## Fiction Group 1



#### Hannah's Chinese Dragon

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ng, Hannah – 5

I gazed out of my bedroom window, and the first thing that caught my eye was Nana munching on the leaves of a towering tree. Nana is a Mamenchisaurus that I adopted when she was just an egg. My mind started to recollect about the time I first met Nana.

My parents had planned a trip to Yunnan, China, and we went hiking at the Nujiang Grand Canyon. I recalled that it was extremely windy the day we arrived at the Canyon. The breeze that swept through the place was calming to the soul, as if it could erase the worries of any troubled person. I was strolling along the walking path when I noticed something strange sticking out from the bushes. The outer shell was as purple as lavender and it had bright polka dots all over it. The object had a smooth and shiny surface that reflected the sunlight. I walked closer to have a better look, and to my astonishment, it was a prehistoric egg! I picked up the egg and urged my parents to return to the hotel. I was filled with anticipation and excitement about what might hatch from the egg or whether it would hatch at all. I immediately booked a flight back home.

Using a thick blanket, I wrapped the egg tightly to give it the warmth needed for incubation. After that, all I could do was wait. Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months, but my patience finally paid off. The egg finally hatched after two months of waiting. The first thing that popped out of the shell was an extremely long neck. Its eyes squinted in the sunlight, giving off an aura of innocence. Next to emerge from the egg were its chunky body and stubby legs. Nana stumbled around, trying to find her balance while taking her baby steps. During Nana's infancy, I took care of her meticulously, feeding her milk every day and cuddling her to sleep.

Nana grew at an alarming rate and it was only a matter of time before she could no longer fit in my bedroom. We had to move her into the garden. Nana is now two years old, and she is an important part of our family. Her favourite hobby is playing fetch with the ball. She has also developed a special liking for tomatoes, which I would reward her if she behaves. Being the first-ever dinosaur in modern times, Nana has become famous. Many people from around the world come to see and take pictures with Nana. She is also friendly enough to pose for pictures with these visitors. Having Nana in my life is an extraordinary experience and I have enjoyed every single moment with her. There are times when Nana lets me ride on her back and we take strolls around the garden. I would even take afternoon naps on Nana's back. I am proud to say that Nana, the only living Chinese Dinosaur, is my best friend.

#### The Great Fossil Adventure

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Xu, Daniel – 6

In the cold, wintry lands of Northern China, a pterosaur named Yulong lived peacefully in his cozy cave nestled high in the mountains. Yulong, which means Jade Dragon, was a majestic creature with a wingspan that stretched across the sky. He was a descendant of the Chinese dinosaur, a small theropod that roamed the earth millions of years ago. Unlike his ancestors, Yulong had evolved to adapt to the harsh icy environment of the mountains, developing strong wings and a resilient spirit.

One frosty evening, as he prepared to settle down into a restful sleep, a powerful thud reverberated through his sanctuary. The entire cave began to tremble and quake, causing Yulong to spring into action. Emerging from his cave, Yulong flapped his mighty wings and soared into the icy sky. He navigated the cold winds until he found a safe perch near a tree by a frozen river. But before he could catch his breath, another thunderous crash echoed through the mountains. Boulders tumbled down, crashing into the river below. Realising that it was an earthquake, Yulong knew he had to return to his cave, but his thoughts were interrupted by the chaos unfolding beyond the mountain.

Meanwhile, in a bustling village on the other side, the earthquake struck without warning. The villagers, unaware of the impending disaster, were jolted into a state of panic. Children cried out in fear, and families huddled together as the ground shook violently. Admist the chaos, a colossal rock barrelled down the mountain, smashing into houses and uprooting trees.

Yulong knew he had to act. But his initial attempt to help was met with fear and misunderstanding. The villagers, especially the children, were terrified of the strange creature with wings spanning the sky. Undeterred, Yulong gathered his courage and made another attempt to aid the stricken villagers. He swooped down just in time to snatch two children from the path of a falling tree, lifting them to safety. The children's parents, watching from a distance, were overcome with gratitude, but Yulong, feeling unsure of himself, flew away.

Word of Yulong's bravery spread throughout the village. The villagers, once fearful, began to see him as a guardian rather than a monster. They started to trust the pterosaur, recognising his courage and willingness to protect them even in the face of danger.

As the days passed, Yulong became a symbol of bravery and trust for the village. The children who once feared him now played in the fields knowing he was watching over them. Yulong's friendship with thw villagers grew, and he learned that true bravery comes from the heart, and trust is built through unwavering support and selfless acts.

Whenever the ground trembles is storm approached, the villagers knew they could rely on the winged friend. And Yulong, with his newfound friends, found a sense of purpose and belonging he had never known before. From that day on, in the cold winters of northern China, the pterosaur Yulong and the village thrived together, their Bond forged by courage, trust, bravery, and friendship that stood the test of time.

#### Adventure In the Lost Kingdom Of China's Dinosaurs

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Chan, Ching Tung Vincy – 8

In the bustling city of Liaoning in China, a ten-year-old boy named Ming was fascinated by dinosaurs. Every night, he read books and watched documentaries about these ancient creatures. One night, as he drifted into sleep, he felt the world around him started to shift. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself in a prehistoric landscape filled with lush greenery, towering trees, and the distant roars of dinosaurs.

Suddenly, Ming spotted a small, feathered dinosaur darting through the underbrush. It was Sinosauropteryx, known for its striking orange and white feathers. With excitement and curiosity, Ming approached the creature. To his amazement, the Sinosauropteryx didn't run away. Instead, it tilted its head, as if welcoming him.

"Hello, lovely!" Ming exclaimed. "I've read so much about you! You're the China dragon bird, one of the earliest feathered dinosaurs!" The Sinosauropteryx chirped, and together they explored the forest. Suddenly, a loud rumble shook the ground. Ming looked up to see a massive titanosaur moving through the trees, its long neck swaying gracefully. The sight of the gigantic creature took his breath away. The titanosaur, with its gentle eyes, munched on leaves from the tallest branches. "Wow, you're enormous!" he said.

Just then, a flurry of wings caught his attention. Ming looked up to see a group of winged dinosaurs known as Pterosaurs soaring through the sky and their calls echoed like a beautiful melody. One landed gracefully beside him.

"Can you take me with you?" Ming asked, eyes wide with wonder. The dinosaur seemed to understand and beckoned him with a nod of its head. Ming climbed onto its back, and with a powerful flap of its wings, they took off into the sky. They soared above the treetops, giving him a breathtaking view of the prehistoric world below.

As the adventure continued, Ming and his new friends explored hidden valleys, crossed rivers, and shared stories of their kingdom. He learned about the delicate balance of nature and the importance of protecting these magnificent creatures.

As the sun began to set, casting a golden glow over the land, Ming knew it was time to return home. He said goodbye to the Sinosauropteryx, the titanosaur, and his winged companion. Then he closed his eyes, and in an instant, he was back in his room, with a smile on his face and a heart full of adventure.

From that day, Ming was determined to become a paleontologist when he grew up, to uncover the mysteries of ancient dinosaurs for his country and share their stories with the world.

# Tracking the Echoes of the Ancient Past

Maryknoll Convent School (Primary Section), Lee, Hei Yiu Skyla – 8

A lengthy moaning filled the forest, followed by a towering Mamenchisaurus mother looming over the trees. It lowered its colossal neck and began munching contentedly on a ginkgo.

"Professor Natalie, I believe we've found the skeletons of Mamenchisaurus youngsters! Here in Yunnan! What luck!" Delighted, Dr. Celestia excitedly examined some remains as she reported her discovery. "Observe the ginkgo fossils surrounding them. It looks like they were heading into a woodland for a feast!" "If only we could unearth adult Mamenchisaurus in this condition... "Professor Natalie murmured.

Out of the thickets trotted a young Mamenchisaurus, which joined its mother in lunch. The rest of the sauropods emerged and tore leaves off emergents. While they were enjoying their meal jovially, the herd was caught off guard by a family of Szechuanosaurus.

The theropods immediately erupted from the undergrowth, baring their deadly teeth at their prey. The now petrified-for-their-babies Mamenchisaurus whipped around and stumbled towards the nearest refuge in a disordered jumble. A handful of the sauropod nestlings ran astray from the adults amid the commotion, and the hunting party made quick work of them. The rest of the Mamenchisaurus, outraged at their lifeless young, launched a furious attack. The Szechuanosaurus, savouring the taste of the meal, were fatally punished by the Mamenchisaurus stampede.

"Look! These Szechuanosaurus's skulls are cracked! They're right in front of the young Mamenchisaurus remains." Dr. Celestia scribbled in her notepad, intrigued. "I agree. This is the first evidence of Szechuanosaurus taking on Mamenchisaurus. This will surely capture the eye of paleontologists around the world!" Professor Natalie nodded approvingly.

The Mamenchisaurus moaned mournfully, lowering their heads to their fallen nestlings as their babies' souls departed. After maintaining this posture for around half an hour, the sauropods raised their necks to the sky and bellowed to the heavens in a cry of loss and grief. Then they slumped, tails trailing, heads bowing, and shoulders sagging. When they finally finished the death ritual, the sky had dimmed as if in response to their wails. A mass of thunderclouds formed over them—the exact type that had the potential to trigger a superstorm.

A torrential downpour cascaded on the Mamenchisaurus, lightning crackled overhead, and thunder rolled. The sauropods murmured unsettlingly, petrified for their lives, and retreated into a vast cave. The last of them had just entered the shelter when the ground began to quake. Fractures ran through the walls, portions of the roof rained down on them, and boulders sealed the entrance. The sauropods unleashed one last desperate howl before they died.

"Wow! So many Mamenchisaurus bones! And some of them are shattered! Just like the Szechuanosaurus!" Dr. Celestia shouted. "They seem to have been caught in a cave-in!"

"I cannot wait to announce this to the public." Professor Natalie stared at the groundbreaking finding they had uncovered. "Twenty complete dinosaur fossils! We'll go viral! Swarms of dinosaur fans will flock to us, hoping to see the biggest discovery ever!"

### The Forgotten Rescue

St. Joseph's Primary School, Kwan, Man Ho - 8

Around 125 million years ago, between the Early Cretaceous period and the Jurassic period, the land in the heart of what is now Liaoning Province was a lush, green paradise. The skies were filled with pterosaurs gliding gracefully, and the ground was teeming with life, including some of the strangest dinosaurs to ever walk the Earth.

One bright morning, a young Yutyrannus named Mei ventured out from her nest. Mei, whose name fittingly meant "beautiful" in Chinese, was covered in a coat of primitive feathers that shimmered in the early sunlight. Though small for her kind, she was inquisitive and brave.

As she set off through the forest to find her friends, she came across a group of Sinornithosaurus perched in the trees. These small, bird-like dinosaurs were also feathered and had sharp, curved claws for climbing. Mei could see that they were all making a great deal of fuss about something, as she approached she could see the reason why these Sinornithosaurus were alarmed. A baby Protoceratops, only the size of a big dog, was stuck in a muddy quagmire, up to its neck. Mei knew if she didn't act soon the infant would be permanently preserved in the bog!

Quick as a flash, Mei chose the nearest tree and with a mighty push felled it with surprising accuracy so that it fell right into the stinky bog where the baby Protoceratops could bite down hard on the tree with its powerful beak. Mei grabbed the end of the tree trunk and began to haul the baby Protoceratops out of the slimy mess.

When the baby Protocerotops was finally safe, it let out a scream of thanks, but this was no ordinary scream, from deep in the undergrowth a second, third and a repeating call could be heard. Within seconds the baby Protocerotops was reunited with its herd of Protoceratopses.

Mei left the reunion with ease and set off once again, as Mei ventured into a clearing, she heard a deep rumble and felt the ground shake. She turned to see a massive Sauroposeidon towering above the trees. This gentle giant, with its long neck reaching high into the lush canopy, was munching on leaves that other dinosaurs could only dream of reaching.

Mei's heart raced with excitement as she realized how diverse and magnificent her world was. Each dinosaur she met had its unique strengths and adaptations, and together, they painted a vibrant picture of life in ancient China.

As the sun began to set, Mei returned to her nest, filled with a newfound appreciation for the land she called home. Little did she know, her adventures would be remembered by future generations, who would uncover their fossils and marvel at the wonders of the prehistoric world.

#### Whispers of the Ancient

St. Joseph's Primary School, Leung, Hoi Lun William – 8

In a quiet village of Yi Xian in Liaoning lived a bright and curious girl named Judy. Aspiring to become a paleontologist, she immersed herself in books about dinosaurs and often explored the hills surrounding her home, dreaming of unearthing ancient fossils. One sunny afternoon, while wandering near a dig site, she noticed a group of paleontologists setting up a camp. Their tents were filled with tools and maps. They were busily discussing their plans of fossil digging.

That caught Judy's attention. She walked to the front and noticed Dr. Mary, the wellrespected paleontologist. Realising this is a rare opportunity, Judy plucked up her courage and asked, "Can I join the excavation?" "Absolutely!" Dr. Mary exclaimed with a smile across her face. Judy's heart skipped a beat. She could hardly believe her luck! With a small brush and shovel, she carefully dug into the ground, uncovering layers of dirt. Meanwhile, the paleontologists shared fascinating stories about different dinosaur species that had been found in Liaoning. Each fossil was like a piece of a giant puzzle from millions of years ago.

Judy immersed herself in the world of paleontology. As weeks passed, she learned a great deal about the significance of each fossil. One afternoon, while excavating, she felt something hard beneath her brush. "Dr. Mary! Look what I found!" she shouted, holding it up for everyone to see. The team quickly gathered around. Their eyes were filled with curiosity and amazement.

"This is extraordinary!" Dr. Mary exclaimed. "This may be an unidentified dinosaur species. We could be close to a significant discovery!"

News of their find spread rapidly. Researchers and dinosaur enthusiasts from all over the world came to Liaoning. The excitement grew even more when they learned about a newly discovered titanosaur species in Jiangxi Province. These discoveries made everyone talked about how dinosaurs lived, migrated, and adapted to various environments.

One evening, as the sun set and painted the sky orange, Judy felt a special connection to the dinosaurs. The fossils were not just old bones, but windows into a world of creatures that thrived millions of years ago. Each discovery deepened her understanding of how everything in nature is connected.

That night, the group gathered around a campfire to celebrate Judy's find. Dr. Wang shared stories about her work. "Every fossil we uncover tells us something important," she said. "They remind us of our place among different living things on Earth."

Judy felt a sense of pride as she listened. She realised her dreams were not just about finding bones, but about uncovering the mysteries of the past and sharing those stories with others. She wanted to ignite a passion for paleontology in everyone she met.

Years passed, the girl who once dreamed of dinosaurs was now a leading member in a paleontology research centre in the heart of China. At the start of each excavation, Judy remembered how the first journey with Dr. Mary felt like yesterday. In every adventure, she was eagerly awaiting to unlock the secrets of ancient life.

#### The Amazing Fossil Hunt

YK PAO Primary School, Lo, Rosabelle – 8

On a sunny afternoon, I was watching TV with my little brother, Travis, when we saw an amazing news report about Jiangxi. Paleontologists had discovered dinosaur fossils millions of years old! "Mom! Dad! Can we go fossil hunting in Jiangxi?" I begged excitedly. Mom hesitated, but finally, she smiled and said, "Alright, but we'll go next month." Overjoyed, I spent the whole month preparing. I trained Dumbo, our clever dog, to sniff and find hidden objects, hoping he'd help us during our adventure.

When the big day arrived, we packed our bags and boarded the train to Jiangxi. I could hardly sit still! After checking into a small hotel, we rested to prepare for the next day. Early the following morning, we set out to the dig site with Dumbo leading the way. He sniffed around, and wherever he stopped, we began digging. My parents examined every bone fragment we uncovered, but after hours of hard work, we found nothing. Tired and disappointed, we returned to the hotel.

That night, Travis and I couldn't stop thinking about fossils. "What if there's something out there we missed?" he whispered. We decided to sneak out with Dumbo and continue the search. Under the moonlight, Dumbo wagged his tail nervously and sniffed the ground. Suddenly, Travis tripped over something hard. "Ouch!" he yelped, glaring at the ground. But when we looked closer, we saw a strange object sticking out of the dirt. Excitedly, we began digging with our hands. The more we uncovered, the bigger it seemed—a massive, jagged bone! Too tired to dig further, we collapsed beside the pit and fell asleep under the stars.

At sunrise, we woke up to Mom and Dad's worried voices. "There you are!" Mom exclaimed. Dad rushed over and gasped at the fossil we'd uncovered. "This could be something incredible!" he said. We all worked together to finish digging. Dumbo tried to help, but he kept covering the fossil with dirt instead. We laughed and carefully brushed it clean again. By the afternoon, we had unearthed a gigantic dinosaur skeleton. Dad called the museum, and a team of paleontologists arrived shortly after. "This is a remarkable discovery!" one of them said. Reporters swarmed us, taking photos and asking questions. The fossil was transported to the museum, but our adventure wasn't over.

We stayed in Jiangxi for another week, searching tirelessly every day. With Dumbo's help, we uncovered more fossils, each one more amazing than the last. By the end of the week, we were famous! People from all over the world wanted to know about our discoveries. The museum even paid us for the fossils, making us rich. Looking back, I'll never forget that magical night under the stars when Travis and I found the first fossil. It was the start of an adventure that changed our lives forever.

### Creative Writing Fiction Group 1



# It's Time To Go Back To The Dinosaur Age!

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Wong, Yik Ga Essie - 8

'Click! Click!' The dinosaur egg shells were brittle like birds' eggs. Some baby dinosaurs were hatching through them...

More than 80 million years ago, there were four little dinosaurs born in China. They were Plateosaurus (Plateo), Pterosaur (Tero), Velociraptor (Velo) and Troodon. During the late Cretaceous period, their mothers laid eggs in simple pits built with mud. Velo's mother said, 'I will bring food for you, my little girl!' Velo squeaked. The other mothers looked after babies Plateo, Tero and Troodon, it was likely they kept them warm and protected them from predators.

As time went by, the dinosaurs grew into enormous creatures! Tero learned how to fly through mountains and swoop down to touch water. He shouted, 'I will snap up insects in the air!' Plateo heard and said, 'This is so much fun!' Compared to other dinosaurs, Troodon had very large eyes. Velo asked, 'Can you help me hunt in the dark?' Troodon replied, 'Of course! I have a large brain and I can use my "intelligence" to spot small prey.' Velo felt so excited about that.

One afternoon, Tero's mother said, 'You know Tero, you have a thick and hairy coat to keep you warm!' Tero understood, 'Yes, Mommy! Reptiles have scales, while mammals have hair.' His mother nodded and smiled.

In the forest, there was a huge dinosaur called Stegosaurus (Stego). It was the length of a truck! He always showed off his tough skin and said, 'Look at my pointed bony plates, no predator will come near me!' Plateo felt scared because he was a small dinosaur. He could not defend himself. Similar to Plateo, Velo was only covered by plate-like skin. Even though his eyelids were protected, her underbelly was free from protection. 'Luckily, I have a long tail to lash out at enemies.' Velo snickered and grinned.

On Sports Day, many dinosaurs were often thought of as heavy-footed types that could only move slowly—but they proved that wrong. 'On your mark! Get set! Go!' Troodon could run at 80 kilometres per hour, faster than a winning racehorse! However, Tero had a light body and long legs. He was the speediest dinosaur, sprinting away from other competitors. While all forest friends made a bet that Troodon would be the champion, Tero became the winner! It was totally because Troodon assumed that he would win and then he used his time to take a nap under a tree!

Over time, all dinosaurs shared their happiness and sorrow. They lived happily and roamed the Earth for over 150 million years, but then mysteriously died out...

As of today, dinosaur detectives in China found several spiky thumbs and fossilized skeletons in Jiangxi. Not only this, but they also found many massive jaws, small heads with narrow beaks, long necks as well as some powerful hind limbs.

Were all these fossilized bones of Plateo, Tero, Velo, Troodon and Stego? No one knows!

#### Amazing Dinosaur Discoveries in China

Kowloon Rhenish School, Fung, Tsun Hin Jayden - 8

Do you know which country in the World has the most dinosaurs discovered? The answer is China. Dinosaurs have been shown to be existed in many provinces of China like Liaoning, Sichuan, Heilongjiang. Recently, dinosaurs was even found in Hong Kong! The species of dinosaurs in China are also various. For example, Tienshanosaurus, Psittacosaurus. The world's very first clearly feathered dinosaur – Sinosauropteryx was found in China too! However, China is not well explored by paleontologists, so maybe there are more dinosaur fossils will be found in the next few years!

In 2025 summer, a miner in Tianjin found an unknown fossil in a cave, he estimated it was a big flying herbivorous dinosaur because of the teeth and bones, he took a few photos of it and then, he gave it to researchers, and researchers found it was a new species! The scientists tried to collect DNA from fossil and clone it to reborn the dino, but failed. Then they keep trying many methods until they put heat around the DNA and it showed evidence of living cells in the DNA. When they discovered the cells are moving, they put the cells in an incubator to reproduce the organs and the tissues, and finally, the first 'Clone Dinosaur'' was born and they named it as "the Tianjinosaur".

When the people bred the dino, it's population grew more and more, until one day, the dinosaurs bring the trouble to human. They are noisy, they scared children and other animals, it even disturbed the humans and ate the farmers' crops.

They made the farmers very angry and finally, the farmers plan to take revenge.

One day, the farmers meet together on the street, they thought of burning the dinosaurs and to attack to dinosaurs, when they arrived at the dinosaur's habitat and started to attack, someone run to the farmers and shouted 'Hey, don't kill them, their feces are very useful! 'and then the farmer said 'Why? 'The guy said 'the dinosaur feces can power up electrical appliances, we can make good use of them, so we have to protect them!' The farmers thought for a while until they changed their mind, then they go back to their farms.

Afterward, the people found that besides the feces, dino's saliva and hair are also useful to human, saliva can be a medicine and the hair can make super-warm clothes. The farmers realized their value and stopped hating them, they no longer treat it as an enemy but as partner, and even tried to communicate and lived with them. At the end, they happily and peacefully lived together.

#### Legends of Five Claws

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Fung, Yau Shun Mathis – 8

"Weirdo!' the arrogant boy affronted. As Mat gazed at his extra finger on his left hand, he recalled other encounters with Vincent, who had teased him just the other day again due to his deformity.

The coach was heading for The Mausoleum of the Yellow Emperor. On the site, Mat was delighted to find Nessie, his best friend, in his group, but unfortunately Vincent was also assigned to theirs. Soon, the group started to climb the apex of the mausoleum's grounds. Things went quite well unexpectedly. Mat grinned widely.

Just then, the weather took an abrupt turn. Dark clouds gathered, followed by a heavy rain squall. A power cable nearby got struck by lightning, plunging the whole place into darkness. Vincent screamed and sprinted, tumbled, and twisted his ankle. Worrying about the weather, Mat immediately put Vincent on his back and led the group back safely to Loongyu Pavilion.

In the obscure pavilion, they settled Vincent carefully. Then Mat noticed the backdoor was open, letting the storm in. As he went to close it, he stumbled upon something magical. A narrow, oddly dry path led from the backdoor into the forest. Hands soaked outside the path dried instantly when withdrawn inside. A comforting sense of safety enveloped him within the path, which then led him to a hidden cave, where he found a massive piece of dinosaur fossil splendidly lying on the ground.

Mat couldn't believe his eyes. It's a dinosaur fossil that had five claws instead of three! Just as Mat redid his counting, a voice whispered. "I am the spirit of the dinosaur. My life, once hidden, now stands revealed to you."

Mat was astonished but asked, "Spirit, why do you have five claws?"

The spirit explained. It had once been cast out by its own kind as it was uniquely born with five claws. Yet, it overcame adversity and became a master of survival. When the meteor threatened all life, it returned to lead its peers to safety, saving the species, which eventually evolved into Jeholornis prima, the most primitive bird ever found in China.

"Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty, met me when he came here to pay respect to the Yellow Emperor. He was impressed, and chose five-clawed dragons as the official symbol of emperors thereafter."

"Celebrate differences, for they are sources of strength. May this story empower you to overcome challenges and inspire others." Filled with gratitude, Mat thanked the spirit. The spirit then faded away.

Mat then hurried back to share his incredible experience with Nessie and Vincent.

The next morning, they were rescued. Before Vincent left, he thanked Mat, "Please forgive me. You are a hero."

The news of Mat's discovery spread quickly. Some paleontologists debated about naming the extraordinary new species after him. Yet to Mat, the spirit's story was his most treasured gift. Seeing his extra finger reminded him to embrace differences and support others with resilience. The spirit of the five-clawed dinosaur was always with him.

#### The Adventures of Xiao Loong: A Feathered Dinosaur's Tale

Shanghai Singapore International School, Jin, Adeline – 7

One day in September, my dad told me that the theme of the Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2025 was "dinosaurs." I was so excited when I heard it. Dinosaurs have always held a special place in my heart; they are one of my favorite animals. However, I actually knew nothing about the "Sinosauropteryx" mentioned in the theme. I asked Dad what the "Sinosauropteryx" looked like. Dad said that he wasn't clear about it either, but he could go to the Shanghai Natural History Museum with Mom and me to look for the fossils or models of the "Sinosauropteryx."

In mid-October, we embarked on our adventure, boarding a large and comfortable bus. The journey was a bit long, but I became excited once we arrived at the museum. With eager steps, we entered the museum, ready to search for the models and fossils of the mysterious "Sinosauropteryx."

Now, I will tell you all about it. This is the world's first clearly feathered dinosaur. Some scientists call it "Sinosauropteryx," meaning "the Chinese dragon bird." It has wings, but actually it can't fly! Why does it have strong features and wings but can't fly? I think there might be some truth or fallacies to certain theories. Today, any creature with feathers is often considered a bird. So is it a bird? Or is it a feathered dinosaur? Nobody knows yet!

A Sinosauropteryx is around 1.2 meters long, 0.4 meters high, and weighs 3 kilograms. It has a long tail and neck. It is shorter than an adult. It is one of my favorite creatures because of its colorful and patterned feathers.

Although the Sinosauropteryx can't fly, I think it can run faster than a car because it has strong wings and a light body.

