched tightly inside her pockets.

After a long, painful moment, she finally spoke, “It is what I’m meant to do. I can hear them calling to me.”

Longyu stared wide-eyed at his sister, *so that wasn’t just my imagination.*

Dr. Zhou nodded, “I’ve also known that for a while now.” Upon the siblings’ perplexion, he continued, “All emperors throughout the history of ancient China had thought they were the dragon descended from the sky, which grants them the right to rule. But this here,” he gestured to the fossil, “this contains the real ‘dragon’, or, rather, where the myths stem from. This new species of dinosaur is going to unravel the heart of the mysteries.”

“That’s why I need both the fossils to form a complete DNA chain.”

“Yes, exactly. Did you think any experiments you conducted in my lab would go without my notice, Dr. Xun?”

“Why would you want the fossil I have?” Longxin asked in alarm.

“To help you.”

Longxin was sure her jaw would’ve dropped to the floor if it weren’t so indiscreet. “You changed your mind regarding cloning?”

“I think you are right. We would never know until we try.”

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier?” Longxin asked in exasperation.

“I wanted to give you space. Are you ready to work on a project jointly?”

Longxin smiled, “Yes.”

Longxin and Longyu leapt in ecstasy as she saw the heartbeat monitor of the newly-hatched dinosaur showing a steady pattern. Each beat seemed to synchronise with Longxin’s own beating heart. Dr. Zhou couldn’t tell if he did the right thing — Only time will tell. However, he was proud of the two of his brightest proteges nonetheless.

Finally, another heartbeat.
Finally, they can roam the earth again.

Silent Peril

St. Paul's Co-Educational College, Chan, Charlotte Yee Hang – 16

As he knelt on the ground, the front of his robes stained crimson, Ying Zheng pelted towards the surface of the frozen stream, using the ice to scrub at his bloodied face and hands. He buried his head into a frail, decaying lily pad. How long would it be until the monster caught up with him? Could he attempt a risky escape? And why was the bottom of the plant steadily going blurry, his vision indefinitely becoming obscured? Surely he wasn't crying. It must have been the fog, for he had to remain strong. Help may or may not have been on its way, but he was still the *Tai Zi*, never to show fear or any form of weakness.

Neglecting the hazy vision before him, Ying Zheng crawled forward, struggling to move his heavily scarred arms. He recalled how these same arms had once reached out to Shu Ya to be coddled, albeit more short and stubby several years ago. Had it already been a crime then, to wish for love and affection from his sister?

Spitting blood on his own footprints, Ying Zheng wondered what would happen to him if help never arrived. He pondered if this was exactly where it would all end.

'Jie Jie, Jie Jie, tell me again, tell me about the story where the mermaid goddess fixes the sky!'

From birth, Shu Ya saw fit to guide Ying Zheng through his education. She taught him how to read, write, and socialize with the monarchs and embassies that filled the halls of the palace. Between his lessons, she'd delight him with the most brilliant tales, taking him sailing on an oceanic voyage one day and flying through the skies the next. Above all, she'd tolerate his implacable obsession with dinosaurs. Together, they'd sit on his bed and pour over bamboo scrolls entailing the descriptions of these marvelous creatures.

'Do you think dinosaurs would've liked to eat humans?' he asked one day, content in the warmth of the room as dusk spelled away the realities of their mundane palace lives.

His elder sibling simply shrugged, tucking a stray curl into her loose coiffure. 'So what if they did? We have hundreds of armies at our command. It shouldn't be hard to overpower them,' she hissed, sparkling alight in the dark of her pupils.

Ying Zheng stared curiously at Shu Ya, alarmed by the intensity of her gaze. He never quite forgot the image of the cruel yet fierce warrior he briefly glimpsed in his sister's soul.

As they grew older, the adolescent boy slowly but surely became aware of his duties as the heir to the throne. He grew a preference for solitude, silence being distinctly favored over the lectures on his imminent responsibilities. His cheeky grins and impish jokes subsided, giving way to nonchalance and an unspoken bitterness.

'Jie Jie,' with their parents constantly preoccupied with paperwork or meeting guests, Ying Zheng found himself desperate to confide in someone about his pressing concerns.

'Do I have to be Emperor? It doesn't seem like a job I'll do well,' he uttered, suppressing a groan as he twirled a noodle around his chopsticks.

'Playing the part is not a matter of choice, but an obligation. You know that as well as I do.'

'But it's so unfair,' he bit his bottom lip, shaking his head in defiance. 'Don't you wish life could be more than this? That we had more time to pursue our interests, fulfill our passions, and live to the fullest?'

'Stop with these immature fantasies, *Di Di.*' Shu Ya gave a breathy sigh, disdain clear in her voice. 'You'll conquer the six provinces and rule the seven seas. You cannot fail our people. You cannot fail me.'

Ying Zheng cursed lightly in his head, staring indifferently at the overflowing bowl before him. He prayed he could wake up the next morning, free of the title. Perhaps Shu Ya would like to rule Qin instead, seeing as she was so adamant about raising him to be up to scratch.

His shoulders shuddered, attempting to shake off the foolish wishes that had been ingrained in his mind.

It was on the evening of his twelfth birthday that Shu Ya abruptly vanished. Rumors were spread throughout the palace, many involving a woven story that she had run off with her lover from Han. Ying Zheng was appalled upon receiving notice, instantly rushing to her bedchambers and banging on the door with increasing urgency. Only after he crashed through the door with sheer force did the truth begin to sink in. Balling up his fist, he slammed his forehead against Shu Ya's vacated desk.

He'd been abandoned. Left without a friend in this cold, unforgiving world, the remaining link that had tied him to the confines of this universe snapped and broke. He stumbled into the library, panting for breath, holding a bundle of

heavy-weighted blankets to his chest. Pulling layer after layer of patterned silk over his head under the dim candlelight, Ying Zheng removed pieces of hair from his scalp.

Strand after strand accumulated in his bare palm, and without much thought, he stuffed a fistful into his mouth. If the accumulation of body parts in his stomach caused indigestion and an early death, who was to know?

He'd never have to be Emperor, live up to the expectations, live for the good of people he'd never know or grow to care for.

Maybe he could eat himself alive.

Several years went past and snow graced Qin with its presence in the late weeks of November.

The icy, slippery floors made venturing outdoors close to impossible, so to his despair, Ying spent much time with his Father and his would-be ministers. He heard of their talk, whispers exchanged in mild alarm. His father had been propped up on the throne, restless, when the ministers finally confronted him about the tales of a resurrected beast. Ying Zheng had raised an eyebrow in query—a brute with a bone-crushing bite and an erect posture? It almost sounded like—

Hastily excusing himself, Ying Zheng dashed through the hallways, summoning a nearby servant to prepare a carriage. Running his hands through his messed-up curls, the boy made his way onboard. The infantile voices demanding his attention had to be silenced. He'd leave behind his childhood once and for all, the memory of the sister he'd learned to rely on, and with it, the cherished moments where he'd listened to stories and entertained himself with accounts of this beast.

Maybe then he'd find the peace to come to terms with his immutable fate.

The carriage pulled to a stop at the edge of the Han River, where farmers and merchants alike were gathering to take a look at the claimed habitat of the monster. Telling his small band of guards to stand guard outside, Ying Zheng charged into the forest. He found himself surrounded by vast mountainous valleys and stretches of pine trees, covered in snow, for miles.

Then, he heard it. The roar of the formerly fallen tyrannosaurus, the tightening of the larynx-like structure which he'd only heard described in books. Its accelerating frequency was evident, the ground shaking as Ying Zheng held on for his dear life.

Reeling in shock, Ying Zheng saw a flash of teal out of the corner of his eye. It was the delicate swish of an emerald riding cloak.

'Shu Ya!' he yelled, logic snapping into place, and he did not care if he looked deranged, his eyes estranged and wild, far from the image of a respectable heir, as he pursued the stranger, for who was there to bear witness? Riding cloaks were a common fashion, even among the non-royals, but an emerald one? He'd asked the Emperor to have all such incinerated after Shu Ya's exit. Burnt to a crisp on the palace grounds. Now he was but a few steps away from the defector.

Ying Zheng was breathless for a moment as the cloak bearer came to a stop. Shu Ya swept around, her hair braided, distinctly taller since he'd last seen her, meeting his eyes for the first time in what felt like millennia.

'Why did you leave me?' he yelled, slamming his clenched fists against her chest.

'I heard...I heard the maids say you left because you fell in love. With a foreigner.' tilting his head slightly downwards, Ying Zheng looked hopefully at his sister. 'You can come back with him. I will be accepting, dutiful,

kind, and amend the law upon ascending to the throne.' He refrained from mentioning the reactions of the people in the palace. That would have to come later.

'It was never about that,' she asserted. 'Never.'

Grabbing hold of her shoulders, Ying Zheng took a deep breath. He tried to remember psychological facts on how to appear more friendly and understanding. He attempted a pleasing grin.

'Then tell me. Tell me what it was about.'

'It is none of your concern,' she snapped. 'You do not care, Ying Zheng.' he did not know what hurt more, the piercing tone of her voice or the fact that she'd used his full name. 'You do not care about me more than you do for the maid, or the gardener who tends to our backyard. You simply don't want to be submitted to loneliness.'

'I am no fool.'

Contemplating her words, Ying Zheng hesitated. He gripped onto the edges of her cloak, for he truly did not know what else to say. It pained him to see that Shu Ya would not even put on a warm smile and kind eyes for her brother. Had those nights she'd read him stories, put on plays with shadow puppets, and tucked him into bed honestly meant nothing to her?

'Leave me alone, *Di Di*. You are in danger here, I—'

Taking in his surroundings, Ying Zheng noticed a queer phenomenon. Birds were soaring into the sky, evading their hibernation as if it had been greatly disturbed with no prior warning.

Slowly but surely, the approaching stomps of a giant, as well as the crushing of dead tree branches, entered his field of auditory.

'Go!' Shu Ya pushed Ying Zheng forward, forcing him to loosen his grip. 'Before it is too late!'

'No,' he screeched. 'I don't understand. Did you make the T-Rex return? And how?'

'Zi Fa,' she breathed, 'my lover, we attempted to replicate the evolution of the species. But the experiment was carefully contained. Until now.'

Eyes widening, Ying Zheng slipped his fingers through Shu Ya's as they barrelled towards the exit of the forest. There would be time for questioning later.

Until Shu Ya withdrew from his hold, turning towards the direction of the beast.

'We will not make it,' she whispered. 'Go at once. I wish not to drag you into this mess.'

Ying Zheng hesitated, his thumb instinctively tracing the bottom of her tinted lips.

'You know how to fight it?' His eyes searched hers in earnest, and even then, a part of him knew the slight nod Shu Ya gave was another string of silk in her carefully curated web of proclaimed lies.

'I do.'

Then Shu Ya pushed him in the opposite direction once more, and Ying Zheng's survival instincts took over. He'd always depended on his sister to get him out of a rough spot. He simply had to do it again.

Pushing through the last of the pine trees, kneeling on the ground to recover from his sprint, Ying Zheng made it to the throng of guards who had been awaiting his return. 'Go,' he hissed. 'Maul the creature. Save the evicted princess. Do what you must.'

Head in his hands, Ying Zheng lay on the floor of the square, its cobblestone surface gleaming under the glow of the afternoon sun. He heard the guards calling for backup among the crowd, lightly acknowledging the mob of city dwellers coming to their aid. But he could not get up. He did not dare to face what was yet to come.

It was only after hours of tenacious battle when the screams died and the air was thick with loss and bloodshed, that Ying Zheng came to his senses. The fight had ended. And though he was aware it was pointless, that fifty or so guards and a couple of merchants could not have possibly overcome the tyrannosaurus, he still made his way back up the slope. Dragging his heavy boots through the snow, he crawled upwards, using pieces of rock to assist him when it became impossible to proceed. Bodies of the butchered littered the valley, and Ying Zheng had to tread carefully to not step on damaged flesh.

Her body was there. He knew the moment he was five feet away, for how many times had he seen that arm? The same arm that taught him how to read, and write, and had pointed out pictures of his favorite pterodactyls on a bamboo scroll.

He took a knife from one of the slaughtered bodies and detached it from its owner.

He bit.

He chewed.

He consumed.

The longing was insatiable, he mused, as Ying Zheng's teeth tore into the pearly white flesh, gnawing away to expose the blood-red veins and the intricate muscles beneath. He'd never thought he'd detest a person so much, to want to punish her for her crimes of abandonment and deceit after death. For she'd been all he'd ever known.

The taste of raw meat filled up the hollowness in his ribs, and Ying Zheng's cheeks were greeted with a sudden wetness. He felt nothing.

He felt nothing.

Why did he feel nothing?

It took him a while to process that he was being watched, and by two parties, nonetheless.

Shu Ya's assessing eyes labored over him, her lucid gaze tailored onto its focus. The lids were slightly droopy as if she were close to falling into a deep sleep, and as Ying Zheng met her glare with his own, he realized he'd never confirmed her death. He dropped the bone he'd been gnawing in alarm.

Her half-closed pupils were filled with scorn and hopelessness, but nothing indicated she was shocked by his actions. Instead, she tilted her head towards him and beckoned Ying Zheng closer. 'You should know why I left.'

'It should be no surprise to you that the palace was always filled with doom and gloom. I thought I might as well commit to this country, as repayment for the privileges of luxury and grandeur we've enjoyed since birth. But like you, something deep and dark and ugly has always clawed at my insides, apprehension afoot in the air, a problem I've insisted on ignoring for far too long.'

‘The cesspools of pitch-black darkness demand our attention. Regardless if you strip away all responsibility and flock to promises of a new life like I did. It will never end.’

‘Never—!’

Mauling at her eyes, Shu Ya dropped all pretenses, releasing a shrill scream from her throat. Ying Zheng watched as her facade derailed, his normally calm, rational sister motioning towards the spear he left on the ground. Giving him one last wobbly smile, she ended her endless suffering, plunging it straight into her neckline.

‘Shu Ya—!’

Ying Zheng stared in blank horror for a while, witnessing her fingertips go limp, the ghost of her departing words hanging on her lips.

When he’d chased after her hours ago, he’d wanted a heartfelt apology from his sister—a pat on the back, an expression of regret for leaving.

A lingering embrace.

To be confronted with something else entirely was the worst thing, he decided. She’d abandoned him again, permanently, been selfish, and justified her narcissistic behavior. So what if he never found happiness? So what if he could never find a way to feel whole? Perhaps she was again submitting him to falsities. He licked off the remaining skin that clung to the skeletal limb, fishing it into his slack, soft mouth. He’d gotten used to feeling only rage or desolation for almost two decades.

Relishing in the strange, bland, metal-like flavor, Ying Zheng swept his head around, noticing the creature stirring in the background. The tyrannosaurus was not as ugly as it was beastly, Ying reflected. Its two pale, protruding eyeballs did provide a distinct contrast to its green, scaly skin, yes, but its jaw did not differentiate much from that of a human, despite being filled with yellowing, gruesome molars he didn’t have the stomach to inspect. Ying Zheng traced the outline of his own. His mouth opened and shut rhythmically, front teeth snapping as they collided. Involuntarily locking eyes with the monster, Ying Zheng stared into the tiny, dilated pupils of the tyrannosaurus. They were not unlike his.

And how different were they, really? Ying Zheng backed away carefully as the creature shifted. The animal also had an undeniable hunger for intangibility it could not quench. A desire so lethal it’d lured oneself to try cures such as consuming his kin. Still, it hadn’t worked.

Ying Zheng headed west, where he was sure a lake of ice awaited. Allowing himself a brief moment of reprieve, Ying Zheng remained near the frozen surface. The monster advanced.

In a flurry of thought, he retrieved a piece of Shu Ya’s skin, holding it out to the tyrannosaurus. The beast ripped it in two, leaving half of the skin on the ground. Ying Zheng tentatively reached for it, cramming Shu Ya’s several cold, spindly fingers into his mouth. He placed three at the roof of his mouth and two near his molars. They became drenched in drool.

The towering demon gave a dull nod, its spine coiling downwards in a gesture akin to a bow. Ying Zheng saw it as a sign of friendship, of trust, of mutual respect. He took it.

The man-eating monster was never tamed or sentenced to death, and its line continues to live on to this day.

Work

St. Paul's Co-Educational College, Deng, Sin Ki – 15

At night, the Zigong Dinosaur Museum emanated a particularly melancholic atmosphere. Empty of the animated tour guides, raucous toddlers, and wandering observers that typically packed the room, the hollow exhibit echoed with the janitor's solitary footsteps. His loafers, dirtied by layers of grime and flaking at the tips, trudged across the redwood floor. Occasionally, the shadow of a dinosaur's skeleton would loom over the man's hunched frame, engulfing him in darkness.

A faint sloshing sound reverberated around as the man walked, water bucket in one hand, towel and mop in the other. As he neared the dinosaur displays, he set his cleaning supplies down. Adjacent to each skeletal structure was a plastic sign that introduced the species, along with a few brief fun facts. Using his ragged cloth, the janitor wiped away the fingerprints that marred the board, leaving behind a pristine, reflective plastic sheen. The man stared at the English translation

of the words, printed neatly in Times New Roman — Fujianvenator, Zigong Dinosaur Museum's newest accession. The specimen, discovered in an expedition sometime in 2022, featured a particularly articulated skeleton, with elongated hindlimbs that hinted at a wading lifestyle. The man sighed, glancing at the petite, bird-like creature. His mind reminisced on the media frenzy that this historical unveiling catalysed, with thousands of news outlets and researchers alike enamoured by the novelty of it all. He had always dreamed of such euphoria, of the gratification derived from palaeontological innovation, of making a tangible contribution to society and being recognised for his hard work.

His reflection stared back at him from the plastic sign, wizened and weary, worn down by years of manual labour and hopes that had yet to be actualised. As a young adult, he had been preoccupied with surviving, taking up jobs that filled his stomach but not his bank account. Now, white hairs were beginning to sprout on his head like unruly weeds, and he was no closer to fulfilling his lifelong goals as a lowly janitor, unremarkable and unappreciated.

Sighing, the man removed his gaze from the exhibition entirely, gathering his cleaning materials and returning to work. Long, laborious, menial work, which paid a meager salary — just enough for him and his family to get by. His quixotic fantasies had to be shelved, neatly dusted away into the forgotten crevices of his brain in favour of supporting his wife and child. Tom was entering secondary school now, and his tuition cost a ludicrous amount of money. Work, the man mentally chanted to himself, because your family is dependent on it.

Closing the doors on the Fujianvenator's exhibit, the man ambled towards another mounted specimen nearby. The Omeisaurus, endemic to China, thrived during the Middle Jurassic period as long-necked herbivores. A staggering fifteen metres in height, its remnants towered over mankind, large and imposing. Mechanically, the man glided his mop back and forth, back and forth, the soapy layers coating the floor with a familiar, chemical aroma that permeated the air and singed his nostrils.

Hundreds of millions of years ago, the Omeisaurus dominated the land as forces of nature, coexisting harmoniously with the dinosaurs of that era. What a life, the janitor thought ruefully, to indulge in the fruits of the land without the worldly worries and societal pressures of man. Yet, despite all its former glory, they were reduced to nothing but fossil, prehistoric remains embedded into rock, a mere chapter in the bulky compendium of history. As fleeting as the flicker of a flame, ebullient and passionate. Then, extinguished.

Dinosaurs' presence was ephemeral, as humanity's will be. As the man's existence is.

The man continued his methodical movements, the robotic, rocking back and forth of the mop. Rather than despair or desolation towards his mortality, he felt an odd sense of comfort. Whether it be an erudite professor, avaricious businessman, venerable palaeontologist, or humble janitor, all of them would, in some form, resemble the fossil of a dinosaur one day. Being forgotten was an inalienable part of the human experience, so it was futile to waste his finite energy pining for the impossible. But what was the purpose of this, of work, if not to receive both praise and profit?

The floors of the Zigong Dinosaur Museum could be cleaned by a layman, and sanitation was hardly fulfilling work. Yet, gazing around at the sundry exhibits of precious dinosaur fossils, the janitor realised that his dreams of archaeology had not been in vain. After all, he was constantly surrounded by the things he loved most, the glorious products of years of gruelling labour.

At that very moment, the man thought of his kid. Tom, who had just embarked on his secondary school journey to develop into adulthood, was his legacy. Besides maintaining the pristine conditions of the museum's redwood floors, the man would leave behind Tom as his contribution to society. Thousands of years from now, human civilisation as the man knew it may well collapse, but at least, in his transient moment on Earth, he had done his best — working diligently, being a good parent, raising his child — even if no one was watching him, he had succeeded.

Satisfied with the cleanliness of the floors, the man returned his supplies to the janitor's closet. As his footsteps neared the museum's entrance, he stared down at his loafers, slightly damp from the soapy water and in dire need of repair, and smiled.

At night, the Zigong Dinosaur Museum towered over its surroundings, not unlike a long-necked Omeisaurus. Step by step, the janitor walked out of the shadow cast by the edifice and towards the faint light emitted by the nearby train station. Later, he would return home, and his wife would chide him for getting his loafers wet while his son snickered in the background, and he would brush her off. He would fall asleep that night, content, and dream.

Somewhere in his dream, the man saw a bird-like creature flapping its wings. The Fujianvenator.

We Tread Between the Thin Line of Life and Death

St. Paul's Co-Educational College, Lam, Tsz Ching – 15

I have been buried underground for the last ninety million years, four months, five days, three hours and seven, *eight, nine...* seconds.

The first few months— or *seconds*, I am not sure anymore— were bleak. There was no sign of the passage of time, no gentle light of the luminaries that gave momentary reprieve to the darkness that surrounded me.

My flesh rotted beneath the dampened soil, maggots crawling beneath my skin, seeking abode in the splintering fibres of muscles. My body felt too full and too empty— the blood and tendons replaced by loose soil and stubborn pebbles, spilling out of my slack mouth, hoping to imitate the oxygen that once breathed life into me. A sack of dead meat, heavy, limp, suspended against a canvas of nagging insects and suffocating earth.

Hundreds of thousands walked over the soil which blanketed me— hunched-back farmers swinging their scythes, molten-gold wheat falling onto soil; children with their bumbling feet and clumsy fingers, digging worms out of the

dirt— though I hoped their hands may brush against ivory bones, if only for a fleeting second of warmth; trembling wheels of carriages carrying men far too small for their titles. I longed to regain strength in my disintegrating limbs and leap out to join this unfamiliar yet lively world. Though, truthfully, it still resembled mine in many ways: blood was spilt in abundance, but there were no longer the maws of predators to feed from the fountain— only steel and cash, both as metallic and brutal as the liquid they're coated in.

Dynasties creaked as they turned like gears on a scraped—together ride, on and on and on until eventually they collapsed, splattering messily, corpses of long—gone dreams and ambitions. They all boasted that they would last forever, live forever, but my kind did, too— until we were also inevitably crushed under the weight of time, dissipating into the air like fine dust. Now, when I'm nothing more than another set of dirty bones buried deep underground, the world has never been clearer to me.

I used to think I was lucky, with my great long neck and trunks for legs. I'd look down at the other chattering beasts below me, and find solace in how much closer I was to the blue sky and setting sun, in how much sweeter the leaves high above tasted. Now, I realise the ones who lived below me, cast in my shadows might've thought the ferns littering the land was a much finer cuisine compared to my diet. But what difference did it make? Now, we are all in the ground, flesh and bones melting away until god knows when.

Still— the minutes, months, years, decades, centuries and *millennia* passed, and now, I could scarcely even remember what parts of myself had left. A quick count left me dreading— seven pieces of my spine, some of my ribs... how long would it be until I was no longer myself, indiscernible from the rest of the earth? I could only hold on to the slightest sliver of hope, straining my ears to the world outside that had morphed beyond my comprehension.

The soil I was buried in was named Shouchun, in the past, then Yuzhang, Zhidi, until they finally settled on a name— *Jiangxi*. Miners and workers roamed the land, the steady ring of metal hitting against solid stone sounding again and again, punctuating the years as they rushed past.

Ah— where was I? Right, I have been buried underground for the last... ninety million years, four months, five days, three hours and seven, *eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve—*

The first *clink* of something metal sounds above me, a force that was hammering onto the stone that weighed on the third piece of my vertebrae. It roused me— and my long—disintegrated heart began to pound. The sounds above echoed it, rhythmic digging and chipping away the hard, suffocating earth above me. *What could it be?* The sounds of metal grew louder and louder, until eventually it subsided.

1

My curiosity withered along with it, thinking it was just another failed exploration attempt that I had seen too many instances of throughout my time here.

But then, the first crack of sunlight shone on my face— and the world was alive again.

I could smell the air outside, different from my age yet wonderful compared to the ever—present stench of earth and rot beneath ground. The sunlight was blinding, piercing in waves into the dirt as it was removed slowly, layer by layer. I could feel warmth on what little bones I had left— not flesh and blood like I had sorely hoped for all the time, but rather the soft, tickling sensation of something brushing against me, clearing away the sand and dust.

I was lifted from the soil, a strange, sticky fluid filling out the cracks in my bones as they're cradled gently in gloved hands. I haven't seen sunlight in so long that it's nearly blinding, splintering rays of light that shone without

obstruction onto my bones, a warm blanket I appreciated greatly. After being trapped for so long, encapsulated in the soil, the world seemed so much bigger than before. Boundless blue skies and tall red boulders manning the landscape— so many times bigger than the pieces left of me, now littered on a stretch of dark canvas. Bright lights flashed in my face— clicking sounds I couldn't make sense of. Everything seemed magnified by tenfold, almost painful to experience, gratingly intense. But I could only enjoy the sensation of being *alive* once more, euphoric after my time being stagnant.

After ninety million years, four months, five days, four hours and seven seconds of being trapped underground— I was finally free.

I may not be a giant on earth anymore, now just a few pieces of bones strung up in front of an audience— but it was so much *better*. The world was right there in front of me, and I finally got to see the mouths that produced the strange, meaningful sounds I had heard from beneath the earth. They were different from the chittering and roars my kind produced, round and slow with so many variations that I couldn't keep up with any. They came and went each day, from places and homes that I knew nothing of.

I longed to talk to them, to emulate their sounds with my big, clumsy tongue— but that had also disintegrated into the soil I was buried in. I wanted to break out of the strings I was kept hanging on and lower my head to the cheering children with their lovely, crooked little smiles that charmed me so.

I longed... for connection. That was impossible now, for I was long dead, existing now as only an exhibition item on the brochures the visitors carried. But as the visitors came and went, reading about my time underground, who I came from, who I *was*... my story could be told. Even if it's from the cold stones of my skeleton and the data extracted from my body.

For a moment, I was alive again, in their imaginations.

Dinosaurs in our digital age: The Struggle between Modernity and Conservation

St. Paul's Co-Educational College, Lam, Wing Yu Amanda – 15

In the mist shrouded valleys alternated with densely towering ginkgos, solitary but imposing. The air was laced with moisture and a whiff of groundly earth. Without any warning, a loud thump sounded in the air — a file of seemingly sturdy trees were crushed by a massive manus. The manus belonged to the newest member of primordial colossuses that roamed the ancient grounds of China — a young ankylosaurid. The newborn wandered aimlessly, its flattened snout poking around in the air, as if in search of something. The juvenile hadn't eaten for days, its stomach rumbling, the sound reverberating through the creeks and crevasses of the silent valley. The low, deep growl seemed to grow louder and louder, until the Earth below it started shaking ferociously — stone, boulders, cliffs crumbling. Amidst the chaos, the ankylosaurid was thrown miles away, in a dark abyss of nothingness...

The sky was bleak, traced with a misty hue of grey. The crisp call of a robin sounded remarkably clear in contrast to the hushed ambience. The clouds cleared and a dome of light gradually revealed itself, inch by inch, shining over the vast, lively land. "Hey! Over here!" A deep voice bellowed from afar, "Are those bones?" "Human bones?" The

clamorous chatter of villagers sounded in the distance, breaking the serenity of the early morning. Not for long, a group of excited palaeontologists rushed to the village to uncover this treasure.

“Ziheng!” A deep voice laced with evident joy called out, flailing his arms, “It really is a dinosaur!” The palaeontologists jumped for joy, for the unexpected discovery had really become a fruition. They gathered around the resin crystal and admired the intricate features of the skull. “This is incredible! The resin perfectly preserved the fossil! It’s practically a time capsule from who knows how many years ago!” A palaeontologist marvelled. The team meticulously extracted the resin, ensuring that they preserved the fossil inside, and carefully moved it on their vehicle before they headed back to the laboratory for further investigation.

Ziheng returned home after hours, days and weeks of investigation of the new dinosaur species uncovered, dragging his weary body up the seemingly endless stairs. His feet trailed behind him, his slumped back and squinting eyes evidence of the long working hours after the discovery of the ankylosaurus, which had been named Huaxiazhulong. The door of his apartment creaked open, welcoming him with a desolate view — barely any furniture in his sparsely furnished living room, except for a worn leather armchair and a three-legged coffee table, cluttered with stacks of dusty, heavy books. A whiff of stale, dust filled air seeped into his nostrils, earning a racking cough from Ziheng, as his eyes drifted to the piece of mouldy, unfinished sandwich on the armchair, which was covered with a thick blanket of dust. He sighed and shifted to the bathroom, his mind overtaken with the need to cleanse his body after weeks of spending days and nights ‘living’ in the laboratory.

As a warm rush of water cascades from the faucet, a burst of life flows from the tap, breaking the silence of the desolate bathroom, washing away the dust and fatigue of Ziheng. He stands under the stream with his eyes closed, enveloping himself in the warm embrace of the shower, a brief respite for all the solitude and weariness he heaved on his back for the past many years. The mirror, fogged with steam, reflects the blurry picture of a man — drowned in the ancient world of dinosaurs, taking him back to the day he settled on his dream to be a palaeontologist.

“Students! We have arrived at the Paleozoological Museum of China! Today, we’ll be looking at fossils! Does anyone know what a fossil is?” The enthusiastic voice of Ziheng’s elementary school teacher, Miss Zhang, interrupted his thoughts. “Bones of dead dinosaurs!” A young voice next to him answered keenly. “Precisely! Well done! Fossils are the remains of plants or animals that lived long ago and today we’ll be looking at the bones of these ancient creatures!” As the curious chatter of youngsters filled the room, a small spark was planted in the heart of the young Ziheng. As he grew up, Ziheng became increasingly fascinated with the ancient world of dinosaurs and eventually paved the path for him to be a palaeontologist.

Ziheng cleared his thoughts, stepping out of the bathroom. He trudged to the kitchen, opening his fridge to reveal — absolutely nothing. Ziheng sighed deeply, his shoulders dropping slightly, he picked up his keys and trudged to the door unwillingly. As Ziheng was about to reach the door, he stumbled over something — hard and cold, with a familiar scent but he couldn’t put his finger on it. He scrambled to his knees and to his horror, there was a skull on his floor. After brief examination, Ziheng discovered that it was the same skull he and his team unearthed in Guangchang county a week ago, except the body wasn’t here — probably still in the laboratory. Instantly, he was overshadowed by a chilling sensation — What is it doing here at my house? The skull was seemingly piercing into his soul through the hollow holes of what was supposed to be its eyes, as if it was trying to communicate with Ziheng. He shuffled back, the horror in his eyes evident as the blood drained from his face. Despite being a professional palaeontologist with many encounters with fossils — he has practically interacted with fossils more than his mom, there was something different about this skull that sent rushes of shivers down his spine. As Ziheng was enveloped in pure terror, the jaws of the skull started to creak without a warning, its upper and lower mandible opening up and down. Ziheng screamed from the top of his lungs, scrambling to his feet. He picked up the nearest object he could reach — a hefty book and swung it at the skull,

stammering “Whatever y-you ar-re, g-get away from m-me!” As if it sensed Ziheng’s immense fear, the skull stopped moving, as if it was just his hallucination. He crouched on the ground, cautiously inspecting the skull. The sun cast a faint light, illuminating the intricate details of the skull.

It seemed to hold secrets beneath its weathered surface.

The next few hours was profusely overwhelming for Ziheng while he experienced emotional turmoil, as his thoughts darted between returning the skull to the laboratory, although he wouldn’t be able to explain the mysterious appearance of it in his apartment, and to continue investigating its secrets on his own, however he would face serious consequences if he hid the fossil as it technically belonged to the country. As Ziheng stared at it blankly, the skull silently stared back, as if beckoning him to uncover its mysteries — He envisioned the possibilities: ancient myths, dark truths — anything could be possible. Being caught in a whirlwind of emotions, Ziheng struggled to make a decision. Should he oblige to his professional ethics and return the fossil? Or hide it and uncover secrets he worked for his entire career? Ziheng felt a knot in his stomach — career or curiosity? professional integrity or intrusive thoughts? After glancing at the skull one last time, Ziheng made his decision.

Secrets. Secrets it is.

Together with his friend, Zexing, a specialist in artificial intelligence, they worked tirelessly and eventually managed to implant a chip in the back of the skull. With a long beep, the skull came to life. “Where.. am I?” Its jaws opened and closed, a disoriented, raspy voice sounded. Ziheng and Zexing exchanged incredulous glances, their eyes lighting with joy and eagerness. “You’re in modern China! It’s currently the year 2025!” Ziheng told it, voice laced with elation. “Do you remember what happened to you?”

“I do.. I remember everything..” Its voice echoing through the small apartment, its hollow eyes glowing faintly. “I was born in a sphere-like figure.. It cracked and I escaped. Then I was hungry, so I went searching for food. After what seemed like weeks, I finally came across this place with a lot of trees and flying animals that looked delicious.. Just as I was going to fill my stomach, the ground started rumbling. The vibrating was so intense I was thrown down a cliff, into a yellowish brown sticky liquid. I couldn’t get out because it was too viscous and as the days passed, it dried up leaving me inside. I didn’t feel hungry there but my consciousness was still present. I never saw another of my kind after the earthquake, but then one day, some other creatures appeared and some dirt collapsed on me and I couldn’t see a thing ever since.”

Ziheng leaned closer, his breath hitching with anticipation. “What creatures did you see?”

The skull paused for a moment, seeming to attempt to gather its thoughts.

“Four legged creatures with tails, covered with brown fur all over. They swung on vines, in groups usually.”

Dryopithecus. Ziheng beamed with excitement.

“Did you see others of your kind before the earthquake?”

“Some had bills, short front limbs, three toes, a long muscular tail and a short neck. There were also some with three horns on its head, two above its eyes and one above its nose, a slightly curved inwards beak like mouth and a frill on its neck.”

Edmontosaurus and Triceratops.

“What abo—” Ziheng was interrupted by continuous, intense knocking. The door with its peeling paint rattling in its frame. “Open up Ziheng. We know you’re inside.” With every pound on the door, Ziheng’s face turned a lighter shade of sheer fear. Was this the end of his dream career?

Ziheng reluctantly opened the door, revealing his livid boss. His boss shoved him aside and rushed into his apartment, eyes blazing with fire. The fury on his face was evident after seeing the skull on the floor. “Zhu Ziheng. Do you know how—”

”Boss I s—swear I can e—explain..” Ziheng stuttered, practically engulfed with terror and fear. He explained the entire incident from the mysterious appearance of the fossil to the implanted chip. Fearing that his boss wouldn’t believe him, he asked the fossil questions again and to his boss’ astonishment, he garnered replies that didn’t seem fake. However, the skull had to be brought back to the laboratory for further investigation, along with the chip, leaving behind a terrified Ziheng, who feared the consequences of his self assertion and curiosity.

To his surprise, after thorough investigation, testing and comparison to previous findings. The information provided by the skull was proven to be accurate.

The application of the microchip invented by Ziheng and Zexing was a scientific and historical breakthrough, opening new frontiers for both artificially intelligent technology, archeology and palaeontology. Ziheng and Zexing found themselves at the forefront of historical discovery, their invention garnering recognition and applause from renowned experts from various industries. However, this also sparked concern in Ziheng’s mind — would scientists destroy cultural relics and monuments similar to the skull to investigate the underlying cause of the working mechanism behind the chip? The remains of history, the past, would be at risk of being compromised in the pursuit of knowledge. Would the excitement of innovation overshadow the responsibility to preserve cultural heritage?

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

St. Paul's Co-Educational College, Qiu, Caroline – 15

The museum is loud with the ringing noise of giggling, chatting and yelling. Loud, with the tall, wide stone room booming and echoing with the sounds of my classmate’s voices, carried down to the corridors and into the next room and all around the museum. I slip away from the robot section where everyone is, walk through the corridors with thick, velvety carpet floors and leave the ringing din behind. This room is quiet and smells of a forgotten piece of ancient history. In gilded gold words labelling the overhead arch is “New Dinosaurs”. Soft feathery white light from overhead showcase torches reflects on the gleaming glass of the displays to show my face. I walk closer and the light rays refract, showing the contents – inside lies a small skull with a pointed beak. “Fujianavorator – A dinosaur from around 148 million years ago”. A picture of a strange, pheasant sized, bird like dinosaur with elongated legs and arms is frozen in a man-made picture that looks unreal, the feathers grey and glossy. Captured by how ethereal this picture looked, I take out my sketchpad and a pencil and try to sketch it out. The 4B graphite pencil softly scratches boxes for dimensions on the smooth drawing paper, soft silvery lines trace out the edges of the dinosaur smoothly. As I am about to add its eyes, the watch on my wrist vibrates and I check the time – four pm, it is time to meet up at the entrance and head back home. I take one last longing look at the dinosaur and quickly pack up my things and head outside.

On the bus the rackety chattering continues on without end. I am immensely frustrated— not because of the unfathomable amount of annoyance my classmates have caused, but because of how impossible it was to sketch out the eyes of the dinosaur in a way that captured the life that lay in its eyes. The eyes should speak for themselves, yet this one is dull, lifeless, unfeeling. There is no light in its eyes. This is not how its eyes should look. The clamor of the bus persists but is now a dull buzz in the background, the view outside a blurred mess but my vision was only focused on its eyes. In a bizarre split second my eyelids grow heavy and tired. The constant buzz suddenly vanishes, and my eyes are shut. I am swooping downwards and the world seems to be changing around me, and vaguely, I hear the rustling of paper, as though I was sucked into the drawing...

When I open them again I stand in an unknown land. The floor around me is white, the sky completely white, the light from the sun shining white and an endless sea of white in all directions. The floor is sandy beneath my toes. Sandy beneath my... are those bones? Did my toes become bones? My hand reaches for where my foot should be, only to see that my hands too have no muscles and are only ivory bones too, the shape I see so often when revising biology: phalange bones connected to the metacarpal bones that connect to the carpal bones, joints, bones and all. I try to touch my face with my newfound bony hands, only to find the hard surface of my skull against the solid surface of the fingertips. How does this work? Am I a skeleton? Where are my muscles? How am I standing upright? Can I speak with no tongue?

A shrill shriek tears through the air, then laughing and then coughing, and I realize they come from *me*. My mouth still works. I can shriek, laugh and cough. What a weird world to be in! I bury my face into the sand. With only bones I do not worry the sand will get into my mouth, and so I dig deeper and deeper into the warm white sand, feeling each individual grain sliding past my bones with a weird sensation, burying me deep underneath. How warm it is here. How soft the sand is. I would choose to sleep here, in all this clean, white, quiet warmth...

The sand quakes under me, and in no time I feel myself lifted up with the sand then slipping past it, falling down. Confused, I frantically pull and grab hold onto the things around me only to find the sand sliding past the parting between my fingers and I'm going down, down, and down. I grasp at the air and unexpectedly find my hands clinging onto something sharp and jagged the next second, the rest of me hanging in the air. I feel the sand continuing to sprinkle down on me like tiny dots of white rain and gasp for air subconsciously, then realizing that I do not need to. I look up and follow the jagged part to see that I am in fact hanging onto the long sharp neck of a creature ten times my size rising out of the sand. It swings its head vigorously to get the sand off, and it takes me all I have to hold on tight. It turns and nudges me with its nose, and with a deep but soft voice it asks "Who are you?"

"I'm... My name is Lily." I fumble over my words and add hastily, "I'm a human. I'm eleven this year, in April. Are you... a dinosaur?"

The creature bends down and tilts its head almost amusedly, and says, "I have never been called a dinosaur in my time. My name is Heiwun. I am 90 million years old."

A laugh sounds from behind Heiwun's leg, and out bobbed a tiny creature with bones that looked like wings, with a small skull and beak. "You're massive!" It tweeted, "I'm Tszying, nice to meet you. I do not quite know how old I am but it must've been a few hundred million years since I was alive!"

"Its nice to meet yo—"

A ferocious roar, savage and violent, sounds in the distance accompanied with sounds of sloshing water and rolling waves. A transparent wall of water shines under the beaming sunlight in the distance and advances steadfastly towards us. Even from a distance, it seems mighty and callous, like the unwavering rule of a tyrant. It won't be long before the wall reaches us and floods the sands we stand on, washing us away as easily as it would with sand granules. *We have to take action, and fast.*

“Quick! Heiwun, Tszying, we’ve got to create a path for the water to go to. Like a river, or else we’d be washed away!”

Being strong and reliable, Heiwun digs and parts the sand in the ground to form a chasm. Tszying, with her abilities to run swiftly, soon moves rocks to both sides of the river to prevent it from overflowing. I sit in the middle of the chasm, digging as hard as I can with my puny, ordinary hands.

“Lily, quick! Get out of the way! The water is coming” Heiwun yells out loud. The pellucid wall of water looms over me and I scramble to get out. But the walls of the chasm are too slippery and I cannot grasp hold of the sand. The water will flood over the chasm and wash me away, yet no matter how hard or how desperately I try, the sand keeps slipping past the bones of my hand, making it impossible to pull myself up. I am trapped. I am going to be washed away.

I close my eyes as the cold water crashes into the chasm, instantly pushing me under the current with immense strength and pressure. For a split instant I wondered if I would drown, but with no lungs I didn’t choke on the water. Then it hit me – it wasn’t death that was so frightening. It was the prospect of being washed away, removed of all traces of your existence, your presence washed away by the slow, strenuous passing of time. I am washed away. Washed away, forgotten, buried under the ever flowing, fluid tide of time, as insignificant as a split second encapsulated within a grain of sand.

I stop my struggles and feel the push of the strong current, and give in to sinking – for how would one win in a struggle against time? Then just as soon as that thought hits me I am shoved back to the surface by a sudden force from beneath my feet. I look down, and I am standing on the strong, *ivory* vertebra of another creature. Its four bony limbs that resemble wings paddle forwards expeditiously in the water, each moving swift and powerful, and in no time we’ve glided to where Heiwun and Tszying stood by the banks.

As we near them, the sun shines down onto the water. The light refracts with the crystalline water, and the originally white light now shines a specter of colors ranging from the deepest shade of crimson to the lightest shade of purple, forming rainbows everywhere. Tszying and Heiwun’s bodies are changing. Muscles envelope the once bare bones and glossy feathers of all sorts and colors sprout from Tszying’s body while Heiwun gains a tougher outer skin. I look down and see that my hands have returned to the color of watered-down honey and my nails have grown back in a healthy pink color. Beneath me, the swimming dinosaur’s skin of blueish grey hues glitter under the rippling water that sparkles in the sunlight.

“I am a *Dinocephalosaurus orientalis* dinosaur.” The dinosaur beneath me says. *Dinocephalosaurus orientalis* – the Chinese dragon? As if reading my thoughts it responds, “Yes, nicknamed the Chinese Dragon. All of us dinosaurs here are recently unearthed fossils. Human effort is needed to restore us to what we originally were, or we would be washed away by time, buried in the sand or washed away by the waters of time, our presence forgotten and gone.” The Chinese dragon nuzzled my hand with its nose. “You were the first to visit our section in the museum. Although we are dead, we can live on forever if we are remembered. We’re dead but in a way still alive, our heartbeats imprinted forever on the history of this world, living on as history. We are grateful for your help, but this is not the right time period for you. It’s time for you to head back, kiddo.”

The sand beneath my feet slips once again and I find myself dropping, past the sand, past time, and slowly the chatter of the bus resumes.

The originally unfinished sketches with the dull lifeless eyes are now furnished with rich, vibrant hues of the dinosaurs and their eyes twinkle, as though alive.

The Last Titan's Lament

St. Paul's Convent School, Chan, Hoi Kay Charlene – 16

Over 200 million years ago, also called the early Jurassic, as tectonic plates rifted apart, different life forms appeared, from apes to a variety of animals. A titanosaur named Gandititan Cavocaudatus was born, with a total body length of about 14 metres as it died. It was one of the last of its species. Its story is definitely a legend.

In the cave, the sun shone through the hole, Gandititan awoke from its sleep and stretched its long neck, its enormous body swayed gently like a great tree in the breeze. It left the cave, searching for food and companionship.

Throughout its life, it travelled through miles of forest, at the same time, the size of its family became smaller and smaller, as its kin had vanished, it was lonely since then. The cries of its young echoed in the memory, a bittersweet reminder of how vibrant, joyful life it once had.

Gandititan started its journey to find others of its kind, it set off towards the distant mountains, where rumours of a hidden kingdom filled with heaven like environment had reached its ears. The journey is indeed long and tough. It

navigated through the boundless grasslands, waded across rivers and climbed rocky slopes, all while evading the dangers of predatory life forms in the region.

As it travelled, it encountered various creatures that inhabited her world, not yet fully grown ceratopsids roamed near the coasts in the rain, fast-moving ornithomimids migrated in great herds, roughly hundreds or thousands, theropods with fatal wounds hid from their predators and formidable tyrannosaurs whose roar sent shivers down its spine. Each encounter reminded her of the balance of life and death in the ecosystem, yet she felt the burden of solitude crushing down on its heart.

After months of searching, Gandititan finally reached the entrance of the kingdom. It was a magnificent site, with blooming blossoms and towering trees. The air was rich with the scent of fresh vegetation, and the sound of the adjacent waterfall granted it hope. But as it stepped into the kingdom, her heart sank. The area is undeniably stunning, but eerily silent.

It wandered deeper into the kingdom, its gigantic footsteps reverberated off the rocks. It discovered remnants of her species, fossils embedded in the ground, and the bones of long-gone titanosaur ancestors. Each discovery brought it grief, a reminder of how fragile life could be. It howled into the air, looking for intimacy, but only the breeze responded.

It explored the kingdom for weeks, but no other dinosaurs or even life forms joined in. Instead, it noticed the changes around her, trees were wilting, the air was gradually getting dry. It felt a deep unease, as if it was witnessing the decline of the heavenly world.

One evening, thick and heavy blackened clouds gathered, the distant rumble of thunder resonated like a warning bell, growing louder as time passed by. Gandititan had heard tales of great storms that could devastate the entire landscape, therefore, its heart raced with fear. She knew that she had to find a shelter.

The world held its breath, creating a tense atmosphere, and by the tempest raged on, it found a cave at the foot of the mountains as shelter. The heavy rain pattered against the rocky surface, the wind blustered like a pack of wolves and the lightning split the sky. Inside the cave, it shivered and listened to the chaos of falling trees and half flooded land outside. It thought of its family, the joyful memories they created, and how that kind of life had been stripped away from it.

The other morning, the storm calmed, Gandititan stepped out to discover a transformed world. The valley is flooded, muddy puddles covering half of the surface. The ecosystem was ruined, it felt depressed again as it understood that its quest of companionship had brought it to a state of remoteness.

As it continued its journey looking for its remnants, Gandititan encountered a group of smaller theropods, struggling to survive, they were herbivores, their species was also declining, it experienced a strong urge to protect them and started assisting in searching for food and shelter. It guided them to the scarce patches of greenery, using the advantage of its height to reach high branches and gather nourishing leaves.

Yet, despite its efforts, the group faced increasing challenges. The climate continued to shift and food became more inadequate. Its heart ached as she watched her new friends suffering and grew weaker. Subsequently, it travelled with the band and acted as a guardian of the fragile life that remained.

Through days, weeks, months, they fought to endure, they learnt to adapt, seek supplies from the relentless extreme weather events. But still, signs of extinction were everywhere. The once vast habitat was now a mere shadow of its former self. Gandititan cheered the dinosaurs with its soothing tone, "We were strong together, we will break through whatever challenges arise". But deep down, it actually realised that no matter how fast they adapt, the ending will not be different. Natural disasters were more frequent, and the balance of life was shifting, and it confronted a profound sense of fear.

The day of their fate has arrived, a violent earthquake struck the region, causing landslides. Gandititan strived to keep

its companions safe, however, the chaos was overwhelming. It lost sight of the youngest theropod as the ground beneath it was cracked and splitted. In that moment of despair, it grasped the truth that nature was reclaiming its territory and the titans of the earth were no longer invincible.

As the water receded, it stood alone amidst the debris. The habitat was destroyed, her heart shattered with the weight of loss. Again, Gandititan reminisced about its time with its family and its new friends, the environment was filled with its soulful cries as it was going to have a feeling of utter abandonment for a long period.

With its last strength, it wandered to the highest peak, where it could see the horizon stretching endlessly before it. It gazed at the remaining picture of its previous home, aware that change was inevitable and extinction was a part of life, a cycle of nature. As it breathed in the air, it felt a sense of peace washing over it. It knew it had lived a life filled with beauty and connection.

In its final stage of life, it closed its eyes, letting the sun warm its enormous body. It felt the pulse of life that continued even as she faded away. It's legacy would live on, a reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of cherishing what one has been given.

Tales of the Lost Waters

St. Paul's Convent School, Chou, Yuk Ying Jannis – 15

The radiant sun shone on a scorching, blistering day, illuminating the pale golden sand below. A foul, gruesome stench of old scrap pervaded the air. As I awoke to the unpleasant odour, completely oblivious, I felt a stiffness prickling across my body. I was lying in the middle of nowhere, but as I rubbed my eyes, everything gradually came into focus. Before me lay miles upon miles of sand, with broken debris scattered everywhere. Dinosaurs once ruled this desert, harbouring a contagious, rapidly spreading virus that claimed the lives of millions. However, only a few immune survivors remain after the apocalypse, and I am one of them. Since then, dinosaurs have yet to be sighted.

I have been in this desert for nearly a month and am no closer to survival. I haven't seen anyone in ages; the other survivors must have reached the safe evacuation point. A sense of loneliness welled up within me—only bundles of dried leaves scattered on the ground for company. I stared at the cracks etched into the terrain; each fissure was deep and lifeless, exuding relentless hopelessness. Suddenly, a scroll of paper descended from the sky and struck the back of my head. When I looked up, I saw a bird-like figure soaring away. It was pretty slender yet had large wings, and I also noticed small figures resembling claws.

“Could it be a dinosaur?” I wondered. I then picked up the roll of yellow parchment and peered inside; I saw the word “QUEST” boldly printed at the top. The paper declared the existence of a hidden ancient relic known as “the hydrous gem” that could hydrate and breathe life into the desert. At the bottom were merely two words: “Go North.” “Is that all?” I pondered. No further explanations or directions were provided for this “quest.” Why had it come into my possession? I mused that it might lead me to the other survivors, so I tucked the paper into my pocket and set off North.

The eerie silence enveloped my senses, leaving me feeling uneasy. Suddenly, I heard the sound of a wild animal rushing towards me, its roar echoing across the landscape. It came to a halt right before me. It had bird-like feet with three toes, each ending in a sharp claw. Swamp-green scales covered its entire body, seamlessly connecting to its elongated tail. I stood there, speechless, astonished by the creature's appearance. I thought I was imagining things; by the time I rubbed my eyes, it had vanished. How strange! “There must be something nearby,” I mused. After a while, I stumbled upon an ancient ruin or a small village. I continued walking until a random child approached me, speaking enthusiastically. “Hello, do you need any help?” I replied, “Hi, I’m new here.” The boy said, “Welcome, friend. I’m Kai; you should stay at our base! I’ll take you to the professor.”

“Ah, another survivor. A pleasure to meet you!” He extended his hand. “I’m Professor Tin, and I oversee this establishment.” I managed a faint smile and shook his hand. “It seems you’ve already met Tiddles!” I turned to see the green dinosaur I had encountered earlier groaning at me. After a brief pause, I asked, “Where am I?” The professor replied, “Welcome to Inner Mongolia. Things have changed significantly since then; we are endeavouring to establish a new civilisation now.” I stood there, absorbing my surroundings and noting only miles of barren sand and a parched riverbed. I contemplated the “civilisation” he mentioned; it struck me as dubious. I attempted to steer the conversation by retrieving the scroll from my pocket and saying, “I wonder if you’ve heard of something like an ancient gem...?” The grown man interrupted me, instructing me to follow him.

We passed the small straw huts and paused at the entrance of a more modern one. He signalled for me to enter, and I complied. I glanced at the old maps scattered across the compact space; it felt like a research centre. I handed my scroll to Professor Tin, who scrutinised it intently, reading the words repeatedly. Finally, he broke the silence. “I knew it! The gem has always existed! Legends say this “hydrous gem” is magical and can hydrate barren land, bringing life to the desert,” he exclaimed, excitement evident in his voice. The scholar lit a candle and positioned the ancient scroll near the flame. After a few moments, a map vividly appeared in delicate lines. I stood there in astonishment as he examined the back of the scroll. “Now we’re going to find it, and I believe I already know where to start.”

The following day, the three of us and a dinosaur set off to find the artefact. We hiked tirelessly until I finally caught sight of rocky cliffs rising in the distance. I noticed that the sand beneath us gradually shifted to a reddish hue, making the path bumpier and more desolate. I leapt over the slight hollows in the rocks and continued navigating the desert. When I was unaware of my surroundings, Professor Tin extended his arm to stop me. I came to a halt and realised we were at the edge of the Grand Canyon! A wave of relief washed over me, and I was momentarily taken aback that I had nearly fallen.

“Here we are at the Flaming Cliffs,” the professor exclaimed. I paused to steady myself and take in the panoramic view. I gazed at the vast stone cliffs, tinged with deep reddish-brown and orange hues. The setting sun cast a distinctive glow upon the red stones, making them shimmer like flames. It was mesmerising. “A few historical facts,” the professor continued, “this area is renowned for the initial discovery of dinosaur eggs. Furthermore, it was once an ancient seabed that existed millions of years ago!” Kai and I stood there, our mouths agape.

Without further ado, we set off on our quest for the gem. The stark beauty of the desert took my breath away; compared to where I had begun, the colours appeared significantly more vibrant here. I spotted faint trails of dinosaur footprints in the distance and noticed several slender bones half-buried in the sand. Suddenly, Kai shouted, “Guys, there’s a cave here!” We all decided to explore inside for a closer look. Entering with anticipation, we found the cave

empty. "Aw, shucks, there's nothing in here!" I exclaimed. Kai replied, "Yeah, just this old rock," as he sat down on it in disappointment. The professor asked, "Wait, Kai, what are you sitting on? I believe that's no ordinary rock..."

Kai swiftly stood up and leapt back. A stone, half white and half black, emerged, swirling with both colours. "That's the symbol of Yin and Yang! In ancient Chinese cosmology, Yin and Yang are counter-opposites, signifying the intricate balance of opposing forces in nature," Professor Tin explained. "Water, the source we seek, embodies the Yin aspect of nurturing and adaptability, while sand reflects the Yang aspect of strength and form." A sudden realisation struck me. "Wait, does that mean water and sand now coexist?" I asked in astonishment. "That's right, young lad," the professor replied.

The concept of Yin and Yang filled me with even greater confidence that we were one step closer to finding a water source, even if it felt strange. "If the answer is so obvious, why hasn't any explorer uncovered it yet?" This thought lingered in my mind. Kai squealed with delight, "We've finally discovered buried treasure!" Suddenly, it clicked. "That's right, Kai, we should try digging beneath it," I exclaimed. Professor Tin looked surprised and called for Tiddles. Tiddles, a small and clever Velociraptor typically found in the Gobi Desert, joined us in the cave and pointed at the dull rock with his dirty green claws. The professor nodded in acknowledgement, and then Tiddles began to dig, scraping away the red sand scoop by scoop. He was quite the speedy digger; the dirt pile grew larger until his claws struck something. The professor shouted, "What is it, Tiddles? Bring it up!" The dinosaur emerged from the hole, his mouth clamped onto a dinosaur egg, though only half of it. "This isn't just any ordinary fossilised egg," the professor stated. "I believe it came from an Oviraptor. Oviraptors inhabit areas near water and symbolise the historical presence of water sources. Well done, Tiddles." He patted the dinosaur's head with delight.

Eventually, we set off once more in search of the hidden gem. "If I'm correct, we should be heading towards Khulsan, the birthplace of Oviraptors, to see if we can find the missing piece," remarked Professor Tin, studying the map. We trudged on until we grew too weary to continue. What was meant to be a minute's break turned into hours; before long, the sun began to set. Exhausted, we found it impossible to resist the temptation to sleep for a while. Suddenly, a piece of paper struck me, carried by the breeze. I awoke, bleary-eyed, rubbing my eyes in astonishment, for the same scroll had hit me days earlier. I stood up and said, "Professor, the scroll came from your pocket..." only to realise that the paper was cradled in the Professor's hands as he slept. What on earth? This must be another one, I thought. I unfolded it and read its contents. It appeared identical to the one we already possessed. "That's peculiar. Why are there two exact copies?" I was baffled. After a time, another familiar scroll fluttered our way. Where could all these scrolls be coming from? It was time to continue our journey, so Professor Tin roused Kai, and we gathered our bags. Ignoring the numerous scrolls flying above, the Professor suggested it was time to head south again.

I attempted to halt their progress, convinced that clues must lie nearby due to the paper trail. Suddenly, the ground shook. It was night; the sky darkened like a black silk curtain falling. I could see the shimmering stars glowing in the distance, twinkling at me and offering comfort. The indistinct dunes before us began to take form. The thin mist shifted. The ground started to crumble. We couldn't believe our eyes. Standing before us was a tropical forest filled with tall pine trees. We were all astonished by this sight. Kai gasped in awe, "Where did that come from?" he asked. The professor looked perplexed, shaking his head while continuing to pinch himself. "Well, that's rather convenient," the professor shrugged.

Uncertain about what to do, we decided to explore the forest. The towering trees loomed overhead, blocking the moonlight. As we approached the area, all we could see were more palm and pine trees. We continued along the dirt path, leaving our footprints imprinted on the earth. Just then, we stumbled upon a spacious clearing ahead. I lifted my head to admire the stunning, breathtaking scenery. It resembled paradise. Towering trees surrounded a tranquil lake, their branches bending gracefully towards the surface as a Tarbosaurus drank from it. Water lilies floated on the lake, creating gentle ripples in the night breeze, while a Spinosaurus lurked in the shadows, poised to catch fish. The air was filled with the sounds of rustling leaves and distant dinosaur calls, crafting a vibrant atmosphere. I stood there in complete awe. Professor Tin chuckled and remarked, "Welcome to the Gobi Desert. There are always plenty of mysteries here." Tiddles acted like a dog wagging two tails, bursting into an enthusiastic roar.

We were severely dehydrated and rushed to the lake for water. The water flowed slowly down my throat, and I felt more replenished and revitalised. I heard the rustling of leaves. Suddenly, a deep, unfamiliar voice emerged from behind and said, "Oh my word!" I was completely frozen. We hadn't anticipated anyone else being in such a remote location. I turned and saw a hooded silhouette. Professor Tin immediately stood up and exclaimed, "Stay right there! Who are you?" The man revealed his face; his most distinctive feature was his long white beard. He spoke in a calm tone. "Relax, mates, I'm Barry, an explorer. If anyone knows this place, it's me. I've been here for at least twenty years." Upon hearing that, we were all taken aback.

Barry explained how the shifting dunes of the Gobi Desert concealed ancient cities that had led to his entrapment. He revealed a pattern of terrain changes occurring every fifteenth day of the lunar month, which he had recently discovered, bringing him close to escaping just before our arrival. Professor Tin spoke on our behalf, stating, "We picked up a scroll. A few scrolls and that brought us here." He handed over all the scrolls we had collected. "Oh, and we also found a fossil!" Kai added. We unanimously exclaimed, "Kai!" as we all felt it best to keep it a secret. Barry quickly rummaged through his backpack and produced the other half of the fossil. He enthusiastically interrupted, "Is this what you're looking for?" We exchanged silent glances. The explorer continued, "I was the one who wrote these scrolls, regularly seeking help in the hopes that someone would receive my message." I took our half of the fossilised egg and slowly pressed it against Barry's to see if the two halves would fit together. "It fits! This is the legendary hydrous gem!" I exclaimed. Barry confirmed my discovery and urged us to follow him, hinting that he knew where to activate it.

We continued our walk through the savanna, encountering various types of dinosaurs along the way. As we rustled through the leaves, we came across metal tracks leading to an abandoned coal mine. Venturing further, the passage narrowed, with dinosaur tracks occasionally visible on either side. The mine tracks opened into a spacious area at the bottom of the rocky descent. Barry spoke of how the mine had yielded numerous dinosaur tracks and fossils, including his discovery of an Oviraptor fossil. As we explored deeper, Kai recognised a stone on the wall as the Yin Yang symbol they had encountered previously. Barry revealed that a switch had been activated, causing the rocks above to shift and unveil the starry sky alongside a spherical slot in the ground. By placing both fossils into the slot, we eagerly awaited the magic to unfold.

We waited, yet nothing occurred. Professor Tin stepped forward and said, "I don't suppose it's that simple. I know a thing or two about the Yin and Yang symbol, representing balance and harmony. Therefore, I assume it's connected to the stars." I returned to the lever, cleared the dust beneath it, and discovered the words engraved on the wall: "Fifteenth midnight marks a full moon; when stars align, you shall end thy doom." I read the words slowly: "Wait, isn't tonight a full moon? That's when the terrain changed, and we ended up here." Barry glanced at his watch, "Oh dear, it's 11:58 pm! Quick, we must prepare and turn the stone!" We all took our positions and raced against the clock. We twisted the rock with all our strength, grunting and groaning, but nothing happened. Suddenly, Professor Tin had an idea and called for the dinosaur, "Oh, Tiddles!" Tiddles came galloping to the rescue, sprinting at full speed. He rested his claws on the stone beside our hands as if he understood our thoughts and began to turn it. Once, twice. A brilliant surge of light illuminated the space, and I swooned.

When I awoke, I found myself back at base camp. However, everything before my eyes had changed completely. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Broad, towering trees had replaced the dry, desiccated bushes, and clear, sparkling water filled the parched river while dinosaurs coexisted harmoniously with humans. A wide grin spread across my face as I recognised this place's life-changing transformation and appreciated nature's beauty. In all my dreams, I never imagined that such a barren, desolate location filled with ruins could ever restore itself to its former glory. Tiddles patted me on the back, signifying our success. As we exchanged a high five, I realised that a new civilisation was on the verge of beginning.

Between Blood and Bone

St. Paul's Convent School, Wah, Hon Mau Anika – 16

Yet, as Dr. Loong gazed upon the egg, a creeping sense of foreboding washed over him like a tidal wave.

For years in China, the revered ‘dinosaur bones’ have been highly sought after by the rich and powerful, with their tales promising cures for any types of sickness. Dr. Loong, fueled by the whispers of a new sighting, led his team into the unforgiving terrain of Jiangxi. Dr. Loong, famous for his determination and tenacity, was no stranger to this type of harsh and treacherous expedition. Dr. Loong, along with his team – comprised of several young ambitious and like-minded paleontologists – had been chasing leads on the mysterious ‘dinosaur bones’ for months, ever since the rumors of an unprecedented paleontological discovery in the remote Liaoning region began to circulate. Despite their efforts, it was not rewarded. Jiangxi was their last hope. The group focused on one goal: to be the first to uncover this prehistoric treasure, while one member silently carried a deeper mission —an unspoken hope that this discovery might hold the key to saving his father.

The journey was perilous. Clambering and wedging across the rugged and isolated terrain, the team was battered by unyielding winds, scorching sunlight and the ever-looming threat of tumbling boulders. Still, Dr. Loong and his team pushed on, driven by what could be a lifechanging discovery.

After arriving at the thirtieth valley, a faint glimmer caught Dr. Loong's eye. Towering ferns and moss layered the ground, twisting and coiling around rocks and trees. A cool breeze flitted through the vicinity, causing the broad leaves to sway and rustle. Jagged cliffs marked either side of the secluded valley, with the setting sun casting a warm glow across everything in its wake. Stepping further into the clearing, the air thickened with a heavy, earthy scent. The echo of a crunch beneath his boot caused Dr. Loong to pause – and there, nestled in the very dirt before his eyes, was the unmistakable outline of an egg. The air thick with anticipation, Dr. Loong and his team carefully brushed away the surrounding soil to reveal a perfectly preserved dinosaur egg. Shadows stretched and danced across the valley and between the trees, as if the forest was alive and watching this extraordinary discovery fervently. In the intact nest, lay the egg, miraculously pristine with its shell unblemished by time, except for its apex where Dr. Loong stepped on. Upon further examination of the cracked egg, Dr. Loong's heart raced. Embedded within the shell were the unmistakable telltale signs of a dinosaur that has only existed in ancient Chinese mythology. The scout of the hatchling was marked with a distinct bright red color. The team was ecstatic as they realized they have had discovered a relic that would forever change what historians knew about China's past. As Dr. Loong sank to his knees in awe, a sobering realization struck him – he had to betray his team to save his father.

His team, a group of ambitious researchers, had fought tooth and nail to reach this place. Alas, for Dr. Loong, this was more than just a quest. His father lied sick at home, consumed by a mysterious and all-consuming illness that had stumped every healer in their village. In the midst of their discovery, the wails of his father on his sickbed drowned out the camaraderie of his team.

He glanced back at his teammates, their faces illuminated by the sunset, eyes wide with wonder and exhilaration. A pang of guilt twisted in Dr. Loong's gut. This group of distinguished individuals were more than his colleagues, they were his sworn friends for life or death, who were loyal and trusted in him. Could he really betray them to save his father?

He crouched closer to the egg, its shell growing brighter, as if sensing his presence and beckoning him closer. Memories played in his brain: his father's laughter, the warmth of his presence, the stories shared over family meals. The image of his father, frail and pale, burned his eyelids. The egg could be the key to restoring that warmth he had missed so desperately these past few years, but at what cost?

His fingers brushed against the cool surface of the egg, and felt a jolt of energy coursing through him. Stretching his fingers across the egg, doubts slowly gnawed at him. Would his team understand his actions? Closing his eyes, he could already imagine their faces—hurt and betrayed.

As Dr. Loong wrestled with his predicament, a wail pierced the night air, cutting through the tension like a hot knife through butter. To the astonishment of everyone in the area, the egg began to crack and split open. Watching the scene unfold with baited breaths, Dr. Loong and his team witnessed the slow, agonizing birth of a prehistoric hatchling, a primordial creature long thought extinct, coming back to life before their very eyes. The hatchling, a mix of scales and talons, let out a pitiful cry from its shell. Its eyes, intelligent and mesmerizing, locked onto Dr. Loong's.

Feeling the weight of the world on his shoulders, Dr. Loong found himself at a crossroad, forced to decide the fate of the hatchling, the team, his father, and perhaps all of humanity.

Stepping forward, Dr. Loong opened his mouth to address his team when the hatchling's eyes narrowed, and its nostrils flared. A deep, guttural roar erupted from the hatchling's maw, shaking the earth beneath their feet.

For a heartbeat, time froze. The hatchling unfurled its wings, its silhouette shrouded the team in an eerie shadow. Dr. Loong braced himself, body tensing as the ancient creature's piercing gaze fixed upon him, emitting a powerful presence that commanded attention.

Dr. Loong felt his heart sink with a palpable sense of dread. The ancient creature, its scales glimmering, rose gracefully into the air. The team stood paralyzed, their faces etched with a mixture of wonder and horror, as they watched their discovery slipped away from the palm of their hands.

Dr. Loong watched, transfixed, as the dinosaur beat its wings, causing powerful gusts of wind sending debris swirling in its wake. Dr Loong clutched his fist tightly as he saw his last chance to save his dying father was soaring through the dark, starry sky.

A weak, old man sat on a porch chair looking up idly at the moon. He asked his son, 'Elian, is it time to take the medicine?'

Elian smiled, 'Yes, Dad.' Elian poured some powder into the herbal tea and gave it a stir.

The powder quickly evanesced and sizzled. Dad gulped down the liquid like a starving man.

Immediately, the father looked younger and healthier. He sat up straighter, color returning to his cheeks as if a cloud had been lifted. Elian smiled, setting down the cup next to the mortar and pestle.

'This herbal tea tastes different from all the previous ones you've given me, what did you add to it?' Dad questioned.

'Oh, I just added a new healing remedy from the local healer. It is said to have astonishing healing properties,' replied Elian, subtly slipping the dinosaur egg into his coat pocket.

Clearing his throat, Elian met the questioning gaze of his father, 'I have high hopes that this remedy will cure your sickness.'

Shifting his stance, Elian rested his weight on his right leg, his hand covering the lump in his right coat pocket. As Elian gazed upon his father's frail figure, a sense of satisfaction engulfed him. Elian knew, for sure, that his father will live for a long, long time.

Zenith

St. Paul's Convent School, Zheng, Jiayao Linda – 16

"Rustle" she bends her knees, to dive deep into the bush, ensuring that her silhouette is fully canopied. Her pupils dilate, allowing every reflection of the movement of her prey to be caught in her brain. Her neck outstretches at her longest, tail straightened with passion. Infinite concentration.

The land she sets foot on lies hundreds billion years away from present, when the young vital earth gestates species of plants, dinosaurs and animals. Gigantic trees rise and soar up to the sapphire sky, cutting the shining silks poured from the sun into shattered golds and patching it up with shades of dreadful darkness. To her, she is lucky to be born in the golden age of small hunters like her—the Early Cretaceous period. At this time, rivers, lively veins of the land roam and crisscross the land, spreading abundant seeds of lives of reptiles and insects.

Breezes of desolation invade the land, flicking the flame of life within her beating hearts, phantoms in the sky, who are released from constriction of the great sun, give out sinister glitter of staring eyes of Death. Life is at a deciding stage for her, catching the last few hours of light beams before the fading sun, that is about to dwell into the coastline and fall asleep and leave the world in an endless black. At then, she would be knifed and slayed by the rampant wind, body corrupted with coldness like a broken corpse, after that her dearest baby eggs would lay dormant forever in her stiff abdomen, turning to gravestones of her bloodline. Then, it will be the final end. That is not going to happen. Overall, she is a successful player, strictly following the law of the jungle. She has spine-tingling times of being preyed on, while

so far, she never fails and never is enfolded by Death. She casts herself into the best position, as if an arrow on the stringed bow, to wager all the remaining energy in this race of life, pointing on that lizard-like creature, which has no conscience at all about its own life being at the edge. This is a duel of wisdom, of combat of strength, a race of speed.

Gently, her forepaws push leaves away, clearing a way to glory for her. Meanwhile, the lizard raises up its head, suspiciously inspects the pit with a sense of nothingness that lies behind the bush. She draws back her passionately straightened neck, hoping to cover up her haste that trips her over from reaching success. Two mung bean eyes of the prey roll and turn confusedly, still trying to take insight of the secret inside. Lizards are as fast as a dart on every type of terrain, whose scampering limbs alternate each other in a miraculously smooth pattern. A slip of mind of the opponent should be its way of survival. It has the greatest confidence in terms of pace to support itself to stand alive in nature, and consciousness is the key. Stay still, she hides in her darkness. Even her throbbing artery is muted, a sense of peacefulness suppresses her passion, chilling herself up into a mannequin. It is a rivalry of patience. Gaze deep into it. Calm, Motionless. Finally, the Lizard returns to the job of feeding itself, yet the string of alertness remains tightened. It is about to leave with filled energy, meanwhile her stomach twitches complaints of being empty.

It is now or never.

She springs into action and shoots herself out like a bullet, muscle tensed fangs bared, vision locked on her hope. She is putting everything in this race. In that split second, the lizard's peripheral glimpse bumps right into the murderously glare of two copper-bell eyes of the hunter. This picture, immediately stimulates an adrenaline rush which activates its four engines, its frantic legs switch on involuntarily and fleet for its life.

The sun sheds its red glow on the two, and one shadow follows another is reflected on the open country of autumn meadow. Leaves rustle, grasses tangle as they strike across. The lizard's body bows in a perfect shape of streamline, and the tail, a slenderly swayed balance in it for swift passage across obstacles. It is proud and gloats of its wide vision field in order to discover the danger ahead and leave sufficient time for evasion. Its vertebral bends and flexes in a cadence of agility and it goes on zigzagging. Despite the prey's twists and feints, she remains sophisticated and manages to identify feints of the lizard by keeping straightforward like a lightning. Every step is a calculated use effort to achieve maximized efficiency, and the distance gets smaller. Closer, closer, her lip can almost bite the tip of its tail. An unusual whip of the tail, feeling hot, breathes death as strokes. Do not slacken up, victory is insight, she thinks. A flash of light, that fleshy tail slips out of her stinging sight. Not for a millisecond, she realizes its cunning trick of taking a sudden swerve, and the lizard has already leaped a few steps further from her. Gut-wrenching after a round of nervous exercise, breathlessness and exhaustion drown her into a state of bewilderment. Though it does not last long. The instinctive will to survive, urges her to keep going, to stand and fight fate till her last blood runs out. With a final burst of energy, she sprints toward her prey with her two thighs, which are too weary even to support her. The last and only thought in her mind is to hold on. If she ever stops, she will collapse.

