



Fiction

Group 2

The True Treasure

Bloom KKCA Academy, Leung, Beverly – 11

Lee Song stared at his finished painting with pride. Painted on the pebble was a chained bird on a swaying tree, struggling to fly.

“Lee Song!” the voice cut into his reverie like a knife. “You were supposed to be mucking out the stables. Are you painting by the lake *again*?”

Lee Song whirled around to face his Cousin Lee Chao, his archenemy, who had bullied Lee Song for years.

Lee Chao inspected the pebble with mock interest. “Lee Song! A painting will not add food to a table. But a rock—” he grinned cunningly, “—will add ripples to a lake!” He raised his arm, about to fling the precious painting into the water.

Finding his voice, Lee Song indignantly exclaimed, “No! Don’t!” He lunged for the rock.

Lee Chao laughed maliciously, and flung the cherished pebble into the lake.

Lee Song stared at the water. The heartless surface reflected back only his pain, mocking him.

His cousin chuckled. “Now go and muck out the stables,” he ordered.

~

That evening, Lee Song trudged off to gather his family’s goats. A rotund runaway goat, Pangzi, frustrated him by attempting **yet** another escape. Angrily, he chased after the mutinous animal, following it to a gathering of grottoes in the plain.

Lee Song cautiously stepped through the winding tunnels and inspected the caves as he searched for the goat.

Framing the spacious caverns were reassuringly solid walls, dry and with no leaks. *Nice*, he thought.

A flurry of scuffles came from behind a rock. Lee Song turned. *Pangzi!* After capturing him, Lee Song herded all the mischievous animals home.

~

After the evening meal, Lee Song snuck out of his house to see his best friend, Chen Lin. She was an independent, free-spirited sculptor, a revolutionary against the social stereotypes of ‘girls who were expected to stay at home and look pretty.’

When he got to her house, Chen Lin was sitting in her courtyard and tinkering around with a clay carving. “Hey, Lee Song, what’s up?”

“No good news”, Lee Song mumbled, dejectedly. “Today Lee Chao threw the pebble I was painting into the lake.”

Chen Lin tactfully remained silent for a moment, she knew Lee Chao was a sore topic, so she changed the subject.

“I’ve got a great idea, how about we find a little place for all the artists in this village to work? We can sneak out at night and work there instead of risking being caught out here.”

Lee Song brightened up. “I know just the place, a little group of grottoes I stumbled upon today in the middle of the plains, along the silk road. It’s perfect.”

“That’s great! It’s a more cheerful topic than the upcoming war. The boys being sent to army registration offices are getting younger and younger these days. The Jade King is desperate for troops.” Chen Lin sighed.

“Well, the Warring Emperor *is* advancing on our borders. In a few moons, the Emperor’s soldiers will be here, at the Village of the Tiger River!” Lee Song was worried.

Suddenly, Chen Lin’s sister shouted, “Chen Lin! Wash the dishes. Hurry!”

She frowned. “If you want the dishes done, do them yourself!”

Lee Song surreptitiously slipped into the shadows.

~

When Lee Song returned home, Lee Chao was lying in wait for him. “*Why were you out so late?*”

Lee Song stopped, petrified.

Lee Chao continued his harangue. “Do you want to bring more shame to the House of Lee, you idiot?”

Just then, Father appeared sleepily. “Will someone explain why you two are up at this ungodly hour and waking the whole of China?”

Lee Chao smirked. “Uncle, Lee Song snuck out and went gallivanting all over the village. He must be punished!”

Father glared at Lee Song, fury and frustration on his face. “For the hundredth time? You know here, in the Village of the Tiger River, you are a farmer and warrior. Nothing else. A painting will not stop the Warring Emperor, nor quell the famine in this land.

“You continue to disappoint me, boy, and you will forever. The next time I catch you creating meaningless artwork, I will throw you out of the house. Now go!”

Lee Song gathered his thoughts. “I will go, but I am done being a nobody. From now on, I will do the chores allocated to me in exchange for living here and my meals. I will not be treated as a scapegoat.”

Father clenched his teeth. Lee Song would be a cheap worker. He would have to agree to the terms. Lee Song knew that never again would there be love between the two of them. He had always hoped that one day, when there was peace and no threat of famine, his father might finally appreciate his artwork. Now he knew that day would never come.

As Lee Song arranged all his material in the caves, a strange sense of inner calm washed over him. His father had rejected him, and society spurned him. However, he was free and independent now.

He felt like the bird in his painting, only he had broken his chains.

He was flying. He was soaring in the sky.

~

The centuries passed. The world changed, yet the caves remained the same haven they had been since the day of their discovery. First in a trickle, then a rush, artists around the Tiger River began to gather inside the caves. A girl specialising in sculpture. A boy who was an expert in calligraphy. Twins whose talents lay in poetry.

The caves were for those who worked with paper rather than plow. For those who wielded a pen rather than a sword.

Steadily, precious pieces of art accumulated within the caverns.

But the real treasure to be found in the caves was the sense of community and appreciation, the affection and warmth. You could take away the artwork and literature, but the camaraderie and respect would remain. That was the *true* treasure of the Mogao Grottoes—friendship.

The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Almeida, Nero – 9

“Enough arguing,” my Dad yelled as we climbed out of the dusty car. We had parked close to the entrance of a huge cave. It had a cavernous mouth and we could just catch a glimpse of tunnels leading away like tonsils. A sign said: ‘The Mogao Grottoes.’ and ‘Entrance here.’ A guide stood waiting for us outside.

Welcome, sir,” he said.

“Hey, how come he only addressed Dad?” Siena said.

“That’s because I’M the most important person in the family.” Dad joked.

“Hey, that’s not fair!!!” Siena exclaimed angrily as we all stepped into the darkness. The guide instantly shushed her.

“You have to be quiet in here otherwise you’ll start a landslide.” But it was too late..

At first only five pebbles fell. Then eight. Then ten. And without warning, boulders started hurtling down blocking the entrance and sealing off our exit.

“Now look what you’ve done!” Dad shouted. I elbowed her. “Ow!” she said and stumbled backwards. Her elbow hit a jutting rock which shifted backwards, revealing a secret passage. Siena tumbled into the passage as though she was being swallowed down a gullet. We heard a loud “THUMP!” And another “OW!”

“Guys there is a chest. You have to come!” Siena’s words drifted up to us. I jumped in after her to find her seated in front of large wooden chest containing. We turned the key in the lock and the lid popped open revealing a ladder going even deeper into the darkness. We all climbed down and reached a musty, damp tunnel. After walking for a long, long time we pitched camp, scared and cold.

After a terrible sleep, Dad shook me awake.

“Get up buddy.” We gathered our belongings and set off, still afraid but hopeful of escape. After walking for an even longer time, the tunnel finally started to slope upwards.

“YES!!!” we high-fived each other, even the guide. We started to run up the slope and eventually we noticed that we could see each other again. We kept up our frantic run and finally stepped out into blinding light. We cheered and clapped while covering our eyes from the glare.

“Uuuuuuhhhh, guys,” I said. “I think there’s a problem.”

The ground was covered in snow and there was a pack of wolves with raised hackles under a nearby clump of fir trees.

“AROOOOOO!!!” Wolf howls filled

the air. Everyone backed into the dark tunnel, spun around and then ran as fast as the wind back into the depths.