I'm curious about its past life. I think one day it might have been like this: Long long ago, there was a land called Dinosaur Land. There were lots of trees and sparkling rivers, but no volcanoes. It looked like a museum full of dinosaurs. She was called that because only dinosaurs lived there. One day, a new dinosaur came. She was called Sinosauropteryx (Xiao Loong). She was very good at running. So she hoped to try her best to find some other dinosaurs to compete with.

Xiao Loong said, "I'm a dragon bird. I can run faster than anyone. Who can compete with me?" Her voice was very loud. But other dinosaurs didn't believe Xiao Loong and laughed at her. Two more dinosaurs joined the running race. The two were good at running and they were called Sinosaurus and T-rex. But Xiao Loong still thought she was the best.

Now the race began. Xiao Loong was thrilled when it started. But Sinosaurus cheated and he jumped into the deep water and swam to the finish line. The T-rex grabbed a fish because he thought that the fish could help him swim faster. So he also jumped into the deep water and swam. But Xiao Loong was very angry with them. So she flapped her little colorful wings and whoosh! Xiao Loong was as fast as lightning and so beautiful in the sky. She tried her best and very hard to catch them. It seemed to be flying and was very fast. So Xiao Loong won in the end and got a trophy. The Sinosaurus got second place and the T-rex was last because he was too heavy for the fish to support. Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2025

Finally, Xiao Loong went to meet the other dinosaurs living on the Dinosaur Land and made friends with them. Every dinosaur loves Xiao Loong because she is very colorful and always helps the other dinosaurs carry things quickly from place to place. And they gave Xiao Loong an appreciation gift, It was Xiao Loong's favourite thing. Running shoes. They were colorful and as beautiful as her wings.

## Fiction Group 2



#### Echoes of the Past: Embarking on the Journey with Fossilized Dinosaurs to Save the Future

Creative Primary School, Cheung, King Ki Michael - 10

In the year 2024, scientists predicted a major catastrophe threatening Earth's survival: an imminent apocalypse resulting from environmental damage. Paleontologist Michael Cheung and AI scientist Cecilia Cheung, both renowned for their expertise, were given a crucial mission by the Chinese government. Together, they were chosen to lead a team of fossilized and resurrected dinosaurs on a daring expedition back to the age of dinosaurs—a time long before the destructive influence of mankind. Their objective was clear: to uncover answers and solutions that could help prevent the impending crisis. Michael, with his deep understanding of ancient creatures, would serve as their guide through the prehistoric landscape, while Cecilia, armed with her technological expertise, would decipher the mysteries of the past with the help of Tea Egg, their AI companion. This bold plan, born from both desperation and hope, was driven by the belief that the key to Earth's salvation lay buried in the ancient past.

To form the best team for the expedition, Michael and Cecilia meticulously selected the fossilized dinosaurs based on their unique attributes and the specific challenges they would encounter. They analyzed the environments of each era they planned to visit, carefully considering the skills essential for their mission. Sinosauropteryx (Sino), hailing from Chaoyang City in Liaoning Province, was chosen for its remarkable speed and agility, making it the ideal scout to navigate dense vegetation. Huayangosaurus (HY) from Huayang City in Sichuan Province was selected for its formidable armor, ensuring the team's safety in a potentially hostile environment. Tsintaosaurus (Tsintao), from Qingdao City in Shandong Province, was picked for its distinctive crest, which would facilitate communication among species. Hamipterus (Hami), originating from Hami City in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, was included for its aerial perspective, providing crucial reconnaissance from above. Lastly, Shunosaurus (Shu), from Zigong City in Sichuan Province, was selected for its strength and size, capable of foraging for food and clearing paths. Together, these carefully chosen prehistoric companions formed a diverse and capable team, united by their shared mission to save the world.

On the eve of their departure, the team gathered in the dimly lit office of the dinosaur fossil laboratory. Accompanying Michael and Cecilia were Tea Egg, the reliable AI assistant, and the five fossilized prehistoric creatures: Sino, HY, Tsintao, Hami, and Shu. Standing together, the atmosphere was charged with anticipation as team leader Michael began the expedition briefing.

"Our adventure will start in the Early Cretaceous period, around 130 million years ago, when Sino and his companions roamed the Earth. Our goal is to uncover the reasons behind Sinosauropteryx's extinction, which may provide critical insights into how environmental changes can lead to a species decline. By understanding these ancient ecosystems, we can better protect our own." He continued, "Next, we'll travel to the Late Jurassic period, approximately 160 to 155 million years ago, to meet HY's friends, the Huayangosaurus. We'll investigate its life and habitat to understand its ecological significance during that time, focusing on how it interacted with its environment and contributed to the ecosystem's balance. This knowledge could inform our efforts in habitat conservation today."

"Moving on," Michael added, "we'll jump to the Late Cretaceous period, around 75 million years ago, where Tsintaosaurus awaits us. Our mission there is to decode its communication methods and social structures, shedding light on how this species interacted within its community. Understanding these dynamics can help us foster better coexistence among species today, emphasizing the importance of communication in maintaining ecological harmony."

"After that," he explained, "we'll return to the Late Jurassic, around 160 to 155 million years ago, to encounter Hamipterus. We'll study its aerial abilities and feeding habits to learn how it thrived in its environment. By examining how these ancient creatures adapted, we can formulate strategies for enhancing biodiversity and resilience in our current ecosystems."

Concluding, Michael stated, "We'll wrap up our journey in the Middle Jurassic period, approximately 170 to 165 million years ago, where we'll engage with Shunosaurus. Our focus will be on deciphering its feeding behaviors and movement patterns, gaining insights into the life of this herbivore during that era. This knowledge will be vital as we consider how to restore and protect the habitats of herbivores today. Team, let's gear up for an extraordinary adventure into the past, one that could illuminate paths toward a sustainable future!"

"Yeah, let's do it!" cheered the team.

In the final hours before their departure, the team huddled together, discussing their strategy and the roles each member would play in this unprecedented adventure.

**Michael:** "Sino, you'll be our scout. Your speed and agility are crucial. Dart through the dense foliage and alert us to any dangers."

**Sino:** "Understood, Michael. I'll keep a sharp eye out and be ready to move quickly." **Cecilia:** "HY, your armor is our shield. We need your protection."

HY: "I'm ready. My armor will guard the team against harm."

**Michael:** "Tsintao, your ornamental crest will be key. Communicate with us, bridging the gap between species."

Tsintao: "I will use my signals and calls to keep us connected."

**Cecilia:** "Hami, your aerial view is invaluable. Keep watch from above and provide support."

Hami: "I'll soar high to ensure our surroundings are clear."

**Michael:** "Shu, your strength is vital. Forage for food and clear our path with your powerful tail."

Shu: "I'll use my abilities to secure sustenance and pave the way ahead."

With final nods and words of encouragement, Michael, Cecilia, Tea Egg and the dinosaurs stood ready, eyes fixed on the shimmering portal of the time shuttle. Together, they would embark on a journey of discovery and courage to save Earth from impending doom. As the countdown began and the portal hummed with energy, the team took a deep breath, steeling themselves for the adventure ahead. With determination, they stepped into the unknown, their destinies intertwined as they hurtled back through time toward a world of ancient wonders and dangers, united in their quest to change history and secure a future for all life on Earth.

### China's Dinosaurs

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chung, Hoi Ching – 11

They stood as still as stone statues, staring into a swirling abyss, its twisting shadows urging them to leap. Carla and Cathy exchanged a glance — a silent promise born of their shared dream: to uncover the untold stories of dinosaurs. Now, standing on the edge of the unimaginable, every dream of lost stories and hidden fossils seemed to call them forward. The void pulsed, shrinking fast, daring them to decide. This was their moment — the choice between embracing the unknown or walking away with the haunting question of 'what if?' The decision was clear. With a deep breath, they intertwined their arms and jumped.

The fall was a dizzying spiral of vibrant colours exploding in dazzling bursts around them as lights flashed before their eyes. Heat seared their skin one moment, then freezing cold gripped them the next, suffocating them as they tumbled through the unknown. Arms locked tightly, feeling each other's racing pulse, they braced themselves until they landed with a soft thud onto a soft, moss-covered ground.

Groaning, Carla and Cathy sat up, brushing off dirt and grass. As they looked around, they realized that towering trees were surrounding them, their leaves filtering the desperate sunlight that shone narrow, golden beams. The air was thick and heavy, filled with a strange hum of life. "Where are we? This feels... ancient." Cathy said, her voice uncertain. As they ventured forward, they came across a narrow lake, calm and serene, with sunlight reflecting off its surface in an ethereal glow.

A rustle from the bushes caught their attention. A small creature emerged, no larger than a deer, covered in brown scales that shimmered in olive green and tan. Its beaked mouth resembled a parrot's, clicking softly as it drank. The creature wandered off, unaware that it had suddenly become the centrepiece of two humans' dream.

Cathy's breath caught in her throat as the creature disappeared back into the trees. "Was that... was that really?" she gasped. Carla's heart raced. "It was a dinosaur! A Yinlong! We saw a China dinosaur!" Carla gripped Cathy's hand in excitement. Their hearts raced with pure joy as years of dreaming came true.

Wandering deeper, they marvelled at the wonders around them until a faint, familiar voice caught Carla's attention. "Mom?" Creeping closer, they found a clearing where four people stood among high-tech equipment — both Carla and Cathy's parents. At the center was a cage imprisoning a young, struggling Tanius, a China dinosaur, its cries piercing the air. Their hearts sank as the dream world surrounding them crumbled immediately. Each step closer to the clearing felt heavier, the reality of what they might find sinking in.

They listened on, each word spoken feeling like a bullet aimed towards them. The people who nurtured them into the love for dinosaurs were harming the creatures. Turns out, they learned the truth: their parents' ancestors had captured some of the last dinosaurs, aiming to exploit their genetics for power and profit, all under the guise of medical advancement.

Carla and Cathy exchanged a determined glance before stepping forward, Carla spoke up, "How could you do this? After teaching us to cherish these dinosaurs, how could you betray everything they stand for?" Their parents turned, startled. "You don't understand, this could change the world!" Carla's dad shouted. "At what cost?" Cathy asked, her voice breaking. While Cathy argued, Carla spotted a key on the ground. Without hesitation, she rushed to the cage and began working to free the Tanius.

The young creature watched Carla with wary eyes. Their parents stood frozen. Carla looked up, her voice firm. "A world without compassion? These dinosaurs deserve to live free!" She fumbled with the key, and with a final twist, the cage creaked open. The Tanius hesitated, then limped out, scanning its surroundings. Suddenly, a loud mechanical voice blared, "System malfunction. Containment breach detected."

Chaos erupted. Carla and Cathy's parents panicked. The system was programmed to shut down completely if any creature escaped from the cage, and all the data would be gone. "Our plan isn't over yet! It can't be!" Cathy's dad yelled, rushing to deactivate the system. Suddenly, the ground beneath their feet trembled, the low rumble growing louder. Everyone froze as the sound grew closer and closer. Leaves rustled, trees quivered, and birds scattered as a herd of Taniuses charged towards them. Carla and Cathy ducked behind a fallen log, pulling the young Tanius to safety as its family stormed in.

Their parents stood shocked as the herd surrounded the clearing. The young Tanius limped towards the leader, chirping weakly as the herd gathered protectively around it. Carla's dad stood frozen, watching the young Tanius nuzzle against its family. "We tore them apart for this," he murmured. "What kind of legacy is that?"

The forest fell silent as the Tanius herd retreated into the forest. "You all taught us to love dinosaurs," Cathy said, her voice softer now. "How could you forget that?" The weight of their parents' actions was heavy in the air. Cathy's mom sighed, a long regretful sigh. "We thought we were helping humanity... but maybe we lost sight of what really matters." The encounter just now was like a wake-up call to their parents, making them realize what they've been doing all along was wrong. Carla stepped closer, "It's never too late to let them free." Regretful and reluctant, their parents agreed. Cathy's mom knelt in before Carla and Cathy, tears in her eyes. "You two girls are braver than we ever were. Thank you for showing us what we were blind to." Together, they dismantled the equipment and vowed to protect this place as a sanctuary.

As their parents created an abyss, a tunnel back to their world, Cathy and Carla stood arm in arm before the abyss. They had saved the dinosaurs, and they had fulfilled their dream. The forest, alive with ancient echoes, stood as a symbol of hope, courage, and redemption.

#### Threads of Nature

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Song, Man Ka Megan – 12

The world was a tapestry woven with threads of silence and scattered whispers. The world was changing, every minute, every second.

Small village huts became tall skyscrapers, fields became highways, and books became phones.

Nature fought desperately to reclaim its territory, but now, nothing was left of her but a small corner of land, hidden away in the expanding metropolis.

Xiao-ling wandered the remnants of a life once lively, her vibrant pink hair and eclectic fashion making her a colorful specter against the dreary backdrop of abandoned buildings and overgrown ruins of the once prestigious National Museum of China. Petrichor filled the air as Xiao-ling stepped into the remains, awe and pity weighing down her heart as something once so magnificent, a symbol of life, has been reduced to nothing but a pile of rubble.

Xiao-ling wandered around in the 'museum', reading the remaining plaques still intact. "A...Therizinosaurus?" she read out loud. The word sounded funny. Her laugh gently echoed off the walls of the damaged room.

As she was about to leave, a glint caught her eye. A small rectangular shape caught her eye. There on the floor lay a recording device. "Strange..." Xiao-Ling muttered. Out of her curious nature, Xiao-Ling picked it up with caution, slipped it in her pocket and hurried home.

Walking back home may only take a few minutes, but to Xiao-ling, it felt like an eternity. She couldn't wait to study this peculiar thing. Her pace quickened and soon enough, she arrived at her front door. Slamming the door open, she took out the recorder and fiddled with it. A big red button was in the middle of it, urging her to press it, to find out what secrets it contained.

With a trembling hand, she pressed a button, and suddenly, the room was filled with a symphony of sounds—a cacophony of calls and roars. Xiao-ling found herself in the middle of a forest, surrounded by green, unseen in the mega-cities every living soul now resided in.

A lush landscape teeming with life, great feathered bodies moving in rhythm with the music of their environment. She saw the magnificent creatures—the last echoes of dinosaurs—living in harmony with a world that no longer existed. Their emotions surged through her, vibrant and alive, each roar a note, each call a chord in the symphony of existence.

Xiao-ling looked down. In her hand was a small book, with the words 'Dinosaur Encyclopedia' on it. She turned to the first page.

#### Therizinosaurus:

This dinosaur is known for its long, claw-like fingers, which could grow up to 3 feet in length. It lived during the Late Cretaceous period and is believed to have been herbivorous, despite its intimidating claws.

Xiao-ling raised her head. In front of her were two Therizinosaurus, feathers sheen and claws sharp as knives. The duo was munching happily on some leaves, oblivious to the stranger that had suddenly appeared in front of them. Not that Xiao-ling minded.

She flipped the thin and leathery paper of the encyclopedia, and was met with a different dinosaur.

#### Sinosauropteryx:

Sinosauropteryx is one of the earliest known feathered dinosaurs, discovered in Liaoning Province. It lived during the Early Cretaceous and provides crucial evidence for the connection between dinosaurs and modern birds.

Xiao-ling turned her head to the right, and everything around her flashed. It was like travelling through a wormhole, with blue and purple lights sparkling around her. Suddenly, she arrived. She looked to the right, and a raccoon-like dinosaur looked back at her. With terror in its eyes, it scampered away.

Xiao-ling looked around her, the place lively and energetic, the opposite of the futuristic megalopolis. So, these are China's dinosaurs, hm? She thought to herself. Xiao-ling strolled along the path, soft grass tickling her bare feet. Dinosaurs surrounded her, but each doing their own thing, all untroubled and-

In a flash, all the dinosaurs disappeared, all the scenery left without a trace, and the joyfilled air vanished. The only evidence left was the now silent recorder, resting on top of Xiaoling's table.

Day after day, Xiao-ling returned to the abandoned ruins, desperate to find out more about the dinosaurs and nature.

Day after day, she heard people discussing abolishing the only piece of nature left.

Day after day, the time she had left to save nature shortened, and she would return to living her dull and lacklustre life.

Days became weeks as Xiao-ling delved deeper into the recordings, her evenings spent hunched over the device, while her nights transformed into adventures through time. She felt the weight of their struggles, their joys, and the pulse of a world that thrived long before humanity's greed began to choke it. She wasn't just hearing the past—she was living it, every sound anchoring her more deeply into the fabric of a forgotten world.

After uncountable hours of reliving the dinosaurs' comfort and angst, a plan formed in her mind.

Under a blanket of stars, Xiao-ling stood at the heart of the ruins, connected to the recording device. As she pressed play, the haunting cries of dinosaurs echoed around them, reverberating into the night. She plucked the strings of her lyre, and with each note, she painted a soundscape that evoked emotion and memory.

Slowly but surely, people heard the music. The community swayed, mesmerized, as memories flooded back—what it felt like when nature was alive and thriving.

Her music cascaded through the crowd, intertwining their hearts with the pulsations of the past. It was a celebration, a lament, a call to preserve the beauty that remained after generations of exploitation. People wept, smiled, and most importantly, remembered.

The past and present fused through her music, breathing life into a narrative of nurturing over neglect, hope over despair. Together, they stood at the threshold of a future that honored the echoes of the past, promising to safeguard the fragile threads of nature still woven into the tapestry of existence.

#### The Boy Who Lived and the Hongkongvenator Yuenopteryx

ESF Bradbury School, Sage, Edgar Lang-De - 10

The news in September 2023 about the fossil discovery in Fujian of '*Fujianvenator* prodigiosus', a bizarre long-legged bird-like dinosaur, was where it all started. Then came the mindblowing headlines in October 2024: potential vertebrate fossils found on Port Island in Hong Kong! I desperately wanted to see them but was absolutely dismayed that it was closed to the public. Still, a bold plan began to hatch...

The next afternoon, I packed a head-lamp, archaeologist's hammer, sleeping bag and snacks in a waterproof bag. Before leaving home, I scribbled a note to my parents lying, 'Going to a friend's home for a sleepover! Don't worry!'.

On arrival at Ma On Shan pier, I swiftly crept down the uneven stone steps and snuck onto a small motorboat attached to a luxury yacht. The owner had 'generously' left the keys for me to 'borrow' it, so I untied the mooring and sped out of the harbour. Shortly, Port Island loomed into view.

I managed to slow the vessel while trying to land on the rocky island. But suddenly, bang! The hull of this tiny, frail boat was punched by a fist of stone and water gushed in like blood out of an open wound. Panicking, I jumped straight into the water and waves threw me onto unforgiving rocks that painfully cut my limbs as I scrambled ashore. Soaked to the skin, I felt as cold as an anteater in Antarctica, with no dry change of clothes!

Taking out my head-lamp, I headed deeper into the island. Before long, I realized I couldn't see! My head-lamp battery had died as I struggled, hiking up the hill to find a safe spot to spend the night.

My body shivering and legs aching, the ground seemed to disappear beneath my feet with a woosh. My stomach lurched into my chest as I plummeted down into a deep crevice, landing with a sickening thump. Excruciating agony ripped through my brain as my splintered left leg seared in pain! I started feeling delirious horror and my mind passed into a deep dark unconsciousness.

I lay motionless, knowing in my heart that miraculously I was alive. Daylight painted my eyelids red, a small ray of hope was in my head of getting rescued. Opening my eyes, I saw the noon day sun peeking through a crack far above me. But nobody was there, my rucksack nowhere to be seen.

Foggy and delirious with pain, I crawled on all fours like a newborn foal, exploring the narrow prison I found myself in for a way out, but found only cold red-stone walls all around. Groping, my trembling hands felt a rock with some odd patterns on it – a fossil! It looked remarkably like *Fujianvenator prodigiosus*!

Then my jaw dropped in amazement. I wasn't sure if I was just hallucinating, but it seemed like the fossil resurrected and jumped out of the living rock! It arose, mighty and majestic, but bizarre looking, a bird-like rainbow dinosaur with two claws in the middle of each wing. I remembered the *Fujianvenator* had three! Was this a new species?

With a beak that looked like a dolphin's full of threatening pointy teeth, "P-please don't hurt me!" I pleaded, my head spinning, slowly edging away. It looked at me in a rather queer

and peculiar way, head cocked to one side, as if offering help. I felt brave enough to ask as I was parched as the Sahara. "Please, I'm very thirsty, is there any water?" To my surprise, the creature half-lept, half-flew upwards, using its two claws to clamber out of the crevice.

Soon, it returned and poured a trickle of life-giving water into my mouth from its beak. That night, it slept next to me, using its soft feathers to warm me. The kind beast sustained me by feeding me food scraps and water every day!

One day, it rocked up with a lunchbox that had a sandwich in it. Ravenously, I wolfed down the sandwich. The lid of the box was labelled 'Professor M.Chan, Archaeologist'. Someone had to be near! My throat was too hoarse to shout, but I had an idea.

Using a sharp stone shard, I scraped on the lid: HELP! TRAPPED IN CREVICE. PORT ISLAND. 20 OCT 2024. (The date I left home.) Trembling, I handed it to my guardian angel and exclaimed weakly, "Find help!" Obediently, it set off in a flurry of feathers. Dizzily, I collapsed back onto the ground, my still black and swollen leg throbbing. I passed out, as a feeling of hopelessness came over me.

Drifting in a dark dream, suddenly yelling voices echoed faintly in my ear, "We found him! There's a pulse but it's weak!!" I felt my body swaying and heaving upwards.

When I next opened my eyes, I was in a hospital bed. Two police inspectors sat with notebooks. "Where's the dinosaur!" I cried, jerking upright. The inspectors exchanged raised eyebrows. They asked, "Yuen, you were missing for ten days. How did you survive with no food or water? How did you get that lunchbox lid with your location to Professor Chan?"

I told them the whole story but they looked at each other, heads shaking and whispering softly, "Poor kid..." Well, of course they didn't believe me and I felt disheartened. "The fossil is there right now! Go find it!" I raged hopelessly in bed. They left, and I suppose they found it because that night, it was reported on the TV news along with my rescue!

\*\*\*

A week later, I visited the Hong Kong Science Museum. Wobbling on my crutches up to the 'Newly Discovered Dinosaurs' display, I gazed upon my fossil – neatly labelled as '*Hongkongvenator Yuenopteryx*'. They had named it after me! Even setting out my survival story, but with no mention of my true saviour. A tender tear dropped onto the glass case as I softly murmured gratefully, "Thank you for everything..."

#### Wings of the Ancient Sky

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School, Cheng Yi Kiu, – 12

In the shadow of the towering mountains of Liaoning, a hidden valley brimmed with lush foliage and vibrant flowers, a world untouched by time thrived. This was the realm of the Sinosauropteryx, the "China dragon bird," a small feathered dinosaur with iridescent plumage that glimmered like dappled sunlight as it flitted through the canopy.

Among these creatures was a young Sinosauropteryx named Feiyan, a curious outlier. While her kin basked in the safety of their nests, she ventured higher into the sky, dreaming of soaring among the stars. Influenced by the ethereal beauty of the valley, she often imagined herself gliding between the colossal trees, her wings stretched wide against the azure canvas above.

"Feiyan, be careful!" called her friend Lian from the safety of their nests. "What if you get lost?"

"I need to find the Spirit Stone, Lian!" Feiyan replied, her feathers glimmering in the sunlight. "It could enhance my flying!"

"The elders warned us about it," Lian said, worry etched on her face.

"Those are just stories! I believe it's real," Feiyan insisted, gathering her courage and embracing her adventurous spirit.

As she ventured deeper into the valley, Feiyan encountered a myriad of vibrant life, discovering strange plants and extraordinary creatures. Along the way, she befriended a clever dinosaur named Thunder, developed by an ancient species of long-lost dinosaurs to assist them in their endeavors.

"Thunder, can you guide me through this terrain?" Feiyan asked, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Absolutely, Feiyan! I can analyze the weather patterns and help spot other creatures," Thunder replied, his voice bright and encouraging.

After days of exploration, Feiyan and Thunder reached the fabled Crystal Cave said to house the Spirit Stone. Bathed in a soft glow, the cave sparkled like a treasure trove, and at its core lay the Spirit Stone, radiating brilliant energy.

Feiyan approached the stone cautiously, her heart racing. "This must be it!"

As she touched it with her beak, exhilaration surged through her. Feiyan felt lighter, her wings stronger and more agile. With newfound confidence, she spread her wings wide and took flight, soaring higher than she had ever dared.

"The sky is my playground now!" she proclaimed to Thunder as she dove and swooped through the air.

But soon, a shadow loomed overhead. A gang of larger theropods, the valley's predators, had taken notice of her. Riding on the tailwinds of her exuberance, she pushed herself farther, distancing herself from her friends and family.

"Feiyan, they're watching you!" Thunder warned.

"I've got this, Thunder! I can handle it!" Feiyan called back, dismissing her friend's concern.

One fateful evening, as dusk draped the valley in golden hues, the predators ambushed her. Using the Spirit Stone's power, she evaded them for a time, but overconfidence led to a miscalculation. With a daring maneuver to impress them, she crashed into a rocky cliffside. "Help!" she cried, pain shooting through her.

In that moment, she realized her hubris had drawn her from her true purpose. The Spirit Stone flickered dimly nearby, mirroring her crumbling spirit. Weak and wounded, she cowered before the threat—a survivor on the brink of extinction.

"Remember the elders' wisdom," she murmured to herself. "Power must be balanced with humility."

Summoning the last of her strength, she called out to the valley, seeking her kin, her home, her purpose.

As her cries echoed into the twilight, her family arrived, led by the courageous elders.

"Together, we will protect you!" shouted Elder Jin, rallying the group as they formed a protective circle around her.

Their combined strength turned the tides, forcing the predators back and restoring balance to their world.

"Thank you!" Feiyan gasped, relief washing over her.

Though she had learned the hard way, she returned to the nest with newfound wisdom—a reminder of the delicate threads binding all creatures to their world. The Spirit Stone, touched with sincerity, ceased to glow, revealing that true strength lay in community and the respect shared for their land.

With each passing season, Feiyan became a revered storyteller among her kin, weaving narratives filled with adventure, joy, and lessons learned from her experience.

"Let me tell you about the importance of unity!" she began to the younglings during one gathering.