After twists and turns, the tender red briquette from the sky is finally swallowed by the mountain. Icy blasts pierce her and gash across her feathers. She clings to her well-weaved hope of a feast as she races toward an arroyo. Like the opening mouth of an ancient beast, forceful air howls through its throat. The silhouettes of trees are like lingering ghosts. Her prey slides down swiftly. She hesitates, for her body structure makes it arduous to descend with sufficient pace. The lizard stops, giving a gloating glance, declaring its superiority. Unable to tear her eyes away from her last hope, she stands blank, at a loss.

Another chaotic current of air sweeps through the valley, bringing a humid scent from below. It pushes her to wobble, and she flutters her wings for balance. An invisible power lifts her, freeing her from gravity as she treads on air. Her brown feathers meld into the night as she spreads her wings. Riding the winds, she glides down the slope. Then, she tucks her wings to dive. Air whistles around her, beating her ears and eyes. She silently drifts down like a withered leaf. The haze of death shrouds the exultant lizard. Swoop. Fearsome talons clench into its shoulder and head. The mighty force makes it roll over. Tearing pain floods its body, dizziness stirs its brain, and the lizard shrieks while struggling to escape. All futile. Her talons grip firmly, her fangs deeply inserted into the flesh. Salty blood runs from wounds; she bathes in the scarlet fountain of victory. Death, now a helpful friend, lulls her delicate meal into forever sleep.

Skilfully, she rips out the viscera of the warm corpse, feeding on the tenderest parts. The meat is succulent and rich in fat. Like sweet dew after drought, her furnace of life is refilled. Afterward, she discovers a moist, warm muddy spot as a cradle for her offspring. Leisurely, she stays in her cosy nest, reflecting on her luck. Tomorrow would be bright, and while unwinding from motherhood, she would prey on more creatures using her newfound gliding skill.

Rumble. Rattling echoes through the valley. In her drowsy state, sounds like thunder explode around her, and the land shakes violently. The ceiling breaks into fragments; the exit buried by debris. In an instant, her world compresses, organs squeeze out, bones break, and blood dampens her life.

The world has a total change, scrubbing off old lives while fresh souls arrive. Humans are among them.

"Sir, this could be a unique, valuable dinosaur fossil. Please allow me to handle this," a man in decent clothes gently inspects a rock delivered by a villager.

Soon, the evidence of feathers on the fossil, along with an article, causes chaos in Western paleontological circles, providing proof of bird evolution theory. Although her species became extinct, her remains advance Chinese palaeontology. After millions of years, freed from rock and bathing in sunlight, she is given a new name—Chinese reptilian wing.

Winter's Borrowed Grace

St. Paul's Convent School, Zheng, Jiayu Lisa – 16

As the boy was exploring the grove in his backyard, he heard the cries of some unknown animals.

The boy's mother was an archaeologist, who often shared fascinating stories of the dinosaurs, especially those that were discovered in China, which had greatly provoked the boy's interest in this area. He loved to imagine the ancient creatures that had once lived on this earth and wanted to find evidence of their existence by himself although he knew it was unlikely to happen.

"Caw! caw!" A sorrowful cry of fear ran into the boy's ear as he approached. The thick pine needles of the towering pine tree blocked out the sky completely, only a few beams of the golden sunlight could pass through and illuminate the ground in patches, guiding the boy's hesitant steps in darkness. The mysterious call from the unknown creature lured the boy to discover where it came from. He approached deep into the forest, then saw a black feather lying on the frosty ground with vibrant red blood stains. He moved his gaze around, and then spotted a black bird near the root of an ancient tree, trembling in the biting winter wind, its feather ruffled and dishevelled, with its eyes shut— waiting for the end to come. There were blood stains on the right wing of the bird and small scratch marks all over its body.

The crunching noise made by the boy's boots on the snow had disturbed it. The raven slowly opened its eyes, wide and frightened, struggling on the snowy ground as it attempted to crawl away from the boy, making a threatening

“caw!” sound deep from its throat in desperation, although it did not seem to scare off the boy. Obviously, the wounded creature would rather die alone than be captured by humans.

“Seems like this raven has been wounded by a cat,” the boy thought, his heart deeply attached to the fragile creature as he reached his hand toward the raven, trying to comfort it by gently petting its ruffled feather. However, the raven cawed with anger and pecked the hand fiercely. “Ouch!” The boy retracted his hand but did not care about the ache on his hand, luckily the peck did not break his skin. Determined to help, he put on a pair of thick gloves, gently placed his hand on the raven’s back, lifted it up, then held the raven on his palm.

Despite the raven pecking him again with all its strength, the boy did not withdraw his hand from it. Slowly, the raven closed its eyes and gave up struggling as the cheerful boy brought it back home.

Once inside, the raven was placed into a carton near the crackling fireplace, where warmth enthralled the bird with a soft towel provided by the boy covering its body. The frozen raven gradually began to recover from the coldness that had seeped into its bones. The gentle heat flux from fire soon lured the bird to a peaceful sleep, safe and cosy away from the harsh winter outside the window.

“Hi Mom! Look what I have found!”

“Rex, is that a Raven?” A woman’s face showed up on the screen of Rex’s phone.

“Yes, I have found it in the grove, its wing is broken, can you teach me how to bind up the wound?”

“Sure, wait... sorry, I have some important work to do now, I will call you lat...beep.”

“Oh, she hung up, sorry about that,” Rex said to the raven that had fallen asleep. “My mom is an archaeologist, she is always busy and away from home...I can help to bind up your wound by myself.” Rex took out a roll of white gauze, carefully wrapping the gauze around the raven’s wing a few times, then tied a loose knot.

“Ding Dong”

“Who is that?” Rex peeked through the peephole. Out there stood a woman with a red scarf surrounding her neck and chin, a white woven hat and a mask. As Rex was uncertain about whether to open the door or not, the woman took out a key from her bag and poked it into the keyhole. Cold sweat smeared out from Rex’s forehead, he reached his hand toward the door chain, but it was too late—the door was opened and in came the woman....

She gracefully took off her masks and scarf.

“Mom!” The cold fear turned into joy, “why are you back?”

“Actually, I am on a holiday, when you called me, I was still on my way back, but I wanted to give you a surprise so I lied to you,” she said with a cheeky smile.

After a flurry of greetings, Rex introduced the raven to his mom. They decided to take it to the vet for treatment. An x-ray was taken, and it showed that the raven had a closed fracture with one of the wing bones broken, which could be cured in about a month.

As they returned home, Rex prepared some raw meat for the raven as food and a nest near the fireplace. Under the nurturing of Rex, trust had grown between them like fire as time passed, the raven sometimes would use its furry head to rub against his hand or jump into Rex's bedroom in the morning to call him up for breakfast. With the companion of the Raven, Rex no longer felt lonely even when his mother was leaving for work, he would spend most of his time playing with the raven at home instead of exploring the grove. As the wound of the raven was recovering, Rex noticed the growth of anxiety in the raven's heart.

A month had soon passed in cheer and laughter.

One morning, Rex took the raven to the room with French windows where they usually enjoyed the sunshine. A ray of morning sunlight sprinkled all over the raven's black feather and reflected a purple-blue light into Rex's eyes. The raven raised its head and gazed deeply into the azure blue sky, sparkling with yearning, it did not move its sight even when Rex took out its favourite meat.

Suddenly, the raven started to flap its wings vigorously, and successfully lifted itself into the air. It "cawed" with excitement and flew toward the sky. "Bang!" the poor raven bumped onto the invisible wall, it all happened so fast that Rex did not even have time to say a word.

The raven fell into a coma, fortunately its brain was not seriously injured. After that accident, the raven craved to stay under the sky more frequently and ignored Rex completely. It would spend all its day standing in front of the window, using its beak to knock on the invisible wall, wondering how to get out.

Rex was left alone again, so he pulled the curtain of all the windows to prevent the raven from seeing any scenery outside. He felt guilty for using this way to suppress the raven's nature of yearning for freedom of flying, but soon he justified his behaviour by thinking of how dangerous it was out there, the raven as a bird could be easily caught and killed by other carnivores, while he was like a saviour that provided sufficient food so the raven would not starve, and a warm nest so it would not freeze in the relentless winter wind, and protection so it could live until its natural death with no worries of being attacked by predators, and so much more that a wild bird would not have. Rex assumed the raven should be satisfied with what it had living with him.

However, the anxiety of the raven did not disappear as Rex expected. The raven became gloomier and there was a crack growing between their relationships, it seemed like the raven understood who had deprived it of flying. Few days later, it even refused to eat any food given by its owner. At night, Rex could not fall asleep as his mind was completely messed up by the raven. Driven to despair, Rex called his mother for help.

"Maybe it's time to let it go."

"No, it is still winter, where food resources are scarce, it will have a better life staying in our house." Rex protested against the idea with a persuasive tone, trying to convince his mother to let him keep the raven. Although he understood how the raven was craving for freedom, he felt that he could not take the pain of losing this precious friend.

"Son, you thought it was best for the raven to stay, but you did not consider what the raven wanted by itself, animals also need to fulfil their spiritual desire."

"Let me tell you about the story of how some dinosaurs evolved into birds. Have a look at the x-ray of the raven."

Rex had a glimpse of the x-ray of the raven, then exclaimed "the general shape of bone structure of the bird is really similar to the dinosaur!"

“Yes, birds are descendants of dinosaurs. Over millions of years, these creatures evolved the ability to fly, developing hollow bones and feathers. This gift of flight became an essential part of their nature. It’s not just about survival – it’s about who they are,” his mother explained gently.

Rex remained silent for a while, then spoke softly, “I understand now. The raven needs to be free, just like its ancestors fought so hard to gain the ability to fly.”

The next morning, Rex opened all the curtains, letting the sunshine flood into the room. The raven’s eyes sparkled with life again as it saw the endless sky. Rex opened the French window, cold winter air rushed in, bringing snowflakes that danced in the air.

“Goodbye, my friend,” Rex whispered.

The raven turned its head and gazed at Rex for a moment, as if saying farewell. Then it spread its wings and soared into the vast sky. Rex watched as his friend became a small black dot against the winter clouds, then disappeared completely.

Dinosaurs (Konglong)— ‘Fearful Dragons’?

St. Paul's Secondary School, Kong, Andrea Wyanet – 15

Since ages ago, dinosaurs have been regarded as fierce, strong, ferocious, powerful species by you humans. Even the term coined, dinosaur, speaks for itself—from the Greek words ‘deinos’ and ‘sauros’ which means ‘terrible lizard’. And even in Chinese, the word is also a combination of ‘fear’ and ‘dragon’.

‘So, as we have come to the end of the Year of the Dragon, don’t you feel like you should know more about us dinosaurs? Are we not the category of the dragon, your idolized spiritual animal as well, people? Shouldn’t we get to know each other? Shouldn’t we have all coexisted together peacefully in the one place we call home?’

A voice came in my mind as I looked at a skeleton; its size was approximately 1.5 m, it was deduced that this dinosaur was an Agilisaurus.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, answering the voice. ‘Unfortunately, that has and never will happen.’

‘Over 230 million years ago, we dinosaurs were the ones that had reigned over Earth; we are ancient. But allow me to confirm one thing: despite the fact that we are depicted as scary and violent creatures like those you see in movies, we aren’t as frightening as you think we are. True, there were dinosaurs that were carnivorous, and there were also some that were herbivorous. Now, now, don’t get me wrong; I am not implying that creatures that subsist solely on plants, particularly vascular tissues, are harmless. However, I must emphasize that us dinosaurs are neither savage nor mindless beasts thirsting for food. We are, or at least were, living creatures, one of the animals of the planet, the same as you humans. We also have a mind of our own, and every day, we’re just trying to survive.’

The voice continued, 'It seemed as though it was yesterday when huge rocks started falling from the sky, in addition to a volcanic eruption...'

'You mean you were there when the asteroid impact happened?'

'Indeed. I still remember... The beautiful blue sky was covered with thick dark clouds, smoke kept emerging, flames ate up the lush fawns and flora, and the atmosphere was suffocating...' The voice paused. 'I often wonder, if it weren't for the asteroid, would we dinosaurs also evolve into something beautiful?'

I heard a tinge of wistfulness in the voice. I muttered, 'It must have been painful to witness that, to suffer from that.'

'Well, Mother Nature is spectacular in her way; no one can beat it—I wonder what other discoveries you magnificent humans may reveal from us? You know, there are still many of us lurking around the corners of China.'

That is exactly why my research team and I are here. More than 40 of your species have been discovered in the province of Liaoning, as well as the titanosaur in Jiangxi. What will we find next? We, a group of paleontologists, came to find out.

'Thank you for your time.' I mumbled, bowing my head and taking off my glasses.

'So, the glasses, did they work?' A colleague of mine asked, her eyes widening with curiosity. 'Were you...really able to communicate with...them?' She gestured at the skeleton.

I turned to her, a small twitch in the corner of my lips. 'Why yes, the invention worked.' I nodded, 'In fact, it told me its small tale. Let's continue with our search and see what our dearest Mother Nature still has to offer us.'

Beneath the Surface

St. Stephen's Girls' College, Leung, Yui Ka – 16

As the sun blazed high in the sky, casting a golden hue over the fields of Jiangxi, Li wiped the sweat from his brow. His calloused farmer hands gripped the plow as he toiled under the scorching sun, the earth stubbornly resisting his efforts.

Frustration gnawed at Li as he dug deeper and deeper, the soil clinging to his fingers like a relentless adversary. Just when he thought he couldn't go on, a strange glimmer caught his eye. Intrigued, Li leaned down to inspect the area.

He began to dig with his fingers, pushing aside clumps of dirt with increasing urgency. And then, as if a reward for his persistence, what he unearthed made his heart race—a huge, curved bone that seemed to be partially buried in the earth.

The bone was not like anything Li had ever seen before. It was massive, with intricate patterns etched into its surface, resembling the fossilized remains of a prehistoric creature. As he brushed off the earth, the shape became clearer—it appeared to be an extremely large skull! Its massive jaws and pointy teeth frozen in a forever rictus roar, a relic of a time long past.

"What in the world...?" he murmured, his voice thick with astonishment.

Li's mind raced with questions. Was it a relic? The bone of an animal long gone from this earth? He gently brushed away the surrounding dirt, revealing more of the bone. He chuckled to himself, "Maybe it's a dragon bone! Ha!"

Exhilaration bubbled within him as he envisioned the stories he would tell his son, Ming. He hurriedly finished plowing the small plot, heart pounding in anticipation. The thought of sharing this discovery with his son ignited a fire within him.

Later that evening, the sun dipped below the horizon to paint the sky in an orange–pink hue. Returning home, Li’s rough hands cradled the bone like a precious treasure. Ming was at the small wooden table, poring over a stack of dusty books.

“Dad!” Ming exclaimed as he looked up. Then, his eyes sparkling with excitement, “What’s that you’re holding?”

Li placed the bone on the table with a flourish. “Look, my son! I found this while plowing!”

Ming’s eyes widened as he leaned closer. The bone was unlike anything he had seen illustrated in his books, and he instinctively reached for it. Having quickly examined it, Ming immediately started flipping through the pages of his books, before stopping and pointing at a small, skinny–looking dinosaur.

“This is incredible! I think it belongs to a dinosaur!”

“A dino–what?” Li’s brow furrowed in confusion, his mind struggling to keep up.

“A dinosaur, Dad!” Ming’s voice was rich in enthusiasm.

“They were fast predators, one of the smartest dinosaurs! This could be worth so much!”

Li watched his son’s excitement bloom, a smile breaking across his face.

“You think so? But what do we do with it?”

Ming’s quick mind raced, mental gears changing as he considered the options.

“We should show it to a museum. They’ll know what to do with it. Maybe they’ll even pay us for it?”

Li nodded, still trying to process the gravity of his find.

“If it helps to get you to college, then that’s what we must do.”

The next morning, they made their way to the local museum, a modest building that had seen better days. Its faded sign hung crookedly and the paint was peeling, but the potential for discovery within its walls resonated with Ming.

As they entered, the air seemed thick with anticipation. A man with slick, greased hair and an expensive suit approached them.

“Welcome to the Jiangxi Museum! I am Mr. Chin,” he introduced himself with an over–easy grin, his voice smooth like honey.

“Mr. Chin, we have something to show you,” said Ming, his voice steady despite a tremor of excitement. As he carefully unwrapped the bone, Mr. Chin’s eyes widened in disbelief.

“A dinosaur bone!” Chin exclaimed “But this is remarkable! Where did you find it?”

“In my field while I was plowing it,” Li replied, in simple honesty. “We just want to know what it’s worth.”

Mr. Chin leaned closer, inspecting the bone with a glint of greed in his eyes.

“Ah, well... for something like this, I could certainly make you an offersay...5,000 yuan?”

Ming’s heart sank.

“That doesn’t seem right. Surely it’s a significant find?”

Chin’s expression shifted, and his smile grew predatory.

“Listen, boy, I can’t compensate you for the bone but I assure you, it will be well cared for. Just think of the exposure this museum and this town will get!”

Li exchanged glances with Ming, sensing the tension brewing.

“We appreciate your offer, Mr. Chin, but it doesn’t feel fair.”

“Fair?” scoffed Chin, waving his hand dismissively. “You’re a farmer. What do you know about fossils? You should be grateful for any offer at all.”

Ming took a step forward, his voice steady and firm.

“My father may be a farmer but he’s also a man of integrity. We will not be taken advantage of.”

Chin’s smile faltered, replaced with a sneer.

“Suit yourself, but you’ll regret it. I have connections that can make or break you.”

With that, Li and Ming turned away. The encounter weighed heavily on their shoulders. They walked home in silence with the bone wrapped safely between them, but their spirits were dampened. That night, as they sat by a flickering candle, Ming spoke up, his voice resolute. “Dad, we have to share our story. People need to know what we found and how we were treated.”

Li slowly nodded, still processing the day’s events. “But how?”

“Social media, Dad. I’ve seen how quickly news spreads online. If we share our story, maybe we’ll find support? We deserve more than Chin’s low offer.”

Li looked at his son, admiration swelling in his heart.

“You’re right, Ming. Let’s do it.”

With a determined glint in his eye, Ming took out his phone, fingers flying over the screen as he crafted a post detailing the discovery and their encounter with Mr. Chin at the museum.

The next morning dawned bright and hopeful. Sunlight filtered through the curtains of their modest home in Jiangxi. Li awoke early, his heart still racing from the previous day’s events.

“Ming!” he called, leaning against the doorframe, “What do you think the people are saying?”

Ming emerged from his room, hair tousled and eyes shining.

“Dad! You won’t believe it! The post has gone viral! Hundreds of people are commenting on it!”

“Really? What are they saying?”

Grinning, Ming pulled out his phone. “Look here!”

He showed Li a screen filled with notifications. “People are amazed by the discovery and upset about the way Chin treated us. They want to help!”

“Help us how?”

“Some people are donating money to fund my college fees, while others are offering to help us officially display the bone. They want to see it in a local showcase!”

Ming’s excitement was infectious.

“Showcase? What do you mean?” His father tried to grasp the concept.

“Like, a temporary exhibition! They want to highlight our story and the bone to draw attention to our farm and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. It can help us, Dad!” Ming’s voice was filled with hope.

Li took a deep breath, the weight of the situation settling in.

“But what if we’re taken advantage of again? I don’t want you to be affected, son.”

Ming placed a reassuring hand on his father’s shoulder.

“I promise, I’ll be careful. Let’s show Chin that we won’t be silenced. We can do this together.”

That afternoon, they set out to visit the local community center to arrange an exhibition. The center was a small but bustling hub filled with villagers sharing stories and the latest news. As they entered, Ming took the lead, his confidence evident as he approached the manager.

“Excuse me, Mr. Zhang,” Ming said. “We want to offer you a unique opportunity to showcase something remarkable.”

Zhang, a kind but stern-looking man with graying hair, raised an eyebrow. “What is it?”

Ming took a deep breath and launched into the discovery of the dinosaur bone, their experience at the museum and their desire to display it for the community. As he spoke, Li watched the villagers’ faces around them—interest sparked in their eyes, and whispers of disbelief and excitement rippled through the crowd.

When Ming finished, Zhang nodded thoughtfully.

“This is indeed significant, but we’ll need to get approval from the council. The idea of a temporary exhibition would attract visitors and support your education.”

A wave of hope washed over Li, and he exchanged an encouraging glance with Ming.

“Thank you, Mr. Zhang. We’re willing to do anything it takes to make this happen.”

Zhang smiled, a twinkle of admiration in his eyes. “

I’ll help you, Ming. Let’s draft a proposal for the council. If we can get their backing, we can set this up in no time.”

With a plan in motion, Li and Ming worked tirelessly over the next few days. The boy used his smartphone to document everything—the bone, their struggles, the community support and the exhibition plans. They regularly posted updates, fostering excitement in their growing online audience. Meanwhile, a team of archaeologists joined them to carefully excavate the site, working diligently to unearth the entire dinosaur fossil, piece by piece, revealing the ancient creature in all its glory.

As they prepared for the exhibition opening, word spread like wildfire and the community rallied behind Li and his son. Donations poured in from supporters —local businesses offering supplies, fellow villagers volunteering their time; even strangers from different provinces wanting to contribute to such a significant find.

On the day of the opening, the sun shone brightly, illuminating the makeshift display area set up in the community center. A banner reading “The Dinosaur Discovery: A Journey of Hope” hung proudly at the entrance. Villagers and visitors gathered, their faces filled with curiosity and anticipation.

Ming stood at the front, heart racing as he prepared to speak to the crowd. Li stood beside him, a reassuring presence.

“Thank you all for being here today,” Ming began, his voice steady despite the nerves.

“This is not just about a dinosaur bone. This is about our journey, our community and our resilience.”

Li smiled at Ming, pride swelling in his chest. Memories of his wife flooded his mind—the way she had encouraged Ming to dream, to fight for what was right. As Ming continued speaking, Li observed the crowd’s reactions. There were smiles, nods of understanding and even a few tears. The bond between them was palpable, and this moment was a testament to their resilience.

“This bone represents hope,” Ming concluded, his voice filled with passion.

“It’s a reminder that even when faced with adversity, love and support leads to a brighter future.”

The crowd erupted in applause. Ming's heart swelled as he observed the supportive faces, people who believed in their story. Li squeezed his shoulder, pride radiating from him.

Li had not merely unearthed a bone from the depths of the earth. He and his son had together unearthed a new path filled with possibilities—one that would lead them to a brighter future.

The Cretaceous Stories

Stamford American School, Lu, Cheuk Yi Jacky – 15

One day, 230 million years ago, it's hard to say which day it was, maybe just an ordinary day. The Earth was as calm as usual.

On the Gondwana continent, there was a large, yellow Tyrannosaurus Rex that had just finished eating and was walking across the vast land. On this day, all the creatures on Gondwana had one goal: survival and reproduction. They didn't care where they came from or where they were going; they only cared about filling their stomachs today and finding a mate.

As the sun began to set, night fell, and stars dotted the sky. In the darkness, the Tyrannosaurus found a seemingly good spot to rest. It squatted down, tail thumping the ground, kicking up dust. After confirming there was nothing around, it sat down heavily, shaking the ground and causing dust to rise. Leaves in the nearby cycad forest rustled, and reptiles scurried out of their burrows in panic.

The dinosaur didn't care; it gazed at the starry sky, lost in thought as if the world had frozen at that moment.

Chapter One: Dinosaurs in 30,000 BC

Dinosaurs had entered a primitive age and small carnivorous dinosaurs replaced the giant Tyrannosaurs as the rulers of the Earth.

Reed knew this was the last day. He sat quietly at his desk, moonlight shining on his chest, and in the darkness, his sad face was barely visible. The moonlight made the small window look like a door to another world, a world filled with silver light, like a scene made of shadows and shimmering snow. He hesitantly looked out the window, and the illusion vanished, revealing the village where he had spent his life.

The village lay peacefully under the moonlight as if no one had been there for a hundred years. The flat-topped houses, typical of the plateau, blended into the yellow earth around them. Only the old locust tree in front of the village stood out, with its dark nests hidden among the dry branches, like drops of ink on the silvery scene.

As the tribe's high priest, he didn't just lead rituals; he also communicated with the "starry sky," a primitive belief that revered the stars. He was second only to the leader in the tribe, possessing great wealth, power, fame, and status.

However, over the past decades, he had worked tirelessly for the tribe. Every night, he stayed in the temple, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, coughing up blood, nearly fainting at his post. He took on all responsibilities but never used his power.

For this village, he devoted his life. His father had died in a sudden drought that lasted three years. Despite being heartbroken, he had no time to mourn and had to focus on food distribution and rescue efforts, leading his people to find water and store food to survive.

But during this difficult time, the leader became his biggest obstacle. The leader doubted the priest's leadership and spread rumors among the tribesmen to weaken the priest's authority. Using his power, the leader suppressed any dissent and punished those who supported the priest. The leader's suspicion deepened, believing the priest's decisions threatened his position, and he secretly set up obstacles to control the tribe's fate.

Tonight was different. Reed returned home early, sent his subordinates away, locked the study door, and extinguished all the candles. The study was simple, with just a large stone table and a rickety chair made of vines, filled with bamboo slips on the shelves.

His fingers tapped rhythmically on the table, making a "thump thump" sound in the stillness of the night.

After a while, a different sound broke the silence—a group of fully armed soldiers rushed through the city, holding spears and wearing metal armor. They inherited their ancestors' speed, their strong legs moving swiftly through the streets. Soon, a beautiful red fire bloomed at the leader's residence, engulfing it in flames. Amidst the chaos and curses, the noise quickly drowned in the fire.

At that moment, Reed knew he had won. The once-wrinkled face relaxed, and his breathing quickened as clarity filled his murky eyes, now burning with uncontrollable heat.

The flames spread from the leader's residence, consuming his loyal followers. This fiery beast devoured everything in its path.

Eventually, the flames began to die down, and a knocking sound echoed, "thump thump thump."

Reed snapped back from his joy, took a deep breath, and returned to a calm state, his eyes once more filled with depth and murkiness.

"Come in," he said in his usual low, hoarse voice.

The old door creaked open. A silver-armored officer entered, bowed, and knelt.

"My lord, in the name of the starry sky, the target has been achieved, and the enemies have been eliminated," the officer paused, "Your Excellency."

Reed's breath caught for a moment but then returned to normal.

"Proceed with the plan. I want to go for a walk."

"Yes, Your Excellency."

As he walked outside along the path, he found himself near the temple of the starry sky. It was an ordinary building; without stepping inside, no one would guess it was the tribe's core. Inside, there were no idols, just a large window with a crumbling sill and weathered white stone walls. He had visited this place countless times for prayers and rituals, which he led like a father—figure, with both authority and kindness.

This time was different. Today, he was just a worshiper. He stepped inside, lit a candle, and slowly approached the altar, trying to kneel as the ancient dinosaurs did. Despite his strong leg muscles, years of work had weakened his joints, and kneeling was painful. He endured the pain and finally managed to kneel.

Night fell, and the sky was like deep blue ink spreading across the horizon. Stars emerged, twinkling faintly, as if ancient messengers were bringing greetings from afar. The moon rose slowly, casting a gentle silver light over the land, adding a touch of mystery to the quiet night. At times, it hung like a round jade plate, protecting the world; other times, it sliced through the sky like a curved blade, leaving a beautiful arc.

Looking at the once—familiar yet strange starry sky, he suddenly thought of his decades of patience and waiting. He realized that under his leadership, the tribe would gradually become a heavenly kingdom on Earth. He thought of how many brave souls had sacrificed their lives over the years...

He cried, tears falling to the ground. A sudden gust of wind blew out the candle, and silver—gray moonlight streamed through the large window, making the tears glisten like silver.

Chapter Two: The year 1568 of the Dinosaur Era

The sea was dark with clouds, the wind howled, and the air was heavy; any experienced sailor would know a storm was coming. The ship "Lot" had been sailing with an expedition fleet from the continent of Lorasias for nearly two months when it lost its way, accidentally entering this storm.

In the distance where the sea met the sky, black clouds poured in like ink, quickly covering the blue horizon and casting shadows over the world. Waves began to rise, crashing against the rocks with a deep, mysterious roar, like the heartbeat of the ocean, signaling the approaching chaos. The salty sea breeze grew sharper, silently warning every sailor of the storm's fury. Lightning occasionally split the dark sky, illuminating the rolling clouds, as if gods were whispering their anger. Seagulls circled above, their cries echoing an ancient warning of the impending storm.

As the wind grew louder, the waves surged like a giant beast, preparing for an earth—shattering disaster. The atmosphere was tense and oppressive; everything seemed to hold its breath, waiting for the thunder that would announce the storm. In this turmoil, a mix of anxiety and anticipation filled the hearts of the crew, as though even the ocean was trembling, ready to unleash its fury.

The storm struck like a wild beast, with thunder and lightning shaking the world. The heavy clouds pressed down on the sea, threatening to swallow everything. The small sailboat felt like a frail leaf on the dark waters, rising and falling with the waves, sometimes lifted high by a swell, sometimes swallowed by the depths. The waves crashed fiercely, drenching the ship and blending the sounds of thunder with the impact of the sea.

The wind howled relentlessly, tearing at the sails with a piercing scream. The ship trembled in the tumult, its mast swaying like a fragile branch in the storm. The waves rolled like wild horses, charging with a suffocating force. Lightning illuminated the darkness, revealing the chaotic clouds like a silver snake dancing in the sky.

In this chaotic sea, the storm's power was merciless, consuming everything in its path, leaving only the small boat struggling defiantly against the fury. The roaring sea was a continuous murmur of nature's wrath and authority. The little sailboat, like a speck of dust in the vast ocean, faced the oncoming tide alone.

Suddenly, someone shouted, "It's coming!" The sailors turned to see a dark line approaching with incredible speed.

"Lower the sails!" the old captain shouted from the bow. The crew quickly moved to comply.

"Prepare for impact!" he yelled again. The sailors adjusted the boat's position to brace for the hit.

"Get off the deck!" The captain's voice, already weak, felt strained.

Everyone hurried off the deck into the cramped cabin, where the only thing to do was pray.

Inside, the air was thick with moisture, and filled with the smell of decay and salt, making it hard to breathe. The walls were covered in mold, dark green and slick, swallowing the faint light. Dim light filtered through a small window, illuminating the yellowed wooden floor, worn and dull as if forgotten by time.

The cabin felt suffocating, with water dripping from the damp walls, echoing the loneliness. Each wave that struck the boat caused it to sway slightly, reminding everyone of their precarious situation. The shadows made the weapons look blurry, lurking in the dark, ready for battle. In this cramped, dark space, time seemed to stand still, steeped in an oppressive atmosphere that bred unease.

Deep in this dilapidated cabin lay a silver disc, clean despite the dampness around it. The surface was etched with intricate star maps, reflecting a reverence for the cosmos.

Every day, someone carefully wiped it down, ensuring no dust settled on it. Even in the shadows, the disc shimmered, a beacon of hope for the universe amidst despair.

As time passed, the cabin filled with noise; some cried with regret for being there, while others trembled in fear.

"Silence!" the old captain commanded, and the cabin fell quiet.

He moved towards the disc at the front of the cabin, and the crowd parted for him. Over the days of sailing, he had become the most respected figure on the ship.

"Lord of the Stars, show us the way forward!" he prayed, kneeling before the disc.

As if in response, the storm began to weaken until it finally ceased. The crew rushed to the deck, and the ship's astronomers started recalibrating the course.

Three Months Later

The "Lot," following the expedition fleet, finally reached its destination. The sailors stepped onto land, armed with swords and guns, their eyes filled with greed. They ventured deeper into the continent, where fires and cries echoed from the villages.

The old captain sat quietly in the cabin, listening to the chaos outside. He touched the silver disc, a fleeting look of disdain crossing his face.

“The so-called goddess of the stars is just a remnant of the old world. This silver disc will fetch a good price when we return.”

Chapter Two: The year 2531 of the Dinosaur Era

The airship "Saint Francis" was traveling through space, returning from a mission to Mars, which involved data collection and sampling.

This modern ship looked like a shooting star, its sleek design shining in the sunlight, ready to soar into the stars. Made of high-strength alloys, its surface was smooth and seamless, providing excellent maneuverability. The ship's windows were made of intelligent transparent materials that adjusted opacity based on light, ensuring crew members could see clearly in varying conditions. Inside, advanced technology filled the space, with control panels lighting up with real-time data and navigation information. The cabin was designed for comfort, featuring ergonomic seats and high-tech entertainment systems with dynamic screens on the walls.

Onboard, astronomer Mary and crew member Berens walked down the corridor. Looking out at the brilliant stars, Mary spoke first: “Dinosaurs were such a fascinating race. We once admired this beautiful starry sky, and now we’re about to conquer it.”

Berens frowned at her words but said nothing.

Suddenly, the ship jolted violently, and alarms sounded as engineers rushed to one side.

Mary grabbed an engineer and asked, “What happened?”

“The ship hit a small asteroid.”

“What?” A collision at a speed of 20 kilometers per second could be catastrophic.

“Don’t worry; the relative speed was only about 1 kilometer per second, and it only scratched the ship's tail. It'll be fine to repair,” he said, hurrying away.

The next year passed peacefully.

As the ship neared Earth, it turned on the communication system, previously disabled to save power.

“Gandis? This is Saint Francis, requesting landing in a week. Repeat, requesting landing in a week.”

Only silence answered.

With a hint of tears, the response came back: “Saint Francis, you cannot return. An asteroid will soon strike Earth. We predict a catastrophic impact on life for the next thirty years.”

After confirming the dire message, the ship broadcast the news. In the following days, the vessel fell into silence.

A young engineer realized from the photos transmitted from Earth that the asteroid they had grazed was the very one threatening the planet. If they hadn’t hit it, Earth might have been safe.

This news spread like wildfire throughout the ship. In the following week, the vessel docked at Lagrange Point, silently watching Earth’s impending doom. Some crew members couldn’t handle the guilt and sense of responsibility and chose to end their lives in repentance, while others wanted to seize control and crash into the asteroid, though it was futile. They failed.

But most chose silence—those who wanted to live always outnumbered the rest.

A massive asteroid tore through the quiet night sky, heading straight for Earth. Its speed shattered the calm, and the sudden roar filled the air, like the universe's wrath. The ground shook violently, flames surged from the earth, engulfing cities and leaving destruction in their wake.

The oceans raged, and waves crashed against the shore, drowning countless lives. Panic and despair spread like wildfire, and cries echoed in the darkened sky. The world fell into endless disaster, all hopes and dreams reduced to nothing.

Amid this catastrophe, a lonely spaceship floated in distant orbit, witnessing the chaos. Its metallic shell shimmered under the starlight, like a solitary star, helpless and isolated. Despite possessing advanced technology, they could do nothing to save the innocent lives on Earth.

The ship was like a lonely child adrift in the vast universe, filled with helplessness and confusion, yearning to help but bound by cruel reality. The crew gazed at the devastation of their blue planet, hearts torn, lost in thought. They had dreamed of exploring the universe, but now they could only watch their home crumble.

Two years later, when the materials on the ship were nearly exhausted, they made an emergency landing on Earth. Though survival in the wild wasn't an issue, they could no longer fulfill the duty of continuing their race.

The dinosaurs were headed for extinction.

Epilogue

The dinosaurs believed they had conquered the stars, stepping beyond boundaries until they ultimately perished in their desecration of the sky. Clearly, they were not prepared to face the heavens.

The dinosaurs never saw the stars again.

It is hard to say which day it was—probably an ordinary day—when the last dinosaur wandered on Earth. Its name had lost all meaning; it was simply an incredibly ordinary dinosaur.

But its body was already battered and exhausted.

"Dinosaurs are not smart enough," he thought, "We can only hope our successors will be smart enough," he paused, "and cherish what they have."

Though he no longer saw the stars, he knew they were there. Sometimes, in the stillness of the night, he would stand with his back turned, often feeling their presence. With his heart, he could perceive every detail of the night sky, watching the stars flicker gently in the night breeze. This was a sky that could only be seen with the heart.

Yet, he still held hope to see the night sky with his own eyes one more time. Quantum mechanics suggests that when the stars are not being observed, they exist in a state of superposition between "being" and "not being." The process of dying meant transitioning from a strong observer to a weak observer and then to a non-observer. When he became a weak observer, the collapse of the probability cloud toward destruction would slow down, giving him hope to see the stars one last time.

As he approached the end of life, he opened his eyes one last time. In his final moments, all his intellect and memories vanished into the abyss of the past, returning to the pure feelings and dreams of childhood. At that moment, the stars smiled down.

The Fossil Seeker

The French International School of Hong Kong, Au, Angie – 14

The boy is five, and he is frowning over the smallest inconvenience. Inevitably, he is a few minutes away from a wild tantrum, prepared to sob his little heart out. His father knows this, gently nudging him and his sister to the nearby museum as an attempt at distraction and a shelter from the cold. Exhaustion is plainly displayed on his face. The National Museum of China is sporting a new permanent exhibit – dinosaur fossils all discovered in China. The child runs excitedly into the pristine museum, stopping only in front of the exhibit's entrance. He takes small, tentative steps, overwhelmed by the sudden plunge into darkness. The further into the enclosure, the more the environment seems to shift. Menacing, monstrous shadows are reflected onto the rocky walls. They change shape and glide from surface to surface. The boy shrieks, clutching onto his tired father.

Further into the exhibit, the full clarity of the fossils are on display, adding to the terrifying grandeur of the museum. To his right is the reconstruction of a *Sinosauropteryx*, a dinosaur discovered in Liaoning, China. Its neighbor, a shiny gold plaque, ensures that everyone is aware of this fact.

The boy's face contorts from fear into awe upon noticing the dinosaur's short arms and oddly long tail. Why is it so strangely shaped? That is the thought that flashes through his mind. Filled with a strange feeling he cannot identify – curiosity – he scampers off when no one is looking. His sister is too busy to notice the boy's absence, her pigtails swinging as she takes in the exhibit, and his father is falling asleep. He extends his hand out to touch the old fossil. Though it is surrounded by a glass display case, his naive and inquisitive mind doesn't care. In his own world, there are no physical limitations.

“Careful, don’t touch!” An order is barked at him by a very, very familiar voice. “Xiahong, come back here!”

But at the moment, the child cannot recognise the sound. A watery bubble of concentration encapsulates him. In a split second, he is wrapped in a liquid texture that only he can see. He floats away from the sound – or rather, sound cannot reach him. But it does not worry him at all, and so Xiahong’s body moves by itself, gravitating towards the specimen. The intense force struggles to pull him through the glass barrier. Still, he eventually makes it through. Conveniently positioned next to the fossil, curiosity compels the boy to extend his hand. His fingers skim the weathered surface like a feather. A split second passes.

He is gone.

Time stills. Where has everybody disappeared to? The boy does not know, nor does he care. His dreamlike state is dramatically interrupted by a sudden noise. The boy wakes to see pieces gradually forming and wrapping around the whole bubble, its colour transforming into a semi-transparent iridescence. Abruptly, it pops to reveal a freezing beach. He is violently dropped in the process.

Xiahong lands hard on his back, groaning in pain. He opens his eyes. The salty scent of the air surrounds him. There is white, grainy sand beneath him. The sun’s rays shine onto the water, obscured only by the faintest clouds. Ripples appear as small creatures make splashes. It is truly a marvelous sight. The child recognises the beach as the one he frequents in the summer, but it looks different in ways that he cannot explain. The smell of freshly applied sunscreen is gone, the ice cream stand is gone, and the rental umbrellas are gone, but its natural beauty is still present. This cannot possibly be his universe.

“Papa?” Xiahong calls desperately, looking around for any sign of civilization. “I’m scared. This isn’t funny!”. Cold wind blows at him aggressively. There is absolutely nothing that he can see apart from nature. He is all on his own – but at least he has some sense of familiarity. The child wonders how he even got here – and more importantly, what he could possibly do to get home. With longing to see his father and sister, he glances at the bracelet on his wrist, which the latter has as well. Wandering around the shore, he looks for some way out. Gradually, the stream of angry tears stops, replaced by sheer determination. He has to get home. If not, who would take care of his family?

As Xiahong trudges forward, majestic rock structures enter his line of sight. Square sedimentary outcrops of brown, silver, and grey can be found just ahead, stacking onto each other in thick layers. Impressive stone monoliths are compressed next to each other and create the impression of looming over him. It is truly a sight to behold.

As he nears an area with rockier ground, all of a sudden, the strange magnetic pull returns. The child walks increasingly faster and faster. He reaches an area of sedimentary rock and takes a closer look, his fingers outlining – memorizing – the rough texture as he marches in circles. The sun makes its gradual descent. More and more terrifying shadows are created. What feels like eternity passes by in the same manner. The hypnotizing trance from before returns, blocking out all thoughts, and guides him endlessly. Pure concentration is all that matters at this moment. Suddenly, Xiahong stops. It is so abrupt, he skids across the surface and trips onto a rock. The child hurls forward, crashing into a rock formation; he barely prevents injury by pushing himself off. The sudden roughness is unique. It seems different from the rest of the rocky area (he would know). Intrigued, the boy allows his fingers to move by themselves, tracing the rock structures from the highest point he can reach.

Near the ground, his fingers find an imprint-like texture in the sediment. The piece is shaky and almost loose. I wonder what that is, he thinks. With all the strength in his spindly, five-year-old arms, he scrapes and scrapes until a piece of rock falls; it is much, much larger than expected. Xiahong struggles to pick it up and observes it with interest, marveling at the sight. An animal’s elongated head is engraved on the rock. *How interesting*, he thinks, *it looks a bit like a large worm*. He almost puts it back on the ground, but his hands seem to be glued to it.

He wonders what it's called before coming to a conclusion: a dinosaur fossil. It must be that. Yes, it was a fossil fragment of a *Jiangxititan ganzhouensis*, or a titanosaur – but he does not know that. All he feels is the mesmerizing pull that refrains his hands from letting go. Holding onto the massive specimen, the child comes to a decision: to take it home. His father should know about this amazing discovery.

At this point, the sun has almost disappeared completely, and the beach is basked in shadow. The sky is adorned in brilliant shades of blue and bright yellow. Rock structures tower over the boy more than ever, reaching their full state of magnificence; shadows are cast onto the ground, giving the appearance of monsters; light is almost nonexistent. Trying to navigate, the boy picks up the pace, emerging from one maze-like section of outcrops only to find another.

Unfortunately for him, nighttime has arrived. A deep midnight blue is now the color of the sky. A shrill, disturbing cry echoes all around him, rousing his terror.

Shivers run down the boy's body. The sound is unnatural. Inhuman. Dangerous. He breaks into a sprint, running out of the rocky area for his life; his whole body is pumping desperately in coordination. The fossil is tightly clutched in his white knuckles.

Clang!

The boy looks back and screams. The sound of the formations behind him slam shut for a few seconds – he cannot afford to count. With a discomfiting rumble, they open again. Only a few hundred metres until he reaches the shore. *Clang*, goes the rocks beginning to close. Instinctively, Xiahong looks back. The rock pillars behind him have not moved. It's the ones in front of him that have.

The boy throws himself backwards before he is crushed by the colossal force. The fossil is tightly hugged and shielded by his whole body. The rocks graze his foot – just barely, but his whole body is scratched from the fall onto rugged ground. Lying on his back, he realises the full danger of the piercingly sharp rocks; along with the line of shadows peering at him, he has never wanted to go home so badly. Help me, he wishes.

Suddenly, one of the shadows peels itself off of the ground. The child screams. It is murky black and resembles a short, young boy. But it must be a monster trying to deceive him! A ferocious shriek leaves Xiahong's mouth as he struggles to pull himself up. Wobbling on his feet, he points and runs, but is swept up by the shadow. He shouts frantically.

The crashes increase in both speed and intensity. *Thump*, goes his quickening heartbeat. He kicks and beats the shadow – a futile attempt at self-defense – but fails. It is much stronger than him.

“Let me go!” Xiahong shrieks in discomfort. “Let me go right now!”

Without listening, the shadow takes off with him in hand. The colliding rocks miss them by a hair. Faint glow from moonlight awaits him at the entrance of the rocky formations; freedom and escape look tantalizingly close. A loud noise is made as the rocks in front creak open. Escape! The child dives off of the creature and onto the sandy beach. He skids across, leaving an imprint on the pure white sand. The full force of the impact is felt.

Safety! A relieved smile appears on his face as he nervously opens up his fist, unveiling the dinosaur fossil. With a pause, he peeks at the shadow curiously. *It saved me*, he marvels. *The shadow monster saved me*.

“Thank you for... helping me,” Xiahong declares timidly, shaking from fear. Panic lingers, mostly as a result of the night's action. The creature does not respond.

Despite it being brilliantly illuminated, he cannot see anything – only a silhouette of absolute darkness. Oozing, emitting darkness. A chill runs down his back. He holds the fossil out to observe it, trying to capture as much light as possible. The fossil gleams magnificently; now, the attention of the shadow is piqued. It turns towards it.

“You want it?” The child asks. “I guess you can, if you give it back. Be careful with it though. I have to show my father!”

The shadow dissipates before it can take any action. *How odd*, Xiahong thinks. The truth is, standing alone in the cold, the child grieves its absence. The realisation that he is completely alone in a completely different place hits him.

“I’d like to go home, please,” his little voice quivers. He does not know what he is wishing for, but he clutches the fossil with a feeling of hope.

A minute passes. Then another. It hits him that rescue is not coming, and he may never be saved. Wind – eddied, forceful, and contentious – blows at him relentlessly. It knocks him off-balance, sending him sprawling into the sand. The fossil falls out of his embrace. It is blown off into the distance, but he does not try to recover it. There he lies, unhappy and despondent.

Weeks later, the shadow returns. The boy’s shadow. It skulks across the beautiful beach, searching for a very particular thing. It struggles under the mortifying light of the sun. Eventually, he comes across a human corpse, rotting in the sand. Just beside is a large piece of rock, almost fully submerged. The shadow digs it out with caution.

An ominous grin appears on its face. It bends down to retrieve the titanosaur fossil, brushing sand off, and examines it in the glowing light. A perfect trophy – a keepsake to remember – for their collection. There is only one more piece it needs before it can complete a full collection of titanosaur fossils.

"Goodbye," it says to the child. The methods do not matter to it, nor does it feel any remorse. What matters is the result.

Accompanied with a piercing, inhuman cry, the shape of the shadow morphs into an older girl with pigtails; the silhouette of a bracelet can be noticed on its left wrist. This time, it must be more careful with who it chooses. It should not *ever* have to intervene.

Turning back with the fossil, it disappears, leaving the body on the ground.

New Tales of the China's Dinosaurs

The French International School of Hong Kong, Ip, Athena – 14

The bleak autumn wind blew across my face, each hefty blow a stark and constant reminder of the emptiness of loneliness, sending shivers to my spine. Dr. Li, the world renowned palaeontologist and my colleague, tasked me with the strenuous mission of discovering the ancient relic fossils of JiangXi, China, the place which recently sparked many palaeontologist's interests. Deep inside though, as a rookie, I would've never thought to be tasked with such an important mission for my first job. But for the past few years, all I could think about was to make a groundbreaking investigation in the palaeontology world, specifically in a mysterious place like JiangXi; and all the countless sleepless nights all lead up to this moment. I'm almost finished with my fossil write up now, but I'm currently missing one last fossil. So with all the courage that I've mustered, I made my way towards the site. However, the heavy fog clouded the once blue sky, and the only sound audible was the soft rustling of leaves and my own unstable heartbeat as soon as I arrived.

I felt my stomach twirling, the swaying flowers almost as if it's telling me to leave while I can. But I know I can't just leave just yet. With each step as cautious as ever, I walked along the decaying cement ground, the pungent scent of mold and daisies engulfed my senses and blinded my ever racing thoughts, each step suddenly feeling a hundred times heavier. Soon enough, I found a remote area, and decided to venture around this surprising area. However, something so peculiar caught my attention.

It was a peculiar, worn-down grave sitting in the middle of a fossil site. It was obvious that it had weathered down significantly as time passed, with the thick moss and vines strangled tightly onto the granite headstone, with several archaic books scattered next to the grave. Despite the overgrown plants blocking most of the grave, the word 'Song'

was elegantly engraved onto the middle of the granite. My body tensed, uncertain on what I was about to do. But in a gentle manner, I carefully picked up the blue book lying isolated from the rest of the field, and the first page read as:

‘Song’s diary of fun discoveries and interestingly weird things!’, with a shimmering sapphire butterfly sticker stuck carefully and a grainy image of a *Sinosauropteryx* glued next to her name. It was clear that whomever Song was, she definitely decorated this diary thoughtfully. Curiously, I flipped to the first page of her entry, with a drawing of a fossil inviting me to immerse myself into Song’s story...

‘February 23rd, 1981,

I swear mom is the most annoying person ever. She literally never lets me play with Stacey nor care about me at all. But obviously, I’m not letting her influence me! So I sneaked to the backyard, digging the holes except this time, a farmer guy approached me.

He had a really gray beard, kind of like Santa, and his eyes were the exact shade of brown like the feathers of a *Sinosauropteryx*, (an Ancient dinosaur in my hometown, but also my favourite), and he told me all about fossils, like the spider attack fossil, which I originally thought was a spider attacking a fossil? Anyways, he told me how the fossil depicts an ancient spider attacking on their prey, and it’s preserved in amber! He told me to think of it like a photograph, capturing a brief moment in time, which is so cool!

Before I left, I think he gave me a dusty old book about fossils, which I can’t wait to read. I remembered a little blue butterfly landing right on my shoulder. I freaked out at first, but the farmer told me how these butterflies represent change and joy in our culture. He also told me how in a way, I reminded him of a butterfly, so maybe it’s trying to tell me that I can spread joy? Or was he complimenting me? Oh well, I wish he told me his name. Do you think I’ll ever see him again, or know his name? Actually, I should really go to bed now.’

I glanced back at the entry again, and couldn’t help but to slip a small giggle under my breath at her excitement at such a young age ; to me, It is evident that she had a strong interest in palaeontology and fossils. If only she were here right now, she would’ve definitely loved learning about the new discovery of the titanosaur, which is the reason I’m here right now, in Jiangxi.

I flipped to the rest of the pages of her book, but her handwriting got more hasty as it progressed, as if her innocence got cruelly crushed by something. Eventually, I found a half-torn page with scribbled drawings that intrigued me, the pages sliding under my fingers as I started to immerse myself in her world once again...

“March 14th 1981,

Dad told me to pack up my suitcase this morning, because apparently we’re all going on a trip in 3 days. Eek, I’m so excited! It has been an awfully long time since we’ve been on a trip together as a family.

Apparently, we’re going for a long time, so I’ll miss the nice farmer guy, and obviously my huge encyclopaedia of dinosaurs. But when I was packing up, I think the farmer left me a little package with a butterfly statue made of clay, and a magnifying glass, with a note saying to “always be a butterfly”. Honestly, I still don’t get what it means, but I hope mom will let me bring them.”

I felt a surge of guilt looming in, hoping that what I thought in my brain wouldn’t be true, that it’s just a normal trip, not anything else. The surrounding weather got worse, but I need the answer to this, desperately praying it isn’t true. Shakily, I flipped to the following page, and realised how the trip isn’t what she envisioned at all, and the sole purpose of it was for her brother’s education. But at least the farmer gave her a last farewell and a book before she left...

I let out a faint gasp, her entry leaving me with a pang of sadness and guilt, knowing how her own society, her own family, had ruthlessly failed her. The cool wind blew harsher towards my face, each one striking me to contemplate

My fingers traced along the yellowed page, and I could feel a lump forming in my throat. The thunder was roaring more and more, and I have to return back to my camp in a few hours. Anxiety kept creeping towards me, but something in me told me to look at the back of the book, .

“May 21st, 1985

It’s Song again. Gosh, it has been such a long time since I’ve written in this diary. But I just want to give a little life update before I officially sign out.

Life in Beijing is hard, especially when you’re living off someone’s shadows. It’s so industrialised that it’s difficult for me to continue my fossil research, so I have no idea how it’ll go.

Speaking of my classmates, I remember how the farmer near home would always call me ‘butterfly’ instead of my real name. I really missed those times. But when I told my classmates, they all just laughed at me.

Luckily though, I still have that old book to keep me company. But the kids at school don’t get why I’m so interested in fossils. But little do they know that each one represents a story.

Anyways, I really miss the farmer, he taught me a whole bunch of stuff when I used to sneak out to the balcony. I sincerely hope he’s doing well now. But more importantly, I wish that I’ll get to make more wonderful scientific discoveries in the future!”

I followed the last strokes of her writing and tried my best to take in everything that she wrote. I flicked through the remaining pages like a burning candle, but to my disappointment, cruel, soulless words from a foreign handwriting were printed at the last pages of her notebook, and my heart wrenched. Song did not deserve that, to pass away not fulfilling her contributions. If only she were alive now, she would’ve loved to know about the titanosaur, the fossils, everything.

I closed my eyes, desperately trying to calm myself down, but my mind is refusing to let me rest. Instead of plain darkness playing in my head, it was a young girl, probably the same age as Song in her entries, in a vast grassland, chasing a sapphire butterfly. Its delicate wings fluttered across the sky as the fresh-cut grass engulfed my senses. Something in me knew that I had to follow the butterfly, so I ran and ran, hands clasping together, trying to keep hold of it. I could sense the tiny raindrops falling upon my shoulders, but nevertheless, I didn’t care, I kept on going. My feet felt numb, like a million sharp needles spreading across my feet while the harsh rainfall continued pouring onto my limp figure. I tried not to think about it, about Song’s story, about everything, but as the butterfly went faster and faster, I became more and more breathless, trying to chase the last remaining object in this vast land. Eventually, my frail body couldn’t handle it anymore, my vision turned cloudy and muffled. My limp legs were telling me to stop, but I have to continue ; what if . But my legs finally succumbed to the fatigue, and all I had left was vast nothingness, while the butterfly continued to fly, further and further and further...

I forced my eyes to open up and tried to blink back the tears. Time was running short, and I can’t afford to lose any more time. I looked through her other notebooks lying around the grave swiftly, gazing at her neatly written observations on dinosaurs, trying to find a tiny drop of clue, but all I found were random doodles everywhere and torn out pages of what seemed like observations. I sighed and decided to pack up my things, go to another site, and continue to find the remaining fossils.

As I was ready to leave, I scrambled through my bag, looking through the fossils I've collected, but to my dismay, almost everything went missing, and all that's left is some soil that I've dug up and a few smaller pieces at the bottom of my bag.

My brows furrowed; *how can I be so careless to lose something as important as the fossils?*

The sudden bang from the thunderous sky woke me up, and the seemingly cloudless sky turned into heaps of heavy grey clouds. Time was ticking fast. In a few hours time, I would have to present all my findings to Mr. Li. Hurriedly I gritted my teeth, tracing back my steps to find the lost pieces. Despite my fatigue, I have to persevere; I have spent too much time and energy on these fossils to give up that easily.

Half an hour had passed, but nothing was found. That was when I realised all my discoveries had gone to waste. My stomach lurched, and I finally gave in. Everything was hitting me all at once. I clutched my stomach with clammy hands, retches coming out spasmodically as delicate tear drops trickled down my cold, lifeless face. My throat felt sparse and I could taste the bitter lingering bile remaining. I winced; It was like nature mocking my sheer foolishness. But I know that the mission means a lot, not just to me, but to Song, to everyone who's interested in fossils. So I'm not giving up just yet, so I went back on my feet, continuing to look for the missing fossils. But as I was looking through my fossils, a small, sapphire butterfly landed right on my shoulder, and then to my knuckles. Slowly, its fragile wings spread, as if it's telling me to follow it.

Although it felt slightly supernatural at first, I realised that I had nothing to lose, and maybe it could lead me to a breakthrough. The tiny creature led me into a field of fossils, each and every one of them lying there lifelessly on the soil, yearning to be discovered. Slowly, I walked towards the field, and upon further inspection, I realised they were the exact type that I was looking for. Hurriedly, I opened my used backpack and carefully placed the fossils into it, while the butterfly landed on a young daffodil bud, seeming like it was looking at my every action. The rain had finally begun to subside, and as I was packing up the fossils, I realised how all the patterns were so similar, like they all intertwine somehow. So I took out the small bits of fossils in my bag, trying to pierce together each and every one of them, and to my astonishment, they all came together beautifully, like a mosaic. All the little pieces I thought were insignificant held so much value. With pride, I started packing up, ready to show my discovery and everything off to the outside world, while the butterfly slowly spread its wings, preparing to fly off to another site, while I slowly made my way back to my truck smiling, ready to meet Mr. Li.

But I know that the butterfly will never be truly gone, it's still here, somewhere in our tiny planet. It reminded me of a beautiful concept Mr Li told me, of how energy can never be created or destroyed, it simply moves from one place to another, kind of like how the farmer transferred his passion to Song, and it is never created or destroyed, it will just pass on to another medium. Although I have never met Song personally, her passion is always evident in everything that she did. Her energy is there with me, and her story will always live on in my heart, and I will continue to honour her.

Fossil Farm

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Evan – 15

Potatoes. So many sweet potatoes. The harsh sunlight of the day beamed onto me as I used my rake to hoist out another crop of sweet potatoes. My back ached as I lifted the potatoes into a wooden box that was painted light blue but the paint had long faded away. I work my arms off everyday, yet I can only sell my crops to greedy merchants at the market which traps me in a crude cycle of poverty. As I stepped forward and raised my rake to dig out yet another crop, my rake hit something hard. I tried to hoist up my rake to try again, yet to no avail. I failed to pull my rake out of the soil. Frustrated, I got down on my knees and dug through the soil, trying to find what was blocking the potatoes. After ten, annoyingly long minutes of chipping away at the dry, flakey soil, with my swollen, red fingers, I saw what my rake had hit. The potatoes had grown unusually deep into the ground, and were growing inside what looked like a cavity inside the ground, which prevented my rake from pulling them out. It was a large, yellowish-white obtrusion in the soil, the color of caramel. As I brushed away more and more dirt, it got larger and larger, until I unearthed the whole object that the potatoes were inside. I gasped in awe, as it hit me what I had found. A skull. A dinosaur sized skull. I lept backwards in shock for a second, only to stumble on the crate and fall backwards, planting myself into another crop. My heart was beating like a drum from the shock. Embarrassed, I got back up to inspect it, rubbing my sore back. It was as large as a basketball, and it was brown from being submerged in dirt, but it was very intact, apart from a small dent from where my rake had landed. I suddenly remember from reading the morning newspaper that a multitude of new fossils have recently been discovered all over China, and some of them have sold for millions of dollars. My heart rate immediately rose again upon remembering this, as that

amount of money could turn my life around. I couldn't believe my luck. Everyday I struggle to make my daily quota through harsh work, but if I got that kind of money... The chances of finding a fossil this big were supposedly astronomical, and I knew that I owned it due to the fact that I bought this piece of farmland. I immediately dropped my farming tools and potatoes and I jogged back to my house with a renewed bounce in my step.

That afternoon, I didn't head to the farmers market. Instead, I searched through my old stack of newspapers. "Where is it?" I asked myself as I furrowed my brow. I planned to find the old article I read about fossils and call the hotline on that page so I could potentially sell the fossil to... I wasn't sure who would answer the phone if I found the number. A branch of the government? Fossil hunters? Archeologists? These questions floated around my head as I continued scrambling and skimming through my old stack of newspapers. As I picked up yet another newspaper, my eyes lit up at the title: "NEW DINOSAURS FOUND IN CHINA, MORE THAN 40 FOUND IN THE LIAO NING PROVINCE." The title was very likely exaggerated to be more eye-catching, as it says new dinosaurs instead of fossils. I quickly skimmed through the article, trying to pick-up information about anything about selling or what the fossil I found could be. Suddenly, I found an image of a person posing next to a dinosaur's skull that looked almost identical to the one I found in my farm. Even though the paper was crumpled and brown, and the image printed in black and white, I was very confident that they were the same type of fossil. I immediately read the subtext of the picture. "Archeologists working for the government found a new type of dinosaur in the Liao Ning province. Scientists have identified it as the close ancestor of the *Sinosauropteryx*. This is a huge discovery, as the *Sinosauropteryx* is the link between dinosaurs and birds, and an ancestor of the *Sinosauropteryx* could be potentially worth millions of dollars." My heart almost jumped out of my chest when I saw the estimated figure. I could not believe it. I had won the jackpot. With this money, I could easily go into retirement, buy a new house, renovate everything, leave this stupid farm and live on the beach or something, I could... then, I saw the bottom of the page and read the number. "Any information on new fossils? Call the government archeologists!" As I walked towards my dial phone, I suddenly didn't feel all that confident. The government was known for their strict sales, and I didn't know if I could even sell the fossil or if they would just take it. I suddenly felt like a baby giraffe taking its first steps into a dangerous forest, because I realised I actually had no knowledge on the topic at all. I realised that I just wanted money, so focused on my own goals that I had no idea what taking the phone call would cause next to ensue.

I tried to push the feeling and my worries deep into the back of my mind as I dialed the number. "9...4...5...6!" as I waited for someone to pick up, the phone dial felt like the embodiment of the fog clouding my mind. Click! "Hello, Fossil Agency department?" I felt my stomach tense up as I answered the phone. "Yeah, Hi. I found a fossil in my farm, can I sell it?" An awkward silence ensued, almost as if the person receiving the phone was disgusted by my uncivilised answer. "Whatever," I thought to myself. I live on a farm anyways. It doesn't matter what others think about me. Especially snobby government officials. I heard the person pick up the phone again "Do you have an idea or identified the fossil?" I heard someone say in the background "It's unlikely for someone like him though" and I heard a few low quality chuckles through the old speaker of my dial phone. I rolled my eyes and continued my description. "Yeah, it matches the one in the magazine which this phone number was on. The one about the "Sinosaursaur" or something." The chuckles immediately stopped and there was radio silence for another awkward second. "Um, Sir, Do you mean the *Sinosauropteryx*?" "Oh. Yeah. That one." Silence again. This time, I was the one who was frustrated. "Hey, can you stop murmuring to your friend?" "Sir, please give us your location." "Oh, so can you come to discuss terms? I'm thinking 3 million will do." I heard the low quality pitter patter of footsteps and chatting, but this time it definitely wasn't about jokes. This time, a different voice answered the phone: "Sure, we'll be willing to... discuss terms." "Great!" After that I told them my farm's address and hung up. I breathed a sigh of relief. "That wasn't so bad," I said to myself. I had almost forgotten my worries when I realised: I hadn't eaten yet.

The next morning, I woke up to my doorbell ringing. I groggily got up from the tattered mattress I used as my bed and stared at the clock on the wall. "5 am. 30 minutes earlier than I usually wake up..." I said to myself in a daze. The almost impatient doorbell ringing continued as I opened the door. "Who is it?" I half yelled as I threw open the door. As I saw who was outside, my eyebrow raised in surprise as the door creaked to a stop. There was a professional looking person at the door, wearing a sleek, jet black suit with a tie that looked very out of place for a farm. He had a shiny red pin on his chest, His hair was combed straight, his face almost had no emotion, and he was carrying a shiny white suitcase. That was the thing that caught my attention. "Ah, so you've got the money. Let's discuss terms, shall

we? I believe that the fossil I found is very—" The man coughed to get me to stop. "Mr Ling." I immediately recoiled in shock and suspicion. "Now how do you know my name?" "We are very interested in buying this farm of yours." My face turned red at the fact that the guy was ignoring me. "No, answer my question first, big guy. How. Do. You. Know. My. Name?" The person at the door's brow creased slightly, like he was also annoyed by my answer. "We looked into who bought this farm. The government keeps a database of everyone's names, and we have the right to do so." "That's slightly concerning" I thought to myself, but decided that if I wanted to sell this I needed to play it cool. "Well, I assume you've bought money for the fossi— Wait, why did you say you want to buy my entire farmland?" I instantly shifted back into suspicion. What could they possibly want from my farm? Was this a scam? Is the government trying to buy the farmland to claim the fossil as theirs? "If this is a scam, it's not going to work." I sternly told the government agent. "I work in the farmers market; I should know about scams." "That will make him back off," I thought to myself confidently. "Sir, we can assure you this isn't a scam." he said with a hint of annoyance in his voice. "Our agency has estimated your fossil to be around 2–4 million dollars, which can be decided after checking it." I instantly started fantasizing what I could do with that amount of money. The person must have seen the dreamy look on my face, and he smirked. He continued: "But if you think that's a lot of money, we're willing to buy your farm for double the price." My eyes instantly widened. I couldn't process what he just said. Double? That's easy money! I was on the verge of saying yes, but then it suddenly hit me. Why would he want the farm for double? I understand— no, KNOW it's easy money but why? In my mind, it all came crashing down on me again. The feeling. I shouldn't do this, especially with zero knowledge on this topic. What if it WAS a scam? But how? My thoughts were spiraling around me like a tornado. I wasn't able to do anything until... "Sir!" I snapped back to attention. The person now looked very confused. "So are you willing to accept our new proposed offer?" "I'll... decide later." I didn't know what to say. It was embarrassing, being eager and impatient only for me to need more time when it actually happened. "Well if you need time, we'll give you a day." I broke out into a cold sweat. "Only a day??? Come on, cut me some slack..." "That's just how it works. We can't afford to give you any time." "No, Wait! Please!" The man started as the man started walking away, a car as shiny as silver pulled up. As he walked and got into the car, he seemed to shake his head and signal something to the driver. He was evidently frustrated at me. As I slammed the door shut, I couldn't shake the queasy feeling off myself again. As I gathered my equipment, I prepared myself for yet another day of grueling work.

After my trip to the farmer's market, which involved a 2 hour trip by bus, I stopped by a stop that was next to the public library. As I took the lift up, I was getting dirty or weird looks, and I realised I was still carrying my crate for my crops and my working clothes, which were tattered and stained with mud. My flip flops were worn out and I was also wearing a wide brim hat, but I just nodded to whoever stared at me. "I just gotta get a book and get out." Once I entered the glass pane doors of the library, almost everyone in the room stared at me. I started walking quickly to the librarian's desk, and when she realised I was walking towards her she immediately averted her eyes and pretended to type something on her computer. "Yeah, hi. Can I have a book about dinosaurs?" She looked at me like I was weird, or speaking another language. "Uhm. A book about dinosaurs, correct? Like for your son?" I instantly realised my mistake. "Oh, no sorry. I meant to say fossils. And I don't want any children's books." The librarian sighed and pointed to a few bookshelves. "7th row to the left." I didn't bother to say thank you as I walked quickly as normal as I could to the bookshelf. I scanned the book's titles: Dinosaur encyclopedia, Evolution explained, Formation of fossils... That one. I grabbed it and went to check it out at the counter. It was a large tome, a little smaller than a dictionary with a few dog-eared pages that were yellow, the color of latte and tea bags. As I got up to the counter, the librarian typed the book's name into her computer as I handed it to her. "Library card please?" "Uhm, what?" I was befuddled. "Sir, do you have a library card?" Shoot. "Uh, no I don't." The librarian took off her glasses and rubbed her temples like I was making her have a migraine. "Well, do you have any identification? That would be useful so we could help you register one." She said helpfully. "I left it at home." That was a lie. I never registered for one. The librarian held up her glasses and put them back on her face. "I don't know what to say. We have some nice reading tables over by the corner.. You could settle down for a read over there." I didn't reply, I just went back to the shelf. "I don't have time for this," I told myself. As I was about to put the book back into the shelf I had an idea. Yes, it was unethical and I would get into serious trouble if anyone found out, but it would be worth it in the end. I would just pay them back, right? I made sure no one was looking, and placed the tome into my crate that carried crops. No one would suspect a thing. As I walked out, I couldn't help but break into a cold sweat. "What if I got caught and sent to jail?" I pushed these thoughts out of my mind. "It'll all be worth it. It'll all be worth it. It'll all be

worth it.” I told myself, even though I had half the confidence I thought I had. As I was walking out the glass doors again, I made eye contact with the librarian. She was looking at me almost as if she was suspicious, but she went back to cataloging books. I sighed and hurriedly rushed into a lift door that was closing. I apologised to the people inside. While the doors closed and I looked into the library, I couldn’t help but feel a small pang of guilt and worry. “Is it really going to be worth it in the end?”

On the bus ride home, I flipped through the pages of the book, as I desperately looked for the answer. My frustrations boiled over as I accidentally ripped a page. Another pang of guilt hit me, but I kept on searching. “Why would they pay so much for the farmland and not just the fossil?” It was like a stock on the market. You only purchase more if you know it will increase in value later. It's not like he's buying multiple fossils by purchasing the farm—... The realisation hit me like a pickup truck. I immediately flipped through to the index and spotted it. “Fossil formations.” I quickly flipped through that chapter and I finally found it. “Fossils are formed through millions of years of being buried and preserved in sedimentary rocks.” Bingo. I had found the answer. Years ago, I had learned the reason that the farm I purchased was so expensive is because it was made up of topsoil that the original owners had put over rocks, sand and soil that was not fit for plant growth. I thought it was a scam. The potatoes must have grown under that layer, into some dry soil and into the fossil which I found. In that logic, there could potentially be many more fossils under the layer of soil and into the rock, which meant my farm land was potentially over a landfill of fossils. I was both shocked and impressed that the government was able to figure this out so quickly, especially just from judging from the fossil I found. But it was whatever now. I knew which offer to take, and what I was going to do next.

Another morning on the farm. Prior to the day before, I had accepted the government's larger proposal and they had bought the fossil. Unfortunately, after analysis they found it was a distant relative of the *Sinosauropteryx*, which downgraded its price to 1 million. Not that it mattered though. I immediately got to work, hiring a whole construction crew to dig away at the top soil. I may not have had the riches I imagined, but I was willing to take a risk for something much bigger. From now on, my life will change. This is no ordinary farm now. Not just an ordinary, generic “Ling’s potato farm.” No. From now on, this is my Fossil Farm!

What's The Worst That Can Happen In Tomb Raiding

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Tong, Shing Hei Ethan – 14

This is the first person recounting of Zhong’s agonizing tale in relation to what’s known today as the “ill-starred fossil”, more accurately ill-starred for its owners, as they’re destined to perish within the month. Zhong is lucky to be here in this room, however lucky might not be what you would describe it.

With the sun shining a faint crepuscular lighting, the merchants of the district began to close their shops as they seemingly integrated into a hoard to embark on their journey home. Within the hour, the urban district seemingly mimicked the livelihood of a dead city. The atmosphere couldn’t be more welcoming, to tomb raiders.

As we stumbled through the cement paved floors, I could’ve sensed a feeling of blithe exuding from my teammates, and it definitely did not ease my guilt complex. The journey across the district was unproblematic to say the least, until we were taken aback by the sudden nature of a deluge of rain.

Our journey went on as the pitter-pattering rain persisted, it gained aggression seemingly as every minute passes. Our stride slowly descended into jogging, but it didn’t stop the fact that our clothes were utterly soaked. However the rain presented a silver lining, the heavy pouring unearthed a seemingly faint, but evident radiance, derived from the governor’s office. “The treasure is in like an ambiguous location, I’m just saying that the shine might contain treasures

as well. ” proposed Shan. “That’s a risk, and it’s conveniently, I suppose a billion miles away from the pinpointed treasure, so it’s not a coincidence, it’s outright impractical, I suppose. ” retorts Liu, but sarcasm doesn’t overshadow his own self-doubt. The short timeframe of silence somehow manages to convince us, hence we all agree in unison that following the radiance seemed more enticing than following some map purchased from some occult flea market.

The house was a stone's throw away, in both a metaphorical and literal sense. The door was never locked, and a few brisk steps into the foyer later, we froze. Honestly I expected some traps and scares to emerge. 5 seconds, 6 seconds, it's utter silence, such silence that becomes deafening. So we walked across the foyer, and as loud as the earlier silence, bang, and we lost him, as a mammoth rock trampled over Shan’s corpse and stopped mere inches away from us. We formed eye contact in disbelief, and continuous silence befalls upon us. It takes a solid minute for us to recoup our focus. I’m stunned, I’m baffled, I felt gut wrenching guilt, I told myself. However, we simply couldn’t afford to hyperfixate, and with a heavy heart, or guilt, we moved on to the next room.