After we rounded a few corners, we stopped to catch our breath. We glimpsed stairs up ahead and began a long climb up a rickety ladder. After an eternity we came to a glass hatch. My Dad had to push it open it was so heavy and when it eventually gave, warm water and light flooded over us. We had surfaced in a rockpool on a tropical beach.

“Booyeah!!!” we all yelled happily. We were so thankful for the magic of the Mogao Grottoes.

The Basilisk Cave

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Almeida,, Siena – 10

There was once a young novice monk who was known as Shenzu. On Shenzu's ninth birthday, a Zen master selected Shenzu to be his pupil. The Zen master's name was Sitagu Sayadaw. After the second year of Shenzu's training, Sitagu said it was time for Shenzu to recite The Sacred Vows at the Mogao Grottoes to finally become a real monk. Shenzu's friend, Abhaya, and know-it-all Dae Shim would be coming with him, for it was their time to become real monks too. The journey to the Grottoes was long and hard, and Shenzu was grateful when they reached bedtime prayers.

Late one evening, Abhaya poked Shenzu in the arm.

"Why didn't Sitagu let us read the scrolls? It's Sunday," Abhaya asked.

"He only lets me read once a month, and only if I've been good," Shenzu replied.

"What?" Abhaya said in shock. "My teacher, Dandan, lets me read the scrolls every Sunday."

Abhaya threw down his blankets. "This is disgraceful. If Sitagu won't let me read, I'll do it anyway. How does he expect us to become wise enough to heed The Sacred Vows?"

"No!" Shenzu pleaded. "Dandan is known for his generosity! Sitagu is different! He's strict!"

"What's going on?" It was Dae Shim, yawning and rubbing his eyes. He surveyed the scene, Shenzu with his arm on Abhaya's shoulder, and the scroll in Abhaya's hand. Dae Shim gasped.

"What are you doing!? If Sitagu finds out, he'll punish the lot of us!" Dae Shim flung his arms out in exasperation, knocking a clay pot engraved with God's noble deeds to the floor. It shattered, breaking into a million pieces. There was the sound of a chair jolting in Sitagu's chamber. Abhaya grabbed Dae Shim and Shenzu's arm, pulling them into a nearby rock tunnel and then rounding two corners for safety.

"Sitagu told us not to go into rock tunnels! We'll be lost for—" Shenzu put his hand over Dae Shim's mouth.

Sitagu's footsteps came nearer, and then receded. Abhaya swiveled about on his heels. Somehow, they had wandered into a labyrinth of tunnels.

"Uh—oh," Abhaya said. "I'm afraid we're hopelessly lost."

Dae Shim looked like he was about to launch into one of his lectures about doing what you're told, but Shenzu saved Abhaya the trouble.

"You're just kidding. Right, Abhaya?" Shenzu said, looking pointedly at Abhaya.

"Right," Abhaya said. And he headed down the tunnel he hoped led to Sitagu and the safety of a warm glowing candle.

They walked for a long time. Maybe fifteen minutes, maybe a hundred. Time was different in the cold rock tunnels.

"Look!" Shenzu yelled. Up ahead, there was a tunnel leading to two blinding yellow orbs of light. "The candles!"

"I told you," Abhaya shot back defiantly. Dae Shim began running towards the orbs, dodging the piles of pebbles that lay in his path.

"Sitagu!" Dae Shim cried. "It was all Abhaya's fault—" Dae Shim's eyes grew wide with fear, and he collapsed to the floor. Abhaya and Shenzu ran to see what was the matter. Shenzu knelt down to check Dae Shim's pulse, while Abhaya looked to see what had made Dae Shim collapse.

"Abhaya!" Shenzu said urgently. "Dae Shim doesn't have a pulse! He's close to death!" There was no response, except the thump of a body hitting the floor.

"Abhaya?" Shenzu slowly raised his head. The orbs of light were eyes. And they were looking right at him.

Shenzu was in a crystal cave. Not one of those pretty ones with dainty fairies welcoming you, but a black cave with dark blue icicles hanging from the ceiling. There was a long green snake-like creature with yellow eyes and a huge mouth that housed hundreds of teeth. Next to the monster, there was a hideous pile of skulls and bones. Shenzu opened his left eye a slit to watch the creature, hoping it wouldn't see he was awake. But the creature's nose had a unique sense of smell, and the creature swung around.

'I am a Basilisk,' The creature said in a mean, growly, musty voice that seemed to come from the bottom of his throat. *'With my eyes I cast The Basilisk Curse over prey. Then I eat them, and add them to my pile of bones.'* The Basilisk's voice became angry and booming, filling the cave with echoes.

'The imposters that dare enter my home, the generation-old Basilisk cave that I now proudly call my own, will be eaten, or, if they dare challenge me, will be eaten alive.' Shenzu's stomach crawled. But the Basilisk's warning gave him an idea. If he challenged the Basilisk, he would die honorably, and if he won, he would find a way to reverse the Basilisk curse and set Dae Shim and Abhaya free. Shenzu grabbed a sword from the remains of a skeleton and said boldly, "If that is true, I will fight."

'Foolish child,' The Basilisk said. *'A choice between dying painlessly or painfully, and you choose painfully. Enough chatter.'*

The Basilisk lunged towards Shenzu. Shenzu deflected the Basilisk's attack with his sword. Shenzu tried to stab the Basilisk, but he kept missing. He frantically stabbed the air and ran towards the Basilisk hoping his sword would pierce the fleshy part of the Basilisk's neck. The Basilisk clamped his jaws down on Shenzu's shoulder. Shenzu dropped to the ground, defeated. But then he heard a huge thud and realized the Basilisk had fallen down dead beside him.

Shenzu sought out the shapes of Dae Shim and Abhaya in the dim murkiness. They slowly revived consciousness. Shenzu helped them to their feet and together they hobbled back towards the warm safe candle of Sitagu. As Shenzu felt his way back along the dark rock tunnel he tried to make sense of the Basilisk encounter. Perhaps wisdom was not to be found in the scrolls but instead in the choice of honor and friendship. And after what felt like an eternity, the friends stumbled back into the candlelight.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chan, Jeffrey – 9

Ch.1 Meeting a New Friend

“Are you alright?” the voice asked nervously. “Hello, can you hear me?”

I woke up and looked around. There was no one else except myself. The stillness in this place was uncanny and I could not remember anything about this place. All that I remembered was riding on a camel, on 2nd September. My friend Vikas and I were obsessed with the fun. And just a moment later, all around me were winds and sands. The winds were going in a way that I've never seen before. I could not see anything in front of me except the feeling of being lifted in the air...

Thousands of thoughts went through my mind as I was recalling my memories. I was dead!

The voice seemed to know what I was thinking as he saw me shaking. As I snatched a look to my right, a face illuminated from the wall by a faint icon-like glow, like a ghost without a body. A light film of sweat covered my face, with the sand hanging dense around like a second layer of grey and brownish skin.

“You have fainted for two days here,” the mysterious boy answered. “In the famous Mogao Caves located in Dunhuang, China.”

I was shocked. For a few seconds I could hear nothing but my breath. It should just be a dream, I was supposed to be with my teachers and schoolmates, on a unique summer exchange.

“You should feel excited about it. This place was not open to all, and was listed in UNESCO's world cultural heritage around three decades ago,” he added.

“Mogao Caves...do you mean the glittering pearl adorning the Silk Road?” I raised my eyebrows at the icon-like glow as I heard of this ancient trade route before.