As time passed, tremors shook their valley, signaling a new challenge.

"We must prepare for what's ahead!" Feiyan exclaimed, rallying her community.

"Will we be safe from the earthquakes?" one youngling asked fearfully.

"With bravery and teamwork, we can face anything!" she replied, sounding confident as she led them to safety. Together, they sought higher ground, moving toward the mountains above. The earth cracked, and waters rose, but the Sinosauropteryx remained united.

"Let's secure our nests!" Lian shouted, flapping her wings as they gathered materials.

Feiyan encouraged the group, "Every little effort counts! Work together, and we'll find sanctuary!"

Finally, as the quakes settled and the skies cleared, they reached a breathtaking overlook of a new valley, sunlight pouring in like a warm embrace.

"This will become our new home," Feiyan announced, her heart swelling with hope.

"Life here will be just as beautiful!" another youngling chirped, gazing at the vibrant landscape below.

"Together, we've proven our strength," Elder Jin said, pride evident in his voice. "We are more than just a flock; we are a family."

Feiyan looked around at her kin, their wings standing strong against the sky. "We will create new stories here, filled with adventures and lessons of unity," she declared.

As they settled into their new nests, the legacy of the Sinosauropteryx lived on—a testament to resilience echoing through the winds of Liaoning, a reminder that in the face of challenges, love and connection prevail, ensuring that their spirit would endure for generations to come.

### To Find a Happier Life

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Lu, Sophia Mingyi – 11

What is the purpose of life? My friends told me that the essence of life is to be surrounded by those who love you. But if that's true, my purpose in life evaporated after that enormous meteorite struck. Now, the world feels hollow, empty, and lost in the void with my friends dead.

I know the purpose of my life, though. It's to be confined in this cage with the whims of a deranged scientist, displayed like a circus animal for the world to gawk at for the rest of my life.

Every time I gaze at the dinosaur bones encased in the crystal-clear glass containers, memories of my friends and family flood my mind like a relentless wave crashing against a golden shore.

Before the meteorite struck, our lands were vibrant, alive with joy.

Before the meteorite struck, everyone was still here, and life was a peaceful melody.

Before the meteorite struck, I wasn't the last Sinosauropteryx alive, nor the last dinosaur alive.

It all happened in a split second, like the snap of fingers or a lighting bolt cleaving a tree. One moment, I was frolicking with my friends, basking in the golden sunlight. The next, they were on the cold, hard ground, lying lifeless on the unforgiving earth.

I snapped back to reality, staring at the skeletal remains of my kin. It was awful. My thoughts were a mosquito, irritating and inescapable. It seemed like the bones were whispering, "Sundri, we're still alive!" But I knew it was just a cruel reminder from my mind of the lonely and empty future that awaited me.

There was a maniacal scientist who wants to conduct experiments on me. He treated me like I was an insect, toying with me as his prey. Did he forget that I have a life, just like him? Dinosaurs were once the rulers of the earth, and now humans took over and spread their power. How ironic is it that we, the once-powerful, are now all dead from a meteorite? Except for me. But the one fact that formed a lump in my throat is that dinosaurs were peaceful. Harmonious. While humans are just selfish and greedy.

I really loathe this place. I'd rather be dead from the meteorite than live this life.

But today, I longed for change. I yearned to roam around somewhere else, other than these bars, and break free. I wanted to escape from the malicious wrath of this scientist, once and for all. I've been trapped for twelve long years, and I had forgotten the beauty of the outside world: the lush green plants, the brilliant blue sky, the soft, fluffy white clouds and the warm sunlight blanketing the feathers on my back in a cozy glow.

Without a thought in my head, driven by desperation and determination, I lunged forward, my jagged teeth piercing and sinking into the bars.

I glanced around for the scientist. He was in the hallways, his cold grey eyes behind his glasses locked onto the clipboard in his hand, using his pen to make quick, decisive strokes on the paper. I had to be cautious–my life depended on it. I crept through the dim corridors, my sharp amber eyes watching him warily. Every step was a potential giveaway, but I tried to keep silent.

As I turned the corner, dread and fear crashed into me like a landslide. My beady eyes slowly moved up. First at that pristine lab coat, then his malevolent grin, then the slicked-back hair. Our eyes met each other, and I felt the heat of his fiery glare as he stood over me–I wasn't even as tall as his knee.

I turned away and veered in a different direction, my claws scraping against the icy tiled floor, making an eerie screeching noise. I kept running, my heart a drum, beating frantically. I kept panting as I looked back, the scientist only mere meters away. "Get back, you filthy animal!" He shouted, his rage-filled voice echoing against the walls of the narrow corridor, surrounding me with his presence.

Ahead of me loomed the escape door, tantalizingly close. The sound of thumping footsteps grew louder, thudding like an approaching storm. I pushed my entire tiny body against the door with all my might. After seconds that felt like infinity, it let out a creak and I bolted through. The heavy door slammed shut behind me, the echoes of furious screams trailing behind.

I was free.

Stepping outside for the first time, I collapsed onto the cold pavement, shivering against the biting chill. It was midnight, and the world was cloaked in the cape of darkness. When I finally woke up, I found myself in a warm, cozy home, the air infused with the sweet scent of vanilla. My heart raced like a startled rabbit, a single thought circling my mind like a vulture, "Where am I?"

I opened my eyes slowly and looked up, only to be surprised by a warm and welcoming smile of an old lady. "You poor thing, don't worry, I'll take care of you," she said gently, her voice soothing like a balm. She picked me up tenderly and set me in her soft lap. She touched my head softly, stroking my feathers, and gave me some food to eat.

She gave me the love and attention that no one ever had in years.

I could hardly believe it. A kind human? I guess I was wrong to judge them all. Maybe they weren't all monsters. A cautious smile spread across my face, a light feeling in my heart. I haven't felt like this in a long time. I finally escaped the heavy weight of life at that wretched place. This was going to be my forever home.

A realization dawned upon me, illuminating my thoughts in a new light as I curled up tighter in her lap. My friends were right all along. The purpose of life is to be surrounded by those who love you.

### The Feathered Survivor

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Lu, Youcheng Patrick – 11

In the vibrant, hazy atmosphere of the early Cretaceous period, I, a Sinosauropteryx, explored the sprawling savannahs that stretched endlessly beneath the blazing sun. As a small but fierce carnivorous dinosaur, daily life was a challenging and terrifying dance of survival. Towering above me, massive herbivorous giants moved through the landscape, their sheer size casting long shadows that darkened the enormous world, every step sounding like a mini-earthquake. Meanwhile, the larger predators prowled with predatory grace, capable of terrifyingly rampaging through our world and dismantling their prey.

Every dawn, I wake up in the heart of the vast savannah, the warm sunlight filtering through the delicate blades of grass, creating a kaleidoscope of colors and light. My feathers, a striking blend of rusty orange and creamy white, served as the perfect camouflage, allowing me to blend seamlessly into the vibrant tapestry of nature. This was essential as I set out on my morning routine, stretching my delicate limbs and taking a brisk run to shake off the lingering lethargy of sleep, the earthy aroma of the savannah filling my nostrils.

Hunting was a tiring task, especially in this dry, battered expanse where the search for food and water was a relentless pursuit. Tiny mammals scurried quickly through the underbrush, while quick-footed lizards darted around, making them resilient game. Fortunately, my sharp eyesight detected even the faintest tremor in the grass, while my agile body allowed me to pounce with lightning speed when an opportunity arose.

Yet, despite my instincts and agility, loneliness shadows my every step. My parents had left me alone long before I broke free from my shell-like egg, leaving me abandoned to navigate the dangers of this vast world alone. My siblings had hatched and started their own lives long before I emerged into this vast landscape. Now, I wandered alone, facing the traumatizing dangers and daunting challenges of survival in a realm filled with both breathtaking beauty and lurking dangers, my heart steadfast and resolute in the fight for existence.

As I set out to hunt, I saw a giant shadow loom over me. I slowly turned and saw what was a nightmare for us Sinosauropteryx: a Carcharodontosaurus! I scrambled backward and ran for my life. I ran until my eyes turned blurry and my legs were screaming in pain. I stopped, thinking I had lost the Carcharodontosaurus, and stopped to catch my breath.

I lowered my head to drink water when I heard a soft rustling noise and looked up. I saw nothing so I prepared to keep drinking. Suddenly, a group of Dromaeosauridae

jumped out of the tall grass of the savannah and surrounded me! I turned around and started to run but saw the Carcharodontosaurid running up behind me.

The Dromaeosauridae slowly closed in, and my life flashed before my eyes. The Carcharodontosaurid swished its tail in hunger, and accidentally hit a few Dromaeosauridae, knocking them to the ground. The rest of the Dromaeosauridae turned their attention to the Carcharodontosaurid, their mounting tension suffocating.

A Dromaeosauridae broke out from its group and charged the Carcharodontosaurid. The Carcharodontosaurid immediately bent down and bit down on the Dromaeosauridae's head, killing it. The rest of the Dromaeosauridae attacked, and chaos broke out. Feathers flew, and blood stained the dry soil of the savannah. I used my speedy reflexes to squeeze through a group of charging Dromaeosauridae. Out of the corner of my keen eyes, I saw a Dromaeosauridae lunge for me. I dodged him and ran as fast as my feathery, tired legs could carry me, and soon, I couldn't see anything except for the dust of the ferocious battle.

As the cacophony of the battle faded into the distance, I found myself in a thicket of dense ferns, heart pounding and body trembling. I pressed my back against a sturdy tree trunk, the rough bark grounding me in the present moment. The sun slowly began its slow crawl to disappear out of the horizon, casting long shadows that danced upon the ground, reminding me of the precariousness of life in this harsh world. In that quiet sanctuary, I took a deep breath, feeling the adrenaline slowly subside. The chaos of the savannah had taught me a valuable lesson—not only about the dangers lurking within my environment but also about my resilience. In the face of predators and peril, I had not just survived—I had outsmarted the impossible odds. As I ventured cautiously back into the open, a soft rustle caught my attention. My heart raced again, but I quickly steadied myself.

Emerging from the bush was another Sinosauropteryx, smaller yet blindingly vibrant, mirroring my colors. His feathers twitch energetically. She looked at me with wide, curious eyes, and a spark of connection ignited between us at that moment. Together, we ventured into the fading light of the day, and for the first time, I felt the warmth of companionship. Sharing my journey with someone else offered a newfound strength, a reminder that survival did not have to be a solitary path. As we roamed through the vast savannah, hunting and exploring side by side, the world felt less daunting, and I understood that even in the most ferocious of landscapes, friendship could flourish amidst the struggle.

With every dawn that followed, we grew stronger as a team, learning from each other's instincts and cleverness. No longer just a solitary Sinosauropteryx, I had found a friend in this untamed adventure, ready to live my life in this wild world, with my newfound friend, together facing whatever challenges lay ahead.

### Jiang Yan's Secret Friend

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Shen, Rayna Indigo – 10

In the remote forest of the Yunnan province, Jiang Yan and her dad set out for their daily hunt. It was a quiet day, and they were not having any luck, so they decided to walk deeper into the forest than usual.

After walking for what felt like hours, Jiang Yan caught a flash of an animal. "Is that a boar?!" she thought to herself excitedly and rushed after it. But as Jiang Yan sped down the path after the frightened boar, Jiang Yan tripped and tumbled uncontrollably down an unknown gorge and landed on a pile of leaves and came to stand in front of a gigantic purple oval shaped body covered with dots. "Is... this an... egg?" muttered the dumbfounded Jiang Yan.

Suddenly Jiang Yan sensed an enormous shadow behind her but before she could turn around, the creature flew in front of her in a blink of an eye and was trying to take flight with the egg but failed. As Jiang Yan tiptoed closer to the being, she observed that it was a gigantic, dark red bird with pink dots on it. It had a pair of sharp front teeth, a thick slimy tail and a head the size of a wheel. "What are you?" the frightened Jiang Yan found herself asking. "I am a pterodactyl," said the huge bird unexpectedly. Jiang Yan could not believe her ears. "So not only are you a dinosaur, but you can also speak?! I thought you only exist in legends!" exclaimed the amazed Jiang Yan. "Yes, we pterodactyls are the guardians of Jinsha (Gold Sand) river since the Han dynasty. For thousands of years, we protect the local people from river floods. We derive our powers of invisibility and speech from the river. However, as you humans drain the Jinsha river in search of gold, we have over time completely lost our power of invisibility and been hunted by the Qian hunters to the point of extinction. I am sadly the last pterodactyl left in China, and I am too weak to hunt for food after giving birth to my egg. In fact, I have not eaten for days." The pterodactyl explained with pain in her voice.

Jiang Yan eagerly offered to help the pterodactyl. After finding Jiang Yan, Jiang Yan's dad, too was shocked by the sight of the Chinese dinosaur. After getting over the shock, he also wanted to help. So, for the next few weeks, the kind-hearted pair hunted extra hard to scavenge food to secretly give to the pterodactyl. With their help, the pterodactyl recovered some strength and was able to fly again.

However, Jiang Yan's secret did not last for long. Jiang Yan's stepmother, realizing that the food Jiang Yan and her dad brought home from the hunts was getting less and less, even though they were spending longer and longer in their daily hunts. Suspicious, she stealthily followed the hunting pair when they set off to the forest and found out their shocking secret.

"You have been keeping this discovery a secret from me?! Do you not realize how much gold we can get from the Qian hunters if we were to share this information with them?" Jiang Yan's stepmother confronted the pair once they were home. "To think the life I could enjoy with this wealth. A big house, servants, silk gowns, and countless jewellery," cackled the stepmother. "I am going to the Qian hunters right now!" Jiang Yan and her dad begged their hardest for her to change her mind, but she would not budge. She was completely overcome with greed.

Crying, Jiang Yan ran out of the house. She ran and ran all the way to the gorge where the pterodactyl lived and helplessly told the pterodactyl about the danger to come. "I am so sorry, please forgive me. I didn't know this would happen. I thought we were careful. What can I do?" cried Jiang Yan in total panic. Surprisingly, the pterodactyl just gave her a soft but sad smile. "Jiang Yan, it is okay. You and your dad have already helped me quite a lot in the past few weeks. I am old and tired of being alone. I miss my family and now I am going to meet them. You have been a big help and accompanied me in the last moments of my life, and I am very grateful for that. I know from the moment that we met that you are a girl of pure heart, and I trust you to take care of my baby whom I deeply love." With tears in its eyes the pterodactyl whispered, "The last thing I can do as a mom is to keep the Qian hunters away from you two." With that the pterodactyl rolled the warm egg into Jiang Yan's hands and flew towards the army of hunters who were approaching fast.

From a distance, Jiang Yan saw her flying friend screech, struggle and fell to the ground. She could hear the faint cheers of the hunters. Jiang Yan slumped onto the floor holding the egg tightly. "I didn't even know your mother's name." Jiang Yan muttered to the egg with tears rolling down her face.

Years later, the baby pterodactyl had grown up well and was named Sacrifice in honour of her mother. Jiang Yan's stepmom had left Jiang Yan's dad and moved to another village after becoming rich which was a blessing for all as she was mean and cruel to Jiang Yan and her dad. Baby Sacrifice's existence was also safe. So, in the end, everyone was happy but work was not done. With the help of the villagers, Jiang Yan and her dad gradually restore the water level of the Jinsha river. And if you go visit the gorge today, maybe, just maybe, you would be lucky enough to see Sacrifice playing with Jiang Yan.

#### Dr Wei Lin's Expedition

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Shiu, Quinnley Aube – 10

Deep in China's Hubei province, a team of dedicated paleontologists convened; the air was electric with anticipation, almost like static. They were about to make an extraordinary announcement: the uncovering of a series of fossil remains that would rewrite the history of feathered animals from dinosaur times. From this rock, they were extracting the remains of a long-legged, birdlike dinosaur that had lived some 90 million years ago.

Dr Wei Lin led the expedition, his dream of uncovering fossilized remnants finally coming to life. As the bright morning sun rose over jagged peaks, illuminating the formations of the hills, the team began to carefully excavate the delicate layers of clay and mud. Each stroke of the brush revealed more than just old dinosaur bones; they revealed a peek into the life of a creature whose existence blurred the lines between dinosaur and avian beauty.

As they dug up the ancient fossils, Dr Wei couldn't help but imagine the world that had existed when these dinosaurs roamed the planet. He envisioned a lush landscape teeming with life, a world in which this creature, which they decided to name "Yichangornis", soared through thick green forests as graceful as a ballerina, its colorful feathers sparkling in the warm rays of golden sun. The airborne dinosaur was adorned with vibrant plumage, a bright kaleidoscope of colors that would make even the most brilliant bird envious. The rainbow of colors swirled around in his mind, mixing various colors together till every imagination of the Yichangornis that Dr Wei had was each more unique than the last, like different layers and shafts of the silver moon: similar, but every one also one-of-a-kind.

More than paleontological pride was at stake; rumors of the importance of Yichangornis began to swirl around scientists, some suggesting that the beautiful, feathered dinosaur may hold the key to understanding the evolutionary transitions between avian and non-avian theropods. Dr Wei felt history weighing on his shoulders; the unearthing of the Yichangornis might deepen humanity's understanding of the natural world.

As they worked tirelessly, the paleontologists discovered a small cave not far from the excavation site. Curious about what else might lie inside, Dr Wei and his assistant Mei cautiously entered, their headlamps cutting through the darkness. The air was cool and damp, the scent of earth filling their noses. Stalactites dripped slowly from the ceiling as they advanced deeper and deeper into the cave.

Before long, they stumbled upon ancient wall engravings——intricate depictions of feathered creatures gliding effortlessly above lush, green landscapes. In wonder, Mei traced her fingers over a depiction that could only be Yichangornis, frozen in an elegant pose, wings outstretched. They wondered who had carved those precise images and why. A sense of almost mystical connection with their ancestor dinosaurs washed over them. The ground suddenly rumbled, and a rift burst open in the wall of the cavern. The cave started shaking with a loud noise like a crack of thunder, fiercely pushing them to the ground. As they scrambled, shocked, back to their feet, they found themselves in a hidden chamber; the walls sparkled of quartz, and in the center there was a singular, rainbow feather laying on a pedestal of shimmering crystal, different from any other they had ever seen.

It sparkled and shimmered with an iridescent shine, casting colorful reflections around the cave. Dr Wei's heart raced—was this a relic of Yichangornis, a feather that had miraculously survived the ravages of time? He felt an inexplicable urge to take it, a tempting beckoning from the distant past.

But as he reached out, a voice boomed through the chamber, echoing off stone. "Only those who respect their past, may set foot on the future."

Dr Wei froze, his hand inches from the vivid feather. Mei stood beside him, wideeyed and stunned, still as a statue. They exchanged glances, capturing an unspoken bond of purpose——they were here to uncover knowledge, to breathe new life into bygone eras, not to plunder. He withdrew his hand with a deep breath, and the feather stayed, undisturbed on the crystal pedestal. It was then Dr Wei realized the importance of Yichangornis lay not in possession but understanding, and they all agreed not to touch it, to never touch it. As the paleontologists emerged from the cave, they shared their revelations. The connection they felt with Yichangornis was not merely one of discovery; it was an invitation to rekindle the relationship between humanity and the natural world. They knew their mission had changed; they would not only excavate fossils but also educate the world about the beauty but also fragility of life throughout history.

### Creative Writing Fiction Group 2



#### The Feathered Secrets of Liaoning

Alliance Primary School Kowloon Tong, Choi, Tsz Yan – 11

In the heart of Liaoning Province, where the mountains whispered secrets of ancient times, a young girl named Chloe lived with her grandfather, a retired paleontologist. As the sun dipped behind the hills, painting the sky in hues of orange and purple, Chloe often found herself lost in the stories her grandfather told her about dinosaurs—their grandeur, their mysteries, and their extinction.

One evening, as they sat on the porch, her grandfather leaned closer, his eyes twinkling with excitement. "Did you know, Chloe, that just a few years ago, a remarkable discovery was made here? A farmer stumbled upon the first feathered dinosaur, Sinosauropteryx. It changed everything we knew about these magnificent creatures."

Chloe's curiosity ignited. "What did it look like, Grandpa?"

He smiled, "Imagine a small dinosaur, about the size of a chicken, with feathers like a bird. It had bright orange and white plumage, and its eyes sparkled like gems. But the most fascinating part? It could glide through the trees, just like the birds we see today."

That night, as Chloe lay in bed, she couldn't stop thinking about Sinosauropteryx. What if she could meet a dinosaur? She closed her eyes, and soon she drifted into a dream.

In her dream, she found herself in a lush, prehistoric forest. The air was thick with the scent of ferns and flowers. Suddenly, a rustle in the bushes caught her attention. Out stepped a small creature, its feathers shimmering in the dappled sunlight. It was Sinosauropteryx!

"Hello, Chloe!" it chirped, surprising her. "I've been waiting for you!"

"How do you know my name?" she gasped, taken aback.

"I know many things," the dinosaur said with a flick of its tail. "But right now, I need your help. The other dinosaurs have gone missing, and I fear they've been captured by a group of treasure hunters who want to exploit our fossils!"

Determined to help her new friend, Chloe nodded. "What can I do?"

Sinosauropteryx flapped its wings. "Follow me! We must gather the other dinosaurs and lead them to safety."

They dashed through the forest, where they met a fierce Velociraptor. "Why are you here, feathered one?" it growled.

"Sinosauropteryx needs our help," Chloe explained. "We must save the others!"

The Velociraptor, intrigued by Chloe's bravery and Sinosauropteryx's plea, agreed to join. Soon, they encountered a massive Brachiosaurus munching on treetops.

"Brachiosaurus, we need your strength!" Chloe shouted. "The treasure hunters are coming!"

With a mighty roar, the Brachiosaurus joined their cause, and together they ventured deeper into the forest. Along the way, they gathered more dinosaurs—a wise Triceratops, a playful Ankylosaurus, and a graceful Pterosaur who soared overhead, keeping watch.

As dusk fell, they reached the hidden valley where the treasure hunters had established their camp. A flickering fire illuminated the scene, and Chloe could see cages holding captured dinosaurs. Her heart raced.

"We have to free them!" she whispered urgently.

Sinosauropteryx perched on Chloe's shoulder. "We'll create a distraction. Brachiosaurus, use your height! Velociraptor, you're fast and stealthy. Pterosaur, can you make a loud noise?"

With a plan in place, they executed their strategy. Brachiosaurus stretched its long neck, causing a ruckus as it knocked over pots and pans, while the Velociraptor darted around, creating chaos. The Pterosaur shrieked from above, drawing the hunters' attention away.

In the confusion, Chloe and the other dinosaurs rushed to the cages. With teamwork, they managed to unlock the doors, freeing the captured creatures. A thunderous roar echoed through the valley as the dinosaurs reunited, their spirits soaring.

Just then, the hunters noticed the commotion and ran toward them. Chloe's heart pounded, but Sinosauropteryx flapped its wings and led the dinosaurs in a daring escape, guiding them through a hidden path in the forest.

As they reached safety, Chloe turned to her dinosaur friends. "We did it! You're all free!"

The dinosaurs cheered, their voices blending into a joyful chorus. Sinosauropteryx looked at Chloe with gratitude. "You are brave and kind, Chloe. You saved us today. Remember, the stories of our kind must live on."

Just then, the dream began to fade, and Chloe found herself back in her room, the morning sun streaming through the window. She sat up, heart racing with excitement. Had it all been real?

As she looked around, Chloe noticed something in her hand. It was a feather—bright orange and white, just like Sinosauropteryx! She couldn't believe her eyes. This feather was proof of her adventure, a tangible connection to the dinosaurs she had just met.

Determined to share her adventure, she rushed to her grandfather. "Grandpa! I dreamed of dinosaurs! And look, I have a feather! We have to protect their stories and their fossils!"

Her grandfather smiled warmly. "Yes, Chloe. You've captured the essence of what we do. Let's begin our own journey to share these tales."

And so, Chloe and her grandfather embarked on a mission to educate others about the wonders of dinosaurs, ensuring that the legacy of creatures like Sinosauropteryx would never be forgotten.

#### Wei's Journey to Dinosaur Discoveries

Kowloon Rhenish School, Lee, Kit Tung - 9

In the quiet countryside of Jiangxi, a young boy named Wei grew up with stories from his grandfather about ancient creatures that once roamed China's lands. His favorite tale was that of the "dragon bird," a dinosaur whose feathers shimmered like sunlight on water. Although the stories seemed no more than fairy tales, Wei often wondered if they held at least a grain of truth.

One bright spring morning, Wei explored hills not far from his village, armed with a spade and a notebook, where he dreamed of finding something special. The recent discovery of a titanosaur in Jiangxi had sparked curiosity in Wei, who was then determined to uncover his piece of history.

As Wei wandered through the hills, he came across a rock sticking out of the ground. Its texture was like nothing he had ever seen before. He squatted and started digging. With each handful of dirt that he cleared away, the outline of the rock took a more concrete form. It was no rock-it was a fossil. His heart pounded. Was this the key to a piece of the past that his grandfather had told him about?

Carefully, Wei uncovered the fossil, which, to his amazement, looked like a claw. Excited and nervous, he brought the fossil before his wide-eyed grandfather's stare. "This," his grandfather said, "is no ordinary fossil. It looks to me like it could belong to a pterosaur."

In a very short period, word got to the village, and subsequently, a paleontology team showed up to investigate. The head, Dr. Liu, described the creatures: "The pterosaurs are flying reptiles that date back millions of years." "This can be a serious finding," she said. "We shall have to research more.

Over weeks, the hills became a hotbed of activity. Wei watched in fascination as the scientists excavated carefully, uncovering even more fossils. Indeed, these included details of the parts of a wing and a jaw with well-preserved feathers. Dr. Liu was on hand to corroborate their suspicion that the new fossils would belong to some previously unidentified species of flying pterosaur. She named it "Liu's Sky Glider" in honor of the region and the boy who had led them to the site.

As the excavation continued, the scientists started to find further evidence of life from long ago. They found plant fossils that hinted at the natural environment being lush and tropical; they found the remains of small mammals that might have coexisted with the flying monster. Wei listened intently as Dr. Liu explained how such finds vividly depicted prehistoric Jiangxi. With Wang's descriptions, ancient China's dense forests and crystalclear rivers seemed to spring to life before their heightened interest.