As if our presence was acknowledged, a gush of cold air bashes on our face. Such air is reminiscent of preservatives, cold, pungent preservatives which filled every nook and cranny of the crematory. The very same crematory, where I...I, uhm nevermind I need to ensure calmness, as calm as I would’ve if I’ve taken sedatives. The train of thought fully embodied my lacklustering concentration, clouding my judgments to the point where I willfully ignored the leviathan sized fossils, of deteriorating state. Yes, I somehow managed to ignore the literal elephant in the room due to immersing my thoughts with the cold air.

After regaining focus, the uncanniness of this room started to register, hence we forcefully trudged forward. “I don’t quite understand, the fossil knows how to shine?” Xing’s statement was promptly ignored, who does he think we are, scientists, because if we were, we wouldn’t resort to such desperate measures. We aimlessly wander the agoraphobia-inducing room, filled to the brim with, nothing, not a single dent in the cement. This strange, more like unexpected choice of design persisted, until the very corner of the wallet. In a font which mimicked size 6, Chinese calligraphy was neatly presented. Right to left, a true prehistoric structuring, I thought. It prescribed :

“Once there were 1, then there was none, it all ends here, without anyone to hear. This is an alleged tale, but if greed prevails, with the invaluable vanquishes. Then the thieves will anguish.”

“Well this was a complete waste of my time”, remarked Liu, chuckling as the words came out of his mouth. Then, a word caught my eye. “Guys, the calligraphy wall scroll thing mentions “the invaluable”, and the fossil is the only thing here, so it has to be valuable right”, I asked. Unsurprisingly, we decided to take it. We have nothing to lose anyways. If this wasn’t my personal experience, I would laugh at the irony. Perhaps because of its deteriorating state, it was much lighter than anticipated. The dismantlement was no issue and within the hour, the room’s centerpiece was ransacked. If we stopped there, perhaps the trajectory of our life would not change.

As we tumbled our way to the exit, our chatter only increased, with the calligraphy as the focal point. “We’re literally outside, has anything happened...” In an unexplainably traumatic scene, his throat clogged, and clogged, and squeezed the life out of him. Right in our eyes, and Liu was gone, in such an instant where his sentence was incomplete. Another life snuffed away, he’s gone, but it’s different, I don’t feel remorse, it’s a different feeling, it’s as if his life didn’t matter, all I could think of, is the increased share of profit. Money, that was the only thing I felt.

And then there were 2. It’s one away from one, I thought. It’s one away from everything being mine. Gradually, such thoughts overtook my mind. It—it was like a descent into madness, an uncontrollable descent into madness. I took a fossil piece, and I plunged it.

I walked away, he didn’t.

I walked on, aimlessly. It wasn’t a feeling of without a care, it wasn’t a state of liberosis, there was a sense of unfulfillment, a lack of. It was avarice. Something snapped, I craved greed, it integrated into my core. I was gone, utterly out of it. And in such a state, and with such escalating avarice, there was only a single place suitable, a casino.

Lodging bags of dismantled fossils, I climbed up the gilded steps of sin. It was 25 hours later, with my wrongdoings publicized like an advertisement. The greed only intensified, and I realised that I wouldn't be leaving this place unscathed. I trotted to a roulette table, and exclaimed "ALL IN". "All in with what sir?" questioned the dealer, to which I responded with "fossils".

The room erupted with a mixture of disbelief and chuckling. I was stared at, like an exhibit, an entertainment of people. After inspection, and verification, which nabbed more of my time, and allowed my insatiable greed to grow, they gracefully accepted the wager. "What would be your bet?" asked the dealer, hesitation was afraid of me, "red.", I exuded nonchalantly. The pinnacle momentum propelled my desire, as the dice clunk against the black silhouette box. At the unveiling, the dice di-dict-dictate-ed.

The transcript of his recounting is incomplete, it's as if I jinxed his luck. With frothing on his mouth, he too passed. Witnessed by my very own eyes. The curse is undeniably factual, it dismantled every bit of his humanity, and didn't leave the remnants of his soul behind.

Beyond The Myths: A Quest For Truth And Beauty

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Yin, Alexis – 15

If you were to ask me to describe the happy memories of my childhood, every one of them would have Baba in it. The man who raised me, the man who taught me everything I knew, and the man who inspired me to live my life.

Many of these memories came from Baba's stories. Every night, Baba would tell me tales about dinosaurs. I was enraptured by his stories about the creatures that walked our earth millions of years ago. The lives they lived, the powers they held, their majestic appearances... Every word he said captivated me, everything about these creatures fascinated me. I loved these dinosaurs and was desperate to learn more about them.

There was one story that I would never forget. One tale that would stick in my mind for many years after. One that pushed me to the journey I was about to uptake. The journey that changed my life.

"Mei! Would you like another dinosaur story? I have a special one tonight!" Baba said, beaming at me. I looked up at his bulbous face, his hair even fluffier in the JiangXi humidity. "Of course Baba!" I cried, closing my eyes to picture the story. Baba's eyes widened as he began with the tale, his voice cheerful and upbeat. "There was once a family of dinosaurs that wasn't quite like the rest. People called them China Dragon Birds (CDB). They've recently found their fossils in Liaoning and realised it was feathered. But the traditional tale entailed so much more for these creatures. They had mystical powers that could help them fly, breathe fire and sparkle at night. They are the most beautiful

dinosaurs of all, but also the most powerful. Some say their powers helped shield them from the asteroid crash and they're still alive today. I hope someday, my love, you can see them in person."

"Ba! There's no such thing! How could dinosaurs be alive?" My eyes shot open, wrinkling my forehead. In my eyes, Baba always had the right answers. I saw him as the one man who was never wrong, the one who knew more than every encyclopedia that ever existed. At the time, I thought this tale would be the first time Baba was wrong. But soon, I was the one who was going to be proven wrong. "Yes my child, they are alive. I know it's hard to believe but one day you'll see. Oh, I really hope you'll see. They're beautiful! Wings, feathers, sparkles... You haven't seen anything like it." The way he spoke, it was almost as if he had seen them before... as if he knew one day, I would too.

If you were to ask me to describe my most devastating childhood memory, it would unfortunately have Baba in it too. The mere recollection of the day my father died stings my heart and brings me an immediate shock of sorrow. I remember everything. The lashing rain, the white hospital walls, the doctor's words... But I remember nothing as clearly as Baba's last words: "You are destined for great things, my sweet. Live your life for me, live the adventure you were made for..." Then... silence. The silence of the room. The silence of the EKG monitor. The silence of the world as it turned upside down for me.

I spent the next few days lying in bed. It felt like losing everything I knew. The person I relied on for advice, the one who guided me, the person who calmed me down in this chaotic world... was gone.

There wasn't anything to look forward to anymore. School felt like an endless repeat of dread, my days became blurred. I tried making up stories to fill Baba's shoes but they weren't the same. They only reminded me of the emptiness Baba's death left me with.

Another week flew by but I hardly noticed. I really wanted to continue my catharting. The only thing that stopped me from letting myself go was Baba's last words. "Live the adventure you were made for..."

I knew exactly what that adventure was. Out of all the countless stories Baba told me, none of them spoke to me like the CDB. The passionate tone Baba brought to the story, the sparkle in his eyes, the way he always managed to link the other stories to this tale...

What was I doing here, defying everything he taught me? What was I doing, ignoring Baba's advice? I knew I had to live my life for him and that I was wasting my time by doing nothing like this. Baba taught me to always do meaningful things, to make the most of my life.

Just like that, Baba acted as my motivation once more. He got me out of my week-long depression when none of my relatives could. He, even though he wasn't there anymore, pushed me to take on a journey I wasn't prepared for.

The only problem was, where do I start?

Baba always talked about Hong. Though I've never met the man, I knew more about his life than any of my distant relatives'. They met in high school. He was the only friend Baba stayed in touch with after he graduated. Baba described Hong as loyal, trustworthy and courageous. Hong accompanied Baba in his magical travels. Their memories had always been very precious to Baba and I could tell Hong meant a lot to him.

That is why when I was looking for more information about my journey, I went to his house for the first time. "Hi Uncle Hong! It's nice to meet you. I'm Mei, Wei's daughter." I said with a smile. "Oh! Hello, Mei. I'm sorry for your loss. Wei was a good man," he started. "You look... just like your father." I could feel the tears pouring in, filling my vision. But this was hardly the time or the place. I breathed, trying to stabilise myself before continuing. "I think, Baba wanted me to find the CDBs and I wanted to ask for some—"

“What?! He wanted you to continue his journey?”

“*His* journey?! He’s tried to find CDBs before?”

“Of course! He suffered the consequences, I don’t know why he’s putting this on you.”

“Consequences?!”

Hong sighed and put his hand on my shoulder. He shook his head, eyes glaring at mine and said, “I don’t know what Wei is doing but you can’t go. For the sake of my friend, for the sake of your safety, I’m begging you to stay put. I know I hurt your father once but please, let go of this. Please.”

The tears flooded in again and this time, I didn’t try to stop them. My vision blurred as I said the only word I could muster... “Why?”

“Why?! Because it’s dangerous and you’re Wei’s daughter. I can’t let anything happen to you. Wei would kill me... Wei... already hates me enough.” He scoffed, avoiding my eyes. “No he wouldn’t! Because he’s the one who told me to go on this journey. ‘Live your life for me,’ he said, ‘live the adventure you were made for.’ Please, help me make his wishes come true.” I cried out in tears.

“I knew he was crazy but I didn’t know he was this crazy... Fine. But be careful. Avoid the wildflowers and don’t go in too deep or it’ll kill you... eventually.” he started. “Your father wanted me to go on this journey with him, you know. Twenty years ago.” His voice started cracking as he fidgeted with his fingers. “I refused and said those adventurous days were behind me. I blocked him out and threw away my best friendship. He’s gone now. I can’t repair my mistakes. He probably hated me after that and... I don’t blame him.” Hong’s eyes were fixated on the ground, as if he was seeing my father’s face again, reliving moments of regret. When he finally looked at me, he said, “Don’t just take on this adventure for Wei. Take on this adventure for me. The journey I should’ve been on. Maybe it would have changed...”

“He talked about you all the time. He told me you were the bravest man he’s met.” I smiled, hearing Baba’s voice again. “Bravest?” He chuckled, pursing his lips and nodding. “Xylia Forest. The south end of our city.” “Thank you!” I said, making my way to the door, “Take care of yourself!”

“You too.”

Thinking back to my time at the Forest, I realised I shouldn’t have been so trusting. Who knew if this was the right place? For all I knew, this could just be a random forest. There wasn’t any sign that this was the place I was looking for. I hardly knew the man. But somehow, it felt right. Something about the forest spoke to me. Maybe it was its beautiful scenery, maybe it was the nostalgia I felt even though I had never been here, maybe it was the pleasant smells that drew me in... I couldn’t bring myself to question it, bring myself to turn back or stop myself from continuing forward.

After about thirty minutes of wandering around, I realised I was completely lost. I tried to look for anyone that could help guide me but the forest was almost empty. I was about to leave when I heard a tree rustling in the distance.

Suddenly, a foreign figure emerged in the distance. The figure had a unique shape, though I couldn’t really make out what they were from where I was standing. As I moved closer, I realised it was nothing I had ever seen before.

“You’re beautiful.” I muttered as I covered my mouth, my fingertips brushing my lips in surprise. The figure glistened in the November sunlight, decorated with shimmering scales that reflect hues of soft lavender, emerald green and a rich blue. At the top of her head stood a sharp, elegant horn that stood like a crown on her glossy, silk-like hair.

The figure froze, eyes widening and reflecting an emotion of horror as they looked at the ground. “Thank you... no one’s ever said that to me before.” She breathed, still frozen in place. “How?! You’re... majestic.” I replied with a

smile, gazing at her glassy scales. “No... no!” The creature suddenly raised her voice and backed away. “You’re... You’re pitying me!” “I’m not! You really are beautiful. What’s your name?” I asked, trying to make my tone sound cheerful, scared of frightening her further. To my disappointment, she seemed even more rattled by my words. She curled up in a ball and started muttering something under her breath. “I’m not beautiful, I’m not beautiful...”

“Stop saying that about yourself!” I screamed, going over to hug the creature. “You’re beautiful, stop thinking otherwise!” “NO! I’m not. I don’t have feathers or fly like CDBs. I don’t have their powers. I’m just a normal Centrosaurus dinosaur.”

I pursed my lips and glanced at the dinosaur in empathy. The hate she brought upon herself... It hurt to think about how she was feeling. “What’s your name?” I asked with a smile. “Rue.” Rue breathed, tears rolling down her glistening face. “That’s a pretty name! I don’t know you, but I know you look amazing. I hate to see you think otherwise. Please believe me. Where I come from, no one has powers or can fly, but that doesn’t mean no one there is pretty.” “Really? Do you really think so?” Rue sniffled, finally looking up at me. I nodded and reached out a hand to help her get up.

Rue explained to me that when the asteroid crashed, a pack of CDBs used their magic to save themselves and the dinosaurs surrounding them. However, the CDBs then abused their powers and took control of the dinosaurs they saved, using them like slaves. Rue even tried to use scientific experiments to make herself grow feathers because she was taught she was born ugly.

“Rue, I’m on a journey to find CDBs. Do you think you could bring me over to them?” I asked, putting my hands together to plead.

“No! I’m not supposed to bring you here.”

“What, why not?”

“I would get killed. And I don’t know what will happen to you.”

I sighed in disappointment and looked at the ground. “What if I take you just outside. I know I’m really not supposed to but, I’ve never met someone kind enough to call me beautiful.” Rue said, smiling at me. I still felt stings of disappointment but was moved by Rue’s compassion. “Thanks Rue.”

The path Rue took me to was filled with sunflowers. The trees were dressed in bird nests and pine needles. The rising mist filled my vision as the aroma of sun-warmed bark kissed my nose. My feet sank into the warm, wet grass. I picked up a blackberry and felt its rough skin. I kept following Rue until...

“Wait! Stop right there! Don’t go any further!”

I stopped immediately and looked around. I gasped and jumped back as I saw the bright red petals of wildflowers. Hong’s warning echoed in my mind as I realised I had accidentally stumbled into my supposed doom. Suddenly, seemingly because of my presence, the wildflowers bowed down towards me and morphed into a soft green colour.

“Woah. It... it turned green for you. I guess that means you can go in? Oh I hope Lucinda doesn’t kill me for this.” Rue said, looking conflicted.

“Who’s Lucinda?”

“The most amazing being alive. You’ll know when you see her.”

Past the wildflowers was a transparent dome with civilization inside it. It was like a city, except instead of skyscrapers stood enormous shadowy spires and flickering wisps of ghostly light. The grass beneath me became cold and pricked my feet. Each creature took my breath away with their unique outlook. Fangs, antlers, claws... It was like walking into a fairytale, which I sort of was.

“There she is, Lucinda. The leader of the CDBs. She’s beautiful. We’re supposed to worship her since she’s the one who saved our lives from the meteorite. We’re all just living in her world.” I glanced up at where Rue was pointing. At the top of a cliff stood a dragon-like creature. She wore enormous wings that wrapped around her red feathered body. Each feather pieced together to form a soft and delicate layer, covering her leathered skin.

As she saw us approach, she spread her shimmering red wings and floated down to the ground gracefully.

“Hey loser, you’re late. Where are my blackberries?” Lucinda scowled, before looking at me. She froze for a second and pursed her lips. “I’m sorry, who are you?” Lucinda asked, looking down at me and holding up a paw to stop me. “Mei. I’m on a quest to find CDBs for my father. Your friend Rue here kindly brought me over.” I explained, heart dropping. The CDBs were beautiful. But, was this really what I expected? “Rue, you brought meat here?! How could you?! Have you not seen what our protective magic does to those weaklings? We don’t want to get in trouble for killing two humans.” Lucinda yelled, pushing me to the ground. Fire emerged from behind her ears as the village warmed up. I felt sweat roll down my cheek, not only because of the heat but also because of Lucinda.

“Killed?” I asked as my body stiffened. I started to piece together the knowledge I knew about Baba’s death. Hong said Baba went on this journey before and had to suffer great consequences. Baba lost his life to a disease the doctors had never seen before. Did Baba die from this journey?

“No. She’s immune, your honour! She’s immune. The wildflowers turned green as she approached! I guess she has some kind of gene that allows her to be immune to your magic.” Rue explained, bowing down to Lucinda. “Immune. So he did find an immunity.” Lucinda growled, glaring at me. “Immune? How am I immune?” I called from the ground, struggling to get up from the slippery grass. “How do you know Wei?” Lucinda asked, ignoring my question. Lucinda kicked me down again and rested a paw on my stomach, pinning me down. “He’s my… late father.”

“Lucinda, using her dark magic, created a barrier surrounding us. If humans get too close, they develop a fatal disease. The wildflower turned green when you approached, which means it’s harmless to you.” Rue whispered to me, eyeing me with pity.

“But Lucinda won’t let this fly.”

“That dangerous man. First he tries to infiltrate our home before meeting his death. Then, he finds an immunity to my magic and inserts it into his daughter. That man!” Suddenly, Lucinda flew upwards in a spiral motion and began filling the dome with a red light. My skin started burning with agony, my limbs feeling as if they were being torn away from me. “NO!” I heard Rue scream as I felt a paw drag me away.

Rue and I ran away from the forest. I brought her home and taught her how to live as a human. We found joy in each other’s company. She saved me and filled a bit of my emptiness by telling me her tales. I taught her that she was beautiful in her own way and made sure she fit into JiangXi.

If you were to ask me about my craziest experiences, it would have to be this journey. But, I always go back and wonder, was it worth it? I saw a whole pack of CDB for Baba. I had achieved what I wanted to accomplish. But somehow, I didn’t get the satisfaction I expected. Was this really what I was expecting? A pack of bullies who used others as slaves? Who used magic to kill people?

Maybe this was what Baba wanted me to learn all along. That beauty was from within and being beautiful means nothing with an ugly heart.

A Prehistoric Future

Ying Wa College, Cheng, Yu Hei Gordon – 15

Somewhere in China, the 26th century...

As the sun slowly set over the mountainous region, Chris Wong, the lead agent in Dinosaur Enhancement and Revival Party – DERP for short – , sat in a camp not far from some ancient ruins – An abandoned factory resembling the architect of the 20th century. Scans had confirmed that this factory contained their data, and was very much not abandoned.

‘Listen up, DERPs, Squad Leader speaking,’ a voice came from Chris’ earphones. ‘I’m going to go over the mission briefing. As you all know, the government has been investing in research for reviving and employing enhanced dinosaurs on the battlefield to better protect the people. However, our targets today have stolen some of their data and fled here, and we’re tasked to infiltrate.’

‘Now, our main objective is to retrieve the data. Chris, you’re going to be doing the physical infiltration. You’re going to have to go solo, else we risk the alarm setting off. At the same time, Mary will hack into the digital defences. Remember, you need to disable their anti-teleportation defences for Chris to escape afterwards. Once you get to a certain point in the hacking, the building might get alerted and go into lockdown, so you’re going to have to time it

so that Chris can get out with our data. Lastly, Peter, you are in charge of breaking in with your team if Mary times it incorrectly, or if something goes wrong and the building gets alerted. Got it?’

‘Understood.’

His trusty watch buzzed. It’s time. Fumbling with his gadgets one last time, Chris slid silently into the factory with heightened confidence, looking around as crickets played a tune somewhere around him.

The watch obediently emitted a dim glow, shining past the many structures in the factory. As the flashlight passed over one of the walls, a neon glow gleamed and a door appeared. ‘Main entrance alarm is down, no enemies nearby,’ he heard from his earphones.

Fishing out a tiny dongle from a small pouch, a flick of his gloved wrist morphed the dongle into a magnet. Attaching it onto the door, he slid the door open.

Chris slowly started moving underground as he found himself listening to the distant talking he could hear. Secretly the watch recorded the chat and was busy analysing it. Chris pointed his watch at the door on the other side of the room he was in. The watch understood the command immediately and promptly displayed a radar on its surface. Blinking on the radar were three red dots.

‘Mary here, providing an update. We are in the process of neutralizing their anti-teleportation defenses. This window of opportunity will last for merely an hour, hence, prompt action is imperative,’ cautioned his associate. ‘The anti-teleportation mechanism is now... effectively deactivated.’

Chris pulled out his phaser. Pointing downwards, Chris popped up on the ceiling of the room below. With a flash he disappeared, materialising at the other side of the room, as three plasma shots flew out of his outstretched arm, hitting three researchers in the head. By the time the bodies dropped to the ground with a *thud*, Chris was already in front of a computer, plugging a dongle in.

The dongle glowed a brilliant green as data from the computer was absorbed. ‘Excellent work, Chris. We shall meticulously examine the data and promptly provide you with any pertinent information.’

Looking away from the half-completed game of Minesweeper on the computer screen, Chris looked through a map he just received from Mary. Devising a path to the room labelled ‘Dino Delving’, he quickly zapped through different walls, sometimes quickly dispatching different personnel in the building, before finding his way into his target room.

The room was dimly lit, and the light made Chris’ hair stand on its end. Sprinting over to a computer, he discovered that the room was used for research regarding dinosaur fossils, and not the revival or enhancement of dinosaurs. He decided to extract the data anyway.

‘Greetings, Chris. This is Mary reaching out. After perusing the map, I believe it would be prudent for you to explore a location known as “Jurassic Justicebringing”. It may just contain the data we seek...’ Fizzed his earphones.

‘Hm, very well then.’

‘Exercise due caution, for there exist several traps scattered along the path to that particular chamber...’

A tough forty minutes later, and Chris was swearing silently, staring at the screen that showed how the T-Rex in the Jurassic Fossils film saved the laser-breathing soldier, and the injustice that the director showed by killing off the T-Rex.

‘Mary here. I must say, that film was rather captivating. However, do bear with me for a moment; some security cameras I previously disabled are reactivating. I shall address that matter promptly.’

Entertaining himself with an article talking about how the T-Rex should have killed the one-eyed beetle, Chris jumped when he finally heard ‘The security measures have been compromised. However, I implore you to remain vigilant, as you are surrounded by multiple adversaries.’

Berating himself for getting distracted – in his defence, the article was *very* interesting – Chris went through wall after wall, coming across more unhelpful rooms, and steadily increasing his killcount.

Swearing not-so-silently, the security was disabled yet again as Chris prayed that he hadn’t missed any bodies as he teleported his victims to the Earth’s core.

‘Dear Chris, it appears they are quite perceptive regarding our current situation... Exercise utmost caution henceforth.’

‘Understood.’

A voice rang through the building. **Workers of the Dinosaur Egg Administrative Department, you are currently 30 minutes behind schedule. Please report to the Department of Dinosaurs immediately. Further lateness will result in severe consequences.**

Dinosaur Egg Administrative Department? The people are dead! Chris thought. His eyes quickly travelled over his watch, quickly locating the Department of Dinosaurs.

Creeping his way over, only stopping once to dispatch some security, he found himself in a long corridor. Neon symbols adorned the white walls, and he found his phaser was unable to bring him past the large door at the end of the corridor.

‘Mary here. The defenses surrounding that chamber are quite formidable; teleportation will be utterly unfeasible. We shall endeavor to breach these barriers; do remain steadfast.’

‘Sure,’ Chris mumbled, staring unmovingly at the neon circle in the middle of the door.

Deafening silence rang through the corridor, as the world seemed to stop. Finally, he received word from Mary again, breaking his trance.

‘This is Mary providing an update. Everything appears to be in order now... do remain vigilant regarding the researchers present.’

Steadying himself, Chris clutched his laser pistol in his right hand and his teleporter in his left.

Pointing at the door, he pulled the trigger and he was inside.

His right hand flew upwards, and within moments the unknowing researchers were lying on the floor, as Chris moved towards the main computer. Plugging his dongle in, he waited patiently as the data was absorbed and processed.

‘*Bzzt*–got the data! But there’s–*Bzzt*–He’s armed with a–*Bzzt*–launcher. And–*Bzzt*–’

‘Huh? Mary? I can’t hear you, the connection’s getting disrupted.’

‘...’

‘Mary? Are you there? MARY?’

Figuring that he would simply teleport back out, he pointed his teleporter at the door, but nothing happened.

He rushed to the door, trying to get it to open, but it wouldn’t budge.

BOOM! A blast came from outside his door, quickly followed by plasma shots being fired, and lots of shouting.

Quickly deciding that he had to get out, and praying that Peter and his team had arrived to hold the enemies off, he set down his mortar, preparing to blast through the door and escape.

That would not happen so easily, however.

‘Ah, what a delightful surprise we have stumbled upon here, how utterly charming. One must wonder at the company I keep.’

Chris spun around. He had heard someone speak. And sure enough, in front of him was... a cyborg. Cyborgs were *extremely* rare because of how hard they are to create accurately, but if done well, cyborgs are... deadly, to say the least.

‘Ah, attempting to pilfer information, are we? How utterly naive of you to presume such cleverness...’

‘Wha... Who the hell are you?’

‘Me? My identity is merely of trifling interest to one of your ilk... Just understand that it was I who thwarted your rather audacious scheme.’

‘Ugh... Enough of this nonsense. This ends here, cyborg!’

Defly bringing up dual pistols, Chris quickly flicked them upwards towards the cyborg, before shots were fired.

With a flash, the cyborg teleported away without even needing a teleporter.

He felt lasers coming his way from behind, and he nimbly sidestepped them, before turning around and shooting at the spot the cyborg was.

Instead, the cyborg was to the side of him, firing more lasers.

Teleporting away to avoid being hit, the fight quickly turned into a man and a cyborg flashing around the room, trying to anticipate where their opponent will go next.

Which proved to be an extremely hard thing to do when you can teleport around in an entire room.

A few times Chris felt something whizz by his hair, and he knew he had to figure out a way to leave. The cyborg was definitely above his pay grade, and his luck would run out sooner or later.

In a split moment decision, Chris teleported to his mortar, before dropping a shield. A relentless onslaught of lasers immediately followed, as Chris fired his mortar at the door.

CRACK! A hole was blown through the door, just as the cyborg teleported next to the shield, and with a neon sword, slashed clean through in one swing.

CLANG! The impact affected him through the shield, and he found himself flying into the wall, before he managed to teleport out of the room.

What met him was a battle between his colleagues, presumably from Peter's team, and the security personnel of the building. A turret was set up in the room, and as Chris appeared, the turret decided to shoot at the newcomer of the battle.

Before he could do anything, the room shook as the door to the next room flew apart. Looking up, he saw more members of Peter's team swarming into the room, and plasma bullets flew through the air as Chris teleported to the ceiling, before teleporting through the now open door, trying to avoid being hit as much as he could.

His luck had run out however, as he felt a sharp pain through his leg, caused by a sword from a certain cyborg he had forgotten about in the chaos.

'Oh, did you truly entertain the notion that you could escape? How quaint!'

Trying to ignore the pain, Chris aimed his teleporter through the battling people, the turret and the doorways, and threading the needle, materialised in the DEAD room. Without checking if his plan to lose the cyborg had worked, he morphed one of his pistols to a medic gun, and shot his knee, patching up the bleeding wound.

Seeing the cyborg not immediately showing up to attack him, he decided on a different strategy. Going back to his mortar, he plopped down another shield, and fired a mortar blast upwards, through the ceiling.

BLAST! The ceiling fell atop Chris' shield, leaving Chris unharmed. Teleporting through, he teleported through the corridor, trying to escape the facility.

His teleporter let out a beep, a screen appearing above it displaying *low battery remaining*.

'This is Peter speaking!' Came a voice from his forgotten earphones, causing Chris to jump. 'Everybody retreat! I repeat, everybody—*BOOM—ROAWRRR—AHHHHHHH*'

Something roared in his earphones, but Chris didn't hear it, as at that same moment, the wall next to him exploded, before he heard a drawling voice behind him.

'It's nothin' personal, kid.'

But Chris wasn't the lead agent of DERP for nothing. Ducking out of instinct, he narrowly avoided the sword swing as he brought his leg around for a kick on his attacker's legs.

This proved comically ineffective, as his foot hit hard metal rather than flesh, and Chris suspected his own foot hurt more from his kick than the attacker—or apparently, the cyborg's—leg.

'Yeouch!' Chris cried out, while teleporting up to the ceiling, and morphing his own neon sword.

Dropping down, the cyborg's blade met his own, as a sword duel ensued between the two, with the cyborg still teleporting around all over the place, but Chris deciding to save on power for his teleporter.

Distant screams and roars back near the DEAD room could vaguely be heard, but Chris was far too focused on his fight to notice, as the cyborg was quickly wearing him down, and he had yet to land a single hit on the cyborg.

As the cyborg teleported again, Chris decided to morph his sword into a hand cannon, and just as the cyborg materialised again, Chris aimed his hand cannon upwards, on the ceiling.

BOMPH! The ceiling collapsed onto the two. The cyborg, sensing what was happening, had immediately teleported away down the corridor, while Chris, deciding that it was go big or go home, shot his teleporter upwards, threading the needle between the falling rubble, and landing on the floor above, as the rubble quickly concealed his previous position, creating a heavy amount of dust.

He hoped that it was enough to at least momentarily confuse the cyborg. Looking around, he realised that he seemed to be in a rather dim corridor.

Growl...

His teleporter gave a final flash, before it died, its lights dimming completely.

Running down the corridor, he checked his map, hoping to find the nearest path to the exit.

Grr...

Stopping in place, Chris spun around. Some distance away from him in the corridor was a pair of glowing blue eyes, and an aqua aura seemed to revolve around the mysterious beast.

The beast reared its hind legs, and seemingly leapt off of the air, as its feet had never been touching the ground.

But the entire time, Chris did not move nor react, mesmerised by the glimmering blue crystals he saw rapidly approaching him.

For a brief moment before the crystals reached him, he realised what was about to happen.

His last thought was how the world would be affected by this new development, as he felt the Allosaurus' teeth sink into his neck for the briefest moment, before the world went black.

Reattempt

Ying Wa College, Cheung, Ka Wing – 15

Underground laboratory. 2060.

For the last time, my creator inspected my undercarriage.

“What is your duty?” he asked.

My creator's words were engraved into my systems. My mind became a dam, blocking the mighty downpour of what I wanted to say.

“To perform scientific investigation on the Early Cretaceous dinosaurs.”

“And?”

“To sabotage others' work by any means necessary.”

“Including?”

“Opening fire.”

Once again, I ran a diagnostic check of my body. My armaments were fully loaded, ready to strike.

“Okay then, you're good to go.”

A greenish light emanated from the tip of my nose and gradually engulfed my entire body, and before I knew it, I was outside the research facility.

Yixian Formation. 125 million years ago.

I found myself somewhere very similar to what my creator had described – an area with lush vegetation where dinosaurs roam free. The lake nearby was adorned with groups of horsetail plants, their stems branching off to form layers of spiralling leaves.

These plants look familiar. Are they the so-called living fossils?

The abundance of these medium-sized plants didn't stop the lake from glimmering under the Sun and reflecting an iridescent glow.

I followed the glow and let my lenses absorb the scenery faraway. Ferns lined the opposite side of the lake, and the creatures there emitted a... growling engine noise?

I turned around, just to find a drone hovering in the air.

My creator's worlds echoed in my mind,

"You are the sole saviour of our scientific studies. They are thieves. They are your enemies. Destroy them. Let them succumb to your will."

No explanations needed.

Everything was automatic now. My weapons systems came online. I narrowed my lenses and placed the enemy at the centre of the target.

"Aim it at the lethal cone," That's what my creator taught me.

So I fired. The missile streaked across the air, drawing one of the most beautiful parabolas I've ever seen—

The enemy dodged, and the messenger of fate landed onto a tree nearby.

Instantly, the tree crackled and erupted into flames. The orchestra of the surprised, yet painful screeches of the wildlife pierced into my metal casings and damaged my computers.

My creator didn't tell me about this side effect.

I didn't have the time to reminisce about the wildlife as soon enough, another parabola was drawn in the air, and an agonising, burning streak in my belly emptied my thoughts and forced me to crash into the arms of Mother Nature.

Systems inactivated. Entering hibernation mode.

Yixian Formation, Present Day.

The dinosaur fossils were gently baked by the rising Sun. A glint of sunlight made its way into my view.

Time to start another day of work.

I took my gear and ventured outside. Just as I stepped out of the makeshift camp, another light beam was attacking the corner of my eyeball.

Oww – that's blinding! Something shiny in an excavation site?

I took off my glasses, turned and stared at the sandy pit again.

There it was, at the centre of the field, a small shiny cone extruding out of the surface.

Something new!

I carried all my tools and rushed to bring this new fossil back to life.

Another piece to complete the puzzle.

I carefully pried open the soil.

This fossil didn't look like a single bone, but the entire body of a baby dinosaur. Interesting.

I continued digging.

The dinosaur's nose was the part that had been sticking out of the ground.

*Its head appeared. Its shape was rather unusual for a dinosaur.
Then its body, attached to a pair of rather sleek wings.*

And that's the entire fossil. Gently wiping the residual dirt that was stuck on its surface, I held the 'baby dinosaur' in my palm and examined it as if it was my prized possession.

Wait. Where are its feet?

Puzzled, I turned the fossil around. Two nearly identical cone-shaped cavities. Then I realised.

Those are thrusters!

As if solving a crime case, the weird 'head', the sleek wings, the protrusions on the side and the somewhat ominous insignia on the tail all made sense suddenly.

Don't tell me this is a miniature fighter plane.

"Hallo?" a warm voice emanated from the 'fossil'.

As if a lightning bolt, I shot up immediately, threw the craft back into the soil, and set off running.

This thing looks nefarious. Keep running, leave that thing in the soil. It's dangerous.

"Owww!" a voice emerged behind me, enough to strike pain into my heart.

Charles Yang, you're a compassionate person. Nothing hurts if you turn around and talk with the plane for a moment.

I stopped in my tracks.

*But I'm not good at conversations with people... let alone a sentient talking military aircraft! I'll try talking a little.
Just a little.*

I gently lifted the aircraft out of the soil, hoping against hope that I would not be shot right away.

Luckily, nothing happened.

Carefully placing the aircraft in my palm, I inspected for damage. Fortunately, I couldn't find any dents or ruptures, but instead I found a glint of hope from its cockpit which managed to penetrate through my glasses and enter my eyeballs.

The aircraft let out a small "Awww..." as it snuggled into a more comfortable position within my palm.

Awww... Am I THIS rejected?

"So, uh," the person started talking again. Was he choosing his words?

"What are you?"

"A miniature aircraft for science exploration. Name's Phantom," I blurted out.

"But... correct me if I'm wrong, those are missiles? For science?" He asked as he looked under my wings.

I feel so sorry now.

So I told him what happened. I told him the exact words my creator told me. I told him how shocked I was when I found out the horrifying side effects of my mission – destroying precious wildlife. I told him how I wanted a reattempt, how I wanted to find a better way to solve the drone problem.

The entire time I was hovering beside the paleontologist, as if a child pouring all his thoughts and emotions into his parents. The paleontologist just nodded – but I couldn't have asked for more – I was craving for acceptance.

"If you knew time travel, why don't you travel back in time now to correct your mistakes?" He suggested.

Good idea.

"I'll bring you there as well for company. Don't panic, I guarantee you'll be out there alive," I said.

Once again, a greenish light glowed at the tip of my nose cone.

I focused more of my energy, then gradually, very gradually, the glow engulfed both me and the person.

I feel my metal surface burn, threatening to melt. One last stretch...

I gave a final burst of energy and we're no longer standing on a sandy pit, but an area with lush vegetation where dinosaurs roam free. The lake nearby was adorned with groups of horsetail plants, their stems branching off to form layers of spiralling leaves.

It's time to rewrite history for good.

Yixian Formation, 125 million years ago

Phantom hovered in front of me for a good while.

"So, uhhh... you're..." it began.

I realised I haven't introduced myself to the awkward fighter.

"I'm Charles Yang."

"So Charles, welcome to the Cretaceous."

"I always see that name in the textbooks," I replied flatly.

Noting our appearance, a small feathery creature flew onto the ground. I instantly screamed and hopped away from that creature.

"What's wrong?" Phantom shouted.

"I—I—It's scary!" I stammered. Despite being a paleontologist, the frightening appearance of a living, breathing dinosaur could still clog my vocal cords. The familiar monster inside me was awakened once more, choking my voice, disrupting my breathing.

Phantom maneuvered itself in front of me, forcing me to halt.

"*Come on*, Charles," Phantom said, annoyed. "Escape is NOT the antidote to fear." It paused for a moment. "That's what my creator told me."

"Nah, I'm just a bit shocked,"

The miniature fighter plane hovered still in the air, unmoved.

"Well, we'll see. Now let's do *science*."

Phantom performed an excited barrel roll at the final word, and rushed beside the small dinosaur, all while keeping a safe distance.

I let out a long breath. I tried to look at the dinosaur, but my eyes automatically darted away.

Something is still tugging me. From inside.

But Phantom's warm voice echoed in my mind. Escape is not the antidote to fear.

One last try.

I willed my eyeballs to move.

For once, the monster within me recoiled, and my eyeballs listened to my commands.

Wow, this fighter plane had special weapons.

I proceeded to analyse the small dinosaur, which decided to perch on a random twig on the ground. Its size was not much larger than Phantom's. The dino gracefully set down its feathered wings on its sides. Two of its feathers were elongated to become tails, and they wagged gently in the air. Teeth were absent in its small but sharp beak.

No malicious intent. For now.

I imagined an X-Ray scan of the dino, and guessed where its bones might lie.

Ah. This IS familiar. The first dinosaur ever to have a toothless beak.

"It's a *Confuciusornis*," I announced proudly, breaking the silence. Then I looked at Phantom, who had a cryptic glow on its cockpit. It was a matter of seconds before a hint of excitement took over.

"*Confuciusornis*, a genus under the clade *Dinosauria*... Wow, Charles, your intuition is much stronger than mine. You'll certainly help—"

The dino lost interest in us. It spread its wings, hopped into the air, flapped its feathered wings and began flying away.

The flashing noise was immediately replaced by the gentle growling of engines. Phantom lurched backwards, then kicked into motion.

A perfect opportunity to record the dinosaur's flying habits.

I accelerated upwards, then a sharp shriek echoed in the area as the dinosaur realised a predator was after it.

Stay close to the dinosaur, Phantom, as if you were to tail an enemy plane. But do not fire.

I was closing in quick. The dinosaur didn't dare to spend precious seconds looking back at where I was. Instead, seeing a tree in the distance, it set a goal for itself and accelerated towards it. It knew that such a high-speed predator wouldn't be able to turn sharp into its favourite perch located deep in the tree.

And the dino was right.

No wonder they named the dinosaur after the famous Chinese philosopher Confucius.

I slowed down a bit, but to no avail – I wasn't good at 90-degree drifts at a high speed while avoiding crashing into tree branches and preventing accidentally scaring more wildlife on the way.

Charles just stood there and watched our small chase. Two flying souls, one from the future world, one from eons ago. He must have found this amazing.

I maneuvered beside Charles and announced happily, "Perfect scan. Wasn't the chase exciting to watch?"

"It sure was exciting... but I thought you wanted to kill or destroy the dino."

All of a sudden I felt my wings droop, my cockpit losing its pristine, energetic glow.

Why is Charles so stereotyped – couldn't I just be a pacifist fighter plane? The chase was to capture actual footage of the flying dinosaur! Just imagine how delighted the researchers would be when they see high-quality videos of dinosaurs, enabling them to discover not only their anatomy, but also their living habits.

Charles must have noticed me being silent for so long.

"Phantom?"

My creator would ask "Phantom?" every time after I was rebooted. On every reboot, his workbench would become the home for complex blueprints.

Among the many rough sketches, there was this claw which was supposed to be mounted on my underside. It had several crooked fingers which coiled to form a circular shape, enabling me to perch on twigs or something of the sort. But why was the design so familiar? Did the Confuciusornis have the same design?

"And now we continue," Realising I've spaced out for too long, I announced in a flat tone, and guided the way.

The day carried on, more dinosaurs, more scans, more video captures. With more practice, Charles seemed to get more accustomed to dinosaurs.

Tomorrow's the big day,

And soon it was night.

Phantom's cockpit had a blue luminescent glow in the dark, enlightening the surroundings. It was restless, circling here and there around our makeshift camp made of the wood gathered nearby.

"I'm tired," I announced.

"It's okay," Phantom replied, its movements clearly more erratic than in the morning. "It's okay," it repeated, in a much softer tone.

"So do I sleep, or do we have—"

“Go on with your sleep,” Phantom interjected. “We need a lot of energy tomorrow.”

I lied down onto the grass, and slept under the twinkling stars of eons ago. The scenes of how Phantom scared away every dinosaur before gathering wood from a tree lingered in my mind.

The entire night I found myself circling restlessly around the open area. The wind was whispering words to me.

“Here again?”

“...”

“For a reattempt?”

“... Yes?”

“I see you’ve got a friend with you.”

“... Yes.”

“That’s a responsibility.”

“That’s an aid.”

“That’s a burden.”

“That’s a hope.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

My sensors picked up the tangerine glow of the sun on the horizon.

Oh, no.

I gently pushed Charles’ backbone. It’s time for the battle.

“Yawwwwwwwwn.”

“It’s time,” I said softly. “It’s time... to make more discoveries.”

“Sure,” he said. He stretched and was ready to step out of the camp.

I could sense an enemy silently lurking outside our camp. But I’m not ready for battle.

My systems were detached from one another, and I lost some control on my movements.

My creator would never approve of me deviating from his orders. But I want to be a peacekeeper.

“No,” I warned in a low tone and remained hovering still in the air. As if a gust of chilling air was blown, Charles became frozen in place.

“Why?”

“Just... no. Just... *listen*.”

Among the occasional dinosaur roars, the sound of running engines lurked in the distance.

“See?” I flew just beside Charles’ ears and whispered.

“But you said... you would guarantee me getting out here alive.”

“Yes...,” Indeed, that was my promise. A series of erratic lights emitted from my cockpit.

“Your creator said escape is not the solution to fear.”

“Right... my creator... I’m so conflicted now...” I was trembling so vigorously. Charles grasped me tightly within his palm.

“Th—Thank you for the warmth. B—but I’m still not sure, C—Charles. Would finding peace be what my creator wanted?”

Charles contemplated for a short moment, then he asked the question.

“What is your duty?”

“To perform scientific investigation on the Early Cretaceous dinosaurs.”

“And?”

“To provide precious information for the future generations to use.”

“For whom exactly in the future generations?”

“For researchers, who need the data for exploring Earth’s evolution. For engineers, who need the inspiration to solve a long-standing problem,” I paused. “For those with nefarious intentions, to make tools to elim—”

Why can’t I finish the sentence?

“It’s okay. Your duty is to let them know what they’re doing is completely incorrect.”

“Understood,” I started up my engines and soared out of the camp in one start.

“Identify yourself,” the enemy drone spoke up.

“It’s not right to sabotage others’ work,” I said boldly, buying time to inspect my surroundings and think of a strategy.

Why is this tree so familiar? Was it once a bird’s nest? Hmm.

“The individual stated is not in the whitelist,”

Time is running out.

I accelerated towards the tree where the *Confuciusornis* settled.

“Do not try to escape. Face the consequences.”

No way. I’m not escaping. This is part of the plan.

With the noise of my engines, I startled the *Confuciusornis* dinosaur. Afraid of being pursued again, the dinosaur flapped its wings, left its nest and flew out of the tree.

Sensing abnormal movement, the enemy fired.

In an instant, a painful screech filled the sky. A few seconds later, the world fell silent. Devoid of the sound of engines or breaths.

The leaves stopped waving, the wind halted, all to mourn for the loss of their dinosaur friend.

On the grassland, a fallen *Confuciusornis* laid. Its half-burnt feathers became the white lilies which accompanied the dinosaur’s death.

Realising its mistake, the enemy hovered in the air. Its cockpits bobbed up and down slowly, as if contemplating its next move. It had just killed a dinosaur. It had just destroyed a key to understanding Earth’s evolution.

“See?” I taunted. For the first time, I could feel a ferocious fire burning in my cockpit. The kind of fire that would make Charles grateful that I was on his side.

“Your actions will be engraved in the soil,” I said, staring at the retreating enemy.

Yixian Formation, Present Day

A green light engulfed the both of us.

The light faded, and we were back at the excavation site.

A pair of dinosaur-like claws emerged from its undercarriage. Skilfully, the cute little airplane perched sturdily on my right shoulder.

“Dinosaurs are such a perfect entry, a perfect inspiration for engineers on solving convoluted problems, bringing phantoms into existence.”

Phantom comfortably rested on my shoulder, its cockpit staring intently at the newspaper article poking cheekily out of my toolbag. It wasn’t there before the time travel.

The heading?

Scientists Baffled: Chinese Dinosaur Fossil Found To Have A Bullet Hole

Finishing its read, it rotated towards me.

I exchanged a knowing smile with the pacifist fighter plane.

Lost Evolution

Ying Wa College, He, Tim – 15

For the relatively short time that humans were on the earth, we seemed to have bested every other creature, conquered disasters that used to be considered apocalyptic and wrapped the earth around our little fingers. We have reason to be prideful, to believe that we are the earth's apex predator. Yet, in our hubris, we have forgotten that we are nothing but a speck in Earth's history. Long before we were ever conceived, millions and millions of dynasties of fantastic monsters and beasts inhabited this world, who are we to say that we are the greatest? Though we may convince ourselves that we know all about the past through all our research of fossils, what can we learn from just decrepit scattered bones and carcasses found by skimming on the surface of the earth? The earth is over 6000 kilometres thick yet we can only dig 12 kilometres deep. The ocean constitutes most of the earth yet we have only explored 5 percent of it. Though we think that we dominate the world, in reality, we haven't even explored a fraction of it. What right do we have to dictate our history when we aren't even clear about what's happening in the present?

As a paleontologist of 20 years, I should be professionally inclined to believe in humanity's current recount of our ancient history. Yet, on this faithful expedition, me and my team have encountered things, abnormalities that go against everything we've learned about our ancient past. This report, while no product of fabrication, should remain a footnote, a myth not worthy of further research or public acceptance. The truth is, we are mere ants, stumbling about in the playground of giants who deem us too insignificant to pay heed to. Some truths are better left untold. I will now begin retelling the events that occurred during this expedition, from start to finish.

The beginning of our expedition was uneventful. China has long been our prime site for excavation due to its wealth of fossils. After months of prospecting, we found evidence of fossils inside of an unexplored cave. We set camp just outside the cave and prepared the necessary gear and supplies to explore it.

Soon enough, a qualified crew ventured into the cave and came back up around half a day later with good news: bone fragments were found in a patch not that deep into the cave. The positions of the fragments seemed to indicate that the fossil was near the surface of the ground, too. Some basic excavation tools were sent down the shaft and digging commenced. A couple of days later, we got our first glimpse at the fossil.

It was a skeleton of a low-standing reptile similar to that of a Komodo dragon but with amphibian features. It was a four-legged crouched reptile with short stubby, "lily pad-like" legs and a chubby round snout. It looked to be one of the many bottom feeders that existed during those ancient times, as insignificant as something like a lizard or a frog if we scale it back to modern times. Yet, there is one peculiar fact about this piece of bone: even after thousands and thousands of millennia of weathering and corrosion, its teeth were still piercing sharp. They were also abnormally large and elongated, instead of teeth they looked more like tusks. I would go as far as to say that this creature is just a gaping wide maw with four faulty, ineffective legs strapped onto it. A creature capable of nothing but biting and chewing and tearing and eating flesh, a creature that evolved as though meat was an abundance in these caves, when our common sense would tell us otherwise.

Intrigued by these curiosities, orders were given to descend further into the cave in search of answers. More anomalies were found. The cave is connected to a network of small and tight passages. Cross-examination revealed that the dimensions of the tunnels were roughly equivalent to that of the fossil's. We considered this to be proof that the underground passages are not products of natural corrosion but are instead dug out deliberately by someone or something. Naturally, we first assumed this to be the work of the aforementioned reptiles. This was quickly debunked. As aforementioned, the only body part that holds strength in the reptile is its teeth. If they were used to bore these tunnels, the teeth on the fossils should have been battered and chipped, yet they were perfectly honed. It was then hypothesized that the reptile deposited an acidic substance on the rock, which progressively eroded it to create a passageway. Nevertheless, no plane of the tunnel showed any indications of acidic action.

At that moment, it was obvious that answers could only be found by going deeper into the cave system. A third expedition was planned. Intrigued by the mysteries found within the cave, I decided to join this expedition though I am a researcher who normally works sedentary jobs. Below is my first-person recount of the events that occurred in this expedition.

The expedition began at around one in the afternoon. In about 30 minutes, we reached the entrance to the tunnel system and prepared for our entrance. We put ourselves in a crouched position, squeezed into the tunnel's entrance, and started inching forward. My first impression of the cave was of its coldness. The cave was small and tight, and as I moved I was constantly brushed against the rock edges. I had a childish fear that I would inevitably touch a critter living on these rocks and be attacked, whether physically or by pathogens that unsanitary cave dwellers carry. Yet, I

did not contact nor spot a single organism during my hour-long travel of these systems. Instead of a cave, it felt that we were inside of a lifeless stone statue, the cold dry stone walls incessantly pressed on me, not a single drop of moisture or softness ever grazed my skin, except for a few drops of sweat coming from my own body. There was also an odd complete silence within the caves. We were the only producers of noise in the whole cave. When my colleagues weren't in conversation, I could hear the shuffling of our apparel against the rocks as clearly as the chirpings of a morning bird.

The cave seemed to be proclaiming that it was a barren, dead wasteland that contained naught but ordinary rocks and stones. However, there is one pronounced distinction that made it clear-as-day that this proclamation was nothing but a ruse. There was an odd smell. It was an irritating, murky smell, similar to the smell of an old, unwashed sock that had been left in a small corner. At first, we waved our hands profusely to try to dispel it, and yet the smell never dissipated. This was proof that there was a source to this smell somewhere deep within the caves. As we didn't have any other clues, we followed this smell like a trail of blood, hoping to find its origin.

After about 2 hours, we found it. There had been a space where the slight musky smell had become pungent. I immediately began investigating the region in depth and found that one of the walls had fractured long ago, and is now just a closely packed mound of broken rocks. We could break through this wall with the tools at our disposal. The crew was exhilarated by this discovery after 2 hours of traversal, enduring the irksome smell. A short discussion later, we decided to burrow through the rubble though it was not the safest option, since any seismic movement in these narrow caves could trigger a collapse. It was an impulse decision. Though most of us came here from the obligation of work and not from the passion for knowledge, curiosity has gnawed through our professionalism long ago. Horrifyingly, we were impatient for the truth about this whole series of discoveries, so impatient that safety has become a secondary concern.

We installed an impromptu drilling device on the loose rocks, the drill head an iron beast ready to devour the pieces of sedimentary rock loosely heaped into a pile like it's an all-you-can-eat buffet. On a count of 3, the drill was started. The sharp scraping sound of metal and stone cut through the silent cave atmosphere like a knife streaking over the cloak of silence that used to encompass these caves. The drill head sparked irregularly and lit up our surroundings like a faulty light bulb. Yet, there was a sense of unease. It felt like we were exposing ourselves to something, shooting up flares in a dark forest where silence is kept for a reason. In complete contrast to our concerns, the louder the drill roared, the more and more quiet our surroundings seemed to be. Nevertheless, the smell remained as vexatious as ever. After a short while, the first bits of debris began to fall off. A breeze whirled out of the small crevices, carrying a more potent stench. The sounds of our drill were reverberating throughout the opposite chamber. On the other side looked to be a great cavern of immense size, in stark contrast to the narrow caves we've been experiencing. As the hole in the wall enlarged, the breeze went from a small gust to a constant incessant blowing. The air coming out of the hole was of briny dampness, the smell not too dissimilar to an open wound: a heavy, sickly salty smell. It was as if the chamber we were next to was a decrepit fish market, wet and boggy, reeking of the odor of decaying, bloodied fish.

Around 20 seconds later, a crucial stone dislodged from the wall and it collapsed in a sudden motion. Then we were hit with the full extent of the stench. It rushed out like a tide, encompassing us, overwhelming us in an instant. It was no longer a mere irritation; it was a visceral assault on our senses. The odor, now unrestrained, enveloped us in a thick cloud. The stench enters through every pore of our body and stings with a rancid acridness, clawing at our noses, burning our mouths with its toxicity, physically repulsing us from stepping forward. Despite this assault of noxiousness on our senses, it was obvious to every one of us that it wasn't the reason why none of us dared to take a step forward. We were frozen in place by some primordial, innate terror, so much so that even as we coughed and

choked from the rancid air we could not move our legs an inch. As we recovered slightly from the initial shock, we instantly realized why we instinctively feared this smell. It was the smell of fresh blood and flesh, unconcealed by any sort of skin, like that of an animal's intestines as it is cut open. This was not the stench of decay, but rather an alarming evidence of overly abundant life, of something alive and breathing in the dark depths of the cave.

The instinct to flee battled against a deeper, darker urge to uncover the truth that lay just beyond our reach. One of my crew members started marching forward in an act of almost feverish bravado, using all his might to temporarily overcome the feeling of fear. The rest of us watched him, our legs tightened. The brave volunteer turned on a flashlight and shone it forward. The light's beam caught something glistening in its edges. The man turned his light towards it. It was a slightly pink viscous ooze, its texture like that of a membrane. In the ooze were multiple different cave organisms incorporated and amalgamated into the bizarre ooze. The ooze had the body of a lizard, it had hollow eyes and a hollow socket where there should be a mouth. A gigantified grasshopper wing sticks out its sides and it twitches as bizarre circular microorganisms crawl all over it like ants over a leaf. Then, it began to move in a hybrid of slithering and walking toward our direction, despite having shown no reaction to stimuli. In a moment of wordless agreement, we all turned around and scurried towards the entrance, making as little noise as possible. As we moved, one of our crew members accidentally stumbled and created a discernable, echoing stepping noise.

And suddenly there were hundreds and thousands of them, each splattering as they encroached upon us. They weren't restricted by the ground, some were stuck on the cavern ceilings like pieces of stubborn gum, while some were capable of flight, we could clearly hear the weak flapping of small wings behind us. For all we knew, some could be capable of sight, some could be capable of hearing. Perhaps they could have even detected us with some form of echolocation.

And then, we heard the man scream, a high-pitched cry that echoed through the cavern, shattering the built silence. Then, a loud thump, and silence. That told us all we needed to know to know. We broke out into unbridled, panicked sprinting, scampering up the rocks in a frenzy. The cave, once a silent tomb, was now alive with a cacophony of skittering legs and primal sounds. Oozing and splashing sounds seem to surround us on every corner, the originally dry and stale cave atmosphere becomes uncomfortably wet and sloppy. Our crew cried and whimpered in a chaotic drone of indiscriminate speech yet our footsteps never stopped, and we never dared to look back down into the cave and into the darkness that pulsed with a tinge of pink. We ran with our lives.

Emerging into the daylight felt surreal. The sun shone like a magnificently cut amber, shining a warm orange light over us, drying us of the liquids that we were drenched in.

Due to our discovery, the expedition was canceled, and we relocated our base camp about 2 kilometers from the cave system. We packed our belongings and prepared to leave the next day, but I couldn't sleep that night and stayed up. At around 2 in the morning, I picked up some strange noises coming from the vicinity of the cave. It was a faint sound of wet sloppy splashing and a faint, beastly cry. Then, a giant fleshy husk emerged from the caves. It was in the shape of a human, its facial features missing and replaced by hollow, stretched-out holes. Despite having no mouth, it moaned in a continuous, deep droning. Blood and mucus and bits of little flesh poured out these holes as the being tried to squeeze out of the caves. It tried to force its head through the small entrance of the cave, shaving off massive chunks of its head, they dropped to the ground and dissipated as pools of blood. Large round chunks of its head are missing now, blood pours from its wounds down onto the ground, yet it is still unable to fit through the entrance. Then, with an almost doll-like motion, the creature collapses and ragdolls, creating a large thumping noise. Then, its body slithers back into the caves like a deflated balloon.

The cave returned to being a small, unimportant cave, one of many that no one bats an eye to.

I, as a man of science, once believed that seeking the truth is humanity's highest calling. Of course, after what I've witnessed in that dark, suffocating cave, I've since retreated from those beliefs, and have completely retreated from any exploration work.

And yet, here I am, penning this unnecessary report, passing down this cursed information to another unfortunate soul.

Although it is against the nature of this report, I must question you, dear reader. What is your opinion on this matter, of truths better left untold, of knowledge that brings ruin to its seekers? Rather, what would you have done in my shoes? Would you have told the truth? Say that you saw a monstrosity crawling out of the caves, bearing the visage of your deceased colleague. Would they have just assumed that I was in hysterics? Even if they didn't, what would they have done? Send a team down, try to exterminate it?

It is not the monster that frightens me, modern weaponry could easily finish it off. What I'm so deeply concerned and even terrified about is what this lone incident implicates. Our knowledge of science, of the world that we've spent thousands of years cultivating is totally wrong. Our carefully curated theories about evolution or cell structure or classification of organisms can be completely thrown out the window. Millions of hours, blood, sweat and tears of academics, all for nothing. How crushing would it be for them if they realized the truth? Even worse, how do we know there aren't other things down here, in the unexplored places of the earth? What if, one day one of them just decides to awaken and trample on everything we have made? What would someone do if they learned of this? That everyone and everything they know and love could be gone at any moment?

Despite all the proof that knowing this information brings no good to anyone, I continue to write. Perhaps I am not just writing the report for you, dear reader. Maybe this report is just a silly attempt from myself to wrestle with my demons, to get over my trauma in a fit of therapeutic confession.

Or maybe we are just obsessed with the truth? Even after all these years, maybe we are still in that very cave, drawn to the truth like moths to a flame. When we get too close, a moth burns, we scatter in fear as he screams in agony, we are forever traumatized and fearful. Yet, we would be satisfied knowing that we uncovered some truth on that fateful day, and solved one more of the earth's mysteries among the thousands of them.

Ah, what funny creatures we humans are.

Radiosaurium

Ying Wa College, Meng, Yuancheng – 15

BOOM!

A huge noise broke the tranquility of the valley. The ground shook for a while, and some slivers of plume rose from the entrance of the cave. Beneath the soil, George could feel piles of rocks rumbling, collapsing, shattering. He could feel millions of dollars, alongside his fame, turning into ash all at once. However, he just smiled and walked away. In the haze, he reminisced about the past.

15 years before, he was a paleontologist with a consuming passion for exploring caves and studying all kinds of fossils. One day, a discovery interrupted the pace of his life. He received a message from his company which asked him to go on a long-time expedition to a distant South East Asian island.

“What? A fossil that can revolutionize medical science? Me? As a paleontological consultant? That’s awesome!”

Dreaming about the culture and adventures on the island, he agreed without hesitation and embarked on the journey. Who knew, this was the start of the nightmare.

“Beep— Ladies and gentlemen, I am Kiwi, the AI assistant of the company, and today I would briefly explain the fossil we are going to excavate: Radiosaurium...” The next scene was on the island. “...Owing to the diet of its former owners, Radiosaurs, a tremendous amount of radioactive substances accumulated in their bone marrow, turning the fossils into ideal radioactive cores of radiation therapy machines...”

“Beep— Most importantly, the fossils could be 50 TIMES AS EFFECTIVE as the traditional cores at the same price. In a nutshell, it could bring HOPE to cancer patients. It could save at least several million more lives. That’s why we’re here. To soothe pain and give health to all...” “Give health to all” That phrase echoed again and again in his mind.

However, not everything went smoothly. Due to the volatility of Radiosaurium, it was impossible to use machines in excavation, so the company had to recruit human workers. Attracted by the salary way higher than the local average, plenty of local people signed up. Endless queues formed at the booths, alongside the raucous chatters of the applicants.

Wandering at the booth, the dialogue of the locals caught his attention – though he had only been there for weeks, he could already roughly understand what the locals meant. “I’ll retire in 3 months. Hopefully I can make enough money for the tuition fee of my grandson. Ha-ha” An elderly applicant with thick eyebrows said in the local language. “Yup, Titu. I believe this is gotta be an easy one. I heard from Ruhaka that those glowing rocks are much easier to dig than the coals last time. Y’ know, they stick loose.” Another responded.

“Excuse me, would diggin’ this be a bit dangerous? You know, there’re some Rad– uh.. Radiowhat stuff inside.” A third applicant asked.

“No...No need to worry!” The company personnel spoke in the local language a bit stammeringly. “Our researches had proven the rocks...DID NO HARM as the thick bone layer outside blocks...all the radiation. You know, all the bad things, blocked, understood?” He made a gesture in the air. “Once our boss himself even kissed a piece of that rock in front of everyone.”

“Okay then. Imma join as well.”

Time flies. only in 3 years’ time, all the fossils had been looted. Standing on a hill on the island, George could never forget the view. Dozens of hollow excavation sites scattered around the island surface, as if the island itself was an animal whose flesh was being bitten away piece by piece.

Soon, most people from the company left, and the disaster started to emerge. One man fainted in the street, then went the second, the third...Someone’s palms suddenly went ulcerous and swollen, while another began vomiting blood.

Turned out, most of the ex–Radiosaurium miners were diagnosed with leukemia or cancers. Everyone was cheated by a lie, a deadly lie. Though short–time exposure to the fossils wasn’t unsafe, digging them for years could be fatal. It was just the culprit could simply run away before the harm of radiation kicked in.

“To soothe pain and give health to all.” How ironic. A company that claimed to be devoted to saving patients, now had created patients itself! But it was already too late. He heard the muffled moans coming out of the hospital in agony. He saw the elderly miner he had met before who mined just before retirement, who reappeared in his sight, lying on a stretcher with a pale face – How was his grandson? Those people were just innocent. They had their own lives and beloved ones, yet all was now ruined.

After that, the memories of his youth began to get vaguer and vaguer. He only remembered, henceforth, he did a lot of repetitive work, retired and went to a secluded place in China to continue his cave-exploring hobby.

Nevertheless, fate played a game on him. Just 3 hours before, he found something unbelievable in an uncharted cavern.

“Pat...pat...pat” walking in the deep bowels 150 meters beneath the ground, he noticed a faint red light emitted from the rock wall. It was so faint and dim that only by blinking his eyes several times, could he make sure it was something other than the rock itself or illusion.

He stopped and took out a professional pickaxe from his backpack.

It looked somewhat familiar.

“Clink, clink, clink” He peeled off a thin layer. The red light was more intense.

“That’s weird. Lemme take a check” He mumbled, took out a worn-out iPad from the bag, and started looking through the files which hadn’t been opened for years.

“Not this one, not this one...”

“GOSH.”

“IT CAN’T BE. IT CAN’T BE...”

Suddenly he paused. He took a gasp.

Judging from its texture, look, light and the chemical component of the peripheral rocks, this is Radiosaurium, and there must be several thousand universal Radiosaurium units of them all around. 27 times as much as at that time.

“What have I found? A vein! I thought all of the fossils had long since been dug out!”

...

There was an abrupt silence.

...

“Wait. Dang it! It’s Radiosaurium.”

The dark memories on the island came to his mind.

“IT WOULD HAPPEN AGAIN!”

“Once the information is exposed, people will flock here like last time, and then...” he said to himself. It was as if the sick miners and the old man on the stretcher showed up right in front of him.

“No, it must be destroyed...but how?”

“Think, George. Think. ”

Suddenly, he came up with the experience of his first week on the island. The chief engineer was giving a speech about the mining process, with a piece of DICE-SIZED Radiosaurium in a shock-proof glass box next to him. His moustache was moving as he spoke.

“Of course, you guys all know we came here for this very fossil. But to dig it out is not that easy.” “You see, normally it’s very stable. Yet once it makes contact with a mechanical drill...”

He turned on a button near the glass box. A robotic arm with a drill popped out and clinked the fossil.

“KA-BOOM!”

The fossil suddenly emitted a strong red light, as if it was activated somehow. As George stood near, he could see some tiny cracks starting to appear on its surface. In less than a second, it blew up and created a huge sound, followed by the collective exclamation of the audience. Despite the marginal size of the fossil and the shock-proof box, the room still trembled a bit.

“Ha-ha-ha”The chief engineer laughed.

”See? The power of nature.”

“Once it receives any kind of HIGH-FREQUENCY VIBRATION which is specifically produced by machines, it explodes and becomes a scrap. That’s why we have to resort to the most traditional way – artificial mining.” His assistant opened the box, grabbed out the fossil and hammered it into pieces as he spoke. Not even a spark was produced.

Eureka! Why on earth did they use human workers to mine? Because the fossils are volatile themselves! Upon mechanical vibration, they will explode one after another and become scraps. Good thing this region is so far away and totally uninhabited. There’s a miniature atomic bomb right in front of me. I just need to set it on fire. And as this place is way too deep and the radioactive substances could dissipate fast via explosions(That’s why some safe reservoirs in Russia were literally built by blowing up atomic bombs), it won’t do any harm. I’m a genius!”

Smart and handy as he was, he soon assembled a simple contraption that could produce high-frequency vibration he required with a speaker from his intercom and other equipment in his backpack. Once the 3-hour countdown was complete, it could detonate the fossils and turn them into useless, harmless ash.

Now that everything was ready. It was time to take action.

Yet he hesitated. His legs were as if glued to the ground. A voice echoed in his mind:

Don’t you know how much these fossils are worth? Why just waste them? Throughout your entire life, you’ve devoted yourself to studying paleontology and making adventures. You’ve made such a great effort, yet the return is absolutely unfair.

It’s all because you’re not the one who DISCOVERED Radiosaurium. You’re just one of the bunch of pawns that went to the island with the company. Now that everything’s different. All Radiosaurium has been depleted a decade ago. The whole world out there is in dire need of the stuff, and you are the first to dig it out. C’mon, you can save a lot of patients whose lives are at stake. DON’T YOU WANT TO BE A HERO?

...His eyes drifted to the faint red light on the rock wall, cherishing the last glance towards the treasure. He lapsed into silence for a while.

N...NO...I DON'T. Can lives be exchanged? What's the purpose of saving lives by sacrificing others? You don't wanna be a true hero, do you? Not at all! All you desire is to be famous, is to become a millionaire by those rocks. You don't really care about the cancer patients at all. The "hero" stuff is NOTHING BUT A FAÇADE.

TIME TO WAKE UP.

He activated the detonator, and evacuated out of the cavern as fast as he could.

BOOM!

A huge noise broke the tranquility of the valley. The ground shook for a while, and some slivers of plume rose from the entrance of the cave. Beneath the soil, George could feel piles of rocks rumbling, collapsing, shattering. He could feel millions of dollars, alongside his fame, turning into ash all at once. However, he just smiled and walked away.



Creative Writing
Fiction
Group 4

New tales of Chinese Dinosaurs

Baptist Lui Ming Choi Secondary School, Mok, Shing Hin – 15

Laughter and conversation spill from karaoke bars and teahouses; the new year lanterns blind my corneas; the incessant clatter of bicycle bells and the blaring of car horns create a dissonance that grates on the nerves; vendors shout their hollow sales pitches about their new Fai Chun's, their voices mingling with the mindless chatter of throngs of people, drowning out any semblance of peace. The city life of the new year awakens, filled with camaraderie, while I remain an outsider in a world that seems to revel in its own vibrancy, oblivious to my suffering.

I dragged my intoxicated husk of a body out of the bar onto the pavement of the outside world; sunlight pinned down on my skin, piercing into the crevices of my hair follicles.

The warmth reminded me of a simpler time.

I had a purpose, a humble career as a taxi driver that kept me busy, but now all I've got is the gnawing pain of being replaced by those soulless machines. I spit out curses at the blinking neon signs advertising the very AI that took everything from me, mocking me with their sterile glow, monotone expression, and heartless frames. It's infuriating to see the world move on without me, as if I'm just some relic tossed aside in this relentless race for efficiency. People rush by, glued to their devices, unaware of the wreckage left in the wake of their precious technology. I can't help but hate this new society that values cold calculations over human touch. I'm just a drunken shadow now, lost in a world that has no room for someone like me, drowning my sorrows in the bottom of a bottle while the city thrives on my despair. An echoing rumble disturbed my thought.

A well-dressed salesman was standing in the middle of the street; he had a whole stand and everything, rambling some mumbo jumbo about his new innovative solar panels.

"Step right up, folks! Save the planet and your wallet for this new year! Solar energy is the future!" Ah, another one of those civilized commodities, what a pain. It seemed like he was approaching me.

"Hey there! You look like a man who cares about the environment!" he called out, his smile stretching from ear to ear.

I arched my back, quickly plugging in my shriveled earbuds from my pocket, eyes laser-focused on the concrete, making sure no eye contact was given to the civilized man.

"C'mon, don't be shy! It's about time we all did our part!" He persisted, stepping closer.

"Do you ever get tired of preaching to the uninterested?" I snapped, my voice slurred from the alcohol.

He faltered, taken aback, but quickly regained his composure. "I'm just trying to make a difference, my friend!"

"Difference? You mean profit, right?" I shot back. "You're all just cogs in a machine, gluttonizing for more, manufacturing your shiny toys while the world rots around you. You've got everything, yet you're still unhappy."

He blinked, momentarily speechless, then shrugged. "Not everyone feels that way. Some of us are trying to change things!"

"Change?" I echoed, gesturing wildly. "Despite ruling as deities over all species, climbing the evolutionary hierarchy, even breaking the shackles of the Earth to reach the moon, yet you still quibble over who gets more ice cream for dessert. Isn't that ironic? A species creating so many

products to fulfill their own needs, yet how many are left to rot in the dirt? To create a utopia, with so many shortcomings, isn't that dystopia?"

I stormed past him, the sunlight feeling less like warmth and more like judgment. I could hear him muttering something about how I should be put in an insane asylum behind me, but I didn't care. Such burgeoning desire, only to fade into greed, ignorance, and war. As for me, I am an abandoned product of the civilized man, a 'lowly no-life' not willing to confine to their devilish ideals.

As I turned the corner, the city's saturated chaos faded into a dull roar behind me. The streets of busking guzheng musicians and firecrackers were a patchwork of cracked asphalt and vibrant graffiti, a stark contrast to the polished glass towers reaching hungrily for the sky. The sun hung low, casting a golden hue that transformed the mundane into the ethereal. Yet, I felt only the weight of my drunken stupor dragging me down.

In the blink of an eye, the monotone cement faded into obscurity, as the lush, overbearing foliage tainted my eyelids. I stumbled past a park, and having nothing better to do, I went in to take a break from the shackles of society. Children laughed and played, their joy a sharp reminder of the innocence long lost to me. "Look at that!" one child exclaimed, he was wearing a T-shirt with a repeating tyrannosaurus pattern, pointing at a fluttering hummingbird above him. "Look, Mommy! It's so pretty!" The exuberance of youth echoed around me, yet I felt like a ghost haunting my own memories, trapped in a world that had moved on without me.

The dinosaurs on his shirt were a kaleidoscope of colors, painted in a cartoonish style. It reminded me of myself when I was younger. I can still recall those sun-soaked afternoons spent sprawled on the living room floor, surrounded by colorful dinosaur toys, each one a tiny portal to a world I adored. My imagination would run wild as I envisioned the colossal T. rex roaring through dense jungles, the swift Velociraptor darting between ferns, and the gentle Brontosaurus munching on treetops high above. I was captivated by their sheer size and power, their prehistoric existence igniting a sense of wonder that felt limitless. Back then, I felt invincible, like the king of a world untouched by time. But now, as I navigate the mundane realities of adulthood, those dreams feel like distant echoes, swallowed by the weight of responsibility and the noise of everyday life. I miss that childlike awe, the way I could lose myself in the past, where dinosaurs ruled and anything felt possible.

Dinosaurs, huh? Times were simpler back in the Jurassic era. A life of gathering nutrients with their colossal necks, living in solitude with their tight-knit brethren, and, most importantly, no human commodities. They ruled over the planet like us, but they didn't need any cheat codes to achieve godhood. With the might of their sheer strength, by force of will, by force of blood. They defended their own, they travelled in packs, they built nests. Dinosaurs were at the top of the food chain, true mighty predators. Before our species tarnished the land, they walked on it with their colossal paws. Before we claimed their territories with eyes of greed, they were the predecessors of our artificial 'glory.'

Our mountainous terrain was their home.

Our lurking oceans were their baths.

Our stratosphere was their hunting grounds.

How dare we slander and defame the dinosaur's honor and prestigious grandeur with our tainted weaponry? Such blasphemy. Will alcohol be the only useful invention of this millennia?