“Exactly,” he replied merrily. “I am from the virtual world. which means I am not physically here. However, I can help you in your exploration and to overcome the obstacles TOGETHER.”

Together...that echo...echoooo... His shouts bounced back and forth around the cave. We both listened, laughed, and that's how my adventure began with this new friend, **Jeffrey2.0**.

Ch.2 The Magical Scroll in the Library Cave

BANG!

“Ow!” I yelled.

“I just bumped my head onto something, like a wall!” as I crawled through the blackness.

“Stretch out your hands and see if you can find any torches,” said Jeffrey2.0 “Some explorers may have accidentally dropped their flashlight in the past.”

A torch! Yes, I got it and wiped the dust off the torch.

Surprise!

In front of me was a mountain of scrolls and manuscripts, that stank with a damp and mouldy smell, hundreds and thousands...Behind that were some ancient paintings, with fading colours and a myriad of Buddhist images, hanging on the wall and covered with a layer of dust.

“Choose a scroll”, a voice in my head said. Out of temptation, I secretly opened a scroll that looked comparatively good and complete. Like a modern magazine, the book had a lot of pictures, musicians playing their instruments, fairies flying around the Buddha... I felt as if I was in that book, and as if I was in another world. Which, actually, I was!

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

I looked up towards the sound.

“Don’t touch my scrolls,” an animal roared, in a throaty voice. “Anyone who intends to steal will be locked up here forever!”

“I am not!” I called out, dropping the scroll accidentally as my hands paralyzed with fear. ‘What are you?’

“Fool, who else would be flying around in a cave? Batman?” The animal showed its body.

“It w—was... a....” I uttered. It had already been enough of a shock for me to discover, that I was in the Library Cave; and that it had been even more disconcerting to see a dragon inside this secret place.

“This dragon was summoned by the Highest Buddha to guard these valuables,” explained Jeffrey2.0. “Explorers have been pouring into China from all over the world in these decades, trying to steal these treasures away for their studies.”

“Now, get out of my Library!” shouted the dragon. All of a sudden, the scroll that I opened shone, unleashing some flying fairies—like musicians up in the air.

“What happened?” I gasped.

As I blinked my eyes, the scroll mountain was gone. Instead, a group of musicians appeared to be flying above my head, playing some sort of lullabies with their instrument. A Buddha was sitting in the middle, with an aura glowing around him which looked like a rainbow enclosing the cave.

“Get out of the door before the music ends!” Jeffrey2.0 shouted. “Or you will sleep here forever.”

But how?

I ran and sped towards the door without an idea of what to do...The music was getting louder...the dragon was roaring...Jeffrey2.0 was shouting something...but my ears were not working properly anymore...

With a huge spurt of speed, I just jumped and grabbed one of the flying musicians by his long silky sleeves. And a second later, I closed my eyes and swung myself towards the door with all my might, hoping for something miraculous to happen...

Ch.3 Reborn

“Are you alright?” Vikas asked nervously. “Jeffrey, can you hear me?”

“Wh—where am I now?” my voice suddenly sounded hoarse, as though my mouth had gone dry for days.

As I was waiting for my old friend’s answer, though I knew I was in the same Gobi desert, I found something in my hand. It was a part of the musician’s clothing. It was a smooth and light fabric that shone with glossy gold. The material was rare and unique, and that I knew I wasn’t dreaming.

"What’s that in your hand?" asked Vikas.

Before I could reply to Vikas, I heard a squeaky voice hissing, “This is mine. Return it back to me!”

“How can I return it back to you?” I yelled back silently.

“***The Reborn Door,***” He laughed in a creepy and spooky voice... “The door you just escaped from...”

The Mysteries Mogao Caves

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chan, Moses – 9

A long time ago in B.C. times, there was a monk and his big village with millions of people, discovering a cave with secrets of Buddhism. When they saw it they were blissful as quokkas, so they celebrated by catching the most delicious meal the grain rice that they brought with them for celebrating their success!

The next day, they made a map of the cave and marked an “X” on the map to represent the cave. Then they named it “The Magao Caves”, because Magao means peerless, which means “Something better than any other of its type.”

They also went in to find even more secrets inside the cave. Every day they found more and more secrets, which meant that they went deeper and deeper, which means it was more creepy and dangerous every day because the deeper they went the greater chance they will get lost.

Days passed, deeper they went. They wanted to find the piece of gold, but they only found some art and carvings. The monk died, but as he said before he went to discover “If I can’t complete and find the gold my sons and daughters will if they don’t, my grandson’s will...” 5 months passed, they then went back out, to get food, because they only got 3 more weeks food, which meant they had to find food for years or more. They came across this hurricane, which destroyed their camel cars, in the group people died from, viruses, extreme temperatures, and natural disasters... By the time they got back to the village, they got food for years. While going back to the caves they came over little earthquakes, which slowed their pace, but worse of all a very strong triple tornado came by. It killed a few hundred people of the leftover people in the group, it killed most of the leaders of the group. They fought for food, drinks, and even shelter. People got scratch marks, diseases, but back in the villages were having war towards them which they didn’t know about, which was dangerous... Days passed until they went back to the caves.

1 week passed every day they wrote a journal about the day, but art was what they only found... They only got 10 people left after everything and it was their mission to find the gold... All they did was try and try until the gods thought it was time for the people to get the gold, so they place the gold and some other treasure there when they were sleeping! The next day, the monk’s friends found golds, silvers, diamonds... They brought it back and showed people and achieved their mission where they found the treasure!

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The Secret of The Mogao Caves

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chen, Heather – 9

“Passport, please?” asked the customs officer. Jade Wong was on a flight from Hong Kong to Dunhuang, a famous city in China because of the Mogao Caves. In fact, the reason why she wanted to go there was for the inspiration for her new books!

After an exhausting flight, she checked into the Dunhuang Hotel. Her room had traditional Chinese decorations with a lustrous red carpet. She then changed into a red qipao to enjoy dinner before the trip ahead of her.

The next morning, Jade arrived at the Mogao Caves. She was amazed by the Mogao Caves instantly! It had beautiful statues, mysterious paintings and Chinese culture. Jade traveled deeper into the caves, and found a statue of Buddha reclining. The Buddha was lying down with a calm expression on its face.

Strangely, there were no other visitors besides Jade. *I thought visitors would be crowding in to see the Buddha!* As if hearing Jade’s thoughts, a voice behind her boomed: “I just put an enchantment on them so they wouldn’t!” Startled, Jade cried: “Who are you?” “I am... the Buddha!” Jade saw a *formerly* reclining Buddha sitting up.

“I wanted you to right a great wrong. A wrong that caused destruction in China a long time ago.” “Then why do you want *me* to right it? I’m not that special” said Jade. “I chose you because your ancestors have helped save lives out of the goodness in their hearts.” explained Buddha.

“The Great Destruction, was a dystopian version of ancient China. It was ruled by King Dargon and Queen Demonia! They’re cruel as they killed their people in order to keep track of the population.” “No wonder why you want to stop them.” said Jade, finally understanding. “I’m about to take you back in time. Hold my hand.” said the Buddha calmly. With shaky hands, Jade took hold of the Buddha’s massive hands, and a wave of dizziness swept across her.

“Are you alright?” Jade suddenly woke up. “Do you want to stay at our house? I mean, it’s not much but...” the stranger trailed off. “Of course! Thanks for your hospitality! My name is Jade Wong.” said Jade. “My name is Lily So!” Lily said happily.