The village soon became famous; people came from around China and outside the country. A museum was built to show these fossils, and Wei's name was engraved into its walls as a memoir of his curiosity and strength. His grandfather was highly proud and told Wei that even great voyages sometimes start with a single step or just one dig in the dirt.

However, that was not all: Wei's discovery would send other children in the village scouring their surroundings for such finds. They organized fossil hunts, hoping to come across their ancient treasure. Some even wrote stories and poems about the dinosaurs, imagining their lives millions of years ago. Local schools held workshops where paleontologists shared their knowledge with guests, fostering a new generation of dinosaur enthusiasts.

One day, Wei made a peculiar discovery as he helped scientists make various discoveries. It was small, round, nestled among the rock. Carefully, he chipped it off the stone until he was clutching it in his hands. "This is a dinosaur egg," Dr. Liu burst out excitedly as it met her eyes. "You seldom find such perfection, so well preserved-just think of all secrets this might hold.

The egg was taken to a lab for further study. Weeks later, the results came in: inside the egg lay the perfectly preserved embryo of a feathered dinosaur. The discovery sent shockwaves through the scientific community, confirming that some dinosaurs were, in fact, close relatives of modern birds. Wei could hardly believe he had contributed to discovering such an important piece of history. His grandfather always told him how the past and the present were connected in ways few could fathom.

As Wei grew older, the fascination with dinosaurs only deepened. He decided to study paleontology to learn even more ancient world secrets. His journey had started with a single fossil, but it had taken him to a lifetime of discovery. Wei often thought of the stories his grandfather told him. They were not just tales but connected to a world with so much to reveal. He felt a deep indebtedness to the miracles of Earth, lying hidden inside the belly of the underground, awaiting the arrival of inquisitive minds to come and get them.

The story of his finding became a symbol of curiosity and perseverance. It reminded them that even the tiniest gestures could lead to extraordinary results. In the end, Wei learned that the true treasure was not just the fossils he found but the journey of discovery itself- a journey that had just begun. His dream of knowing more about the creatures of the past instilled in him hope for the future and inspired a sea of people to look towards the world with wonder and curiosity.

# The Sinosauropteryx Adventure

Pui Ching Primary School, Ku, Lap Yin – 12

"Before I start, have you ever seen a feathered dinosaur? And where do you think it was found? Argentina? Brazil? Germany? South Africa? Let me tell you, the first feathered dinosaur was found in China." Steven said as he pointed at a picture on a museum brochure.

"In the 1990s, a fossil hunter named Li Yumin found the world's very first feathered dinosaur. Scientists called it the Sinosauropteryx, which means 'the China dragon bird'. The Sinosauropteryx lived during the Early Cretaceous Period, 125–122 million years ago. It is a meat-eating dinosaur and it ate small animals, including mammals and lizards. Since then, more than 40 dinosaur species have been found in the province of Liaoning, including more than 24 pterosaurs (winged reptiles) and more." explained Steven, my crazy scientist friend that invents futuristic gadgets.

"It will be a pleasure to visit the Early Cretaceous Period..." Kyle said with a sigh.

"Actually, we can!" exclaimed Steven.

"How–We can use your newly invented time machine!" Kyle said as his thought interrupted him

"Hmm, how does this thing work? Kyle wondered.

"Let me turn this on," said Steven, then he pressed a few buttons on the round thin panel. The time machine started glowing and flashing. All of a sudden, the tiny laboratory filled with books and maps turned into a narrow glass tunnel filled with blue and purple smoke and stars were shining. Bright blue lights started flashing and the time machine panel beeped loudly. Before Kyle knew it... bang!

"Where are we?" Kyle screamed loudly.

"Don't be such a freak. We're in the Early Cretaceous Period." Steven said calmly. "But where?" Kyle said while wind blew on his face.

"Um...The time machine can tell what place we're in!" he said excitedly, then we swiped to 'Location' on the virtual projection.

Tony, the robotic voice whispered," We are in the Early Cretaceous Period of northeastern China, and in the area of..."

"Ok, please stop it, Tony. That's enough information" he said as Steven pressed a navy-blue button and a digitally projected screen popped out on the panel. Then he swiped to "Off".

"Let's start our adventure!" shouted Steven. Thrilled, he took out two small bags in a compartment in the thin panel.

"Uh, where are the dinosaurs? We walked for almost two hours, and found none." Kyle signed hopelessly.

"Is your time machine broken..."

Stomping sounds interrupted him. The sand ground was shaking and they felt like someone was behind them.

"RUN!" shouted Steven, then they ran down a hill and into a cave. The cave was lit with twenty candles.

Huffing and puffing Kyle said. "Phew, we finally escaped from that horrible thing-What was it?" as he sat on the rocky floor.

"Silly, it's the Sinosauropteryx, it roa...Huh, what is this?" He said as he walked to a narrow path in the cave that was covered with rocks and mud

"Let's go in!" Steven said excitedly, then Steven went in. The path led to a cave hole. There were two eggs, with little cracks on each of them.

"Roar..."

"Uh-oh, the dinosaurs are coming! What are we going to do?" asked Kyle panicked. Crack! They heard some squeaking. When they turned around, their eyes widened, -the egg hatched.

The little dinosaurs were feathered. "What are we going to do? The dinosaurs are coming. We have to protect these little dinosaurs."

"Yes, but how-We can use the Survival Mud Sprayer! If you press the button on the handle, it can spray mud on the dinosaur, the mud will become solid so it can survive."

"Ok, let's spray mud on it now...Don't, because the solid mud can only make the creature inside survive 122-125 hundred years. The mud will freeze them, so they can have a narrow chance of survival." explained Steven as he took out his inventions from his bag.

He took a deep breath and whispered, 'Here goes nothing' then he sprayed the mud spray onto the two little Sinosauropteryxs. Then they froze into mud statues in 5 seconds.

"Let's escape now before it's too late!' Kyle reminded Steven, and they climbed up the cave. When they went back to the surface of the cave and saw there were huge dinosaur foot tracks that went deeper into the cave.

"This is a great chance to escape. Let's sprint back to the time machine-where is it?"

"Don't worry, I've put a tag on the time machine. We can locate the area of the machine. You can see it on your watch. They followed their watches to the time machine.

"So, it should be here-but where is it?" said Kyle worriedly.

"Don't freak out yet. Before we went out, I pressed the hidden button, just in case the dinosaurs chew the wires." Steven said proudly as he pressed the 'Show' button and the time machine popped out of thin air.

"Wow, that was impressive!" exclaimed Kyle. Steven pressed a few buttons on the round thin panel. All of a sudden, the deserted desert turned to a thin glass tube. As they raised up the pitch-black tube filled with sparkling tiny stars, red and yellow smoke filled the tube, but this time it felt like a million years to arrive back to 3023.

"Uhh, we finally arrived. Is there something wrong with your time machine?" said Kyle, annoyed.

"No..." said Steven as the TV reporter cut him mid-sentence.

"-We have great news! A team of fossil hunters found two baby Sinosauropteryx fossils in a cave where trees and rocks blocked the entrance. They have also found giant tracks leading dippers into the cave. We will do more research about that. Thank you for your time." announced the reporter.

"Did we make that fossil?" asked Kyle.

"Yes, kind of ... " said Steven.

"What do you mean we created two fossils?" Kyle asked, shocked.

"Yes, we created history," said Steven delightedly.

# New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

S.K.H. Kei Yan Primary School, Cheuk, Wing Yan - 10

The golden morning light was streaming through the window, filling the warm and cozy living room with a warm aura. On top of the table, ingredients were placed one row on the other; vegetables, spices, meats-a whole assortment nicely organized. Mom prepared a feast for the guests. The room wall filled with the aroma of garlic, ginger, fresh meat promising to make every single dish delightful. "Mei Mei! ", called mother. "Can you bring me the peas? " Mei Mei sighed. She rolled her eyes and waddled over to the table, snatching the bowl of peas and tossing it to Mom.

"Here, " she grumbled, stomping over toward the couch.

She plopped down, turning the TV on to the news flickering on in front of her.

The news reporter appeared on screen. "Good morning, and welcome to today's top story. China has been slowly evolving into the gold medalist of fossil-hunting", she began, capturing Mei Mei's brother's attention. "What's this?" He jumped onto the couch, watching patiently.

News reporter: "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."

The two siblings leaned forward, intrigued. Flashed on the screen in front of them were images of ancient fossils and scientists at work, dusting off those delicate bones. "Sinosauropteryx, meaning 'Chinese reptilian wing' is a compsognathus dinosaur". They continued. "It was covered with a coat of very simple filament like feathers, Structures that indicate colouration have also been preserved in some of its feathers which makes the sinosauropteryx the first non-avialian dinosaurs where the color had been determined. The colouration includes mostly a red-brown color with alternating dark and light stripes on its tail." Photos of the sinosauropteryx began to flash across the screen. "Hey!" Mei Mei's brother exclaimed. "I have that dinosaur!" He rushed into his room, soon returning with a miniature figure of the feathered dinosaur. The details on the figure were exactly as the news reporter described. "That's really fascinating... bro" Mei Mei murmured. "Thanks to the farmer, a new species of titanosaur has recently been discovered, named the 'floravivensaurus'. It has an estimated length of 90 feet, making it one of the largest known titanosaur. This new species features a vibrant color palette, starting with dark forest green into a yellow green towards the head. It is a herbivore, mainly feeding on night branches and fruits, with its small herds." The reporter kept talking. "A new dinosaur?" Mei Mei asked, "That's interesting..." Suddenly, her brother's massive face popped up in front of her view. "When I grow up, I will discover many new dinosaurs! Rawr~!" Mei Mei nearly jumped out of her seat. "You? Discover dinosaurs? That's.." Mei Mei looked at her mom. "That's amazing!" Mei Mei pushed her brother's face out of the way, as she continued to watch the news, her eyes glued to the TV screen.

On a Wednesday morning, Mei Mei and her brother went off to school, their mom escorting them off with a kiss. "Don't forget your bag for the field trip!" mom reminded her. Excitement buzzed in the air as Mei Mei and her classmates trickled into the school bus. "Later on, when we arrive-" the teacher started "We will be put into pairs, but don't get your hopes too high! We will be pairing students from across grades" Mrs Chan smiled. Chatter came from every corner of the bus. "Today, we will all be able to dig up fossils like real paleontologists! Remember to follow the rules and keep safe. The morning light flowed into the bus, making Mei Mei half-blind. She closed the curtain and closed her eyes...

Mei Mei was woken by the sound of chatter and the teacher's voice, she carried an annoyed expression on her face. "Okay everyone! Grab your tools, head over there and get digging." She waddled out of the bus, tired, hungry, and angry. The teacher paired her up with her brother, ("Oh great..")as they went over to the dig site. After fifthteen minutes, the sun was melting her alive and she was exhausted. She looked around, all the students crouching on the dig site all looked exhausted, hopeless and soulless. "Teacher, can't we take a break?" She asked desperately. The teacher smiled.

"It's only been fifthteen minutes, you can wait." All of the students on the dig site sighed. They continued digging at the soil hopelessly. Mei Mei rolled around and lay flat on her back, her uniform now stained with dirt. "We're just slaves... Whats this?" She felt an uncomfortable bump in her back. She groped around the dirt, until eventually, something came out. Something that looked... like a small fossil? "Teacher teacher!!! I've found something!" She kicked dirt behind her, rushed towards the teacher, and held out the fossil. "I see you've found a fossil!" Mrs Chan smiled warmly. She started whispering to other teachers on duties. Annoyed, Mei Mei turned to look at the suffering students. "We have a trip again next year, don't we?" she thought to herself. "Mei Mei, you can keep this, I suppose. Good job!" Mrs Chan handed the fossil out to her. Mei Mei grinned. She snatched the fossil and dashed towards her brother. Her brother stared at it, fascinated. "You can keep it if you want, I have no care for it." She said, as if her brother were a peasant. A wide smile spread across her brother's face and she handed it to him. As if her soul had been sucked away once again, she started digging at the ground, thinking of the times where she would just sit on the couch, watch TV, and eat snacks. Those were the best times.

Eventually, after alot more digging and alot more fossils, it was time for lunch. Mei Mei and her friends picked a spot under a big tree, set up the picnic mat, and started devouring the food. They exchanged stories and giggles, and even sang some songs. Mei Mei couldn't wait to get home to tell her Mom everything that had happened.

As they packed up to head home, Mei Mei felt grateful. She knew this would be a day that she would cherish forever, filled with laughter, learning, discovery, and the magic of dinosaurs.

#### "Frozen in Time: The Pterosaur's Legacy"

S.K.H. St Peter's Primary School, Yeung, Hoi Ching - 10

"This exhibition is wonderful. How did you manage to do it?" Journalists were eager to talk to me, but I went moodily into an empty room and closed the door behind me. Nobody knows what happened six months ago, why or how I appeared with a pile of fossils and bones, or why I organised this huge dinosaur exhibition. Yes, I am an ordinary archaeologist; my daily work involves digging up fossils and bones. Sometimes, if we were lucky, we could discover one or two fossils a month. However, my colleagues always asked me: why were so many fossils discovered at once, and all by one person? I cannot explain; after all, no one will believe me. They would think I'm mad. But it's real, I thought bitterly.

"Found anything?" a voice called out. "Nope," I responded. We were digging for fossils under the blazing sun. Pits had been dug on the ground for us to excavate, and I was digging like mad in my pit. "Anything? Anything?" the others were taking a break, so I was alone in the pit, digging away. A rocky corner appeared beneath the sand. Shoveling a shovelful of sand away, "is it a fossil, or an ordinary stone?" I asked myself. After ten more minutes of digging, it still looked like a rock. I noticed a patch that looked like wood; the pattern was different from the surrounding rock. Perhaps it was a plant fossil and I lifted it up!

Suddenly, I had the feeling of being squeezed into a dark, narrow tube, twirling in the air. The moment before plunging into darkness, I saw a small pit under the fossil with frost inside. Twenty seconds later, I saw light. The sandy pits had disappeared. Tall trees and strange ferns appeared instead. "Is this some kind of jungle?" I wondered, rubbing my eyes – but I had wings instead of human hands. Just then, a robotic voice echoed in my mind: "Liaoning, two hundred thirty million years ago, Dinosaur Age." "Who's talking?" I said loudly, but I realised I was roaring, not speaking human language. I looked around and saw a little pond. I hastily ran to it. Using it as a mirror, I peered over to look at my reflection. It clearly showed the appearance of a pterosaur in teal. Did this mean I was a pterosaur now?

Even though it's unbelievable, I still confronted this reality. It seemed like I traveled through time and turned into a pterosaur. "If I'm really a pterosaur, I should know how to fly. Why not try?" I said thoughtfully.

I stretched my wings, and repeated the steps in my heart: leap high, flap wings... Ten seconds later, I leaped as high as I could, then stretched out my long wings, flapped one, two, three times. I was flying! I spread out my wings like a hang glider, gliding at a terrific speed. The warm sun shone brightly on my feathers. The wind blew in my face, stroking my head. I landed.

Behind me, the leaves of bushes rustled. The fluttering of wings approached slowly. I turned around, facing the bushes vigilantly. Like a flash of lightning, two pterosaurs zoomed out. After they saw me, they relaxed. "Oh, darling, where did you go?" The lead pterosaur hugged me tightly. "Mom was so worried about you!" She scolded the other pterosaur, "I told your dad to search here for about ten times! He insisted you definitely wouldn't be here," he forced an apologetic smile. It seemed I had met my first pterosaur parents. "Let's return home," the pterosaur mother suggested. I reached for her wing, and as she took flight, my father followed closely behind.

Fifteen minutes later, we arrived a big cave entrance. They led me inside. The cave was simple; it only had a stone stove and a pot. Pieces of tree bark were laid on the ground. I suppose it's used as mattresses. "What's for dinner?" my mom asked. "Anything," I murmured. Ten minutes later, the pot was bubbling on the stove. Mom was mixing the contents in the pot, but I was thinking. Why would I time travel? How did I do it? How can I go back to the modern world?

After dinner, Mom and Dad slept. I laid on the tree bark, thinking deeply. Suddenly, an icy breeze blew in. I shivered. Mom and Dad woke up too. We ran out of the cave. It's colder outside. As the temperature dropped and dropped, my heart sank. "Ice Age..." the robotic voice again, a sound like thunder. In the blink of an eye, big crowds of dinosaurs were running and I was pushed by them into a pond. The temperature was dropping at a horrible speed. The last thing I heard was: "To my dear daughter: If she can stay alive, tell the others what she had experienced!"

Thunk.

I opened my eyes. I was lying in a small pit. It was wet beside me. What happened? I saw my body – I'm no longer a pterosaur. I climbed out of the pit. The familiar fossil came into my view. I suddenly understood what had happened.

"Miss Yeung, could you accept our interview, please?" A sharp knocking interrupted my thoughts. I sighed. After I awoke, I knew these: I was frozen for millions of years, and when I lifted the fossil, the sunlight melted the ice. After that, I found piles of fossils around the pit. Two of them must be my "Mom and Dad". Even though we had met for not even a whole day, we were still like a real family. "To my dear daughter: If she can stay alive, tell the others what she had experienced!" echoed in my mind.

"Mom, Dad, your daughter can finally fulfill your wish. I'm sorry to keep you waiting," I said silently in my heart.

Thinking of this, I gripped the handle of the door, closed my eyes and... stepped out.

## New Tales of China's Dinosaur

The International School of Macao, Guan, Sing Yuet Constance – 10

Oliver's lips curled into an enthusiastic grin as he skipped forward excitedly to get a better view of the Shoushan mountain in Liaoning. This is it, he thought. He turns around to face his best friend Adrian who was still slowly making his way towards Oliver.

"Hurry up," Oliver yelled impatiently as he crossed his arms and tapped his foot. "We were given only thirty minutes for this! Let's make it count!"

"Thirty minutes?!" Adrian clarified, trying to hide the lingering fear and hesitance in his mind by acting shocked. "How are we expected to visit the entire mountain in a span of thirty minutes?! Is Thomas crazy?"

"Don't tell him this," Oliver said, looking around the area surrounding them to check if anyone, more specifically, Oliver's older brother Thomas, could hear their conversation. "But, I have decided to trick him by telling him that we're just looking for the nearby bathroom. If he had known where we were TRULY planning on heading to, he would call us insane and continue on with taking us back to the hotel."

"Why? Because you ARE crazy! You're crazy for-" Adrian paused and stared at the Shoushan mountain in awe. Wow... he mouthed. He tried his best to hide the wonderstruck look on his face from Oliver, but his widened eyes were giving it all away. "The real Shoushan mountain..."

"I told you that you would like it," Oliver smirked, slamming his hand on his best friend's shoulder. "Now you know that I'm ALWAYS right."

Oliver smiled as he observed the splendid view of the afternoon in Liaoning from the Shoushan mountain. Walking beside him was Adrian who already seemed enervated.

"I wish I had brought my water bottle with me," Adrian said with a raspy voice, wiping the sweat away from his forehead with the back of his hand. "If only you had told me that we'd be climbing this mountain for so long before we headed out of the hotel. You're actually willing to skip lunch for this?"

"We get lunch everyday," Oliver replied, snapping out of his thoughts. "But we don't get to climb a mountain in Liaoning everyday! This could be the first and last time we even climb a mountain in China! This is a special opportunity!"

"That doesn't change the fact that I'm tired," Adrian mumbled under his throat.

"Of course you're tired from-" Oliver tripped over the hard part of what seemed like pebbles to him before completing his sentence. Adrian couldn't help but giggle softly as Oliver tried to pull himself up. "What are you laughing at?"

"An egoistic ten year old kid tripping because of some tiny.... pebbles." Adrian taunted as his voice eventually became more hushed by the second. He squinted at the "pebbles" before kneeling down and feeling the texture of them as Oliver slowly stood up. "Those aren't pebbles... "

"Oh yeah? What else could they be?" Oliver snapped back, backing off from the tiny "pebbles" on the ground."

"This part of the 'pebbles' is... soft," Adrian commented as he examined the "pebbles" conscientiously. "And this... thing has a really odd shape... could it be a fossil?"

"You're kidding? Fossils?" Oliver laughed, giving Adrian a look saying I'm not buying it. "You'd have to be in a really special place to find fossils. Dinosaur bones are buried too deep for a lazy child like YOU to find it."

"Fossils aren't bones," Adrian said in response while looking around his surroundings for materials that could help him separate the rock with an odd shape of... maybe a dinosaur's bone on it. "They're objects that form once the sediment around the actual bone turns into rock before the actual bone dissolves. Also, for your information, Liaoning is already a very special province of China and it's good enough for professional fossil hunters."

Oliver watched anticipatorily as Adrian lifted up a hefty rock he found sitting on the ground in silence.

"How do you know if Liaoning is already good enough for professionals to find fossils?" Oliver asked, hoping to prove Adrian wrong for once.

"I know it because a fossil of a feathered dinosaur was found by farmers in LIAONING, and its name, SINOSAUROPTERYX means the first CHINESE dragon feather," Adrian answered, smirking.

"Yeah," Oliver muttered while doing a dramatic eye roll. "Whatever your little books tell you I guess."

"I can't wait to show this to my parents!" Adrian said proudly as he continued skipping, holding the fossil he had found. "Come on, let's make our remaining fifteen minutes on this mountain count, Oliver!"

"Oh, so now you're motivated to climb this mountain," Oliver smirked before following behind Adrian, proud that his assumptions were finally right for once. "I told you that you would like this."

# Fiction Group 3



# Lost Worlds, New Dawns

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\*\*\*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\*\*\*

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

\*\*\*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Darkness.

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

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

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

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

# The Last of Their Kind

Diocesan Girls' School, Lo, Ellis – 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Remember when Cheng got stung by a prickly bush?"

"He was doing his business at that time!"

"Also, when Ming broke his teeth!"

"Hey! I thought it was a berry; I didn't know it was a pebble."

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

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

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

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

On the fateful day, all seven sinosauropteryxs were foraging for food in a wide valley when the sky flashed and the Earth rumbled violently, knocking Cheng off his feet. "We have to run!" Cheng panicked.

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

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

"That isn't a sun." Zhi whispered.

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

"I'll...roar at the sky, a hundred percent success rate so far." Guan shrugged.

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

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

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

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

## I See Her

Dulwich College Beijing, Guo, Catherine – 12

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

I have always known.

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

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

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

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

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

I have always known.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And it begins.

"I am the hand that molds earth together.

I am the breath that lights up the stars."

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

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

Tabitha's breath catches.

It continues.

Its voice softer, touched by sadness. "My kind are forgotten, like dust on windowsills.

Yet the egg you carry is a token of hope, a promise.

A reminder of what we ought to become."

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

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

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

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

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

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

It roars. With strength. With power.

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

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

"Why was I the bearer of the egg?"

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

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

It triggers me.

And so I float towards Tabitha.

I whisper in her ear:

The words of wisdom:

Of how,

"Courage, responsibility, and respect,

Are the three key aspects,

That guard the door to the unknown."

Of how,

"Through your mother,

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

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

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

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

You are your mother's daughter. You are bright, and you are strong."

# Legend of the Dinosaur Academy

ESF Sha Tin College, Shi, Iris Sun – 12

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

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

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

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

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

The Dinosaur Academy.

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

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

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

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

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

The silence was broken only by the faint crackling of distant lava. Then, volunteers began to step forward.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Unless you can grow wings, that's a bad idea," Jiang snorted. "Maybe Gui can leave us here."

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

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

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

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

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

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

As they neared the fissure, the forest gave way to a barren wasteland. The air was thick with ash, and the ground radiated unbearable heat. It seemed to stretch endlessly, glowing with molten lava that hissed and bubbled.

Dongi surveyed the scene. "We'll redirect the lava into that canyon. Build a barrier strong enough to hold it back."

"We're building... what, a dam?" Jiang asked incredulously. "You've seen the lava, right?" Dongi's tone was firm. "Unless you have a better idea, start clearing debris."

The team worked tirelessly. Chuan hauled massive boulders under Tao's direction, while Gui zipped overhead, scouting for cracks. Psitta tied vines, her cheerful chatter a sharp contrast to the tense atmosphere. "If this works, we'll call it Psitta's Perfect Dam!" she joked.

"Please, shut up," sighed Dongi.

"Another crack on the left!" Gui called, darting back toward Dongi.

Just as the barrier neared completion, the ground shook violently. Lava surged forward. "It's going to breach!" Tao cried, her voice steady but urgent.

"Hold your ground!" Dongi barked, though his voice betrayed tension.

Psitta darted forward, her energy undeterred. "We can funnel it here!" Using vines and stones, she created a makeshift channel, slowing the flow.

But it wasn't enough. Tao's voice rang out, sharp and urgent. "We need to collapse that ridge to redirect the flow! Quickly!"

"Impossible," Jiang growled, then exhaled sharply. "But I'll do it."

With a fierce determination, he charged toward the ridge, his claws ripping into the unstable ground like the predator he was. Gui zipped after him, her wings a blur as she darted around the falling debris. "You're not doing this alone!" she shouted, adrenaline surging through her.

The ridge trembled under Jiang's relentless strikes, rocks shuddering and dust swirling. With a final, earth-shaking blow, the rock gave way, collapsing in a thunderous crash. Debris tumbled down, cascading into the molten lava below, diverting its fiery path into the canyon.

The last echoes of destruction faded, and the fissure took its last rasping breaths before that waned as well. The five of them stood there, triumphant, and began their slow return by land to the academy. Exhaustion and silence dominated their journey. But when they reached the lush green forest once again, Psitta's chirpy voice broke the stillness. "We make a good team, don't we? I mean, aside from Jiang being a grump half the time."

Gui fluttered down to land beside Chuan. "She's right, you know. Grumpy or not, Jiang, you pulled through."

Jiang rolled his eyes but said nothing. It was Tao who spoke next, her soft voice carrying strength. "Without everyone's efforts, we wouldn't have made it. Chuan's strength,

Psitta's ideas, Dongi's leadership, Gui's quick thinking... even Jiang's courage. It all mattered." As they reached the academy gates, Professor Lufeng awaited them, her gaze scanning the

team's weary faces. For a moment, she softened and told them how proud she was.