I lost my train of thought. The city was now miles away. Come to think of it, how long did I wander off? I was now in a secluded part of the park, a dark, liminal space. At that moment, I

stumbled upon a strange formation peeking through the earth, half-buried into the earth. Curiosity drew me closer, and as I brushed away the dirt, I uncovered what appeared to be the remnants of a dinosaur fossil, its ancient bones whispering secrets of a time long past. A chilling sensation shook me down to my spine; I couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. It wasn't just the eyes of the passersby; there was something else, something omnipotent. It was then that I caught a glimpse of a shadow in the corner of my eye—a flicker of movement among the grains of dirt and flora. I paused, squinting into the scenery around me. Was it just my imagination, or was there a presence lingering in the air? A spirit? A poltergeist? An apparition? No, it was something far more mighty, far more incomprehensible for us mere mortals. It felt like my bones were amalgamated into chunks of metal; every step felt more lumbering than the one before.

“Do you feel that, too?” a voice whispered, barely more than a breeze rustling through the leaves. I looked around, but no one was near. “The weight of history? The echoes of those who once roamed freely?”

I blinked, startled. The voice seemed to arise from the ground itself, a deep, resonant tone that pulled at something deep within me. “Who’s there?” I muttered, my heart racing, almost beating out of my chest.

“You mortal, what a testament to both technology and folly.”

“Look at you,” a voice resonating like distant thunder. “A mere shadow of what your kind could be, yet you trudge through this world, oblivious to the marvels around you. You’ve tamed the skies with your metal birds and split the atom, solar panels soaking up the sun’s embrace, electric cars gliding silently like whispers in the wind, yet here you are, drowning in a bottle, lamenting the very life you’ve built.”

I trembled in trepidation, my breath shaken under the immense pressure. I instinctively looked up from where the voice came, until I was shaken to my bones. A spirit had burst forth from the fossil, a magnificent silhouette of a dinosaur, ethereal and majestic. It hovered above me like a sentinel, eyes shimmering like the magnanimous ocean, neck overshadowing the ones of giraffes and scales as tough as titanium. I had awakened something powerful and restless.

“Do not be afraid,” the voice continued, gentle yet commanding. “I am the ghost of a creature long forgotten, a dinosaur who once roamed the vast lands of China. My kind ruled the Earth long before your civilization rose, and yet here I linger, a mere whisper of a time when giants walked the earth.”

My breath caught in my throat. “A dinosaur? Here? You’re telling me this is real? You just spurred out of this fossil out of existence? What do you mean you’re a dinosaur?”

“My name is Longwei. I’m a spirit of my ancient brethren, meandering the lands in limbo. Stuck in a state between reality and the afterlife. I was once proud and strong, my scales glistening under the sun, my roar shaking the ground beneath me. But now, I am but a remnant of a bygone era; my bones lie buried beneath your resplendent cities, your innovations, your glory. Yet, how are you still unsatisfied?”

“What’s the point of innovation? It’s all just more chains, more ways to keep us in line. They think they’re better than us, but they’re just as lost.”

“Lost?” Longwei scoffed, his form rippling with indignation. “You call this loss? You’ve built a society that could honor even the legacy of beings like me! Instead, you drown in your own despair, blinded by the very inventions that could set you free. You’ve forgotten the strength that lies in your connection to the world, to each other—and to those who walked before you!”

The insanity of the situation abandoned my logical reasoning; Longwei's words seeped into the crevices of my brain. I observed the children in the park again, their laughter ringing out like a symphony of innocence. "They don't know what it's like," I muttered. "They'll never understand." "They understand more than you," Longwei countered, his voice softening. "They play in a world of possibilities, untouched by the burdens you bear. Your ancestors—those who roamed this Earth long before you—understood the cycles of life and death, of creation and destruction. They would have marveled at your innovations, not wallowed in bitterness."

I paused, the weight of Longwei's words penetrating the fog of my intoxication. For a fleeting moment, I felt a stirring within him, a flicker of hope amidst the darkness. But just as quickly, the moment faded, drowned by my self-loathing.

"Why should I care?" He sighed, my voice filled with resignation. "What have I done that matters?" "Everything matters," Longwei replied, his voice now a gentle breeze. "Come, follow me."

With a sudden tug, the dinosaur pulled me along, out of the confines of the park. Our surroundings transformed into a blur of neon lights and bustling crowds as we navigated through the throngs of people. The air buzzed with excitement, laughter, and anticipation of the New Year's celebration. "Look around you," the dinosaur urged, gesturing to the vibrant atmosphere. "These people—do they not grasp the fleeting nature of joy? Their lives, like mine, are but moments in time. Yet here they are, celebrating life."

As we reached an open space, I hesitated. "I don't care about their celebration. It's all just noise," I muttered in disdain.

The dinosaur sighed, a sound like the rustling of leaves. "You mistake noise for meaning. Look closer. Can you not see the hope in their faces? The joy of connection?"

"Look," it said, its voice rumbling like distant thunder, "the sky is about to awaken."

I squinted up at the dark canvas overhead, and then, with a spectacular burst, the first firework exploded. It unfurled like a blooming flower, casting a cascade of vibrant colors in every direction. I felt my breath catch in my throat; for a moment, I forgot the bitter taste of alcohol and the weight of my regrets.

"Do you see?" the dinosaur urged, its gaze fixed on the sky. "This is life, the society of today, in all its brilliance."

As the fireworks continued to pop and crackle, each one more breathtaking than the last, I found myself entranced. Golds and silvers danced across the night, weaving intricate patterns that shimmered and faded. The air filled with the scent of smoke and excitement, and I could hear the gasps and cheers of others around us, their faces illuminated by the bursts of light.

"Each firework is a story," the dinosaur said, its voice softer now, almost reflective. "A moment of beauty amidst the chaos. You, too, are a part of this tapestry."

I turned my gaze from the sky to the dinosaur, my heart swelling with an inexplicable longing. "But I'm just...lost," I confessed, my voice barely a whisper.

"Even in the darkness, there is light," it replied, its tone reassuring. "You must choose to see it."

As another firework erupted, showering the ground in a rain of sparkling embers, I felt something shift within me. The colors reminded me of lost dreams and forgotten hopes, but they also flickered with the promise of new beginnings. I realized that, in that moment, I was witnessing not just a display of light but a reflection of life itself—joyful, fleeting, and full of potential.

With each explosion, my heart began to mend, and I allowed myself to feel the warmth of the moment. In the company of this ancient creature, I learned that even from the depths of despair, beauty could emerge, illuminating the path forward.

“You have the power to shape the future. Remember the legacy of the past—not just of dinosaurs, but of your own kind. Every invention, every dream, every child laughing in the park is a tribute to the journey of life. Stop being a ghost in your own story.”

“Do you hear the music?”

“Yes, yes, I do.” I whispered.

These dazzling displays were not mere distractions; they were expressions of joy, hope, and the connection we share. Each explosion resonated with laughter and the collective heartbeat of the crowd around me. My laughter, now echoing amidst the cheers, understood then that these inventions—whether they be fireworks, technology, or art—reflected our deepest desires to connect, to celebrate life, and to find beauty even in absurdity.

In that moment of clarity, a longing stirred within me. I thought of the ancient giants of this land—the dinosaurs that once roamed the earth beneath my feet, their stories forever etched in the fossils of China. They had lived in a time when the world was vastly different, yet their existence still inspires wonder. But now, all that is left in the ground are long lost stories of ginormous beings. Their legacy and glory, just as fireworks illuminate the night, these magnificent creatures had once cast their own shadows across the landscape of history.

It struck me that their lives, their very existence, had been sacrifices that paved the way for us to flourish in modern society. The ecosystems they inhabited, the ground they tread upon, even the fossilized remnants of their bones had contributed to the life we now enjoy. They were the foundation upon which our world stands, and in their extinction, they made space for the evolution of countless species, including ourselves.

Each bone, each fragment held stories of survival, adaptation, and the relentless march of time—echoes of lives that once roamed the earth. This connection ignited a fire within me, a yearning to delve deeper into the past and share its lessons with the world. I envisioned myself as a palaeontologist, unearthing the secrets of ancient life and spreading the message that we are all part of a continuum, shaped by those who came before us. I could celebrate not only their memory but also the responsibility we carry to innovate and advance the world of today.

“Be foolish enough to honor what had come before and innovate what will come after. This culture, this land, is my lifeblood; remind the people of their colossal pasts; only then can we tread forward in today. Longwei’s scales began to fade out of existence, blowing like dandelions in the wind, back into the fossil it once came from. He had realized his purpose; I will craft my own.

The chunk of the fossil, now in my hand, was etched by cuts and scratches from the ebbs and flows of time. The dinosaurs of China have been fossilised into time capsules, and I will personally open every last one. My path towards palaeontology won’t ever be stopped, some might call it foolish, but this is my true calling. The sovereignty of the dragons has since been long gone, but I will trailblaze a new future where all people see the beauty of the past, and marvel at the beauty of today. The lanterns flickered with incandescent beauty; the Fai Chun’s glistened with sanguine hues under the moonlight.

“How about buying one of my solar panels?” The salesman asked again.

“I’ll think about it.”

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College, Lee, Wing Fung – 16

In a vibrant valley located in ancient China, young Dino gazed at the tall mountains that surrounded his home. With scales that shimmered like emeralds, Dino was a curious Titanosaur, always dreaming of adventures beyond the familiar trees. Each evening, he would gather up with his friends—a wise Pterosaur named Luna and a cautious Stegosaurus named Tao—to listen to the tales spoken by Elder Rex, the oldest dinosaur in the valley.

“Beyond the mountains lies the Enchanted Valley,” Elder Rex says, his voice echoing in the wilderness. “It is a magical place where the legendary Rainbow Dinosaurs live.”

Dino’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “We need to find it!” he exclaimed, his heart racing with excitement. Luna flapped her wings, eager to elevate into the sky, while Tao, though hesitant, felt the thrill of adventure creeping into his heart, chills down to his spine.

The next morning, armed with courage and a map graphed by Elder Rex, the trio set off on their great adventure. Their first challenge lay before them: the all mighty Yellow River, known for its rush currents. As they approached the river, the shifting water roared like a lion.

“How can we cross?” Tao asked nervously, glancing at the swirling waters.

Luna suggested, “We can build a raft out of bamboo! It is durable and light.”

Together, they gathered sturdy bamboo piles, tying them together with ropes. With teamwork and laughter, they constructed a raft that floated on the river’s surface. Taking a deep breath, they climbed aboard, paddling with all their strength. The current was fierce, but under unity, they reached the other side, hearts pounding rapidly with triumph.

Their journey continued as they ventured into the Great Bamboo Forest, where towering stalks swayed gently in the breeze. The mist was thick and dark, and shadows danced around them, causing Tao to shiver in fear.

“Stay close, pals!” Dino called, leading the way. “Let’s go through this together!”

As they navigated through the maze of bamboo, they encountered strange sounds and flickering shadows. Luna ascended to the skies, her sharp eyes scouting ahead. “This way!” she screamed, guiding them through the puzzling maze of bamboo. They soon emerged into an exit, filled with colorful flowers and sparkling streams.

After days of traveling, the trio finally reached the Enchanted Valley. It was a breathtaking sight, filled with vibrant hues and sounds that sang to their hearts. In the center stood the magnificent Rainbow Dinosaurs, their scales reflecting the sunlight as shiny as they ever could.

“Welcome, brave travelers,” boomed the leader, a majestic dinosaur adorned in iridescent colors. “We have awaited your arrival.”

Dino, Luna, and Tao shared their journey, speaking of the challenges they undergone and the lessons learned. The Rainbow Dinosaurs nodded while listening.

“Your solid courage and friendship have brought you here,” said the leader. “Remember, the balance of nature is a treasure to protect. You are the guardians of your valley, just as we are of ours.”

Filled with newfound wisdom, the trio spent time learning about the land and its history. They discovered the importance of friendship and the beauty of their heritage.

As the sun began to set, casting a golden glow over the atmosphere, Dino, Luna, and Tao knew it was time to return home. They bid farewell to their new friends, promising to protect their own valley and inspire others to explore and learn.

The journey back was filled with laughter and stories, each step echoing the lessons they had learned. When they finally reached their valley, their hearts were full, ready to share every glimpse of their encounters.

From that day on, Dino, Luna, and Tao became the storytellers of their home, inspiring young dinosaurs to embrace courage, friendship, and the wonders of their world.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College, Ng, Cheuk Hang – 17

Once upon a time, there laid lots of ducks' egg in an ordinary valley. The ducks' eggs cracked one by one. However, when the last egg cracked open, there came a little creature unlike any other ducks. His name is Harry. He was enormous larger with a weird blue pattern. When Harry cracked out from the egg, the other ducks including the duck mother gathered around. Their eyes widen with shock, "You are really weird!".

After 3 years, Harry was still getting isolated by other ducks. He was so depressed and went to find the duck's mother. "Why do other ducks don't want to play with me?" However, the duck's mother felt annoyed and turned her backs on Harry. Leaving Harry standing on his own. Feeling alone and rejected.

Harry found there's no sense of belonging in the duck's field. He left away from the pond. He explored the grassland and forests, hoping to find friends who would accept him. However, everywhere he went, all animals will laugh about his skin. The rabbits giggled, the birds chirped in disdain, and even the wise old tortoise shook his head sadly. He felt lonelier than ever.

One day, Harry went near the pond. Through the reflection from the water, he suddenly discovered that his body changed. His scales transformed into vibrant feathers, his wings spouted with a powerful tail. A wise owl flew by. He told Harry that he is not a duck. He is an archaeopteryx. Although Harry was shocked in horror, he was excited to show his new form. He rushed back to the pond. As he approached, the other animals gasped in awe. "Look at the beautiful dinosaur!" they exclaimed. The ducks, who once rejected him, now stood in astonishment, realizing that Harry was no longer the creature they had ridiculed.

From that day on, Harry the dinosaur became a beloved figure in the valley. He reminded everyone that true beauty lies in embracing who you are, no matter how different you may seem.

After 10000 years, Harry was discovered by a farmer. Harry became one of the milestones of the human research. No matter what kind of person you are, you are one of the kind and you have your own abilities.

The Odyssey of Microraptor and Confuciusornis: A Tale of Empathy and Unity

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Chiu, Isaak – 15

In the depths of the ever-ranging Grand Black Mountain were lines of temperate forests that were dyed with the autumn ginkgo leaves in shades of gold. Beneath the luxuriant crowns, across the intertwining branches, under overhanging vines was an Eden Garden of harmony under the protection of these evergreen titans. At the heart of this paradise flowed a sprawling creek, originating from the side of the ridge, crawling its way to the grand Yellow Sea.

Above the mountains, painted by hues of dark scarlet and violet, the clouds were dyed vermillion, and the sun was barely visible. The forest was tranquil, very tranquil. Just as everything was about to rouse, a creature stood on a sable, attenuated but staunch twig. With a graceful flap of his wings, he dove down towards the creek. As the delicate dim sunlight of daybreak reflects a silhouette on the ground, it became apparent that this was Ian, the microraptor, flying agile and swift. This diminutive glider snapped a ripe fruit, returning deep into the forest. His clan always held steadfastly to a maxim: "The early raptor catches the fish." Ian adopted vegetarianism as a moral choice after witnessing the suffering of small mammals preyed upon by larger predators from an early age. Despite his hunting clan background, he chose compassion, seeking fruits over fish. Known for his black and iridescent feathers and four-winged celerity, his dexterity propelled him forward as a top contender in his clan and always brought unexpected success. Yet, he rarely ventured beyond his comfort zone, preferring to stay in this secured asylum.

On his journey home, Ian heard a faint, despairing cry. Touched deep in his heart, he flew all the way to the source and discovered an injured Confuciusornis, a golden-feathered avian, trapped between fallen trees. Ian kept his eyes on the prize, used his claws and beak, slowly broke the branches, and freed the bird. The Confuciusornis wailed in pain; his wing had been fractured. Putting himself in the bird's shoes, Ian felt the agony and unbearable pain he was suffering. Ian urged the bird to seek refuge in a nearby cavern to heal. Day after day, Ian visited, providing care and resources for the recovering bird. Days turned into weeks; the Confuciusornis regained strength. When Ian was about to leave one day, the bird asked, "What is your name, and why did you help me?" "To feel another's pain is the essence of truly being dinosaurs. I am Ian, and you?" he replied. "I am John. You are my savior! It's unexplainable in words, your selfless help. Would you mind if my clan stayed somewhere near yours? Our home has been burnt into ashes, and this part of the forests seems tranquil and wonderful." Without hesitation, Ian agreed, and John followed him home. A profound bond blossomed between the improbable pair, along with a strong tie between their clans. Their neighbors were amazed at the power of empathy—uniting a dinosaur and a bird. The forest was alive with activity and remained in peace for several months after the grand migration. Small mammals scurried through the underbrush, insects buzzed around the flowers, and dinosaurs roamed freely.

However, all of a sudden, the peaceful forest began to severely quaver. Microraptors and avians fled to their shelters to escape from falling snakes and broken branches. The aftermath was only a few fallen spruces, but the atmosphere of the jungle was thick with fear and panic. Shortly thereafter, the union of the clans called an emergency meeting with the coordination of the wise elder of the forest. The roundtable convened near the altar deep within the woods. Every creature gathered and their faces etched with concern. Meetings were never taken lightly, as they were a precursor to disaster. No one took it as a trivial matter, and silence pervaded the air as the leaders of the forest clans arrived. As the meeting started, there were no opening remarks. The elder, a venerable Liaoceratops of centuries-old wisdom, did not beat around the bush but instead talked straight to the point.

"The rumbling of the land is a warning," the elder began gravely. "The last disaster two decades ago was an exactly similar rude awakening, which brought a lot of ruckus and dismay to the community. The ancient volcano several miles from the mountain is having its resurrection. Only the almandine hidden deep in the abyss of the Red River Valley can restore balance and calm the disturbances beneath the ground." Ian's heart sank. The almandine was an ancient and legendary gem that glowed the entire continent with its unique scarlet light, warmed the entire globe from total coldness, and saved the suffering races from despair. Yet the odyssey to find it was perilous, from ridges with

sudden strong wind shear to valleys difficult to navigate. The gem was guarded by a formidable Yutyranus, who was one of the strongest dinosaurs in the region. Ian's father had attempted this quest two decades prior, returning with scars both physical and emotional.

"The almandine is fiercely protected," Liaoceratops continued. "As predicted, the last quest only restored the forest for only two decades. To address the cause, we need a team of elites to fly forth and bring back the gem to completely maintain a healthy forest. All participants must have flying abilities. Does anyone wish to volunteer?"

The forest was in complete silence. Everyone turned their heads and looked to Ian and John. Recalling his father's harrowing tale, Ian was in complete denial deep in his heart. Just as he was about to refuse, John spoke up. "We'll go."

Ian, shivering with fear, replied, "This is too risky; there is no way we will come back alive with the almandine."

"You must fly beyond familiar waters," John urged. "It's not just about us but everyone in the forest. You can run, but you cannot hide."

Knowing John was right, yet haunted by memories of his father's warnings, Ian wrestled with his fears. Fearing for his own life on the journey, while also fearing for everyone's lives if he did not volunteer, he slowly reconsidered the option. Hiding would just push the ball to someone else but not solve the problem. With a deep exhalation, all of his temporization and trepidation dissipated. "I can't bury my head in the sand, I'm volunteering."

Ian's father was in complete denial and furious. Just as he was about to scold him and reject the elder but Ian stood firm. "Dad, this is my choice. Whatever it costs, I must go, or we may all perish."

After bidding farewell to their friends and relatives, the duo began their erratic odyssey, navigating over the peaks and saddle passes of the Grand Black Mountain. Looking back to the forests, Ian had mixed feelings. It was his first venture beyond the forest, and it could very well be his last. Right when he was spaced out, John reassured him, "We won't take long. This isn't rocket science. We'll be back." John's words made Ian calm down and eventually stopped his wondering.

As soon as they left the Grand Black Mountains, John and Ian reached a ravine, dividing the mountains from the flatlands. As they were crossing the ravine, they heard a loud and distinct roar deep from the abyss. They dove down to figure out the situation. Nearing the source of the moan, they discovered a Beipiaosaurus trapped by the walls of the crevice, hanging midway between the ground and the bottom of the ravine. As time passed, the Beipiaosaurus grew more impatient, and the walls slowly began to crumble. As Ian attempted to help, John whispered, "Leave it alone. It's too dangerous. Who knows if it will attack us after we save it?"

Ian shook his head and started to figure out a solution. "I understand your concerns about the potential risks involved. However, leaving someone in need without help could lead to worse outcomes for everyone. Everyone deserves a chance to be saved, and our actions could be the turning point for them."

Without another word, John nodded and joined Ian in lifting the Beipiaosaurus. Pulling back and forth, they worked tirelessly to move it back to the ground, risking their own lives. As they reached the ground, they were too tired to even fly. Once freed, the Beipiaosaurus thanked them with gratitude and introduced them to its territory. Experiencing the sincerity of the clan, Ian and John had a wonderful night with the Beipiaosaurus, and they continued their journey the next morning. As they were leaving, the Beipiaosaurus told them, "Whenever you need help, we are always here to assist." Ian and John smiled and left the clan. They continued north until the ethereal Fairy Woods appeared, veiled in morning mist that gave the old magnolia trees a charming radiance. Weary but resolute, Ian and John made their way through glistening foliage and tall trees. Ian heard the enthusiastic cries of Zhenyuanlong echoing around them.

"John, did you hear that?" Ian asked, spotting a nest of Sinosauropteryx eggs clutching on branches, surrounded by prowling predators revolving around the tree. "We must do something," Ian insisted. "Yeah, or these babies will perish prematurely," John replied.

The nest was under siege when the duo swiftly flew up to it. While Ian reinforced the nest with wood and leaves, John squealed and diverted the predators' attention. They carried out synchronized strikes with perfect coordination, chasing the predators away. Safeguarding the eggs, they watched as the mist lifted, illuminating the Fairy Woods with gentle light.

"Praise God," Ian said proudly. "The eggs are safe." John smiled, his golden feathers shimmering. "We couldn't have done it without each other." Each act of kindness deepened their understanding: this quest was more than merely retrieving the almandine.

After a prolonged journey to the north, they finally arrived at the Red River Valley, where mountains met the river. The tenacious water battled against the rocky stone, eroding a passage to the grand ocean. The palisades were sharp yet colorful, painted in hues of orange, iron brown and red. The river shimmered like silver and the vegetation blanketed the land like a quilt. At this place, Ian and John witnessed the beauty of nature. Navigating a narrow mountain pass, a sudden rockslide blocked their path. With sheer cliffs offering no escape, a pack of Graciliraptors appeared, their eyes gleaming with hunger. "We must sort it out," Ian whispered. "Let's use the terrain to our advantage," John replied, spotting a narrow ledge above.

To divert attention, John soared into the air and flailed his golden wings. Distracted, the Graciliraptors jerked their heads up. Ian darted across the rocky terrain, further dividing the predators' focus. Now divided between two preys, the predators paused. A group of Graciliraptors stumbled as John led them to a group of boulders. The other raptors, meanwhile, struggled to follow Ian as he enticed them into a small area. Regrouping at the ledge, they dislodged rocks to create a barrier that forced the raptors to retreat. Breathless but triumphant, Ian and John continued their journey, their bond stronger and wits sharper than ever. A cavern gradually rose out of the valley as they continued north. As they got closer to the entrance, they saw the startling sight of innumerable dinosaur carcasses, where the competitors who had failed the quest never came home. A Sinornithosaurus was one of them, gripping the dangling rocks. "This is where many have lost their lives," John said, trembling. The entrance was concealed by a curtain of ivy and moss, but those who found it feel an inexplicable allure, as if the earth itself beckoned them to discover its secrets. They entered the tunnel, where the walls glistened with crystals, casting a soft, ethereal glow that illuminated their path. Past winding tunnels and echoing chambers, they found an ancient garden. The ground was dotted with eroded stalagmites and columns. In the deeper end of the cave stood a towering totem carved from ancient stone, embedded with almandine gemstones that sparkled like droplets of blood frozen in time. The almandine shone like a star, reflecting the light, proudly displaying its distinguished status.

Ian and John were amazed by the gem. "This is way more beautiful than what the contemporary folk stories have said, it's indescribable." Ian said, his voice filled with awe. John nodded in agreement. When they were admiring the almandine, deep footsteps echoed through the cavern. A Yutyrannus emerged from the shadows, staring at the duo. Its golden eyes glared furiously at the intruders.

"I am the guardian of the cave. Why are you here? For the almandine?" the Yutyrannus demanded furiously and impatiently. Confronted by his gigantic size, Ian and John realized they stood no chance in a battle. Choosing honesty over conflict, they decided to share their story truthfully, hoping to appeal to the guardian's empathy.

"Yes, we're here for it to save our forest." Ian confessed.

"Two decades have passed so quickly. It was a stormy day when a team of dinosaurs, including a Microraptor, a Sinosauropteryx, and others, entered this cave to escape the dangerous cliffs and the onslaught of rival groups. Loose stones, slippery ground, and a sudden wind shear caused a tragic accident. The Sinosauropteryx and other crawling dinosaurs slumped and were fatally injured by the stalagmites. The Sinosauropteryx, in his final moments, requested me

to use his life as a price to restore the forest to its original state for twenty years. I promised. Only two members narrowly escaped death; the rest perished, except for the Microraptor. Though physically unscathed, the leader Microraptor was mentally devastated, knowing his closest friend was dead. You bear a striking resemblance to him. Are you his son?" The guardian shared. Listening to the words of the guardian, Ian was saddened by the story. Realizing how devastating it was to his father, he finally understood why his dad always told him not to leave the forest.

"Yes, I am his son. Though my father warned me against this journey, I chose to leave my comfort zone. This place is very small and rather safe, why do you guard this place?" Ian replied. The guardian sighed but did not attack. He began to speak in a deep and sorrowful voice. "Nearly centuries ago, a large-scale natural disaster occurred over the entire region, from minor wildfire to major earthquakes. Many unions suffered from the incidents and decided to use the almandine to restore to the original state. There was only one gem, but many altars to be placed. To save themselves, dinosaurs fought over the almandine, blinded by greed, a regional major war inevitably started. Many perished, leaving only hatred and despair. Most of the clans involved in the war were eliminated due to the consistent fight for the almandine, which led to no one being able to use it. As the war ended, my ancestors were the only ones to survive. Therefore, they claimed it to restore the forest's health, pledging to protect it—not only for themselves but also to prevent the massacre from repeating." His words resonated deeply in the cave. Ian stepped forward. "We don't seek the almandine for power nor profit. Our forest is collapsing, and neighbors are dying. The abnormal tectonic activities will destroy us all if we don't restore balance. Please, let us bring it back to the forest. It's not only for ourselves, but for everyone in the forest waiting for our return. We are their last hope." He pondered and stared at the duo for a long moment. Finally, the guardian stepped aside and rumbled. "Take it, but always remember: Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

"Thank you. We will pass this as a motto for our clans," John said.

With the almandine in their grasp, the duo began their return home. Passing by the Fairy Woods, they saw a flock of sinosauropteryx flying freely in the sky. They even saw some fledglings in the flock. The fledglings chirped at them and the duo finally realized it was the eggs they had saved, which was heartwarming. As they continued southward, they finally reached the Grand Black Mountain. When they were returning to the altar, the earthquakes had grown more violent, and more trees had fallen. As they landed near the meeting place, the leaders of the clans were waiting for them frantically. They were told by the Beipiaosaurus they had saved that the crisis was deteriorating, and they had helped many species evacuate. Without a doubt, Ian and John placed the almandine at the base of the altar. A radiant beam of light spread from the gem, activating the altar, calming the earth and silencing the tremors. The fallen trees began to regrow, and relief washed over the gathering. Tears of joy glistened in Ian's father's eyes as he welcomed his son back. John's clan also welcomed his return, and the union had a celebration party for their successful odyssey.

The forests of the Grand Black Mountain survived the natural disasters once more, and their health was restored. Ian and John were hailed as heroes, but they remained humble and never became arrogant. "This was never just our journey," Ian proclaimed. "It was everyone's story—everyone in the forest and the dinosaurs we met. It's a lesson for all of us: empathy and unity can overcome even the greatest challenges." Their tale became a legend, passed down through generations. The almandine remained a symbol of hope, and the words of the Yutyrannus echoed in every heart: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

As time flowed onward, the Grand Black Mountain stood tall, a testament to the enduring power of empathy, unity and adventure.

Evolution

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Zeng, Elyn – 15

9am, Monday.

“ Terribly sorry, I have to inform you that...you did not pass... ”

My Godness! It was another ‘Black Monday’, the second time that I failed the DSE—the admission test for Hong Kong Universities. Undoubtedly, The result this year was even worse—what kind of student could possibly fail a single exam two times in a row?

Honestly speaking, I had always dreamt of graduating from that medical school and becoming a doctor to help people in need. But that would cost a large amount of capital that my parents obviously could not afford. My sister was way better than me in the academic field. I knew they wanted me to get a job. Every time my mother caught me watching medical-related videos, she would be fuming—

“ Why are you wasting your time on these useless videos? You might be a good cheerleader, but definitely not captain material. ”

My mom always had numerous words to express her crestfallen feelings.

“ Who said I can’t be a captain? ” I mumbled but no one heard me. Filled with grief and eagerness to succeed, I weeped along the way, covering my eyes so that nobody noticed my failing tears. The way back home was crowded yet noisy; just as the sky was wailing for my unwavering failure, it started raining and thunder was bombing as loud as it could, hoping to destroy my fragile soul.

2 pm, Monday.

I arrived home and laid down, grunting with tiredness. Until a phone call :

“ Hey! Rosanna! I have very, very big news! ” It was Jerry, my childhood best friend.

“ What’s so delightful for you? I just messed up my DSE again. Don’t you dare to make fun of me on this piece of failure! ” I quaked desperately.

“ No? Sorry to hear about that... Anyway, go to the TVB channel 2, it’s live streaming right on time—some breaking news about dinosaurs! ”

“ Really? ” I inquired suspiciously. “ What’s the big deal...” I murmured.

“ Yes! We may do something together! ” giggled Jerry.

TVB Channel 2 : Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. For decades, we’ve been searching for fossils of dinosaurs, who were the rulers of Earth hundreds of millions years ago, but none of them have been discovered in Hong Kong so far. Recently, the HK Technology And Innovation Community have developed a supersonic ultrasonography-based implementation technology, which succeeded in finding some major clues—one code on some fossil discovered last month had been successfully decoded and translated these days, leading to the discovery of the very first Dinosaur Egg in our city, a kind of plot that only occur in fictions, is stepping into real life. However, code for the other egg remains unknown. Therefore, we are sincerely and officially reaching out to the public for help, for decoding the Maya hieroglyphs words, as one more egg is expected to exist— and by disclosing more details about the two twin eggs our city is launching a signature program related to dinosaurs, leave open the possibility of

establishing the third theme parks besides Disneyland and Ocean park. Therefore, the government now offers up to 1 billion HK dollars reward to the public, whoever provides valuable clues to decode the arcane message...”

.....

Bang! A huge crack of the door struck my ears and the ‘sharp edges’ of the sound nearly broke my eardrum. The smell of alcohol immediately spread through the whole atmosphere.

“ I’m back home...”

What I saw was devastating— it was my drunk dad again!

“ Dad! Could you stop being drunk all the time.... ” I bellowed. “Doctors don’t often have drunk dads.”

“ Oh dear, how was your DSE? Failed again? ” He remarked earnestly, “ Kids, at your age, always have too many unrealistic ideas. So, just get a job! Don't waste time anymore.... ”

“ Can you just keep it down? I am playing Mahjong and I need to focus! ” Yes, That’s my mom’s complaint, as always, from our neighbor's house. She yelled for a second, “ Rosanna, I don’t care where you are going, the best way you should go is to get a job and save money to raise your little sister! ”

I was at a loss for words. Such ridiculous words! But, they might be right. I replied nothing, rushed out of the door, helplessly, as always.

It was raining outside. I felt the anger inside of me growing larger and larger. The thunder seemed to become more fierce and the rush of adrenaline made me start to gallop. The rain began to growl, as if it was reviling me of my ultimate failure. My head hurt abruptly, “am I a failure, am I useless, should I give up, I don’t even know what I want.... ” I boomed— Ah!

I was oblivious to the passage of time.

“ Rosanna.... Rosanna....wake up.... ” A voice evolved. Who is that? Am I still alive? In Hell or Heaven?

I muttered, clasping my hands, trying to remember where I was.

“ No one was born to be a failure, follow your heart, go and find what you best deserve.” The voice was echoing yet steady, “ In the most terrifying place in Hong Kong, prove yourself, not only for your parents and friends, but for yourself, and you shall find something over there..... ”....

“ Ah! ” I woke up in a mess, sweating. “ Gosh, is that a dream...so weird...is that true? ”

I immediately phoned Jerry and yelled, “ Jerry, you won’t believe what I just heard. ”

After repeating my dream, Jerry was immersed in musing, the air seemed to congeal,

“ Rosanna, do you think this has some relation to the dinosaurs? ” I can feel her voice shaking a bit.

“ You mean the one billion game? ” I became excited as well.

“ Probably... ”

“ No way lah... ”

“ Why not, even if there is a 1% chance, we may change our lives together, Rosanna...”

“ First, I don’t know Maya h... whatever that is, and second, we have no idea about dinosaurs. ”

“ My dear Rosanna, we should fight for our dreams! ” She exclaimed.

“ Oh, this little positive person. ” I soothed, “ Ah! It’s one billion! With nine zeros behind one!...”

“ But where is the most terrifying place in Hong Kong? No matter whether it is related to the 1 billion game, I'm gonna prove myself at least once for you ”. I continued.

10am, Tuesday.

Jerry took me to visit her uncle, Josh. Josh is an enthusiast of HK local culture and history. After getting to know our purpose of visit, a place named Bride’s pool came to his mind.

“ Bride’s pool? This name sounds not terrifying at all, ” Jerry nodded.

“ Not exactly, It was indeed a sad story that happened long, long ago....” Josh bawled with exclamation.

Many years ago, a bride was being carried in a sedan by four porters on her way to meet her groom in stormy weather. As they passed the pool, one of the porters slipped and the bride fell into the pool and drowned. After that, no sight of her was ever seen. The pool was named Bride's Pool in memory of the bride. Since then, all the nights after the bride’s death, people could hear the sound of carriages moving and the noise of gongs and drums, celebrating the marriage. Some people stated that they saw the dead bride at night, sitting beside the water, and the water quickly became red, she would come to you and...

“ Oh my! That is indeed the scariest place in Hong Kong ” I drew in a sharp breath.

“ Yes, I agree, and that place is well known for traffic accidents in Hong Kong. Ten or more people die from mysterious car crashes every year. Local people believe there must be some magic power, and are terrified to go there ” claimed Josh.

“It must be there! ” Jerry and I exclaimed almost at the same time.

.....

6pm, Wednesday.

I turned on my porch, brightened the words on the dusty board—Bride’s Pool.

“Jerry, We arrived”.

Sweats began dripping off my forehead and I felt my heart thumping in my chest, as well as the shivers that made me get chills on my arms.

“ It is so dark here, Jerry.” I trembled with fear from the unknown.

“ I believe courage breaks the darkness.” Jerry replied.

At that moment, it was pitch black. The sounds of ravens trilling and leaves scattering set off this place's ghostly status.

“ Ros, Look over there! ” Jerry exclaimed.

All of a sudden, the water stopped splashing and turned into a bloody red!

“ Oh no! The pool turned red! ” I screeched, pointing at the lake. “ It's the dead bride coming! ”.

“ Wait, Ros. ” Jerry gasped.

“ Run or you'll die in a minute! ” I screamed.

“ Ros, do you remember how Harry Potter eventually finds the chamber of secrets?” Jerry peered at the pool, looking unexpectedly calm.

“ Harry Potter? Are you kidding me? ” I couldn't get my head around what she meant.

“Ros, dive into the water! ”

“ What? Jerry, are you out of your mind! ”

“ Trust me, Ros, legends won't lie.

I had no time to think, yet I trusted my friend. Didn't know where my courage and power came from, I jumped into the freezing bloody water despite its yuckiness.

Strangely, I thought that I would drown, the water started to withdraw.

With the help of our porch, some words appeared on the waterbed...

“ That looks exactly like the Maya words in the news! ”

“ You're right! Oh, and, why is it shining? ”

“ I think it's calling out to us. ”

I faltered on land. Anxiously, I stepped into the 'dried pool' with water around me. It was such a magical scene that I felt like I was in a dream. I kneeled down above the mysterious Maya words and I put my fingers onto the shining words as if I was possessed by an unknown force.

Flash! The lights grew brighter, until the whole atmosphere was filled with brightness. In the blazing light, an egg burst into our sights— It was a dinosaur egg!

That familiar voice came back again.

“ Congratulations! We've been sleeping here for a long, long time, and you are the first person who has overcome the curse of fears in the unknown, set by the Queen Dinosaur millions of years ago. ”

“ Oh.... ” I wasn't yet relieved from my shock. “ You're welcome....We look totally insane, we just didn't expect the mysterious dinosaur egg here...”

My pupils were expanding.

“ It was a long story— Millions of years ago, when the dinosaur family was about to be annihilated due to the impact of an asteroid hitting the earth, our queen had just given birth to her twin eggs. To survive, the Queen carried them and travelled a long way south to our shelter near the sea. However, accidents always happen—the queen lost one of her eggs along the way. And the other egg is just the one in front of you. She buried the last of her eggs into the most frightening, mysterious site so that no one dared to discover and steal her baby. The red colors are her tears, as she lost both of her child, and the rest of her life she couldn’t get out of the shelter but being mournful and heartbroken. I am her designated protector of her last egg. And I am about to go— it is my destiny and mission to find a person who truly deserves to keep the egg.... ” The voice added, weeping silently.

“ You have been chosen, Rosanna. You broke the Maya seal by the queen.”

“ Me? I...” I inquired.

“ Ros’, who are you talking to!” . Jerry stared at me. Oh, I forgot only I could hear the voice.

“ Sometimes, the unknown breaks one’s courage.” That voice continued. “Once you’ve tried, the whole matter doesn’t seem that frightening anymore! ”

I nodded.

“ Yet, Rosanna, this egg is the last of our queen’s children—it is more precious than anything. I demand you to give something in. ”

“ Exchange? What do you want? ” I smelled an uncanny tone. “ I have some jewellery at my home—you can have them, for the exchange of your egg. ”

“ No, no, no....” the voice ordered,

“ I need the soul of your most cherished and precious one”.

I froze, I thought of Jerry immediately, standing next to me. She was not aware of any of my conversations, and started to plan how to spend the 1 billion.

“ And I need it now....”

My heart stopped for a moment. What do I have now? Except for my best friend, Jerry? I looked into her eyes, and she gave me a very sweet wink. I didn’t want to let her go. But, I know if I failed the request, we would lose the egg, and we have no chance of getting the reward—one billion dollars of cash!

“ One billion dollars is the aim of me being here....” I crouched to myself painfully. “ I have already proved my courage— I cracked the code and reached out to the eggThe egg is the aim, the very final aim, for the one billion dollars, for the one billion dollars....”

“ Rosanna, are you done?” Jerry’s voice faded and reemerged outside of my mind repeatedly “ It’s getting so late and chilly, can we get the egg back? ”

“ Don’t waste my time.” That voice snapped.

“ Ok, ” I opened my eyes and responded. “ We deal.”

“ Good, then now, take the egg, and by the time you walk out of the pool, Your friend will have to stay here forever. ” The voice remarked.

1 billion for a 15-year friendship.

I did not speak. I turned back and didn't dare to look at Jerry. She realized my awkwardness, yet she did not suspect it. We held onto the egg, and walked towards the exit of the pool.

I waited, and at the very second I stepped out of the pool's boundary, strips twisting and sounds of ache rang behind me.

“ Ros' , help me! I can't move! ” Jerry screamed in immense pain.

“ Ros' , it hurts! Ouc...chh! Urgh! Help me! Ros' ! Rosanna! The water is coming! ” Jerry yelled with intense fear, and she couldn't hold herself together anymore.

I walked away and away—Jerry's voice went softer and softer, at last she left a bubbling from her throat, my heart dropped deeper and deeper...

Wasn't it my dream?

I was about to get the reward and my life would be turned upside-down!

Why wasn't I smiling in delight?

Jerry was the one who always stood out and protected me when I was in trouble. She was probably the only person who believed that I could be a doctor one day.

Tears dropped down my cheeks, and I couldn't stop trembling.

I was such a coward. Dad and mom were right. I did not know what I wanted, 1 billion dollars, a 15-year friendship?

The pool went back to dead silence, as if nothing had ever happened, only a lonely shadow of me, standing in the dark, holding the egg.

No —

I cried out and rushed backwards, holding the egg. Water at my knees began splashing along my run, leaving me no time to care for the coldness of water at midnight, nor the temptation of the reward, e'en the endless fright of the dead bride-to-be and the pressing yells of the voice.

I dived into the water determinedly, there into the pool I saw Jerry, laid in a bubble, without consciousness. I put the egg back and punched the bubble— it broke instantly. I held Jerry tight, very, very tight, just like how she usually did to me and we floated back onto the surface.

“ Oh! ” Jerry spat out a mouthful of water. “ I knew you'd get me, Ros' ”

“ Of course, you are my most important person. ”

“ That's a weird phrase....” Jerry mumbled.“ Where is the egg? ”

“ Jerry, I have found something much more important than the egg.” I beamed at her.

10am, Thursday.

I picked up the phone and made a call to the Government Hotline.

“ Good morning, I would like to report the clue of the other dinosaur egg.” I started confidently.

“ Oh! Please go on.” The operator on the other side chimed.

“ The egg was at the bride’s pool, I mean, inside the pool. ”

“ Bride pool? Madam, are you serious? Anyway, you will be rewarded if your clues are proved to be true.” The voice cheered. “ Oh and, may I know your name?”

I made a momentary pause to catch my breath.

“ Throughout our lives, there are many things that cannot be evaluated by money. I don’t want to lose my loved ones for something I don’t truly need. If you happen to find the dinosaur’s egg, please treat it well and treasure it as your loved one. I hope the stories behind Dinosaur eggs will tell more good stories of our beloved home city...”

9am, Friday

I woke up early, packed up my school bags and headed to school. Breeze was touching my face, the sunshine was brighter than ever, I felt happiness grow larger and larger.

Jerry was waiting outside our campus.

“ Morning teacher... These are our grade 12 registration forms. ” exclaimed Jerry and I.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Chen, Fannie – 15

In a prehistoric age so far away that it is almost impossible to measure the modern concept of time, the surface of the earth was covered by a vast, vibrant primeval forest, an age of dinosaurs, a magnificent era of giants, everything, full of primitive wildness and mystery. In this ancient land, dinosaurs in their unique way to deduce the legend of life, and among the many lives, there is a young Tyrannosaurus Rex, his name is Rex.

Rex, the young Tyrannosaurus Rex, not only has the sharp teeth, strong body and awesome momentum of the Tyrannosaurus Rex family, but also has a different heart. He is not as homicidal as other Tyrannosaurs, but is full of curiosity and desire for the world around him. At sunset, Rex would walk alone at the edge of the forest, staring at the horizon, filled with the infinite reverie of the outside world. He is eager to explore the unknown, eager to understand the world more mysteries.

Rex's path to growth has not been easy. At a young age, he was injured in a fight with other T-Rex cubs and was temporarily abandoned by the pack. However, it is this lonely time that gives Rex the opportunity to come into contact with other species of dinosaurs in the forest, and he discovers that there is friendship, mutual help and coexistence among dinosaurs in addition to hunting and being hunted. These experiences shaped Rex's unique character and gave him a deeper understanding of the harmonious coexistence of the dinosaur world.

One day, when Rex came to the edge of the forest again, he was surprised to find a strange light. The light slowly fell from the sky as a meteor streaked across the night sky, eventually creating a huge space-time gap in the ground. Through the crack, a group of humans in strange clothes and holding strange devices slowly emerged. They are scientists from the future who have been transported to this time by an experimental accident.

Confronted with these sudden outsiders, Rex, though surprised, did not immediately show hostility. He watched the humans with curiosity, trying to understand where they came from. Using a translator in their hands, the scientists explained to Rex who they were and what they wanted. It turned out that they had come to study dinosaurs, eager to learn about the habits and ecology of these prehistoric giants.

Rex felt a sense of responsibility he had never felt before. He realized that this was a rare opportunity for these humans to learn about the harmonious coexistence of dinosaurs and thus change the misunderstanding and prejudice of humans about dinosaurs in the future. So Rex decided to lead these scientists to explore his home and let them witness the wonder and harmony of the dinosaur world.

Led by Rex, the scientists began their unprecedented journey of discovery. They traveled through dense forests and vast grasslands and met all kinds of dinosaurs. They saw gentle herbivorous dinosaurs such as Triceratops, Diplodocus and brachiosaurus, leisurely foraging or leisurely basking in the sun; We also see equally powerful but diverse carnivorous dinosaurs such as Velociraptor, Allosaurus, and Rex's own group, Tyrannosaurus Rex. Although these dinosaurs have different shapes and habits, they together constitute the ecosystem of this era, and they depend on each other and live in harmony.

In the course of his exploration, Rex also introduced the scientists to his best friend, a wise elderly brachiosaurus named Wendell. Wendell is one of the most respected wise men in the forest, with a wide range of knowledge and a kind personality that is admired by all dinosaurs. Wendell told scientists many stories of mutual aid and coexistence among dinosaurs, and their wisdom and courage in the face of natural disasters and predators. These stories have deeply moved scientists and made them more deeply aware of the wonder and harmony of the dinosaur world.

In addition to exploring the ecological environment of dinosaurs, scientists have also conducted in-depth research on the physiological structure of dinosaurs, behavioral habits, and their interaction with the environment. They found that the relationship between dinosaurs is not simple prey and prey, but there is a complex ecological balance. Each

dinosaur species plays a unique role in this ecosystem, working together to maintain the stability and harmony of the entire ecosystem.

Scientists have also noticed the social structure and communication among dinosaurs. They found that dinosaurs form complex social networks that communicate information through specific calls, gestures and smells. These discoveries have not only given scientists a deeper understanding of dinosaurs, but also of the interactions and ecological balance between organisms in nature.

The experience not only opened the eyes of scientists, but also made them deeply reflect on the relationship between humans and nature. They realized that even though dinosaurs were extinct, their wisdom and courage were still worth learning from. Before leaving, the scientists promised to bring this real dinosaur story back to the future, so that more people can understand the true face of dinosaurs and their complex and wonderful ecological relationship.

Rex watched the cracks in time and space gradually close, his heart was full of hope and moved. He knows that although his own era will eventually become history, at least through these human efforts, the legend and spirit of dinosaurs can be passed on in the future. He believes that future human beings will draw wisdom and strength from the story of dinosaurs, and cherish and protect our earth home more.

Under Rex's leadership, scientists not only harvested valuable scientific data, but also brought back a deep understanding and awe of the dinosaur world. They shared their findings with the world, stimulating people's interest in prehistoric creatures and awareness of conservation of the natural environment. Rex's stories and legends have also spread to every corner of the world, becoming an eternal legend in people's hearts.

Since then, Rex has not only become a hero and a wise man in the group, but also a bridge between the past and the future. His story and legend will forever be etched in the memory of this era, inspiring those who come after him to explore, learn and grow. The legend and spirit of dinosaurs will always shine in the long river of human history and become the source of our continuous progress.

In the years to come, whenever people look up at the stars and think about the mysteries of the universe and the origin of life, they will always think of that distant prehistoric era, and think of the brave and intelligent T-Rex. His story will forever inspire mankind to pursue the truth, explore the unknown, and cherish and protect our common earth home.

Special Blood

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Chen, Yuntong Emma – 14

As night falls, the hustle of the city, but in a laboratory in one corner of this modern city, the lights remain bright. A scientist named William sat alone in front of the microscope, under the lens of a microscope, a blood samples reveals remarkable qualities, and the blood is not from ordinary human blood, but directly from a girl's own body, this girl named Sophia. William's fingers drummed on the table top, confused. As a scientist, he was supposed to know every property of blood. However, today he dropped all his scientific knowledge. He can't believe what he is seeing.

William took a deep breath and tried to calm his mind. This is not just a scientific discovery, it could be a major breakthrough in human history. William realized that Sophia's blood might contain some unknown power that could change the future of medicine and perhaps even reveal the deep secrets of human evolution. But as William experimented further, he began to feel a fear. Sophia's blood seemed to call out some ancient power, like the smell of dinosaurs he had read about in books before. William and Sophia decided to keep it a secret because the blood was so special that it was the first person in the world to have this condition. Sophia's blood is the gateway to knowledge that humanity is not yet ready to understand. William carefully analyzed the blood sample under a microscope, and her eyes struggled to catch any unusual cellular activity.

As time goes on, Sophia becomes more and more comfortable with her blood identity, pretending to know nothing and living with normal blood all the time. And William are working on it. During this time, William has been staying in the laboratory and has little contact with the outside world. So he was felt by his competitors Carson, in a doctor between meals, Carson sneaked into the William's lab, circled around his lab, and saw the computer screen was not relevant. On the screen is the information about Sophia's blood, Carson are afraid of being found, the first secretly shot back to their own laboratory research. He searched the Sophia profile, and he knew Sophia's blood was special. Carson told his whole company about it, and the amazing news soon spread all over the city. Sophia saw the news immediately to question William, William rushed back to the scene, immediately called for monitoring. Finding that it was his opponent, he blamed himself very much and felt that he had not kept the news. So the two people together to find a way, Sophia moved home, changed a city. William are responsible for alerting the police, controlling the spread of information in the shortest time, and catching the leak of information. But people all over the country were immediately interested in the dinosaur blood and discussed it on the internet.

People who are interested in dinosaur blood search information online, they all want to research Sophia's dinosaur blood. Everyone knows that if study gets a result, it can get a large amount of money, and also will improve human evolution history. Sophia anticipated this situation, she started to hide in a comprehensive way, all the social media turn privacy. However, this method is no use. People who want Sophia's information already think about this way, so they find more advanced methods, to search for Sophia's information. Sophia didn't think she could just sit back and do nothing. She decides to investigate the dinosaur blood by herself, calling in William and his trusted colleagues. There is three of them, Leo, Benjamin, and Evelyn, they are William's business partners. These three are also interested in Sophia's blood. So they immediately began a secret research program.

Sophia has an idea to build a travel machine and take it to the dinosaur world to explore the mystery of her blood. The scientists thought the idea was not real, and William said he had read an article about a time travel machine. They decided to give it a try. The scientists consulted various sources and found reliable designers to help design the time machine. In order to finish this project quickly, I worked all night every day to help Sophia get over her sadness.

They were divided into two groups, one for boys and one for girls. The boys are in charge of building the ship. The girls, Sophia and Evelyn, have not been idle during this time, have been researching the information about dinosaurs, making plans for their future arrival in the dinosaur world, how they investigate and how to survive. Slowly, step by step, the time ship's core fragments have been worked out, and the completion of this is not far from victory. They worked day and night to help Sophia. Sophia was so moved that she decided to repay them when the research results came out.

Several years later, the ship was finally built and everything was ready. Sophia and William's team have everything ready to go. Several people went into the cabin, took their seats, and put on their seat belts. Everything is ready for takeoff. The ship slowly rises and slowly connects to the shuttle orbit. The next second, there is a sudden push-back feeling, immediately catapulted out, into the dark tunnel. Everything is unknown, no one knows whether the spaceship will successfully shuttle to the dinosaur world, the scientists are especially nervous, but Sophia especially believes in them, she thinks everything will be successful. In this dark space, it feels very scary to stay a second longer, but they do not know how long it will be over, how long it will take to leave this place. But at this moment, no one regrets working on this project, everyone helps each other, and we are still studying dinosaurs during this unknown time. After an unknown amount of time, a white dot seemed to be seen in the dark space, and as the ship moved, the white dot grew larger and larger. Sophia and her team seem to be passing through, the ship is accelerating at constant speed, and everyone is waiting to see what will happen. In the blink of an eye, the spaceship passed through the white spot and came high up in the sky. Looking out the window, I finally saw the blue sky, white clouds, green trees and grass. The people in the spaceship are cheering, because they have made it, successfully shuttle to the world of dinosaurs. It's the moment when all the stress is released, and all that time in the dark was worth it. William began to control the ship and asked Sophia where to go. Sophia told William about a cave, which was where she found their residence after searching for information.

When they reached the cave, they took a brief rest. Non-stop to the dinosaur dwelling places to explore. They fly in spaceships and operate in stealth mode, so that they can observe the habits of dinosaurs and secretly obtain dinosaur blood. They repeated this process on different species of dinosaurs and got different kinds of blood. William and his colleagues are investigating the blood one by one to see if it matches Sophia. Take out a bunch of test tubes and pour blood on them. After many tests and adjustments, scientists found that Sophia's blood is not normal dinosaur blood, she is a mixture of human blood and dinosaur blood. This is a very special blood, the results were expected to come soon, but now Sophia's special blood has scientists taking a closer look. They're now moving from point to point, back and forth between the cave and the dinosaur dwelling. Flying and watching every day, and taking new blood.

Finally, a few weeks later, they found a clue. The blood they got from dinosaurs was actually the basis of human blood, which evolved into human blood. However, Sophia's blood is the next kind of blood that human blood evolved from, and the new creatures in the future will be Sophia's blood.

They took it back to the modern world, and they posted the analysis, the research, the search. As soon as the information was released, the Internet began to discuss, and everyone knew the importance and rarity of Sophia's blood. This huge discovery, a few months later, was recognized as the world's greatest scientific discovery, receiving the highest awards and large awards in science. Sophia is no longer an object of human attack, but a object of protection. Sophia returned to her normal life .

The Frozen Dinosaur

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Chen, Zekun Tiger – 14

A normal day of working had just ended. Jimmy walked back home just as usual. Everything was normal, and nothing special happened that day. In a sudden, a loud crashing noise from somewhere near his house broke the peaceful mood of his family.

Jimmy was an elementary school science teacher who graduated from college a few years ago. He didn't earn a lot of money from his job, but fortunately, he had a family who always supported him in spite of his failures. And because of that he lived comfortably and cheerfully. He had just enough friends that he needed. Outside of all those factors, he was an ordinary man, and never did he imagine that he would become a famous figure who would decide the fate of human.

Scared, he carefully walked out from his house, glanced at the direction that the crashing noise came from, and immediately sprinted back to his house and closed the door.

"That was an UFO!"

Not until 30 minutes, his house was crowded with polices and journalists. Some of the polices surrounded the unexpected structure that eventually landed on the ground after being discovered. Some journalists interviewed Jimmy about his feelings. Others did what they believed were supposed to do. Compared to the UFO, what shocked Jimmy more was the fact that it was the first time that hundreds of people gathered around his house.

The UFO turned out to be a spaceship. Very neatly designed and made. It was not hard to tell that which civilization that made the spaceship possessed extraordinary technology that were far beyond the control of human being. As soon as the spaceship reached to the ground, large troops and armies arrived. Jimmy stayed in his house, and no one took him away. He was told that everything was under control, and a police officer stayed with him in his house.

A dinosaur stepped out from the spaceship. He bowed, and waited for a few seconds to let the humans catch up with what was happening. Then, he started to deliver a speech:

"My honorable human friends, I am the representative of dinosaurs. Don't be overly frightened, as I can see from your faces. I mean no harm to stand over here. Your scientists have concluded that us dinosaurs had been extinct for decades and centuries and millennia..."

At the moment, Jimmy was overwhelmed. He couldn't believe what had just happened in front of him. Their theories were wrong. Dinosaurs apparently didn't extinct as they had assumed, but they survived in some unexpected way. Since he studies science so much previously, he couldn't accept what he heard from the speech of the dinosaurs.

"Jimmy," the police officer interrupted him from his thinking. "The world is full of fantasy, isn't it? Everything is magical." Jimmy Nodded. The police officer then continued, "We had once doubted whether the dinosaurs had really extinct. We had seen signals that they might had already migrated to other planet. We guessed that they had been watching us for a long time..."

In a sudden, sounds of guns and cannons came from the field outside. The humans clearly weren't patient enough to allow the dinosaur to complete all of his speech, and the hypothesis they made about dinosaurs secretly watching them for a long time could drive them to deem the dinosaur as their enemy. However, everyone knew that

trying to start a war with the dinosaurs was an irrational decision. No one could fully explain why, but everything just happened. Humans had put themselves into a desperate situation where they had to fight and win this battle.

“Uh Oh.” Signed Jimmy. Then followed by the other family members. And the police officer. “Didn’t expect that to happen,” said the police officer. “As you know, human as a group is extremely arrogant. They are confident on things that they shouldn’t be, and throw doubt to the ones that we should believe.”

The anger of the dinosaurs were also ignited. Their weapons were much more advanced than the humans’. The war didn’t even last an hour until dinosaurs killed all the human soldiers without anyone even getting injured.

“Hello? My friend, hiding in the house. It is time to compromise.”

Jimmy and everyone in the room knew that the dinosaur was talking to them. They immediately replied by rushing out of the house, raising both of their hands and said “We SURRENDER!”

“Honestly, I am disappointed.” Said the dinosaur calmly, but angrily. “I thought human would be humble and modest, so that we can assist you human with technology. By the way, we don’t care if we really have to support you or not. How your representatives acted didn’t fulfill our requirements for a qualified civilization. As a punishment, all humans will be eliminated. And you, my friend, will be used in our experiment, to create another civilization...just has how we were created.”

“Remember firmly, that human died for a death crime: arrogance.”

Dino-er

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Chen, Zihan Owen – 14

71st century, the ancient, mysterious wizard Merlin unleashed a powerful ancient magic. The magic makes all the dinosaurs resurrect, and they are controlled by a new occupation called Dinoer. Each country has one Dinoer, who will represent their country to fight against another country, and the losing country will lose a piece of its land.

“Get ready to say goodbye to our homeland; this is our last game, and we will play against one of the best countries in Asia, which is South Korea. ” The minister of China cried.

The main reason for this situation is because in 71st century’s china there is no expert of dinosaur. However, I traveled through time and space to come here and save China. I easily passed all the exams to become a Dinoer and become the last hope of Chinese.

5 days later, the game starts. The game takes place in a giant stadium looks Colosseum. The first feeling it gives me is stress, surrounded by giant iron wall he walls are never shiny anymore, blood spills all over it. Suddenly, the host starts to speak.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to enjoy the bloody but exciting game of the dinosaur. ”

“What an easy game, China again, haha. Let me finish the “greatest” China.”said the dinoer of South Korea.

“Let’s see who will be the winner” I said.

“If you win this game, the whole of South Korea will belong to China.”

“Sure.”

Simultaneously, the Dinoer of South Korea summons a Bukkyongosaurus, a gigantic herbivore. 20 meters long and 19 tons, the earth starts to shake as it walks.

“No! We have no chance to win!”Chinese minister cried.

However, I am very calm and even feel a little amused.

“It seems like there is no Dino-expert in South Korea, isn’t there?”

“Stop rubbishing”

I summon a dinosaur calmly, and then the South Korean Dinoer is shocked.

“Ho...how can Chinese summon this dinosaur, how’s that even possible, crap.”

The sky turns black, South Korea's audience's piece was broken. Albertosaurus, a swift and powerful relative of T. rex, terrorized the late Cretaceous landscape. Weighing as much as a rhino, it hunted with a mix of speed and strength, using its sharp teeth and powerful jaws to tear through prey. With long, muscular legs for running and a long tail for balance, Albertosaurus was an agile predator, possibly hunting in groups. Fossils found in Alberta, Canada, reveal its impressive size and fearsome appearance, making it a formidable creature in any story. However It just stood there. Everyone is terrified. The match started. In a dramatic confrontation, the Albertosaurus, a dangerous conniver, squared off against the Bukkyongosaurus, a resilient herbivore. The Albertosaurus, eyes shining with hunger, charged forward, its teeth shines in a threatening brightness. The Bukkyongosaurus, though primarily a plant-eater, was no stranger to defense, and it raised its tail like a ax, ready to wipe out this dinosaur.

The Albertosaurus attempted to close in for the kill, but the Bukkyongosaurus was quick to respond, pivoting to face its attacker with a display of unexpected agility. The theropod's claws scraped against the herbivore's armored hide as it sought a vulnerable spot. The jump onto the back of the Bukkyongosaurus and tierce of a meat of the neck. The only thing you can hear now is the sound of Albertosaurus chewing the Bukkyongosaurus.

"The whole South Korea is now a part of land of China" The host announced.

Everyone is cheering, the dinoer of South Korea sit on the floor waiting for his trial.

Great things like this happened a lot after that event. How ever it didn't last long because China has dominated the whole Asia and even some Europe countries. America, the country with the best and the most aggressive Dinosaur stands out, and want to fight China. They claims that, they are the greatest country in the world and there should be no discussion about that. So they will fight China. If we win than we can get the reputation of "Great of all Time".

Suddenly all media turns to America. Even Chinese feels unconfident to their country. After 6 months of prepare the match started.

As I walks in to the stadium of this match, it makes me feel like walking with the shadow of death. I can feel the bloody circumstances happens here. I have to stay calm. If I feel scare even before the match started, than we have no chance to win. Suddenly, the ground shakes beneath my foot. A low, resonant growl passes through the air, sending shakes down my spine. I turned towards the source of the sound, my heart stop pounding any more in my chest.

There, in the center of the clearing, stood the majestic and terrifying form of a Tyrannosaurus rex. Towering over the landscape, the T-rex was a colossal beast, its scaly hide glistening in the dappled sunlight. Its short and funny two fingered arm, however I can't laugh even a little.

Time seemed to slow as our eyes met. I felt a mix of sick and fear, knowing that I was in the presence of one of the most formidable predators to ever walked the Earth.

I press the button to open the cage with my shaking hands. The animal comes out is a Mamenchisaurus. How to describe Mamenchisaurus? Imagine Mamenchisaurus as a gentle giant with a neck like a towering skyscraper. This long-necked herbivore roamed the lush plains of ancient China, gracefully reaching for the tallest treetops with its 15-meter-long neck. With 19 neck bones, it could stretch further than any creature today. At a staggering 22 meters long and nearly 7 meters tall, it was like a living legend, peacefully browsing on leaves and branches in a world long past.

As this two dinosaur faces each other. They roared to show there power. T-rex attack first straight forwards. The moment T-rex come bellow Mamenchisaurus's face, it stands up with is back legs and step on T-rex, T-rex lays on the flour and stop breathing. The whole stadium stop to make noise. Everyone was shocked. However, I wasn't shocked, I'd simulated this in my mind a thousand times. And the results have only one, T-rex will die. Chinese start to cheers. Cheers for the winning and cheers for becoming the king of the earth.

Benign

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Dai, Miaohan Daisy – 15

Things have been strange these days, Benign wrote as he was walking out the book store like any other day. And when you thought nothing actually happened, you'd found the thing staring back at you. It seemed that no one except himself realized that something was going on. The sky has been gray, the streets were gray, even the air looked gray. And turning after one deepest and darkest corner of the town, on the hill laying in the shadows of the clouds, there was a freak house, up upon where all the time storm tumbled and lightning forced, like it was eager to tear the first seen object apart. Moaning faces of the old trees roared and they stretched their arms and their jagged teeth sharpened and their eyes looked into you deep down.

Things have been happening, Benign thought, scrawling alone in a corner of his room, surrounded by the endless darkness. They called him the nerd, though he didn't care when they always saw him with a book and couldn't want them more to be not aware of the ongoing events. And in some way, in a way he did not know how, it had something to do with the freak house. He searched his brain, but all that responded was the retorting silence in the dark. There were only pieces, pieces that couldn't be connected. As the deeper his explored, the less he could remember. It felt like part of his memories were stolen on purpose and whoever did this was too careless to reorder it properly, so it was left in a mess. Flesh, and blood, and pain, and then all that he felt was burning anger. He woke up, panting, sweats running over his face. He found his fists tightened, along with unreasonable anger, both he wouldn't understand.

It *was* the freak house. A pale white hand and he could not go on. It was something like a flashback scene, a short vision, and it was terrifying. Benign thought he would never wanted to see anything like that again.

Then with no clue, he was back there again, standing right in front of what must be the freak house, except that it was twirling and spinning and everything was in a blur of bloody red. There were blood in his eyes, he could feel it, but he knew it wasn't his. He heard roars beyond somewhere which he couldn't bear.

His head was spinning, it felt dizzy, and then it just came over him that he walked straight into the freak house. He felt death, a strong eagerness of death. He heard a voice in his head, that kept on whispering to him, death. Death is the end of everything, everything that had been going on. The death, it was calling him. It would be a relief, a new world for the living. For a moment he didn't know how those thought came up to him, there was just silence, and the bright red reflecting into his eyes.

Everything shall be over, Benign thought. He was in his very own bed, laying with no hope in his life. It was all over. The murder, the hell and the fire, things began to emerge in his head, things that he didn't know about, and has never even thought about. It was in his head, the thing, and he knew it, but nothing could be done about it. He was lost in thoughts, slowly drowned into a deep sleep.

'It's about time.'

Benign woke up in a sudden, something curious was that he wasn't at all in his room. He took a quick glance around, it there was a best word to describe this, it would be the hell. Literally the hell, it was dark and there were no windows, fire burned around the hard stone walls, lava boiled down from holes in the wall resembling a waterfall. He

was chained on a raised platform in the middle of the space, feeling the heat like standing in the sun. He did not speak, while he knew the thing was watching, right now hiding somewhere in the dark.

'Are you too afraid of showing yourself? I can see you didn't even put a mark of identity in your place.' As there was no response, he was patient enough to keep on saying, 'Those stones that made up the wall, they are rare, aren't they? Or to be more specifically, only from the Jurassic age.'

'You thought you hid it well.'

'But I'm just too much smarter than you think.'

Then there was a endless darkness and he found himself in his room again. He could not tell if it was a dream or not, or that vision he had earlier. It felt so real, the heat and the chain he felt on his hands, except that the words did not seem like something he would normally say. But it was in a blur all now. Maybe it wasn't just a feeling that someone had erased his memories.

He need some fresh air to think, Benign thought. So he set on to the woods all the way through the town, passing by the freak house. He didn't even give it a glance. When he stepped into the woods there were some sound then a sudden silence, like life suddenly disappeared. He took a quick scan around. Nothing relevant found. Except that there were blood stains and it seemed to be leading to somewhere. He followed and the stain became redder and more alarming, finally he came to a bush and the blood has stopped here. He knew what to do, but he wasn't sure if he was bold enough to do this. He took a deep breath, and ducked into the bush. There was nothing. That was weird. He touched that piece of ground and suddenly felt a sting in his hand. He repeated the same action but nothing happened, like it was just his own illusion.

'That was strange.' He said to himself. Then something suddenly came up and he sprinted towards the freak house. Through the dead garden and up the cracking front stairs, he swung open the old door and unsurprisingly, the body, it was right here. Its skin, it was black and bonny like some kind of rotten egg, and its eyes, deep like a tunnel, and there was no sign of dragging... Rather than a corpse, Benign would say it was a zombie. And the thing, it was staring at him, hidden in somewhere in the dark.

Suddenly, he heard a roar 'All non-dinosaurs shall perish!'

They all died. And everyone in the town kept on their lives like none of these had happened. Sometimes life is as ridiculous as this, Benign wrote, when you were in the middle of the storm you felt all your life is over, you thought this could be the darkest days you ever lived in, but when it was all over, everything kept on going normal and anyone couldn't actually care less. So just chill, Benign finished his last words, chill when there's a situation and live it to the fullest.

Fossil Heist

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Fan, Yu Han Shawn – 14

The sun was setting over the vast Texas plains, casting long shadows over the dry, cracked earth. The heat of the day still lingered in the air as Josh Leonard, a dedicated Texas State Police detective, sat in his squad car, staring out at the horizon. His phone buzzed, breaking the silence.

Leonard,” Josh answered.

It’s Jones. We’ve got a report of a theft. Big one. A fossil discovery site near the Red River. Dinosaur fossils,” said the voice on the other end.

Fossils? How’s that possible?” Josh asked, his voice tinged with disbelief.

You better get over there. This is no ordinary theft. Whoever took these fossils is serious about making a lot of money.”

Josh's mind raced. Fossils were rare and incredibly valuable on the black market. He heard rumors of a growing underground network trafficking ancient bones, but he never thought it would hit this close on him. He started the engine and drove toward the site, determined to unwrap the mystery.

The fossil discovery site, an old quarry about 40 miles from Amarillo, was oddly quiet when Josh arrived. A few workers stood around looking lost and confused. The manager, who’s a tall, bearded man named Eric Carter, greeted Josh with a grim look.

What happened here, Eric?” Josh asked as he observes the site.

It’s like they knew exactly what they were looking for. A whole shipment of fossils, packed and ready to be shipped out, just gone. No sign of a break-in. It’s like they vanished into thin air.”

Josh went near the empty crates, carefully inspecting the scene. The precision of the theft surprised him. This wasn’t some random act of vandalism, it was calculated.

Do you have any leads?” he asked, standing up.

There’s one name that keeps coming up, Kim,” Eric said, his voice low. Kim’s people have been poking around for a while, asking questions about the fossils. I thought it was just rumors. But now...”

Kim?” Josh repeated, narrowing his eyes. Is this a person or a group?”

Just one name. A known trafficker of rare fossils. Lord is he building an empire.”

Thanks,” Josh muttered, walking back to his car. Kim. He’d heard whispers about him from other law enforcement agencies. A ghost in the system, elusive and dangerous. Now, Josh had a lead.

The chase began. Josh and his partner, Detective Sarah Collins, started digging into Kim’s past, tracing his movements across the state. The more they uncovered, the more they realized Kim had a vast network of buyers, sellers, and fixers scattered across the region. He operated on a number of warehouses and low-key offices, but his main base was somewhere in the desert outskirts near Lubbock.

Every place Josh visited seemed to lead to a dead end. Fossil dealers who once worked with Kim turned up missing or unwilling to talk. The deeper Josh and Sarah dug, the more dangerous it became. They exchanged gunfire with small-time gangsters in bars, barely escaping with their lives each time.

But they couldn’t stop. They were getting closer, and they knew it.

The final confrontation came a week later. After tracking Kim’s operations to an abandoned ranch on the edge of the desert, Josh and Sarah prepared for what was sure to be a deadly confrontation. Armed with information from a recently captured informant, they knew that Kim was hiding in an old barn, surrounded by his loyal gang.

As they approached the barn under the cover of darkness, their hearts pounded in their chests. The air was thick with tension. Josh motioned for Sarah to take the left flank while he circled around to the right. The sound of footsteps echoed from within, and Josh’s hand tightened on his gun.

Suddenly, a burst of gunfire shattered the stillness. Josh dove behind a nearby rock as bullets whizzed past him. His heart raced, but his training kicked in. He moved swiftly, using the terrain to his advantage, as Sarah provided cover from the left. Another burst of gunfire rang out from the barn.

Kim!” Josh yelled, his voice booming in the night. This mockery ends now!”

Inside the barn, Kim’s voice rang out in a mocking laugh. You think you can stop me? You’re just a small-town cop. You don’t have the power to stop what’s coming.”

With a loud crash, the doors of the barn swung open. Kim’s men poured out, guns blazing. Josh and Sarah ducked for cover, exchanging fire with the thugs as they moved closer to the barn. The air was thick with the scent of gunpowder, and Josh’s muscles burned from the effort.

Finally, he saw Kim standing at the back of the barn, surrounded by crates of stolen fossils.

You’re too late,” Kim sneered with his hand resting on a gun. The fossils are already sold.”

Josh’s eyes locked onto Kim’s. Without hesitation, he lunged forward, catching Kim off guard. The two grappled, rolling across the dusty floor of the barn. Kim fought fiercely, but Josh was faster. With a swift motion, Josh knocked the gun from Kim’s hand, pinning him to the ground.

Kim's smirk faded, replaced by a face twisted from anger and surprise. "You think this is over? You can't stop the money, and the greed. The world wants what I have. And they will do anything to get it."

Josh pressed his knee into Kim's chest, breathing heavily. "Then it's us police's job to not let this happen, boomer."

As backup arrived, Kim was handcuffed and led away, his empire of fossil trafficking collapsing in a heap. Josh looked around the barn one last time at the crates of stolen fossils, the remnants of a dangerous and illegal operation. The job wasn't permanently done, but for now, it was a victory.

Dinosaur

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Gao, Ava – 14

"Dong! Dong!" the footsteps became closer and closer to me, my legs started to sore, I think they might be dying, but I can't stop. I hold the round egg firmly in my arms, running as fast as I could to escape from death.

"Come on!" someone shouted

My view start to become vague, a small, tiny black spot expand as my leg keep running, using my limited power I jump on to the car.

My vision gradually became clearer, but when I tried to move my body, I found myself sore all over and unable to move.

"She is awake! Call on the nurse!"

Looking around, I found myself in a white room, but where is this. As I was trying to figure out the problem, a shoe came into my view. This person was wearing a pair of leather shoes, as my gaze slowly shifted upwards, I noticed that he is wearing a suit.