Suddenly, a figure pounced on them. “Arghh! Who are you?” asked Jade fearfully. “I am... Queen Demonia. Welcome to our land,” she sneered, “I never liked newcomers, so everyone who is foreign in our land, goes to jail! And so do the people who help them.” Demonia glared at Lily.

Lily gulped. “Bye girls!” cackled Demonia, as a chariot whisked Jade and Lily off to jail. “We are in one of the most dangerous dungeons in this city. In order to get out, we need to escape the cell, dodge all the booby traps and swim through a lake with alligators in it.” said Lily, trembling at the thought of it. “I know! We can try using my hairpin!” said Jade excitedly. “Hope it works.” muttered Lily as Jade stuck her hairpin inside the keyhole and turned it.

Clang! When they got out, they dodged past swinging logs, slithering snakes *and* flying swords. “I’m afraid we’re down to the last obstacle. The lake of yangtze alligators.” said Jade gravely.

When they reached the lake, they saw those alligators. They were *smaller* than she expected, small *but* ferocious, with their jaws full of sharp teeth and keen eyes, it would be *impossible* to get past them. Suddenly Jade had a thought: “Lily! I think alligators *might* ticklish!” Jade said.

Without thinking, Jade jumped in. She tickled the first two alligators. Surprisingly, they cackled so hard they sank to the bottom of the lake. Quick as a flash, Jade put some metal chains around them, so they wouldn’t escape. Suddenly, *another* alligator appeared. This one seemed the most fierce of them all!

Strangely, when Jade tickled it, the alligator didn’t move a muscle. Jade immediately backed away from it. Lily wanted to help Jade, so she jumped in to distract the alligator. Jade caught on and started bounding the alligator in chains. It didn’t take long for the alligator to sink to the bottom of the lake.

“ The only problem is... Demonia and Dargon.” said Jade solemnly. “ I have an idea on how to defeat them! They must know that we escaped by now. So we turn ourselves in, and offer to be their servants. Then we will turn the guards in the palace against them.” finished Jade.

Once they got into the palace, a voice bellowed: “ So you have come to my palace? What a great honour!” said Queen Demonia sarcastically. Suddenly, Dargon entered the room, Jade said: “ We want to be servants instead of prisoners.” “ All right. You’re servants. Work, now!”

The girls discussed the plan while they were cleaning. “ First step: Make the guards go against Dargon and Demonia. How? We tell them they’ll be free. After all, everyone likes freedom” explained Jade.

“ Let’s go!” whispered Lily. They ran down the hallway. Suddenly, they spotted guards protecting the hallway.

“Do you hate Demonia and Dargon? If so, our plan is: if all of you go against Demonia and Dargon *and* win, you’re free!” said Jade. “Are ya sure we’ll win?” questioned a guard. “ Of course! Your numbers outmatch Demonia and Dargon greatly.”

“ Then let’s go. Charge!” screamed the guards. A battle started, and during the chaos, Lily cried: “ Let’s go!” They ran through the doors of the castle, and out into the light. Suddenly, Buddha appeared! He congratulated Jade: “ Well done, I shall send you back to the future.” “ Oh! Jade is from the future! Take me with her! ” cried Lily. “ Alright. You can come. If you don’t say a *word* that hints you are from the past.” said Buddha sternly. Suddenly, they went back to the present. That was the story of how Jade and Lily rewrote Chinese history. Thanks to these young ladies, China has the largest population in the world!

The Bodhisattva, Creatures, and Monks

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chen, Renee – 9

“Kaboom, crack!” Lightning shone from the sky; thunder groaned like lion roaring right beside you. A gust of wind ran through the leaves as if it was playing tag. It was raining cats and dogs, and if you were there, you would drench in just one second. Luckily no one was living there except for plants, plants everywhere. In such severe weather, plants were soaking in the water world with big drip of water pouring down. Rocks fell from the mountain hitting hard on the ground. Not falling off everywhere, the rocks bended and formed into an enormous cave.

After a few days, the rain stopped. A grand rainbow stretched across the sky like an upside down smile. In the lake, water glowed as if jewels in the water. Some trees were lying on the ground, and some were leaning.

Up on the sky, a bodhisattva was sad about what had happened, but still, she was thrilled that a cave formed in Dunhuang. It was a cave with large golden rocks covering it. The bodhisattva got a brilliant idea – to paint the cave to make it colorful and to use each art to represent a story. After a well-thought-out planning, she called up her mythical creature friends to do her painting job because of their gigantic size and their strong paws.

“Swoosh!” In just few seconds the mythical creatures gathered. They examined the spacious cave, their eyeballs turned and then smiles spread across their faces... The mythical creatures ran into the cave, took their paws and started scribbling, actually, they were making the beautiful cave arts. After a while, the sketches were finished and it was time to add some painting to it. There were a variety of colors on the creatures’ fur and they can control whatever color they want to paint on the wall. Rub, rub, rub, scratch, scratch, scratch. Adding paints on it made the drawing more enjoyable.

The mythical creatures didn’t report to the bodhisattva after a week. The bodhisattva got worrier and worrier, she decided to go down and have a look. When the bodhisattva got to the cave, in an instant, her mouth fell agape, she was stunned and speechless. Her eye opened wide – she was completely shocked by the drawings of people, creatures, and the views. On the wall, the mythical creatures were sweating, their tongues were sticking out their mouths and their eyes drooped. What a busy day!

Years passed, no one has gone into the mysterious cave. Until one day, when a monk was riding a camel, he saw half of a painting sticking out. The monk was curious and decided to go inside to discover. With just one step in, he saw cave arts with the attractive drawings and paintings. Impressed by the masterpiece painting, he thought he could add something to the cave to make it even better. In a flash of inspiration, he got an idea. He could build something to cover the cave – temples! The monk convened thousands of his fellow monks to build these temples. With innumerable trials and hardship, they finished the temples in decades.

Up on the sky again, it was really cloudy, the bodhisattva was playing fetching with her mythical creatures, she spotted something bright on the ground. It was from the cave with amazing cave arts painted by the creatures. But it looked totally different now.

The bodhisattva took a step back, “OOWWWWWWWW” screamed the bodhisattva. She got tripped by a spike. The spike was as sharp as the horns of an ox. Despite of the pain, she slid down to discover what was going on.

It was the spiky needle on the top of the temple roof that tripped the bodhisattva. The gigantic temples were as colorful and bright as the cave arts. When the bodhisattva stepped in the fabulous temple, she was amazed by the delicate sculptures, her eyes started to sparkle, she seems to be in love with it. Inside, there were also tall statues standing still. In a jiffy, the bodhisattva dashed out the temple and called for her mythical creatures. Immediately, the mythical creatures landed next to the temples, they were incredibly shocked as the bodhisattva was.

It was almost dark, the bodhisattva continued to explore the cave with the creatures – small parts of the sculpture were carefully carved by hand. Some pictures were in strange shapes that the bodhisattva didn’t even understand. In addition, they discovered more statues. Statues of buddhas, and other creatures that look like lions.

“What is the name of the cave?” The bodhisattva asked. No one had an idea, not even one.

“Then let’s come up with one!” The bodhisattva exclaimed. The chats started and went on and on and on and on and on till the next morning.