"You've all exceeded expectations," she said. "Not just in strength or skill, but in spirit. The academy stands because of your resilience and teamwork."

The once-mismatched group, now bonded by their shared trial, became legends at the Dinosaur Academy—a tale of courage, ingenuity, and the power of working together.

# The Red Envelope

ESF West Island School, Lee, Claire - 12

Fern didn't need to be reminded of the address that her father had texted her. She knew it all too well already. It was the home of her childhood.

She walked up the stairs to the patio, an amber glow lighting up in the sky behind her. Fern smiled wistfully, then removed the rarely-used hidden key from under the corner of the cheerful welcome mat, brushing off months of dust to restore its original luster.

Fern had just visited her father, Evan B. Wilder, a wealthy icon in his industry. Outside of his field, he was little-known. His opulence was a mystery, even to his own daughter - the very person whom most of the fortune was bequeathed to. Fern's father had made it clear that he didn't want to concern her about such matters, even though was more than ready to hear what he had to say.

And he didn't have much time to say it.

Evan Wilder had just been relocated to a private ward in the hospital – he had been diagnosed with an illness, presumably decades of work taking a toll on him. Professionals had informed Fern that her father's chances of living another dozen months were slim. Since he didn't have much time left, she had returned to her childhood abode to stay nearby.

She unlocked the door, which creaked in protest after years of use. She stood on the threshold and inhaled deeply, taking in the scent of wood and the fragrance of late summer flowers.

Something caught her eye. A crimson envelope was barely poking out from under the front door. It had likely been slid under the door . . . which was odd considering there was a mailbox outside.

Curiosity piqued, Fern set her bags down, picked the envelope up, and headed to the dining table. It couldn't be addressed to her - for years, the only resident of the house had been her father.

The name on the back was Evan Wilder.

She fumbled to unseal it. Out fell a handwritten note and a magazine article on pterosaurs discovered in Liaoning. Confused, Fern proceeded to read the note, hoping it would offer more information.

#### Evan, let's talk - tomorrow at 11AM

It was surely from a friend of her father's - only, who?

Fern attempted to turn on the computer on the desk, which remained stubbornly dead. She noticed a pale yellow Post-It note tacked to the screen. *Call Justin Barret*.

Oh! - she remembered Justin Barret. An acquaintance of her father's, whom Fern had met some five years ago. He was a dino specialist - perhaps he would help her make sense of the cryptic message. She would go see him tomorrow morning, she decided.

Even so, Fern couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

Tension prickled in the air.

The house no longer felt warm and inviting.

The following morning, Fern rapped on a semi-translucent glass door. The plaque fixed to the door identified it as the office of Dr Justin Barret, PhD in palaeontology.

"Come in."

She steeled herself and entered the room. Sitting primly in a swivel chair was a man in his forties. His lined face wore his typical grave expression.

"Ms Wilder." He spoke in a curious manner - monotone, in a way that made everything a statement.

"Hello, Dr Barret. I believe you knew my father?"

"Certainly," he replied, remaining taciturn.

"This envelope came yesterday for him. It contains an unsigned note and a magazine clipping about the pterosaurs of Liaoning. I've no idea who the sender is. I was wondering if you did." She dropped the ruby envelope onto his desk.

His expression remained impassive, but his hooded eyes betrayed surprise.

"Perhaps the sender prefers to stay anonymous. Have you asked your father?"

She took a deep breath, "My father is on his deathbed, and I've moved into his home. He's in no state to be questioned about such things."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Ms Wilder," said Barret sincerely.

Silence.

"Well... as for the magazine, the Liaoning Province is a dino excavation hotspot. Recently, new species of pterosaurs have been found there. For example, the *sinosauropteryx* and the *Chuanqilong*."

"Thank you, Dr Barret. I should be on my way now."

"Goodbye, Ms Wilder."

Fern was about to unlock the front door when she got a call.

"Hello?" she replied breathlessly.

"This is Pine Grove Hospital. Are you Ms Fern Wilder?"

Her heart dropped. "Yes," she whispered, clutching her cellphone.

"We're sorry to inform you that your father has passed."

She heard nothing more.

Fern collapsed on the front porch. Objects shattered. She could no longer discern reality from nightmares. She had lost her grip on everything. She didn't know how long it was until her head stopped spinning.

Colours flashed in her eyes, her cheeks heating up, a hum in her ears. The only thing she registered were her shaking hands, nails chipped. A successful man's intrepid, resourceful daughter appeared to be a homeless, derelict person. All she could do was stumble down the pavement, dazed.

Her feet led her to a glass door.

"Ms Wilder?" Dr Barret looked up from his desktop screen.

"My father's dead."

His face changed, and for the first time, she noticed the wicked upwards curve of his lips, the slight smirk they betrayed; the abhorrent cold stare of his hooded eyes.

"I suppose it's time to tell you."

"Tell me what?" demanded Fern. "He's gone now."

His voice was clear and icy, "Do you know anything about his career?"

"He's in business," responded Fern sharply.

"His business is dinosaurs. Evan Wilder owns an excavation site in Liaoning, China, and has been reaping the rewards for years. Now that he is... not with us anymore, that excavation site will be entrusted to you... his only heir, who has no interest in dinosaurs. What a waste."

Realization dawned on her, and with it, horror.

"You've... been sending my father these... notes? For this excavation site?"

His eyes darkened.

Instead of answering, he held up a carmine-red envelope.

# I, Dinosaur

ESF West Island School, Yu, Theodora - 10

The night was dark, a surreal ill-lit darkness – as though a flask of jet-black ink had spilled across the sky. But beneath the moonless black, a sprinkling of little lanterns quivering with fire, like an old grandma's fist trembling at the touch of her aged mao-bi. Below the light, dwellings swarm with families dancing, singing, sharing stories around the flame.

\*\*\*

"... preserve culture, let us retain the tradition of the Anyang people of Shang dynasty; of the Zhou dynasty, and of the final script chosen in Qin." Master Zhen declares triumphantly, passing fragments of bone, stone and rice paper around the room.

I hold my shard of bone above the fire. It seems to illuminate the fragment's cracked surface, which is swiftly filled by my queer anticipation. It is a turtle shell. Inscribed upon the shell's surface are shallow grooves, arranged in a pattern like no other knows. I run my fingers along them in wonder, feeling each, and every delicate line. "An oracle bone... " I utter softly to myself, eves widening in wonder as I behold the fragment.

Zhen tells us to follow our hearts and let them lead our brush along the ragged edges of bone. We begin to write. I drag my maobi along my coarse oracle bone, boisterously glue my eyes shut and scatter ink across the surface. When my eyes flutter open, I see the word '龙' vigorously marked on the bone. My heart races as I squint at my product. 龙? This character has always fascinated me. As I carefully trace each stroke, I notice something peculiar. The sweeping curves and sharp angles of the character begin to shift in my mind, transforming into a shape that resembles...a dinosaur footprint I saw in one of my books. My mind wanders to the fossils in the stories I was told—particularly the footprints of dinosaurs embedded in ancient stone. Fossils, too, tell stories, but their narratives are often silent, etched in the rock like whispers of a time long gone. The delicate ridges and impressions left by a dinosaur's foot reveal not just the size or shape of the creature but also hints its existence to the world it once inhabited.

My brush floats above the oracle bone, and I imagine the character coming to life, transforming into a dinosaur tracking through a prehistoric landscape. I shut my eyes again. The chinese character contorts in my mind and twists into great herds of dinosaurs grazing peacefully, their scales glistening in shades of emerald and gold. I envision the mighty Sinosauropteryx—the feathered dinosaur that had captured my imagination. Its delicate feathers, like a painter's brush strokes, painted the air with vibrant colours.

By midnight, as I drift into sleep, the boundaries between reality and my dreams begin to blur. I can almost see the fossilised footprints leading away from where I lay. I feel a warm, gentle pull, as if the universe is guiding me to a different time and place. Soon, I find myself standing in a lush, prehistoric landscape, the ground beneath my feet, soft and inviting. Towering ferns and towering trees surround me, their trunks thick and aged, reaching high into the sky. The air is alive with the mere sounds of chirping insects and rustling leaves, the familiar, yet foreign melody of nature. And then, there it is—its vibrant feathers glistening like jewels in the dappled sunlight. A majestic Sinosauropteryx stands before me. I feel a mix of awe and disbelief, my heart pounds deeply in my chest. The creature is smaller than I had imagined, but its beauty overpowers its size. Each feather shimmers in shades of orange and cream, and its eyes sparkle with curiosity.

"Hello," I whisper, my voice barely breaks the enchanting silence. I am mesmerized, unable to take my eyes off the peculiar creature.

To my utter disbelief, the figure huffs, its voice resonating like wind through the trees, "Child, I once walked these lands where you stand. You must preserve our stories for the decades which follow."

Wonder, reverence, and a profound sense of responsibility wells through me. The Sinosauropteryx drew closer, its feathers gently touching my arm in a soft caress, almost reassuring.

Night after night, my slumbers in the prehistoric landscape become so alive and real in my imagination. The Sinosauropteryx is my regular companion, taking me through forests and across rivers teeming with life, telling stories of survival and adaptation. Each evening, I come back into my world, my heart after with purpose, ready for oracle bones to trace the wisdom of my sleep.

One night, I sit beside the shimmering river with the Sinosauropteryx, and notice something glimmering in the water. It is a small, smooth stone, reflecting the light like a jewel and attracting my attention. The dinosaur nudges it gently with its beak, encouraging me to pick it up. As I hold the stone in my hand, I realize it is not just a rock—but a fossilized feather, perfectly preserved.

"This feather... was once mine" whispers the Sinosauropteryx, its eyes speaking volumes of some ancient wisdom. "Long ago, I soared through these skies. Now, I'm in the trees, I'm in the breeze, my footsteps lay on the ground."

My breath catches in my throat. It dawns on me that this creature, of which I had dreamed, is not a figment of my imagination – but the remains of a spirit that was once attached to our land.

"What happened to you?" I inquire, my voice trembles.

The creature looks me in the eye, "My kind faced great challenges. As the world changed, so did we. The feather in your hand is a reminder of our existence and the fragility of life."

Abruptly, I feel a strange sensation wash over me, a tingling in my fingertips that spread through my body. The ground begins to shudder, and the vibrant landscape around us warps and twists, colors blending in a surreal, foggy haze.

I shriek, panic rising in my chest.

Before I can fathom what is occurring, a blinding light envelopes me. When it fades, I find myself back in my bedroom, the familiar sights of my nightstand and plush toys come into view. Yet, the feather still lays in my palm, and there is a queer feeling that something is... off.

My grandfather storms into my doorway, but his expression is strange, his eyes wide with fear. "Son, you've opened a door that shouldn't have been opened!"

Confusion floods through my mind and flows into my face.

"The feather! It's... a portal." he exclaims. "You've brought something back!"

Just then, a small rustling murmurs from the corner of my room. My heart races as I turn to see a shadow moving. To my horror, a small, feathered creature emerges, but it is nothing like my friend, the Sinosauropteryx. This creature is grotesque, its feathers matted and its eyes glow an unnatural red.

I gasp and step back. Grandfather squeaks as the creature lets out a low growl, and I feel a wave of impending dread wash over me. I clutch the fossilized feather tightly. As I stand frozen, the creature begins to morph, it shapeshifts into a bizarre hybrid of dinosaur and something utterly alien.

"Quickly, child. Close your eyes and think of the world you came from!" Grandfather urges. "You have to banish it!"

With my heart pounding, I squeeze my eyes shut, recalling the lush landscapes. But as I concentrate, the creature lunges forward, and the candle flickers out.

When I open my eyes again, I am alone in my room, the feather still in my hand, drenched in an eerie silence. Has it all been a dream? What have I unleashed?

As I gaze around my room, uncertainty gnaws at me. And then, from the corner of my eye, I see it. A flicker of movement. I turn, only to find my own reflection in the mirror staring wide-eyed, ghostly-pale back at me.

But it's not just my reflection. It's... different. My eyes glow with the same eerie red as the creature. I reach up to touch my face, and to my horror, I find small, feather-like patterns beginning to form on my skin.

"No, no, no!" I whisper, backing away, panic surging through me. "This can't be happening!"

I feel a strange compulsion, as if the feather in my hand is calling to me, urging me to embrace this transformation. I stumble back, my heart races as a deep, guttural growl escaped my lips...one that didn't sound human.

I am becoming the very thing I had sought to understand. A twisted blend of boy and dinosaur. I haven't just opened a door; I have become the portal, trapped in an existence where the past and present collides.

Then, the feather slowly dissolves in my hand...

#### Mountains and Mysteries

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lui-Schwille, Maia – 12

Astrid had always felt a magnetic pull towards the mountains. Growing up in a small town on the coast, she'd spent countless hours exploring the crags and cliffs, often with a tattered old climbing guidebook in hand. Everyday, she found a new way, struggled up a different path, but the spectacular view made all the effort worth it. With light brown hair that danced in the wind and sea green eyes that sparkled with determination, she was a self-taught climber, learning the ropes through trial and error, passion and perseverance.

Ever since she could talk, the folk stories and traveller's legends of Yunnan's Earth Forest captivated her – an otherworldly landscape known for its towering limestone pillars and unique rock formations. The prospect excited her, not just the climb itself, but for the sense of adventure. She had also heard of strange fossils being found, dinosaur fossils in fact, and that made the wait all the more unbearable. Her parents had always been supportive, and now they were allowing her to go all the way to Yunnan, that was some serious trust they had in Astrid. All they'd asked of her was to come back in one piece! At seventeen, she already began preparing: studying maps, watching documentaries, and meticulously packing her gear, swearing she would return, full of stories and adventures.

Finally, on the morning of her eighteenth birthday, she set out for Yuanmou, heart racing with excitement. As she arrived, the sight took her breath away. The Earth Forest spread out before her, a labyrinth of stone. The sun bathed the landscape in golden light, the air buzzed with the sounds of chirping birds and rustling leaves. It was a dream come true for anyone.

Astrid began her ascent with a mix of caution and exhilaration. She navigated the first few hundred feet with ease, her fingers finding purchase on the limestone. The view above was stunning, with twisting spires resembling ancient, petrified trees. As she scaled the rough rocks, she felt a deep connection to the earth beneath her and the sky above.

Hours passed, and she decided to take a break. Perched precariously on a narrow ledge, she took a sip of water and looked over the vast expanse. As she scanned the horizon, something caught her gaze – a glimmering object embedded in the rock face below. Amber, larger than any seen before, catching the sunlight, emitting a soft orange glow.

Curiosity took hold of her, she carefully descended to examine the amber closer. It was stuck in a stone crevice, with a wide, flat surface facing out. Strangely, there seemed to be nothing there, but Astrid felt the need to stay near it. So, she set up camp on a ridge and began cooking dinner.

The sun started to set, casting a warm glow of coral reds; wisteria purples; vermillion oranges; marigold yellow and so much more. This place was truly incredible. While she was preparing for bed, something tugged at her mind, like something was missing. It kept her up past dusk, sp she grabbed her climbing belt and torch, and stepped outside. Nothing looked amiss, but Astrid couldn't shake the feeling, so, to clear her mind, she decided to do some climbing.

Somehow, she ended back up at the amber, but this time as she approached, she caught a glimpse of something inside and gasped. As if by magic, the once empty amber had a creature in it, a dinosaur! Perfectly preserved – curled up, small feathered, and seemingly frozen in time. It was unlike any she'd seen on TV: this creature was no bigger than a Great Dane. Its vibrant colours were visible through the resin, and its wide, unblinking stare appeared to follow her.

Astrid's heart raced. She was witnessing something extraordinary, and as she leaned closer, putting a hand on the rock, she felt a small pulse emanating from the amber. It was alive. *How*? Her mind spun with questions, this dinosaur had been here for millions of years, yet no had ever found it. *Why me*? *Out of all the people, why did I find you*? She thought, breath quickening; she was torn between excitement and fear. What had she stumbled across?

Suddenly, a cracking sound reverberated though the air. The amber began to fracture, sending shards flying. Astrid carefully backed away, instincts kicking in. The beast stirred, breaking free of its ancient prison. It stretched upwards, revealing a magnificent plumage that shimmered in the dim light. The colour shifted every few seconds, from deep midnight blues, to bright sea green. The dinosaur towered over her, much larger than what she'd been expecting. It blinked at her and for a moment, they locked eyes – human and reptile, separated by millions of years, yet united by this bizarre coincidence.

Astrid felt an unusual bond forming. She couldn't help but wonder if it had been waiting for someone to set it free. He let out a soft chirp, like a greeting. The world around faded away and all that mattered was the beautiful creature before her.

Reality snapped back like a boomerang as she realised, she could be in danger. The creature could be frightened or aggressive, and she was alone in an isolated forest. She took another step back, trying to gauge its demeanour. To her relief, it seemed more curious than hostile, tilting its head at her. Astrid knew she needed to move, so she turned and clambered over the ledge, hoping it would follow. Glancing back, she saw him climbing gracefully, leaping up beside her. He had strong, muscled legs, with a long tail and claws for grip.

"Okay little guy," she whispered, in awe and disbelief, "we're going to figure this out together."

With her heart pounding in her throat, Astrid started up the spires again, this time with the dinosaur keeping pace easily. It was so surreal – mountaineering alongside a creature that had roamed Earth millions of years ago. They reached a higher vantage point overlooking the sprawling forest, shining in the moonlight. The view was magnificent, but Astrid's mind was on her companion.

As they paused to catch their breath, Astrid took a moment to gather her thoughts. What to do with a dinosaur? There wasn't exactly a step-by-step tutorial, so she was on her own. She couldn't leave it there; the world needed to know. But what if they hurt him? It had been trapped for so long and now had a chance at freedom.

"We can't stay here forever," she said softly, "but where can I go?"

She decided to sleep on it, so she headed back to her tent, and immediately hopping onto her mattress, promptly falling asleep. Waking up at dawn, she changed, ate some food, and went outside. The dinosaur was impatiently waiting, eyes glinting as if to say, "what in the world took you so long?"

"Somebody was up early," she laughed. With an irritated dino watching her, she packed up camp and set off down the towers. His colour dulled and he seemed to flicker in and out of sight in the sun, threatening to disappear. As they climbed down, his form became clearer in the shade. No wonder I couldn't see him earlier, he's transparent in the day.

Finally, they reached the base of the limestone cliffs, the soft pastel sunrise painting the sky in a gorgeous array of colours: soft pastels, like delicate peach, blush pink, robin's egg blue, cerulean, accented by wisps of golden-yellow clouds. Astrid knew she would return – if only to protect her secret.

Together, they stepped through the brightening sky and into the canopied jungle, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead. But this was just the beginning.

# Feathers of Gold, Wings of Change

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Leung, Sin Ying Alicia – 14

The Gobi Desert was quiet as the team of paleontologists worked under the scorching sun. Dr. Mei Zhang, a rising star in the field, was at the center of the dig, meticulously brushing sand off what appeared to be a new species of dinosaur fossil. Her assistant, Kai, crouched nearby, cataloging fragments they had unearthed over the past week.

"This one's unusual," Mei murmured, running her fingers along the fossil's intricate ridges. The fossil seemed to shimmer faintly under the light. Feathers—long, delicate, and iridescent—protruded from its skeletal remains.

"Another feathered dinosaur?" Kai asked, glancing over her shoulder.

"No," Mei said, shaking her head. "It's different. Look at the structure of these wings. These aren't just for gliding. This one might have flown like no other dinosaur we've seen before." As she spoke, the ground trembled.

"What's happening?" Kai shouted, grabbing onto a nearby rock to steady himself.

Before Mei could answer, the fossil began to glow. A brilliant beam of light shot into the sky, illuminating the desert in hues of gold and green. Mei and Kai stumbled backward, shielding their eyes. When the light faded, standing where the fossil had been was a creature that defied explanation.

It was a dinosaur, but unlike anything in the fossil record. Its plumage shimmered like molten gold, its wings outstretched, and its eyes—sharp, intelligent, and impossibly old—seemed to pierce through Mei's very soul.

Kai gasped. "Is this... real?"

The dinosaur emitted a series of trills and clicks, its movements graceful and deliberate. It tilted its head, studying Mei with curiosity.

"I don't know," Mei whispered, her voice trembling. "But it's alive."

The creature took a step forward, and nudged Mei gently with its beak before letting out a piercing cry that reverberated through the air. Suddenly, the ground beneath them gave way, revealing a vast subterranean cavern.

Kai grabbed Mei's arm. "Are we going down there?"

Mei's heart pounded. Every instinct told her this was a once-in-a-lifetime discovery. "We have to."

The creature leapt into the cavern, Mei and Kai scrambled down after it, their flashlights barely penetrating the cavern's depth. As they descended, they were met with a sight that left them speechless. The cavern was a hidden world, glowing with bioluminescent plants and filled with creatures long thought extinct. Dinosaurs of all sizes roamed freely—some small and agile, darting between glowing trees, others towering giants with scales that shimmered like the stars.

"An entire ecosystem," Mei breathed. "Untouched by time."

The golden dinosaur—whom Mei silently named Shenglong, or Sacred Dragon—led them to a central pool surrounded by carvings etched into the stone. The carvings told a story: a catastrophic event that had driven some dinosaurs to retreat into the Earth's depths, where they had adapted to survive, evolving alongside the mysterious energy that sustained this hidden world. "This is why they survived," Mei said, running her fingers over the carvings. "They found a way to adapt."

Kai pointed to a newer carving, one that depicted humans. "But why now? Why reveal themselves after millions of years?"

As if answering, Shenglong approached Mei and pressed its forehead against hers. A flood of images filled her mind—lush forests reduced to barren wastelands, oceans choked with plastic, skies clouded with smog. The dinosaurs had sensed the Earth's imbalance and emerged, not as invaders, but as guardians seeking to restore harmony.

Mei staggered back, overwhelmed. "They've been watching. They know what we've done to the planet."

Kai looked around at the thriving ecosystem. "They're showing us what balance looks like. They want us to learn."

The days that followed were a whirlwind. Mei and Kai documented everything, but they kept the discovery secret for now. Shenglong continued to guide them, revealing the intricate relationships that sustained the cavern's delicate balance.

One evening, as Mei sat by the glowing pool, Shenglong approached her again. It trilled softly, its eyes filled with an emotion Mei could only describe as hope.

"They're not here to blame us," she said aloud, as Kai joined her. "They're here to help us. But only if we're willing to change."

Kai nodded. "The question is, will humanity listen?"

Months later, after careful preparation, Mei unveiled her discovery to the world. The revelation of Shenglong and the hidden dinosaur sanctuary sparked global debate. At first, there was skepticism, then awe, and finally, a collective call to action.

Years passed, and the world began to change. Forests were replanted, oceans cleaned, and sustainable technologies flourished. Governments passed sweeping environmental protections, industries reengineered their practices to align with nature, and communities worldwide rallied to restore ecosystems that had been teetering on the brink of collapse. The dinosaurs were no longer just relics of the past but partners in shaping a sustainable future.

Mei had become a global figure, her work inspiring generations. Yet, she often felt the weight of the responsibility. On one of her visits to the sanctuary, she found Shenglong perched on a high ledge, watching the glowing river below. It looked at her as she approached, its golden feathers gleaming in the cavern's light.

"You seem troubled," Kai said, catching up to her.

Mei sighed. "We've made progress, but there's still resistance. Some people see the dinosaurs as threats, others as tools for profit. Not everyone understands the balance they represent."

Kai nodded. "Change takes time. But we're moving in the right direction."

Shenglong let out a low trill, its eyes fixed on Mei. It leaned forward, nudging her gently as if reassuring her. Mei smiled faintly, reaching out to touch its beak. "You've taught us so much," she said softly. "But the world is still fragile. There's so much more to do."

Shenglong suddenly spread its wings and leapt into the air, circling the cavern before diving toward the central pool. It dipped its claws into the water, sending ripples of light cascading across the surface. Other dinosaurs emerged from the shadows, their movements deliberate and synchronized, as if answering an unspoken call.

Kai frowned. "What's happening?"

Mei watched in awe as the dinosaurs began to move in patterns around the pool. It was as if they were performing a ritual, their cries and movements weaving together into something ancient and powerful. Shenglong returned to the ledge, gesturing toward the carvings. Mei followed its gaze, her breath catching as she noticed a previously hidden section of the carvings beginning to glow. The images depicted a catastrophic future—a barren Earth, devoid of life, with only shadows of humanity remaining. But alongside it was another vision: a flourishing planet, vibrant and green, where humans and dinosaurs coexisted in harmony.

"It's a warning," Mei murmured. "And a choice."

Kai stepped closer. "The future isn't set. They're showing us what could happen if we succeed—or if we fail."

The ritual sparked a renewed sense of urgency in Mei. She began traveling the world, sharing the dinosaurs' story not just as a scientist but as a messenger. She spoke to world leaders, to children in schools, to activists fighting for their communities. Shenglong often accompanied her, its presence a living testament to the bond between ancient and modern life.

But not everyone embraced the message. Mei had been speaking at a global summit when a group of protesters stormed the stage, accusing her of prioritizing the dinosaurs over human development. As tensions escalated, Shenglong stepped forward, its imposing form silencing the room. It let out a haunting cry that seemed to echo in the hearts of everyone present.

Mei seized the moment. "This isn't about choosing between humanity and the dinosaurs," she said, her voice steady. "It's about recognizing that we're part of the same story. We can't thrive without the Earth, and the Earth can't heal without us. Shenglong and its kind aren't here to take over—they're here to remind us of what we can become."

The room fell silent, and slowly, the tide began to turn.

Decades later, Mei stood on a hill overlooking a restored valley. Shenglong soared above, its golden feathers catching the light of the setting sun. Around her, children laughed as they planted trees, their parents guiding them with care. The air was fresh, the rivers clean, and the forests alive with the songs of birds and the calls of dinosaurs.

Kai joined her, his hair streaked with gray but his smile as vibrant as ever. "You did it," he said.

Mei shook her head. "We did it. All of us. Shenglong showed us the way, but it was humanity that chose to follow."

Shenglong landed nearby, its eyes meeting Mei's. She approached it, placing a hand on its beak. "Thank you," she whispered.