The man said, "I think you have something for us, the egg, the dinosaur egg, but where is it, we promise you we will give you great beneficients after you give us that dinosaur egg."

I seem to know all the words but as it combines into a sentence it become perplexing.

"So, what egg?" I asked

"Don't try to fool me that is our agreements, you offer the egg, we give you money and that's all" the man started to become impatient.

"Sorry sir, she somehow lost her memories here the egg that you wanted" a women came in holding an egg.

The man seems to be in a hurry after he took the egg he dashed away. After the man left, I started to have a brief view of this women, she seems to be around the same age as me.

"Hi?" I asked meticulously.

"I know this my baffle you, but we need to run away there is no time for us to stay over here, just get with me I will tell you everything you need in the car." The women said in a hurry, she grabs my arms and slam me into the car.

The person sitting in the driver's seat is men, before wondering the man's identity, the women started to speak.

You used to be a great researcher, but things are gradually changing. At first, you were only interested in dinosaurs and had the willingness to conduct research. We also support you very much, and in this process, you have also studied different species of dinosaurs. In one of the experiments, you unexpectedly discovered how to create dinosaurs, but most importantly, you need dinosaur DNA so that even different species can combine and reproduce new offspring. This skill has sparked countless discussions since its release, with some supports and others oppose it. But it was also at this time that a company specializing in dinosaur reproduction found you. It is precisely because they have provided you with countless high-end equipment and research spaces that you chose to go to their company. During this period, all your research on dinosaurs was recorded.

However, as you're about to stop, they seem to want more. This caused a huge argument between you and the company, so you decided to resign, but they hope you can do one more thing before resigning. Even though this had struggled you, but after all you had been working for so long, so you agreed. This time, you have been sent to the forest to search for the traces of dinosaurs. If you can find them, you need to submit the dinosaur egg. I was originally going to assist you this time, but during your coma, we accidentally discovered the conspiracy of this company. They want to use this skill to turn dinosaurs into weapons. Although I didn't ask for your opinion, I don't think you would accept it.

Numerous information burst into my head, just as I want to digest this information, a speeding car is coming toward us.

"We need to go it's the man from the company, he finds out that is a fake egg, drive faster please," cried the women.

Our two cars began to gallop, and our current location was already very remote. Before long, we were forced to the precipice. The man in the car slowly got down and said, "If you give us that dinosaur egg now, I will let you go. If you give it to me, I can pretend that nothing happened."

But I tightly held onto the dinosaur egg in my arms, and looking at it, there seemed to be a bond that attracted me. Although I didn't know what it was, but I think the women is right, I do really love dinosaur before

The women said 'Just ran away, don't worry about us, we'll try our best to offer you time to run away.

I held the dinosaur egg and tried to plan an escape route, but it seemed to be surrounded by the men's allies. The only way out is behind me. I looked down at the cliff and found a river below. After some hesitation, I jumped off the cliff holding the dinosaur egg tightly in my arms.

As a wake up a could feel something is rolling on my body, as I open my eyes, I say a small baby yellow dinosaur with a wing behind, I seem to flow to a unknow village.

I settled myself with the dinosaur in this area, everything seems wonderful to me. I am having a great day, no one would bother me, there is great environment over here.

I know I need to find back my memories, but for now I only want to enjoy my time relaxing.

Free

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Gong, Yimeng Tammy – 14

Under the grey sky with no clouds, tress was been cut, if we look down in a high position everything seems so died. The people in this village has no smile on their face, they all work for the evil scientist Amy. The world is colorful, but we can't see it at all in this town. They work hard, just like robot. The kids looks very mature, doesn't looks like the age they are. Everyone works like an emotionless machine, there is a special person in charge of supervision stand beside them, if the villager shows a little laziness they will get in trouble. There is also a weird rule in this village, no animals is allowed to live except dinosaur, because Amy believes only dinosaur is noble enough to live. So they will send people go find dinosaur in another island each year. They will prepare a competition for young people, and choose the strongest to be qualified. The competition is coming soon, but no one is preparing it. Excepts Rose, Oscar and Daniel, they are really good friend with each other and they grow up together. They are also the only ones we can see smile on their face, they really want go leave this village and go see the bigger world. Rose, Oscar and Daniel believes the other island looks different, so they have been prepared a lot.

Sun raised slowly, the silent village finally become like human lives place. Everyone was excited to participate in this ceremony, because today is the only day people don't have to work. Young people are talking and warm up at the same time, Amy stand on the stage waiting for people to come up. Amy is a very beautiful woman, but her personality seems not balanced. With her fair skin and fat figure, she looked like a young lady who had been pampered for years, that was a huge opposite with the villager. Everyone think Oscar will won this battle, cause he is the on who do the most work and has the strongest muscles. Daniel and Rose also has a high voice, cause they are very talented, they use different techniques to persuade Amy give the villagers more benefits. "So, let me talk about the rules in this competition."said Amy. "The young peoples will only has one round to stand out, and that will be free sparring, you cannot use any weapon in this battle, now let's start !". After Amy finished her speech, every participants goes up on the stage, include Rose, Oscar and Daniel. The battle begins....

“The first on the stage! Rose!!” Called the manager, Rose walk on the stage nervously. As the whistling sounded, Rose first take the lead, she run back to the boy and kick his back. Even Rose is good at speed and being very skin, but it’s also a bit hard for Rose to won a strong and high man. They battled for a long time, then finally Rose has won the competition first. Next one is Oscar, he won almost effortlessly, because people is afraid of him. The last of the three is Daniel, he use his intelligent brain and found the weakness of the opponent, and won the battle. Everyone is cheering for them, one is because they don’t have to do the dangerous place, second is they were worship of the three people. The thing different is that their parent was supper worried, even their kids is good at everything. At night, they went to their secret treehouse, they spend lot’s of time in the tree house when they are young. They packed all the things they need, and lay down on the carpet. Rose said: “ do you guys think we will success? What will Amy do to the dinosaur?” “Stop worried, I guess we will have a menimoribal time on that island.”answered Oscar. “I agree” Daniel replied. They fall a sleep in anticipation, no one knows what will happen...

The second morning, it was very loud outside, people are preparing a ceremony for Rose, Oscar and Daniel. The noise sound wake them up, they slowly sit up and get all their things run outside. They saw all the people stand beside the ocean, and at front there is a big boat. Rose was shocked: “ wow, is that for us?!” Daniel an Oscar answered at the same time: “ it was a big surprise for us, I guess yes.” They take all their stuffs, smile walking to the boat. People around were cheering, dancing, it was so hard to see these villagers to have smile. It might is because their kids do’t have to go, and it’s also because they really feel that Rose, Oscar and Daniel can did it. They went on the boat and get a map from the manager, start driving the car. Oscar said as he drove the boat: “ we did it! We finally left that place.” “Hooray!!” Yelled rose. Daniel is watching the course carefully, just in case. After two days, they finally arrived at the destination. After they get off the boat, Rose suddenly screamed. She was shocked by what she saw, Daniel and Oscar were no exception. Green trees, blue sky, there are even birds flying and sining. They just realize, what nature looks like, and animals doesn’t have to relay on humans to live. Rose, Oscar, and Daniel look around and walk slowly into the jungle looking for a cave where they can stay. After they get in the forest, they have noticed so many animals are living here, and doesn’t looks scared when they saw. Rose said: “ I think it’s there first time saw humans, people before didn’t get to here, they might all escape.” “So that’s why they are not afraid of us, cause they think every creature is kind.” Answered Oscar. Daniel screamed: “hey guys, look what I’ve found.” Rose and Oscar all look at where Daniel is pointing, a cave. They were all surprised, but they don’t have more energy to examine. They all step in the cave and lay on the ground, It wasn't long before they all fell asleep.

The early morning sun was shining and the birds were singing, the noise waked Rose up. She looked around and found out the cave is so deep, that cause she can’t see clear inside. After she was totally sober, she woke Oscar and Daniel up. Oscar suggested that they go to the river first to wash themselves, and then go somewhere else to find some fruit to eat. Daniel and Rose all agree, so they walk out of the cave, and went to a place where most animals are staying, cause they know here has food and water. Daniel went to pick up some fruits, then they went back to the

cave. Rose suggest go in the cave, and see what's inside. Oscar and Daniel didn't stay too long before they set off with rose. Rose get to the destination first and saw a big and weird egg stands in the center. She was attract by this egg, after Daniel and Oscar followed in the egg starts shaking. "What is this?" Ask rose. " I guess it was a dinosaur egg, I have read a book about this." Answered Daniel. "Cool, but why it's shaking?" No one answered, cause they two put all their attention on the egg. It wasn't long before the shell broke, baby dinosaurs popped up from inside. They three were all surprised, but they didn't make a loud noise, cause they are afraid scared the little dinosaur. The baby dinosaur look at them curiously, wandering why they looks so different from him. Rose take out the baby and gives him a name "Bobo", they take Bobo outside the cave and let him adapt the environment first. The second day, many dinosaur comes to this cave at the same time, looks like finding something important. Oscar come up and take Bobo beside them, the biggest dinosaur know who he is at the first time. Rose was doubt why dinosaur is that peace, they thought dinosaur is a very dangerous creature. Surprisingly, the cave belonged to these dinosaurs, but dinosaurs lived in harmony with humans. They lived together for many days, and becomes goods friends. Rose, Oscar and Daniel already forget what are they doing here, but they all know they don't want to go back.

Sadly, peace time didn't last a long time. A noise of squabble waked all the animals in the forest also Rose, Oscar and Daniel. They knew anything can't hide from Amy, scientist still found here. Rose is in charge of sending the animals to a more safer place, Oscar and Daniel went up and to see what's happening in front. Bobo was crying hard, the parent dinosaurs take him in the cave. Oscar and Daniel run back quickly, cause Amy is trying to attack them. Amy send many her trusted followers to attack Rose, Oscar and Daniel and trying to take Dinosaur Island for themselves. " run! And hide to a place that no one can find us!."yelled Oscar. Rose take the dinosaurs and other animals to the cave, these days they noticed Amy will come, so they hide the cave make sure no one can see it. Lucky, before Amy found Oscar and Daniel they run in the cave and stay silent. soldier walk around the forest but didn't see anything, so they decide to go back. Before that they cut all the trees and take lot's foods back. Daniel was so angry and want to run out to fight, next second Rose grab his hand and said: " they will come back, not now." Then Daniel sat down unconvinced. The humans didn't stay for an long time. After they left Rose gathered all the creatures together and said: " we have to do something." " I agree!" Yelled Oscar and Daniel, the other creatures make noise to tell Rose they also agree. " here I has a plan, if we can't fight in front, them let's make some traps to guide them." Said Rose. "Good idea"answered Daniel. Oscar and Daniel quickly get up to arrange the traps, while Rose takes the animals to bed. When Oscar and Daniel come back, it's already middle night, so they quietly get in too asleep.

The next day, as all the people aspect, Amy took a lot of people back. But there are also something different, humans and dinosaurs stands together, getting ready for the fight. They all stands in front of Amy, not afraid at all. "Hey Amy, nice to see you again, come lets to see the dinosaurs." Said Daniel, then they all walk to one direction. The fight begins, Amy and her party are careful where they go. They escape many trap, but the biggest one is still in front, a big hole is waiting for them. Rose was so excited when they are almost stepping in, just like what Oscar imagined,

most people step in the hole. But there are also some people who is standing outside, that means they still have to fight. Oscar and Daniel run fast to their enemy's, just like in the competition at first. Even they won, but Oscar and Daniel are badly injured in the battle, which makes Rose worried. Fortunately, they managed to intercept Amy and her party, but they don't have time to celebrate because Oscar and Daniel are almost dying. Rose first put other people in the hole, then take Oscar and Daniel to the river, cleaning their blood, and get some leaves to tape their wound. "Amy is not going back to our island again, let's go, take all the animal with us." Said Rose. The next day, they start their journey again, what will happen next? What we know is everyone is free...

The Circle

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Gou, Xichen Serena – 16

Wait, Wait. So you think I'm mad? It's OK. Because when I saw that scene, I thought I was a kind of psychopath, too. Do you want me to repeat "the story"? Oh, for sure, but that is not a story.

The day I was notified was very normal, drinking my black coffee, sitting on the chair in my office, doing nothing but just staring at words and comparing them with strokes we had found. I have done things like this for seven years! Three hundred and sixty-five times seven days! I thought something should happen for my effort. Such as the dinosaurs falling from heaven, such as aliens taking control of a country, such as I had a chance to take part in top-secret research. And then, the phone bell rang. I picked it up, and I'm here.

The subject we were researching seemed impossible to interact with or even talk with. It is wrong, impossible, unbelievable! However, when I stood in front of them, sweating, the feelings were so real that my brain couldn't deny them. They were dinosaurs. Not just some rocks deeply buried under the ground. It was alive, moving, staring at me curiously, talking to its companion. My boss spoke to me, and seemed satisfied with my expression, "These are our research subjects."

My position was to figure out their writing. Before I was invited here, the researchers had cleared what they were saying, but only basically. Such as "hello" "Yes" and "No", while they still had completely no idea of their sentence structure and grammar. Therefore communication seemed impossible, which the researchers wouldn't accept. So they found several linguists, including me, willing to find a breakthrough by studying their words. And then they could begin the study of dinosaur physics and chemistry, or else.

When I was just standing there doing nothing because of this "surprise", my boss showed me some pictures. A giant pattern, as complicated as a ball of wool dropped on the floor. The pattern consisted of many lines, twisting, and intertwining, forming fantastic writing.

"This is a word we asked them to write." my boss said.

That time, I knew, I would devote myself to this project my whole life.

Don't you know that feeling? Your soul is burning, your heart is beating so fast that seems it will break, and your whole body is yelling: "I want to do this." You are also researchers! Oh, how poor you are, my friend!

Then I moved into the basement, spending all day in the office trying to find the common between every single word and determine the regular pattern in them. I had never considered the feasibility of this project because it was extremely attractive. Even if I couldn't determine anything, the process of thinking and reading this extraordinary writing itself was the dream of all linguists. I have never regretted taking part in it. Even if things came later destroyed my worldview at all, even if no one could understand me, even if it drove me, as you said, mad.

"These words are really strange," I said to the boss of the director. His thick eyebrows were entwined together like two snakes, definitely, confused by my words.

"There is no space between each character, and they aren't arranged regularly. Instead, it looks like a circle, a loop."

"Explain that."

“I asked them to write a word, a sentence, and then a paragraph. There is a stroke that goes through the whole word and connects its beginning and end. Sentence and paragraph show the same feature, but it is more complex and variable. Such as here, it fluctuates weirdly.”

His eyebrows twisted even more, squeezing his eyes. “So what’s your conclusion?” Obviously, his brain was messed up by many linguists or scientists before, by their “nonsense” conclusion. So I decided not to torture him.

“I need more time.”

He took a deep breath. It seems like the total time linguists asked was more than one century.

“Well, go ahead.”

I spent all my time, almost 15 hours a day, studying dinosaurs’ words. Sometimes, when I had nothing in my brain, I would stand in front of the glass, in front of my subjects, in front of the dinosaurs, which were the rulers of ancient Earth. Their huge bodies kept silent under the white, cold light, casting a giant shadow on me. I put my hand on the glass slightly, but they had no response. Every single time I did this, I would feel a strong, implacable passion, passion of doing my work.

I kept on practicing dinosaur–language writing, the pen moved again and again, and the ink ran out again and again. As I studied their word constantly, my dinosaur–word writing was better and better. I personally called the dinosaur language writing “Circulus–dinero”. Circulus was for “circle”, dino, well, just dinosaur. As for the “sermo”, it meant “word” in Latina, but I preferred another meaning of it: preaching. In the beginning, I had no idea about where my pen should go, which resulted in the words I wrote rarely forming a loop. However, I gradually have a clear mind about how I should write, and where I should go. The first stroke could also be the final stroke I needed to add. My brain started to think about how I wrote. When I considered the beginning, I could reach the end through it. When I caught the clues of an end, I could use them to trace back to the beginning. Tiny vibrates were everywhere, in everything. I could feel them. When I spoke to people, I could catch the pen falling from the desk simultaneously. Because I saw it. It was there. It would fall.

It is hard to explain. Even now I can see something in your body. And that’s what I will say next.

One day, I found that I could see something in dinosaurs. From their toes to their head, similar to the nervous system. But there was a core, that looked like a small black hole, twinkling, radiating violet glimmer, bottomless.

When I finally realized, one of the dinosaurs bowed down, forehead almost being against mine. Its big eyes looked at me, deep and black. There was something in its eyes, like hiding behind a curtain, revealing a vague shadow. I didn’t understand what I saw at the beginning. That night, I just wondered if I was working too much overtime.

But soon, this little black hole appeared in my colleague, in myself, and you. That “illusion” lasted for a long time. I couldn’t help but the image in the dinosaurs’ eyes flashing in my brain. So I went to a psychiatrist and said “Oh my gosh I could see something in your head and it seemed will burst soon.” Just a joke! I had done nothing. It meant nothing to me at that time.

The only change was that I went to see the dinosaurs more and more frequently, and the image in their eyes was gradually walked to the front of the curtain.

Then the moment finally arrived. After two hours of scratching my head and trying unsuccessfully to write a paragraph in dinosaur language, I was possessed by the dinosaur again. I tapped the glass gently, and it, as usual, was

incredibly docile and bent down to look at me. The huge head slowly approached me, but I felt strangely relieved. Its big, grape-like eyes stared at me, and I looked back at it. Through its cold retina, I saw the scene.

The cause of the extinction of dinosaurs is a matter that archaeologists have been arguing about. I am the luckiest person in the world to know the truth. But it may be unfortunate in your eyes.

They just disappeared. Quietly, quickly, in an instant, they were sucked into the black hole in their bodies and disappeared. Wow, how simple and poetic! The ruler of the world, a huge creature, just collapsed into small molecules that no one could see and disappeared!

After this scene, the world was like a movie being fast-forwarded, quickly crossing the Neogene, the Middle Ages, the modern era, and reaching the future with many cars flying in the sky.

Then what? Guess what happened? Ha ha, humans also collapsed like this! One by one, the little creatures busy at work, the little creatures sleeping at home, the little creatures ruling a country, were pressed into that little black hole like compressed biscuits.

The world was immersed in a deep purple glimmer, which was the last scene I saw. When I came back to my senses and broke away from its eyes, it seemed to be smiling at me, smiling, and quickly, just like what I just saw, disappeared.

Emily's Adventure Journal

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Han, Elsa – 14

A young scientist named Emily is passionate about the ancient mysteries of paleontology. My adventure team, which consists of top-tier biologists and students, assembled in the lab today to prepare for an extraordinary task. A unique dinosaur egg lay in front of us; its discovery has disproved every biological theory now in use. This isn't your typical dinosaur egg; it appears to have a secret ability that can cause amazing things to happen.

I set off on a quest with my team using this mysterious egg. In the hopes of getting some hints from the locals, we first visited the location where the dinosaur egg was found. At my earnest request, the villagers related some old stories about a dinosaur realm buried beneath reality, but they were also suspicious of these foreigners.

We passed through the concealed entrance and found ourselves in a vibrant dinosaur world. The dinosaurs here were completely different from what I knew; they were not only gigantic but also possessed unimaginable intelligence.

In this world, my team and I witnessed an entirely new ecosystem, everything here was different from the modern world. I recorded what I saw and heard, hoping to bring this valuable information back to the real world.

But as our investigation progressed, we came across peril. Despite their intelligence, the dinosaurs in this area were hostile to people. Some humans mutated into half-dinosaur, half-human monsters after the dinosaur egg accidentally activated, releasing an unidentified energy. The safety of the entire community was even threatened when these mutant beings started attacking the peasants.

I came to the realization that we need to find a method to avert this catastrophe. We made the decision to return the dinosaur egg to the actual world in the hopes of discovering hints that would help us solve the issue.

When we returned to reality, we discovered that the dinosaur egg's energy had wreaked havoc on the entire planet. People in towns dispersed in fear as dinosaur relics in museums started to come to life. The world would descend into unending panic unless my team and I could figure out how to stop this calamity.

We eventually found that the energy in the dinosaur egg was associated with a rare plant. By

neutralizing the energy emitted by the dinosaur egg, this plant could stop additional human mutation. In order to locate this plant, my group and I took the chance of going back to the dinosaur world.

In the dinosaur world, we found this plant and successfully brought it back to the real world. However, during this process, I was unfortunately affected by the energy of the dinosaur egg, and my body began to mutate. To protect the team, I chose to stay in the dinosaur world, using my newly acquired power to protect this new world and prevent the energy of the dinosaur egg from getting out of control again.

My team brought the plant back to the real world and successfully quelled the chaos. The world gradually returned to normal, and people began to rebuild their homes. As for me, Emily, I remained forever in the dinosaur world.

Emily's sacrifice became an eternal topic. Her adventure diary was published and became a bestseller, inspiring a new generation of explorers and biologists. And that dinosaur egg was safely stored in the museum as a memorial to Emily's courage and sacrifice. The world returned to its normal orbit, but people will never forget that there was once a brave team that embarked on an incredible adventure to protect the world.

Emily's story, and her love for this world, will be passed down forever. Although she has left us, her spirit and courage will continue to inspire every person who explores the unknown. In the world of dinosaurs, she became a legend, a guardian who forever protects the balance between two worlds.

New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Lan, Mary – 15

Cathy opened her eyes.

She looked around in surprise – the green landscape all around her was crashing over her nerves like a wave.

Her view was so vast that she could just lift her head to see the clouds gently drifting above her head, and the fresh air made her breathe deeply and relax.

Cathy had gone through time!

Before, she was just an ordinary high school student, but now...

She tried to lower her head, only to find that her neck was very long, and her body was very heavy.

Oh no, she thought.

She had turned into a titanosaur!

Cathy had been interested in history before, so she had a good understanding of dinosaurs. But now that she had become one herself, she knew them better than anyone. To be honest, Cathy really wanted to dissect herself to see how she was put together.

Thinking about it too much made her hungry, so Cathy went in search of food.

"Ding –"

"Hello, host, I am your personal dinosaur system."

Cathy: ? What's that noise?

"I detected that you are currently inside a dinosaur body, and your task is to take the place of this dinosaur and live on!"

This confused Cathy, as systems like this that only appear in novels would never happen to her, and what's more, it's calling itself a dinosaur system? Such a terrible name.

"System, I'm asking you; what time period are we in now?" At this point, she might as well try her luck, as Cathy didn't expect the system to be of any help to her. For her, this world of the strong preying on the weak was brutal, and she might as well die.

"The host is currently in the Cretaceous Period, 90 million years ago."

Cathy scratched her head irritably in her mind and continued to ask, "How can I get back?"

"It's simple, just complete tasks to exchange for time travel gadgets."

"... Time travel device? That must be expensive."

"Not expensive at all, just 100 million points."

"? Do you even know what you're talking about?"

Well, Cathy could only temporarily do tasks to earn points for now.

I don't know how long it went on, maybe a few years, maybe decades, day after day, Cathy was earning points by completing tasks. For example, eating grass, driving away other dinosaurs, etc. But the points she earned were too little. Each task only earned 100 points, and there was a daily point limit. It was clearly not intended for her to go back.

One day, the system suddenly became very excited and told Cathy that she could go back.

"A spatial rift has been detected ahead, and the host can go back through it!"

"Is that true? I don't believe it."

"This should be one of the few opportunities in the past few thousand years! Host, you must seize the opportunity!"

"....."

In the end, Cathy still trudged to the empty lot, where there was thunder and lightning, dense clouds, and hardly any light.

"You actually want me to die, to be struck by this lightning, I really don't need to live anymore," she said.

"On the contrary, host, when you are struck by the lightning, the time portal will open immediately, so you can go back," the system replied.

Cathy pondered for a moment and decided to trust the system. After all, all these years, she had been constantly thinking about the meaning of her existence. Life here was too comfortable, making her not want to return to reality. But reality, although tiring, was the place where her loved ones and friends were, and she had to go back.

"Host, if given the choice, would you choose to stay here?" the system asked.

"No," Cathy replied decisively, "This place is boring. I prefer a world full of challenges and hope, rather than lying down and doing nothing, although it's tiring, but it's worth it."

"Okay, I believe the host has already made up your mind," the system's mechanical voice faded away.

"Then I will accompany you one more step," the system said.

Cathy's vision was filled with white, and countless currents of electricity entered her body, making her feel painful as if ants were biting her skin.

Then she fell to the side of a river.

"Where is this?" Cathy tried to contact the system.

"The Time River, you can go back now. Just jump into the river ahead of you," the system replied.

Cathy bit her lip and looked at the shimmering water surface, where countless times flowed with the current. The past, present, and future appeared in front of her at the same time, making her sigh. This place was quite similar to the four-dimensional space, and if she had the chance, she still wanted to explore it thoroughly. But it didn't matter, seeing this was enough.

She bid farewell to the system and turned to jump into the Time River.

Cathy opened her eyes again.

This time, she saw the ceiling of her bedroom, a few rays of sunlight streaming in through the curtain gaps, and the cheerful and bright sound of birds outside the window.

Everything she had experienced felt like a dream, yet it was all so real.

She sat up straight and looked at the clock on the table.

December 15th, 2024 Sunday 8:30 am

Friendship Town

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Li, Enzhuo Angel – 15

On the edge of Hashi in China, there is a quiet town surrounded by forests and mountains. The villagers here are cut off from the outside world, they are not interested in changes outside the town, they only focusing on their daily lives within.

Mr. Li Sen is a well-known good man in the town, always ready to help other villagers. His job is as an architect, but he always lend a hand to help other whether it's related to construction or not. He has a very good reputation in the town because of it. Mr. Li Sen has a son named Lee. Lee has been different from other children since he was young; while they drew trees in school, Lee climbed on a tree and saying he want to see wider world outside. The children in town don't understand him, and also he don't have any close friends. The only thing that could be considered a "friend" was a pebble he found during one of his "explorations". Although the people in town don't understand his actions, but there parents asked their children to persuade Lee to do some "normal" things like what other kids are doing for Mr. Li Sen's sake. But as expected, he didn't listen to their advice. Mr. Li Sen sometimes thinks that it's hard to understand his son's thoughts and actions, but because Lee was his son, at most of the time, he supported Lee in doing what he wanted to do.

One day, Lee was exploring the nearby forest. What unlike usual, he went deeper through the forest. He used to just walk around the forest and then go back home. But today, he had a strong feeling to explore more deeper to the forest. After about 15 minutes, he arrived at a place he had never seen before. It was surrounded by lot's of plants and very hidden, making it difficult to discover. Not far away, there was a cave. Lee, feel very curious about the new discovery. He decided to continue exploring and entered the cave.

After entering the cave, Lee heard some strange noises and he think that there must be some secret hidden in the cave. He slowly went deep into the cave. It was so dark that he had to use a mini flashlight he was carrying. After turning on the flashlight, he was shocked to find that there was a dinosaur inside! Lee was so surprised, he fell down because of it. He knew that dinosaurs were extinct and could not be alive today. But in front of him, there was a baby dinosaur! The little dinosaur was afraid to see Lee, too. It had been hunted by humans and had stumbled upon this cave to hide. The little dinosaur had never expected to be found by humans so fast, and was very afraid of human. Lee saw many small wounds on the baby dinosaur, although he was shocked and a little scared of the little dinosaur, but he decided to help clean up the wounds on the little dinosaur.

After cleaning the wound, Lee felt that this baby dinosaur must be really hungry and have not eaten for a long time. So he gave the little dinosaur the only sausage he had brought. After eating the sausage that Lee gave him, the little dinosaur realized Lee seems different from other human; He is very kind and friendly. The little dinosaur relax one's vigilance and trusted Lee. Lee found that the baby dinosaur was not that scary, although the little dinosaur is already hurt by the human, but the little dinosaur still chose to trust human. They became good friends because of this accident and Lee also named the little dinosaur Dino.

Lee would come to the cave and visits Dino whenever he had time, and each time he comes he will brings Dino some food and some interesting things happened recently in the town. They listened to the birds singing during the day and looked at the stars together at the night. Over time, they have become very important partners for each other. However, somehow, Dino's news are known by someone else. Recently, the town put up a notice that said,

"The forest is dangerous, do not enter." After this notice was sent out, Mr. Lee Sen advised him not to venture in the forest. Reluctantly, Lee agreed. Lee did not see Dino for days.

The news of dinosaur living in the forest caused a sensation among the villagers. They were scared and curious of it. Even though they usually don't care about the outside world, but this mysterious news couldn't keep them calm. There was a scientist in town which every other people call him Dr. Chen. Because of the town's closed-minded thinking, Dr. Chen's scientific research had not made any progress. When he knew about the news of Dino, he thinks that it is a very rare chance to make him famous. He quickly gathered his team and began searching around forest to find Dino, he hopes he can solve the mystery of dinosaurs and make a contribution to science to let him become famous.

While Lee secretly visiting Dino, he perceived the suspicious actions of Dr. Chen and his team. He realized that Dino's safety might be threatened, so he decided to take a protective action. He moved Dino to a more hidden place, a secret place which only he knew. The new secret place is deep in the forest, Lee found a cave hidden by vines and bushes, which he believed could provide a safe haven for Dino. He then started setting up a series of traps and misleading paths to confuse Dr. Chen and his team. Dino and Lee worked together and soon designed a very complex defense system.

When Dr. Chen discovered that Dino's hiding place had been changed, he was very angry and began to search for Dino's new location. As Dr. Chen and his team got closer to Dino's new hiding place, Dr. Chen's team accidentally triggered the traps set by Lee and Dino. They quickly returned back to the cave together. Dino protecting Lee with body, and Lee holding Dino tightly. Lee thanked Dino for its protection at this critical moment.

After this incident, Lee became more determined to protect Dino. He knew that as long as Dino was alive, there would be more and more people who wanted to use Dino for benefits. He must protect his best friend. He decided not to act alone anymore but to seek help from his father and other villagers and let Dino's live be safely in the forest.

Lee began to tell the villagers the story of his friendship with Dino, telling that Dino is friendly. At first, the villagers were scared and skeptical about Dino's existence, also not believing what Lee is saying. But as Lee persisted and showed his sincerity, villagers were touched and began to understand and accept Dino. The villagers started to help Lee, guarding the secret of the forest together. They took turns to guard the forest edge to make sure no one entered without permission. Some villagers used their skills, like making traps and hidden paths to strengthen the defense. Also, they spread a legend about a "guardian beast" in the forest to scared outsiders.

Over time, the town became more and more harmonious, and the relationship between the villagers and nature became more and more close.

After these things that happen with Lee and Dino, Dr. Chen starts to question his own actions. Initially, he believed that capturing Dino would earn him fame and could breakthrough his scientific research. However, after he saw the friendship between Lee and Dino, also with the villagers' solidarity in protecting Dino, he realized that it is his mistake. Thinking back on his original intention for science, he respects nature. He realized

that his actions contravened the essence of scientific and the principles of living with nature. Filled with repent, he decided to start changing.

Dr. Chen admits his mistake and seeks forgiveness, he promises that he will stop his plan to catch Dino. He then uses his scientific knowledge and resources to assist villagers in designing systems to protect the forest. He also engages in Dino's protecting efforts and educates the villagers on the importance of dinosaurs and nature conservation. Over time, Dr. Chen earns the trust and respect from all other villagers, also goes back to his passion for the original scientific research.

After Dr. Chen regaining his reputation in the scientific community, he become a leading figure in nature conservation in the town. Working with Lee and Dino, he works constantly to ensure the safety of the forest and the town. He instilled young people a sense of responsibility and the importance of protecting nature. Dino became the real guardian beast of the town, and its story was passed down from generation to generation, reminding people to cherish and protect our home together.

Dinosaur Regeneration Project

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Li, Sichan Angela – 14

One day in the future, the Earth is no longer our only home, with the progress of science and technology, human's mind is turned to the wider universe and world, like a new world. After three years of scientific research and the continuous experiment, the scientist have found evidence of a habitable environment on Mars, that mean, Mars maybe a another planet suitable for life. Thus, the Mars colonization program was officially launched. At this historic moment, an even more startling plan has emerged.....Human decided to pick out a bunch of dinosaur fossils on Earth, and then extract their DNA genetic sample, reactivate genes, sending these strong dinosaur to Mars to hatch, and rebuilding the dinosaur kingdom, restore the Earth billions of years ago.

Then, the project start, the scientist use the latest cloning techniques extracted the DNA from dinosaur fossils, there are many varieties of these chosen resurrection targets, including triceratops, stegosaurus, Tyrannosaurus Rex and so on. After a year of laboratory cultivation, the first successful experiment dinosaur embryos were appeared, when the news disseminate, the whole world was shocked, an idea that everyone thought was impossible has been proven, everyone is looking forward to the result of the plan. After the surprise, the scientists didn't let up and they are not complacent, They continue to clone more dinosaur embryos, work hard for their big dreams. In the end, they selected the four most healthy and strong embryos, and carefully placed them in the spacecraft, took them to the mysterious red planet. But what they don't know is that while rejoicing, an evil plan has been gradually budding. After they reaching the surface of Mars, the space team immediately established an ecological park called "Dinosaur Empire", this is a simulation of Earth's Cretaceous ecological environment, there are dense forests vast plains and small lakes, there has everything that dinosaur needs. Five weeks after the dinosaurs arrived on Mars, the first eggshell cracked and made a tiny sound, human's history has turned to a new page, the curious eyes touch the world for the first time, and the baby dinosaurs start to try to walk, explore his surroundings, feel the strange breath. When the news reached the scientist lab, all the scientists felt great relief.

As time goes by. other dinosaur eggs are hatching too, the dinosaurs gradually adapted to their new home on Mars, they are very happy there, there is where they run, hunt and procreate, and they make an ecosystem. And the scientist also find a very pleasant news, like due to the lower gravity of Mars, carnivorous dinosaurs who walk slow on Earth can walk and move fast, they become to surprisingly agile, for example, they can make short leaps in the air on Mars, and for the grass eating dinosaurs, however, they learned to take advantage of Mars's unique vegetation resources, they shown a good ability to adapt. Mars, once considered a desolate planet, has become to a paradise that full of life, and all the dinosaurs lived in harmony here. Scientist decide to install a camera to watch the dinosaurs, and they doing a deep studying of the dinosaurs on Mars through remote monitoring. Then they made an important discovery, dinosaurs were far more intelligent than expected, they are more smarter, some of them are starting to form the simple communities, and learn how to use the tools like a human, they shows the great wisdom. This momentous discovery broke all previous human understanding before, this has led to a profound discussion about the nature of life. Every thing is going well here.

At the same time, scientist stationed on Mars also began to explore ways to live peacefully with the dinosaurs, they want to try to make friends with the dinosaurs. They started walk into the dinosaur ecosystem, and they touch the dinosaurs for the first time. This time, they are not sitting behind the monitoring room and looking at the screen, they try to imagine cross species communication.

But nothing will ever go perfectly smooth, scientist discovered that their surveillance had been implanted with a computer virus, a new electronic virus that they never seen before. in a panic, the scientists called the most famous

hackers to help them fix this problem, but even the strongest computer genius, also can't help it. When the scientists are most anxious, they found that the dinosaur had been stolen unknowingly. It's making everyone feel dejected. This was actually a work of an evil group called the League of shadows, they want to use the dinosaurs to help them fight and dominate the world, the virus was just a diversion, their real goal was to steal the dinosaur while the scientists were fixing the surveillance cameras.

For the rest of the time, all the scientists kept investigating the evil group, the goal is to recover the dinosaur as soon as possible. Finally, after two months of investigation, they were able to locate the evil group. After hearing the news, the governments of all countries banded together and set up a special rescue team, assembled the best of our military and the best scientists. A program called Operation lights was developed. The rescue team penetrated the enemy base, an intense and exciting operation was launched, they fight with the enemy, after a series of fierce encounters, the rescue team finally found the location where the dinosaur was held, they opened the cage and released the dinosaur, in that time, more enemy is coming, they start to fight again, the second war is began. During the fight, scientists were surprised to find that, those dinosaurs would help them fight with the evil, and they were very smart, they shows the unprecedented unity and wisdom, they seem to sense danger, start trying to escape and even help humans fight off their enemies. Especially that smart raptor, it has learned and imitated human tactics. In the end, they took on the enemy and eventually defeated the evil group together, the dinosaurs were rescued, they succeeded in saving the dinosaurs. This action is not only for punished the bad guys, it also increased the trust and friendship between humans and dinosaurs. When they back to Mars, everyone receive a hero's welcome, their stories inspire everyone and become the embodiment of courage and wisdom. The Mars incubation program is back on trade, everything is become better.

As the Mars hatching dinosaur program continues to develop, scientists have made more discoveries. They were pleasantly surprised to learn that dinosaurs weren't just copies, they they are a true form of regenerative life, they have their own thoughts and emotions, this upends the traditional idea of cloning.

This project to bring dinosaurs back from Mars is not just a demonstration of technological prowess, it is a great progress of human civilization. It testifies to the tenacity of life, even across the barriers of time and space, we can also get unexpected results. Life, no matter what form it takes, deserves to be treated fairly. Human beings, as representatives of the earth, shoulder the heavy responsibility of safeguarding the diversity of life, we should learn to appreciate and live with it, not just conquer it. Every living being has its own consciousness and emotions and should not be a tool for human beings, we should live in harmony with nature and protect the earth and every life in the universe.

Windy and Koyama

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Li, Xintong Chloe – 14

Chapter 1–The isolated world

Deep in a dense forest forgotten by time, the sun struggles to penetrate the canopy and dashes on the ancient ferns, forming flickering light. This is an isolated world ; a corner untouched by modern civilization. In this mysterious land, ancient creatures still wander among here, they are prehistoric giants – dinosaurs.

Awaken in the forest

The protagonist of the story is a young raptor called Windy. It wakes up by ferns surrounding, its sharp eyes slowly opened to adjust the light coming through the cracks of canopy. Windy's body was covered by a layer of delicate feathers, glistened in the sun with a deep blue luster, as if it's a protective color given by nature.

Windy stood up and gently shook the dew from his body. His movements were graceful and gentle. He began to walk in the woods, looking for his breakfast. All around was a lively scene of insects busying the undergrowth and small mammals darting through the tree trunks.

Windy's senses are so acute that it can pick up the faintest sounds and smells. It is light on its feet and hardly makes a sound, which is its instinct as a predator. The wind's eyes are curious and alert, and he knows that in this ancient forest there are both dangers and opportunities. His eyes wandered among the treetops, searching for possible prey.

Encounter in the woods

Just as Windy is about to catch a small dinosaur that is hunting for food, he hears something not far away. It was a young Triceratops named Koyama, who was clumsily trying to reach the leaves on a tree. Koyama was large in size relative to the high wind, but it moved slowly and was clearly a child.

Windy stopped and wondered at the appearance of the Koyama. It knew Triceratops were usually social animals, but Koyama seemed to be on his own. Windy's intuition told him that the hill was no threat, and he decided to move closer for a better view.

Koyama noticed the Windy's gaze. It looked nervous, but it did not run away. There was an innocence and curiosity in his eyes, as if he were curious about his new friend, Windy. Windy approached slowly, its movements careful so as not to startle Koyama.

The accidental friendship

As time went on, the tension between Windy and Koyama faded. They began to walk together in the woods, exploring this mysterious world. Windy taught Koyama how to find food, and Koyama showed Windy its amazing power, and their friendship quietly grew in the ancient forest.

Together, they traversed dense jungle, crossed babbling streams, and even chased across an open meadow. The speed and agility of Windy, combined with the strength and endurance of Koyama, make them a unique sight in the forest.

As the sun sinks, the light in the forest begins to soften. Windy and Koyama found a quiet place to rest. They know that tomorrow will be a new beginning, and they will continue to explore the unknown mysteries of this ancient and mysterious world.

Chapter 2– The roar of nature

In this forest forgotten by time, the friendship between Windy and Koyama grows quietly in the ancient land like a new bud. They do not know that a sudden natural disaster is about to break the peace of this forest and test their courage and wisdom.

The omen of storm

Windy rushes through the forest, its acuminous sense picks up the subtle changes in the air. There was an unusual trace of moisture in the wind, it's a sign of an approaching storm. Windy stopped and looked up at the sky, where heavy clouds were slowly approaching from a distance, blocking the sun.

Koyama also felt the unusual breath, his footsteps became hesitant, there was a hint of unease in its eyes. He turned to Windy and sought the answer with those innocent eyes. Windy touched Koyama's body gently with his tail, trying to soothe his friend.

"Don't be afraid, Koyama." The voice of Windy rang in his heart, and though Koyama could not understand it, it could feel its calm and strength. "We will face the coming storm together."

Windy began to lead Koyama in search of a shelter, and they sought shelter through the thick jungle. There was a determined light in the Windy's eyes, and he knew that, as a predator, he had to protect this new friend.

Seeking for shelter

Led by Windy, they came to an open field where there was a large rock under which a natural cave had formed. Windy remembered this cave, where he had once taken shelter from the rain, and knew it was a safe refuge.

The interior of the cave is large and dry enough for both of them to hide. Windy and Koyama crowded at the entrance of the cave, their eyes fixed on the outside world. The wind became violent, the trees swayed and rustled in the wind. Rain began to fall, a few drops at first, but soon became a downpour. Koyama's body trembled slightly, he had never experienced such a violent storm. Windy presses close to the hill and warms it with its own body heat. Their eyes met in the shadows of the cave, and a silent understanding formed between them, they knew they will overcome this storm safely.

The outside world became blurred, and the sound of rain and wind intertwined, just like a symphony of nature. Windy and Koyama listened, their hearts filled with awe of the nature.

Revelation in the storm

The storm lasted all night, and when the first ray of sunlight penetrates the cloud and lit up the forest, Windy and Koyama came out of the cave. They were shocked by what they saw. After the storm, the forest changed beyond recognition. The fallen trees, the overturned soil, everything seems to be so fragile.

Windy and Koyama began to patrol the forest, and they saw what had happened to the other dinosaurs in the storm. Some small animals were injured and some plants were uprooted. Windy and Koyama decided to help the injured creatures, and in their own way, they did their part to restore the forest. Windy use his keen senses to find injured animals, while Koyama use his powers to help clear obstacles in their path. They work together, hard as it is, but their hearts are filled with satisfaction. In this process, they not only help other creatures, but also deepen their friendship with each other.

Chapter 3— Meeting the pterosaur

Helping the pterosaur

Windy had caught an unusual scent in the forest, and it stopped and looked up at the sky. A pterosaur hovered in the air, its wings seemingly flapping unnaturally, clearly injured. The wind's eyes were fixed on the pterosaur, and he could sense its anxiety and pain. Koyama also noticed the pterosaur in the air, looking curiously at the high wind with its big eyes, as if to ask what to do next. Windy did not say a word, but answered Koyama with a firm look, and then ran quickly in the direction of the landing of the pterosaurs.

The pterosaur eventually landed in an open field with visible scars on its wings and blood dripping down its feathers. Windy and Koyama approached cautiously, and the pterosaur raised its heads warily, their eyes flashing with fear and

distrust. Windy slows down his steps, he can sense the pterosaur's tension. He looks gently and friendly into the pterosaur's eye, trying to convey his kindness. Koyama watched quietly, just like knowing that his size might make the pterosaurs feel threatened.

After a period of confrontation, the pterosaur finally let its guard down. It lowered its head and gave a little chirp, as if asking for help. Windy and Koyama sprang into action and began to look around for herbs that could be used to heal the pterosaur's wounds.

Seeking for herb

Windy knows this forest so well and he knows which plants can be used to heal wounds. He led Koyama through the thick undergrowth to a meadow full of strange plants. Windy carefully selects the herbs, for fear of destroying these precious plants. For Koyama, he was here to help, sniffing the herbs with his nose, and though he did not know how to use them, he was willing to do what he could to help the wind. Working together, they soon gathered enough herbs.

Back at the pterosaur's side, Windy begins to treat the pterosaur's wound gently. He uses his mouth to apply the herb to the pterosaur's wound and then holds the herb in place with his saliva. The pterosaur resisted at first, but soon felt the coolness and relief of the herbs, and its eyes were filled with gratitude.

Contending for territory

Just as Windy and Koyama are about to leave, a flock of pterosaurs appear in the sky. They're the companions of the wounded pterosaur, but they're not here to thank them. These pterosaurs think Windy and Koyama are intruders of their territory, so they hovered in the air, making threatening chirps. Windy and Koyama were aware of the tension and stood back to prepare for a possible attack. One particularly large pterosaur in the group lets out a high-pitched call, as if giving the order to attack.

Windy and Koyama did not escape. They knew this fight was inevitable. The speed and agility of Windy, combined with the strength and endurance of Koyama, make them opponents that can not be underestimated.

The group of pterosaurs began to dive, their claws glittered in the sunlight. Windy moved quickly across the ground, evading the attacks of the pterosaurs while looking for opportunities to counter. On the other side, Koyama uses its strong body to shield Windy from the pterosaurs' attack.

After a fierce battle, both sides began to feel exhausted, and the pterosaurs finally realize that they cannot easily defeat Windy and Koyama. The largest of the pterosaurs let out a long cry that seemed to be announcing a retreat. The group of pterosaurs first gave a confusing call, but then eventually left the territory.

Windy and Koyama stood where they were, watching the direction where the pterosaur vanished, with a few bruises on their body. In their eyes, there's determination and pride as they protect not only themselves, but also the wounded pterosaurs.

End

Within the pterosaurs' departure, the forest is silent again. Windy and Koyama stood in the sunset, feeling tired but also relaxed. Since they've met, it seems to be so many days, so many weeks, even so many years. Together, they overcame so many difficulties, and came through so many soul stirring events. Windy and Koyama know, deep inside their heart, although they can't be together forever, but as long as they are united, nothing is impossible.

Dark

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Li, Ziang Daniel – 15

The wind blows through the mountain valley, strong enough to split the mountain into two pieces. A group of scientists and soldiers are setting a camp outside of the Kunlun mountain. The leader of that group of scientists is John Doerr. The first impression John gives to people is he is incredibly tall and strong. He is six feet, eight inches tall, with blue eyes with brown hair. He waves his hand to General Arthur. "We need more men!" John shouted.

One month before. On a sunny morning, John woke up at 6 am. He believes in taking care of himself and having a regular exercise routine with a balanced diet. If his face is a little puffy, he will put on an ice bag while doing his stomach crunches, he can do a thousand now. He finished his regular routine like an artificial machine. He then drove his 2021 vintage Mercedes-Benz to his company. The headquarters of his company is located in a valley in the forest, surrounded by trees and lakes. He drove through this mysterious road all the way up to the company. The wind was blowing, and birds were screaming. The forest was covered under the shadow of dark clouds, the trees at the side of the road stood straight like marine soldiers, staring at John.

"Talk to me Kendall," John said.

"Good morning Sir, your schedule has been provided on your desk. You also have an appointment with a defensive administrator at 1:30 pm, sir."

John stood in front of the window and took his blazer off. "Thank you, Kendall." He answered.

"My pleasure, sir."

John sat on his chair and looked around his office, which was colossal and uncanny. The walls are made of obsidian, whenever light shines on the walls, the dinosaur's skull hidden in the walls can be seen faintly. John's face looked extremely abnormal, his eyebrows curved like a hockey blade, and he bites his lips so hard it start bleeding.

After a period of silence, he whispered: "God please help me this time."

After a while, Defensive Minister, Mr.Marshall, arrived in a blacked-out G wagon.

"Nice seeing you again Mr.John, shall we?" Mr.Minister said.

John shakes his hand with Mr. Administer and says, "Straight to the point? I like it, nice to meet you again Mr.Marshall, come with me."

They walked through the gloomy, minimalist corridors, it's scary how quiet the corridors are. Even the sound of a drop of water can be magnified thousands of times.

"So, I heard you found something inside Kunlun Mountain," John said.

"Indeed, it's a T-Rex, what is your plan for it?" Marshall replied.

They walked into John's office and sat on the couch, John took out a bottle of whiskey and poured himself a drink.

"This is what we got now, we've taken five pictures during its sleep, but we can't make any moves now unless we have a backup from your company, that's why I want to have this meeting with you Mr. John." Marshall dropped a file wrapped in brown paper on the table.

"How many men do you need?" John asked.

"How much you got?" Marshall replied.

It was a long night for everyone, John and Marshall stayed at the office all night, discussing their plan. That night had a lot of anomalies, the sky started crying, and the wind started blowing frantically. Suddenly, a gust of wind bumped the gate open with rage. The watchdog started barking, it's not just a call, it's a warning.

The next morning, John woke up with dark circles around his eyes. He got up from his couch, the room was cold and cheerless. He wiped his face with a warm towel, then quickly put on his blazer.

"Kendall, drive me back to home," John said.

"Yes sir."

After a while, he returned home, to that cold, empty mansion. As usual, John did his morning routine. But this time, he didn't drive his 2021 vintage Mercedes to his company, instead, he stayed at home for the whole day, in his basement. At nightfall, John cooked himself a ceremonial dinner. He first put butter and rosemary in the pan, then he carefully added the codfish, after which he added light cream, garlic, and white wine. The kitchen is full of the smell of gourmet, John sat down by himself and opened a bottle of 82s Lafite Rothschild. The tattoo on his arm is faintly discernible from view.

"Hasta la vista baby." is what he tattooed on his arm. The way John acted was so elegant, even the cherry tree outside at his garden started to dance with him. Wind softly blows through the leaves, like couple touching each others face, using the tips of fingers.

Two weeks later, John and his company members are on a plane flying to the Kunlun mountain in China.

General Arthur told the members of the plane through the microphone. "Alright ladies and gentlemen, we're on the way to China now. I believe everyone already knows what is the purpose of this trip. We're going to catch a T-Rex! And John is going to help us achieve that, as for return we'll help them whenever they need."

"Nice robot Mr. John, how much for it?" General Arthur walked by and sat beside John.

"Don't call him like that, his name is Kendall, and he's not for sale," John replied.

"Have you ever met a live T-Rex before Mr. John?" Arthur asked.

"No, I haven't. I can't imagine how it feels like seeing it" John said. He then rolled up his sleeves and said, "You see this scar, Mr. Arthur, I got this scar lifting a raptor skull, these big guys are unbelievable."

They got there without spending much time on the plane. John stood outside of the plane, looking up at the sky and wondering. The forest is surrounded by mountains and rivers, forming an unusual landscape, like the Colosseum in ancient Rome. John gazed into the distance, the mountains in the distance were draped in dark clouds. The smoke that was floating around the forest, cut the tree far away into two parts like a mirage. John Doeer walked out of the nacelle. The rain dropped on his body heavily, the ground had long since turned to mud. All at once, the sound of two animals screaming miserably attracted everyone's alert, a couple of soldiers walked over with weapons to check what is that sound. "Just monkeys fighting with each other!" They shouted. Everyone relaxed again, turning back to what they were working on.

"General, let's go to a higher spot." John waved his hand and shouted at General Arthur. "Let's go Kendall." "Yes, my lord" Kendall replied. The way up to the top of the mountain is extremely steep and dangerous. John sat at the back of his G-wagon looking stressed, he looked outside through the window, it was dead silence here. Once at the top of the hill, it didn't take them long to set up camp, everyone was working on their job, getting ready for the hunt tomorrow.

John woke up early the next day, he put on his blazer and took a little walk around the camp. He puts his fingers across in front of his chest, thinking of something on his mind. Even if they're in the forest he is still so elegant, he puts a pan on the stove, cracks an egg open, he then mixes it with a bit of salt. John always exuded a sense of elegance, he enjoyed his omelet, grilled bacon and mushrooms with a cup of skim milk. By the time of sunrise, everyone in the camp started to wake up and get ready. John's staff opened the back of the truck and carried all the equipment to the tent.

"Launch the drones, gentlemen." John walked into the tent and said it to his crew.

Countless mini drones started to fly away from the camp, hovering in the air. They flew over the forest path, they flew over the creek, they flew over the mountains.

A few days later, "We got it, boss. I have visual on the main target." Jake said.

"Well done Jake." John quickly walked behind Jake and tapped his shoulder.

John walked out of the tent and told Kendall, "Go tell General Arthur that we are good to go."

"Understood sir," Kendall replied. The SWAT team and John's crew were ready and waiting to go, they approached the T-Rex at a breakneck speed.

It was a cloudy day and it was raining heavily. It was difficult for cars to even cross a rushing creek because the mud on the ground caused the vehicle to sag. The visibility was bad, they couldn't see anything even if it was in front of them. A thunder strike suddenly lit the sky for a few seconds. It is a huge... huge dinosaur. She was covered with dark gray skin, there were several spikes on her back. Her skin was covered with hard, splintered scales. Her huge thighs were a stark contrast to the tiny human beings. Her claws are like the claws of an eagle, but with bigger and sharper fingernails. Her eyes appear in a brick-red color, anyone who looks into her eyes can't stop shaking and being afraid.

T-Rex's footprint was still in the mud, it was big, incredibly large. It moves slowly, the ground is shaking whenever it walks. The birds standing on the tree branch flew as fast as they could, everything beside it looked so small and weak. They followed the T-Rex all the way to its cave where it rested and slept. The SWAT team and John ran to the cave entrance.

"John, we will use the tranquilizer gun later, and for now let's keep absolute silence until she's asleep." General Arthur whispered to John. Arthur and his SWAT team started to walk quietly in the cave after night falls. The T-Rex was incredibly large, and every time she breathed it was like a thunderclap.

Arthur's team stood around the T-Rex in a circle, he whispered, "Shoot on three. One, Two, Three." The crew standing around the T-Rex used the tranquilizer gun. But it seems that the T-Rex was awakened by the sting, she flicked her tail and just tried to stand up but fainted right away again.

"Come in John" General shouted outside. John Doeer was shocked by what he was seeing, he stood straight in front of the T-Rex, not moving just watching.

"Very good job gentleman. Let's pack her up and get home." Arthur said.

Arthur walks by and stands beside John, he puts his right arm around John and says: "She an absolute beauty, am I right Mr. John."

"Absolutely Mr. Arthur. I imagined millions of times what it would be like to meet her, and then now, she is finally mine." John reached his hand to the right side under his coat, pulled out a revolver, and pointed it in front of General Arthur's head.

"John what are you doing!" Arthur looked into John's eye.

"You really think that I'm going to let you take this T-Rex? She's mine Mr. Minister" John an undetectable smile appeared on his face as he placed his finger on the trigger and slowly pulled it.

The SWAT team was shocked, the soldiers stood there as their souls flew away from their bodies. "Kill them all!" John said.

The cave echoed with screams and gunshots. Suddenly T-Rex was awakened by the gunshot inside the cave, and she broke free of her bonds. The T-Rex was enraged by the human's actions, and she roared at the sky. The cave again echoed with screams, but no more gunshots. And all that's left now is death and silence. No one has escaped from there, that eerie place of death.

A Dinosaur With Feathers in China

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Lin, Xiaoyu Tiffany – 15

In the pitch-dark night, the wind whistled upon the man's ears, rain drops splashed on the windows, a thunderstorm is coming. He looked down the building, huge edifices are like black monsters staring at him, he saw lights of myriad families, but none of any belong to him, he thought of his wife, her daughter, every second with them is always meaningful, every time he thought about them, his heart felt a pain deeply in his heart, he truly missed them.

That day, the rain came down in sheets, the man's wife and the daughter was driving on the precipitous mountains road, trying to be on time for the 10th anniversary of their marriage, but they were on their phones, arguing about the man's behavior and time spent with his family, he was stubborn on his point, he wanted to make a rise in life, he would not trying to reach that goal until he had succeeded.

The rain fell heavier, it was like raining cats and dogs in the sky, the quarreling seemed to mix with the raindrops, after a large honk, suddenly everything stopped, the world was like in slow motion, the mother cradled the daughter into her arms, the car flew out, crashing onto the mountain rocks, the wife closed her eyes forever, the doctor said the girl has a slim chance of waking up and she would be in danger in any second. At that moment, he felt that the time has finally started moving, every second was like a kind of trail, hammering him on the pole of shame..

He returned to his thoughts. Suddenly, he saw a book lying on the ground, it must be blown down by the wind, he thought, but when he walked close, there was a pterosaur on the book, it was flying freely on the sky, he cannot figure out why this book was on the shelf before, suddenly, a bright light shimmered out of the book, an outline of an animal appeared, what happened, he thought, he walked up close to get a better look, it was a humongous dinosaur that has wings on the back, he immediately realized it was a pterosaur! On the top of the roof in 2021! It was a miracle.

"It could not be there, it would be caught by scientists and sent to the lab for researching!" he thought, so then he slowly approached the pterosaur scared it would be frightened and fly away, but it didn't! it was acting clam as he approached him, and was responding to his touches, the feathers were light and soft, when he lied on its back, it was like If he was riding a blanket that could fly, it purred at him when he touched it, how could a dinosaur be this adorable! He planned to take this cute thing back home and make sure it was safe from those evil scientists, he started finding a suitable place for him to habitat in, it was his bedroom, they slowly began to fall in sleep, his excitement has overwhelmed the sadness he has had before, it was truly a great day.

Rays of sun slips through the curtains, spotting the bed sheets with honeycomb colors and patterns. The first thing he did was rushing into the bedroom to look at the pterosaur, the creature was sleeping soundly on his bed, its belly rising and falling when breathing, this was truly the most marvelous scene he had seen ever. After a while, the eyes of that creature began to open, sunlight reflected into the pulps, it was like an emerald glistening in deep blue, the whole world would fall to have a glimpse of this. At that moment, he had made a decision, it would be named as Taran, meaning that it was the thunder which brought him here, he would protect him no matter what.

Day and night, he spent every second with his dinosaur, this furry thing would look at him while he was eating breakfast, reading books, it would still stare at him even if he was too sleepy to open his eyes, as if he would vanish at any second. Every rainy day, they would sit on the balcony, his head on the Taran's shoulder, staring into the foggy rain, slowly forgetting why he was standing on the top of the roof, bit by bit. Life just when on like this for a month.

One day, a heavy bang on the door interrupted the calm life he has spent for the last few weeks, “oh no”, he muttered, its them again, after since his wife died, he cannot afford to pay the debt of their original house, so he moved to this small attic but still had a hard life of paying the rent. They cannot take away my dinosaur, it was his first thought, he rushed down the stairs, pushing Taran too. Once he started the car, his heart fell into place, but at the instant he went out the garage, he froze, it was a rainy day, after that accident, he cannot drive a car on rainy days because of posttraumatic stress disorder, but thinking of Taran, he gritted on his teeth and kept on going.

Unconsciously, he drove onto the road that his wife has driven before the accident.

Same road, same weather, still the same kind of honk, the car flipped down the mountain, at the last second, Taran pushed him onto the road and fell down, not flying because of an injure on the back of its wing, sheds of blood mixed with rainwater, glass fragments spread on the ground, he slowly fainted.

The white light from the hospital woke him up, he immediately thought about Taran, after pulling the nurses sleeve and asking for a sign for Taran, but after being misunderstood for an maniac, he gave up, as if Taran has never existed on earth.

He came home in a daze, but found a book on the ground, it has recorded every moment of them together, on the last page, it was—dad, I miss you.

They Taran lived in his mind forever, after 10years, he became the first man to find a dinosaur with feathers in china.

Through the Age of Dinosaurs: A Visual and Spiritual Journey

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Lin, Yanxi Chrysta – 14

The sun shines brightly in the sky, with the birds singing on the tree all seem to show that today is a sunny day, unless if you didn't hear the radio, sharping sound calling, "Attention please, attention please, today afternoon and evening will be having rainstorm, please do not go outside." No one will know the weather forecast will gently bring the opening of an mystery adventure to the age of dinosaurs, waiting for the last thing or the last person to come.

I, a high school girl, am having a big dream about exploring the dinosaur world just like my favorite book "The Age Of Dinosaurs" say. This is an amazing adventure book, attract my attention when I first seen it. Each page is like a door that can bring me to the ancient times, leading my mind through the mystery dinosaur world of time and space.

I read the book for hours, putting myself in the drawings of this fantastic book, as if I could hear the wind and the see the clearer of the water in ancient times, as well as the roar and footsteps of the huge creatures that had long gone extinct – dinosaurs.

While I was reading, suddenly a strange light broke the silence. The strange light is falling like the brightest shooting star in the night sky. I stared in amazement, forgetting about anything, only to feel that the body was being pulled by an invisible force, and quickly flew away in some unknown direction. I was stunned, terrified, but I could not stop the powerful force pulling me. When the light faded and there's no pulling feel, I slowly opened my eyes and found myself in a completely unfamiliar environment, everything before me was completely different, I was not in my lovely room, instead in a non-ending forest.

All around is the dense forest, tall trees blot out the sun, but the sunlight still peak through the leaves, bringing sprinkle light and shadow. The air was fresh with the smell of earth, and the growl of dinosaurs could be heard far deep in the forest. I was feared, even though I love adventure, but still not this sudden, I'll probably prefer if I'm still dreaming. Filled with shock and confusion, questions are sticking in my mind. Did I really travel to the dinosaur world in the book? How can this magical thing ever happen? No sooner had any other thought occurred than it was replaced by a fear. I looked around, trying to find something familiarity, however yet everything was so strange and mysterious.

My vision became very clear, maybe because of the fear that let me be in a self protecting position. In the distance far away, I saw a giant dinosaur moving forward, its huge body and a long tail cover all the things near in shadows, each step seem to bring the earth shaking. I saw the winged dinosaur flying in the sky, flying high and free. I also saw those carnivorous dinosaurs in the shadows, their eyes twinkling with shine, ready to attack their prey.

However, I realized that this strange world was exactly different than the normal one, there are strange plant that I've never seen before. I must find my way back soon, or I will be trapped forever in this unknown and dangerous age of dinosaurs. Not even the dinosaurs, I can also die because there's no food or water. I began to think about the book's description of the world of dinosaurs, trying to find some clues. But while I gladly see the book beside me, there is one line on the open page, "I sense that you have a strong desire to explore the world of dinosaurs, luckily you have me, a magic book. I'll give you one mouth to explore the dinosaur world, good luck."

I was almost desperate in this sentence, I have no idea of how to live a month long. Just then a rush of footsteps from far to near interrupted my thoughts. I followed the sound and saw a young man with sharp eyes running towards me. He wore a tight uniform with a sharp dagger at his waist and a full backpack on his back.

He stopped, looked at me curious, and asked, "Who are you? Where did you come from, here's too dangerous why you're here?" I was stunned by all this question, he's the people living in this world? I took a deep breath and told him what had happened. When he heard it, there was a of surprise in his eyes, but he soon calm and introduced

himself, "My name is Jack, a biologist. I'm the leader of a adventure group, and our job is to discover the dinosaur world. Now that you're here, why don't you join us? We have different people at all place here, group is always better than one person."

Just as I was about to nod my head, there was a loud roar, and then a huge carnivorous dinosaur run out of the trees, its eyes staring on me, as if it had see me as its next prey. I was so frightened by this sudden that I stood still and forgot to run away. At that moment, Jack quickly reacted, he look at the dinosaur like they're both waiting each other to move and start the fight. I gradually regained my thought back and began to look for an way to escape.

After I hide, Jack starts a fierce fight with the dinosaur and succeeded, the dinosaur run away. When he come back to me, he patted me on the shoulder and said, "Well, we've got to get out of here. I'll take you back to our base. It will be much safer there."

Under Jack's leadership, I gradually get into the life of the team. The small team includes an herbalist named Ellie, who is well in the medicinal properties of so many plants; And a biologist named Lone, who had so much interest in dinosaurs, his main job is to record information about dinosaurs. The four of us face a world full of unknowns and dangers, but none of us are afraid.

One day, we decided to go deep into the jungle in search of a magical plant, in the middle of the march, Ellie suddenly stopped walking, she pointed to a patch of grass ahead of her, and whispered: "Watch out, there seems to be movement." We approached slowly, and sure enough we found a group of herbivorous dinosaurs finding food. They are large, but gentle and no ill towards humans.

However, just then, a carnivorous dinosaur suddenly burst in and broke the original calm. It stared at us with its eyes, as if it wanted to eat all of us all. We moved quickly to the sudden threat.

Jack stood in front of us with a dagger in his hand. He shouted, "Don't panic, everybody, stay calm! Lone, you watch the movements of the dinosaurs; Ellie, you have your herbs ready; I will try to direct his attention." With that, he walk out a bit, trying to attract the attention of the carnivorous dinosaur.

Lone quickly takes out his book and write the movements of the dinosaurs, providing us valuable information. Ellie nervously finding through her backpack, preparing for a possible injury. I, on the other hand, held the book "Age of Dinosaurs" tightly, and said in my heart: "Please keep us safe."

After a fight, we finally succeeded in fighting off the carnivorous dinosaur. As we sat on the floor, breathing the fresh air, Ellie smile and said to me, "Looks like your book isn't just a souvenir, it's a book for good luck." I smiled and nodded.

In the coming days, we face all the challenges together. We explored the mysterious dinosaur nests together which are so fascinating and found many precious fossils; We also tasted a type of delicious fruits called key, it have this name just because it look like a key, I'll say the taste are like strawberry and peach together, which is very very juicy. And enjoyed the gifts of nature. In the process, I formed a deep friendship with the team members.

One stormy night, the white light appeared again, just like the one I've seen before I got here. I realized this is the last day of the month, might also my only chance to get home. So, I quietly wrote a farewell letter to each team member, expressing my sorry and sadness to them, I also said how they full up my dream.

When I gave the letter to Ellie, her eyes turned red, she squeezed my hand and said, "Wherever you are, you are part of our team."

"I hope you're doing well over there." Lucas patted me on the shoulder and smiled, "Don't forget to bring us some of the local specialties!" Jack silently handed me a dagger and said, "This dagger has been with me through many times, and now it belongs to you. It may help you on your way home."

Deeply moved, I hugged them one by one, and then went alone to the place where the white light appeared. When I opened the page, a line of words suddenly appeared on the blank page, "those who are destined will meet again." I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, slowly touching the line, I feel the pulling again had feel asleep.

When I woke up, I found myself back in the familiar room. The sun shine on me through the window, warm and familiar, just like the day before. As I looked around, I know that I have returned to my own world, I think of if all was just my dream, but the dagger was still in my hand reminding me that everything is true. I know my heart is full of dinosaur, and I have a deep relationship with the team members, however I don't belong there. I believe that one day in the future, we may somehow meet again to continue that unfinished adventure. Just as I was still in my emotion, the book suddenly glinted with a small light, with a line "you will."

Wish I have a Blur Necklace

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Luo, Qi Vicky – 14

A row of enormous blue box slowly arrive in front of the gate, look like the body half of a navy blue pickup truck. They sat down quickly and take out their camera, ready to record all the insane scene inside the activity. Surprisingly, the car move forward when it only contains two people which originally suppose to have 8 people sitting in the car. Max is excited, thinking they were too lucky that no people distract their dating time, but Annie's eyes drift towards the surroundings and keep her mouth shut, look like she is nervous for the experience of Jussi park.

A broadcast rang out, with the background music

'Gps navigation, connected'

'Invisible fence, connected'

'Overall avoidance technology, connected'

'Welcome to the Jussi park'

As the car keep moving on the track, a tremendous hemispherical screen appear in front of tourists.

Max was shock, the screen was showing a realistic habitat where the dinosaur use to live before. A green unclear mountain stay at the back, while the land is all full of grass, trees planted surround, and a lake has divided half of the field.

The screen effect is too realistic, which makes Max feel like he has time to travel to Jussi Park.

The sit turns and suddenly thundering. The radio broadcast in the game said 'ladies and gentle men, due to the weather condition, we have to decline our Jurassic Journey' and the car was be out of control.

'Dinosaur detected, Tyrannosaurus Rex, Hazard Index Five Stars, safety system is on.' The car said

Max was shocked by the content of the broadcast, 'Tyrannosaurus ??????' Max whispered to his girlfriend with a shaking tone, and he slowly move his neck and turned his head. Max

lip change to white immediately like he's nearly died when he saw a huge tyrannosaurus is

tracing the footprint of the car's tyre, a complex feeling has inflow in Max's heart. A sense of

thrill and a sensation of death, his head was exploded and felt dizzy. 'Peng' his

hypoglycemia has come in an inappropriate situation, and he was fainted on the ground.

The next time he opened his eyes is in a secret zone while the environment is full of

electricity light and glass, it was unbelievable that he rubbed his eyes and pinched himself to see if he can perceive any touches. Undoubtedly, he is alive and lying on a green blue velvet sofa, he suddenly sat up straight staring at the girl in front of her, a face with deep brown pupils, long, dark lashes, nude lip color and an ivory skin color with playful freckles on the bridge of her nose.

'Stephanie!' Max shouted

'Why are you here, and where are we?' Max is confusing why his girl friend is here, in an isolated place. He is wondering he has been kidnapped by Stephanie.

'You better know what you are saying, liar! I trust you so much and you trick me. How clever you are, Max' Stephanie shouted

A heel clicked along the center pavement, the sound stopped in front of Max and Stephanie. A woman with a red lip and an elegant white short hair stood in front of them, behind her were two bodyguards wearing the same black suit, same sunglasses with same white earphone.

'I believe you guys are Max and Stephanie, I'm Jennifer, and I heard you guys are having a deep exploration on dinosaur. After a serious discussion between me and my other group member, we decided to choose you guys to save the last species of dinosaur --Yanbeilong ultimus. This type of dinosaur is discovered in China which lived in the late Early Cretaceous period, approximately 113 million years ago. His skeleton was stolen under my protection which is unacceptable, and I hope your professional knowledge could help me to trace back the dinosaur fossil.'

'Sorry sir, I'm confusing now. Ehhh, so let's just make it clear, why am I here, also why my girl friend is here.' Max asked

'Fine, to make my long story short, you and your girl friend are traveling back to the Jurassic period during the 'time travel to Jurassic park' in Universal Studios. Coincidentally, I am looking for a suitable person to help to recover the loss and my assistant told me that there are two strangers who sleep at the doorway in front of my basement. I tell them to detect the 'two strangers' and surprisingly find the two perfect candidates, you and your girl friend.

'You mean we travel back to the Jurassic period? Currently?' Stephanie shouted

Jennifer nodded and gave her a smile

Jennifer called her assistant to take Max and Stephanie to visit the area so they could feel more familiar. The secret base was built on a mountain, and it is a high technology underground lair that cleverly concealed beneath a large amount of trees. Access to the basement is allowed only through a series of biometric scans that is difficult to entrance.

As soon as the staff in the basement helped Max and Stephanie to do some preparatory work such as explaining all the use of tools. They soon get on the car and follow the gps positioning, after a thirty minute drive, Max and Stephanie arrive at the foot of the hill and the gps shows that it is located near this area. They get off the car and follow the navigation system, it guide them to a heavy iron door that use rivet to stable them on the mountain. The door has no doorknob that let them to enter, but the tattoo of different lines has attracted their attention. It was an irregular shape with messy lines, 'I think it looks like something I have seen before' Max said while his eyes stair at the lines and pucker up his brows. However, they still have not infer anything from the tattoo until midnight. The moon was round and bright shinning up on the sky, the stars begin to emerge one by one, as if the universe is slowly waking up to the symphony of the night. Suddenly Stephanie shouted 'I know what it is! Max! Try to call back the memory when we study about the stars at the library, the tattoo is the image of The Big Dipper!'

"Exactly! You are definitely a genius Stephanie" Max replied with an exciting tone and complement that the tattoo on the iron door has graph the image of seven dots and a line that connected it. As the time pass, the surface of the door starts to rust and corrode which make the The Big Dipper become vague!'

And they find out that the place of Alkaid is deeper comparing to the other six space, look like it has some secret behind and they believe that this is the key that can let them to pass the gate. Stephanie moved closer to the tattoo and a blue light has appears on her neck with sparkling powders, a strong power on her neck has pull Stephanie to the iron gate, "dada" The necklace on her neck stick on the empty space like a magnate and the door starts to open slowly with dust around that seems like an old historical building. Behind the gate is a spacious space with a glass display stood in the middle, illuminated by a beam of golden light. And a dinosaur fossil has appears intact in the display, so they carried out the Yanbeilong ultimus fossil to the car and went back to their secret basement.

Stephanie and Max hand the fossil back to Fiona and feel so proud of them self, but Max were wondering why isn't Jenifer smiling? Immediately, Fiona announce that" Stephanie, you are the new treasure inheritor! I have been always wondering that since I saw the necklace on your neck, I knew it was symbolizing something because there is a rumor about your necklace that said a fatcat pilot who has seven children have a special jewelry for each of them, and the smallest child has a blue necklace that look like a rain drop and a signature at the back which is the same as yours.' Soon then, Stephanie become rich and live happily.