“Why don’t we call it the Mogao Cave?” shouted a lion–body, dragon–skin, ox–horn and three eyes creature. “Because,” continued the creature, “The Mogao Cave means peerless with cave arts, temples, sculptures, and statues.”

The long – hidden legends continue and remain to be discovered.

The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Cheng, Maegan – 9

What would you do if you were stuck in a cave, with no way out?

It was the year 2016, Tyler who was now 18 was a few months away from graduating. He was so excited that he couldn't even start describing what he felt. Tyler was going back to his hometown in China for college and to visit his grandparents while he was there.

In China he felt back home welcomed in open arms, he couldn't wait to see his grandparents again.

It is now the year 2017. Tyler was now a freshman in his college. He soon learnt that they were going to visit the Mogao Grottoes. In class, Tyler's mind was in the clouds and he missed the safety rules and instructions for the Mogao Grottoes caves.

During the visit, Tyler was so clueless that he even bumped into a huge rock pillar, but suddenly he heard a sound like a crack, as if something was ready to fall. Tyler was then taken aback.

Different sized boulders came crashing down, but Tyler managed to escape the boulders, only to find the room pitch black. As Tyler's eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw there was no escape. Tyler tried to think of ways to escape but the same thought kept returning to his mind. There is no point, there is no way I can leave here until someone notices I am missing! I should've listened. Tyler tried his best to stay calm. He tried repeating the same thought in his mind. He tried meditating. He tried thinking of happy times. He even tried banging the rocks, but nothing worked. Tyler started to cry and he started to scream in his mind. This can't be happening this can't be the end yet right?

A few days had passed, Tyler managed to stay alive, thanks to the food and water in his backpack, but he was almost down to nothing. 28 days had passed since Tyler's disappearance, everyone was concerned about where he went, but no one came to his rescue. Tyler is surviving Thanks to bugs and puddles of water. One day when Tyler was finding some water puddles he came across a flashlight, to his surprise, the flashlight was in a suitable condition, he used it to look around, and he saw a giant sculpture, a Buddha sculpture. Tyler was amazed by the fact that he was in this cave for maybe a few months, but never did he realize that there was an amazing sculpture right in front of his eyes. Then he curiously, but carefully explored the Buddha statue. "Wow..." Tyler gasped. Cool, this thing was built 1,000 years ago.

A week had passed, and Tyler was found! He was ready to cry. To be honest, I never thought I would be able to see light again!

"It is the same time of the year again., do you know if we are going to visit the Mogao Grottoes again? Maybe this time it will be the Yellow Mountain." Tyler asked Ben. Ben is Tyler's one and only best friend. "Beats me." said Ben "But the real question is, are you gonna get trapped in a cave again?" "Maybe not, I will cautiously approach them." Replied Tyler, but the truth is that Tyler was trembling all over. Ben frowned "Are you okay?". "I am better than ever! Why?" "No, it just looked like you were trembling."

At Mogao Grottoes, Tyler was given a supervisor. Just in case he goes missing again. When everyone saw it they laughed, they laughed until they coughed. Tyler's nose and face were now rose pink. Why can't I be left alone? Why do I need a supervisor? I'm 20! Great, my face is now rose pink and people are laughing at me, just wonderful.

Tyler then discovered that the supervisor's name is Mark

Being followed by this guy is a pain, he's so annoying, he's like a walking encyclopedia, I know some people like that but not me. He keeps on spitting out random facts at the wrong time, overall he has bad timing. *sigh, Mark frowned "is something wrong" and he just had to ruin my thoughts, I'll just tell him I'm fine. "No, I'm good." I wonder what thoughts he has about me. Mark thought

"Hey by the way, which cave are we in? Tyler asked "Cave 51" Mark replied that is the only reason why he is useful. "Watch out!" Exclaimed Mark, "Close call, thanks" Tyler said and maybe that's another reason why he's useful. I wonder if he likes me now, because I kind of saved him from getting trapped again. Mark thought. Suddenly Tyler laughed and said "I guess I really need a supervisor" Mark laughed too. I guess he's not that bad. Tyler thought I guess I don't have to worry about him hating me. Mark thought

“Hey, is this the library cave?” Tyler asked “Yup” Mark answered joyfully “Wow... this place is so cool, I never been to one of these before.” Tyler said “I know right?” Mark asked “I think we should tone it down a bit, the echo in this cave is making it seem loud.” Tyler whispered “Yeah.” Mark Whispered.

It’s time to go.” Whispered Mark. “ *sigh it was fun while it lasted.” Tyler whispered quietly.

Back outside they took attendance, and made sure everyone was here. While Tyler was getting bullied by other students saying “Did you have fun, having a supervisor?” or “How does it feel to have someone following you?” Tyler’s answer was simple, “Yes it was fun, Mark is funny and nice.” Then Tyler heard all of them murmur about what he said.

When they arrived back at school, their teacher wanted them to reflect on their journey, and create a presentation about it. The presentation was due in a week.

The day of Tyler’s presentation went splendid everyone listened and clapped for him. When everybody clapped for Tyler’s smile was bigger than anyone else’s.

Mogao Caves

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chiu, Ellie – 9

A cold winter morning, in the north-western part of China, a class of students was thrilled to be going on a field trip. The location they were heading was the Mogao Caves, a group of 500 ancient Chinese temples over 1500 years old. But recently, there had been cases of missing children around that area. For security purpose, the principle sent more teachers to go on this field trip to watch over the students. The whole grade 5 was going on this day, and the teachers grouped them into teams for extra safety. Nobody was allowed to explore alone. Teddy was partnered up with Amanda, Sarah, Rachel, George and the teacher Ms Applebee.

Once they arrived at one of the caves, it was already crowded with people, but they went with it because this place was beautiful. There were ancient drawings on the walls, and lots of statues, with a big Buddha sculpture right in the middle. Teddy's group wandered around and found an empty room with no people inside, except for four security guards standing just inside the room's entrance. But these guards were wearing different uniforms than other guards. Teddy's group walked into the room and used their iPads to take nice pictures inside. All of a sudden, the security guards ran out of the room, took keys out of their pockets and locked them inside.

The teacher and the students all panicked. Everyone started screaming for help, and banged on the door as hard as they could. Before long, some of the students started crying, some started peeing, and some got very mad. The teacher tried calling for help many times, but there was no signal in the room. Most of the students gave up screaming, as they were tired and hungry. They had left their lunch boxes at school, and only had enough water for one person. Ms Applebee felt miserable and they were running out of ideas. The screaming didn't work, the banging didn't work, and the phone didn't work. Everyone is scared, not to mention some of them needed to use the restroom.

By the time it hit six, everyone got super hungry and thirsty. There was only a slither of light from a crack in the wall. As time passed, it got dimmer and dimmer. Mice and other small creatures started coming out through the holes on the wall. After a while, the room was filled with mosquitoes, mice, ants and lizards. Everyone was tiptoeing and leaning against the wall. Some screamed and cried with the little energy they had left. But Ms Applebee thought of a brilliant idea. She told the kids to step on the creatures and eat them if they were really hungry. But none of them listened to her, as they thought the idea was disgusting and may even get them sick or poisoned. Time kept ticking, and their hunger grew. Out of despair, they all started screaming and kicking the doors again. When it hit midnight, everyone got really cold. Some brought extra jackets but it wasn't enough. Using the light on their iPads, they started looking at the pictures on the wall to find clues for getting out. But they found nothing useful. Soon they all got sleepy and tired, and didn't really have the energy to do anything. Suddenly, the pictures on the wall started singing and dancing. Most of them freaked out, but some found it funny. Rachel was so shocked that she fainted! After five minutes or so, the singing and dancing stopped. Ms Applebee tried to calm down the kids by saying it was only their imagination, but she looked very frightened herself. After a long night, everyone finally fell asleep.