The dinosaur trilled softly, as if acknowledging her words. Then it spread its wings and took flight, disappearing into the horizon.

### Fossils of Love

St. Paul's Co-Educational College, Chow, Wing Cheung - 15

"Each footprint beholds a wish for love, that is the legacy of Shen Niao," the gravelly voice of the weathered elder echoed across the cavern, his voice barely louder than the crackling of the kindle between us. His spindly arm reached across the flames, slender fingers closing around the pebble next to me. He gazed intently into the blaze, the golden aurora twirling and convoluting, the auburn peaks rising and falling like currents of the resentful sea.

My gaze settled upon his weathered face, shadows prancing across his wizened features, caverns on his forehead narrowing and flattening, eyes ablaze with brilliant radiance as he murmured, "Alas, our world resents too much and loves too little."

We set off the next day, backpacks pulling at the muscles on our shoulders, each step extraordinarily heavy as the metal of our tools clanged against each other. The sun's radiance set our bodies ablaze, droplets slithering from our napes to our backs. The vast expanse of the desert filled me with a bizarre and sudden fear-as if the world would crumble beneath me if I dared to jump. Our boots scraped across the gravel and rocks under our feet, and we trudged along for seemingly forever until the ground beneath us started to darken, changing from a bland sepia to a slate grey. This was the infamous mark of Shen Niao, a "divine bird" in China-a colossal grey palm print in the middle of a desert, so large you had to use a drone to view it completely. Complete with knuckles, calluses and palm lines, the palm print was embedded on the surface of the desert, so ginormous it could only be made by a god. The heart line on the palm was completely unbroken-I am no expert palm reader, but I know enough to realise it signifies happiness and success. We are here in pursuit of the fossils of the Yunnanosaurus-specifically bits of the tailbone that had not been found before. To be exact, it's just the old man and his team who's doing the actual archaeology. I am here to write-my new novel is going to be based on China's dinosaurs.

As the team skipped along, every footstep bursting with elation, prattling on and on about the Yunnanosaurus, the Sichuan Plateaus and the Szechuanosaurus, I reached for the mini notebook in my jeans, its spine straining against my tight pocket. I had scrawled a mind map on dinosaurs and their symbolism in the world on the first page, but it was just some simple research on the Yunnanosaurus and its tailbone, the lines stretching out of the circled dinosaur aiming towards space, resembling the few sole bare trees I saw on the journey here, spears pointing up to the listless, monotonous sky. I watched as miles of ashen dirt rolled past beneath my feet, the desolation of the desert creeping up along my back, pounding an unsettling rhythm into my veins. The world was so huge for us, but dinosaurs could shadow a whole continent with the raise of a talon, cover planets with a brandish-such magnificent creatures were now buried deep in the ground, nothing but dust and ash. Finally, the harsh sound of rubber against gravel ceased, and it was replaced with the thump of backpacks against rock.

"Poke around if you like-we'll start digging in a minute!" one of the archeologists called, and I settled on a boulder nearby, the searing heat on my bottom nearly sending me toppling off the rock. I watched as they scrambled to nail tarpaulin onto the rubble, picking up toolboxes and unfastening equipment their holders, their movements synchronized even under the sun's blistering force. I yanked my pen from my back pocket, index finger tapping

against its rubber tube. Fossils...symbolism.... Static droned on and on in my mind as I wrinkled my brow and pondered long and hard about what themes my book was going to be about. I stared into space, watching the people down below shifting in and out of focus, little automobiles zooming in and out of my field of view. The old leader was hollering instructions, doing his best to drown out the clanking of the trowels and brushes. My mind kept wandering in circles, his voice astray in the sea of thoughts in my head, and I heard a persistent and forceful sound resonate, "Alas, our world resents too much and loves too little." The guttural, rasping voice sounded clear as day, and that was all I needed to start writing away.

The body of a creature will decompose into ash and dust, but the fossils will always remain, just like how love will pass down even when a person passes away. Love never really dies, it just stays buried like fossils, eternal and unfading, so you just need to do a little digging to find it. Moons will rise and set, tides will ebb and flow, but love remains. And when the veneer of humanity fades away, when all that remains is the bare essence of who we are, we all have the same human nature, the same ability to love, the same ability to be kind, and just like dinosaurs, people may seem unapproachable or brutal, but we are made of the same substances, we share the same roots, and in the end, humans and dinosaurs are still the same warm-blooded creatures that possess the ability to love. Even the idiom "love someone to their bones" shows our deep-rooted connection between love and the enduring nature of fossils. Just as fossils preserve the essence of ancient life, love encapsulates the essence of who we are, transcending time and space. Fossils are scattered all over the world, and the remnants of the same dinosaur can be found all across the continent, but if you have the patience to uncover them and piece them together, a complete body structure can be formed. Kindness can shine through in moments in our lives, both mundane and special, and if we piece these moments together, the entity of love is formed. Yes, we need to meticulously brush away dust and sediment to see love in our daily lives, but if you slow down and appreciate the beauty of life, it is easy to notice how everyone boils down to the same essence-love. To quote Ed Sheeran, "A life with love is a life that's been lived", the dinosaurs that had once walked the earth lie buried underground, but their fossils live on, symbolising the eternal and unwavering nature of love.

"Oi! Daniel! We found caudal vertebra number 57! First in the world!" I leapt up with a start, tearing towards the sky blue tarpaulin. The rounded, pearly white edges of the bone shone under the brilliant sun, perfectly well and undamaged. I picked up the fossil, a remnant of a life with love millions of years ago. The cool bone turned around in my palm, and I murmured under my breath, "The myth of Shen Niao is correct-love does exist here." I tucked the fossil away in an archaeologist's plastic bag, pulled out my spiral notebook, flipped to a new page and scratched with my ballpoint pen, "New tales of China's Dinosaurs-love is..."

# A Brother's Tragedy

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lau, Fong Hing – 13

Fluorescent lights flickered above us. The air was stale with a pungent stench of decaying specimens hovering above jars oozing with murky, ominous liquid. Papers were sprawled across the oblong tables, each page more intricately detailed than the previous, until black ink seemed to completely tattoo its surface like a swarm of dark ants.

Weijin leaned stiffly against the wall, eyebrows furrowed as if holding back a torrent of words. When he spoke, I was hunched over a microscope, examining a shard of fossil. I knew this would happen one day. It was inevitable.

"I don't belong here," Weijin snapped, clenching his knuckles until purple veins protruded from his taut skin. "I want to write. I'm not father and I don't have to be."

I straightened, eyes narrowing as I turned to face him.

"You're being selfish," Snarling, I gestured to the scattered papers. "This isn't about being father, Weijin. It's about continuing what he started. Do you think so little of the man who raised you?"

He parted his lips soundlessly. Through the palpable silence, I could faintly hear his haggard, shallow breaths.

"As expected," Harsh laughter tore from my mouth. The words were like liquid venom, spilling out before I could fully process what I said.

"You've always been a quitter, haven't you? You failed at school. You barely passed Gaokao. Now you're going to throw away father's sacrifices for some—some *stories*?"

A deafening crash echoed through the laboratory. Weijin violently swept a stack of books off the nearest table. They cascaded to the floor in a heap, spines cracking against the cold tiles. His arm, still hovering in the air, was quivering.

"You know nothing," He spat, voice hoarse with fury. Without looking back, he stormed out, the heavy door slamming shut behind him.

I stood still in momentary silence before scoffing incredulously. My gaze dropped to the pile of books on the floor, their pages splayed open like wounded birds.

Kneeling down, I picked up a book, wiping away a layer of dirt and grime that caked its cover. It was worn, with creases and faded lettering, but I immediately recognised the meticulous handwriting and dinosaur sketches. It was my father's journal.

As my fingers ran through the pages, the weight of my words finally began to settle in my chest, heavy and suffocating as a barrel of rocks.

The days in the lab morphed into an oppressive monotony, a constant repetition of waking up, eating cold leftovers, and conducting experiments that led to nowhere. Without Weijin guiding me, I felt like a lost sailor without his navigator.

Fragments of the Sinosauropteryx fossil lay scattered on the workbench, each delicate piece preserved in slabs of ancient sediment, as though they were trapped in time's unyielding grip. Farmers plowing their fields had unearthed wonders beyond imagination—feathered dinosaurs, winged reptiles, all of which had once roamed these lands. Yet as I scrutinized the rock, the questions the Sinosauropteryx posed eluded any possible solutions I proposed. The hours spent sketching diagrams, comparing skeletal

structures, poring over Father's notes, all led to doubtful hypotheses, ultimately resulting in an array of question marks.

Uncertainty clouded my thoughts. Through my mental fog, I often saw glimpses of Weijin, wild arms gesticulating at something obscured, imperceptible. Those were moments when the regret of not reconciling with him gnawed at me, an intangible claw of bitter guilt that dragged me deeper into the pit of apprehension. Despite his disinterest in science, he'd always had a knack for seeing patterns where I only saw chaos.

"Should've figured this out hours ago," he'd grumble with a slight smile gracing his lips, tapping the blackboard impatiently, pointing out what I had been oblivious to.

However, our paths had split, there was only myself to depend on now. I looked down and sighed. My notes were a mess of contradictions, my sketches littered with incomprehensible scribbles.

The Sinosauropteryx was a relic of the past, connecting the prehistoric predators to magpies outside my window. China was filled with untold stories, bubbling beneath soil fertile with rich history. And here I sat, staring at several rocks, unable to complete a single chapter.

I flipped through Father's journal again, its pages brimming with notes on dinosaur genetics. I held up a page with my fingertip. Paper had never felt so heavy.

A shrill, obnoxious ring vibrated through the air. I picked up my phone. "Hello?"

"This is a pre-recorded message from the police. Mr. Li Weijin was involved in a pedestrian accident and was struck by a vehicle. According to his emergency contacts, you are listed as his brother Mr. Li Xiaojin. Regrettably, his injuries were severe and paramedics could not save him. The police extend our deepest condolences for your loss. For further information, dial..."

My phone crashed onto the floor. The screen burst into glass shards, shattered beyond retrieval.

Days passed in a blur. I was disoriented, as if my consciousness had been cloaked beneath a veil, beneath the thick linen shroud my brother's body was wrapped in. The world had turned monochrome and lost all vibrancy.

A few months after his death, I opened the box containing Weijin's belongings. Inside, piles of artifacts and trinkets lay densely stacked upon each other. Waves of nostalgia hit me as I sifted through them, a bittersweet smile tugging at my lips, though a throbbing ache pulsed with every beat of my heart. I picked up a flimsy plastic dinosaur, fidgeting with it as I reminisced about the nights when we'd huddle under the blankets, stifling our giggles as we played with the toy dinosaurs.

Digging further into the pile, I noticed a folded parchment with my name written in bold black calligraphy wedged between two books. They were my father's journals; I hadn't expected Weijin, who had often regarded them with disdain, to have kept them in his possession.

Etched into the yellowing parchment was Weijin's handwriting—something I had often criticised as an unintelligible jumble. Now the familiar scrawl seems like sacred runes, an eccentric, original masterpiece.

I scanned through the letter, hands shaking. A tear slid down my cheek, leaving a blossoming dark bruise on the paper. I clenched the paper and sobbed silently, frantic breaths racking my body as I cried for the brother I had lost.

Dear Li Xiaojin, my beloved brother,

The very moment I stepped out of the laboratory, I knew I had made a grave decision. Father's legacy depended on us, and I had left those heavy burdens to you. For that, I am sorry.

In many ways, you were a better son than me. You wanted to contribute, to give back to our motherland through science, to glorify our family's name. Li Xiaojin, the Li family's scientist. Compared to you, I admit I was selfish.

For years, I have helped you achieve your ambitions. Took chemistry instead of literature. Spent countless nights assisting your experiments on dinosaur anatomy. Stood behind you while you presented our accomplishments on stage, a blinding spotlight cast upon you as I stood in the darkness. For years, I neglected my aspirations, for you.

Currently, it has been weeks since we last spoke. My actions then have been ignorant and spiteful, I apologise again. Yet my choice remains unwavering. For once, I will decide what I want to become. I want to be Li Weijin, an author, not Li Weijin, a palaeontologist.

Please do not resent me, Xiaojin. This has been abrupt, but it was the only way for me to escape everyone's judgemental comments. Especially yours. Everything I have previously done was to gain our family's approval. Now, this is for me.

However, the guilt of leaving everything behind has been nagging me. Brother, I've always admired your passion, and sincerely hope my departure doesn't hinder anything for you. Therefore, during my weeks away, I gathered additional research on your current hypothesis. All my results are attached below. Consider this a parting gift, and the last scientific report I will ever make.

Love, your brother, Li Weijin

Attached to the letter was a thick wad of documents, 30 pages of meticulous analysis containing every detail I had missed, concluding the experiments with sophisticated, satisfactory results. As I emptied the contents of the box, buried beneath everything was a battered notebook, titled "Manuscript".

One year later, a biography was published in a blog for dinosaur enthusiasts. It read,

"The observations of primitive bird-like dinosaurs, mainly the Sinosauropteryx, are accredited to the late Li Weijin, Chinese palaeontologist and author. His discovery is of the utmost significance in dinosaur studies. Mr.Li's surviving manuscript was transformed into compelling sci-fi novel "The Warm-blooded Reptile", published by his brother Li Xiaojin, fellow renowned palaeontologist. Li Weijin's accomplishments in palaeontology and speculative fiction will inspire many future minds. His name will continue to be featured in history books—as one of China's great scientists and authors."

# Creative Writing Fiction Group 3



# Through the Eyes of a Jiangxititan-The Untold Story

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Lee, Sum Suet Charlotte - 12

"... Near the end of June, a group of palaeontologists discovered an unidentified dinosaur's skeleton during a worksite in Jiangxi, China. It was later revealed that this set of fossils belonged to Jiangxititan ganzhouensis, a new species of titanosaurian sauropod. According to studies, these fossils are thought to be dated back about 90 million years ago..." Zhao sat on the side of the couch, leaning on the armrest. He turned down the volume of the TV, scoffing sarcastically as he kept his eyes and ears on the news report.

"Can you believe it? They removed most of the important information about our discovery! First off, Jiangxititan ganzhouensis is not simply a new species of titanosaurus sauropod. Jiangxi is a singular genus of somphospondylan, and J. ganzhouensis is its sole species of this genus, therefore this species isn't a titanosaur, and instead non-titansaurian somphospondylan. Which suggests the existence of an entirely new undiscovered group of titanosaurs in Asia!I mean seriously, how could you mess that up?-"

"-Give them a break. After all, they only report as much information as their sources gave them." Dr. Chang cut him off, standing near the entrance of the resting area She had her white laboratory coat on, paired with plain gloves usually used for inspecting specimens. Chang walked to the front of Zhao, standing with her arms crossed.

"Now, if you're done with your little afternoon tea party. We have to get back to work." Dr. Chang commented lightly before walking hastily around the couch and back outside, leaving Dr. Zhao to quickly follow after her.

It's unusually quiet today, aside from Zhao's obnoxious chirping and Chang's sarcastic responses. Usually there's a few more people in the laboratory. Dr. Ming Lee would be at his station busy as always, mostly trying to finish the team's piles and piles of paperwork, such as filling out forms or research. Aimee- the new intern- normally only goes to on-site work and verification as such, but sometimes she would stop around the laboratory to help out with analysing and or just basic tasks like removing dust and rocks from fossils. After doing all of their respective work, both of them decided to take a break today, hence why neither of them came in.

Nevertheless, the show must go on. As the wise Dr. Ming Lee once said, "The history of the very earth does not wait for us!"

"So, shall we get started?" Dr. Zhao grinned cheekily.

"Get started we shall!"

She gently and carefully glided her hand against the fossil displayed for inspection, feeling every bump and dent. Dr. Chang moved onto the other side, picking up a brush with her remaining hand. She delicately dusted the specimen with the brush, taking in every scratch visible on the surface, trying to feel for some kind of...connection.

You see, to the plain eye, Dr. Chang may just be a talented and remarkable paleontologist who cares a whole lot about dinosaurs and such. But every paleontologist was once a huge geek that used to hold up their notebook to their teachers while blabbering on and on about dinosaurs and how cool they are. Of course, Dr. Chang is no exception, however she possesses a tragically extraordinary ability which no one else has. Zhao peeked over her shoulders sheepishly.

"Uh. so what? Do you feel anything yet?" He asked, his interest piqued.

She shook her head. What a shame, most of the time her ability worked on almost anything. But it seemed her ability malfunctioned. This might happen from time to time, so it's not that big of a deal anyways-

Then, it happened.

It felt like someone shot a bullet through her head, except the pain was replaced with a sudden wave of nostalgia. A bright, white light flashes before her eyes, her ears were ringing. Her head was reeling with nausea. She didn't feel anything, yet felt a thousand emotions at once, but they did not belong to her. Images flashed between frames in milliseconds. The next second, everything went dead silent, peace. Dr. Chang squinted open her eyes. She found herself positioned in the middle of a wide wasteland.

She was in the past.

Well, not actually in the past, but simply... reliving the memories of the fossil she just touched, you could imagine it as some sort of dream. That was her tragically extraordinary power.

Tragic, because she has to watch the entire life of these animals, just to see them die in the end. Extraordinary because it was power no other had.

Her train of thoughts were cut off by the sound of... squeaking? No, it was a tiny, highpitched roar. She looks to the left of her feet, and finds a little dinosaur, freshly hatched out of an egg. Chang recognized it to be a Jiangxititan.

Its little squeaks were met with a gentle roar. The mother stomped towards her baby, lightly nudging it with her head.

Then, the scene fades out, and shifts into another landscape. The pair of Jiangxititan was strolling along in the grassland, lined with tall pine-cone shaped trees which were much taller than our modern trees now. The sun was beating, big and bright. The pair stopped under the shade of a tree, the mother lifted up her head and extended her neck upwards, patiently biting off a large piece of leaf for her child. The little one was running around, making noises almost similar to a laugh, as would a human toddler. At the moment, Dr. Chang felt only contempt and warmth in her heart. She only saw what was not simply dinosaurs, but instead a mother and son.

The scene switched. The once little dinosaur had grown a bit bigger, perhaps it was in its teens. This time, It was not happiness Dr. Chang felt, but rather anger. The Jiangxititan roared at its mother, stomping its feet and shaking its heads around, which it admittedly looked quite odd considering it had such long necks. The mother was displeased, roaring louder back as a response. The teen turned away in a fit of rage, and they both parted ways.

She blinked, and to her surprise, she felt love this time around. Romantic, wife-andhusband kind of love. The Jiangxititan stood beside another one of its kind. They nudged at each other necks, moaning gently and almost purring. They picked foods for each other, they chased each other around. But they were both happy, hopelessly in love. Dr.Chang almost wished them to have a carefree life together.

The scene shifts.

And suddenly, Dr. Chang's heart sank. The worst part of the experience every single time, and every single time she would forget. She would forget that they died. She would get captured in the moment, she would forget that all these innocent animals with real emotions and lives and lovers and families, end in a devastating and undeserved fate. Dr. Chang couldn't bear to watch this part. Roars of panic. Wales of horror and hopelessness. The dinosaurs were running for their lives, tripping over themselves. In the midst of the chaos, Dr. Chang spotted the Jiangxititan, laying down on its side, taking its final breathe before falling into an eternal slumber, thinking no one would carry on his memories, happiness or sadness, anger or fear. The most heart-breaking part most people seemed to forget was they were just as humane as we are. Some prioritize their own children, sacrificing themselves; Some run over others, desperate to survive: Some give up, because they know no matter what they do, there's no escape. And in the end, it would not matter. They would die together, strangers meeting strangers in their final moments. They didn't understand what was happening, but if there's one thing in common, they all shared an understanding that they would not survive. It's almost poetic, all species of dinosaurs –no matter Jiangxititan or not, once separated and divided– were brought together by the tragically beautiful melody of death. A meteor collided with the ground and-

She's back. No longer feeling herself. She silently wipes her tears away with her sleeve.

"Hey now, it's okay, I'm here." Zhao reassuringly puts his hand on her shoulder.

Dr. Chang had her back turned to him. Even though he's annoying, there's one thing you can always count on him. She was thankful for that.

" I'm alright, thanks. The least we can do now is continue our research and keep digging up more fossils, for them, to tell their untold story when no one else can. It's our job, yeah?" She looked back at him, smiling bitterly.

So, every time she felt tired or exhausted with no motivation, she reminded herself, she's doing this for the animals that couldn't live to see another day. It's what she does, that's her motto.

# New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chan, Evelyn – 14

I'd always feared I'd have to meet Baba again like this, after four years torn apart from my motherland.

Why, why, why?

The rhythm of blood throbbed in my temples, and my eyes stung from the sandalwood incense as I halfheartedly listened to my mother's eulogy for Baba's memorial. Suddenly, the awful bitterness when she mentioned my father's name disappeared when she spoke of her late, divorced husband. They were replaced with pain and regret and an unspeakable sense of sorrow I couldn't quite put my finger on. Grief spilled out of her like ink from a broken cartridge, as the enunciation of every word she spoke sagged with emotion.

The aftermath of the ceremony was held together by a pregnant pause. People gathered in the comfort of the church hall. I stayed outside, letting the autumn rain drench me in its melancholy. The pitter-patter of the rain reverberated in my ear. Northern China was unforgiving with its transition from summer verdure to ashen winter, its brittle wind bringing an unfaltering chill to her heart. The spirit of once vibrant leaves met the ground holding souls and broken bones.

I fidgeted with the tendrils of ebony hair that fell across my face. Even that reminded me of my father, the obsidian colour of his eyes and hair which were quite the opposite of the blue of my mother's eyes and her wispy, golden hair. Unusually cold droplets trickled down my face. You'd never have guessed that I wasn't crying if it weren't for that. But the truth was, I couldn't remember the last time I succumbed to so much emotion. I've spent the last few weeks so thawed and vulnerable and exposed with my heart conditioned to the ache only felt once in a lifetime.

Only 56, a fire so wild, too early to be extinguished...and a dinosaur breakthrough, they say?

And with this I turned down my head, closing my red-rimmed eyes, hiding from the piercing glares as if I were a criminal victim to the gallows. When I flickered them again, I was alone, sitting in the doorway of a memorial service, black dress drenched in rainwater and salty tears.

The air hung heavy, permeated with the scent of aged paper and leather, a thousand whispered stories clinging to the shelves that lined the walls from floor to ceiling. I'd begin seeking solace in my father's study after his death, slowly piecing the fragments of his legacy. His legacy remained stubbornly elusive to me, for my mother whisked me away from his care to America the day I turned 15. But memories came washing over me as I threaded my hands over his palaeontology books. Suddenly I was a petulant young child, Baba trailing his fingers over every word as he tried to tell me how dinosaurs had roamed the earth long before humans were crafted from the hands of Nuwa.

I scaled the shelves, fingers running over the threaded spines, stopping when my gaze fell upon a familiar title. Baba's journal. With unprecedented excitement, I drew the volume out meticulously, plumes of dust waltzing across its pages, the colour swept away by the sands of time. It was bound to leather so dark it seemed to absorb the meagre light. Each entry was a window to his work throughout the years, painstakingly written, ink flowing across like a stream tumbling rapidly over the river bed. Unbeknownst to me, gleaming days bled into darkness as I fell captive to memory, the dim light of his study engulfing me into his embrace. I remembered.

When I was five, engulfed in his embrace. Filled with childlike wonderment as he unfolded his discoveries about the newly unearthed Fujiaventor, gifted with wings but cursed to live their days on the ground. "Why couldn't it fly?" My question hung in the air, my chin resting on my hands. Baba laughed. But he never told me why.

When I was ten, hearing my parents battle with words as sharp as scythes, enough to cut through their hearts, and mine. Screaming and fighting replaced the laughter that used to fill our house with infectious joy. I was foolish enough to live for the hope of it all, drunk on blind optimism as my family fell apart. Was it my fault, I wondered. But they never told me why.

When I was thirteen, swept away to a country worlds apart from the chiselled walls I called home, the succinct syllables of my mother tongue, forced to fit into a mould of American society. I sacrificed my identity for another, wondering why I couldn't be happy. No one told me why.

When I was eighteen, desperately waiting for my college admissions letter, hope brimming inside me as I told of my dreams of following in my father's footsteps. My mother's eyes darkened, her curved lips drew taut. She never told me why.

Those questions plagued me like darkness as my fingers flicked through the archaic book, like linen sized with starch to touch. My eyes widened in surprise as a slip of paper fell from its crevice between two pages. Chinese characters written in delicate strokes of obsidian black, tapering off at the end of each slash.

when the dinosaur spread its wings and soared

did it fear the ground, the earth, the floor?

did they think: flight or fear?

did they see Death, coming for a life to reap?

or did they drink on the highest bliss?

not a fire yet to be extinguished?

There was something so evasive about the way Baba had described his love for dinosaurs, as though he were channelling the spirit of creatures lost in obscurity. It was as if his voice were reverberating next to my heart, tinged with warmth as he read those words aloud under the slant of pale light from the study lamp.

I clutched the paper to my chest, its weight like a talisman against the storm brewing within me. Waves will continue to erode the shore, sands of time will wash away all that is left – but I couldn't allow myself to shun Baba's legacy to the abyss of oblivion. I turned the paper around, hoping for something more, to feel his presence upon me once again – met with hasty strokes, unusual for a perfectionist like him.

"The Fujiavenator – did it embrace the thrill or fear its fate? Every fossil tells a story, a whisper from the past itself. The fujiaventor's skeletal frame restricted it to spread its wings and soar, but it didn't encumber its will to live. And I want my child to know this: the spirit of dinosaurs thrum vivaciously within you, an unquenchable thirst for freedom. For the world is yours."

I could almost hear the gentle ebb and flow of his voice, the bubble of his laugh. From him, I could touch a world filled to the brim with aspiration, dreams and hope. That was how I could mend the hollow ache perforated by grief, replaced with passion and purpose. A seeker of truths, just like Baba had been, to take the paths he once walked. To unearth the stories washed away to the streams of time. To breathe life into his legacy frozen by fate. I would not fear the fall and passionately pursue the flight. The answer finally dawned upon me. Now I know why.