"Hey babe, it's our turn soon, don't sleep anymore." Max whispered

Stephanie jerked awake and look around, there is a row of enormous blue box slowly arrive in front of the gate, look like the body half of a navy blue pickup truck and realize it's only a dream, but she really gonna experience the game later. She hope she could really have a blue necklace.

A Reappearance

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Qu, Cici – 14

A quiet and secluded forest, an area that are told to be a plain where dinosaurs used to live.

“Such a mystery”, said Jim.

“ Sure. Can’t believe how prosperous the era of dinosaurs can be,” replied Noah.

“But it is so hard to thoroughly know what happened that time”, Jim said in a disappointed tone.

“ Yes, that’s our main problem. Being archaeologists we really want to what really happened.”

Noah sighs.

They finally walked into the forest. A mysterious and ancient atmosphere was revealed. Trees are black and there are no evidence of animals’ existence.

Jim and Noah took about their tools and started digging. As they dig deeper and deeper, different ancient and diverse materials appear out of the mud. We can some mysterious skeletons, some teeth-like items and even some parts of creatures’ skin.

“Wow, here is some evidence for us to dig in the mystery of the dinosaur era. Lets go and see dig deeper and see what’s inside!” Jim said in a satisfied tone.

“Not only is this surviving evidence useful, we can also see some creatures’ footprints, which is very handy. Great!”

They dug deeper and deeper, a eccentric box slowly came out into Jim and Noah’s eyesight. It looks The top of the golden box is concave, as if to urge people to open it quickly. Jim tried to open it, but the box seems invulnerable and can’t be opened at all.

“Maybe tried to throw it on the floor! Huge force may be able to open it” said Noah.

“Pa!” Jim threw the box on the floor and a bright yellow light appeared out. A powerful force burst through in an instant, trying to blow Jim and Noah in it.

“Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!” Jim and Noah was blew into an invisible door.

As they finally got out, a very different world appear upon their eyes. The previous forests turned more bright and vital. Large numbers of dinosaurs wandered between the woods. There are tall Poseidon, domineering Tyrannosaurus and four-legged walking cerataurs.

“Wow! I think we accidentally time-travelled. I think god really wants to help us! Time travelling to the dinosaur era can really help us learn the realistic situation and characteristics of dinosaurs! Noah, quickly check what you have with you! I hope we have something to record” Jim said excitedly.

Noah opened her bag and looked for tools, she got out a camera and a new notebook. Happily, she shouted: “Jim! Look! Our camera and notebook time-travelled with us! What a wonderful news! Not only can we witness the movement of the dinosaur, we can also record and take it back to reality! Then people in the world can know the history of dinosaurs clearly and we two can also get promotion and higher salaries!”

Thus, they started taking photos and videos, trying to depict these fascinating scenes.

After a while, the four-legged walking creature came upon Jim and Noah and said: “Hi, Guys! I’m Watt, a cerateur. Welcome to our dinosaur world!”

Jim jumped in fright: “How in the world can you a dinosaur talk!”

The cerateur replied: “Ha! You accidentally deleted our curse by opening the box! We as dinosaur have a curse that our elaborative faculty and ability to talked is canceled by the god because we once made a mistake. Thus, people later on believe we are just normal creatures like fishes. Actually, we are as intelligent as human beings!”

A shocked expression appeared on Noah’s face: “Oh my god! What a surprising news! Hey, Jim, I can’t even believe what the world will think when they hear such news!”

“And let me tell you some even more shocking news! Actually, we, the dinosaurs, didn’t extinct at all! We just created another universe, which is diverse and very different. We have even more advanced inventions than you human beings!” The cerataur talked in a proud tone.

Jim was so excited that he jumped and jumped: “Can you tell us more details! I want to write a essay on this!”

Cerataur answered in a secret tone: “Sure, let me take you to that universe. Lets go!

“Wow, you are such a great dinosaur! I’m prepared!” Noah said.

Just as Jim and Noah followed the cerataur to the path towards another “universe”, a big tyrannosaurus came out from one of the trees and started running towards them. The tyrannosaurus shouted and howled, bursting out eccentric words. Jim and Noah seemed to be pulled in a desperate situation, which they are forced to keep going backwards step by step.

“No, no, no, no. no, no! We really need to see the other universe! Don’t pull us away!” They shouted hopelessly.

Suddenly that invisible door appeared again, a strange force start to pull Jim and Noah. A mysterious sound came from the sky: “Hahahaha hahahahha hahah! How can time–travelling really be real! It’s all fake! We are just giving you guys a chance to witness some fun myths! What are you really looking for! Selfish people who just want promotion and high salaries! Say bye to the dinosaur era! Bye bye, you stupid guys!”

The next moment, Jim and Noah opened their eyes. And they found out that they are lying on their beds. Everything is fake.

Imaginary Friend

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Shao, Linrun Lydia – 14

Have you been through a difficult time before? I have, definitely have. And how did you overcome it? I had that most exhausting time with my best friend ever, Lucy. When I told this story about Lucy and me, people would think that I was crazy, because Lucy is a dinosaur toy, my third birthday gift. Whatever. She, my escape, is the most precious memory itself to me.

When I was three, on a nice, sunny day with all my family members together, I sat around the big table. Mommy was cooking my favorite braised fish, and the scent flowing to my nose forced me to imagine dishes filling the table. Daddy and a few of my uncles chatted, talking about how smart I was and that I could even remember twenty-ish poems at this age. I used to be the one that Daddy was proud of. I, the main character today, sat with my grandparents. When all the dishes had gathered like soldiers, people stopped talking and gossiping but listened to my father, who was the “host” of my birthday. When I was three, I could not understand a single word of what Daddy said with a glass of wine. He held the glass and smiled at everyone, but his eyes did not capture my face at all. The meal started. Probably it was because I was too young, no one asked me to give a speech for my birthday.

Daddy quickly got drunk, all his colleagues and brothers were also drunk. Their faces turned red, and the words in their mouths became blurred. They seemed happy here at my birthday party, and I should feel good about that. However, what I saw was a contrasting picture. I could seek Mommy’s figure in the middle of the door, cleaning in the kitchen, while Daddy was already half asleep, slurring the words, making a few conventional remarks with those sycophants; Grandpa and Grandma held the drunk people on their feet so that they would not fall. In the meantime, I stayed alone. The day was a big carnival. Everyone was enjoying it, except me, the one that should be the center of the event.

Mommy and Daddy started the fight the next day. They squabbled about everything in their unsuccessful marriage. From day to night, the diatribe continued to push them further and further away from each other. Finally, the implacable situation caused the divorce.

Mom left a dinosaur toy as the last birthday gift she prepared for me. Since then, it sleeps with me instead of my mother. I named her Lucy, which is a random name that I saw in a comic book. Short and green, the soft fur on her body comforted me each night that I missed Mommy.

One night, I was so tired of crying and fell asleep. Vaguely, I heard a voice calling my name from far, far away, and it got closer and closer. Not only the sound, but a huge, green dinosaur came to me. I could see the figure clearly; it was Lucy, the toy that surrounded me every night. She called out my name. The expression on her face was not the same as other toys, with a stiff smile. Hers was truly bright smile.

“Lucy? You? Is it really you?” I stuttered, disbelievingly observing the environment around me. There in the dream is exactly like my bedroom. Lucy was about the same height as the ceiling of my bedroom, standing there watching my reaction. I sat in bed, back against the headboard, and wrapped the quilt around my body.

“Are you surprised? It is me, one hundred percent real.” She said with a smile still, “I felt that you are not happy.”

I got out of bed and hugged her; the fur still felt the same. My tears flowed like a river and nonstop, smearing on her body. It was like I found an outlet. Lucy listened to me silently, waiting for me to pour out all my anxiety and concern.

Nevertheless, the dream ended soon. I was awakened by the sunshine in the morning that went through the curtains. There was nothing but the words that Lucy said, “Everything will be okay, just keep going,” in my head.

The tears on my face were also gone. The negative emotion disappeared. Lucy, as a toy, still stands nearby, but quietness fills the room; she does not talk anymore in reality.

I went to kindergarten and didn't cry when I said goodbye to Grandma for the first time, because I carried Lucy with me. Unlike in a dream that she is a giant dinosaur who can let me lean on the body, she accompanied me as a small toy. In the day, everything went smoothly. My life magically started changing. It was the first time I put down my emotions, talked to my classmates, participated in the activities, and enjoyed the food there, especially the cake, chocolate cake base with strawberries on top, which was so delicious that I can still remember the taste of it now.

I recalled that dream yesterday when I went to bed. I was looking forward to seeing her again, so I slept with no tears but a smile on my face.

"I am back." The sweet calling of Lucy echoes in the ear, again. She tilted her head to look at me, and I hurried to hug her.

"How was your day?" She asked softly.

"It was pretty good, and it is even better now because I have you." We both laughed.

Lucy was like another me. When I felt depressed, she could sense it and give me suggestions; when I felt happy, we could celebrate every small event together. Sometimes, we don't even talk to each other, but sit by each other's side and enjoy the night.

As the years passed, life didn't always stay as simple and comforting as it had been in kindergarten. By the time I was in eighth grade, things had started to take a turn for the worse. Lucy, had become a secret. I no longer carried her with me during the day; she stayed on my bed at home, waiting for me to come back. However, at school, I felt anything but safe. I hadn't anticipated the harshness of my classmates. At first, they had been kind enough, but as the months went by, something changed. The whispers started.

"Hey, look at the weirdo. She's always by herself." Every time I heard this kind of voice, I just left without any explanation.

The rumors did not disappear with my silence. They weren't just whispering anymore. The teasing grew louder, and so did the bullying. My classmates made fun of the way I dressed, the way I spoke, even the way I carried myself. The cruelty wasn't just verbal. It was physical too. Pushing me against lockers, tripping me in the halls, or blocking my path when I was walking to class.

The worst part, though, was the isolation. I sat alone during lunch, reading a book, trying to hide behind the pages. The cafeteria buzzed with groups of friends, and I felt invisible, even though I was right there. I wanted to scream, to reach out, but something inside me froze. Maybe it was the fear of being seen as weak. Maybe it was because I was so tired of fighting battles I didn't know how to win.

The moonlight filtered through the curtains, casting a soft glow across the room. As I closed my eyes, the dream began again.

I did not tell Lucy about all of that in school until the third week of being isolated. She seemed to know my dilemma much earlier.

"Are you okay?" Lucy's voice was gentle, her figure standing in the corner of my room, her bright eyes filled with the same understanding as always, waiting for me to tell her everything.

"No," I whispered, not even bothering to hide the tears that were streaming down my face. "I don't know how to do this anymore. I don't know how to face them."

I explained everything to her. Lucy stepped closer, her large, soft form filling the room as she crouched down beside me. “You don’t have to face them alone. You’re a powerful human.”

“I don’t feel strong,” I replied, my voice cracking. “Every day, they tear me down. I just want to escape. I don’t know where to go.”

Lucy’s smile was warm, as always, but now it held something else, a kind of knowing. “Sometimes, the hardest thing is not running away. It’s choosing the path that makes you feel safe again, even if it’s different from what others expect.”

“But what if I can’t do it? What if I can’t escape them? What if I fail?”

Lucy’s eyes softened. “Failure is just a lesson in disguise. What matters is that you try. And you don’t have to do it on your own. You can make the choice to change, and when you do, you’ll have the strength to carry it through. I believe my girl can do it.”

Next day, when they passed over me with sneering eyes, I stared at them back. Even though it really scared me to look the bullies in the eye, they left faster than before, still whispering.

“Is that all they did to you?” the dean of students asked. I told him about the bullying in grade 8, and he promised that he would soon deal with all of it. Out of the dean’s office, it was as if all the burdens had been lifted from me. I wondered why Lucy’s words are so magical and can make me try to overcome all the difficulties in front of me. The answer never comes, but it did not matter.

When I woke up again, Lucy disappeared. I thought that she was kicked off during the night and fell down the bed. However, after I searched for her twenty minutes, I found the problem was not just as easy as I believed. Under the desk, my closet, my bathroom, I searched every edge, every corner of my room, and I just couldn’t find her. On second thought, I realized that she hadn’t come to me in the dream for several nights. I found myself in a ice hole, feeling no hope for the future. I was confused. Why had Lucy left so suddenly? My best friend ever left me with not even a single word.

I had the worst breakfast in my whole life. Angrily, I was thinking about her leaving, but more, sadness filled my whole body. The day was painful without her. It scared me that I had to live the rest of my life like that. I couldn’t bear it. At a normal day, I lost my best friend in life.

It had been a week since Lucy’s disappearance, and still, I hadn’t spoken to anyone about it. Not my parents, not my teachers, not even my closest friends, because I was afraid that the friendship between me and Lucy would make others think that I am a psychopath.

The emptiness that settled in my chest was heavy. I no longer had my comforting friend to whisper words of encouragement, to wrap me in the safety of her soft, green fur. I felt like I was falling into a deep, cold pit, and every day I woke up, I struggled to even get out of bed. The world outside seemed just as dark, just as unwelcoming, and I couldn’t escape it. The silence in my room echoed louder than any whisper or taunt I had ever heard.

School was still hard. The bullying hadn’t stopped, and the isolation was still there, but something had changed within me. For the first time, I didn’t shrink away when they whispered and laughed, since Lucy’s words were reminding me to be confident. I didn’t hide in the corners, afraid to be seen. I stood tall, even when my heart pounded in my chest. I spoke up when I needed to, even when my voice shook.

I didn’t fight every battle, but I chose the ones that mattered. I started talking to my classmates again, slowly, carefully, finding one or two that would listen without judgment. I joined a math club, tried to participate in competitions with other members, and little by little, I built a life outside the shadows of my old self. Every day was a

challenge, but each small victory, each conversation, each smile, each moment of self-belief were reminders that I didn't need to escape. I just needed to keep going.

A few weeks passed, and one day, as I sat in the cafeteria, I realized something. I wasn't alone anymore. Not really. The loneliness hadn't disappeared completely, but I had learned how to sit with it, how to accept it without letting it consume me. I no longer carried Lucy with me in my thoughts every moment, but I carried her lessons inside me, like a quiet strength I could rely on when I needed it most.

The new life made me realize that I had done it. I had learned how to face my fears and move forward without Lucy. Though it still hurt sometimes, I knew now that I didn't need to run away from life anymore. I could face it head-on, just as I was, with all my strength, because I had always had something in me.

I woke up and stretched in a normal morning, feeling the weight of the world a little less heavy. I think I was ready. The path ahead would be challenging, no doubt, but I wasn't afraid anymore. I didn't need to escape. I had already found the courage to keep going.

And for the first time, I was okay with that, with the leaving of Lucy. The last lesson she taught me was to accept everyone's departure with a peaceful mind. I could live my life confidently and positively everyday. I guess that is what Lucy wanted to see the most.

Now, I can tell you the story of Lucy and me with a calm feeling and introduce my best friend ever to every listener. I am not afraid anymore. I believe that in somewhere of the world, my Lucy is proud of me for this.

The Secret of the Crack

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Wu, Vivian – 15

China, Jiangxi 1104.7.21

Boom—— Boom—— With the voice of the thunder, a torrential rain started pouring down from the sky. The sunny day was just like a fleeting dream, with the sky getting darker and darker, the darkness cloud gradually pressing down to the city. In an instant, a lightning strike struck an old pine, causing a fire to quickly ignite and gradually spread, with branches continuously falling off. Fortunately, the rain was large enough to stop the fire from reaching Jeremy's house. After a huge amount of time, the land finally received the illumination of light. Jeremy looked at the debris outside and decided to tidy up the fallen branches. Open the door, he was greeted by the dazzling sunlight. He picked up his hat and walked out from the house. Jeremy picked up tree branches one by one and threw them into wood boxes. Suddenly, he felt some strange sounds coming from the ground beneath, something like animal calls, but they were coming from far away. But he just doubts for a second, then continue working. By the branches gradually reduced, a huge crack appeared in front of Jeremy eyes, clearly due to the lightning last night. The animal's calls became clearer at this time and Jeremy was certain that such strange sounds must have something to do with the cracks. So, what is waiting for Jeremy, surprise or shock.

China, Jiangxi 1104.7.22

After Jeremy discovered the crack, he quickly contacted his best friend Max to share the shocking secret. Max was also pretty interest with it. He arrived in Jiangxi by plane from Shanghai within three hours. After seeing the crack, Max is also shocked by such amazement thing. He had never seen anything that is exaggerate like this crack before. So, he and Jeremy immediately decided to enter the crack and explore the truth.

China, Jiangxi 1104.7.23

The sun shone through the window and sprinkle on Max and Jeremy's faces. The two of them opened their eyes groggily, had breakfast, sorted out some equipment, put on protective clothing, and ready to enter the crack. They first drove a wooden stake at the crack and tied a thick bundle of hemp rope to the stake. Then they climb down into the crack with the help of the rope. Under the crack was a seemingly endless tunnel, and as they walked deeper, strange sounds became more clearer and louder. After an hour passed, they finally reached the end of the tunnel, and being sweating profusely. A strong beam of light shone on their faces. It turned out to be a transmission gate. Then they just looked at each other for a second and then stepped into the transmission gate resolutely. So, will they be greeted with challenges?

China, near the center of the Earth 1104. 7. 23

When they open their eyes again, they have reached the destination of the portal, and everything around them is suspended. They're on a hill two islands away from the portal. Looking up, the islands were linked together, and many pterosaurs were flying in the sky, trying to find traces of food. At this moment, a small dragon with silky feathers, about a meter long, runs around them and makes noises from time to time, as if trying to say something. Jeremy and Max look at each other in a confused way. A closer look, the small dragon in front of the body has many blood wounds, like being scratched by sharp objects. The blood is seeping out. So, Max took out the gauze and rabbit legs he had in his bag and tried to help him stop the bleeding. Perhaps the little dragon perceived that they had no malicious intent, and just snatched the rabbit's legs and ate it. So, Max and Jeremy put the bandage on the dragon with ease. Suddenly, a harsh male voice rang out: "Put down the dragon!" When Jeremy sees who's coming, they saw that he is a bounty hunter who wants to capture the dragon and sell it for money. Suddenly an alarm sounded, and it turned out that the portal was closing, with only three minutes left. If they don't make it to the shuttle gate within three minutes, they will remain trapped in this world. Max and Jeremy decide to run to the portal immediately, but after seeing the dragon in such a poor state, they decide to take the dragon back. Due to the noise bounty hunters' gun make is too sharp and loud, a flock of pterosaurs are attracted. Max picks up the dragon and runs away while bounty hunter avoids the attack from the pterosaur. Jeremy followed suit. At this time, the bounty hunter finally

escapes the attack of the pterosaur and begins to chase Max and Jeremy with guns, bullets crackling out, fortunately hitting the stone walls along the way. In the last ten seconds of the countdown, Max and Jeremy finally reach the portal and do not hesitate to put their legs through it. Oh, the poor bounty hunter ran out of breath because he was so bloated that he didn't feel it at the last moment when the portal closed. And stayed in that world forever.

China, Jiangxi 1104 7. 24

A white light flashed, Max and Jeremy returned to the tunnel they had come from. But this time the group has a new member, which is the little dragon they just bring back from that strange world. Looking at the dragon's pitiful appearance, Max and Jeremy decided to bring him home and raise him up.

China, Jiangxi ST University, 2024. 12. 5

You must know how *Sinosauropteryx* came from now. Although the story I just told you is just a legend, do you know more about the history of dinosaurs now? Alright! Then I will assign the homework for the next class, "the professor said. Please find some background knowledge about pterosaurs tonight and share it with us in the class tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing your answers!

She and Dragon

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Wu, Vivian – 15

“What do you want for me? Just let me go!” Her brow was furrowed, her eyes sparkled with angry fire, and her lips pressed together as if they were going to spew fire.

“Don’t kidding. You are our women, there is no escaping.” Laughing from two teens.

Even though blindfolded, Nian could smell a whiff of danger. The smell of drought soil mixed with gasoline, unbearable pungent air went straight up her nose, as if inhaling again would let an invisible threat penetrate deeper. As night fell, the crow's cry poured into Nian's ears—not as cheerful as the birds', but creepy and terrifying.

“Open your eyes, my dear.” Susurrated a thick and powerful voice.

Nian opened her eyes in the darkness, where the teens of the voice she had just murmured vanished in an instant. Instead, a castle framed in her eyes was surrounded by a moat filled with slimy green water, plunging into endless depth. She stared at the building, the walls of which were made of huge square stones, with deformed windows protected by thick iron bars staring back at her. Nian flinched.

The windowpanes were blood-red.

Just then, a light came on in the highest tower. In the darkness, it looked like a glowing eye of a terrifying monster. “Come over, my dear Miss Nian. I’m sure you want to try some new.” As the murmur died away, Nian vanished all of a sudden.

In the brush, a black cat's fur stood on end from fright.

“Meeooooooooowww!”

Before these weird events happened, Nian was an ordinary nurse in Deepspace City Hospital. The word "ordinary" is defined in the city exactly as 'having no special abilities. In Deepspace City where all residents have some special ability, such as time still, instantaneous freezing, flame spreading, and other skills, Nian existed as a bird without feathers, a lion born with no fangs, ordinary and silent — But the special powers in the city are completely different from the sci-fi movie, this is a real war: their existence is always a catalyst of mutual exclusion between energies, leading to loss of control and turning to the vagrant creature facing death — Nian won't suffer about it. She was normal as we are. The only thing she had was the claw scar on her shoulder. Thus, she was bullied by her classmates, everybody said she was a monster, but Nian was quite smart and fought back by: "I'm never gonna be a monster. But you will."

Despite Nian doesn't have superpowers, she was getting into big trouble. She was an excellent subject for extracting the excess power into people who don't have a superpower, therefore, vagrant creatures wouldn't exist.

That's why she is here.

The long empty corridor was covered with red carpet, and the candles flickered on both sides. She checked the painting on the wall. All the paintings depicted dragons which represent demons. Some of these dragons fought with soldiers and spread fire, some of them froze the ground, some of them fanned their wings induce the time still and there is only one dragon, the only one, who didn't do anything on the painting. It seemed like as powerless. That looked so familiar. Nian thought. Like a real scene, she had experienced before.

And yet at the bottom of each painting is signed by the same person, Sylus.

Just as she thought. The eyes of each dinosaur had holes in them! Someone was spying on her!

"Who was there!" Nian yielded.

“Please! Don’t hurt me!” Nian cried. “Let me home!”

“Eat him... He is yours.” A demonic whisper came from Nian’s head.

“Ahhhhhhh!” Her delicate voice became hoarse with the roar, and pain filled Nian’s throat, bursting in an instant

"Hrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr"

“Wait, where does this voice come from?” Nian wandered.

[illegible]

Sounded like a tiger baby, or a lion baby, or... a dragon? In the painting?

Nian slowly turned her eyesight upward. It is the powerless dragon. But nothing in there.

Suddenly, she saw a shiny, jewel-like object hidden in the eyes of the painted dinosaur. She looked closely, wanting to reach out and feel the strange thing.

“Eat him. He is yours.” The voice came again.

All of a sudden, this gem... flickered.

No, the dragon blinked!

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! ” Nian shouted!

“Don’t be scared of me. Hrrrrr.....” A tiny weak sound spread out from the painting.

Nian shocked. “Who are you?” She slightly stepped back, staring at the painting with caution.

“I’m a.....Ahk...Hurr.....Hurrrrr.....”

“Sorry, are you alright?” Nian didn’t know why but her heart felt strained by a bowstring.

“I’m Dragon! Hrrrrrrahhhhhhhhh!”

A dark shadow suddenly broke through the painting, flapping its wings across Nian. The wind whipped by the wings extinguished the two candles. Then the shadow bumped into the side wall and fell to the ground.

Silence.

Nian couldn’t breathe. A pair of dainty dragon horns slowly emerged from the darkness, followed by a dragon head with a sharp outline, spreading its scaly wings, its body with crystal pieces following its long tail, and walking towards Nian.

But the creepiest thing is, the chest of the dragon was bleeding

“Do you need help? I’m Nian. I think you are injured...” Scared but said by Nian.

“Wait a second, what did you just say? You are...Nian?” Said by Dragon.

“Yes. Pretty sure I am. Any problem?” Nian hesitated for a moment. “I think you are injured. Do you need help? I can...”

“Look straight in my eyes,” Dragon murmured.

That sound is so familiar. Is that the voice from that man? But it can’t be... It’s a dragon! “Why my head is burning... Please, don’t hurt me...” Dragon and painting blurred into one as fresh tears swirled her eyes.

“Calm down, girl.” Dragon went up to Nian and spread his wings around her as a consolation.

Nian stared at Dragon. She felt Long’s wings so comfortable which cured herself. The scales on Dragon’s body were sharp, but Nian could not feel them hard. Instead, they were exceptionally soft.

“You want to go home, that’s right. But I have one question, are you tired of your powerless life?” Dragon asked.

Nian went silent.

“You really want to be the weakest one in Deepspace City, or the world?”

“Well, I don’t care what they said. I’m... quite good.” Nian murmured.

Dragon chuckled.

“All right. So, I’ll send you outside of the castle and let yourself explore how to cross over the sticky acidic river and Dark Lord Forest, how about this?”

“No! You can’t just let me go!” Nian shouted.

“So what’s your request?” Dragon frowns slightly.

“I...I want those who despise me to hell.” Flame rose in Nian’s eyes.

The lightning shocked again and ignited the hall.

Dragon’s eyes glittered.

“The best way to punish someone is to let them live forever.” Said by Dragon.

Nian shocked. She could clearly feel that it was not the first time to heard this voice.

Nian gazed at him.

The eyes of the Dragon were made of scarlet diamond. In Deepspace City, no one dares to look straight into the dragon’s eyes. People think it is deemed inauspicious to do so since a dragon is a demon.

Nobody would like to see a demon.

However, Nian does.

There is always a voice inside Nian’s heart calling her: “Get that eye. It belongs to you. Eat it.”

“Hahaha...Hrrrrrr...” Dragon coughed.

“I stuck in this castle for three thousand years. But I still know humans can’t look straight into a dragon’s eye. Why can you do it?”

Nian hesitated.

“All right, Dragon. I told you this story because right now in this castle, it’s only me and you and no one else which means I could only trust you.”

Dragon nodded.

"In Deepspace City, everybody has one superpower, only except me. I hate my hometown because everybody keeps in touch with me on purpose. I don't have real friends. When I was young, people said I'm a monster. But now, they want to use my body to store their extra power to ward off mutual exclusion." Nian said.

"...I want to escape. I want to escape my hometown."

Dragon stared at Nian in a meaningful way.

"Hometown is a place that you could escape, but your root is still here. Well, I mean for the first time you open your eyes when you birthed, the place surrounding you is your whole life. This will accompany you forever."

Dragon sighed.

"If you want to get stronger, you have to resonate with me."

"Sorry... what do you mean by 'resonate'?" Nian asked.

Dragon's eyes glittered.

"You have a scar, right?" Dragon flipped his tail.

"Yes... Wait, how did you know that?" Nian shocked.

The hall was empty as hell. In a moment, it's nearly in deathly stillness.

"Nian, your scar was made by me. I don't know why you forgot me for now, but the only thing I can tell you is that we are meant to be enemies. This is our destiny. We are meant to be abandoned by the world. Demon and w... anyway."

"Woah, I need a second. You know me before? I mean when? And how? And ..."

"There is no time for questioning." Dragon roared.

"I want to save you," Nian said affirmatively.

Moonlight boils in his eyes. Dragon cackles.

"Save me? Are you aware of the cost?" Accompanied by a strong cough.

"Once we hold hands now, our lives will be bound together, along with our deaths."

"We must offer half of our soul to the other. They'll be merged...to forge an unbreakable bond. This is the curse from dragon."

Suddenly, a warm stream poured into Dragon's claw.

"Then I'll take it instead." Nian grasped Dragon's claw.

A warm, soft golden light spilled from Nian's palm. Nian pressed it against the wound on Dragon's chest.

A harsh noise came from the end of the hall.

"Shhhhhh, people who are looking for you are here." Dragon lowered his body and flipped his tail to cover Nian at the corner of the hall.

The sounds of footsteps and metal collisions were intertwined.

"Where is that girl? We took her here on purpose!" A voice came from a sharp voice man.

"Do you remember? Only the Friend's destined archnemesis can kill the Dragon! The girl! Her scar on his neck! You still don't understand? It is the only dragon on the earth, be careful, we could get a big price though." A voice from a deep voice.

"Who exactly do you think that is?" Dragon roared and whispered in Nian's ear.

Nian had been lost in thought.

"They want to...kill you? I'm not the one to target. I'm only a decoy... Mutual exclusion is not a reason; Wait, I'm the only one who can kill a dragon?" Nian suddenly enlightened.

Dragon nodded his head.

"But it doesn't make sense to me. Why me?" A silent growl from Nian.

The mark on Nian's shoulder boiled with the agony only death could deliver. She suppressed her fear, lifted her trembling hand, and gently placed it on the dragon's eye.

"Eat him, he is yours." The voice echoed again in Nian's head.

Exhilarated, her heart raced. Fervent desire reverberated in her ears.

Her arm trembled as I raised it. Unable to control it, her hand was slightly moved close dragon's heart and quivered uncontrollably. She gritted her teeth and tried to shake off the voice in her mind, but suddenly, her wrist was caught.

"Kill me for reborn." Said by Dragon, gently.

"We are meant to be enemies."

"I can't do that... You are... kind of special to me."

"Look up at the paint," Dragon whispered.

The paint hanging on the wall above Nian's head was an altar burned by fire. The statue of God turned into a shamble.

Nian's head was splitting, her mind was falling, and the long gallery of the castle was turning into a holy church. Have they been found? Nian didn't know. She just noticed that her body had become lighter and lighter.

"How could a witch stand in a church? That's strictly forbidden" Shouted from the saint.

"I'm not a witch!" Yielded by a little girl who wore a white robe.

Nian felt breathless. On the shoulder of that girl peeped out of the robe was a scar from the claw.

She is Nian.

"So little 'saint', can you tell me what dragon claw represents?" The saint laughed sneery.

"Does it present for no reason? You never met a dragon before?"

"Dragon represents demon. You are the one who was chosen by the demon!" Another saint said.

"Only the Friend's destined archnemesi can kill the Dragon! She is the chosen one to kill a drake!" Said another saint.

"God, please forgive us. Dragon and witch should be burned in the flame. The gates of hell are open to them, and there is no time."

"Wait! Let me go! I'm not a witch! Dragon is my friend!" The little girl put up a feeble resistance.

Space-time suddenly reversed. As Nian opened her eyes again, she found herself at the corner of the garden.

In the dusk, with a gentle breeze, the girl and a tiny little dragon played together and held the dragon baby high above her head.

"You are my only friend and the best friend in the whole world!" The girl said it while laughing.

"Hurr...!" Dragon baby tried to flap his wings, but he was too weak to fly.

"Boy, you are too small! One day you will fly! One day, you will have an ability which greater than any other dragon! I promise you will!" Said by the girl.

A ray of sunset felt among them.

At some point, the girl took out a roll of painting paper and a paintbrush and put them between her and the dragon.

"Let's draw our future home!" The girl said.

Pink and violet pigment spread on the paper foamed an ocean flower. All the flowers were waving with the breeze growing toward freedom.

"Everybody said I'm a monster. I'm a person who belongs to hell. Well, I think that's quite cool to be the assistant to Demon! Demon was no worse than holy man unless he didn't hurt me." The little girl said to the amber sky.

"...Or if you are a demon, while I don't quite believe though... If I'm really a witch, then I could be the best friend with you forever!" She lowered her head and said to the dragon.

"We're done! Our future home will be full of flowers, hung with the wind of freedom. You don't have a name yet... Hum, I'll call you Sylus! Little demon!"

"That's why every paint had the signature of Sylus. It's... Dragon's name. And it was given by me." Nian murmured.

"Even I have to go... I will remember you forever."

What happened next, Nian couldn't remember. She only dimly saw the Holy Church turned into what it was in the painting – the flaming rage. The little girl disappeared, and the dragon seemed to fly away --- to the castle.

Stone feathers launched by the Arbiterwings pierce through the dragon's wings, while electrified arrows from the dragon hunter themselves in his scales.

The wings were nearly shredded, but no amount of damage can ruin a dragon.

Suddenly, he pressed Nian's hand against his chest. Nian felt a resonance between two souls.

"Sylus..." Tears rushed out from Nian's gaze.

In the split second before the dragon's death blow, under the pull of our resonating souls, the blood-red greatsword reappears in her grasp.

Nian's Heart let out a silent scream, yet the sword still pierced the dragon's chest. It looked as if Nian were the one who plunged it in.

"What...have I done..."

“Blood...so much blood...”

“Don’t fall at here! If you fall, you are not able to go back.” Dragon screamed with all his last strength.

The dragon gripped her hand tightly and used all his strength to push the sword further into his own chest.

It’s as if an unyielding life was mocking the curse and making a final stand against fate.

Dragon, is not a demon.

Witch, won’t kill a dragon.

Nian felt like she went to the flower ocean again. She finally went home. A home only belongs to Nian and Sylus.

Her tears fall onto Sylus as she lowers her head. She allowed him to place a kiss on her forehead.

The dark—red glow in his eyes dimmed. Obsidian—like crystals crawled over the dragon’s scales and slowly covered his entire body.

“My dragon is gone.”

As his body disintegrated, shards of crystal began to peel away.

The wind blew through the flower ocean, lifting those fragments like black petals wrapping around Nian which made Nian feel Sylus’s soul was passing through her body.

Nian’s beloved was born into apocalyptic terror.

People cursed his existence, fabricated his sins, and celebrated his death. Only one person ever gazed into his jewel—like eyes, embraced his burning soul, and sang to him in the night wind.

“He had already etched the traces of his existence deep into my life...”

“Sylus...I’ll curse your soul.”

He said the best way to punish someone is to let them live forever.

“I curse your soul... to never fade away... You’ll always be tied to me. Forever.”

Nian pinched the last black petal as if grasping the final piece of his soul.

“This is... my curse. Only I... can...”

“Grant you a true death.”

A faint of dragon’s roar echoes. The petal flutters, drifting far on the wind, like a dragon returning to the clouds above.

In the castle, in the hall, all the hunters were dead.

At the end of the hall, a painting hangs on the end wall.

A girl sang to a dragon during the sunset of the flower ocean.

Gladiator

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Xia, Cong Zhe Thomas – 14

Born to be armored, born to fight. Dinosaurs' pathetic destiny becomes public entertainment, which is what people never noticed, even Tommy himself didn't notice. The only feeling he has all the time is nothing but pain, from bottom to top, from his legs to his neck, there were scratches of all sizes. Meanwhile, his own claws tend to be sharper due to past victories in the arena. He knows he's gonna fight again tonight because of the smell of blood wafting from afar. He didn't know if other dinosaurs liked the smell of blood very much or if the smell even excited them, but for him, after 5 years of facing challengers, he felt nothing at all.

The arena is a cavernous structure, encased in steel and stone, where the roars of the crowd echo like thunder. The air is thick with the scent of sweat, blood, and the musty tang of ancient stone. Tommy's senses are dulled from the years of fighting, but the sharp clang of chains rattling against metal always jolts him from his stupor. Tonight is another night like any other. Another battle. Another day in the long, brutal cycle of gladiator life.

Tommy, a towering *Tyrannosaurus rex*, strides out into the arena, his massive body weighed down by layers of armor forged from steel and bone. The metal plates cling to his scales, reflecting the harsh lights of the stadium, and his eyes, cold and distant, scan the crowd. He's been here so long that the faces of the audience are little more than blurry, faceless specters.

His opponent tonight is a *Spinosaurus*, a sleek and ferocious creature, with a sail-like ridge running down its back, making it look even more menacing under the spotlight. The crowd roars, sensing the fierce contest to come.

The battle begins with the sound of a gong, and the Spinosaurus immediately charges forward, its large claws slashing the air. Tommy's instincts kick in, and he steps back, using his size and strength to maintain distance. The first strike is a feint—too quick for Tommy to catch, and the Spinosaurus spins, its long tail sweeping across the ground, aiming for Tommy's legs.

Tommy barely manages to sidestep the tail strike, feeling the rush of air as it whips past him. He growls in frustration. This fight is not going to be as easy as the others. The Spinosaurus is fast, calculated, and doesn't leave openings like the other challengers. Tommy's claws scrape the dirt as he digs in, gathering the strength to counterattack.

The Spinosaurus charges again, this time using its powerful hind legs to launch itself at Tommy's side. But Tommy, desperate for victory, counters with a savage swipe of his own claws, raking them across the Spinosaurus's exposed flank. The crowd erupts as the beast howls in pain. Blood stains the dirt.

But the fight is far from over. The Spinosaurus lets out an enraged roar and backs away, circling Tommy. There's something almost... calculating in its movements now, a level of intelligence Tommy's never seen before. The crowd's excitement grows—this fight is becoming legendary. Tommy can feel his pulse quicken, his heart pounding beneath the weight of his armor, but his mind is growing foggy. The pain is there, always there, and the years of battle are catching up with him.

The Spinosaurus leaps again, but this time, it isn't alone. From the shadows, a *Triceratops* emerges, its horns gleaming. The crowd gasps. A second contender, a twist in the game. A surprise tactic the arena managers have orchestrated for their amusement.

Tommy roars in fury and surprise, but there's no time to react. The *Triceratops* charges with terrifying speed, aiming its horns at Tommy's chest, while the *Spinosaurus* moves to his rear. They're not just opponents; they're a team. Tommy's backpedals, his claws scraping against the stone floor as he struggles to face both threats at once. His side is torn open by the *Spinosaurus*, while the *Triceratops* thrusts forward, its horns goring the side of his leg.

Pain. Only pain. His vision begins to blur as his strength wanes, and the crowd's jeers and cheers blend into a cacophony. He is no longer the fierce predator that ruled the arena. He is just another beast, bleeding out for the sport of the masses.

In a final, desperate move, Tommy charges at the *Spinosaurus*, hoping to land a killing blow, but the *Triceratops* intercepts him. It swings its massive head with brutal precision, and Tommy's skull cracks under the force of the impact. His vision flickers, his legs give way, and he collapses to the ground with a deafening thud.

The crowd falls into a tense silence, and then, with the flick of a signal from the arena's overseers, the stands erupt into jubilant cheers. A victory for the spectacle. A new champion—though Tommy is nothing but a crumpled heap of blood and broken bone at the center of the arena.

The *Spinosaurus* and *Triceratops* step back, their bloodied bodies standing victorious, while Tommy lies in a pool of his own. His breathing is shallow, his heart slowing. There is no triumph, no glory, no final roar. Just a pathetic, fleeting life snuffed out for sport.

The audience cheers louder, as if unaware—or perhaps uncaring—that the very creature they are celebrating is now lifeless, reduced to a broken relic of a battle fought without reason. The gladiator who had once fought for pride, for survival, is now just a carcass, a tool for their entertainment.

And yet, there is no true victory in this arena. Tommy had lived only to fight, to kill, to survive for the crowd's pleasure—but in the end, his destiny was no different from those who had fallen before him. His bones will be forgotten, his name lost to time, just like all the others. The crowd will go home, content, their thirst for violence quenched—until the next dinosaur is dragged into the arena to die for their amusement.

Tommy's final thoughts flicker like dying embers in his fading mind. *Born to fight. Born to die. For nothing.*

As the lights dim, the audience disperses, already forgetting the battle they'd just witnessed, moving on to the next spectacle, the next gladiator, the next star to burn bright and fade away into the cruel, indifferent darkness.

The Forgotten Dinosaur

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Yan, Jiayu Alisa – 14

Lera Winston stared in disbelief at the vast, open view before her., wondering what have brought her here from New York City to this odd place. Looking away, tall, twisted trees stretched high above, their thick trunks reaching up to the blue sky. The air was heavy with the smell of ancient plants, and the ground seemed to shake with the deep, with rumbling roars of dinosaurs in the distance. Their calls echoed through the jungle, making the air vibrate in her chest. It was like she had stepped into a world forgotten back in time.

It was Lera's 14th birthday, and she had planned the perfect day—shopping malls, a fancy tea party with her closest friends, all the things she loved. She could already picture the fun they'd have. But her excitement was quickly shattered when her mom handed her a ticket to a dinosaur museum. Lera wasn't thrilled. Dinosaurs weren't exactly her thing; they felt like something out of a history book, distant and boring.

She sighed, trying to hide her disappointment, and reluctantly agreed to go. After all, it was her mom's idea, and it was her birthday, so she didn't want to make a drama. She walked into the museum with her friends, half-heartedly glancing at the exhibits. The walls were filled with lifelike dinosaur models, towering skeletons, and dusty old fossils. Lera tried to look interested, but it all felt so... distant. She just wanted to get it over with.

As they wandered deeper into the museum, Lera felt something off. The air grew cooler, the lights flickered. Suddenly, the ground trembled, Lera's heart raced and a dizziness appeared as the world and environment around her shimmered and then, vanished. In an instant, she found herself in the middle of a dense jungle, with large plants and the fresh smell of soil.

Her mind raced. She wasn't in the museum anymore. She wasn't even in the same time. She remembered the last thing she'd done, noticing a dusty, ancient book on a shelf in a dark corner of the museum, its pages yellowed and cover nearly falling apart. She placed it up and found that it was about a mysterious dinosaur recorded by words but never seen, from ancient China, its drawings and cryptic symbols feeling oddly out of place.

Just then, the ground beneath her feet shocked violently. Lera alertly looked by, a massive tree nearby on a little hill cracked and splintered of the hill, rolling. In an instant, the ground seemed to shift, and before she could react, a heavy branch from the fallen tree crashed down, pinning her down to earth. Lera gasped in the pain as the weight of the branch pressed against her legs. She embraced the thought of calling for help, but it was fruitless and also dangerous for this ancient era, The jungle, once alive with noise and small creatures around, suddenly seem weirdly quiet in the aftermath of the tree crash.

Her vision blurred with panic as she takes a deal breath, tried her best effort to pull herself free, but the branch was too heavy. Just when she thought she might be trapped forever, something soft and strong nudged her arm. Lera froze, her body paralyzed with scare. She looked up, her eyes widened. Standing over her was a massive dinosaur, its scale deep, rich green, with a long neck curving downwards, as it gazed at her curiously with bright eyes. It wasn't a fearsome predator she imagined as a dinosaur like Tyrannosaurus rex, it was kind, almost curious. The dinosaur lowered its head and nudged the branch aside surprisingly, freeing Lera's legs. Lera gasped with gratitude, then struggled a little to stand up. First time facing a real dinosaur, she was amazed by the gigantic creature, her hands trembling as she reached out to touch its warm, smooth scale.

Before she could say a word, a smaller dinosaur, no bigger than a big dog, waddled over from behind the larger one. It was clearly a juvenile, with soft scales and wide, innocent eyes. It nuzzled Lera's hand quickly, as if welcoming her. The two dinosaurs seemed to recognize her as no threat. The large dinosaur gave a soft, melodic sound that seemed to communicate something with the younger one, and they both moved closer, trying to figure out what Lera, a unique creature for them is.

The baby dinosaur playfully nipped at her sleeve, and Lera laughed softly, wiping the sweat on her head. It was as if they had accepted her. She couldn't believe what is happening. To be honest, Lera had expected danger at first, not companionship, but the behavior of the dinosaurs enhanced her to realize that, they were no longer just extinct, fierce creatures from the past, they were her kindhearted friends and she was theirs.

She suddenly remembered the book that took her here, she shifted through the book with fluster, and she noticed that the records about that mysterious dinosaur fits in to the features of the two dinosaurs facing her. Her heart swelled and she gasped to the destiny and coincidental with the mysterious dinosaur. She eagerly wondered why this spiritual dinosaur became a mysterious myth the human and why their fossils are never found.

As the sky began to darken, the air grew cooler, the dinosaurs moved away to a small clearing, with a flicking campfire. And Lera decided to follow them. As she approach it, the baby dinosaur danced around the flames, movements awkward but joyful, while the bigger dinosaur resting beside Lera's feet peacefully. Lera sat down, fascinated by the calm and reliable personality of the dinosaurs, also feeling unusual, yet comforting by how the dinosaurs accept her.

Suddenly, the larger dinosaur snugged Lera's hand with its snout. She saw it had something in its mouth and dropped it into her palm. Lera was astonished to find a bracelet made out of small, polished, and transparent stones with a daisy fossil in the middle. The dinosaur itself was also wearing a similar one. She couldn't believe the dinosaurs gave her this special gift. Lera felt a rush of warmth. She put the bracelet on her wrist and admired it. She knew it will become a beautiful reminder of the time with these dinosaurs. But still, she can't understand why the book brought her place.

But then, just as the warmth of the fire began to calm down her into sleepiness, the ground trembled. Lera's breath caught in her throat as the earth shook. The trees leaf swayed. A deep, rumbling sound echoed through the jungle. The volcano in the distance, not far, which was originally standing quietly in the sky, seemed to be awakened at this moment. The mountain was slowly vibrating, and clouds black smoke roses from the top. Lora realized that the volcano— is erupting.

Her heard skipped a beat. She had heard about theories and also stories of ancient eruptions, destructing the ecosystem of ancient world, mainly towards the dinosaurs. Her mind race, she need to escape but what about the dinosaurs? How can she warn them?

She stared urgently at the dinosaur beside her. Its gaze met hers, also shocked and terrified, with confusion of what have happened. Without thinking, she raised her hand, palm opened and point toward the erupting volcano and the other way to run in a clear movement she can make.

"Danger" she mouthed, her voice trembling and unclear in the rumbling of the ground. "The volcano RUN!"

The large dinosaur blinked seems to understand, quickly growled and let out a sharp, low call, its a signal, warning the other creatures. The deep roar echoed through the jungle, other dinosaurs, unique creatures, big and small, began to gather, moving toward deeper jungles. Somehow, the dinosaurs had communicated the danger to the others.

Lera ran alongside them. The volcano erupted in the distance, splashing ash and fire into the sky, sending heat waves and destruction across the land, The dinosaurs moved in an lighting speed, Lora soon struggle to keep up, full with exhaustion, limping. That big dinosaur noticed it and placed her onto its back. As Lera glanced back, the eruption started to consume the jungle, the sky full with ask

At last the dinosaurs reached their destination, a sheltered valley, far from the eruption. Lora jumped down from the dinosaurs back.

“we’re safe!” She finally relaxes.

She held up the book she have been protecting in her lap. Words started to appear, on the origin dirty page, about that dinosaur and of what happened in ancient china back then,.Then, a strange sensation washed over Lera. The air shimmered again, and the world around her began to blur. She blinked, disoriented, as the jungle, the dinosaurs, and the erupting volcano slowly faded from view.

Lera woke up on the cold floor of the museum, confused of what have happened, her body aching as if she’d been in a exhausting and tiring journey.Her head felt heavy, remains of a strange vision appeared in her mind as her eyes meet the book opened on the floor, a vivid image in ancient China with dinosaurs and a volcano. She blinked, to reduce her dizziness.

“Lera!” Her moms voice cut through the silence.She looked up and saw her friends and mother rushing towards her, worry filled their faces.

“We were so worried! Are you okay? You disappeared a few hours! We were all finding you!”Nina, one of her friends asked, kneeling beside her.

“I...I think I just had a really tired dream.” Lera whisper.

“Follow me”, the tour guide bought back Lera’s mind.

Years past as she have grown from a teenage girl to a mature undergraduate student at Boston. The journey with the dragons slowly faded in her mind after she was found sleeping, or fainting at the dinosaur museum on her 14th birthday, after that day, for some inexplicable reason, she found out that she have slightly changed her impression towards dinosaurs, they didn't seem that boring when the teacher spoke about them unstoppable in the animal history class. For years she have been seeking for an answer, but till now, it seems like a mystery. And now, with a sense of curious, she stepped into this dinosaur museum.

She seemed to have a vivid dream. All that left her was only a fossil bracelet with a daisy on it and the dream, with dinosaurs, volcano, and a vivid ancient world. She has been seeking for an answer, but till now, she still can't figure it out. The sudden appeared bracelet felt warm against her skin, as if it held some hidden answer behind. Suddenly, she felt an attraction pulling her to a certain place. As she walked, a strange force seemed to guide her steps, to a show case with people crowded around.

A tour guide introduced around that huge Glass case with a full dinosaur skull , "Here we see, is a new – found dinosaur fossil, discovered in East China. Scientists believe that this new – type dinosaur fossil has overthrown the volcanic eruption theory. It has proved that someone, or something stopped the volcanic eruption at that time, allowing life around it. The fossil's unique structure and the ancient patterns on it were a testament to a past that was far more complex than anyone had imagined. Research teams are now flocking to the site where the fossil was found, hoping to uncover more secrets. They believe that this discovery could rewrite the history of the prehistoric era.The survival of this type of dinosaur for many years is a mystery.”

Lera stared at the large skull. Her hands trembled slightly, and she could hardly believe what she was seeing.

There, lying peacefully, around that dinosaurs feet, was a fossil that exactly matched the one on her bracelet. On the glass, introduced that this unique fossil had been found, in the jaws of the dinosaur.

With her eyes wide open and a gasp escaping her lips, she realized that the confusion that had haunted her for years was now clearing. The dream she had held so close to her heart was real. She felt a shiver run down her spine, with a mixture of disbelief.

The memories of that ancient world, the beautiful sights and sounds, figures of the spiritual, came flooding back in a rush. She have actually changed history, changing the path of the river of the past flowing to another unknown way, till know. She have actually stopped a huge construction toward the dinosaur, and that kind dinosaur was the one who helped her made it.

It was a sign that her life was intertwined with something far greater, something magical that spanned over time.

Myth of All Time

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Ye, Andy – 14

In the myth that was told throughout generation the story talked about the story of time and enormous creature. The story was taught "Once upon a time, there was a king who lived with enormous creature named the dinosaurs. They had huge horns, sharp teeth, and giant claws, the small ones was only half of a human size, large ones can grow up to the size above the clouds. The king had a deal with the creatures that both of them wouldn't disturb the development of each other's society. But the king was not fulfilled with the power and land he had, he decide to betray and break the deal between them. The king found a magician who said that he was able to get rid of the dinosaurs for the king, but in return every ten centuries on the day when the moon is closes to the surface of the Earth the scar of time will be ripped open and there is a small chance of the dinosaurs might escape from my control. All citizens of the community must use their life to protect the scar."

The myth has passed for generation and the responsibility mentioned in the myth falls on the shoulder our main character, Jah. But till today no one actually believe in the myth. The castle of the kingdom was nowhere to be found. The night arrived under the chilling mood of everyone, as the moon slowly approach the surface of Earth the sense of gravity and weight began to diminish under the sense of your body. Jah took hold on one of the fences around so he can feel the lift from the moon. As the moon began to approach even more some people began to lose control of their body, it felt like people have lost their weight and began to rise toward the sky. Just before the villagers were about to arrive on moon, a sudden sound broke into the ear of everyone, it was like something had used all of its strength to rip the cage that had been the only thing limiting him. With a great roar there appeared to be a large crack in the air, there was a crack of time and space. Trough the crack a vague figure with great claws and teeth and head appeared, at the same time Jah was back to the ground, the moon has begun to leave, but the creatures seemed to appear and unable to return. Under the shine of moon a great roar had broken the peace that continued for centuries. As the mist in the air began to diminish from the air the figure began to appear, it was a big reptile that seem to be very destructive, but Jah recognized it. That big creature was a dinosaur, it was the first time that Jah felt such fear and unsettled about something, he hide behind the trees and bushes. Under the shine of the night his black jacket provided him a natural camouflage, the dinosaurs began to approach. Every step was marching on to the beat of Jah's heart, he kneel down on one side, so he wasn't so high and obvious. His legs began to shiver, but just when he decide to turn and run, he accidently stepped on a frog. GUA, the loud sound of the frog made the dinosaurs alert of the surroundings, the turn their head toward the direction almost at the same time, Jah got down immediately, unfortunately he wasn't faster than the eyes of dinosaur. As the tremendous creature approach Jah, he was like having a sudden decision made, he stood up and faced the creatures that was about ten times higher than him. What came to the reality than the mental thought was the total fear, in a sudden all the dinosaurs turned and ran toward the opposite side, Jah called stop of one of the big dinosaurs who seems to be fearless. The dinosaur turned its head with a mouthful of British accent, the dinosaur spoke to Jah in a fearful tone his words were full of feeling of begging.

"Halt your steps and leave your action where it is now!" Jah shouted toward that big creature in an uncertain tone.

"Yes sir, what is your demand for this generation, we have been obeying and surviving under the pressure of your family." The dinosaur spoke in the tone of pain with a British accent.

"What is all this thing happening, answer my question and I will let you go, that is all my demand. "Jah's voice was full of desperate and curiosity.

“Well if you really forgot about your birth and the history of your family, let me retell the myth that had been for a long time again but in the correct way. It was long ago since the two kingdoms was still friends, until the day when the kingdom decided that they wanted more. They found the magician that changed everything in history, he came to the castle of the men, but his action wasn't so accurate. He merged the two kingdoms into one, but the process not only binds the structures, but the citizens were also forced to bind with each other. Unfortunately, accident happened during the process of combination the structure of time and space collapsed under the pressure from the magician, everything was pressed into a lower dimension. Only on every ten centuries it was possible to escape using the gravity from the moon to rip apart time and space.” The story ended in sigh of the dinosaur, at the same time the other had returned in silence and sat down. Jah rubbed his hair with perplex still written on his face.

“If I was the child of the family, why am I not in the lower dimension.” Jah was now more curious about his birth than anything.

“Well, you are actually the offspring of the magician in the myth.” The dinosaur's voice and tone were absolute serious and low.

Just between the chat a voice came from far away, but it was very clear as if the sound was just beside them, the voice wandered in the air.

“You fools finally broke out from that dimension, only with your sense may woke me up from my deep sleep, and you my son you shall be my weapon against all ancient “Artifacts”.” The voice ended just as the shadow of a man covered everything in darkness. Jah lift up his head so he could see what was happening, when he saw clearly a man was wearing a black cloak that had covered the shine of moon fully. In a sudden all the dinosaurs kneel to Jah wishing he can fight for them, in the contact of their eyes Jah understood. From his eye his determination was easily understood that he decide to take this fight. He drew out the dagger on his waist , and as he bent down, he puts all his weights on one of his feet as his muscles burst with the pieces of his broken pants, he dashed in front of the magician in a second. Just as he slashes toward the man, but it was blocked by the man. Jah pulls his hand back and, in an instinct, he raised up his left feet for another attack, this time he was straightly hit back to the ground. He then launched his second wave of attack this time his left hand began to heat up and his dagger shines with energy. Then his hand started burning with fire and his dagger was enchanted with electric. Jah threw the fireball into the air directly toward the magician and followed up the fireball. As the fireball was triggered, he was also the three, just after the fire began to dissipate Jah suddenly came in front and with the collision of flame and electric an explosion happened the magician flew far but his back grew out dark arms and hands that slapped Jah away again. The two man was again already in position ready for the next wave of clash. The magician reached out with his chaotic formed hands from his back, Jah turned his waist and back to evade the attacks from the magician, then under the sight of everyone Jah had one last slice the body of the great magician was locked into the prison of time and space. That last slice from Jah had broken the attraction in space. When peace return the body of the dinosaurs began to disappear, modern was not the habitat for them.

The Extinction of Human

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Zheng, Le Ran Tiger – 14

A normal day of working had just ended. Jimmy walked back home just as usual. Everything was normal, and nothing special happened that day. In a sudden, a loud crashing noise from somewhere near his house broke the peaceful mood of his family.

Jimmy was an elementary school science teacher who graduated from college a few years ago. He didn't earn a lot of money from his job, but fortunately, he had a family who always supported him in spite of his failures. And because of that he lived comfortably and cheerfully. He had just enough friends that he needed. Outside of all those factors, he was an ordinary man, and never did he imagine that he would become a famous figure who would decide the fate of human.

Scared, he carefully walked out from his house, glanced at the direction that the crashing noise came from, and immediately sprinted back to his house and closed the door.

"That was an UFO!"

Not until 30 minutes, his house was crowded with polices and journalists. Some of the polices surrounded the unexpected structure that eventually landed on the ground after being discovered. Some journalists interviewed Jimmy about his feelings. Others did what they believed were supposed to do. Compared to the UFO, what shocked Jimmy more was the fact that it was the first time that hundreds of people gathered around his house.

The UFO turned out to be a spaceship. Very neatly designed and made. It was not hard to tell that which civilization that made the spaceship possessed extraordinary technology that were far beyond the control of human being. As soon as the spaceship reached to the ground, large troops and armies arrived. Jimmy stayed in his house, and no one took him away. He was told that everything was under control, and a police officer stayed with him in his house.

A dinosaur stepped out from the spaceship. He bowed, and waited for a few seconds to let the humans catch up with what was happening. Then, he started to deliver a speech:

"My honorable human friends, I am the representative of dinosaurs. Don't be overly frightened, as I can see from your faces. I mean no harm to stand over here. Your scientists have concluded that us dinosaurs had been extincted for decades and centuries and millennia..."

At the moment, Jimmy was overwhelmed. He couldn't believe what had just happened in front of him. Their theories were wrong. Dinosaurs apparently didn't extinct as they had assumed, but they survived in some unexpected way. Since he studies science so much previously, he couldn't accept what he heard from the speech of the dinosaurs.

"Jimmy," the police officer interrupted him from his thinking. "The world is full of fantasy, isn't it? Everything is magical." Jimmy Nodded. The police officer then continued, "We had once doubted whether the dinosaurs had really extincted. We had seen signals that they might had already migrated to other planet. We guessed that they had been watching us for a long time..."

In a sudden, sounds of guns and cannons came from the field outside. The humans clearly weren't patient enough to allow the dinosaur to complete all of his speech, and the hypothesis they made about dinosaurs secretly watching them for a long time could drive them to deem the dinosaur as their enemy. However, everyone knew that

trying to start a war with the dinosaurs was an irrational decision. No one could fully explain why, but everything just happened. Humans had put themselves into a desperate situation where they had to fight and win this battle.

“Uh Oh.” Signed Jimmy. Then followed by the other family members. And the police officer. “Didn’t expect that to happen,” said the police officer. “As you know, human as a group is extremely arrogant. They are confident on things that they shouldn’t be, and throw doubt to the ones that we should believe.”

The anger of the dinosaurs were also ignited. Their weapons were much more advanced than the humans’. The war didn’t even last an hour until dinosaurs killed all the human soldiers without anyone even getting injured.

“Hello? My friend, hiding in the house. It is time to compromise.”

Jimmy and everyone in the room knew that the dinosaur was talking to them. They immediately replied by rushing out of the house, raising both of their hands and said “We SURRENDER!”

“Honestly, I am disappointed.” Said the dinosaur calmly, but angrily. “I thought human would be humble and modest, so that we can assist you human with technology. By the way, we don’t care if we really have to support you or not. How your representatives acted didn’t fulfill our requirements for a qualified civilization. As a punishment, all humans will be eliminated. And you, my friend, will be used in our experiment, to create another civilization...just has how we were created.”

“Remember firmly, that human died for a death crime: arrogance.”

A Transaction

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Zhou, Muyao Beverly – 16

"Transact successfully." A string of text appeared on the phone, flashing with a faint light. A wave of anxiety and excitement rose in her throat. "Will I be punished?"

On the day before the Christmas holiday, all the students in Greenwich High School were highly agitated. In Class A, Mr. Adrien was discussing the conservation of momentum.

"Anyone can answer this question?" In a daze, Aurora raised her hand, below, was a green bruise.

"Sir, the answer is..." Evelyn said.

"Please raise hand first, Miss Evelyn," said Mr. Adrien unsatisfactorily.

At this moment, Aurora felt a cold gaze from Evelyn. The shrill school bell rang, and she knew the nightmare was approaching.

"Come here, Aurora, now, let me show you something," said Gloria. A piping hot curling iron slammed into her wrist rapidly. The intense pain made she almost faint in the school bathroom. Indifferently, at the corner, Evelyn watching the whole game, a terrific smile appeared on her face.

An iron-made, almost 9-foot gate revealed in the darkness, which was tightly closed. "What's going on? Aren't you guys leaving?" Asked Lady Penelope, the senior principal, who is the last one to leave school everyday.

"We are locked at school, and there's no one can help us. Everyone has gone for Christmas," answered Mr. Adrien. "Who did that stupid thing?" Evelyn stroked her hair, cursing loudly. "Guys, we need to stay calm and wait for help". Said Ms. Sophia.

Bang, there was a loud noise, and the sound of glass breaking echoed through the hall. "What sound?" Gloria asked. Everyone shook their heads. Then, the sound of a cabinet falling to the ground came from the next room.

"Who's there?"

"Is there anyone else in this school who is trapped besides us?"

"The voice seems to be coming from that classroom."

Several people looked at each other, but none of them dared to step forward and open the door. "I'll take a look", Mr. Adrien stood up from the couch and took a gentle step, his brown shoes making a rustling sound against the soft carpe, slowly placed hand on the doorknob of the classroom and then suddenly opened the door. A cool breeze burst out of the door instantly, blowing his hair.

staggering back, Mr. Adrien reached out to turn on the classroom light. "The classroom window is broken!" Mr. Adrien turned his head in disbelief. Everyone jumped up from the couch and ran over to check.

"And the bookcase in the classroom is overturned."

"Hey, what's that?" Gloria pointed at a huge thing.

"Obviously, a Christmas decoration," said Evelyn indifferently.

"Are you sure a Christmas decoration can move?"

The sound of heavy footsteps approached them, growing more and more rapid. "Kids, back off!" Mr. Adrien held up a metal meter ruler and shouted at the children. Evelyn shouted and dragged Gloria rush out of the classroom. Ms. Sophia helped Lady Penelope to hide under the desk. Nobody found Aurora gone. The giant creature pushed its two front paws through the shattered glass, its rough dark green skin, sharp fangs, and hideous orb-like eyes revealed under the classroom light. Mr. Adrien's face was pale, and his legs began to tremble, but still waved the ruler and stabbed at the monster. Ms. Sophia looked out through the gap in the desk. She was stunned for a moment and kept muttering the word "dinosaur". The elder lady heard it, not seeming to be surprised but deep in thought.

The green monster lifted a foot as big as a desk and stepped on Mr. Adrien. No hesitation, he stabbed the meter rule into the monster's foot. A stream of weird liquid spread from the monster's foot, with a extreme stench. It raised its foot and let out a sharp cry. "Run!" Shouted Mr. Adrien. Meanwhile, Ms. Sophia glanced back at the monster, muttering, "This is really a dinosaur....."

Three adults ran into the swimming pool and locked the doors and windows. "Where has the situation led us? We must find a way to get out of here safely. We all saw that thing. It's incredible. It opened its mouth wide." Mr. Adrien pinched his face, trying to wake himself up. "Have you heard about the new research in the lab next to our school? They must have caused this. At this point, we need to find a way to get out of here safely," the elder lady pushed her glasses and said.

"What the hell? I want to go home! I haven't eaten dinner yet." Evelyn stomped his foot. "By the way, do you see what it is?" "Whatever, must be the escaped animals from the zoo. It's not the first time." Gloria shrugged her shoulders, "Well, let's go to the cafeteria and get something to eat. I'm really starving."

Gloria opened the refrigerator, said, "Hey, there's yogurt here, Evelyn? Where are you? I don't have time to play hide and seek with you." The empty cafeteria was silent as a sleeping monster. A feeling a burst of anger rising in her heart. "Hey, don't make trouble!"

Suddenly, a huge figure appeared in front of her. The yogurt in the hand fell on the ground. Gloria raised her head and saw Evelyn, who was struggling to be carried by the dinosaur. "What's going on?" The dinosaur stretched out its front paws and was about to grab her, but it suddenly stopped. Evelyn, who was merely dying in its paws, also fell. "Run!" A familiar voice came. It was Mr. Adrien. It was seen that he and Ms. Sophia were both holding a bucket in their hands. "What's going on?" "It's not the time to tell the story!"

They ran to the swimming pool. "Who can explain this?" Gloria wiped her sweat. "The monster you saw is actually a mechanical dinosaur. It ran out of the experimental base next to the school. We guessed that the people in the laboratory haven't perfected it, so we splashed it with water, and its function really failed. Now we are safe, and we just have to wait for help." Ms. Sophia explained breathlessly. "What, this is outrageous....." Evelyn woke up. "Wait, where is

Aurora?" Mr. Adrien asked. "Whatever, she runs the fastest when we were in danger. She's really as cowardly as usual." Gloria laughed contemptuously. "Hey, can you just stop being that men? The dinosaur was broken, Aurora is safe now. We might as well rest first." Mr. Adrien sat down in a chair and said. Everyone acquiesced.

"Where's the replacement core?" Aurora rummaged through her schoolbag, "Here. I only need to read the replacement chip manual that X gave me, and the dinosaur can be restarted." Aurora took out a thumb-sized black square. She looked at the scribbled instruction manual and pressed the button on the mechanical dinosaur's tail. "This dinosaur skin is too realistic! Why doesn't X keep such a successful test in good shape? Why did him ask me to let it out?"

She Thought about it, heard the sound of the chip popping out of the dinosaur's back, pulled out the original chip, and inserted the replacement core in her hand. Soon, the dinosaur moved its tail slightly. "Oh, it works." said she, preparing to leave the cafeteria.

One step, two steps, the dinosaur got closer and closer. Nobody realized death was approaching. In an instant, the glass door was shattered by a tremendous force, and countless tiny shards stabbed at them like throwing knives. "No! I'm going to die. I don't want to die!" Gloria staggered continuously and then lost consciousness. "Jump into the pool!" The Mr. Adrien shouted. "Trust me, please!" Except for Gloria, everyone jumped into the pool.

The dinosaur reaches out the claws to grab the others, but fails. It seems to know it can't go near the water. Evelyn pokes her head out of the pool, shouting, "I can't breathe!" Dinosaur hears the sound and turns its head sharply, stretching its left leg to catch her. Fortunately, Ms. Sophia caught her hurriedly.

The dinosaur roared in rage as it paced back and forth by the pool, its eyes fixed on the people huddled in water. Aurora watched them from a distance, a strange look in her eyes. She knew she had caused this chaos.

Suddenly, there was a faint sound of sirens in the distance. The dinosaur, sensing the approaching danger, became even more agitated. It started to smash at the walls, sending debris flying everywhere.

Mr. Adrien, trying to keep everyone calm, said, "Stay in the water. The rescue is coming." But the fear of everyone was implacable. Evelyn was sobbing, and Ms. Sophia was praying softly.

The sirens grew louder, and finally, a team of heavily armed police and scientists from the nearby laboratory arrived. They were shocked to see the destruction. The scientists quickly set up some sort of energy device, aiming it at the dinosaur.

"Oh, please help us. We almost died!" Aurora cried in a deep sorrow, knelt down on the ground, pretended that she knew nothing as an innocent victim.

"Poor girl, everything is getting better, we are here." The rescuer comforted her with compassion.

The news of the death of Gloria and the dropping out of Evelyn was declared in the assembly, everyone showed their incredibility, indicating the willingness to attend the funeral.

Nobody can hurt her, she's the winner, but not the mastermind behind the scenes. Aurora recalls the whole game, a terrific smile appeared on her face.

"Is Aurora here? There is a man called X wants to see you." Said somebody.

The Lost Dinosaurs' Exodus

HKCCCU Logos Academy, Ho, Wung Hay Hayden – 14

Part 1:

The biting wind whipped across Dr. Li Mei's face as she carefully brushed away another layer of sediment. Despite the harsh conditions of the Gobi Desert, a smile crept across her weathered features. "Professor Zhang! Come quickly!" she called out, her voice barely audible over the howling gale.

A lanky figure hurried over, his salt-and-pepper hair tousled by the wind. Professor Zhang Jian squinted through his goggles, kneeling beside Dr. Li to examine her find.

"Incredible," he breathed, reaching out to gently trace the outline of a fossilised skull emerging from the ancient rock. "A theropod, but unlike any I've ever seen. The cranial structure... it's completely unique."

Dr. Li nodded excitedly. "And look at the teeth – they're serrated, but far more delicate than typical carnivores. Could it be an entirely new species?"

"It's certainly possible," Professor Zhang mused. "We'll need to excavate the full skeleton and run extensive analysis, but this could be a major discovery for palaeontology in China."

As the two scientists conferred, neither noticed the small drone hovering high above their dig site, its camera zoomed in on their precious find.

Miles and miles away in an office building, a man in an impeccably tailored suit leaned forward, studying the live feed on his computer screen. Cheng Wei allowed himself a rare smile. "Excellent work, Dr. Li," he murmured. "You've just made my company a fortune."

Over the next few days, Dr. Li worked tirelessly to unearth their remarkable discovery. As each new bone was revealed, their excitement grew. This was no ordinary theropod – its unique combination of features hinted at an entirely new evolutionary branch. "We're calling it *Sinomixosaurus*," Dr. Li announced. "A true missing link in China's prehistoric past."

Cheers erupted from the team, but their celebration was short-lived. As the sun began to set on their fourth day of excavation, a fleet of SUVs appeared on the horizon, kicking up clouds of dust as they sped towards the dig site.

Professor Zhang's brow furrowed with concern. "Who could that be? We're not expecting any visitors out here." Dr. Li shook her head, a sense of unease growing in the pit of her stomach.

The vehicles screeched to a halt, and a dozen men in dark suits emerged, led by a familiar face that made Dr. Li's blood run cold.

"Cheng Wei," she hissed. "What is he doing here?"

The tech mogul strode confidently towards them, a predatory grin on his face. “Dr. Li, Professor Zhang, how wonderful to see you both. I trust your excavation has been productive?”

Professor Zhang stepped forward, his normally gentle demeanour hardening. “Mr. Cheng, this is a restricted archaeological site. I’m afraid I must ask you and your... associates to leave immediately.”

Cheng’s smile never wavered. “Oh, I don’t think that will be necessary. You see, as of this morning, TechnoFossil Industries has been granted exclusive rights to all paleontological discoveries in this region. Your little dig site now belongs to us.”

Dr. Li gasped. “That’s impossible! We have all the proper permits and authorizations from the authorities!”

“Had, my dear doctor. Had,” Cheng corrected smoothly. “It’s amazing what a few well-placed donations can accomplish. Now, if you’ll excuse us, my team will be taking over from here.”

As Cheng’s men began to swarm the site, Dr. Li felt a surge of anger and desperation. Years of work, countless sacrifices, all about to be snatched away by a greedy corporation. She couldn’t let that happen.

In a flash, she grabbed the partially excavated skull of *Sinomixosaurus* and sprinted towards the team’s battered Ford. “Professor, come on!” she shouted. They leapt into the vehicle as Cheng’s men gave chase.

“Stop them!” Cheng roared, but it was too late. The engine roared to life, and Dr. Li floored the accelerator, sending them hurtling across the desert landscape.

As they sped away from the dig site, adrenaline coursing through her veins, Dr. Li glanced at the precious fossil cradled in Professor Zhang’s arms. She knew their actions would have serious consequences, but the thought of Cheng Wei exploiting their discovery for profit was unbearable.

“What do we do now?” Zhang whispered. Dr. Li’s grip tightened on the steering wheel. “We protect *Sinomixosaurus*, no matter the cost.”

Little did they know, their daring escape was just the beginning of an adventure that would uncover secrets buried for millions of years – secrets that would shake the very foundations of our understanding of the world.

As night fell over the Gobi Desert, Dr. Li and Professor Zhang found themselves huddled in a small cave, the stolen. They had managed to lose Cheng’s men in the twisting canyons, but they knew it was only a matter of time before they were found. “We need a plan,” Zhang said, his usually calm voice tinged with worry. “We can’t stay here forever, and we certainly can’t return to Beijing. Cheng’s influence runs too deep.”

Dr. Li nodded, her mind racing. “I have a colleague in Xian – Dr. Wu Fang. She specialises in advanced imaging techniques for fossils. If we can get *Sinomixosaurus* to her, we might be able to unlock its secrets before Cheng can claim it.”

“It’s risky,” Zhang cautioned. “The journey is long, and we’ll be fugitives. Are you sure about this, Mei?”

She met his gaze, determination burning in her eyes. "We've dedicated our lives to understanding the past, Professor. If we let Cheng rewrite history for his own gain, what was it all for?"

Zhang smiled, some of his old spirit returning. "Well then, my dear colleague, it seems we're about to embark on quite the adventure."

As they settled in for an uneasy night's sleep, neither scientist could have imagined the incredible journey that lay ahead.

Part 2:

Dawn broke over the Gobi Desert, painting the sky in hues of pink and gold. Dr. Li and Professor Zhang emerged from their makeshift shelter, blinking against the harsh sunlight. They had spent a restless night, taking turns to keep watch, but now it was time to move.

"We need to ditch the Raptor," Dr. Li said as they carefully packed the *Sinomixosaurus* skull. "Cheng's men will be looking for it." Zhang nodded. "Agreed. But how do we cross the desert on foot?"