When morning came, everyone was upset. They had hoped it was all just a dream, but it wasn't. George was particularly mad because he didn't like sleeping in his outside clothes, not brushing his teeth, and not having pancakes in the morning. Sarah knew there was no way to escape, and that only luck can save them. Seeing a large Buddha statue in the room, Sarah bent down and started praying to Buddha for help. She closed her eyes and mumbled to herself. When she got up, everything was the same, not much had changed after the praying. Moments later, a light started glowing out of the Buddah's finger. The finger started moving inch by inch, then it stopped, pointing at a wall full of pictures. Everyone moved closer to find clues, but they found nothing interesting. Out of madness, Teddy started kicking on the wall. Later, George followed and started kicking as well. Then Sarah noticed that the wall made different sounds depending on where they kicked. In one particular area, it sounded more hollow. Then Ms Applebee told the kids to pick up rocks and started throwing them at the hollow area. After some effort, the wall started cracking, and breaking. They finally made a hole and saw light from outside! Everyone thanked Sarah for her brilliant idea to pray to Buddah.

When everyone got out, they were all cheering and thankful. The teachers told the parents to pick them up, and the parents were very glad everyone came out alive. And the homework for that day was to write a letter about their adventurous field trip.

Masterpiece Tales From The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chong, Selene – 9

Prologue

‘You will never be successful! You are wasting your time! You have got to be kidding me!’ Those were the words I always heard. Every single second, my extremely malicious parents said that I could be anything *but* an artist.

You see, when I was young, I loved drawing. As a matter of fact, I would choose drawing over reading or even playing games. All my life, my parents were disappointed in me, but I knew I just couldn’t change their mind even if I really wanted to.

Chapter 1

‘Wow!’ Every piece of fabulous artwork surrounded me. Inspired, my eyes filled with big, bright, shiny stars. I felt my heart pounding in my chest. I yearned to be a famous artist, but everyone just looked down on me. The more people looked down on me, the more I believed that I couldn’t do it. I quietly walked down the hallways; my footsteps echoing. I saved up all my money for this trip —I just knew that this way, by getting inspired, I could definitely be a famous, inventive artist.

In each piece of artwork the Buddhist have made, I studied it carefully. Wondering how they made each detail fold in the sculptures, and how they got their inspiration for their drawings and paintings.

I creaked the door open to the second floor. Just when I opened the door, a piece of paper floated as gracefully as an eagle soaring freely and landed on the dusty floor. As curious as a cat, I picked the paper up. I slowly unfolded the delicate paper, and it read:

Dear reader, I predict that you are here to improve and become an artist.

If so, I have carefully chosen some very helpful tips just for the one and only you.

Tip 1: Be yourself — art isn’t just a way to create, but it is also a way to express yourself on a sheet, canvas or sculpture.

Tip 2: Normal is fine — you don’t have to fit in with others to be famous, show the world the real you, what makes you so unique and special.

And lastly tip 3: Go straight forward — if someone says ‘you can’t’ or ‘you won’t’, they’re probably scared that you will.

Signed,
Leonardo da Vinci

I gasped in shock. I didn’t know how to react.

Wondrous?

Peaceful?

Nothing?

Leonardo da Vinci was whom I admired the most.

I thought deeply back into his very last tip. ‘Was that something I needed to hear?’ I had a whole mind full of questions. But then the most important question came to mind ‘Was this note real?’ As much as I wanted to believe that it was real, that question fought against that theory. I knew there were fakers in this horrible world but would someone really create a rip-off of Leonardo da Vinci writing a note?

I thought about that question when walking back to the hotel with the note in my hands. At last, I’d finally arrived at my hotel room, I slumped in my periwinkle coloured bean-bag and set the piece of paper on the table. Suddenly, a slight breeze encircled the piece of paper. The paper floated in mid-air, higher and higher. My mouth hung wide open, what was happening? Gradually, the piece of paper floated back on the table. I picked it up to make sure it was safe but something caught my eye. It was Leonardo da Vinci’s signature! It was real! I blinked a few times to see if I was dreaming or not, but it was actually real! I was holding the note Leonardo da Vinci wrote himself. Half of me wanted to shout and yell happily while the other half felt amazed.

Swiftly, I pulled out a drawer in the silent room. I took a piece of colourless paper and a few paintbrushes. With a positive mindset, I started painting. At first, I just dabbed the paintbrush on the paper, but later on I started using my imagination to paint something unique, special and creative. I pressed hard on the paper and slowly ran the paintbrush against it. Soon, I had created a mini mural — a masterpiece.

While I was looking at the masterpiece, I remembered something: ‘every artist was first an amateur’. That’s how I realised, I was on my very first step to a great, forever lasting journey.

New Tales from The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chow, Annabel – 9

CRASH! BOOM! BANG! Bullets flew, grenades exploded and time felt like it stopped. The queen of Mangawea (mang-ga-wee-a) was sending off foreign packages from inside the city. No one knew what was inside the packages and no one knew what was happening, except that it wasn't good. The queen was making an escape and trapped herself in a box and told her servant to send her off with the other packages. The servant did as he was told and sent her off. Attached to her package was a star that let him know which box she was in when it arrived at the destination.

The queen never got to the destination due to a boat crash. The other boxes were recovered by her servant as he was very loyal and never gave up looking for the queen. No one knows what happened to the queen but the servant buried the boxes deep inside the sand. That was many many years ago. The boxes were opened by the king of Sephjawaia (sef-ja-Way-ii-a) in 1804. Found deep inside the sand the boxes were filled with shovels and tools made of gold. As he peered into the box he admired the beauty of the gold and lifted it up into the air to shine in the sun when someone took it right out of his hands. It was the queen's servant!

The king yelled pathetically in desperation and told his servant to find the man and capture him. The soldier nodded and left. But he was very curious and wanted to read up on the boxes to gain some extra knowledge that might help him. At the library, he read for hours and hours, days and days, even weeks and weeks. By now he was as wise and smart as an owl and was able to tell the king all about the boxes. The soldier told the king all about what happened and apparently, the servant was still alive. The servant was the only one alive who still knew about the story so their number 1 subject was the servant. They had a lot of power over the world back then and so they checked all boat records and it turns out there was a man that left Sephjawaia recently. The boat landed in China so they set sail to China. As they traveled the king and the soldier planned how to capture him.

When they arrived they scanned the city. They found a man about 38 years old who held a familiar-looking box to the wise soldier who read about the boxes, but it wasn't the same box that they discovered in the sand, it was the box with the queen inside of it! They grabbed the box from the servant and opened it.

Inside the box was a scroll. As they opened it they saw a map from exactly where they were to Silk Road in China. The soldier told the king what he had learned and stuffed the servant in a bag just in case they needed him. The ride was pretty smooth, the servant didn't try to escape and the transportation was easy. When they arrived they followed the map slowly to a cave but it wasn't just any cave it was the...