I emerged from the dark chambers of my past, the crumpled paper crinkled in my grasp. My mother's silhouette stretched across the room, her hand reaching for the mahogany door. Darkness plagues her bleary eyes flickering with exhaustion, and a haunting vacancy is all that stared back at me. I search for the curve of her smile, the crinkle at the corner of her eyes that embraced me as a child, finding none.

She seemed to want to speak, but instead she let her gaze linger over me, and I found my heart bleeding flesh all over again. I take her cold hands into mine, my voice steady despite the hurricane brewing in me. "I want to stay," I told her.

She winced, brows furrowed tight with pain. Tears started again without sound or movement as worry lines framed her mouth. A question lingered on her lips, but silence swallowed it – she chose to cup her hands in my face. "He…would have been proud," she spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"Your father – Baba's," she chastised herself slightly for letting her words slip, "his dedication created a chasm between us. We ended in a quiet tragedy because we were all but a flame bound to be extinguished one day. He left to board his ship into a horizon promising a different dawn, and I couldn't hold him back."

Her mouth turned up a fraction of an inch. "But you can be the wind sailing his dreams. Do what I couldn't do. I believe in you."

My compass, my anchor, lay in the foundation of my own family. I promised the heavens to embrace the flight, to soar and let his spirit guide his dreams home.

### Secrets of the Past

Wellington College International Shanghai, Chen, Fika – 13

Silent tears streamed down Giselle's face, racking her body with sobs and making her vision blurred. She took a deep breath, trying to compose herself as the eulogist started the speech, going on about how much of a good palaeontologist he was, about all the achievements and projects he had carried out and acquired. She sucked in a sharp breath, feeling her heart break as she realized that he would never ever appear in her life again. Letting out an anguished cry, she started to remember how she used to run up and hug him when he came back from work, and she wondered how she would ever get on with life without his presence around her. Giselle paced the room, nibbling on her fingernails as she anxiously awaited for the reading of his will.

"And to my beloved daughter, I leave my estate in Shandong province, and 25,000 Yuan. I want you to go to the manor and find something. In the house of memories where shadows play, Seek the floor that's loose in the light of day. Find the key to a world both old and new, Where wisdom lies with ancient knowledge. This should help you find you what you need.

Determined to honor her father's memory and unravel the mystery he had left behind, Giselle traveled to the estate in Shandong. The property was vast, filled with ancient artifacts and relics of her father's illustrious career. The house was like a labyrinth of rooms and hallways, each one holding a piece of the past. She put her explorer's cap on as she wandered around the massive house, humming to herself quietly as she found herself in the enormus library. Giselle roamed around the book asiles, when something glittery caught her eye. She backtracked, and found a tiny, barey-visible intricate design on a floorboard directly below the window. She pried it open carefully, and found a small, brass, ornate key hidden beneath. This must be the key to a world both old and new. It had the same intricate design printed onto the floorboard; swirling lines around what seemed to be a leaf, and it was quite heavy.

With the key in hand, Giselle explored the house further, trying to find the place where the wisdom, lies with ancient knowledge. She suddenly thought of her late father's study room. It was where he always wrote and presented case studies. She looked around the room for clues, any imperfections in the bookcases or the floorboards, eventually discovering an odd looking book that didn't seem to fit in with the other books in the shelves. She pulled it out cautiously, expecting a secret entrance to pop out or something. Giselle braced herself, but nothing happened. She rolled her eyes, as dissapointment flooded her senses. She was about to put the book back and walk way, but something was calling to her. She peered into where the odd book had been, noticing a slight crack in the bookshelf. She peeled back the thin wood, revealing a small key hole camoflauged into the back of the bookshelf. Giselle dug the key out of the pocket, and inserted it into the keyhole. The key fit perfectly into the lock, and a hidden door popped open behind her, showing a dark staircase leading into the basement of the gargantuan mansion.

Inside, Giselle was met with an astonishing sight: rows and rows shelves lined with neat little jars containing perfectly preserved, pickled dinosaurs. She could hardly believe her eyes. She knew her father had always been fascinated by the prehistoric world, but she had never imagined he would make such an extraordinary discovery. Giselle carefully lifted one of the neatly labelled jars, holding it up to the light. It seemed to be filled with some kind of thick, droopy liquid. The tiny creature inside, a prehistoric lizard-like dinosaur, seemed to float in suspended animation. She marveled at the details, feeling a connection to a world millions of years old.

In the center of the room, on a large table, lay several dinosaur eggs, carefully arranged and labeled. Alongside them was an old, leather-bound book, presumebaly her father's diary, filled with detailed notes and reports on his experiments with the eggs. She flipped through the pages, suspision coursing in her veins as she realized that the pages had been ripped out. Giselle, sat down on the marble floor, took a deep breath, and started reading.

#### Day 1

The experiment's working! We finally figured out the formulae a few hours ago, and I can't wait to test it out. This one's different from the others, I can feel it. It's supposed to grow a dinosaur fetus in some superficial egg shells we made. We're really excited about this project because it means we get to analyze the egg the whole time.

#### Day 19

Progress is showing. The fetus is growing, and it looks like a pink pile of flesh molded breifly into shape. It should hatch by the end of November. We've modified the genes so it hatches as an oviraptor, the world's 3rd most rarest dinosaur. We're hoping to run some tests on it when it hatches so we can get to know more about this nearly uknown species.

The last entry of the diary looked messy, as if her father had rushed it, and it was torn into half; the bottom half missing.

#### Day 91

Dear Giselle, if you're reading this, I want you to know that I love you and always will. Please be careful, because at this point, you will have seen the jars and dinosaur eggs, and you'll be in grave danger. I need to tell you something. I'm actually n...

Giselle put the diary down as she stared ahead of her in confusement. "*I'm actually what Dad?*" The lack of information she was getting was so irritating. Giselle threw the book down onto the floor, her anger evaporating a bit, as she felt a tiny twinge of satisfaction watching the tattered book clatter to the other side of the room. The hair on the back of her neck suddenly stood up, sending shivers down Giselle's spine. She was getting an uncanny feeling that she was being watched. She turned around swiftly, suprised when she caught a glimpse of a tall shadow escaping out of the secret passageway.

" Hey! "

# 9

# Fiction Group 4

## 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 ladened 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 acuate 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 fàn, 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 absentmindedly and returned to her cooking. Frowning, he tugged on her sleeve, only to receive a sharp glare in return. "Érzĭ, 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 konglong shares its name with the long 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. "Háizĭ, 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 kŏnglóng. 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 konglong 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 konglong 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 Qı́lı́n, 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. "Hàizĭ, 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 konglong 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 kŏnglóng, 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 konglong, 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, pulpous 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 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 cacophonic 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 crow 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. Cowering 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 other-wordly 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.

# 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

# New Tales of China's Dinosaurs

International Christian School, Liu, Tinchi 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 eigth 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. Sandpaperlike 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.

### 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 shricks 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.

## 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 laserfocused 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."

### 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 ths relentless battlefield, vying for food, for habitats, for safety.

But was this the sole pathway to a resolution?

Certainly not. I, Orni, an Ornithopod (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 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 deextinction 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 halfdeveloped foetuses floating in formaldehyde. Frankly, it unsettled me. I could never look those foetuses 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.

\*\*\*

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.

\*\*\*

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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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.

### 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.

# Fiction Group 5



### Mortal Qualms

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Flora Chen

#### Prologue

Sihetun Village, Beipiao City, Chaoyang, Liaoning, China October 2003

The last whispers of daylight play amongst reluctant stars as sweeping twilight slumber lulls their soft hues asleep. Soon the moon has torn a shy crescent between Night's thick dark folds, and its glowing presence urges the stars out of their hiding places and into an easy liquid scintillation that falls, irrigates the rolling fields and winding rivers of Sihetun village below with heavenly half-light. Not a soul evades Night's reach—with nimble fingers aglow it enshrouds all Sihetun's earthly entities within comatose rest. Satisfied in the work it has done this evening, Night retreats into a slumber of its own, content in the knowledge that tonight, as is the case with any night, all who presently lie in dreamland below have once again succumbed under the warbling tremors of its lullaby.

All except for one.

In the remotest corners of Sihetun, tucked amongst the tangling foliage that springs inevitably in places humanity has neglected, obscured by curtains of unkempt ivy from the dough-faced men and women who come tramping up wearily beside it after each long day's work out in the fields, lies a hidden cave.

The cave, though no one in the village could possibly testify, runs deep and spiralling into history's rocky chasms, and from its depths, though no one in the village has seen, glitters the promise of life.

\*\*\*

#### Meimei

Some six thousand miles away the air hangs stifling and stagnant over Arizona's Sonoran Desert. Here the land is barren, save for the stalks of saguaro that rise towering and unfriendly all around, and the earth thirsty, beaten dry under the unrelenting sun, sapped of all nature's bounty by the sweltering desert heat. Buried deep below ground are the remains of the once all-powerful dinosaurs, permineralised by time to stoke a paleontologist's murderous craving for discovery. One would not be predisposed to fathom the image of a half-Chinese, half-Caucasian fourteen-year-old girl in such a place, standing amidst her parents' flurry to move house to 'someplace in China', incongruous against the backdrop of monotonous terrain that stretched for hopeless acres about her.

'Meimei, I've told you to keep all your things together in one box,' her mother chastises from where she loads a bizarre array of probes, chisels, and hammers into the back of the moving truck. 'You'd hate for them to get lost in transit.'

Meimei grumbles but knows no other complaint to issue. She is all too familiar with this course of action—her career-oriented palaeontologist parents would uproot them from each new location into which they settle the moment their deranged fossil-search for a new dinosaur species proves unsuccessful. The routine disruption of her life every few months not to mention years of social-isolation under homeschooling—has gradually led Meimei's parents to become her subject of loathing. Still, Meimei has long since resigned to the unalterable truth of her life, and so does nothing but brood in silent discontentment as her last home shrinks into despairing obscurity behind her.

\*\*\*

#### Jiang

The morning's first light catches seventy-six-year-old Lao Jiang toiling away amid Sihetun's fertile farmlands, resolve shining against the deep hollows of his eyes as his brown back curls under the efforts of labour.

Down in the fields, Jiang Yunxian has once known life differently than the perpetual hardship and impoverishment by which he knows it now. Taking a brief pause in his work to straighten out the kinks along his spine, he finds his gaze drifting towards the sky, as Day's sparkling jewel-blue beauty in its pure, unaffected passion spurs a torrent of recollections from deep within his past.

May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1945. The date marks an unrelenting turn in centuries since, but the scenes embossed upon Jiang's memory have not aged a second. Against shimmering cerulean heaven, the smiles of Jiang and his seventy graduating peers flashed all the bliss in the world, radiant, carefree, imbued with the exhilarating vitality of adolescence beside Peking University's impossible grandeur.

From then on, he would be a real scientist. Many of his peers had wondered and some had even plucked up the mettle to ask Jiang directly: *'why palaeontology?'* To which Jiang would answer with mischief in his eyes, *'what could be better?'* To him, the exploration of prehistoric Earth was a form of art, one that held answers to uncovering the greatest truths of the universe. He had been prepared to devote the whole of his life to palaeontology.

Somewhere in the far distance, a voice from another life shouts in coarse vernacular. The sound feels scathing against his eardrums, awfully out of place amidst this scholarly and soft-spoken university assemblage. It snaps him back into reality, and soon his vision is once more a collate of fresh countryside green and Day's blinding blue. 'Lao Jiang!' His wife's sunspeckled skin glints beneath its sweaty sheen. 'What have you been doing, staring off into space all morning? It took calling you five times before you finally looked my way!'

One thing is clear: it does him no good to recall these past times now—better to not waste any more of Day's precious nourishment in pointless reminiscing and churn this earth some more; after all, Lao Jiang does not suppose he could bear to see hunger upon his family's already malnourished frames for yet a day longer.

\*\*\*

#### Taryn

Taryn's life should not have fallen to disaster.

After all, she has done things *the right way* her whole life—spent her most infantile days in tutoring and the prime of her teenage years buried beneath crippling academic expectation. She has grown up cherishing like priceless treasure each piece of praise bestowed upon her—upon her exceptional arithmetic skills, her effortless talent for the arts, her long-standing linguistic prowess.

Thirty-something now, she stands alone at a London crossroads, the imposing brickand-mortar facade of the publishing house behind her. It has been nearly a decade and a half since she first left her family and past behind in Beijing. Taryn's fingers grasp tersely at the spine of the manuscript in her hands, its flimsy pages stirring in the wind, every now and then catching on a lapse in air flow and flashing a few broken phrases to her newest rejected novella.

*"We're sorry," they'd said, 'but it's just not quite what we're looking for." The wind rises, frigid, unforgiving against the sooty cobblestone path. "It's a great story, really. Dinosaurs and fantastical such..."* 

Overcome with sudden melancholy, Taryn finds herself swept down, down, down a tide of remembrance, back to the time of her Oxford days, back when she was still a carefree, happy-go-lucky eighteen-year-old Literature major roaming the sacred halls of Bodleian Library, her passion enshrined and protected under the gilded roofs of scholarly splendour.

How would her past self, brimful of confidence in her destiny to become an author, feel, to see the worn adult Taryn has become, beaten hard by the years as a consistent authorial reject, left to crave and yearn for everything and nothing gain?

All of a sudden, light as feathers upon a fallen angel, evasive of man as if a fury's child—it falls from the sky. Tentative and shy to begin, as though afraid of overstepping the shapeless boundaries of a stranger, the flyer first grazes the top of Taryn's ebony hair, searching for a place to land, then the soft pads of her fingertips as she reaches up to smooth the bizarre poster between her hands, and read:

\*\*\*

'The British Museum, in collaboration with Beijing Museum of Natural History, proudly presents Dinosaurs: The Lost Children of Mother Nature featuring fossils of the Sinosauropteryx classification First unearthed near the village of Sihetun in China's Liaoning province, 2003, we invite you to view these prehistoric gifts of nature, exhibited here for the first time outside China.'

\*\*\*

#### Meimei

Night is fast approaching but Meimei, being the daughter of a pair of overzealous palaeontologists, has long since grown accustomed to the ways of nature and the wilderness to allow them hindrance against her nightly excursions. Alone with nothing more than the flashlight between her teeth, she forges on ahead upon the narrow, moonlit lane, vowing to explore Sihetun past exhaustion in just the way she has managed to scavenge the depths of all her previous places of abode.

Night's blanketing presence is especially potent this evening, but to unsuspecting village newcomers like Meimei—call it beginner's luck—it might as well still be brilliant Day for all their susceptibility.

On climbing her seventh consecutive incline, Meimei stops to catch her breath; three days in her new town has been nowhere near enough time for Meimei's desert-drylandoriented centre of mass to acclimatise itself to Sihetun's hilly mud terrain. Although, from what plenty mundanity Meimei has seen of this agriculture village thus far, it won't be long before her parents call off their stay; as to what possessed them to make the move to such an unlikely place for fossil-hunting success in the first place, she can only begin to fathom. Seeking to tease out the strain in her muscles, she makes to lean against the wall of mossy sediment beside her and—

-falls straight through into a hidden crevice.

She lands hard on one side onto a muddy path declining sharply downhill, the wind knocked out of her; strangely, the mud feels moist and slippery under Meimei's skin. The flashlight slips from between her bite and extinguishes on impact against something hard beneath her, plunging Meimei into total, instantaneous darkness. Struggling to quell her panic, Meimei claws about the claustrophobic cavity, and, once she feels to have located a strong enough foothold, makes a tentative gesture to shift weight onto her feet—

—losing her balance in the split second it takes for her to realise that this is how she'll die before she plunges deep into the chasm's gaping mouth.

\*\*\*

Behind closed eyes, a piercing light sears across Meimei's retinas as she struggles to come to. She recalls the complete darkness of the chasm and feels her disoriented conscience strain against this glaringly bright new reality of her present. On opening tentative eyes, Meimei's squint is quickly widened into a look of utter astonishment, as she casts her disbelieving gaze from the sheer expanse of grasslands dressed in nature's first green before her, to the trunks upon trunks of towering Carboniferous pine and soaring conifer all around, to the white puffs of cloud swimming in endless blue and the dinosaurs, *the dinosaurs;* they were everything, everywhere all at once, soaring pterodactyls silhouetted impressively before gleaming Day, the beating trill of a microraptor's feathers against airborne current, the *thump-thump-thumping* of scaly, stampeding limbs as it stirs up mountains of dust over the gravelly terrain and evokes a primal musicality that penetrates into the deepest threads of Meimei's being.

#### Where is she?

Her eyes catch upon a scene unfolding beneath the shade of a particularly great pine. Approaching with curiosity, the dinosaur nestled there around her egg looks like none Meimei has seen in all her years trailing her parents' expeditions. No bigger than the average large dog, with an unusually long tail and short limbs covered in thin, splintery feathers, Meimei's tentative footsteps stir the dinosaur's attention, who twists her slender neck back to address Meimei with reciprocating interest whilst clawing continuously against an invisible ditch in the ground.

Just then, the tiniest of crackles rents the air—the egg is hatching! Holding her breath beside the delicate thrill of new life, her eyes sparkle as she watches a whisper-thin pink fuzzball emerge stumbling and clumsy from between the eggshell's shards.

On closer inspection, Meimei notices the discrepancy in earth at which the mother dinosaur has been pawing—a glinting opalescent pebble that Meimei... is to have. A present.

Warmed by this gesture of miracle, and warmed by the sun's rays, Meimei and the baby dinosaur both feel their consciousnesses lull. Before long, though it is still Day, she and the newborn have both come upon Night's slumbering train, leaving behind a perplexed mother dinosaur to stand guard over her young.

### Jiang

Finishing the workday, Lao Jiang hastens up a mud-path home, douli, a conical farmer's hat, slinging limply across his body. Desperate to rest for at least a few hours before tomorrow's work, his desire for sleep mingles inextricably with feelings of guilt at once again returning home empty-handed after having traded much of today's harvest for oil and soap and other such essentials. Engrossed in his thoughts, Lao Jiang's absent-minded fiddling with foliage growing on the wall along the path leads him to plunge a fist straight through ivy and wallflower into the cave's opening.

Parting the curtain of fauna with tired fingers, he retrieves a flashlight found sitting dented and caked with mud at the mouth of the cave; to his surprise, it switches on with ease. Shining its light down the chasm of darkness, he discovers a downward-sloping path, not an unmanageable climb for the experienced miner but certainly a risk to undertake between the moistened cavern walls and muddied flooring he now notices with a start. Hadn't his professor at school said that damp caves were where fossils formed, shielded from solar radiation and entrenched within consistent humidity? He has never known a cave like this to exist here, of all places.

An unquenchable thirst for discovery reignites inside him, finding Jiang Yunxian lowering himself carefully down the cave opening, inching his way through the chasm, startling to discover the sleeping form of a small girl at its bottom, and beneath her, an impossible dream, enough to send the old man into shock—two perfect halves of fossil, chronicling two unrecognisable dinosaur forms, scattered with a terrifying disregard across the rocky cavern floors.

#### \*\*\*

### Taryn

Roaming the hallowed halls of the British Museum makes Taryn feel as if she were a high school student again, on her first organised trip from Beijing to visit the United Kingdom beside teachers and classmates.

Fifteen years later, and the pillars of the entrance pantheon still stand with full majesty, welcoming wandering souls like herself who now find themselves amidst the crowd for a buzzing new exhibit. The pamphlet in her hands guides her to one artefact on display in particular—a fossil stone, split in miraculous perfection down the vertical axes to showcase the miniscule forms of a pair of dinosaurs with tails stretching curiously long.

'Sinosauropteryx,' the sign beside its glass encasing reads, 'a recent accidental discovery of a new dinosaur species made in a remote cave in Sihetun Village, Liaoning Province, China, this fossil stone was found and retrieved by local farmer and palaeontologist Jiang Yunxian and Meilin Lee-Clarke, who claim to have stumbled upon the artefact in its present state of separation. Though experts are still uncertain as to how this improbable phenomenon occurred, perhaps its ambiguity in origin can be considered an origin story in itself.'

So it can.

Met with a sudden stroke of inspiration unfelt by Taryn for over a decade, she turns decisively to leave, though not before stopping at the travel agency on the neighbouring street and arranging transit to Sihetun in Liaoning, China for tomorrow—it was time for her to go home. Perhaps not in the sense one would anticipate, but to Taryn, the pursuit of literature has always been its own form of sanctuary.

### Epilogue

Sihetun Extinct Organisms Fossil Institution, Sihetun Village, Beipiao City, Chaoyang, Liaoning, China

### August 2005

The new morning dawns bright and early. Day's light, shining splendidly as ever, cascades down from fiery heavens and pierces through the glass structure of the new Sihetun Extinct Organisms Fossil Institution, pooling in crepuscular slivers upon Head Palaeontologist Jiang Yunxian's office desk.

Now a full-fledged researcher dedicated to uncovering mysteries of prehistoric life all across China, Jiang has used his half of the wealth and fame obtained from the jointly discovered Sinosauropteryx fossil to fund the establishment of a palaeontological research institution right here in Sihetun.

Taking a short break from his morning spent working, he traces his line of sight across the view unfolding outside his office window. Down below, sixteen-year-old Meimei skips across the Institution's entrance pavement alongside her parents, here for a final weekend internship before returning to boarding school next week. A small jewel-like pebblestone adornment in her hair catches the shifting sunlight as she dances her way down the path to this day, Meimei is still uncertain of what had happened that night in the cave; all evidence points to it having been no more than a dream, but the discovery of the opalescent pebblestone in her pocket the next morning yet remains a complete and beautiful mystery.

As Jiang shifts his attention back to the day's timetable on his desk, he finds himself smiling.

But never mind. Now is no time for reminiscing. There will be plenty for that in the evening, after the author visit the Institution is hosting today; Jiang flicks his notice to the event poster pinned onto his wall—*hmmm, bestselling author Taryn Chen, with her novel* The Jurassic Awakening. *Isn't it true that she'd written that novel right here in Sihetun before skyrocketing to fame?* Now that Jiang is thinking about it, he feels he has seen her in passing through the fields a fair few times throughout the years before.

\*\*\*

*Oh, he definitely has.* Up in the sky, there is not a soul beside to hear Day's chuckling remark. Maybe it will tell it again to Night later, but for now Night remains woefully ignorant, imposing darkness upon the other half of Earth's hemisphere. And for just a few hours longer today, Day's radiance will continue to reign the skies supreme, the very exaltation of its presence torn between impossible myth, indivisible fate, and invisible magic but felt below by Sihetun's flurrying creatures all the same.

### The End

### Descenting into the Truth

HKUGA College, Wong, Kin Long Keith – 17

Morgan ran his hand through his already scruffy hair feeling annoyed. He was never a fan of the humidity in Hong Kong. Even the sterile interior of the jet seemed to be polluted by the muggy mood. Morgan was still not accustomed to this kind of rushed travel, the frantic emails and calls that had dragged him away from his discoveries of fossils all over Guangzhou.

The archeological community, recently, has been busier than ever. Countless dinosaur species had been found all over the globe, some even in places where they were never supposed to exist, defying the established consensus among scientists and geologists. In fact, Morgan wasn't even surprised by his summons to Hong Kong – Guangdong had always been one of those mythical provinces, steeped in the supernatural and mysteries.

He carefully reviewed the data on his tablet one last time: The unusual energy readings received from a construction site in Hong Kong, high levels of radiation, and ruins beneath the site that came to light. Local reports had spoken of fragmented dinosaur fossils, unlike anything seen before. But preliminary surveys hinted at something far more extraordinary: something that defied his lifetime work and his understanding of nature itself. It was the rumors of the 'strange energy' that truly grasped his interest.

A jolt marked the end of his flight. He was met by Wang, his long-time colleague and friend, a young but accomplished Asian geologist.

"Thanks for fetching me," said Morgan, his voice tired but hurrying. "I trust your plunder was uneventful?"

"Come on, you know I am not one of those Western ghouls," she replied, a wry smile playing on her lips. "Surely you've read about the radiation and the anomalies? We have so much to discover, yet all surveying methods through ground level failed. Professor Ding Yi always joked about it like a Pandora's Box."

Wondering who Ding Yi was, Morgan followed Wang towards the construction site over a blur of honking taxis and bustling street markets as they approached the excavation. The roads, he noticed, were all cordoned off, guarded by an armed officer every few blocks. And the site finally lay in front of their eyes.

Spanning 5 kilometers squared, the construction site saw gigantic, sharp skeletal structures – those Morgan immediately identified as dinosaur fossils – jutting out of the soil, with an indefinite number of complex tunnels and reservoirs that seemed to extend deep underground. Only a small fraction of the site near the entrance has been exploited so far. "You've forgotten to mention how beautiful it is." Morgan beamed, only to find a sigh coming from Wang.

"Morgan... There isn't much time left for us to enjoy the view," Wang said, her tone urgent. "The authorities are insisting on a change of hands for the site if we don't uncover something new soon. They're citing everything – public safety concerns, the expenditures... Rumors have it that they plan to abandon all research and pave it up."

Barely suppressing his exhibitation, Morgan felt a peculiar surge of designation. Something had ignited inside him, something propelling him to make a decision that would transform his life.

"Send someone," he told Wang. "No - send me into it."

Wang grinned. "That's what Ding Yi expected. He also offers to be your accompaniment, shall you not mind."

Morgan was genuinely surprised by the chaos as he entered the research campsite. Around him were numerous excavators in various states of disarray. They clearly had run out of table space and put a few workstations directly on the floor, where power cords and networking wires formed a tangled mess. Instead of being installed in racks, routers were left haphazardly on top of scattered bones on the floor – which, to Morgan's surprise, resembled those artifacts in the Great London Museum. He wasn't sure if this was the "mystery" that they were mentioning, but he was sure of one thing: Whatever they were dealing with was too important for them to care about their appearances.

A tall, young man hurried over, apparently unbothered by the mess. Morgan shook his hand. "You must be Professor Charles Morgan," the man said, his voice weary yet clear. "I'm Ding Yi, and on behalf of my team, thank you for your contribution."

"The pleasure is mine."

"Shall we begin? I'll walk you through the big one right away, the one Wang kept on saying."