A glimmer appeared in Li's eyes. "We don't. We're going underground."

Hours later, they stood at the mouth of a vast cave system. Ancient legends spoke of a network of tunnels stretching across all of China, supposedly created by prehistoric beasts. "Are you sure about this?" Zhang asked, peering into the darkness. Li switched on her headlamp. "No, but it's our best chance." As they ventured deeper into the cave, the air grew cool and damp. Their footsteps echoed off walls adorned with striking rock formations, each twist and turn revealing new wonders.

Several hours later, Zhang called for a rest. As they sat on a rocky outcrop, sharing a meagre meal of dried fruit and nuts, he turned to Li with a thoughtful expression.

"Mei, there's something I've been meaning to ask you," he began. "The *Sinomixosaurus*' features are truly remarkable. Almost too remarkable. Have you considered the possibility that it might be..."

"A fake?" Li finished, her voice sharp. "Of course I have. I've spent my entire career learning to spot forgeries and frauds. This is different. I can feel it in my bones."

Zhang held up his hands placatingly. "I meant no offence. It's just that if it is genuine, it could rewrite everything we thought we knew about dinosaur evolution." Li's expression softened. "I know. That's why we have to protect it, to study it properly. Cheng would probably just sell it to the highest bidder without a second thought."

As night fell in the world above, they pressed on through the winding tunnels. The darkness seemed to press in around them, broken only by the beams of their headlamps. Strange echoes sometimes reached their ears, but they dismissed them as tricks of the cave's acoustics.

On their third day underground, they stumbled upon something extraordinary. Their tunnel opened into a vast cavern, its ceiling lost in shadows high above. But it wasn't the size that took their breath away – it was what lay before them.

Dinosaur tracks. “Impossible,” Zhang whispered, kneeling to examine the nearest prints. “These should have eroded away millions of years ago.”

Li’s mind raced with possibilities. “Unless... this cave system was sealed off somehow, protecting them from the elements. Jian, do you realise what this means? We could be looking at a snapshot of dinosaur behaviour!”

They spent hours documenting the tracks, identifying different species and theorising about the interactions they implied. Their reverie was shattered by a distant boom that shook dust from the cavern walls. “What was that?” Zhang asked, alarm clear in his voice. Li’s face paled. “Explosives. We need to move, now!”

They hurried deeper into the cave system, the sounds of pursuit growing louder behind them. The tunnels began to slope downward, taking them further beneath the earth’s surface. The air grew warmer, more humid, and an odd smell filled their nostrils.

Rounding a corner, they skidded to a halt. A rickety wooden bridge, looking centuries old, spanned a large chasm. On the other side, the tunnel continued, emitting a strange, pulsing glow. “We have no choice,” Li said, testing the bridge’s nearest plank with her foot. “We have to cross.”

Step by careful step, they made their way across the chasm. The bridge creaked and swayed alarmingly, but held. Just as they reached the other side, a shout echoed from behind them.

Without hesitation, Li drew her knife and began sawing at the ropes holding the bridge. Zhang caught on quickly, attacking the other side. As their pursuers reached the chasm’s edge, the last rope snapped, and the bridge fell away into the darkness below.

Breathing heavily, Li and Zhang shared a look of grim triumph. But their victory was short-lived. The strange glow from the tunnel ahead intensified, and with it came a sound that chilled them to their very core – a low, rumbling growl that no human throat could produce.

“Mei,” Zhang said slowly, his eyes wide with a mixture of fear and wonder, “I don’t think we’re alone down here.” As if in response, the growl came again, louder this time.

Li clutched the bag containing the skull. “It can’t be,” she whispered. “It’s not possible.”

But as an enormous, scaled head emerged from the glowing tunnel ahead, they were forced to confront an impossible truth. Their journey had led them not just into the heart of the earth, but somehow, incredibly, into the distant past.

The dinosaur – a creature straight out of their wildest paleontological dreams – regarded them with curious eyes. Behind it, they could see flashes of movement, hints of a thriving ecosystem that should have vanished aeons ago.

“What do we do now?” Zhang asked, his voice barely audible. Li squared her shoulders, her scientific curiosity overcoming her fear. “We do what we came here to do, Jian. We study. We learn. And somehow, we find a way to protect this place from those who would exploit it.”

Part 3:

Dr. Li and Professor Zhang stood frozen, their eyes locked on the impossible creature before them. The massive sauropod lowered its long neck, bringing its head close to the awestruck scientists. The dinosaur's nostrils flared, taking in their scent. Then, to their amazement, it gently nudged Li with its snout.

Zhang let out a breathless laugh. "I think it likes you, Mei."

Slowly, carefully, Li reached out a trembling hand and placed it on the dinosaur's scales. They were warm to the touch, slightly rough, and undeniably real. Tears welled in her eyes as the magnitude of the moment washed over her. A chorus of chirps and squawks erupted from the glowing tunnel. A group of small, feathered theropods – similar to *Sinosauropteryx* but with vibrant, iridescent plumage – scampered into view. They regarded the humans with curious tilts of their heads, chittering amongst themselves.

"We need to document everything," Zhang said, fumbling for his camera with shaking hands. "No one will believe this without evidence."

As they photographed and sketched their surroundings, the initial shock began to wear off, replaced by burning scientific curiosity. The cave opened into a vast, illuminated cavern that seemed to stretch for kilometres. Bioluminescent fungi and strange, glowing crystals provided soft, ethereal light. A diverse array of plant life covered the ground and climbed the walls – ferns, cycads, and species they couldn't begin to identify.

And everywhere, there were dinosaurs. Herds of hadrosaurs browsed on the lush vegetation. Small packs of dromaeosaurs darted between the larger creatures. In a nearby pool, a group of aquatic reptiles that resembled *Nanchangosaurus* lazily swam in circles.

"It's an entire ecosystem," Li breathed, her mind reeling. "Somehow preserved here for millions of years."

Zhang nodded, his eyes wide with wonder. "But how? What could have caused this?"

As if in answer, the ground beneath their feet trembled. In the distance, a section of the cavern wall shimmered and rippled like the surface of a pond. A massive, serpentine neck emerged, attached to a body that seemed to defy the laws of physics. The creature was there, and yet not there – its edges blurred and shifted as if it wasn't fully part of their reality.

"Impossible," Zhang gasped. "Is that... a dragon?"

Li shook her head in disbelief. "Not a dragon. A dinosaur, but... different. Look at how it moves through the air, almost like it's swimming."

The creature – which resembled a cross between an elongated sauropod and a mythical Chinese dragon – soared gracefully through the cavern. As it passed, the very fabric of space seemed to warp around it.

"Of course," Li said, a look of dawning comprehension on her face. "That's how this place has survived. These creatures – they're not just dinosaurs. They've evolved the ability to manipulate space-time itself!"

Zhang looked sceptical. “That’s a bit of a leap, don’t you think?”

“Is it any more unbelievable than what we’re seeing?” Li countered. “Think about it – the legends of dragons, the myths of underground realms. What if they all stemmed from encounters with these beings?”

As they debated the implications, a commotion arose from the direction they had come. Cheng’s men had found another way across the chasm and were now pouring into the cavern, weapons drawn.

The effect on the dinosaurs was immediate. Panic spread through the herds, with larger animals stampeding and smaller ones scattering for cover. The air filled with alarmed calls and the thunder of massive feet.

Cheng Wei himself strode forward, his eyes gleaming with avarice as he took in the scene. “My dear doctors,” he called out, “I must thank you for leading us to this... goldmine. Can you imagine the profit potential? A real-life Jurassic Park!”

“You can’t do this, Cheng!” Li shouted over the din. “This ecosystem is fragile. Your interference could destroy it all!”

Cheng’s smile was cold. “I’m afraid you don’t have a say in the matter. Men, secure the area. And catch me one of those little feathered ones – it’ll make a nice souvenir.”

Suddenly, the air rippled again, and the dragon-like creature descended, hovering protectively over the two scientists. Its eyes, swirling with galaxies, fixed on Cheng and his men. A low, resonant hum filled the cavern, and the invaders found themselves unable to move, frozen in place.

Li felt a strange presence in her mind – ancient, wise, and unmistakably alien. Images flashed before her eyes: the birth of the planet, the rise and fall of the dinosaurs, and the evolution of these incredible beings in their underground sanctuary.

“They’re showing us their history,” she said to Zhang, her voice filled with awe. “And... I think they’re asking for our help.” The presence in their minds conveyed a clear message: this hidden world was in danger, not just from Cheng, but from the inexorable march of time and progress above.

As the mental connection faded, Li and Zhang found themselves holding hands, tears streaming down their faces from the sheer beauty and emotion of what they had experienced.

“We have to protect them,” Zhang said firmly.

Li nodded, her resolve strengthened. “But how? We’re just two scientists against Cheng’s resources and the whole world’s potential exploitation.”

A soft chirp drew their attention. The Sinomixosaurus they had excavated – or rather, a living version of it – stood before them, its intelligent eyes regarding them curiously. In that moment, Li had an epiphany.

“The fossil,” she said, reaching for her bag. “It’s not just a specimen – it’s a key!”

As she held up the skull, it began to glow with the same ethereal light as the cavern crystals. The living Sinomixosaurus touched its snout to the fossil, and a surge of energy pulsed through the cave.

The dragon-like being let out a melodious call, and the other dinosaurs began to gather around Li and Zhang. The air shimmered and swirled, and Li realized with a start that a portal was forming – a gateway to another world, one where these magnificent creatures could live in peace.

“They’re leaving,” Zhang said softly. “But where will they go?”

Li smiled, understanding flooding her mind. “To a new home, beyond our reach. And we’re going to help them get there.”

As the dinosaurs began to file through the portal, Li and Zhang worked quickly. They gathered their notes and photos, knowing they had a responsibility to share this discovery with the world – but only after ensuring the dinosaurs’ safety.

Cheng and his men remained frozen, helpless to intervene as history literally walked past them. Li approached Cheng, her face set in determination.

“You wanted to exploit the past, Cheng. Instead, you’re going to help preserve the future.” She placed a small, glowing crystal in his hand. “This contains enough data to revolutionize a dozen industries – clean energy, medicine, materials science. Use it wisely, and maybe you’ll do some good for once.”

As the last of the dinosaurs disappeared through the portal, Li and Zhang shared a look. They knew their lives would never be the same after this experience.

“Ready for one last adventure?” Li asked, gesturing towards the shimmering gateway.

Zhang grinned. “With you? Always.”

Hand in hand, the two scientists stepped through the portal. They didn’t know what awaited them on the other side, but they were certain of one thing – A great adventure awaited. As the portal closed behind them, the cavern’s glow faded. Cheng and his men unfroze, left to wonder at the empty cave and the miraculous crystal that would change the world. And deep beneath the earth, the echoes of the dinosaurs’ last song in our world slowly faded away, leaving behind the promise of a new beginning.

The Beacon in the Abyss

Hong Kong Taoist Association Tang Hin Memorial Secondary School, Huang, Sheung Yu – 15

When the world descended into darkness, was there even a glimmer of silver lining amidst the clouds?

I could not answer.

As the sun sank beneath the jagged skyline, darkness swallowed everything. I found myself amidst the remnants of a wrecked defensive stone wall built by the Ceratopsians, its once-majestic arches now crushed and crumbled by the brutality of war. The air was heavy with the scent of burnt foliage, distant growls of theropods reverberating through the valley. Two centuries had passed since the massacre initiated by the aggressive Sinraptor, marking the threshold of the verge-less darkness. Ever since then, burgeoning wars between different dinosaur tribes raged on, spiraling and festering like an infectious wound.

Every tribe had its own justifications for partaking the brawling: safeguarding feeding grounds, fighting over dwindling prey, shielding the young; The weather had grown increasingly inhospitable: sparser vegetation, scarcer prey, a heating-up climate. Everyone was confined in this relentless battlefield, vying for food, for habitats, for safety.

But was this the sole pathway to a resolution?

Certainly not. I, Orni, an Ornithomimid (a gentle herbivore), had always yearned for peace. “There’s always a luminous path that emerges from the shadows.” Mama used to say. In the past few years, I had traversed through different territories and stepped onto dangerous battlefields, pleading for peace, but to no avail. As days bled into nights and nights fought into days, I was compelled to witness, again and again, how precious lives, one by one, were taken away by the relentless fury of fighting soldiers. Those were days and nights of immense grief, anguish and darkness I did not want to recall.

But the darkest day was to come.

Today would be the day.

Bloodstream, bloodbath, bloodshed. Everything was in a brutal strife; Battling, combating, wrestling. Everything was bloodstained. The once-peaceful valleys that had been my home were now a cacophony of roars and thundering clashes. In the vicinity, a Therizinosaurus and a Monolophosaurus faced off, the herbivore Therizinosaurus brandishing its formidable claws while the agile predator circled, searching for an opening. With a thunderous roar, Monolophosaurus lunged, jaws snapping perilously close to Therizinosaurus. The herbivore retaliated, slashing with its elongated claws, determined to drive the predator away. Both battled fiercely, each aware that only one could leave the encounter unscathed. I could feel the ground tremble beneath me, the vibrant greens of ferns and cycads crushed under the weight of titanic bodies.

Somehow, my heart was crushed too.

In a dense thicket on the left side of the valley, Sinosauropteryx, a feathered small predator, spotted the elusive Dromaeosaurus. With a fierce screech, the Sinosauropteryx lunged forward, narrowly missing the Dromaeosaurus’s neck but catching a tuft of feathers in its jaws. The larger predator retaliated by sweeping its powerful tail, sending the

smaller dinosaur tumbling into the underbrush. Undeterred, Sinosauropteryx sprang back to its feet, its feathers ruffled but eyes gleaming with determination. It darted around a cluster of trees, using the terrain to its advantage, before launching itself at the Dromaeosaurus once more, this time aiming for its exposed flank. The two then engaged in a furious flurry of feathers and teeth, darting between trees, their movements a blur of instinct and agility, each vying for the upper hand in this fierce contest for survival. The ground trembled again, this time more vigorously, as if sensing the brewing chaos of their struggle.

A pang of profound sadness surged within me.

This brutal, gruesome battlefield used to be my homeland. Once, the sun bathed the lush ferns in golden light as I darted playfully between the trees, my agile legs propelling me effortlessly. Once, I paused by the crystal-clear stream, watching the water sparkle as it danced over smooth pebbles. Once, I could merrily savor the juicy bursts of sweet berries, unburdened by concerns of weather or food. Our world had been so flamboyant and idyllic before all the fighting began—the gentle rustling of leaves, the warm sun on my back. Back then, the air was filled with the cheerful chirping of insects and distant bird calls. Life was so bright, so welcoming, so hopeful.

But now, as I gazed into the distance, I saw nothing of the sunshine and flowers that once flourished. Crimson was haphazardly splashed onto the boundless canva, caging the world in scarlet obscurity. The rivers bled into different hues of maroon, the vegetation torn, the prey split open. I saw and only saw the bleeding sky, the wrecked habitats, the clashing bodies.

“My dear,” Mama once said to me under the twinkling stars of the night sky, “Imagine the world as a vast darkness, but each of us, you and me and all the others, is a flickering light. In the moments of strife, the shadows grow, and life may seem so bleak and hopeless...” She lowered her voice, gathering me closer. Gusts of silky wind blew softly, caressing my face.

Her next words, carried by the tender breeze, were whispered softly yet resonated deeply, “But Orni, remember not to forfeit kindness even in the darkest times. Kindness is like the beacon which illuminates the path of others.” Her eyes reflected wisdom as they gazed into mine. “True strength, Orni,” she said, “is not the power of our claws or the might of our roars, but in our unity to shine brightly together. At that moment, we could create a glimmering, shimmering constellation of hope, where every light contributes to a brighter world.”

I still remembered the stars twinkling in the boundless sky that night, as if they were inviting me to embark on a perilous journey calling for peace. I remembered reaching out to my claw to accept the invitation. But no matter how hard I tried, no matter how high I leaped, I still couldn’t touch the stars even when I was jumping the highest I could.

I never saw the stars again. They were engulfed by the mist because of the escalating weather.

As the war raged on, my soul felt like it was being pulled apart. I had always believed in the power of peace, but the scenes before me were overwhelming. Everywhere I looked, my fellow dinosaurs were consumed by the fight. I watched Iguanodon fight valiantly, its thumb spikes glinting in the moonlight, defending its territory against the relentless Sinraptor. A Jianchangosaurus attempted to bite the long neck of a Mamenchisaurus, but the herbivore swung its powerful tail, striking the predator and sending it sprawling. The ground trembled and shook again and again to the ferocious rhythm of the brawl.

What could be done?

Mama, you told me to be the beacon and illuminate others. I did listen to you and tried so, so hard to become the beacon. But could the gloom really be lightened up?

I often tried to speak out, to gather allies for peace, but my light was so dim, so trivial that it was shrouded in darkness. "Please," I would plead, "there must be another way! We can find common ground!" "We could be united, not divided!" Yet, my pleas drew scorn, my words fell on deaf ears, drowned by the clashing of teeth and the cries of warriors. "You fool, haven't you heard of the survival of the fittest?" "He's insane, he just wants every dinosaur to die!"

No one listened, no one cared.

As I rested on the cold, damp rock, it suddenly hit me—I had never been so lonely.

Amidst the chaos, the great Sauropelta lumbered into the fray, its armored body a testament to its resilience. I admired its strength, standing firm against the predators, yet I felt a pang of hopelessness. Even such might could not stem the tide of war. The Sinraptor nimbly dodged the heavy blows by the Sauropelta, targeting Sauropelta's vulnerable joints in return. With each precise strike, the Sauropelta was worn down, struggling to regain its balance. With a well-placed leap, the Sinraptor clamped down on the Sauropelta's neck, delivering the final blow.

I shut my eyes again, isolating myself from the ruthless combat. I envisioned a tranquil valley, untouched by the ravages of war, where dinosaurs roamed freely, unthreatened and united. I dreamed of a future where dinosaurs like Pachycephalosaurus, with their thick skulls, could channel their strength into building bonds instead of breaking them. My imagination had long become my refuge, a way to escape the reality of our fractured world. Yet, I knew my visions would be futile if no one else shared my dream.

But should I give up? What if there was still a silver lining?

The ground trembled more violently again beneath my feet, sending vibrations through my bones, this time finally alerting me. I immediately searched for the sky. Dark, billowing clouds began to gather ominously overhead, swirling with ash that blackened the sky and dimmed the sunlight. Sulfurous fumes wafted through the air, stinging my nostrils. Whispers of a great upheaval spread among the dinosaurs, but still, they fought, too consumed by their hatred to heed the warnings of the earth.

My heart sank as I came to a realization.

The volcano that loomed in the distance, long dormant, was awakening.

As cracks appeared on the ground, revealing glowing magma just below the surface, a flicker of determination ignited within me. I knew I had to act. I couldn't give up. I had to tear them from the battle at least for this moment and take us to a safer place. I vowed to find a way to bring my fellow dinosaurs together, to remind them that we were more than just fighters—we were a community, a family. We were part of a greater tapestry of life, intricately woven together. If we could restore that balance, perhaps we could fill our world once more with harmony, laughter, and the vibrant colors of life, instead of the dark shadows of conflict.

There was only a little time left.

The sky darkened as ash began to rain down, mixing with the chaos of battle. I called out to my fellow dinosaurs, my voice straining against the roar of the eruption. "We must leave! The volcano is going to erupt!"

I wailed and ran and hopped and slashed. But their eyes were filled with fear and rage. They continued to fight, oblivious to the impending doom.

I kicked and cried and leaped and screamed. Yet their eyes brimmed with dread and fury. They persisted in their struggle, oblivious to the approaching catastrophe.

No one listened, no one cared. I was clawed on the neck, on the back, on the face.

I fell to the ground.

I watched in horror as the ground split open. Fiery plumes shot high, casting a hellish glow over the battlefield. The molten rock spewed, painting the landscape in vivid, terrifying colors. Everything was engulfed in darkness.

It was all over now.

As the volcano erupted, a fiery wave of destruction surged toward us. I stood frozen, surrounded by chaos, my heart heavy with sorrow. All the fighting, all the hatred—it had led us to this moment of annihilation.

Mama, I failed you. I am so, so sorry. Yet, in this final moment, I found solace in the thought of joining you, away from the screams and growls and pains. Finally away from the abysmal darkness.

In those final seconds, as the world around me crumbled, I clung to the last flicker of hope—the vision of a peaceful valley where we were united, not divided; we were friends, not enemies.

But as the eruption unleashed its fury, engulfing everything in its path, my dreams shattered alongside the world around me, each fragment falling like ash, lost in the chaos. The last thing I felt was profound sadness for all the lives lost and the dream of peace that would never be realized. In the end, the fire of conflict consumed us all, and my call for peace was silenced in the roar of destruction.

Over, it was all over now.

In the wake of the eruption, silence reigned over the valley. The once—vibrant land lay buried under ash and rubble—a testament to our folly. But perhaps, somewhere in the ashes, the seeds of a new beginning could take root, and the sprouts of new life forms could be fostered—if only someone would remember. If only, someone would heed the call for peace.

When the world descends into darkness, will you be the beacon?

The Lies

Hong Kong Taoist Association Tang Hin Memorial Secondary School, Liu, Yu Ting – 15

Carlyle stood still to a piece of gigantic rib bones.

The room was cold, dim and silent, even the steps of a cockroach or the nibbling of a lab rat could be heard from doors away. But even so, there would be nothing to hear. There were, to be frank, no bugs or mice, not even creatures alive. If you open one of those doors and look out, you will see more doors coming into vision. Behind the doors there was more silence, silence enough to throttle one's heartbeat into nothing but a whispering drumming in one's cochlea. There would not be conversations among these doors and the quarantine areas the doors were trying to isolate since nobody dared to. Not because of some fearful penalties, but the board hanging on each of these doors: Silence the secret. Nobody could make a noise even if they wanted to because everybody knows their mission on the first day of stepping into these doors——Hide the secrets. These words were engraved in each and every one's mind and were penetrating throughout their whole body along with the blood in their veins. These words could be seen everywhere within these walls. The wall of 'the Underground Top Secrets Unit of Integrated Science and Nature' was full of secrets. The gate of the UTSU trapped nothing but lies.

Carlyle Tompson was a paleontologist at the UTSU. All documents in anyway related to dinosaurs were written, examined, approved and published by him. All documents were kept confidential before the release. All documents were secrets Carlyle had to keep to himself. New generations would not hear about ancient creatures without UTSU, most posterities would say that dinosaurs were some ordinary modern animals. If you ask the others, the answer would be just the same. But the truth lied with a few seniors, who came into existence on earth before the revolution, before the epoch of UTSU, before the haze of lies. Lies that blinded the public's eyes.

On the most usual days, Carlyle sat in his laboratory, rummaging over piles of dinosaur fossils, taking notes. He was often mad about an insignificant slit or a slight crack on the bone. Never had he untangled himself from the hustle, getting from his seat seemed harder than committing suicide. He sometimes wondered if he remembered how the sun shifted round and changed color in dusk.

Click, clack. Carlyle pattered against the rib, making stout, solid echoes in the room. He then scribbled down '556-660' on a flack of paper and tied it to the rib. Young and scrappy, Carlyle thought to himself. Evidently, the rib dated back to not long ago, a couple of thousands of years perhaps, which happened to be rather contemporary among all relics in Carlyle's collections. But it was after putting those bones and corpses away would he start working, uttering at the beginning of work, a deep, unconscious sigh was left out as he pulled his keyboard closer to his chest.

Pages of documents revealed in front of Carlyle's eyes, the light emitted from his computer seemed to be the most garish light source under the gloomy, low ceiling. His job was to amend data like all members of the UTSU ministry of secret. Like all members in the ministry, he was told to correct those falsified numbers into 'fact'. But it never bothered anyone since their job was to announce a reidentified fact, the number that would from then on be factual.

If you asked a child of 5, they thought dinosaurs were from the late Triassic period about 230 million years ago. If you asked the public, most reckoned dinosaurs were long extinct and were yesterday's message to learn.

"This is the global news podcast from the UTSU world service. I'm Sally Mile and at 14 hours GMT on Monday, 1st September, these are our main stories. Another piece of fossil of *Sinosauropteryx*, the Chinese dragon bird, has been discovered at a construction site in the province of Liaoning, China. Journalists from all over the world are gathering where the fossil of the world's initial non-avian dinosaur with feathers was unearthed. The name '*Sinosauropteryx secunda*' is given to this astonishing finding..."

The daily news report burst out from the radio. There were 3 trials before launching on the real radio. It was the second time already.

'Second trial, checked.' A buzzing mumbling broke in and ended the broadcast. Then came the third trial, after every detail, especially numbers were checked legitimately.

"Third trial, checked. Safe to release." Gulp Carlyle, frowning. His rough fingers constantly rubbed those crinkled eyes where lights of fatigue seemed to be infiltrating everywhere they touched.

It was a clear chill day in early Autumn, and there's not a cloud in the sky. At least Carlyle could read the weather and the color of the sky on paper. Absolute quietness cast upon the hollow aisle. One of the reasons Carlyle hated his office was just this silence, making his raging roars echo, repetitively nudging him. He felt weird and panicked.

An envelope was stuffed in his office from underneath the door. Obviously, the minister's message was all it could be. But it came privately this time, as a letter aimed individually at Carlyle himself, which made him feel uneasy. Albeit his habit of not putting his mood on his face or simply not doing facial expression had been a status of instinct, it was quite difficult not to betray a momentary surprise at that point. Whatever was written in the letter, he should know that there was something wrong, something intimidating, macabre even, would come. So far he could infer two possibilities: Radio trial errors or on the other hand something he would at the very least hope to see: a summon, a threat indicating top-secret leakage. Carlyle picked it up, with trembling fingers that were likely to drop it again. An unreasonable hope persisted as his inner voice begged out loud that it wouldn't be the latter option, and his heart banged. Take the deepest breath ever, and unfolded the letter. On it was neatly written:

NEWS: DINOSAUR FOSSILS ON THE MOON. THE LATEST TRACED BACK TO 2000

The quiet corridor began to stir. In the laboratory, there was an unprecedented sense of shock and panic. The former tranquility was shattered. This earth-shattering news came crashing down on people in a breathtaking way. It was unbelievable that dinosaurs were actually alive. Scientists at UTSU studied the soil obtained from the moon and one discovery was concluded. It was said that when dinosaurs knew about the meteorite impact, they started to flee to the moon, but the nonavians stayed behind, and disappeared.

The Earth seems to have had a dream, and upon waking, it has forgotten the colors and substance of it. All that remains are the gigantic remnants that have lost their color and flesh. The fossils of the dinosaur species are evidence of the dream, but not the dream itself. Who can bring them back to a memory that no longer exists? Humans use their own dreams to reconstruct the lost one of the Earth. In picture books, there are large reptiles painted with meticulous brushstrokes, and on the silver screen, there are ancient monsters chasing each other and tearing at each other's flesh. These vivid illusions may one day become a prediction of humanity's own fate: Perhaps the collapse of the dinosaur empire is simply a fable, serving as a projection of the real world by coincidence.

'Facts' remained concealed from the public. The tales behind the fossil might just be another unawakening dream that we consigned ourselves to.

The Beacon in the Abyss

Hong Kong Taoist Association Tang Hin Memorial Secondary School, Huang, Sheung Yu – 15

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I could not answer.

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But was this the sole pathway to a resolution?

Certainly not. I, Orni, an Ornithomimid (a gentle herbivore), had always yearned for peace. “There’s always a luminous path that emerges from the shadows.” Mama used to say. In the past few years, I had traversed through different territories and stepped onto dangerous battlefields, pleading for peace, but to no avail. As days bled into nights and nights fought into days, I was compelled to witness, again and again, how precious lives, one by one, were taken away by the relentless fury of fighting soldiers. Those were days and nights of immense grief, anguish and darkness I did not want to recall.

But the darkest day was to come.

Today would be the day.

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Somehow, my heart was crushed too.

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neck but catching a tuft of feathers in its jaws. The larger predator retaliated by sweeping its powerful tail, sending the smaller dinosaur tumbling into the underbrush. Undeterred, Sinosauropteryx sprang back to its feet, its feathers ruffled but eyes gleaming with determination. It darted around a cluster of trees, using the terrain to its advantage, before launching itself at the Dromaeosaurus once more, this time aiming for its exposed flank. The two then engaged in a furious flurry of feathers and teeth, darting between trees, their movements a blur of instinct and agility, each vying for the upper hand in this fierce contest for survival. The ground trembled again, this time more vigorously, as if sensing the brewing chaos of their struggle.

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“My dear,” Mama once said to me under the twinkling stars of the night sky, “Imagine the world as a vast darkness, but each of us, you and me and all the others, is a flickering light. In the moments of strife, the shadows grow, and life may seem so bleak and hopeless...” She lowered her voice, gathering me closer. Gusts of silky wind blew softly, caressing my face.

Her next words, carried by the tender breeze, were whispered softly yet resonated deeply, “But Orni, remember not to forfeit kindness even in the darkest times. Kindness is like the beacon which illuminates the path of others.” Her eyes reflected wisdom as they gazed into mine. “True strength, Orni,” she said, “is not the power of our claws or the might of our roars, but in our unity to shine brightly together. At that moment, we could create a glimmering, shimmering constellation of hope, where every light contributes to a brighter world.”

I still remembered the stars twinkling in the boundless sky that night, as if they were inviting me to embark on a perilous journey calling for peace. I remembered reaching out to my claw to accept the invitation. But no matter how hard I tried, no matter how high I leaped, I still couldn’t touch the stars even when I was jumping the highest I could.

I never saw the stars again. They were engulfed by the mist because of the escalating weather.

As the war raged on, my soul felt like it was being pulled apart. I had always believed in the power of peace, but the scenes before me were overwhelming. Everywhere I looked, my fellow dinosaurs were consumed by the fight. I watched Iguanodon fight valiantly, its thumb spikes glinting in the moonlight, defending its territory against the relentless Sinraptor. A Jianchangosaurus attempted to bite the long neck of a Mamenchisaurus, but the herbivore swung its powerful tail, striking the predator and sending it sprawling. The ground trembled and shook again and again to the ferocious rhythm of the brawl.

What could be done?

Mama, you told me to be the beacon and illuminate others. I did listen to you and tried so, so hard to become the beacon. But could the gloom really be lightened up?

I often tried to speak out, to gather allies for peace, but my light was so dim, so trivial that it was shrouded in darkness. "Please," I would plead, "there must be another way! We can find common ground!" "We could be united, not divided!" Yet, my pleas drew scorn, my words fell on deaf ears, drowned by the clashing of teeth and the cries of warriors. "You fool, haven't you heard of the survival of the fittest?" "He's insane, he just wants every dinosaur to die!"

No one listened, no one cared.

As I rested on the cold, damp rock, it suddenly hit me— I had never been so lonely.

Amidst the chaos, the great Sauropelta lumbered into the fray, its armored body a testament to its resilience. I admired its strength, standing firm against the predators, yet I felt a pang of hopelessness. Even such might could not stem the tide of war. The Sinraptor nimbly dodged the heavy blows by the Sauropelta, targeting Sauropelta's vulnerable joints in return. With each precise strike, the Sauropelta was worn down, struggling to regain its balance. With a well-placed leap, the Sinraptor clamped down on the Sauropelta's neck, delivering the final blow.

I shut my eyes again, isolating myself from the ruthless combat. I envisioned a tranquil valley, untouched by the ravages of war, where dinosaurs roamed freely, unthreatened and united. I dreamed of a future where dinosaurs like Pachycephalosaurus, with their thick skulls, could channel their strength into building bonds instead of breaking them. My imagination had long become my refuge, a way to escape the reality of our fractured world. Yet, I knew my visions would be futile if no one else shared my dream.

But should I give up? What if there was still a silver lining?

The ground trembled more violently again beneath my feet, sending vibrations through my bones, this time finally alerting me. I immediately searched for the sky. Dark, billowing clouds began to gather ominously overhead, swirling with ash that blackened the sky and dimmed the sunlight. Sulfurous fumes wafted through the air, stinging my nostrils. Whispers of a great upheaval spread among the dinosaurs, but still, they fought, too consumed by their hatred to heed the warnings of the earth.

My heart sank as I came to a realization.

The volcano that loomed in the distance, long dormant, was awakening.

As cracks appeared on the ground, revealing glowing magma just below the surface, a flicker of determination ignited within me. I knew I had to act. I couldn't give up. I had to tear them from the battle at least for this moment and take us to a safer place. I vowed to find a way to bring my fellow dinosaurs together, to remind them that we were more than just fighters—we were a community, a family. We were part of a greater tapestry of life, intricately woven

together. If we could restore that balance, perhaps we could fill our world once more with harmony, laughter, and the vibrant colors of life, instead of the dark shadows of conflict.

There was only a little time left.

The sky darkened as ash began to rain down, mixing with the chaos of battle. I called out to my fellow dinosaurs, my voice straining against the roar of the eruption. "We must leave! The volcano is going to erupt!"

I wailed and ran and hopped and slashed. But their eyes were filled with fear and rage. They continued to fight, oblivious to the impending doom.

I kicked and cried and leaped and screamed. Yet their eyes brimmed with dread and fury. They persisted in their struggle, oblivious to the approaching catastrophe.

No one listened, no one cared. I was clawed on the neck, on the back, on the face.

I fell to the ground.

I watched in horror as the ground split open. Fiery plumes shot high, casting a hellish glow over the battlefield. The molten rock spewed, painting the landscape in vivid, terrifying colors. Everything was engulfed in darkness.

It was all over now.

As the volcano erupted, a fiery wave of destruction surged toward us. I stood frozen, surrounded by chaos, my heart heavy with sorrow. All the fighting, all the hatred—it had led us to this moment of annihilation.

Mama, I failed you. I am so, so sorry. Yet, in this final moment, I found solace in the thought of joining you, away from the screams and growls and pains. Finally away from the abysmal darkness.

In those final seconds, as the world around me crumbled, I clung to the last flicker of hope—the vision of a peaceful valley where we were united, not divided; we were friends, not enemies.

But as the eruption unleashed its fury, engulfing everything in its path, my dreams shattered alongside the world around me, each fragment falling like ash, lost in the chaos. The last thing I felt was profound sadness for all the lives lost and the dream of peace that would never be realized. In the end, the fire of conflict consumed us all, and my call for peace was silenced in the roar of destruction.

Over, it was all over now.

In the wake of the eruption, silence reigned over the valley. The once-vibrant land lay buried under ash and rubble—a testament to our folly. But perhaps, somewhere in the ashes, the seeds of a new beginning could take root, and the sprouts of new life forms could be fostered—if only someone would remember. If only, someone would heed the call for peace.

When the world descends into darkness, will you be the beacon?

The Dinosaur Within Us

Kowloon True Light School, Li, Tsz Ching – 16

In the quaint village of Sihetun village, nestled between rolling hills and flourishing fields, lived a farmer named David. Each day, he wakes up before dawn, tending to the crops that had sustained his family for generations. The sun would rise slowly, casting a golden hue over the fertile land, and David's hands would toil in the rich soil, nurturing the fruits of his labor. He had always hoped for better achievements than just farming. Unlike his other family members, who are financially successful, he lived a peaceful life without wealth or fame. Just an ordinary farmer that worked hard in the suburbs.

One fateful afternoon, while clearing a patch of land for planting, David's shovel struck something hard. Curiosity piqued, he knelt down and began to dig. As he unearthed the dirt, his heart raced at the sight of a piece of rock with a print of a weirdly shaped creature. "It's a fossil," he gleed. Intrigued, he brushed away the remaining soil, revealing a distinct and remarkable yet rarely small fossil which is only around 68cm.

Later that evening, David sat in front of his table, poring over old books and family records, searching for clues about his find. He has always been a dinosaur lover. Growing up, his father always told him the story of the Legend of The Feathered Dinosaur but he always took it as a fun read and giggled it off. Among the dusty pages, he stumbled upon an ancient family lore that spoke of distant ancestors who were said to be descendants of the first feathered dinosaur, the Sinosauroptryx. Skeptical yet intrigued, David couldn't help but dismiss the tale as mere folklore, an embellishment of a proud lineage. His family had always been successful businessmen, but he was just a simple man, laboring under the sun.

Days turned into weeks as David continued to dig deeper into the ground, hoping to uncover more fossils. But one evening, the scorching sky hung high in the sky, while he was in the fields, he felt an unusual tremor beneath his feet. "Maybe I should go and take a rest, it's probably just a heatstroke." The earth seemed to rumble as if it were waking from a long slumber. Startled, he looked around, wondering if he had imagined it. He approached a tree and sat beneath it for a quick nap.

With a sudden jolt, the ground shook violently. David woke and found himself engulfed in a blinding light. When his vision cleared, he was no longer sitting in his familiar fields. Instead, he stood in a foreign land, surrounded by towering trees that reached towards the sky like the spires of a cathedral. The air was thick and humid, and the sounds of rustling leaves and distant calls filled his ears.

Confusion washed over him as he glanced around. There were no signs of civilization—no farms, no homes, just an expanse of lush greenery and a cacophony of strange noises. He took a few cautious steps, trying to gather his bearings, but an unsettling feeling gripped him. Something was not right in this land, a land that seemed alive with ancient energy.

As David ventured further, the realization hit him: he was not alone. Strange creatures roamed the area, their silhouettes casting long shadows in the dappled sunlight. His heart raced as he recognized the unmistakable forms of dinosaurs—magnificent, awe-inspiring, and utterly terrifying. He watched in disbelief as larger dinosaurs grazed nearby, their scales glistening in the sunlight, while smaller ones darted through the underbrush.

Panic set in, and David's instincts kicked in; he needed to find a way back home. He was still in disbelief and trying to clarify everything. But as he turned, a sudden rustle in the bushes caught his attention. From the foliage emerged a small, feathered dinosaur—no larger than a chicken, with a curious expression and a plume of soft, downy feathers adorning its back. The creature was unlike anything David had ever seen, and he felt a strange connection to it.

The small dinosaur approached cautiously, eyeing David with a mix of curiosity and caution. David knelt down, extending a hand in a gesture of peace. "Hello there," he whispered, his voice trembling. "Are you lost too?" The creature responded by tilting its head, and in that moment, David recognized it: the Sinosauropteryx, the very dinosaur his family lore had spoken of. He recalled the ancient stories of its feathers and its ability to thrive in a world dominated by larger predators. Though small, the Sinosauropteryx was resourceful, using its agility and keen senses to navigate through the forests. "So the legend is true!" David exclaimed.

"You're a remarkable little creature," David said, his fear subsiding as he observed the dinosaur's movements. The Sinosauropteryx seemed to understand him, its bright eyes sparkling with intelligence. Its reddish brown and white striped tail wiggled as if it met a new friend. It took a step closer, and David felt an unexpected bond forming between them.

David shook his head, trying to focus on how to leave the ancient world. He tried to recall what was written in the books he had read. "Follow, em, follow the guardian, embrace its power. Yes, that's it. I need to find my guardian." He looked everywhere, nothing but the Sinosauropteryx was found. He mumbled, "there's no other choice but to believe this small fella, let's just pray. In fact, I'll just pray and hope there will be a larger and fierce guardian for me." Deciding to trust the small dinosaur, David followed the Sinosauropteryx as it led him deeper into the forest. The creature darted ahead, demonstrating agility as it weaved through the trees and underbrush. David found himself captivated by its grace, and he couldn't help but admire the way it blended into the landscape, its feathers shimmering like sunlight filtering through leaves.

As they journeyed together, David learned to observe the Sinosauropteryx closely. The dinosaur used its keen instincts to avoid danger, skillfully navigating past larger predators and leading David to hidden trails. They encountered streams filled with fresh water and patches of wild berries, which the Sinosauropteryx voraciously devoured. David started to change his mind. He underestimated the ability of the new friend and guardian.

However, their journey was not without peril. After a long walk, while traversing a narrow path, they stumbled upon a larger dinosaur—a predatory Marshosaurus with sharp claws and fierce eyes and is 2 times of the Sinosauropteryx's size. David's heart raced as he instinctively backed away, but the Sinosauropteryx remained calm. With a series of soft chirps, it signaled David to stand still. The small dinosaur crouched low, its feathers blending seamlessly with the surrounding foliage. He shakes his tail, creating an illusion and distracted the raptor. David marveled at its ability to camouflage itself, realizing that this tiny creature possessed a wisdom he had underestimated. The raptor, confused and unable to spot them, eventually lost interest and wandered away.

Through their shared experiences, David began to reflect on his own life. He had spent so long doubting himself, feeling like he was destined to be just a farmer, lost in the shadows of his family's legacy. But here, in this foreign land, he found a purpose. The Sinosauropteryx, despite its small size, had shown him the importance of resourcefulness, adaptability, and courage. He's no longer the David he used to be, he became stronger and tougher.

As they continued their journey, David began to take the lead at times, using the lessons he learned from the Sinosauropteryx to navigate their surroundings. He approached challenges with newfound confidence, realizing that he, too, possessed strengths he had never acknowledged. He was not just a farmer; he was a survivor, capable of overcoming obstacles. In the evening, as they rested under the stars, David turned to the Sinosauropteryx. "You've taught me so much, little one. I never imagined I could be more than what others expected of me. You've shown me that size doesn't define strength." The Sinosauropteryx chirped in response, as if understanding his words.

After what felt like an eternity, David and the Sinosauropteryx finally reached a clearing that overlooked a vast expanse of land. In the distance, David could see familiar hills, the silhouette of Sihetun village emerging on the horizon. Hope surged within him, but he also felt a pang of sadness at the thought of leaving his companion behind. He waved at the dinosaur, asking it to come with him and so it did. They both hopped into the modern land David

was familiar with. The ground began to tremble once more. David felt the familiar blinding light envelop him, and in an instant, he was back in his fields, standing in the very spot where he had first unearthed the fossil. Overwhelmed with emotion, he looked around, half-expecting to see the Sinosauropteryx beside him. But it was gone, a fleeting memory of a remarkable adventure. Yet, David carried with him the lessons learned during their journey.

In the days that followed, David returned to his routine, but he was no longer just a simple farmer. He embraced his heritage, sharing the tale of the Sinosauropteryx with the villagers. He recounted the lessons of resilience and courage, inspiring others to look beyond their circumstances and believe in their own potential. The villagers listened intently, captivated by his story. They began to see themselves as part of a larger narrative—one that included the whispers of ancient creatures and the echoes of ancestors who had once roamed the earth, who are the descendents of dragons. He also donated the fossil and some of his archives to the Liaoning Paleontology Museum in order to let more people know about the history of Liaoning province and guardian that taught him a lesson.

David's fields flourished with renewed vigor, as he infused his farming practices with the wisdom gained during his journey. He cultivated not only crops but also a sense of community, encouraging others to explore their own capabilities and embrace their dreams.

As the seasons changed and the years passed, David often visited the museum and reflected on his extraordinary adventure with the Sinosauropteryx. He understood that the small dinosaur had not only guided him home but had also awakened a sense of purpose within him.

Just as the Sinosauropteryx had thrived in a world dominated by giants, so too could David rise above the expectations placed upon him. In the heart of Sihetun village, the tale of the first feathered dinosaur lived on, a testament to the strength found in unity and the power of believing in oneself.

And so, in the quiet moments under the vast sky, David would often hear the whispers of the past, a gentle reminder that even the smallest among us can leave an indelible mark on the world.

The De-extinction Files

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lee, Ella – 15

17th April 2073.

If you've found this, either something really bad has happened to me, or I've succeeded. And I hope it's the latter.

I am the child of [REDACTED], one of the world's most famous contributors to the de-extinction efforts. As of now, he is also one of the world's most wanted criminals.

No matter what they try to tell you, my father was a good person at heart. He did what he had to do for the sake of other lives, unlike the people who tell you otherwise. This is his story as much as it is mine.

Now I shoulder his legacy.

Wish me luck.



If you had told me three months ago that I would become the owner of the first reanimated dinosaur, I wouldn't have believed you. Sure, science has come a long way since the 2050s, but the technology of de-extinction is still in its infancy. There's always news about breakthroughs – the first woolly mammoth, first dodo, first thylacine – all animals that initially went extinct relatively early on. But dinosaurs – those have always been the final obstacle.. Anyone who manages to produce the first clone of a dinosaur is on the way to winning a Nobel Prize. That's how difficult it is.

Yet my father did it.

He declared he was going to tackle the impossible with his team – he was going to clone a dinosaur. The occasional photos he sent me (once a month on average, sometimes even less) were always of his work; cells under microscopes, tissues in petri dishes, ghostly half-developed fetuses floating in formaldehyde. Frankly, it unsettled me. I could never look those fetuses in the eye, or what could have been an eye. Perhaps that was why I could have never become a scientist or a doctor, despite my fascination with biology as a subject.

However, my father came home hurriedly one day with a haunted look in and dark circles around his eyes, ten pounds lighter than he had been a year ago. My mother, understandably worried, asked him what was going on. He wouldn't answer, choosing to evade the question as the days elapsed. Eventually my mother and I learnt to ignore the elephant in the room, curtailing our curiosity. It was better for my father, we decided, because he was visibly deteriorating in front of us. No matter what we did; however many soothing words and soups we offered, his condition only worsened.

A month before he passed, he was possessed by a burst of vitality, which only solidified the belief that the worst was to come. And the things he told us about what occurred in the laboratory...

The de-extinction project wasn't as harmless as it seemed, he said. It was operating under some large conglomerate – [REDACTED] – which aimed to produce a large chain of pet dinosaurs. Small dinosaurs, of course, not gigantic T-rex's. They would be the new snakes or lizards, the so-called exotic pets, bred in an underground cloning farm lest the animal-rights activists revolt. It was all profit, he said with venom in his eyes, profit, and he could not stand another second working for those inhumane *dogs*. As redemption for his actions, he'd done something very

brave and very stupid. He'd downloaded multiple important files pertaining to the project onto a USB, and stole a specimen – the first reanimated dinosaur.

At that moment I didn't know whether I should be in complete awe of my father or shrivel up on the spot out of sheer terror. Of course, I was tasked with the protection of the safe that held the USB and the dinosaur.

At first I debated what to do with it. My preferred options were submerging it in cement or setting it on fire – anything to get it off my hands. But my mother dismissed those ideas in her gentle, firm way – perhaps the contents would come in useful one day.

"Fine," I snarked. If we were keeping this safe though, I had to at least know what was inside.

So I opened it.

On the top shelf was a locked box, which I guessed contained the USB, and on the bottom was a small white cube that could fit in my palm with a stainless-steel handle. Above the handle was a screen displaying red LED numbers and controls for temperature and humidity. I opened the little door and took out the egg inside, the residual heat warm on my finger-tips. The egg was tiny, about three centimetres long with a greyish-white shell, almost like a plastic bead. One rogue movement could have crushed it easily. As it quivered in my hand a burst of affection welled up in me for this fragile little life, and I decided to put it back in its incubator.

Unfortunately, that was when the egg decided to hatch.

Hairline cracks appeared on the pearlescent shell, radiating from a pressure point until a hole appeared, and the tiniest little snout I had ever seen on a living creature took its first breath of air.

The dinosaur emerged from its shell, fitting perfectly in the heart of my palm. It was feathered all over, terracotta brown with deeper ochre stripes encircling its thread-thin tail. Its twinkling black eyes stared into mine and I stared back at it. Honestly, it was adorable. I could see myself raising this little creature. I could do it, even if it meant hiding a real live dinosaur's existence from a mega-corporation. It squeaked cutely, as if having read my mind.

Then it bit my hand.

"MOM!" I screamed in horror. She bolted out of the bathroom, a towel wrapped neatly around her head, laughing when she saw what had happened. Gently, she pried the dinosaur's jaws open and pinched it with her thumb and forefinger. It writhed helplessly in her grip. I had no pity for it, of course, because it had just bitten me – luckily its teeth hadn't grown in yet.

I glared at my new mortal enemy. My mother did the same, but with interest and affection. "A *Sinosauropteryx*," she mused. "Fascinating." (Being a palaeontologist's daughter, she knew a thing or two about dinosaurs herself.) She ran the back of her nail against its little head, and it settled in her hand with a grumpy look on its snout.

"I suppose we're keeping it?" I grouched.

"Certainly," my mother smiled, more to the *Sinosauropteryx* than me. "For your father's sake."

I sighed. There was no arguing myself out of this situation.

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Three months passed.

I was slowly getting used to living with a *Sinosauropteryx* in the house. After a heated debate with my mother, we named it Fluffy. I was going to go for something more sophisticated, like Mahogany or Sienna after its feathers, but my mother kept calling it Fluffy around the house and the name stuck.

My mother and I rapidly got used to having a dinosaur for a pet – I had always wanted a kitten or a puppy when I was little, and now I had something similar; albeit a feathered, reptilian version. Fluffy even played with laser dots. Whenever I would take out one of the laser pointers my father used for his lectures, Fluffy’s eyes would light up eagerly and it would patter over to me, hopping onto my foot. I would squeal in surprise and ticklish delight when it pawed beseechingly at the laser, turn it on with a *click*, and watch Fluffy go!

But there was always that nagging thought in the back of my mind that reminded me that my time with Fluffy was limited, not in the least because it was a living, breathing creature. No, what I worried more about was that someone from the mega–corporation would come find us, and terrible things could happen. Sometimes I resented my father for dying and leaving me with this burden. I cannot recall exactly how many times my mother and I discussed ways to evade capture around the dinner table, as if it were some trivial topic like the daily news. We had come up with so many plans – to obtain new identities, move across borders, get plastic surgery if push came to shove. The people we were up against were vicious.

Yet I supposed that my mother and I were the best candidates to take care of Fluffy – a biologist’s daughter and a palaeontologist’s daughter. Anyone else would have missed some crucial detail concerning the *Sinosauropteryx*.



They found us in the end.

I was woken up to the frantic and continuous pressing of our doorbell – less ‘pressing’, more ‘slamming an entire fist on the button’. It sounded like someone was being chased by the mafia and found the first half–decent hiding spot.

“Yes?” I heard my mother say as she opened the door. When I rushed over to her there were five men in crisply–ironed suits, all the same shade of charcoal–black and paper–white.

For a fleeting moment I wondered whether I could escape past them or jump out a window. That idea was dismissed because of how absurd it was – even if I did distract all of them momentarily, how was I supposed to fend off five highly–trained, physically adept bodyguards? And what about my mother – what about Fluffy?

“Who are you?” I asked.

My mother glared at me with that half–desperate, half–furious glare only a mother can wield with precision. Her lips quivered to form two words.

*Stop talking.*

I shut up immediately, looking at one of the men with as glazed a look as I could muster. His mouth twitched in amusement. I blinked back my rage, covering it with placidness.

“You are the wife of [REDACTED], correct?” the man I had been staring at questioned my mother. She nodded. He turned to me. “And you are his child. We gather you have been in possession of our company’s property,” the man continued. He was the brains of the group, it seemed – the rest were just intimidation material. “A *Sinosauropteryx* egg. Judging by the time that has elapsed since conception, it hatched into a specimen similar to this.” He took out a tablet and clicked on a few keys, pulling up the hologram of Fluffy. It looked exactly like Fluffy, down to the rings on

its tail. The hologram's head moved and its tail lashed. Occasionally its mouth opened to let out a noiseless growl. "Besides this, you may also be in possession of a few files pertaining to the de-extinction efforts. Those are confidential."

My mother and I stood quiet, shoulder to shoulder.

"Do you have them or not?"

My mother's lips quivered.

*"Do you have them or not?"*

Tears welled from my eyes, threatening to run down my cheeks. But I wouldn't cry. Not in front of them.

*"Do you have them or not?"*

"Yes."

To this day I'm not sure whether the answer came from me or from my mother. But one of us went to Fluffy's den, the other to the safe with the papers. Fluffy seemed to sense something was wrong, because when I picked it up it writhed around nervously, as it had done the very first day it came into this world, and bit the flesh of my palm. The memory of the day it hatched caused the tears to flow, and I silently sobbed while I carried it all the way to the suited men. Their leader grinned. I resisted the urge to punch him in the face.

"Thank you," he had the grace to say when my mother gave him the USB. "Now the *Sinosauropteryx*." He reached for Fluffy, who shrank into the folds of my hoodie. In that moment, as I looked into its eyes and it into mine, I knew I couldn't let them take it. Depriving Fluffy from us was depriving a mother of her young. So I begged, hugging it closer to me, "Please don't take it away from us."

"Protocol," growled the leader, before motioning for one of the brawnier men to snatch Fluffy from my arms. I didn't stand a chance. He lifted me onto my tiptoes by my wrist, and wrenched Fluffy from the arm that was still tightly clutching it. Fluffy screeched, hissing and biting with its sharp teeth. The man winced as Fluffy's tail narrowly missed his sunglasses. It raked its claws down his wrist, slitting veins, drawing blood. The man grunted, his nostrils flaring as he clamped Fluffy's jaws down with two fingers and held it away at arm's length, so all it could do was scrabble uselessly at thin air.

"No!" I screamed, flinging myself at the man. "You're hurting it!"

"It is a faulty specimen," said the man, "prone to violent outbursts. It must be terminated immediately."

My heart dropped. I howled and dug my nails into his arm.

"Don't do it, *please*," my mother pleaded, either to me or to the man. She barely managed to drag me away before he could do worse harm. "I don't want bloodshed in this house. Please *leave*." Those words seemed to take the air out of her, and she deflated like a wilted flower.

I stared at her indignantly. "But Fluffy—"

"There is nothing we can do," my mother whispered. "Go."

I don't know what compelled the men to obey her, because they could have simply stormed into the house and caused more discord. But something in her voice was steely and not to be defied, and I think they sensed it. This frail little woman had some sort of power within her – even if they didn't know what it was. I like to think they were scared, unlikely as it may seem. Whatever the cause, they left abruptly as they came.

My mother and I cried into each other's arms for the Fluffy-shaped hole in our lives. We were powerless, defeated. What could we do against people who had fleets of bodyguards and sue-happy attorneys? We didn't even have the money to support a top-class lawyer. For all we knew, they had probably hijacked our laptops and phones, using them as surveillance cameras to watch our every move.

As we hugged each other for the first time in – forever, I felt the pressure of something small in my palm. Something as small as an egg, a *Sinosauropteryx* egg, and for a fleeting absurd moment I wondered if Fluffy had a little sibling. When I opened my hand, I saw a USB laying in it.

“I copied all the files,” my mother whispered into my ear, “every single megabyte.”

In that instance, I knew what I had to do.

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So here I am.

I have made ten copies of the file, all saved to different USBs that I have mailed to different media sources. I have corroborated with reporters who have confirmed the release date will be on the 23rd of April – Fluffy's birthday. If all goes well, they will never find me. They will never find my mother. All our records will be erased, making it look like we never existed.

Are you listening up there, Dad? Are you seeing this?

This is my gift to you, your legacy continued.

Wish me luck.

The Spiked Guardian

Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Wong, Ieok Lam – 15

The summer heat leaned heavily on Shanghai, shimmering off the streets and casting the towering skyline into a haze. Twelve-year-old Mei and her younger sister, Jia, wandered the chaotic flea market near their apartment, their attention caught by a stall selling odd antiques. It wasn't unusual for Jia to dart off toward something shiny, but this time she clutched an object that made Mei pause.

It was a heavy disc of carved bronze, worn smooth with age, depicting a strange creature with spiked plates rising along its back and a clubbed tail. The beast was unlike anything Mei had ever seen—part dinosaur, part mythical dragon.

"Look at this!" Jia exclaimed. "It's some kind of dinosaur!"

The kiosk owner, a hunched, age-bent old man with hawk eyes, laughed. "No ordinary dinosaur, young one. That is a *tuojiangosaurus*. As old, in fact, as your nation's guardian god."

"*Tuojiangosaurus*?" Mei echoed, weighing the alien word upon her tongue.

"*Steathosauria* that roamed in ancient millions," he clarified. "Sichuan had them. In a museum, if you will. You could still be able to find some of their remains."

The girl felt a sudden thrill of excitement. Dinosaurs had captured her imagination when she was little, listening to her grandfather's tales about China's fossil-rich lands. She fished out her allowance, gave it to the man, and took the disc.

As she and Jia walked home, she noticed that the edge of the disc was carved with some peculiar symbols. They almost looked alive, glimmering faintly in the sun.

That night, in the silence of their communal bedroom, Mei and Jia examined the artefact more carefully. As Jia ran her finger along the carved spines of the **tuojiangosaurus**, the disc began to glow.

"What did you do?" Mei whispered, shaking.

Before Jia could say a word, the room started filling with a soft hum; the air condensed, and suddenly they were deluged by a wave of light. It whirled Mei off her ground. By the time the light vanished, they were not in their bedroom anymore.

They stood on a grassy plain beneath a wide blue sky. The skyline of Shanghai was gone, replaced by an endless expanse of green hills, forests, and distant mountains.

Jia spun around, her mouth agape. "Where are we?"

Mei's voice shook. "I think we're... in the past?"

The plains teemed with life. Strange, prehistoric plants swayed in the breeze while birdlike creatures with teeth fluttered between trees. The air was alive with unfamiliar calls and distant rumbles.

"What is that?" Jia pointed toward a massive shape moving near the horizon.

As they approached cautiously, the shape came into focus—a dinosaur different from anything they could have dreamed: 23 feet long, its back sporting two rows of high triangular plates, its tail ending in a heavy spiked club that swung with casual power as it browsed on low plants.

"It's a tuojiangosaurus!" Mei breathed, her eyes shining with recognition. "This is one of the stegosaurus. Scientists found its fossils in China—it lived during the Late Jurassic period, about 150 million years ago."

Jia narrowed her eyes. "It does not look like the fierce dinosaurs of movies."

"It's not a predator," Mei explained. "It's an herbivore, like a plant-eating giant. Those plates and the clubbed tail are for defense. They think the plates might have been used to scare off predators or regulate body temperature."

Jia inched closer to the creature, her curiosity outweighing her fear. "It doesn't look scary. It's kind of... peaceful."

But peace didn't last long. A deep roar echoed across the plains, and both girls froze.

"What was that?" Jia whispered, clutching Mei's arm.

From the forest edge, a larger dinosaur emerged. It was a carnivore, with sharp teeth and menacing eyes fixed on the grazing tuojiangosaurus. Mei's heart dropped.

"It's an allosaurus," she murmured. "One of the apex predators of this time."

The tuojiangosaurus raised its head, sensing the danger, and let out a deep bellow. Its spiked tail swung menacingly, but the predator crept closer.

"We have to help it!" Jia cried.

"How?" Mei asked, her voice trembling.

But before she could even try to come up with an answer, the golden disc inside her bag began to shine again. She drew it out, and then something almost unbelievable appeared upon its face—a map of the surroundings, illuminated with glowing dots to show where they were and the positions of the dinosaurs.

"It's showing us the way!" exclaimed Jia.

The sisters ran toward the markings on the map, their hearts pounding. They found a thick grove of tall cycads nearby and realized it could offer the tuojiangosaurus some cover.

Mei cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted, "This way!"

But it seemed the dinosaur comprehended. He turned and, with much movement, lumbered towards the copse, flashing in the sunlight as he moved; then the allosaurus charged after him but the heavy undergrowth impeded it.

When the tuojiangosaurus reached the grove, it whirled and its clubbed tail lashed out in a wide arc. The predator leapt, but the tail connected with a sickening thud, sending the allosaurus tumbling backward with a pained roar. After a tense standoff, the predator retreated, its pride wounded.

Jia let out a whoop. "It worked! We saved it!"

Mei puffed out her chest, beaming with pride. "That tail is like a prehistoric wrecking ball. No wonder it could defend itself."

Night began to fall, and the sisters made camp in the grove to keep watch over their new friend. Mei seized the opportunity to share what she knew about the tuojiangosaurus.

It's one of the oldest stegosaurus scientists have found in China," she said, her voice low as they huddled by a small fire. "Its name means 'Tuo River lizard,' because its fossils were discovered near the Tuojiang River in Sichuan Province."

"Do you think there are more of them out there?" Jia asked, glancing toward the forest.

"Perhaps," said Mei. "This one might be looking for a herd. Most plant-eating dinosaurs traveled in groups for protection. If we could find the others, it would be safer."

Jia brightened. "Then let's help it find its family!"

The glowing disc beckoned them further into the primeval landscape at dawn the next day. Following the map through thick forests, over rivers, and across rolling hills, the sisters encountered other marvelous creatures: gigantic dragonflies with their sparkling wings, sauropods reaching into the treetops to eat, and flocks of feathered dinosaurs running through the undergrowth.

Every step was like a journey into a lost world. Mei couldn't help but stare at the ecosystem surrounding them, untouched by time or humans.

After hours of walking, they heard distant calls—low, rumbling sounds that echoed through the hills. The tuojiangosaurus perked up, its small head swiveling toward the noise. It let out a responding bellow, its plates quivering with excitement.

"It's them!" Jia exclaimed.

They came out on top of a hill and saw a herd of tuojiangosaurus grazing in a verdant valley. The spiked dinosaurs moved as one, their tails swaying, plates winking in the sun. The sisters watched in wonder as their companion hurried down the slope to join its family.

"We did it," Mei said, a small pride and sadness in her voice. "It's home."

Jia sniffled, wiping her eyes. "I'm gonna miss it."

As they watched, the golden disc began to glow once more. This time, the light enveloped them, pulling them back through time.

When they opened their eyes, they were back in their bedroom. The sounds of the prehistoric world were gone, replaced by the distant hum of cars and city life.

Jia looked at the disc, now lying dark and silent on the floor. "You think it will ever work again?"

Mei picked it up, running her fingers over the worn carvings. "Maybe. Or maybe it's waiting for someone else to unlock its secrets."

She set it gently on her desk, her mind racing with everything they'd seen. The past felt closer now, like a secret they had been lucky enough to glimpse.

Jia smiled. "Do you think people will ever find out about all the dinosaurs we saw?"

"They're already discovering more every day," Mei said. "Like the *tuojiangosaurus*. Its fossils were buried for millions of years, and then someone found them. Who knows what else is out there, waiting to be uncovered?"

The sisters sat in silence for a moment, their hearts still buzzing with the wonder of what they had experienced as the city buzzed on. And though it was a journey that was over, they knew the stories of the past would live on, not just in fossils but in the imagination of those who dared to uncover them.

The Ancient Tales of Zhou The Legend

S.K.H Tang Shiu Kin Secondary School, Yip, Yat Ju Isaac – 17

Listening to the roaring of fierce predators, combating for glory and destroying the wicked enemies will immediately come to our mind when we heard of the word ‘dinosaurs’. However, one was to stand up on top of the mountain, fighting for its glory during the ancient dinosaur times. Zhou The Legend, his name will always be remembered.

Zhou, a handsome sinosauropteryx with stylish hair-like feather, also known as the China dragon bird, was proverbial. He was the son of the famous clan warrior, Zhou-Wang, who had defeated 70,000 devastating creatures in his whole life in Liaoning. Liaoning was a place like heaven where mountainous areas were filled with the sound of rapid river flow, the pleasant breeze surged through the land and the evergreen vegetation basking under the warm sunlight. In order to protect the clan from external threats and make a good life for them, Zhou-Wang set up a wide rocky terrain where the other dinosaurs could be trained on a rugged relief. They could wrestle with the others to prepare for combat. They could smash the conglomerate on the ground to practise kung-fu. They could test their agility on the steep running ground. However, Zhou, as the warrior’s son, was too timid and reluctant to fight. He just wanted a peaceful life in Liaoning paradise.

You heard that right. The dinosaur was originally a scaredy cat who sometimes covered under the rocks and sprinted to the caves when predators launched an attack against their clan. Fearing the enemies’ sharp claws and gigantic teeth, Zhou immediately retreated without resistance. Zhou-Wang had always feared his son’s future as he was always bullied by the other junior members for being an idiot. He urged his son to fight but Zhou rejected without thinking. “How many times have I told you, father? I am truly not well-prepared for that.” Zhou moaned. “You will grow up soon.” Zhou-Wang explained “In the near future, you will take over my position and lead the whole clan. With great power, comes great responsibility. That had been the proverb lasting for ages. Thus, you must fight until the end, do not retreat.”

Zhou-Wang insisted on holding a fighting match between Zhou and the strongest opponent, the big bully Liu, to train his son to build up his fighting spirit. Zhou stammered and tried to run for cover but there would be no retreat now. All dinosaurs formed a wide circle to watch the two gladiators having a duel. “You are digging your own grave, moron!” Liu screamed maniacally, grabbing Zhou’s head tightly with his right arm and began to slowly torture him on the sandy ground with great force. Zhou tried to call for help and could not resist the attack. Liu kicked his body incessantly, causing blood to gush from Zhou’s mouth. His shaking gastric juice in his stomach made him black out for a few moments. Zhou-Wang witnessed his son being tortured to death with his own eyes. He was so worried and believed that it might be a heart-wrenching and wrong decision for letting him fight.

During his blackout while being kicked to death, Zhou saw the ancient God of Mount Liaoning, Liaoshen, whom he had always worshipped since he was young. Usually, Liaoshen was taciturn in the mountains of Liaoshen. When Zhou was bullied, his sacred face began to emerge. One time, young Zhou was bullied for having tiny legs. Liaoshen comforted him and inspired him “Wisdom is the energy that pushes you to absolute victory.” “Hard work is the criterion that determines the ending.” His aura would be hovering around Zhou. This time, it was a different story. “Go. Mighty warrior.” Liaoshen decided to give Zhou courage. “But sir, I am an unworthy opponent. I am just a kid who always cry for help and hide in fear.” “My boy, continue to be courageous, all your fears will be gone.” Suddenly, a surge of mystical energy from the elements of the earth entered Zhou’s body. He woke up and leaped with a heavy punch on Liu’s face. The bully was shell-shocked by Zhou’s revival. Charging wildly, Liu took a sharp conglomerate and began jabbing insanely. Zhou dodged and used his tail to whip the rival non-stop, “A man shall never be afraid of the evil.” The crowd could hear the vibrations of the ground clearly while Liu was screaming in agony. They chanted

happily when Zhou began to rise. “I do not care about your stupid quotes.” Liu spat and tried to make his jumbo body a land bomb. Zhou used Liu’s body as a platform to jump, successfully jump-kicking to suppress the bully. Not knowing other moves, Zhou cut the conglomerate rapidly into thousands of tiny gems. He used his tails to continuously launch the gems as missiles. Liu was hit endlessly like he was shot by one hundred bullets from a machine gun. With Liu’s falling to the ground, the duel was finally over. Zhou–Wang hugged his son tightly with tears coming out from his eyes. It was crystal clear that Zhou had risen and was ready for battle in the future.

A party was going to be held to celebrate Zhou’s first victory. Before the party, both Liu and Zhou were in the medical cave, waiting for their treatment. They really needed a therapy. Liu, wrapped in gigantic insect nets, marched slowly towards Zhou. “You know, fella” He started, “It seems you are a worthy opponent now.” “Come on, Liu, let’s reconcile.” They knew each other well through a fight and began to make friends.

Kan, who was a beautiful dinosaur, was helping Zhou with his treatment. Kan was so impressed not only because of Zhou’s handsome look, but also with his incredible performance during the fight.

“Excuse me, is this Zhou?” She asked softly. Zhou loved Kan at first sight and answered politely. “Yes, dear.” Kan smiled lovely and began to use the silk and honey extracted from the silkworms and beehives respectively to heal Zhou. She held out his injured hands and began to scrub them carefully and smoothly.

“I’m lucky to have you looking after us,” Zhou thanked her, listening to her melodious giggles.

“So, why didn’t you join your father from the start?”

“I was quite timid,” Zhou replied, “Now I may consider doing so after the inspiration by Liaoshen. In the past, aggressors had always continued to invade our homeland. They would not give up making our lives miserable. We were always tortured. I fear that there would be the same horrifying events coming.”

Kan felt so worried about external threats. Zhou comforted her softly by saying “As long as the devils are driven out of our homeland, harmony shall be restored.”

“If I am captured by the other devils, I will certainly be ensalved and toyed.” Kan groaned sadly. “Only if I have a great hero to protect me.”

Zhou saw the opportunity. He held her hand and said, “No matter what happens, I will always be there to protect you. No other friends in my clan shall be brutally squashed by the invaders.” Kan and Zhou had a tiny kiss and a lovey–dovey moment. The elements of romantic harmony sparked. They fell in love.

The party began with a glorious speech. “As the saying goes, all dinosaurs in our clan shall be equal.” Zhou–Wang promoted his son to be the clan sergeant afterwards. “Dear Zhou, may the spirit of bravery continue to be with you.”

A grand banquet was held after this presentation ceremony. Dinosaurs were served with fresh meat of captured prey. They were drinking the prey’s blood too. As Kan was a caring nurse, when she saw her clan drinking fresh blood, she felt uncomfortable.

“I do believe we will stop invaders, but not going an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Kan frowned. Zhou was touched by her thoughts and was madly in love with her. He thought, “Kan is such a sweet girl. She is definitely the only girl I love.” “Don’t worry Kan. I promise I will try my best to avoid payback during battles. I will use the most peaceful solution to solve problems.” Kan was comforted by his considerate attitude.

“Dear son, it seems that you have a good friend there.” Zhou–Wang smiled warmly and was very happy to see him not being a coward. Zhou whispered secretly to his father, “Dad, would you like us to be married?” Zhou–Wang was surprised and pondered for a few moments until one of the generals rushed into the banquet.

“Zhou-Wang, you have to see this!” One of the generals called. He rushed to the scene and discovered a gang of pterosaurs soaring, preparing to charge at full speed. Battle alarms sounded from the bones were heard. “I’m coming with you, father” Zhou exclaimed. “I have the duty to protect our hometown. I have the duty to stop the aggressors.”

Not far from there, the opposing commander-in-chief warned “This is the pterosaurs clan. Surrender your lands. Take instructions from us, and we will not attack you.” The generals were confused about the decision and did not want a battle. All sinosauropteryx soldiers held the line, waiting for the signal to launch a full-scale attack against the pterosaurs.

“This is the head of sinosauropteryx clan. The decision is NO. We will not give in.”

“Dear, I will miss you truly.” Kan wept while telling Zhou.

“Don’t worry, Kan. I will certainly be back.” Zhou said, “I will not stop until my homeland is defended.”

“Attack!” the commander-in-chief for the pterosaurs yelled. The full-scale battle began.

Sinosauropteryx soldiers were clashing with the nosediving pterosaurs. Blood was spilt all over the terrain. You could listen to the monstrous roars from both sides. Incessant beatings and crunchings devastated Kan. Zhou rushed to her and said, “Hide, Kan, or you’ll be massacred instead. Don’t worry. I’ll be back.”

Coming out from the military camp, Zhou used his jump kicks to suppress the pterosaurs. “Attaboy” Zhou-Wang said. Later, the opposing commander-in-chief, facing Zhou-Wang, used his sharp claws and SCREEEEECCHH!!! The father suffered a fatal blow and fell to the ground. Zhou rushed towards his father and carried him away from the battlefield. The enemy screamed, “Get the son!”

Zhou carefully laid the body of his beloved father on the ground. “Zhou, you have grown a lot. Certainly, a lot.” Zhou began to weep. “Father, what shall I do? What am I to become without you?”

“Zhou, remember, with great power comes great responsibility.”

“I will always remember that, father.”

“Protect the clan and the homeland” Those were his father’s last words. Paroxysm of tears ran down from Zhou’s eyes.

He began to reflect on his life under the protection of his father since he was a small child. His dad’s great care and everlasting love were his greatest treasure he had ever had. Whenever he was sad, he would comfort him. Whenever he was scared, he would protect him. Now, it was the son’s turn to protect his homeland.

Opposing commander-in-chief teased Zhou and said, “Now, your leader is dead. Your father is dead. What else can you do now, scum?”

Zhou turned around and said to him “I am one with my father” He decided to fight the murderer of his father.

“Really? I am scared now. You are an incompetent being who cannot protect your friends.” Hearing those nasty words, Zhou’s fiery eyes emerged and decided to crush him once and for all.

“Long live, my homeland!” He rushed towards the commander’s wings and bit them. Then, he strangled his neck and began yelling furiously. The commander-in-chief tried to break free and tried to move. Zhou kicked him off the cliff. The body rolled over the fault breccia and the commander defended himself with his sharp claws.

“You are an invader. And I shall never let invaders go free. You will never invade us again.” Zhou’s fury fists caused earthquakes on the breccia fault. The commander could not stand still and began to faint. Zhou jumped down,

strangling him more tightly and using his sharp claws to scratch his face. “Anyone who decides to invade our homeland will face the power of unity of the great clan.” At that moment, Zhou remembering the promise to Kan and stopped his brutal behaviour towards the enemy who killed his father. With no other options, the seriously injured commander threw himself into the great abyss. A lava plume burst out of the abyss and the body was burnt into pieces.