THE MOGAO GROTTO CAVE! Why did the map lead them here? The building had many levels and was very colorful. You could feel joy from looking at the building, the red and gold-colored railings, and the beautiful murals in the background. As they examined the building they saw that there was a door next to another door so they shook the handle of each of the doors, but they were all locked. They thought about the golden tools, and used a hammer to hit the wall as hard as they could and the wall broke. When they entered there was a room. The room was magical. It had a beautiful tiled floor, the sun was shining through the window and it reflected onto beautiful golden murals. On the floor was a scroll. The scroll said that the queen, in fact, built the very room they were standing in. But the scroll also said that it was getting harder and harder to leave until she couldn't leave and no one knows what happened to her. Soon the room started to shake. They evacuated as fast as they could. They realized as soon as they got out that nothing was shaking and their hole was gone but they didn't get to read about who wrote the scroll.

They went to check on the servant that was still in the bag. When they got back to the front of the cave and got to the bag they looked inside the bag and no one was there. Did he escape? Or maybe he was never there? Did the queen use him to lure them there? But why would she want to lure them there? It was too good to be true! Was it all a dream?

The Adventure

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chu, Kai Xin Davina – 9

The raging fire was quickly approaching Chen Yin Ming. He was dodging left and right while dashing through the monastery, but the fire was still close. He looked ahead, he looked back, but there were flames everywhere. Heat was burning his body as sweat was dripping onto his hands, body and legs. Suddenly a door appeared, as he thought finally he could escape, until he felt the doorknob. It was burning but he had no choice. He dashed in, thinking that he could easily escape, but nevertheless the inferno still caught up to him.

2 days later.

“Mom, Dad I know ever since the fire, you don’t want me to be a monk any more, but I want to be one. You and Dad were monks too. So I have the right to become a monk like you guys.”

“Chen Yin Ming, trust us: it is too dangerous.”

“I know, but I want to. How is it fair? You know how many times I have heard in the monastery of how adventurous you guys were. Why can't I?”

“Fine. When your Dad and I were young, there was always this legend going around. It said that two boys went to travel to the Western Paradise, but they stopped in the Gobi Desert because they saw a vision. The vision was a lot of golden Buddha’s and they were both so inspired by it, they made the most beautiful cave ever made by man. People say if you find the Mogao Grottoes, it is an honor to humans.”

Chen Yin Ming left for his journey, with water, food, a sleeping bag, a tent, and his phone, little did he know he needed to bring more than that.

As he was walking through the Gobi desert, he saw an enormous scorpion trying to eat a snake. Chen Yin Ming was so afraid that he tried to run as fast as possible, but he caught the scorpion’s eye. He ran faster than a hot knife gliding through butter, but the scorpion still crawled closer and closer. He felt something touch his back, and then he felt really tired and closed his eyes.....

“Are you alright? We saw you on the floor; we almost thought you were dead. Me and my dad think it is because of the scorpion sting on your side that made you unconscious, but we saved your life luckily. If you were in the desert like that you would have been dead meat. We saved you but I think you have been severely hurt. I don’t recommend going anywhere in the next few weeks and definitely not today!”

“I’m OK, just let me go. I need to go somewhere,” But the pain was like the fire right next to him again but burning him, making him dust. As he walked the fire was growing inside of him, making it grow and grow, even though everyone was shouting, until that pain suddenly rushed through his veins and his eyes closed once more.

“Let us help you, we might be able to help you but you have to be more careful and listen to us.” said the little boy

“Fine. I am trying to find a monastery but I still don’t need your help. I am fine.”

“Please trust us” answered the little boy. But Chen Yin Ming didn’t want to bring a little boy and his dad on this journey. He thought it was going to be too dangerous, until he felt a sting on his back and woke up. He was still in the desert but his back was in horrendous pain.

As Chen Yin Ming checked his bag for some bandages and some food he realized his bag was gone, and he was more desperate than ever, thinking, “Will I ever make it back?” Through the night he had no shelter to warm him up nor food or water. As he tried to sleep, his tummy rumbled as loud as a lion.

The night was long but the next day he could barely walk. He would eat anything as long as it was not poisonous. He walked and walked until his face, body, and legs were skinny, until he had to crawl. As he crawled he saw a cave. He entered it thinking it was finally the Mogao Grottoes until he saw ancient writings.

It all told him to select one. “But select what?” He looks around the room and on one side he saw gold, and the other side had nothing. He remembered a lesson that he had learned, and would always remember, because he lost someone’s life for it. The time was when he picked money over his teacher. For he thought money was the most powerful thing in the world, until he grew older and he realized he was wrong.

That is why he picked nothing instead of gold, and as he went to that side of the room, he felt the floors moving up. When the floors stopped moving, he saw something that was beyond anyone’s imagination, it was colorful yet dark, it was beautiful yet airy. He stood there and took it all in.

Lit with Stars

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Derman, Elise – 10

The sky was lit with stars. Their light illuminated the silhouette of a small girl, perching on the sandy roof of a hut, her legs swinging and her azure eyes staring intently at a sea of people. Dressed in red, villagers danced and laughed under the light of a full moon. It was Lunar New Year and Una had never spent it away from home before. Her eyes drifted from the throng of people to the mountains overlooking the oasis village. Was she imagining things or did the holes and crumbles in the rock look almost like gates? Doorways to freedom?

Something cold touched her back, ripping Una out of her daydreams. She toppled over and skidded dangerously close to the edge of the roof. She shut her eyes, praying for her meagre grip to hold. It didn't, she fell.

Una groped around in the darkness. She cried out but she couldn't hear her own voice. She was standing in a cavern, the walls made of solid rock, painted upon them were murals, dozens of them, all lined up and depicting different scenes in delicate brushstrokes and faded paints. Buddha's, great monarchs and kings – their postures regal and demanding. A shiver ran down her spine as a foreboding chill crept its way into the room. "Now go to sleep," a voice said. "Let the waves of time wash over your body and let yourself sink into the ocean of memory." Silence was sweet like the darkness it resided in, and Una gave in. She slumbered.

For as long as she could remember, Isi had been alone. No one to confide in. No one to acknowledge that she existed. According to the rest of the world, she might as well disappear, for absolutely no one knew that the Mogao Grottoes had a ghost as a resident. What would she do with this human? One of the people who had killed her family. Out of fear. This fear was a monster. It made people do horrible things. Were children capable of fear? Isi had been watching Una, and she had recognised kin.

Isi sat atop a towering sculpture of the Buddha, at least twenty feet wide and thirty feet tall, holding a large pink lotus in his hands. Isi's gaze fell onto the slumbering Una. Her white hair was sprawled around her rosy face. Isi slid down the back of the Buddha and landed quietly on the floor beside Una. She knelt by her side and began to tap on the hollow drum in the corner of the room. She sang while she played, and Una awoke.

The sky was washed in bright pinks and purples. Two silhouettes were sighted, perched on a crumbling mound of stone that sat at the edge of the cave, one snowy headed, the other with the head of midnight, chattering to one another in the brisk morning breeze.

"This is not a simple story..." Isi told her. "But if it helps you understand who I am, I will begin."

"Dragon people, with silver scale
Never welcome, never ail
Cast away by human finger
Told that they shall never linger
Hide away beneath the boulders

Years and years they spent a making
Months and months they spent creating.

The word spread throughout the land
Pilgrims, priests who were at hand
Travelled far, travelled wide
To make art in the temples' tide.