They arrived at the main exploitation area that loomed like a gaping maw in the earth, an enormous hole plunging downwards for nearly 500 feet, its walls steep and rugged. Surrounding the perimeter, heavy machinery hummed ominously, their cables snaking into the abyss, ready for transport into the depths below. Above ground, the atmosphere was thick with tension; the air was heavy with dust. With each creak of the machinery and distant echoes, an unsettling sensation crawled over Morgan – rather than a Pandora's Box, the site gave a stifling sensation.

Ding Yi asked Morgan whether he had ever tried nuclear protective clothing before; Morgan said no.

"Those suits are borrowed from authorities," said the scientist. "It tingles a bit at first but you will soon get comfortable."

They were greeted by a series of chambers. Morgan noticed they were descending gradually, giving him the time to study his colleague: Ding Yi was a man with his sharp gaze, exuded an air of competence that didn't suit his age.

"Aren't those fossils at ground level?" He asked as they awaited for what seemed to be a vertical conveyor belt.

"Those you saw on your way, Charles, are just the surface," said Ding. "But the other side of the world is 1400 feet down."

Morgan followed his descent into the earth. Conveyor cables strapped to their backs plunged downwards with a swift motion, carrying them through layers of rocks and sediments. The familiar urban sounds of Hong Kong faded, replaced by a low rumble emitted from the very distant darkness.

"600 feet underground." Ding Yi's voice echoed all over the radio.

The temperature dropped noticeably. Morgan noticed that Ding Yi reached into his pocket and took out a small tablet that flickered along their descent. He murmured something in Mandarin that was muffled by his helmet. Morgan tried to ask, but Ding Yi did not elaborate any further.

The silence went on and on and minutes passed, until when Morgan's view was nothing else but pitch black. Even the low hum was starting to fade away. Something was off.

"1000 feet," Morgan reported. "1300. We're almost there... Hello?"

But there was no response.

Before Morgan could react, the cables jolted to a stop, reaching the bottom of the tunnel. He quickly powered his electric lamp, only shocked to see a new environment revealed through the blinding mist.

The very first thought that came up was aliens – Before him was a cavern far exceeding any expectations. Gone were the narrow walls; instead, a subterranean hall stretched before him. The air was surprisingly breathable, carrying a faint scent of damp earth and something else... something ancient, almost metallic. Immense, nicely carved pillars, reminiscent of ancient Chinese architecture but far exceeding anything Morgan had ever seen, appeared from the dark, disappearing into the gloom of the high, vaulted ceiling. The floor itself was a mosaic of polished stone, worn smooth by time, its surface reflecting the strange light.

Then, he saw them.

Not just scattered bones, but impossibly preserved skeletons that went against his knowledge. These were undeniably dinosaurs, yet their size was staggering, exceeding even the largest discovered T-Rex specimens. But it was the details that truly captivated him – hieroglyphs-like characters were carved into their bones – Chinese, Greek, Hebrew... Morgan felt as if the hall was a forge of distinct cultures, mixing and matching continental histories into a cluster of absoluteness.

And alongside these colossal dinosaurs, he noticed something else. Much smaller skeletons – unmistakably human, were buried alongside the dinosaurs – they were not preys, but more like equals. All the arrangements hinted at one conclusion – a burial, a ritualistic laying to rest.

A low hum resonated throughout the cavern, a deep, throbbing vibration that seemed to emanate from the very earth itself. Morgan felt as if it wasn't a voice that reached his ears through the air; it felt as though it resonated directly within his mind, bypassing his senses entirely. It was ancient, deep, carrying the weight of millennia.

"Charles Morgan," the voice boomed. Echoes initiated from everywhere and nowhere at once.

"Hello?" Morgan, holding his breath, managing himself through fear and adrenaline. He figured that the best way was to communicate: "What exactly am I looking at?"

"You have stumbled upon a truth long buried." It answered. "Do believe entirely what you see. The dinosaurs, and humans among them. Lying before you is the cradle of a forgotten time. It was a time when dragons walked the earth, and men lived alongside."

The voice paused, the silence amplified by the persistent echoes. Morgan's mind reeled, trying to comprehend the words.

"You're saying... The ancient fossils...?"

"They are the sleeping ones, the dragons that live in the hearts of the pure. Most unfortunately, a slumber was long imposed upon them by those who fear their existence. All that remained was no more than hard, cold stones."

Morgan felt as if he were lost in a maze of thoughts. The voice seemed to be speaking out of a dream. "I don't understand."

"Do you not see? The dragons are not ordinary creatures; they were the embodiment of spirits - spirits that were long demised - individuality, courage, and the unyielding will to progress." The words surrounded Morgan with glimmers of pride.

As he stepped forward, flames emerged along both sides of the corridor, illuminating the atmosphere, and revealing the image of the speaker that would haunt him forever.

Before him lay a gigantic dark red titanosaurus, the largest ever recorded to his memory. He could determine that the voice so far was not pronounced verbally; it was delivered through means beyond physical propagation. They were mentally linked; thoughts were simultaneously transmitted and deciphered at each end. "Dragons?" Morgan did not speak this time, circulating his sentence in his mind. "As you call it." The voice answered simply.

Dragons? The words seemed absurd, the product of every archaeologist's fevered dream. Yet, the evidence before his eyes, even the sheer scale of the discovery itself has defied any logical explanation he could come up with. The voice continued, its tone shifting, taking on a more urgent, almost frantic quality.

"But the shadows, Professor Morgan, are lengthening. There are people - people from your world, that seek to exploit it, to twist it for their own nefarious ends.

"Those who seek to control the narrative, those who intend to erase the past and rewrite history, are growing bolder. The world you live in seeks to silence this truth forever. They fear the power of the spirits it carries, the spirit of individualism, that it will inspire rebellion. Indeed it is a spirit that cannot be contained, but also a spirit that can be forgotten.

"Beware the ones that surround you," the voice continued, its tone shifting from sorrow to a chilling warning. "Malicious intentions... They seek to erase this place, this history, and with it, the courage of those who dared to resist."

A long pause followed as Morgan felt a knot of dread forming in his stomach. Things were more far-reaching than he had ever imagined; he could see the systematic effort to erase such a significant piece of history, to stifle the truth that lay before him.

"You must protect this legacy, Professor Morgan," it continued with sheer desperation. "Remind the world of the spirit long forgotten! The future of true courage, of identity, of free will... depends on it!"

But before Morgan could formulate a response, the voice was then abruptly cut off. A flicker of movement caught his eye; Morgan looked around, his gaze sweeping across the large skeletons, the smaller human remains, the intricate carvings on the ancient pillars... and Ding Yi, appearing from nowhere.

Ding Yi activated a device on his wrist, his face impassive: A small metallic disc, glowed with an eerie red light. He raised it, aiming it towards the stone pillars. It gave an ominous beep.

"What is going on?" said Morgan.

"Well, that's an interesting question," said Ding Yi pleasantly. "And quite a long story. I suppose we don't have time to go through that."

"What do you mean?" said Morgan, whose mouth had gone dry.

"They are relics," distorted by the helmet's comms, Ding Yi's calm voice cut through the cavern like a sharp knife. "A bygone curiosity, but nothing more. Best kept hidden."

All the time he spoke, Ding Yi's eyes never left the skeletal structure. There was a hungry look in them that made the hairs stand up on the back of Morgan's neck.

"Hidden?" His voice was tight with controlled fury. "This is the truth we are standing for! This is what we have pursued for our entire life!"

"Haven't you realized what - or who I stand for, Morgan?" said Ding Yi softly. "But it is not relevant. What matters is our final goal. For years, the world has been dealing with the very same problem. My superiors - some among world leaders, some even in higher positions - agreed that free will is simply too much.

"We sought to extinguish any signs of this dangerous precedent. But how? Spirits are never meant to be contained, but what if they were addressed at their roots – the symbol of an era where free expression of thought and individualities thrived?"

"Yo," said Morgan, feeling defeated. It became evident what Ding Yi was about to do, but it was too late.

"Sometimes progress means sacrifices." Ding Yi concluded.

The device pulsed faster, the blue light intensifying into a blinding flare. A wave of heat filled the chamber, revealing a deafening roar. Morgan scrambled to his feet, his ears ringing, his vision swimming; the air itself seemed to vibrate along. Then, the explosion hit.

A blinding flash of white light engulfed him, throwing him to the ground. The last thing Morgan saw before he lost consciousness was Ding Yi's face, a mask of cold, determined fanaticism right inside the implosion... and the rest was darkness.

Morgan opened his eyes.

Shadows flickered along the walls, and faint voices drifted in from somewhere far away. Gradually, fragments of memory began to float back to him. Snippets of ancient fossils, fish markets... and then the flash of Ding Yi's last moments.

Morgan swallowed and looked around him. He was lying in a bed with lined sheets, when the sudden brightness of his surroundings made his head throb; a dull, persistent ache that made even the slightest movement painful. He realized that he was in a hospital facility. Wang, her face expressionless, stood by his bed.

"I need to see Ding Yi." Morgan croaked with all the strength left in his mouth.

"I'm so sorry, Professor," she said, her voice softening further. "There was a... a fatality. He didn't make it."

"Wang, you need to help me... It was not an accident... Everything was a calculated act! Ding Yi killed himself -"

"You are eating yourself up, Charles. Perhaps it's the survival guilt that plagues you -Nobody would have predicted a gas leak."

Morgan paused. Gas leak. Almost too convenient.

But Wang knew what he was about to say. "Morgan," she said, her words clipped and hurried. "You need to stop this. You're going too far. This isn't something you can handle."

So she knew.

They were all trying to cover it up. The dinosaurs, the voice, Ding Yi, Wang – they were all part of it, a piece of a puzzle far larger, and far more conspiratious. Had Ding Yi been a pawn in this larger game? The voice had warned him of a malevolent intent to erase the site and silence those who knew its secrets...

The world, it seemed, was not just suppressing the truth; they were actively erasing it, obliterating any trace of a history that threatened their carefully constructed narrative.

Morgan had no clue what he could possibly do.

## Creative Writing Fiction Group 5

X

### A Story in The Dust

HD Beijing School (JinZhan Campus), Li, Heloise – 17

"... until the dust fades into nothingness."

My pen hesitated over the last word, ink bleeding across the page. I felt my spirit drawing back, its endless whirl above me slowing, then stilling. A knock at the door awakened me; sadly, I took control of my body again. It was the servant. The usual routine, she came in to remind me that it's time for breakfast.

"Young master, you know your brother is worried about you, and he doesn't want to see you indulging in such... I don't know... literary things," said the servant.

"To be precise, It's science," I put my pen in my pocket and grabbed my notepad, correcting her, "but I'll be coming soon."

As I stepped across the doorsill, a gust of wind pierced my chest with its unforgiving coldness. I knew this wind belonged to autumn, for it blends summer's warmth with winter's intensity. A flash of vertigo, accompanied by the wind, prohibited me from clearly seeing the falling leaves, the sun glinting, or the servant. How long has it been since I returned to China... in 1900? Maybe about four years, but it feels as if nothing has changed. It's just like how I was certain my brother was now sitting at the far end of the redwood dining table, placed in the most inconspicuous corner of the main room, where all the important matters take place in our—or any—quadrangle dwelling. He would grab a cup of tea and read his newspaper bought by the servant, frowning at certain moments. Imagining this, I began to feel a strange clarity, and the world finally stopped dazzling me.

My brother was indeed seated at the far end of the table. But this time, he immediately looked up at me, his two hands still holding the newspaper, apparently waiting for me to approach him. Without a word, I walked towards him. "Take and skim through them," he said, his brow furrowed in worry. As he requested, I took the newspaper from him.

Honestly, the text was full of intentional emphasis on imperialism, conspiracy theories about what's happening in the cabinet, and some meaningless advertisements. At least, the newspaper was free enough for any idea to be published, perhaps because the politicians were currently too busy dealing with foreign affairs and their dear fellows or maybe they found these words entertaining as well. But the news reminded me of my father, who is also a politician. Didn't know how he has been doing lately.

"We are not in an optimistic situation," he sighed. I agreed with him because my research progress was also stuck at the moment. I already grew tired of commenting on politics a few years ago. How unfortunate it is to live in this era. This thought always comes to mind when I read ancient books, in which I see the glory of the past. Those glories have vanished, and, of course, our Empire will ultimately fall into destruction too. My brother frequently says that I'm too pessimistic; well, surely, I can't see what he sees in me, and arguing is unnecessary. Therefore, I've chosen to have fewer conversations with him and focus on the study of Dinosauria, which I first heard about while I was at university in England.

That was a geology lecture, where the professor mentioned the first dinosaur fossil found in England, which they named Iguanodon. As the words entered my ears, they took root and sprouted in my mind—vivid images of creatures from millions of years ago presenting themselves in my head, showing me their magnificent empire—orderly and glorious. At that moment, I knew what I was going to study and bring back to China. Fortunately, I found records from historical books that there were unrecognizable bones discovered, which I speculated to be likely dinosaur bones based on the descriptions given. This proves dinosaurs' territories were vast, possibly spanning the entire Earth.

"... are you still listening," said my brother, interrupting my thoughts, "things are starting to change. Actually, they started to change four years ago. You know about the invasion. But the time has come for us to find an alternative place to live."

"Sure," I responded unconcernedly. The change he's referring to is probably the Russo-Japanese War, which took place in Manchuria. If things have changed, they must have done so a few years ago. However, the days are the same. Slight changes are normal and necessary in this era, but moving to a new place is no reason for me. I could still make more progress here with my studies.

"The real dinosaur that you're describing is this empire we live in. Nothing from the past works anymore nowadays. We should make changes just like our father," my brother said, his voice rising, as if annoyed by my indifferent attitude. "You are willfully ignoring the fact."

"One thing that could be permanent, without being buried, is knowledge rather than a nation," I've provided my reason to him, so now I'm going to leave as I planned. A field visit is also a crucial part of my studies. I turned and walked out the door before my brother could find a counterargument. The food on the table was forgotten by both of us.

'Visiting the pharmacy' was the first item on my schedule. According to records, Ossa Draconis (long gu)—a rare medicinal substance used to treat anxiety and insomnia, is typically made from fossilized bones of large extinct animals such as dinosaurs, mammoths, or other prehistorical creatures. So, I might search for some genuine pieces from the owner.

On the way to the pharmacy my family and I had visited before, the sun climbed higher, the noises around me intensified, and the air grew thick. Once again, my mind began to wander, rethinking the every words I wrote, until the familiar shop sign appeared in my sight.

"Welcome back, young master," the owner said graciously, standing behind the counter that faced the door. "What are you looking for today? I remember last time it was your elder bother who came here to get medicine for your father. "

My words hesitated for a moment, then I said, "I wanted to ask if you have any raw bones for making long gu."

"Oh, I can surely get some for you. But it might take a few days, as they are only sold in a distant materials market, where I source all my raw materials from."

"Please, then. I'd appreciate it. I'll come back in a few days."

"Of course! By the way, how's your father? He must be very busy these days."

"He hasn't been home for a week." I said honestly. "I'm actually not sure how he's doing at the moment. I've been caught up with my own work, and I haven't had much time to check."

"My young master, your father will be fine," the owner said confidently. "He's truly a remarkable person, your father. A brilliant politician and a real asset to our country... we don't see many like him, do we? We all learn skills to survive, but only a few can reach the top to thrive. Without a doubt, your father is one of the successful ones, those who fail are quickly swept away."

I nodded, unsure how to respond. The owner seemed excited now, eager to continue. "Only those at the top can really change our country and the world. Most politicians are just fishing in troubled waters. They should be swept away so the country can revive. People like me, we serve the capable ones, which I find satisfying as I know I'm doing my part." "Is that so?" I replied, flatly. "Thank you. I also believe he'll be fine."

I didn't want to prolong the conversation. I didn't entirely agree with him, but there was little point in debating. His views, while strong, didn't influence me much. In my mind, no one was truly above anyone else—no matter how high they climbed in life, we all face the same end. Pretentiousness, in any form, was meaningless.

After that conversation, I left and went to a bookstore to find more detailed information about the existence of dinosaurs. The more I read, the deeper my regret grew. It's a pity that no real fossils have been recognized in China yet, partly because this field of study hasn't gained much traction, and people have yet to realize the significance of dinosaurs in expanding our knowledge of Earth's history. The world of dinosaurs comes alive even more vividly when I compare it to the present. Carnivorous dinosaurs hunted weaker dinosaurs to satisfy their desires, and they also preyed on each other, battling until one's skin was split and one's flesh broke forth. This even mirrors the struggles of life today. But the most absurd thought is that, unlike dinosaurs, humans have the capacity for rational thoughts and self-reflection. Yet, despite our intelligence, we, too, are trapped in the same cycle of violence and self-interest. In a way, both humans and dinosaurs have followed a similar path, and are likely to meet the same end.

\*\*\*

In the midst of my studies, I've also encountered a variety of people—some familiar, and some strangers. A retailer told me that our empire is eternal and that the emperor would lead us. A fortune teller tried to convince me that pursuing everything is unrealistic; the past is past, and she thought my pursuit of things from that distant time was ridiculous. A hobo wandering the streets called me over, asking what I was searching for. I told him, and he acknowledged my pursuit, saying that when our country is strong enough, ruled by all its citizen, there would be no more wars, and people could pursue their dreams freely. Not only dinosaurs, he said, but anything we don't fully understand would be studied by all of us. Besides these people, I've also spoken to others, and each offered a unique perspective on life, empires, and knowledge—showing me some new viewpoints for interpreting the world, history, and dinosaurs.

I also received the bones from the pharmacy owner (although I couldn't be one hundred percent sure they were really dinosaur bones), but they allowed me to add some new scientific content to my essay. After finishing a month of work and writing, all the stories people shared and the words I had heard were still echoing in my head as I lay down and closed my eyes. This has never happened before when I was abroad, alone in a foreign land. Now, here, I began to wonder if solitude was ever truly my ally.

In the past few months, I have been writing and reading. Going outdoors has also become part of my usual routine. Father has come back a few times. He looked tired and old, but he remains enthusiastic about what he is doing, constantly striving to make changes to our country and the world. I used to not understand him. Childhood memories occasionally come to my mind—those days when I spent most of my time at home. I enjoyed going out into the courtyard, watching the leaves of the sycamore tree standing near the front door gradually turn orange in autumn, exposing the taupe branches in winter, and then spring would bring the green back, always in the same way. My brother always looked forward to the moment when he could ask me to play with him after coming back from school, and my mother always encouraged us to explore, while never forgetting to remind us to return home. In this turbulent world, our house provides a little peace for all of us. I sought to record all of history in my diary, though for no apparent reason. Or perhaps for a reason I'm not yet aware of. How time flies.

\*\*\*

A year passed, and my brother again asked me to move to a new place. But I didn't answer him; instead, I went out again. The streets were full of people, dust flying in the air. They weren't prosperous, but they were alive. The sun warmed me. I walked around without a purpose, greeting the people I knew.

Without realizing how much time had passed, a familiar figure ran up to me from a distance. It was the servant.

"Young master, I finally found you! Please come back home. Father... he had a heart attack," the servant said weakly, her voice trembling. My thoughts of everything else were cleared away. How sudden. I braced for misery to engulf me, but it did not come. The bustling sounds of the market faded into a distant hum, as if I had lost my hearing.

An expected stillness. As I stepped in, my mother and brother glanced at me when I approached the bed. The first thing awaiting me was the sunlight, penetrating through the window and illuminating the stone flooring, which reflected rays into my pupils. I thought—and hoped—that it would give me a sense of distance, a moment of relief. But instead, it pressed harder, as if commanding my eyes to open to a truth I wasn't fully ready to face. Glaringly, it poured its light onto the quilt that covers my father's body. The dust drifting in the beam of light just made time feel even more elusive, slipping through, and nothing else.

My mother walked slowly to my side. She murmured and placed her hand on my shoulder. "Accidents always happen, especially at this age. Life is... delicate and fragile, never showing the slightest mercy. Don't worry about me, though. I believe in destiny. Things will surely unfold naturally, at their own time."

I was oblivious to the expression on my face in that moment, and my mind felt blank. A reel of thread inside my heart unwound slowly and painfully from a tiny end, pricking me at the very core. Sadness deepened in my chest, as it does for almost anyone when facing the death of a loved one. Never indulge in emotions that will overwhelm you, I used to remind myself, believing that control was healthier. But the longer I lived, the more those emotions clawed at me. So this time, I decided to confront them, to grasp the path that goes through my fear and pain, and to unravel myself—before it could grip me.

I thought I understood my brother now. I, too, am deeply attached to this society, to our family. Not just the past, but the present as well. I've been ignoring a simple truth.

A day has passed, and what happened in the country didn't give us much time to mourn father's death. I saw my brother standing at the front door.

"Are you now willing to leave with us?" my brother said, looking into my eyes. "To move to a remote place? Mother will have matters to attend to there, and the servant will take good care of her. I'll probably return here after sending you there, as there's still some of Father's business left that I can help settle. And you—well, you can pursue any studies or writing you wish there."

"I guess so," I said. "I've known this place long enough, and there's no reason to stay. The revolution and war will swallow it all. But... I'll leave my works here. Maybe one day, someone will find them, and they'll be remembered. Just... give me a minute."

"Sure," he simply answered simply, without further questions, "I'll wait for you here"

\*\*\*

This may be the last moment in my room, which has been with me for decades. Unforgettable is the smell of books and old wood, mixing with memories that flow into my lungs one last time, triggering not nostalgia, but a sense of completeness that makes everything feel worthwhile, even if, ultimately, everything will fade away: my brother, my mother, and anyone I had met or spoken to. But I know that the world will continue as usual, with people fighting to save their countries, their worlds; while some trying to destroy them. Generation after generation, endlessly.

I look through the open front door. My brother is waving at me, calling me from under the sycamore tree in the soft glint of the sunlight. For the first time, my sight feels clearer than ever.

A flicker of hope is growing in my heart that someone will find my diary and essays, which may soon be buried by ruins. So, before I go, I write down the last sentence in my diary:

"... until the dust fades, leaving behind only traces. To whoever finds this, driven by a hunger for history, may you look beyond the dust of time and find in my words something lasting: the dinosaurs, the Empire, our family, and my own story."

# Fiction Group 7



### A Titanour's Elevator Incident in Jiangxi

Korean International School Springboard, Fan, Ka Chun Ethan – 16

In a new tech area located in Jiangxi, four green giant titanours went to an office underground 200 km below the sea level on a stormy day at 10 am on a Wednesday morning. The four green giant titanours walked slowly from their home for 25 minutes. "Pump, pump, pump.." their steps woke up the surrounding insects and birds as the smallest titanur was 1001 kg. When the giant titanours entered the secret office underground from the underground floor, they nudged the call button and barred to the elevator immediately. When four of the giant titanours entered the elevator, one of the giant titanours nudged the button to the fifteenth floor but it overloads since the maximum capacity is 3000 kg (26 people) inside because the four giant titanours squished to the elevator car and the lift announcer said that the elevator was overloaded.

Suddenly, when the elevator moved up to the top, the governor rope could not afford more than 3000 kg to move all the giant titanours up to 200 km and the elevator collapsed with a bang vibration. When the elevator collapsed, the news reporter published the incident of collapsing the elevator with four giant titanours at the office building in Jiangxi. On the news article that was posted recently, it said that one of the titanours was squashed by the two dinosaurs and entangled in the elevator immediately. The news article was posted on the live news websites.

A few hours later, one of the Chinese Dragon Bird (also known as a Flying Dinosaur) is appeared and he was acting as an elevator repairer wizard and clutched up slowly off the wall and brought a big bunch of ropes to put up on the elevator cartop. The elevator finished the repair. Later at 2:30 PM, four of the giant titanours went up to the fifteenth floor without announcing and displaying the Overload Signal. After arriving on the fifteenth floor, the titanours finally started working as office workers until 6:30 PM.

At 7:00 PM when the giant titanours went home and watched the news, the News reporter announced the breaking news titled "Four Giant Titanours collapsed into a elevator at a office building in Jiangxi this morning" and watched the entire news article until the end to see the conclusion of the elevator incident of today. When the conclusion of the news article said that "The Elevator was fixed properly", then the problem was solved for a day. When the titanours went to bed to sleep, the parents said "Don't break the elevator next time, ok?". "We will check the instructions carefully before entering the elevator. We will go to the elevator one by one and we will not break the elevator" the giant titanours before going to bed at 9:00 PM.

### The Dinosaur War

Korean International School Springboard, Lin, Adrian – 19

Long ago in Jiangxi, China, in 2000 AC, there lived a group of Chinese feathered dinosaurs. They all have lengthy wings and secure feathers. Instead of stomping, they can soar in the air over long distances. This province was ruled by three elderly dinosaurs namely Sino, Savills, and Hong Jiang. The leaders were having a conversation about making Jiangxi a modernized city. Unpleasantly, this created conflict with many villagers, and one of them was Lawson.

Lawson, one of the dinosaur villagers, got upset at the leaders for demolishing the houses because they were for the villagers only. He was about to throw a tantrum at the leaders by yelling really angry. He asked the other villagers "Shall we join the fight against Sino and his group? We want to make Jiangxi a city! Let's do this immediately!"

When the three elderly dinosaurs were demolishing the villagers' houses, they decided to make higher buildings because they wanted more people to live in that area. They said angrily "We're unhappy that the villagers don't like houses in Jiangxi and we want to make those houses into high rise buildings!" This caused other villagers to get upset. The villagers cried "Oh no! We're losing our homes! Stop demolishing the houses for dinosaurs!"

Lawson and the other villagers prepared for war by getting swords, arrows, and catapults. They waited for a full moon in the dark sky to start the war. Lawson and his group surprised the leaders with their attack. They said "Wow, why are you guys there? This is now a war!" Sino's soldiers were awestrucked and they were caught off guard from the violent shooting!

A lot of the soldiers were killed and heavily injured in this attack. Lawson and the other villagers send their messages to Sino and his group about keeping Jiangxi a simple province. They said "We want Jiangxi to be a simple province, not a city!"

The war lasted for a month through days and nights. Everyone was very exhausted and fatigued with a dark cloud of emotions from the loud noises and angry chanting. Sino and his group left Jiangxi and moved to Xiamen when the war halted. Lawson said "I'm the new emperor of Jiangxi, China!" What a tough war it has been with Sino and his group! Lawson will be able to be looking after Jiangxi forever.