The battle was finally over. Zhou could only cry while carrying Zhou-Wang’s body home.

“Dear Zhou, I am grateful that you are all right.” Kan said with a soft voice and accompanied by him to comfort his sorrow. Zhou became the leader of the clan. Many dinosaurs commemorated his father’s death when Young Zhou made his speech. “Together, we shall fight against the power of aggression with one heart. Long live the clan!” All dinosaurs chanted. The glorious and mighty chant became the symbol of Zhou’s tale. The roaring, the spirit of leadership and the unity would forever be his legacy.

Dozens of years later, Zhou sadly died because of a volcanic eruption which destroyed the whole clan. His whole body was buried, but not his spirit. His legacy shall never be forgotten. His bravery and dedication to his clan became legendary.

After millions of years, the legendary fossil was discovered. Zhou’s spirit has been awakened once again. The tales of his bravery and love for his clan spread far and wide. The belief of Zhou and his spirit shall live on forever. No one shall cower. Even in turbulent times, all will never give up but will continue to strive for peace, justice and harmony.

Zhou the sinosauropyx was a great dinosaur. The people praise him with the poem:

“Zhou the legend of Liaoning, his name shall forever reign.

Roaring from the mountains, he creates the peaceful fountains.

Devastation will fall until his name is called.

Let there be joy, and his friends shall cheer ahoy!”

Zhou’s filial obedience to his dear father inspires us to follow the footsteps of the older generations and preserve their wisdom gained through a lifetime of experience. His ever-lasting commitment and true love to Kan motivates us to love and respect our family. His loyal dedication and sincere promises to the clan encourage us to respect and devote ourselves to our country wholeheartedly.

Echoes of the Past

Shanghai Community International School, Kim, Daeyeop David – 14

The old pickup truck steadily climbed up the winding mountain road in China's far west. On one side loomed a rocky cliff covered with thick strands of ivy. On the other side was a sheer drop.

The aged man in his early 50s driving the car was Professor Zhao, a paleontologist. Sitting on the backseat were his two children, Ralph and Irene. They were headed for their uncle's home, nestled near the mountain's peak, far above the rural village at the base. When they arrived at the old three-story house of stone and wood, Zhao stopped the car, and everyone got out. The children would stay there while their parents went on a fossil hunt in the Gobi.

When Zhao walked up to the door and knocked, it slowly opened, its rusted hinges creaking in protest. Uncle Zhu, a tall, thin man stepped outside. He greeted them pleasantly, but he looked very tired. His face was haggard, and he was wearing a lab coat and white gloves, as though he had stopped to greet them in the middle of an experiment. Despite being a paleontologist in the deserts for years before he retired eight years ago, he looked years younger than his age, early 40s.

"Hello," Zhu said. "Welcome. It's been quite a while since I last saw you. Was that a year ago, or two? You've grown so much!" There was a hint of surprise in his voice.

"Um, no sir," Ralph politely corrected him. "That was 13 years ago. Dad told us I was only 2 years old, and Irene was an infant when we last came here. We weren't old enough to remember your face."

"Well, I guess time passes really fast!" Zhu said hastily. "Come in, children! It's very cold here and I'll give you some hot tea!" Then he walked inside.

"Bye! I'll pick you up next Friday!" Dr. Zhao waved goodbye to his children. "And be respectful to your uncle!"

Together, the two children waved goodbye, stepped into the house, and shut the door behind them. They were shocked to find the living room decorated like a miniature museum. Dinosaur fossils were in all corners, and a full-size model of a huge aquatic reptile hung in the center. It had a magnificent serpent-like body and jagged teeth.

"It seems you are interested in my collection," Uncle Zhu said. "Do you like dinosaurs?"

"Yes! I love to watch movies about them, and when I was a kid, dad took me and Irene to museums across China to see these exotic fossils!" Ralph said. "Your collection is so amazing!"

"I see," Uncle Zhu said, apparently pleased. "That dinosaur right over there is the *Dinocephalosaurus Orientalis*, the terrible-headed lizard. It's the closest thing to a dragon paleontologists have found. It's about 20 feet long, used to live in the Triassic waters of China. Unfortunately, I couldn't get my hands on the real fossil, so I had to make do with a model."

"Follow, me, children," Uncle Zhu said. "I'll give you a tour of this place. Even though it's not a lot, I have collected the fossils and models of China's most exotic dinosaurs."

The house was full of wonders, from fully preserved bones of small dinosaurs to fossil pieces that belonged to huge ones. It took them almost two hours to get through.

"Finally, we are done!" Zhu cheerfully said. "Now you can go to bed. You can use the room on the second floor."

"You sound awfully excited," Irene said.

"Irene!" Ralph scolded. "You're being rude to him! Uncle Zhu, I'm sorry about my bratty sister." He got a glare and an elbow from Irene.

"No, it's okay. You may be offended but please understand that I can now get back to studying dinosaurs after you've gone to bed, and my work really excites me!"

"Okay, Uncle Zhu!" Ralph said. "Let's go to bed, Irene."

"Wait," Irene said. "One last question." She pointed to a small dinosaur about a meter long. Its jaw was lined with small teeth, and it looked like it was hunting down a prey. Brown and white feathers covered its sleek body and long, puffy tail. "You haven't told us about that? It looks very interesting."

"Oh," Uncle Zhu said with a hint of annoyance and surprise. "That is the *Sinosauropteryx*, one of China's feathered dinosaurs. Very interesting. Now go to bed."

"Why is that arm so limp?" Irene said, pointing to the dinosaur's right arm, which vertically hung down, revealing a small piece of metal beneath the paint.

"A few years ago, I accidentally broke it," Zhao replied, his voice rising. "Go to bed now. I have work to do. And remember, do NOT touch anything, fossil or model."

"Fine," Irene said.

When they went into the small room Uncle Zhu had prepared for them, Ralph sat down to study for his math test. He was a good student, with high grades, and he had decided to study for the test that was to be done a week after the Chinese New Year holiday.

"Shouldn't you do your homework?" Ralph asked Irene.

"Ugh. It's the first day of the holiday! I don't need to do my homework today!" Irene rolled her eyes and groaned. She hated it when her brother told her to do this or do that. She could think for herself!

When Irene kept thinking about the day's events, she couldn't get the nagging suspicion off her mind. She had to tell someone.

"Something's off about Uncle Zhu," Irene whispered to Ralph. "How could he think it's been only two years since we last visited him? That old man's delusional!"

"It's been only five minutes!" Ralph said. "Could you just stop bothering me and let me do my work!"

"Come on, Ralph!" Irene said. "I'm serious!"

"I mean, it's a bit weird, but I guess he's having a bad day. Or it might be his age. Doesn't matter," Ralph said, still annoyed.

"Fine," Irene said, but she still didn't sound convinced. "But what about that Sinosauropteryx? He didn't tell us before I asked, even though he had explained everything else thoroughly!"

"He might have forgotten it," Ralph said.

"Plus, how could such a thin, frail man like Uncle Zhu have broken that arm?"

"Irene, where are you going with this?" Ralph asked. "Do your homework or go to bed. Leave me alone!"

"I'm saying that we can't trust Uncle Zhu, no matter how friendly he seems, even though he's our uncle!" Irene's voice was rising. "I can't wait any longer. I'm going to check that arm out!" She opened her bag and took out a flashlight, which she had originally brought for reading.

"Irene, Uncle Zhu told us NOT to touch anything. We'll get in big trouble if he catches us!" Ralph shouted, frowning. His voice was full of shock and worry.

"It's worth the risk!" Irene said. She opened the door and ran outside. Ralph ran after her, the flashlight's thin beam the only light in the dark, dusty passage and the steep stairs.

They were panting by the time they had reached the model on the 3rd floor. The house was much bigger on the inside than it had seemed on the outside. Irene shined the flashlight on the broken arm.

She slowly looked over at its vertically suspended position, wondering about the secrets the metal may hide, yet the answer was elusive, sliding through her searching mind.

"Well, there's nothing," Ralph said. "Let's go back." He was worried that Uncle Zhu might come back at any moment. He was tired of his sister acting before thinking. Hasn't she got in trouble enough in school because of her stupid curiosity?

But Irene wasn't ready to go back. "The arm, this vertical position..." She grabbed it, and there was a soft creak of metal grating and machines turning.

"Ralph, come look at this," Irene said. "This thing is mechanical. It's not broken; it's meant to be this way! I think it's a lever!"

"What does that mean?" Ralph asked, more exasperated than intrigued.

Irene stared at it for a moment, then with a look of determination, jerked the arm upwards. With a click, it locked in position. The moment it did, the floor beneath them began to shake, and they staggered and fell.

"What is this? What have you done?" Ralph shouted.

"I... I don't know!" Irene said, stumbling and failing to regain balance. "Ahhh!"

With a screech of ancient machines and mechanical gears turning, the model Sinosauropteryx sunk to the floor, and the wall behind it opened, revealing a dark passage. The shaking and the groaning of the machines stopped. For a few seconds, the siblings stared at the gaping entrance.

"It's a secret passage!" Irene shouted, breaking the silence. "I knew Uncle Zhu was hiding something! We must explore it!"

"Explore it?" Ralph asked. "We don't know what's in there! We should go back!"

"No," Irene stubbornly said. She was tired of Ralph's worries, and she couldn't stand being in the dark. "Time to find out what Uncle Zhu's up to!" With that, she entered the passage, shining the flashlight before her. Ralph sighed and reluctantly followed.

The passage led them into a spacious chamber full of books. In the middle was an old, intricate wooden table with carved dragons on each leg. On top sat a huge map of China. A closer inspection revealed that the map had been marked with red Xs and filled with annotations written in neat handwriting. The paper had yellowed with age and covered with dust. Clearly, Zhu had been searching for something, something rare and precious, but the children didn't know if he ever found it.

"What do you think Zhu was looking for?" Irene asked.

"I don't know. But from the look of it, he put a lot of work into it. Decades of work," Ralph said, staring at the immense wall of books.

"I wonder why he kept this place hidden," Irene said.

"Well, he's not here now, and we can't just poke around his private space. We'll ask him politely tomorrow. Maybe he'll tell us," Ralph said.

"Seriously? Ask him?" Irene shouted, flailing her arms in frustration, angry that her brother would never listen to her. "You think he'll tell us what he's been so desperately trying to hide! We've got to find out what he's doing!"

"Why won't you ever do as you're told?" Ralph shot back. "It would save us a lot of trouble! It's time to go. This place isn't meant for us!"

Ralph tried to tug Irene's sleeve and take her back to the passage, but she twisted out of his grasp. She slipped, and trying not to fall, she leaned on one of the books on the shelf. It clicked into place.

Suddenly, there was a loud groan, and a large bookshelf before them sunk into the floor with the whirling of machinery, revealing a hidden laboratory behind the wall. The clean white floor had been littered with paper and pieces of fossils. At the center of the room was a set of stairs leading up to a raised platform, and on the platform was an intricate spherical machine. At the center was Uncle Zhu, working at the control panel.

"What are you doing?" Irene shouted.

Uncle Zhu whirled around, his mouth gaping open in shock. "What are you doing here! How did you find this place!"

Ralph stood still, staring at his uncle and his lab, shell-shocked, but Irene was angry. "What are you doing! What are you hiding from us! I'm tired of not knowing!"

Uncle Zhu, regaining his composure to some extent, but still unable to remove the surprise from his eyes, said, "It seems your father did not tell you how I came to be here, doing this. Or perhaps he was too ignorant to know. I will tell you now, and you will understand." Bitterness oozed from his mouth, and he spat out the word "your father" like poison.

"Long ago, Zhao and I were ambitious young paleontologists, looking to make great discoveries, searching barren deserts for fossils containing dinosaur DNA."

"That's what you were looking for on the map!" Irene exclaimed.

"Yes. But as time passed, and no discoveries were made, our colleagues gave up on us. They laughed at us; told us we would never find it. And your father, my brother, gave up on me. Even though our grandparents had kept their ground when the Japanese attacked, even though our parents had continued working through the Cultural Revolution, he left. He made peace with the fact that he would never bring dinosaurs back, and he immigrated to America, where there was a more systematic exploration of dinosaur fossils by paleontologists at the time. That's where he met your mother. But I never gave up. I knew that China's land was fertile with fossils, and if there was any place to find dinosaur DNA, it was here. And I found a way, to prove them all wrong!"

As he neared the end of his speech, Zhu's voice began to tremble with anger, spit flying from his mouth. Madness and obsession seemed to possess his eyes as he slammed his fist into the control panel, and the spherical machine came to life, whirling and spinning. Electricity sparked out of it as it rotated faster and faster until a veil of wind surrounded it. It was slowly collapsing into itself. As the gravity intensified, the machine became smaller and smaller until it was a tiny black dot. Then, it exploded outward, forming a dark black void in the middle of the room.

The void shifted and churned, forming a rift and revealing a world lost millions of years ago on the other side. There was a large clearing in front of the gateway. Beyond that, ancient forests of the Jurassic stretched to the horizon.

The wormhole was complete. Ever since he retired, Zhu had looked for a way to create it. The gravity it warped had made him younger, made him forget time, that the outside world even existed. He was shocked when he heard the children were coming to stay, even more shocked when he realized that so much time had passed since he'd seen the outside world.

Suddenly, from the trees emerged a great monster of a dinosaur, as long as a bus, with teeth like daggers. Its muscular legs supported its immense body like the trunks of an ancient oak. But the scariest were its eyes, filled with the bloodlust of a hunter locking in its prey.

Uncle Zhu didn't seem unnerved. He locked eyes with the beast and then began to laugh hysterically. "Come to me, your maker and master!" he shouted.

Ralph, finally out of his shock, shouted, "What are you doing? That thing is going to eat you alive!"

"Stop! Please!" Irene yelled.

But it was no use. Zhu's obsession had crushed common sense. He opened his arms and prepared to embrace the fatal bite. And when he designed his wormhole, he had forgotten its nature in his mad pursuit of the living dinosaur. Wormholes are fragile things, hanging on a delicate balance. Should a single particle pass through it, it would collapse. And the dinosaur was much bigger than a single particle.

As the dinosaur put its head through the hole, the wormhole crackled with electricity, and its boundaries began to waver.

"No!" Irene shouted and tried to rush to her uncle. Ralph held her hand, holding her back. "It's too dangerous!"

Then, the wormhole collapsed, exploding in a writhing inferno, swallowing the dinosaur's head and blasting Zhu in the face, killing him instantly. Ralph tackled Irene to the ground as a piece of metal whizzed by over their head.

Fire surrounded them, and pieces of the ceiling began to come down.

"We have to get out of here!" Irene said, and the two of them ran for the exit, for the outside world they had left behind. Just as they rushed out of the house, it collapsed in a plume of fire.

Part of the library could still be seen, and the books were burning, the pages flying. The metal structure of the lab had been twisted beyond recognition. Ralph and Irene stared at each other for a long time, then at the destruction before them.

"I'm so sorry I doubted you," Ralph told Irene. "Without you, we would have never found out. The fire would have burned us in our sleep."

"No, don't be," Irene said, and a single tear slowly moved down her cheek. "You saved my life. Without your caution, I would have gone near the inferno and the fire would have burned me. I'm sorry I acted so rashly."

Then, they hugged each other.

A piece of paper fluttered by, and Ralph snatched it out of the air. It was a picture of their father and Uncle Zhu together. They were in their late 20s, posing in front of a gigantic sauropod dinosaur's fossil. The words below said: Found a fossil of a Mamenchisaurus in the Gobi. No DNA yet, but still amazing!

They looked at the picture, the picture of an innocent man before he became a shell of his obsessions and ambitions, whose love had been replaced by bitterness. They cried silently.

A year later, they would come back, and in their uncle's resting place put a marking stone. It read:

BELOVED BROTHER, BELOVED UNCLE
MAY NO ONE ELSE FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

In the years to come, the house would never be rebuilt, and the vines of the forest would swallow its ruins. But Ralph and Irene Zhao would never forget the silent vow they made that day, the vow to never let the past bind them, to always remember the beauty of today, the beauty of life.

A Wish to Be Granted

Shanghai High School International Division, Lin, Jenny – 15

It was the end of ten-year-old Kristen Wu's first week to school in Los Angeles, she had gotten off the school bus while fighting back the tears that threatened to spill. Her brother Ryan, who is two years older and a head taller, ushers his little sister down the bus.

Almost immediately, the girl's face was reduced to a shimmering pool of tears and snot. She wailed at the sky and kicked her brother, quite forcefully with what her sticky legs could muster. "You let them tease us on the bus!" she shouted angrily in shrilled Mandarin as another sob choked her throat. Her voice gargled with another wave of wet snot. "And you dare to join *their* side!?"

Ryan backed away to avoid the tantrum, but some of the hits connected nonetheless, "Alright! Alright stop that!" he bent down and put both of his hands on Kristen's shoulders, gently pushing back her flailing form. "What's the matter? It's just a joke—"

"Oh, so you think it's a joke?" She glared daggers at him, "*Oh no! Here comes the Woos!*" the girl put both her arms on her head, melodramatically portraying the kids on their bus, "*They must be related to Boo Radley!*" she mimicked in the shrilled voice of one the older girls.

At only age ten, Kristen had never read '*To Kill a Mockingbird*', but the first time a middle schooler on the bus pulled the wires, the name had unfortunately stuck in her vocabulary bank. The name itself held no particular meaning, but it made Kristen feel sophisticated despite the humiliation. And *sophistication* is all that matters when one is not entirely fluent in their second language.

"Alright, now there's no harm with—"

"It's just because of the 'oo' sound!" suddenly, Kristen's tears stopped flowing, and what remained was the twin fire burning behind her eyes. "If I hear one more '*Woonies' loonie house with poopies*' I swear I'm going—I'm going to break their pencils!" she breathed heavily, heaving loudly after the outburst.

Ryan sighed and put a hand to his forehead. "Kris, you've gotta let go of it. I know moving to a new country is hard when you can't speak the language very well, but it's never too late to try."

"TO TRY?" Kristen cries out, her juvenile voice cutting starkly through the air. "Well, I will *try*. *Oh yes, I will.*" She retreated slowly, her widening eyes unblinking and fixated on Ryan, "But I will try when I WANT TO TRY!"

With that, she flailed her school bag toward Ryan. The boy yelped and almost tripped on his feet to catch it. The Disney bag landed square in his arms.

"Hey! Get back here!" Ryan shouted.

But Kristen was already gone. Her body still small yet nimble, ran to the yard where she momentarily forgot all of her previous unpleasantness. She knew Ryan would not come after her again. Her brother, who is now a fifth grader, had homework to finish before going out with the *new friends* he made, *or so he claimed to made*.

"New friends...*barf.*" Kristen rolled her eyes at the thought of Ryan's 'new friends'. She made a face and grimaced, breathing out a small sigh as she laid spread eagle against the soft meadow, the gentle silence leaving her loneliness raw and exposed.

Little did she know, just behind a melon-sized hole in the garden fence, a pair of luminous blue orbs had been watching her movements.

The creature's eyes followed the girl as she occasionally mumbled into the wind; stretching against the green lawn like a dazed cat; and later, climbing the tree that reaches all the way to the second floor of her bedroom window.

Its black claws sank into the solid earth, gleaming nails slightly blunted and coated in dried earth; its small feathered forearms shook like a humming engine; red-orange beaks chattered and clicked like an alarm clock; the head was so twinly identical to a bird's, that one would have difficulty to differentiate between a weird-looking eagle and the little bird-like creature that stood quivering outside of the fence. Its head, only the size of a puppy, poked through the melon hole cautiously. And ignoring the long feather tail that dragged behind its rear, the creature couldn't be larger than a turkey.

"Wheet wheet!" it whistled tentatively.

A rubber ball went sailing over its head, and the birdy creature flung back, horrified by the sudden motion. Reflexively, it let out a sharp screech of terror as the ball bounced against the fence. The creature jumped back, already regretting the surge of curiosity that had driven it to follow the shrilled shriek that resembled its kind. *It was just a girl*, it thought. The thing it had thought (hoped, even) was perhaps one of its own kind, turned out to be a human pup. It clapped its beaks twice and skipped away from the hole.

It was about to jump back into the woods when a series of loud barks came from behind. When it turned, a bundle of dark brown fur was charging toward the birdy creature. The beast's beady black eyes were wild with enthusiasm that the birdy creature could not reciprocate. It opened its beaks and let out a piercing screech.

"York! York! Bad dog, York! Come back!" A moment later, the girl, Kristen, climbed over the fence and came running toward the small Yorkshire. The birdy creature tripped on a branch in panic and fell to the ground with a soft *thump*.

As Kristen got closer, her eyes widened when she saw the feathery mound curling against the ground. "What..." The girl tentatively took a step toward the birdy creature, but the thing flapped its forearms and she let out a small yelp as well. The two of them jumped back simultaneously. But once her initial shock began to wear off, Kristen had knelt to her knees and cautiously inched closer. "Well...don't you make a weird bird. Where did you come from?"

The birdy creature tilted its head but made no attempt to approach her. Its pale blue orbs regarded her warily.

Kristen wouldn't give up. The family cat Roger was a stray cat she had befriended back in her old apartment in Shenzhen. And if she could tame a wild beast like Roger, well...how hard can it be to befriend a weird birdy creature?

"I'm Kristen." She held out a hand, making *tsk-tsk* sounds at the creature like she had done to the stray cats before.

The birdy creature regarded her with matched curiosity, but not without tension. Every time Kristen tried to close the distance, it would take a tiny step backward. It got scared quite easily, flinching when it accidentally broke a twig, or at the distant cry of migrating birds.

After what felt like another Jurassic had passed, the girl remained unfazed by the creature's reluctance to her offered intimacy. In fact, her vigor had only grown acceleratingly more.

At last, Kristen remembered the can of tuna in the fridge. Her gaze returned to the quivering creature, and she made a quick decision.

"Wait here." Slowly, she rose to her feet, doing her best to avoid clumsy mistakes that might scare away her new *friend-to-be*.

When Kristen had her back turned, she felt something tugging at her pants leg.

"York, not now." She sighed, expecting to see the small Yorkshire at her back. Instead, the small dog was right in front of her, wagging its tail and barking happily at the girl.

Kristen raised an eyebrow. Then she looked down, and her eyes widened. A small, dimpled smile crept up her cheeks.

Bending its scrawny legs, the birdy creature held on to the fabric of her pants with its small beaks. Its pale blue orbs met the girl's dark eyes. Sensing the attention, it immediately let go of the pants leg and backed away shyly.

"Huh..." the girl mused with a huff, "I guess you can come along if you want. That's also an option."

Back in Kristen's bedroom, the girl was standing on tiptoes in front of the bookshelf. All around her, a ring of discarded books was already piled up in a small colorful mound.

"I can't believe this," she muttered. The birdy creature was perched on her bed, its blue orbs unblinking and fixed on the girl. "There's simply no other birds that look like you in the books!" Kristen let out an exasperated sigh. "I'm starting to wonder if you're even a bird at all..."

"*Peep*." the birdy creature tilted its head and hopped down the bed in one swift movement. It looked up at Kristen and flopped its feathered forearms.

"You wanna take a look too?" Kristen giggles, "Alright then." She took the creature in her arms and lifted it over her head to take a scam through the taller shelves. "You found anything, little one?"

"*Tck-tck-tck!*"

The birdy creature clicked excitedly and flapped its tiny wings in Kristen's arms, almost making the girl lose her balance as its long, feathered tail draped over her eyes. "Hey! Careful, will you?" she sneezed as her new companion continued to flap its wings.

Sensing the girl's support was wavering, the birdy creature took aim at the target, and with an elegant crane of its long neck, it snatched the book between its beaks and managed to balance at a bizarre angle.

"Oh goodness that was heavy," Kristen's arms wobbled as she placed the creature down on the bedroom floor, she regarded the book in its beaks curiously, "What's that you chose?"

The birdy creature dropped the book on the ground, and Kristen picked it up.

"*Dinosaurs of the Cretaceous*," she also noticed a small line of Chinese next to the bolded heading, "*with 3D pages and interactions*. Interesting, but why would you—"

The birdy creature nuzzled her hand aside with a soft bump of its head and flipped open the cover. Its eyes squinted and focused on the content page for a short while, then it screeched in an upbeat manner and began to flip open the pages with flicks of its bird-like beaks.

“*Wheet! Wheet!*” it whistled as it pulled back from the book, eyes wide with unmasked excitement, hoping the girl could make out the puzzles.

“Sino...sinor...nithides...” Kristen grimaced as she forced out the strange syllables from her mouth. She looked at the birdy creature for support. The pale blue orbs stared back at her for a split moment, and then the feathered head gave a shake of disagreement.

Kristen slumped back and sighed exasperatedly. “What difference does it make...” she muttered gloomily, though her eyes were transfixed on the pictures under the genus of *Sinornithoides*. Her eyes widened, and her gaze darted toward the birdy creature who had made itself a nest beside her leg.

Her eyes dart back to the pictures of a Sinornithoide, and her mouth dropped open.

“YOU ARE A DINASAUR?!”

The small creature sprung up from the carpet like a spring and skipped away in panic, making weak hissing noises as it covered in the corner. Kristen quickly covered her mouth and apologized to the Sinornithoide. “Sorry, sorry. I was just so shocked.” She picked up the book and waved at the Sinornithoide. “You still want to join me?”

The Sinornithoide’s pupils flared and contracted, but it made no move to walk forward.

“I promise I won’t shout again.” The girl smiled apologetically. The Sinornithoide flapped its feathered forearms in disdain and chirped several times as if complaining.

“Please? I’m really sorry.” Seeing the dino had no intent of coming, she sighed. There was one last trick up to her sleeve, and this was the time to pull it.

“How about you come over to me, and I will give you something real special?”

Back in the corner, the Sinornithoide clicked in confusion, but its half-lifted leg already gave off its curiosity.

Kristen grinned mischievously, knowing she had gotten its attention. “Come on, don’t be shy.”

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Ryan slammed down his pencil and groaned loudly at the ceiling. *What in the name of math was Kristen doing upstairs?* It sounded as if she was having a race with a chicken in her bedroom.

“Wu Kai-Xuan!” the boy bolted to the staircase and shouted up in fury. “Quiet down! I’m doing Math here!” he flailed his arms in the air helplessly and stormed back into his room.

Upstairs in her room, the Sinornithoide had frozen midway when it heard the shouting from downstairs.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

“GAAAAAARH!”

With a final *thud*, the Sinornithoide skipped into the girl’s arms. Kristen giggled guiltily and ruffled the Sinornithoide’s fluffed head. “It’s just my brother,” she whispered to the dino, “He’s only like that when he’s doing math.”

The Sinornithoide showed little interest in the topic. It blinked twice at Kristen, and the girl was reminded that she still had a promise to fulfill. “Oh yeah, your name. Let me think...”

She bent forward and quickly scanned through the context of the Sinornithoides. A snap of information caught her attention, and her eyes were lit up at once as the realization sank in. She gasped.

“You are from China too!” she gave the Sinornithoide a light tap on the beak and pointed at the archaeology sight in the picture, “Look! ‘*Sinornithoide* was first discovered in Inner Mongolia, China, 1993.’ And ‘*Sinornithoides*’ literally means ‘*Chinese bird form*!’”

A bubble string of laughter broke across the bedroom. “You are from China, just like me.” Kristen smiled and stroked the small creature’s back thoughtfully. The Sinornithoide shut its eyes and clicked in a comfortable haze.

“*Loui*. “The name was carried off her lips.

“I’m calling you *Loui* because it has a similar pronunciation to *Ruyi* in Chinese.” Kristen declared triumphantly, nodding in satisfaction at her choice of name, “It means ‘a wish to be granted’, it often comes along with ‘luck’ too.”

The Sinornithoides clicked in approval, and for the first time since its mysterious arrival in Los Angeles, the birdy creature that was in fact a Sinornithoides had gotten his name and a friend.

And that was how both of them, a girl and a young Sinornithoide, made their first friend in a new country.

To Kristen, Los Angeles was still a long distance from home in Shenzhen. But for now, with the company of Loui, maybe the journey in this new city wouldn’t be as harsh as she’d imagined, and whatever awaits in the future, she was certain they could conquer together.

“Oh Loui,” Kristen pressed a light kiss on the Sinornithoide’s beak, “*Loui, Loui, Loui...*” She repeated the name several times more, testing the sound of it on her tongue.

“You really are a wish granted. You know that?”

Dinosaurs of 2034

Shanghai High School International Division, Nian, Guoshwan – 15

One step.

Two steps.

The navy-blue Utahraptor bared its dagger teeth, opening jaws large enough to swallow a human head whole. Its yellow eyes flashed electrically as it ruffled its colorful, artificially garish feathers. It flexed sharpened steel claws that had tasted the sweetness of flesh hundreds of times before. Its reptilian feet sneaked softly on bloodstained, bloodthirsty sand.

It ignored the intensely watching noonday sun, the cheers of the excited crowd above, the confetti dancing innocently in the air, the distracting flashes of banners drooping from the seats of spectators. Its electric yellow eyes focused only on the target in front.

Three steps.

Four steps.

It cocked its head, facing an electric eye directly at its much smaller opponent. The Atrociraptor, only the size of a chicken, cowered into a corner, protecting itself with measly feathers as it faced a battle-hardened killing machine. Yet, to the spectators, this wasn't a lost battle yet. If the Atrociraptor lashed out fast enough, it could go for a –

A dash. A bolt. A cloud of sand. The head of the Atrociraptor went rolling along the sand. Blood ran down the length of the Utahraptor's long, iron claw, painting the thirsty soil crimson. It licked its claw like a lion bathing its fur with one long stroke of its narrow tongue.

“And THE TERMINATOR WINS AGAIN!” roars the announcer. “And it wasn't even close!”

The crowd roared, cheered, screamed in excitement like a mindless mob. Blinding lights and poisonous confetti obscured the sky, glittering with its false flashing colors. The Utahraptor shook its head as the spotlight shone brightly upon it.

“For two whole months, the Terminator remains undefeated!” The announcer roared. “Who knows if it'll ever be – ”

A yelp in the crowd. A little boy tumbled down from the stands and into the arena below, pushed by the spectators who could not tame their ecstasy. The child rolled in the bloodred sand, as he clenched a tiny little dinosaur action figure.

The crowd was suddenly dead silent. The Utahraptor cocked its head at the new target, its electric yellow eyes crackling with energy. The little boy stood up, clutching his toy T-Rex as he stared at the monster in front.

“That's my son!” His mother suddenly cried out, squeezing through the crowd. “Connie! Connie! Come back here!”

Connie turned back “Mo – ”

With frightening speed, the Utahraptor bolted towards the boy. Teeth bared, claws ready, it swiped –

BZZZZZT!

Raptor snipers got it first. Large as tanks with bloodthirsty muzzles, they lined up in rows along the stadium and fired bolts of paralyzing lightning. They connected. Streaks of lightning ran down the Utahraptor as stopped dead in its tracks.

It screamed. It screamed and screamed and screamed its hoarse, raspy lungs out. It jerked frantically like a haywire machine out of control. Then it froze. The little boy whimpered as the “undefeated” hunter tumbled down, its nerves fried by paralysis.

“Connie...” murmured the mother, rushing down the stands to hug tight the boy she almost lost. “Don’t ever do tha– ”

“RAAAAA!” The crowd cheered out, drowning out the mother’s voice. “RAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

“UNBELIEVEBLE ATTACK!” roared the announcer, as the crowd cheered on. “What ruthless and quick hunting! Had our special guns not been a moment quicker, the boy would’ve been raptor dinner! Well, folks, that’s an Utahraptor for you! That’s what happens if you’re not careful!”

...

“Well, what’d you expect? Now pay up.”

Scoffing, the old bastard reluctantly pulled out a fat roll of dollar bills. “We all know you’re cheating,” muttered the old man, spite dripping with every croaking syllable. “We’ll kick you out someday.”

“You lost your Atrociraptor in seconds. Keep dreaming, loser,” she replied absentmindedly, already distracted by the money shuffling in her hands. Snarling, the old man walked away.

“How’s the gladiator business?” asked a man nearby. Behind his jet-black sunglasses beeped his blue, mechanical eyes, embedded in a metallic skull with a powder-white wig on top. His human mouth – the only human part left of him – smiled as he adjusted the “Dinosaurs Rule” T-shirt covering his hissing mechanical body. He tapped his prosthetic legs amusedly.

“It’s great, Unc Adam,” replied the girl, brushing her expensively dyed apple-red hair aside. Her velociraptor tattoo, branded at her neck, lashed out. “You know, in the streets, I never thought I’d touch even a single hundred-dollar bill. But here we are.” She kissed Adam’s iron cheek. “Thanks, Unc.”

Uncle Adam laughed. “Oh, it’s nothing, Charlie dear. Just what an uncle should do for niece.” He took out a bottle of vintage wine and took a swig. “Even I didn’t predict,” he said, wiping the rich purple wastefully from his lips, “just how lucrative the Dinosaur Games business would be.”

“We definitely wouldn’t’ve made it this far without your bio-engineering skills,” said Charlie. “The man who helped revive dinosaurs definitely should cash into the profits.”

“True, true,” chuckled Uncle Adam.

“Well, our little Terminator would’ve never passed the examinations without my... bargaining skills, either” winked Charlie. “We make a great team.”

Uncle Adam hesitated for the briefest of seconds – so brief that Charlie thought she just imagined it. “Yes, of course,” Uncle Adam replied, smiling as widely as he could. “How do you even do it?”

“Oh, Unc Adam,” laughed Charlie, flexing her velociraptor tattoo. She took out a butterfly knife and spun it on her index finger. “Greed pilots society, after all. Find the footholds selfishness creates, and you can go anywhere. Don’t, and you’ll be killed by gang members or eaten by wild dinosaurs.

“Ya clever girl,” chuckled Uncle Adam (or did he sigh?). He ruffled her apple-red hair. “At this rate, we’ll be the most famous champions in the dinosaur arena. Once we repair our little Terminator after the... ah, incident, it’ll be ready to rake in the money.”

“Honestly,” whined Charlie, “they should just let the dinosaur eat the kid. Who brings a kid to a gladiator fight? And those raptor rifles did *quite a number* on our poor little Terminator. the repairs would be *sooo* costly, especially because of our... extra components. If only they could let the dinosaurs do what they want. I mean – ”

“★Cough★ ★cough★”

Charlie and Uncle Adam turned around. Behind them was a businessman, with sleek, glossy black hair, dressed in a black tuxedo, and carrying a black suitcase. His shiny black shoes glowed with black light as his onyx black eyes glittered shadow. “Dr. Adam,” said the man, his voice oozing and oily, “We have a business proposition regarding Dinosaur Games. May you and your niece come along?”

Uncle Adam’s smile slipped off of his face.

“Who’s this?” asked Charlie.

Uncle Adam simply nodded, paying Charlie no mind. “Let’s go.”

...

Deep beneath the arena, in a dimly lit room, the man in black sat down on a simple, rusted chair. He gestured towards the two other rusty chair, pre-set just for this meeting. “Please. Sit.”

Uncle Adam and Charlie sat down.

“Who’s this?” asked Charlie, her apple red hair swishing softly.

“A... businessman I’m acquainted with.” Uncle Adam replied, none of his usual laughter hanging in his jaws.

The businessman in black stared at the pair of them. “Let’s cut to the chase,” he oozed. “The Dinosaur Games is a lucrative business. Ever since Uncle Adam and his team recreated the dinosaurs, they’ve been all the rage. They...” he smiled. “They were the second most savage creatures we’ve ever seen. Of course they’d be popular.”

“We all know the first,” said Charlie absentmindedly.

“And with popularity comes money,” continued the businessman, “and with money comes shady business. With shady business comes riches. But with shady business also comes... consequences.”

“I thought you’d cut to the chase,” said Charlie, already growing impatient. She twirled her hair confidently.

“Apologies,” oozed the businessman. “Well, I discussed with your uncle about this yesterday. The authorities have found out that your Terminator, your Utahraptor... doesn’t fit the guidelines for dinosaur participation. It has been mechanically modified. Robotically enhanced, if you will. It’s not a true raptor.”

“How?!” Charlie asked. “I was sure that —”

“How do you think?” asked the man in black. “That inspector you bribed. He ratted you out.”

Charlie gasped. “No, that can’t be. I thought that...”

“Your career would be wiped out. Everything you worked for would be gone. Your reputation would be ruined. You’ll lose everything.” The businessman leaned in, looking directly at Uncle Adam. “But there *is* a way to save it all.”

“What?” asked Charlie frantically.

“Charlie...” Uncle Adam’s mechanical eyes drooped down, his pixelated pupils refusing to look at her niece.

“Throughout history, living organisms — including the dinosaurs — lived under the law of natural selection,” said the businessman. “The ones who could take advantage of their environment, through any means possible, would win. The ones who can’t must die.

“That’s how dinosaurs lived. They hunted. They prowled. They killed. They *were* killed. Killing and eating and feasting like the most savage of animals. Any faulty dinosaur born would immediately be devoured by other, larger dinosaurs. And even now, the basic principle still applies.”

“What’s your point?” asked Charlie, voice hardening. Street instincts came back to her. She put her steady hand in her pocket, waiting to pounce. Her velociraptor tattoo bared its teeth.

“Well, this all begun because of the mistake of a little chicken, a chicken that grew up only with other chickens. And now it thinks it can fight with dinosaurs. Well, that chicken must be taught a lesson.”

Just when the businessman drew the gun, Charlie pulled out her butterfly knife.

A gunshot.

A flash of steel.

Uncle Adam’s electric eyes observed Charlie, her lifeless body lay broken onto the floor. Blood crawled along the floor, seeping and wailing under the dim lights.

“She was a street thug after all,” groaned the man. The butterfly knife buried itself in his shoulder, inches away from hitting his neck. Blood trickled out. The man in black grimaced.

“Like dinosaurs, like humans,” said Uncle Adam emotionlessly. “I truly hoped it didn’t come to this.”

“I know,” grunted the man in black. “But her screwup almost destroyed your entire life. We did what we had to. Now, I’ll shift the blame from you to her. We’ll find another inspector to bribe. There. Our business is complete.”

Uncle Adam knelt down, feeling his niece’s icy cold corpse with an icy cold mechanical hand. “She really loved dinosaurs,” he said, staring into her blank eyes and dead wisps of red hair. “It was her dream to see one, you know. In the flesh. She’s why I even made dinosaurs alive in the first place.”

“Let’s go,” said the black man.

Uncle Adam nodded. “Yes. Let’s go.”

...

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!” roared the announcer. “Now, for our final round, we have the recurring champion: TEERRRMMMINATOOOORRR!”

The navy-blue Utahaptor returned, roaring out at the crowd as it clawed along the sand. The people went crazy. Uncle Adam watched his dinosaur and felt a tiny inkling of pride.

“See, Charlie,” said Uncle Adam, turning around. “Isn’t it –”

“She isn’t here,” said the businessman, smiling.

She was nowhere to be seen. Her red hair, her velociraptor tattoo, her butterfly knife. Nowhere. Where could she have –

Oh right.

She wasn’t here. She’ll never be here again.

“Now, before we announce Terminator’s opponent,” said the announcer, “we have an announcement about the violation of rules.”

Murmurs.

“As you all know, only pure dinosaurs could join the competition. That meant no mechanical components could be used to enhance the dinosaur. However, Terminator has violated this stipulation – mechanical components were discovered in its body.”

A hush. Then a susurrus. Icy blood crawled through Uncle Adam’s iron veins. Only a single question remained, pumping and drumming in his head.

What?

“Fear not!” said the announcer, his voice booming across the arena. “We have a dinosaur ready to face him. And the sponsors of *this* dinosaur promised to take down Terminator with a true dinosaur. Can they do it? LET’S FIND OUT!”

Suddenly, out emerged another dinosaur. A dinosaur with steak knives for teeth, thirsting for blood. A dinosaur with unnatural red eyes, ready for murder. A dinosaur with feet large enough to crush a car like a tin can. The most powerful dinosaur to ever be found.

A Tyrannosaurus Rex

But that wasn’t possible. Uncle Adam found no sample of Tyrannosaurus Rex with enough information that allowed him to recreate it with 99% accuracy. Which meant... this wasn’t an actual T. Rex.

It was an artificial one.

“What...” Uncle Adam turned to the businessman, his mechanical eyes whirling wildly with confusion and rage. “What... did you do?”

The businessman smiled. It was a smile of demons, curved unnaturally high, enough to send electrical shivers down his mechanical spine.

“Sorry, Adam,” he said. “Natural selection dictates that you had your run. It’s time to welcome the next age of dinosaurs.”

Terminator the Utahraptor shrunk, immediately recognizing its foe. As the T. Rex loomed over the Utahraptor, Terminator realized. This was a fight that was impossible to win. But Terminator was drunk on success. It thought that, if it struck fast, it could kill the T. rex in one go. It dashed forward –

CRUNCH!

And the battle was over. With one unnaturally swift bite, the T. Rex tore the Utahraptor’s head off. It chewed the mechanical head, feasting on the metal and flesh as the limp, headless body fell down to the side, feeding the sand once again with blood.

The world broke down. Uncle Adam felt everything around him fade. Sound failed, refusing to play in his thumping ears. Voices failed, blurring into each other. The sky failed, fading into nonexistence as everything crumbled. His coding failed, unable to process whatever remained in this reality.

He felt limp.

He didn’t resist when the businessman pushed him down the stage, into the sand. He didn’t move when the announcer say: “NOW LET’S SEE THE CHEATER GET PUNISHED!” He didn’t move when the raptor snipers aimed at him, ready to shoot him if he ran away. He only saw.

He saw hordes of dinosaurs cheering ecstatically. He saw a dinosaur with a microphone, roaring stupidly. He saw a dinosaur in black, licking its lips in delight. He saw a massive dinosaur approaching him, blood and saliva drooping from teeth ready to slice. He saw a smiling, apple-red dinosaur, nodding along in the ethereal, pure sky.

No matter what day and age. No matter if flesh or machine. No matter if animal or human. They’re all dinosaurs. Every single one of them.

Each and every one of us are dinosaurs.

Those were his last thoughts as the T. Rex chewed him up in one bite, spraying his metallic insides on the sand. As the T. Rex ripped a human into scraps of iron and flesh.

The dinosaurs roared in approval.

All the Dinosaurs are Dead

Shanghai High School International Division, Zhang, Sophia – 14

Everybody knows that all the dinosaurs that have ever lived are dead now, and it's common knowledge that they've been dead for ages. We only have their bones— bones turned to fossils and fossils turned to museum exhibits. That's the way everything is supposed to be.

Dr. Edmund doesn't believe in "supposed to be", though.

When he asked me to join his research team, I said yes without hesitation. It's one thing to have a passion for science, and it's another thing to be offered the chance of a lifetime— a place to work with the world's most brilliant geneticist.

And now here I am, deep underground in a poorly lit lab beneath an excavation site in China's Xinjiang province.

"Finally," murmurs Dr. Edmund, holding up a tiny vial.

I stare at the neon green liquid inside. It gleams unnaturally under the dim, flickering fluorescents of the lab, almost as though it's alive. Honestly, I was expecting something more than whatever the serum was, but who am I to question Dr. Edmund?

"So, this is it?" I ask.

"This is it," he confirms, his voice calm but his sea-green eyes wild with an unfathomable excitement. They seem to shine in the gloom. For a moment, I swear there's something sinister behind his smile, but I push the thought away. "This is the final piece."

The excavation site above us had unearthed the extraordinary: the remains of the femur of a sinraptor, a large, predatory dinosaur, complete with its perfectly preserved bone marrow. This was all Edmund needed. Years of visiting excavation sites around the world and extracting DNA from fossils have led to this very moment.

"What's next?" I ask, trying to sound confident. I still can't believe that he chose me of all people to be his apprentice— me with my clumsiness and practically nonexistent experience.

"We finish what we started all those years ago. Tonight is when it all happens." He nods toward the rusty metal workbench in the corner, where the reconstructed dinosaur lies under the basement's broken, blinking bulbs, imploring us to bring it to life.

If I'm being completely honest, it's grotesque, an unholy marriage of various synthetic materials and organic tissue developed with the DNA we've collected. Its olive-green skin is stretched taut over a framework of printed polymer bones, shimmering despite the weak lighting of our basement, and its eyes are tightly shut in its hollow sockets. It's taken months for Dr. Edmund and I to complete it, fitting its massive parts together inch by inch and piece by piece, but now, standing here, I feel a sharp unease biting at me.

We approach the table together, the horrid smell of bile growing stronger as we near the sinraptor. I stare as Dr. Edmund injects the concoction into the creature's dormant body, the neon of the potion darkening into an avocado green as it mixes with the dinosaur's inky blood. The air seems to thicken around us as the liquid snakes through its veins.

And then it moves.

Its claws twitch.

And its legs quiver.

And its tail jerks.

And its chest heaves.

And its eyelids flutter.

And suddenly it stands up, a guttural sound escaping its throat. Finally, it's alive.

Dr. Edmund is silent, marveling the dinosaur like it's the Mona Lisa.

"We've done it," he whispers. "We've brought dinosaurs back."

The sinraptor slowly blinks its large, emerald eyes, tilting its head back slightly to look at me. Its eyes lock onto mine, and I feel a chill crawl down my spine. Its cold, intelligent glare unnerves me, almost like it knows something I don't. Although my heartbeat thuds in my head, the room is eerily silent aside from the continuous electric buzz of the unsteady, wavering lights.

"This changes everything."

"You're right," Dr. Edmund replies. There's something strange about his tone, perhaps the potent patience of his pitch, but I can't place it.

"You're right," he repeats again, softer this time. "It does change everything. Life doesn't just appear out of nowhere, you know."

He doesn't say anything else, but I watch as he steps closer to the table, silently observing as the dinosaur flexes its muscles and shifts on its rusted platform. Its nostrils flare as though it's trying to smell the sour air. The lights shudder.

"It's perfect," I offer.

Edmund turns to me, the corner of his mouth twitching into an unnatural smile.

"You've been a great help," he says softly, like a father praising a child. His eyes glint a poisonous green that makes my stomach churn in fear. He wields a syringe, filled with the same shiny serum we just used.

"What are you doing?"

"You really thought we could make life appear out of nowhere?" His voice is gentle, as though he's explaining a basic concept to a student.

"Energy can't be created or destroyed. It comes in many forms, yes," he continues, "but it has to come from somewhere— that's the law of the conservation of energy." His smile widens and my chest tightens as the realization dawns on me.

"You want to use me?"

"You're an ideal candidate," he says, his tone calm, cold, and calculated. "No family, no friends, nobody to ask questions. And besides, you've admired me from the start— it's made all of this way easier."

I need to run away. I try to back off, but my feet feel rooted to the floor. My body won't budge. I hear a cruel laugh by my ear.

"Don't struggle," Dr. Edmund cautions me as he steps closer. "Save some energy. Besides, it'll all be over in the blink of an eye."

The needle pierces my forearm before I can even scream. The elixir burns as it floods through my veins, my skin turning a sickly veridian as it spreads through my body like fire. My vision blurs and my limbs go numb.

Behind me, the sinraptor lets out a vicious screech— a sound so primal, so alive that the sound of blood pounding in my ears is drowned out.

Dr. Edmund lets go of my limp body, and I can just barely make out his eyes, those treacherous murky— green eyes, in the faltering lights as he leans in and whispers six final words into my ear.

“Not *all* the dinosaurs are dead.”

Frenny's Journey

Tai Kwong Hilary College, Chow, Wing Sze – 17

Frenny argued with his parents over whether he was supposed to explore the Baishiya Karst Cave in China. This was where the fossil of the Denisovan, which was its Jawbone, was found in the 1980s, but then described and dated by archaeologist and colleagues in 2019. But recently in 2024, the last day of the year, 31st of December something treacherous happened to the most famous anthropologist called Biao Yang who followed a different group of people to continue a similar research on other fossils hidden in this cave. But he got crushed by rocks before he could leave the cave with them. It was a day after this incident happened, where the news had shown that he was known to be dead. Which was why Frenny's parents had advised him not to go into this cave since it's arduous and hazardous.

When Frenny heard this, he hurried inside his room with his head down, still almost hitting the ceiling. His mind burned up like a meteor entering the earth's atmosphere, and slammed the door behind him.

Frenny sat down in his room, thinking back to what his father had told him about a famous anthropologist who died after going into this cave. He searched for the information about it online, but he couldn't find more detail about it. This infuriated him so much that he was determined to find a friend to talk to. He kept scrolling through his phone. All he could find were the professor's and both his parents' contacts only.

He lay in bed, closed his eyes and fell asleep immediately.

On the next day, when the sun shone brightly in the sky, Frenny packed his bag all by himself, without needing to hear any demands from his parents or the professor. Frenny already planned on going into this cave without telling his parents or the professor about it.

In his bag, there were extra clothes, jacket, water bottles, towels, socks, shoes, boots, helmets, headlamps, torch, tracking poles, navigation tool, binoculars and hiking apparel. Everything combined made it feel like he was carrying a T-Rex on his back.

Frenny left home, leaving a note behind on the dining table, telling his parents that from these 3 to 4 weeks he would be spending his days at the university campus, doing more and more research for his studies. Little did they know that he had already quit university last week.

As he closed the door softly behind him, he noticed the bus on the road, and immediately sprinted towards it. He was running as fast as a Gallinimus even though he carried his heavy bag. But before he took his next step, he fell forward, nearly twisting his ankle. He yelled in pain.

The bus driver drove forward closer to Frenny's location and immediately got out of his driver seat, and ran towards Frenny with both hands out. He asked Frenny in a nice, understandable tone, that Frenny had never felt, almost in his entire life. "Are you alright? May I help you?" . Frenny instinctively nodded and followed the driver, who simply

helped Frenny to carry the bag up to the bus, like he could lift a 2 tonne elephant in one hand while Frenny hopped onto the bus.

Frenny sat down in a seat where the bus driver helped him to put his bag.

The warmth the bus driver had given to Frenny had made him feel better about the path he decided to take. This slowly made him remember someone who also acted the same way like the bus driver did to Frenny, when they first met.

Frenny thought back to his last day at university.

The day he left university was the most tragic day in his young life, where he argued with the professor whether or not he should continue his research on the history of Denisovans. The professor recommended him not to continue this research but try something else. This made Frenny lose hope, lose his temper and yelled “I QUIT” in front of the professor.

Frenny stumbled out of the university gate, feeling stupid and regretful that he had quit university. All his hopes and dreams vanished because he lost his temper.

He carried stumps of papers feeling extremely embarrassed. Where he kept thinking that people would realize that he had quit university already. Then, he walked past a group of 4 nasty colleagues, who stared at him curiously, whispering to one another. This made Frenny think that they were talking about him behind the walls, which made him feel uncomfortable, so he dumped everything onto their feet, making them shout in pain like a squawking chicken. The paper flew everywhere like the fallen leaves from the trees in spring. Frenny opened his mouth in shock. All of a sudden, the 4 of them together pushed Frenny down onto a muddy puddle, and splashed mud onto his face while some got into his mouth. Frenny stood up and roared at them like a T-Rex and raised his left hand up high, prepared to punch their faces. Suddenly, an old man held Frenny's hand, and shouted, “STOP your nonsense!” in a thick voice.

This old man might have looked like a silly stubborn dwarf sized old man with a pair of big round eyes when his glasses were on, who wandered a lot in the park playing chess all by himself. Frenny looked at him, feeling speechless. Before this old man spoke, Frenny thought his voice would be husky and incoherent. In fact it was soft and clear. As he spoke, he could see the same ambition in Frenny's eyes.

Frenny blinked and realised he had to drop off at this bus stop. He spoke loudly, “Stop please! Thank you!”, as he bumped his head twice, and both legs got stuck twice, as his legs tangled between the seats as he walked through. The driver said in a soft tone, “Take your time, be careful.... and have a nice day!” Frenny replied, “Thanks! You too....bye!”

After the thunderstorm and lightning had struck his head. The warmth and kindness the driver had given to Frenny had made him feel better about this world and what he's up to next.

Frenny looked around, feeling unsure about which path he should take. He looked left and right repetitively. But when he blinked, he saw someone sitting in the park 5 steps away from him, looking so familiar. He walked closer and realised it was old man Geri.

They had a mini conversation together. By the time old man Geri asked Frenny, "What are you up to with all this gear? You are going out exploring in the caves aren't you,...huh?" . Frenny suddenly felt unsure whether or not he should tell old man Geri the truth that he was going to the most treacherous places in China. Frenny replied, "Um...m I...am ...n...not going to any dangerous place, I am just going hiking. Get myself to move around, before butt explodes." old man Geri nodded, and laughed a bit telling Frenny that it's alright to tell the truth since there's nothing to lie about. He also told Frenny that when telling the truth, there's no need to care about how other people might think about his plan on doing something. Finally, Frenny told old man Geri the truth that he's planning to go to the Baishiya Karst Cave.

Old man Geri gave Frenny an unpredictable response, "You know what? I will come to you! Since I've also been doing this kind of research for the last 40 years in my life. There's no point going there alone. Eh!" Frenny looked at him feeling speechless. And together they head off and go in direction towards the cave. As they walked, Frenny asked, "Geri, m...may I call you o...old m...man G...Geri?" Geri replied understandably, "Of course! It's alright to call me that."

It was about an hour walk to the entrance of the Baishiya Karst Cave. They both had to be extremely careful each step they took on the slippery wobbly path where fences weren't built yet.

When they arrived at the entrance. They could see a black gaping mouth, where spikes were everywhere on the path and on the walls of the cave. As they took their first step into the cave, water droplets that were as cold as ice fell onto their heads, freezing the cranium and their brains.

Frenny and old man Geri both immediately stepped aside and put on their helmets with a headlamp attached on, before anything weird dripped onto their heads again.

Old man Geri settled down for a break after a long walk that felt like it had been 50 years already. So, he sat down on a flat rock and closed his eyes and fell asleep immediately before Frenny noticed that.

While Frenny looked around, the green coloured cave had made it felt like it was injected by a contagious disease.

Frenny quickly walked towards old man Geri and realised he had already fallen asleep. He looked closer and gossiped. This created a weird echo. Frenny kept still, as still as a mouse, and wondered when would old man Geri be awake.

He wondered and wondered, and decided to head off by himself.

The further Frenny walked, the darker it got. Only a trigger of light that could be revealed in front of Frenny's eyes. There were long shadows crawling on the walls and a hideous screech sound from the ceiling.

All of a sudden, a freezy breezy unidentical smell whoosh towards Frenny's face where dust scattered to his mouth. The drumming wind sound somehow uncovered a sound life further in the cave.

Frenny immediately took out his tracking poles and navigation tool and moved towards the source of the sound. The flickering light inside him had brought him to someone where everyone once thought to be dead.

The man turned around and looked at Frenny. Frenny replied in shock, "You...you are a...live Mr. Biao Yang!" Together they had a short conversation and started an investigation.

The walls were cold and rough, but below there were white solid flat triangular mountain-like structures expanded on the fossil. Together they dug it out. Mr. Biao Yang wondered, "what kind of stone or fossil is this?" Frenny immediately took out his hand written research booklet and realised it was a Stegosaurus dinosaur fossil. As he took it up and placed it in front of his own face, he realised there were some unrecognisable bite marks located on it. Mr. Biao Yang took it up and placed it in his a=bag immediately.

Behind the walls there were big round eyes watching all along.

They moved on and found other dinosaur fossils which also have a similar bite mark located on it such as the neck of the brachiosaurus, the horns of the torosaurus, last but not least the spiks of a ankylosaurus. All with the similar bite marks on it.

The bite marks were similar to humans, where its c-shaped, short and not extended forwards like the jaw from a dog o a polar bear.

Time flies after a progressive discovery, where all the fears and spooks of the cave had been washed away. Mr. Biao Yang continuously asked Frenny about the details of the bite marks.

Frenny replied confusingly, "Uh...uh I...I am n...ot so sure who made those bite marks." This infuriated Mr. Biao Yang, where he raised his hand up high, ready to make a punch on Frenny's face. Frenny was scared and felt regretful, since he started to remember an action he did which was similar to what Mr. Biao Yang's doing now. Swiftly behind a rock had popped out a dwarf sized old man held Mr. Biao Yang's hand tightly and made him yip in pain. Frenny yeap, "Old man Geri! You came!

Mr. Biao Yang immediately sprinted away towards the glimpse of light which's a few metres ahead.

By the time Frenny and old man Geri caught up to Mr. Biao Yang punched the wall of the cave as he smiled cunningly and left.

The sound of beap on the wall had gone louder and louder. Frenny and old man Geri immediately stopped and hid behind a rock that's the size of a torosaurus.

BOOM!

Piles of rocks had fallen on to the ground, dust waving in front of it. Frenny lowered his head and apologised to old man Geri that he left him alone earlier. Frenny said, "Thank you man Geri for saving my life again. You truly are a great friend." Old man Geri nodded and gave him a sweet soft smile.

They looked around and found a tunnel shining in brought gold. Together they squeeze through this tunnel as their hands tremble when they touch the stone.

The walls on the side weren't sticky or slimy with mosses, but filled with stories of life and discovery that were noted down a hundred thousands years ago. Where little humans known as the denisovans made them.

There were little humans surrounding a giant fossil of a long neck species. This made Frenny remember the structure of the fossil he found which was the long neck brachiosaurus. He even chopped part of it and kept it in his bag. Frenny said, "The history of Denisovan hadn't just started in recent years but it had already been a long discovery. It's just that people hadn't noticed yet."

Together they crawled and crawled and finally left the cave.

Old man Geri pulled out his dentures and compared the size of the bite mark from the Denisovans. He said to Frenny, amazed, "Hey! The bite marks of the Denisovans are the same as oursEh!" Frenny looked at him and felt disgusted and immediately took out a tissue paper to wipe off the wet slimy saliva from old man's Gero's teeth.

Frenny picked up the paper that just fell out from his bag onto the ground. As he looked at the paper, he realised it was the phone number of the bus driver who helped him previously. The paper was written, "Call me anytime when you need a ride! I will come by in 5mins."

When he made the call, he said "I am Frenny! Old man Geri and I are in the Baishiya Karst Cave. Is it alright if you could pick us up?". The bus driver answered him in a soft and compassionate voice, "Yes of course! Take a break and I will be there in just a sec."

Before Frenny And old man Geri sat down on a rock, the bus driver arrived in a blink of an eye with his private car, ready to pick them up. They sat down and fell asleep immediately, snoring like piglets.

The Bones of Time

Wycombe Abbey Nanjing, Cortes, Nina – 16

The air was heavy with the humidity of Sichuan, thick and pressing against Lily's skin as she walked through the cobbled streets of the university town. The chatter of students, the hum of scooters, and the aroma of street food—baozi and skewers sizzling on grills—should have felt familiar, comforting even. Instead, it all blurred together, muted by the storm in her head.

Lily shuffled into her small dorm room and slumped onto her bed. A half-read textbook on *The History of Ancient China* lay on her desk, abandoned. Her once-vivid passion for history and archaeology felt distant, dulled by the unravelling of her parents' marriage. Mei and John Cameron had once been titans in the field of archaeology. Their shared love for uncovering the past had been legendary—until it wasn't. Now, her father had spent a long while in Canada, her mother in Chengdu, and Lily felt stretched thin between them.

"You need to focus on your studies," her mother often scolded over the phone, her tone sharp and clipped. "Don't let our problems distract you."

Her father wasn't much better. "It's not your responsibility, Lily. We've grown apart, that's all."

But it *was* her responsibility, wasn't it? The unspoken expectation of holding their fractured family together weighed heavily on her.

That night, restless and unable to concentrate, Lily scrolled through her phone, searching for an escape. A news article caught her eye: *Special Exhibition: The Sichuan Dinosaur Museum*. It featured the fossil from the groundbreaking 1986 Canada-China dig—the very project where her parents had first met.

The pull was immediate and inexplicable. She decided to go.

II

The museum loomed before her, an imposing building of steel and glass that glinted in the midday sun. Inside, the air was cool, tinged with the earthy scent of preserved fossils. Lily wandered the halls, past skeletons of towering sauropods and fierce theropods, until she reached the exhibit that had drawn her here.

It was breathtaking, a massive, nearly complete skeleton of a hadrosaur, its long neck curving gracefully as though frozen mid-motion. The plaque read:

"Discovered in 1986 during a landmark Canada-China archaeological project, this fossil symbolizes collaboration and perseverance. It reshaped our understanding of Late Cretaceous ecosystems."

Lily stared at it, overwhelmed. She imagined her parents here, decades ago, standing together, their shared passion igniting something more profound. She reached out, her fingers brushing against the cold, ancient bone.

The world tilted.

A rush of air engulfed her, and the museum dissolved. When Lily opened her eyes, she was outside, surrounded by dirt, tents, and the unmistakable buzz of an active archaeological dig. The air smelled of freshly turned soil and distant rain.

A man rushed past her, carrying a clipboard. "Hey! Are you with the Beijing team? Get to the main tent—Dr. Cameron is looking for the assistant from Nanjing."

Lily blinked, her mind racing. *Dr. Cameron?* The realization hit her like a thunderclap. She was in the dig site from 1986. Somehow, she had travelled back in time.

She glanced down at herself. Her clothes had transformed into practical work attire—cargo pants, boots, and a dusty shirt. Grasping at the opportunity to figure out what was going on, she nodded briskly and followed the man to the main tent.

Inside the tent, Lily saw them. Her mother, Mei, was hunched over a table, meticulously sketching a fossil fragment. Her father, John, stood nearby, animatedly discussing stratigraphy with a colleague. They were young, vibrant, and full of life, so different from the weary, distant versions she knew.

"Ah, you must be the assistant from Nanjing," Mei said, looking up. Her tone was firm but not unkind. Lily's heart skipped; her mother's sharp eyes and steady hands were the same, but her face held a softness Lily barely recognized.

"Yes," Lily managed, her voice shaking slightly. "I'm...Lil- Li..." Her words went halfway through, the shock of her mother's young face making the blood rush to her cheeks in surprise. "Lily." She managed to finally say with a wavering voice.

John turned, smiling warmly and oblivious to her behaviour. "Welcome, Lily. Mei, why don't you show her the ropes? We're cataloguing the hadrosaur fossil today."

As the day unfolded, Lily could only work alongside her parents, absorbing every detail in awe. Mei's precision balanced John's boundless enthusiasm. They laughed, teased, and debated passionately. But Lily also noticed the cracks—small misunderstandings, a slight edge to Mei's voice when John interrupted her, the way John seemed oblivious to her frustrations.

A constant presence lingered as Lily settled into the rhythm of the dig, especially when working with John, she couldn't shake the feeling that someone was watching her. One evening, she caught sight of a man lurking near the edge of the camp after hours, disconnected and seemingly uninterested in proper collaboration with the others. His dark eyes followed her movements, the faint line of smoke from his cigarette creating an uncomfortable aura. She couldn't help but stare, feeling a growing unease before she hastily turned away and kept walking.

III

"Who's that?" she asked one of the other working assistants left at sundown. "Who?" The assistant asked innocently, lifting her head. "The guy smoking over there," Lily motioned her head, "oh— That's Dr. Wu," the assistant replied. "He's one of Dr. Cameron's partners, they've been working together for years." the assistant shrugs, and lets her eyes linger back to her clipboard. Lily's brow furrowed in confusion; she had never heard of any Dr. Wu working with her father. "Really? They're that close?" She couldn't help but inquire, the assistant clicked her pen mindlessly "oh yeah, well— they *were* close, since graduating I think." The assistant corrects, "I'm not in on the full story, but let's just say they've always clashed with funding after working in the same company, what really tipped the boat was when Dr. Wu had been pushing for funding to lead his own dig, but the board chose Dr. Cameron instead." Lily blinked, this level of information about her father's past and this Dr. Wu was heavy, but she couldn't help but be curious, the assistant put a hand on her shoulder "maybe don't talk to him, he's been in a sour mood since getting here, and you're new— I wouldn't want you getting on his bad side for nothing." With those words the assistant walked off, leaving an unquenched curiosity— and worry, within Lily.

IV

She couldn't help but nitpick at strange occurrences as they days went on: tools missing, catalogue entries altered, unnecessary arguments or misunderstandings between the team, and once, a nearly catastrophic collapse of a support beam near the fossil site happened, almost hurting several people and sparking the contemplation of a shut down. Each time, Dr. Wu was conveniently nearby to help and subtly pushing the blame onto John's leadership skills. It took some time for Lily to finally notice the pattern, but she only needed one more incident as proof to take action.

Late one evening, tensions came to a head. Mei had spent hours cataloguing the fossil's intricate bone structure, only for John to present their findings as though they were solely his to the team.

Lily passed by the tent she was meant to see her parents for work finalization and happened to hear their argument escalating— "I don't understand why you're so upset Mei!" – John's voice raised worriedly, "why don't you? You never listen! I worked hard on that structure the least you could have done is credit me!" "Why is it so upsetting, I didn't know! I thought you just wanted the work done." "You should have asked me before snatching it off my desk— "I didn't do that, my assistant just handed it to me!" "That's not the point John—"

Lily quickly entered, cutting through the rising tension, "oh— sorry to interrupt..." She said, feigning an oblivious tone. Both Mei and John quickly went silent and turned away from each other. It was clear they were both unhappy with each other, but for now all Lily could do was be a distraction while she figured out what to do to fix this.

Unfortunately, the tent became a party of four as Dr. Wu appeared, an expression *too* content on his face. Though his gaze quickly became calculating when he laid eyes on Lily, "well", he began "seems there's more people with some work to get done." He shrugged and placed an unfinished catalogue on the table. "By the way, incredible work today John. Must have been difficult getting the structure done so quickly." Dr. Wu spoke in an uncharacteristic level of praise. John's shoulders tensed and he could only clear his throat, likely feeling guilt for taking all the credit. "No, no... it wasn't *all* me..." John's gaze drifted to Mei for a moment, but her back was still turned as she placed her focus on a different sheet of paper. "Oh, don't be modest." Dr. Wu continued, "I know you. Dr. John Cameron, top of his class." Wu's smug gaze darted between the two, and Lily finally clocked his intentions. Since there was a chance he could never destroy John's work, he could stab holes into his relationship with Mei.

Lily's heart pounded.

She realized Dr. Wu was exploiting her parents' discord to undermine them. If she didn't act, he might succeed in derailing their careers and driving them further apart.

She cleared her throat almost obnoxiously, interrupting. "Y'know... I think I saw Mei working on that fossil earlier yesterday, right John? Did she happen to help?" John's shoulders seemed to drop in relief at the inquiry, he nodded. "Yes," he couldn't help but look at Mei again "She did. It wouldn't be any good without her actually...She deserved the credit for it." He motions his head, and Mei's pencil stops moving, then resumes. She's always been a stubborn woman, but it was clear she had processed his words.

"How... humble of you John." Dr. Wu spoke in the same tone, yet holding a faint hint of mockery. He subtly eyed Lily with a judging glare, and she returned the sentiment with a slight roll of her eyes.

Later into the night, Lily and Dr. Wu excused themselves, and as they walked at a slow pace she suddenly spoke up. "It's weird that Dr. Cameron's assistant didn't clarify who made the structure, huh?" His gaze flickered from side to side at her question and he shoved one hand into his pocket, feigning ignorance and nonchalance. "Yeah, well, mistakes happen. He's not the most experienced to be quite honest." "Still—"Lily pushed, "Mei seemed upset. I

doubt his assistant would just hand it over without acknowledging her first.” “Is there a reason you’re so invested in discussing this with me, Miss...?” He inquired to feign politeness,

“Lily.” she finished

“Right.” He responded,

“like I said, mistakes happen, I’ve known John for years, he’s no stranger to slip ups—” “Oh please.” she cut off, becoming easily confrontational, an unfortunate habit of hers that she picked up from her mother. “That was more than just a slip up, someone took that finished work from her desk, and I doubt Dr. Cameron’s assistant would do that without her knowing.”

Dr. Wu stopped in his tracks and turned to face her directly.

“I don’t like what you’re insinuating.” “So, you admit it was you?” “Don’t go getting accusational with me, you’re a simple assistant, a late one at that. Aren’t you a bit... young? To be a part of this project I mean. I am *very* meticulous about the people I work with, and I have never even heard of you before you showed up two days after we set up. You look like a university student... you just— appeared. Out of nowhere.” Lily’s heart thumped in her chest, this man was too observant for his own good. “Quit changing the subject, I’ll remind you I don’t work directly under you, Dr. Cameron is the head of this dig. Not you.” Dr. Wu’s jaw clenched a bit at those words, “I am aware of that..” He forced out, hiding the surfacing anger. “But you better watch yourself, at least have some respect.” Lily crossed her arms and took a step closer. “I’m onto you sir. It’s not as if I can prove anything, but I’d stop these games if I were you.” “Touché kid, I could still get you kicked out worst comes to worst.”

She stared him down from behind as he walked away, fists clenched in frustration, she concluded that she could only turn her attention to her parents and repair any damage to their relationship. The next morning, she suggested that Mei and John collaborate on cataloguing the fossil—a task that required careful coordination and communication.

"It'll save time," she argued when John hesitated. "I'm not so sure..." Mei spoke "two perspectives are better than one." Lily continued, "your work is incredible Dr. Zhang. This could be done with the most efficiency and quickly if you and Dr. Cameron did it together."

Reluctantly, they agreed. Over the next few days, Lily nudged them closer. She encouraged Mei to voice her ideas and urged John to listen. She shared stories—disguised as anecdotes—about the importance of mutual respect and balance in relationships.

V

As the camp buzzed with activity, John called Lily over to a partially unearthed fossil. "Hey, Lily. This is a juvenile theropod. Notice the vertebrae spacing? It shows how fast they grew."

Lily sat beside him, studying the fossil. "Oh, yeah, I've seen these online." She immediately backtracked. "I mean, my dad showed me pictures he uploaded on the home computer." John raised his brows. "Wow, your dad must be cool to have such tech." Lily shrugged. "Yeah, he's into dinosaurs. Loves them."

John chuckled. "Sounds like a great guy. You're a natural at this. Ever consider doing this full-time?" She hesitated. "I've thought about it, but family stuff complicates things."

John leaned back thoughtfully. "I get that. My dad pushed me toward the army, but my mom wanted something different. It's tough to find balance, but it's important to stay true to what you love. Maybe talk to your parents." Lily smiled. "Thanks."

Later, Lily overheard Dr. Wu discussing her. "Lily's not on the roster. If she's unregistered, she's a liability." Panicking, Lily realized she couldn't stay. She resolved to find a way back to the present.

She passed Mei's tent and paused, watching her parents' shadows. Mei stepped out, startling Lily. "Oh, Lily, still out?" Lily impulsively hugged her. "Thank you, Dr. Zhang... for everything. You're one of the best archaeologists I've met. Don't forget how much you love this work." Mei, surprised but touched, replied, "Thank you, Lily. Rest well."

Lily walked into the night, scanning the surroundings. Suddenly, a gust of wind engulfed her. A strange pull gripped her chest as the world blurred. She stumbled and fell, landing on her back.

When she opened her eyes, she was back in the museum under bright lights. A security guard approached. "Miss, are you okay?"

Disoriented, Lily nodded, noticing the fossil in front of her—the same one from the dig. It was as though no time had passed. "I'm fine," she assured, her mind racing.

As the guard walked off, Lily stared at the fossil, then turned and ran home, her heart full of questions and newfound resolve.

VII

She opened the door to her apartment, expecting to be greeted by the familiar lonesome of the property, but to her astonishment. Lily found her parents waiting for her. They were together, sitting side by side on the couch. Her parents turned at the sound of the door, John was petting Lily's dog spread out happily on the cushions, while Mei had the T.V remote in her hand.

"How was the museum?" Mei asked, her tone light and casual.

"Mom— "Lily spoke, it's as if a weight was lifted from her heart. She ran over to her parents and hugged them both eagerly. They invited the embrace, John patting her back while Mei put a hand on her head, "why so excited kiddo? You weren't out for weeks." her father joked. "You should be out more," her mother commented, "you study inside all day."

Lily kept the hold on her parents tight, "I just... missed you." Is all she said. Mei scooted herself to the side so Lily could sit down, and she did so happily. She rested her head on her mother's shoulder.

"So, how was it?" Her father asked, waiting for her to answer this time.

"It was...incredible," Lily replied, her voice thick with emotion.

Her parents exchanged a glance, their hands brushing briefly. They told her stories about the 1986 dig, laughing over shared memories. They still had disagreements, but there was a warmth between them, a connection that hadn't existed before.

Lily realized she had altered the past, giving her family a second chance. The burden she had carried for so long began to lift.

As Lily returned to her studies, she found her passion reignited. She threw herself into her work, inspired by her parents' resilience and the lessons she had learned about communication and connection. She knew the past wasn't perfect, but it was a foundation—one she could build on to create a future filled with hope, love, and understanding.