But soon after these days
Soon after these ways
They were found by someone so mighty
They cowered and cried, and their enquiry
Wasn't even thought of
Wasn't even listened to
Wasn't even reckoned that they might know a little thing or two.

They made a promise to each other
That they would never forget
That they would always remember
All the secrets they had shared
All the religions that they had brought to light
All the people they had inspired
And then they died..."

"Why would anyone ever do something that horrible to innocent people?" Una asked in a trembling voice.
"You created these beautiful caves and yet you were discriminated against! Why?" Isi paused in silent thought.
"Sometimes people do things out of fear," Isi said.
"Humans feared the powers of the Dragon people. And so, they thought to get rid of us."
"It's only fair that I tell you my story too," Una whispered.

"Born to a noble family
With wealth abundant from their hand
You would think I had the best
That's what you misunderstand
My father ran off with a water spirit
She hadn't been approved
Casting him into shame
And his dear children too
When we were born
You could hear it in the doctor's cry
Me with my snow white hair
And my brother with his only eye
Looking too different
Strange and scary
Something like aliens
Watchful like an eyrie

But it all got out of hand
Brother was killed on command
Father rushed up to the squires
Shrieked and scrambled in the muck and mire
Cried and cried for months and months
Couldn't hear my pleas for once
So I was sent away
Told that here I would be safe
Am I really, though?"

A blinding blue light exploded at the feet of the Buddha as the poem ended. Una tried to make out the shadow of the statue and her dragon friend. Emerging from the light was something very different. A towering man in beige robes with eyes the colour of flax, holding a large pink lotus in his hands. The Buddha was awakened for a purpose.

The Mogao Grottoes were opened once again. And people rediscovered the world the dragon people had created. Isi came to live with Una and her father, who were welcomed back into their home. The grottoes were given to the care of the two who had worked so hard to see it thrive. Una, Isi and Mogao, one and all, all and one.

**Double spaces between paragraphs notes a new chapter*

The Tale of the Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Fuji, Miki – 9

Once two curious boys named George and Shawn wanted to explore the Mogao Caves in the desert on the Silk Road in China.

They packed food, sleeping bags, water, a torch and a tent and off they went.

After a long haulage through the desert, they finally arrived at the oasis.

Looking for the caves, they went through woods, lakes and rocks.

Just behind the White Rock, they saw a ferocious Mogao panther.

They ran as fast as their legs could carry them. They hid in a dusty old cave.

George looked at the wall: a map of an old temple!

Shawn decided to sketch the map, so, he used some ketchup as ink on a white t-shirt. It worked!

They decided to follow the map to the old temple.

They quickly went out of the cave and continued exploring. They both looked at the map and it said to go west. So, they went west all day long.

They traveled for days, and the days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months.

Then one day when they stopped for lunch break, they realized their food was over. Since they had no food, they had to seek for their food. They picked wild berries and stinky cabbages; they also found a cave to live in.

One day the ground started to shake! Rocks rumbled and boulders tumbled: earthquake!

They quickly went into a hole in the ground. When the earthquake stopped, they came out of the hole and checked what was wrong outside.

What they saw was mind blowing!

Two of the four boulders supporting the cave had just collapsed: they needed to leave the cave immediately. They looked at their cave one last time and waved goodbye.

Shawn looked at the t-shirt map and he pointed East: "I guess the way we are going must be East."

On their trip to the East, they were very tired because they had used a lot of their energy on their trip to the West.

They fell flat on their tummy. Since they had been sleeping too long, ten dirty little rats took away their food.

They were both starving for many days, so they kept on drinking cold water.

A few months passed and Shawn and George grew up.

It was a miracle that they had survived almost a year without proper sleep and meals.

Then one day when they looked at the t-shirt map, they realized that the trail had stopped at the edge of the map.

The boys were both stunned!

What made them even more shocked was the place the map had brought them: a golden temple!

Everything was golden. Then they saw a treasure chest.

They filled their bags with some gold bars and then they ran back to the oasis.

It was time to go home.

Once back at their village they used the gold to build a school for young explorers.

Shawn and George became great teachers.

An Adventure in the Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Hadi, Zayna – 10

Startled, Lilly sprang back, scrambling for her torch. The Buddha stared at her. In the half-darkness, Lilly stared back apprehensively. Had the Buddha just moved a moment ago when she stumbled and fell against it? Yes, she was sure of it. She peered around in the darkness – but everything in the Library Cave seemed still.

The Library Cave was one of the most famous of the Mogao Grottoes, the ancient caves on the edge of the Gobi Desert that had been an important Buddhist pilgrimage site along the Silk Road. In the fifteenth century, as the Silk Road fell out of use, the caves were forgotten and lost in the desert, until their rediscovery in the early 1900s. A student of archeology, Lilly, had been studying the manuscripts found there in cave number 17, also known as the Library Cave. Lilly had long dreamed of visiting the site where the manuscripts were found. As she had approached the mystical caves in the scorching sun that afternoon, she had stared in awe and amazement. At the entrance, a tall structure seven stories high was held up by slender red pillars. Jutting out of the sandy rock, the roofs of each level were like Chinese pagodas.

When Lilly had walked in, she had seen the many Buddhas lined up against the walls, and numerous pieces of Buddhist artwork. The Buddhas had calm and peaceful expressions, as if meditating. Colourful Buddhist paintings covered the rocky walls. She had headed straight for the Library Cave, knowing her way around after all the hours she had spent poring over the maps of the grottoes during her studies.

Distracted by her thoughts, Lilly did not notice her untied shoelaces. As she stepped into the seventeenth cave, her shoelaces suddenly caught beneath her hiking boots, causing her to trip. Dropping her torch, Lilly stretched her arms out to break her fall, crashing into the largest of the Buddhas in the cave. It was then that she had felt the Buddha move.

Curious, Lilly placed her hands on the Buddha's knee and pushed. Nothing. Planting her feet firmly on the ground, she pushed again with all her might. This time, it moved, sliding to the left. Where the Buddha had originally stood, Lilly saw a handle, but the rest of the area was embedded with spiderwebs. Gingerly, she placed her hand on it and brushed them away. Once all the cobwebs were gone, it made more sense. It was a trapdoor! Lilly lifted it up, and saw a narrow chute sloping downwards. Afraid but intrigued, Lilly cautiously climbed into it to get a better look with her torch. But the chute was slippery, and she started to slide down the cold, damp passageway, unable to stop. Terrified, her mind raced through horrifying possibilities of what she might find, but an adventurer at heart, Lilly didn't let her thoughts stop her from feeling excited.

Eventually, she landed with a loud "thud!" onto a hard wooden floor, wincing in pain. She stood up, and looked around the large yet crowded room. There was a shelf full of ancient Chinese books and paintings of Buddhas filled the spacious area. On a desk-like platform were creased scrolls and a bottle of dried ink. Mesmerized by the ancient but well-kept items, she realized something. All this had probably belonged to Yuezun, the monk who had a vision of a thousand Buddhas, and was the first to start building the Mogao Caves. But how come no one has found it yet? Surely archeologists would know, she thought. Looking around some more, she saw a wooden knob jutting out of one of the walls. Thinking it was a door, Lilly walked over and tried it. Surprisingly, it opened with ease, not even making the slightest creak.

Entering a room with a high ceiling, she saw stone and sculpting materials. This space must have been for sculpting the Buddha statues. Except for the tools that hung on rusty iron nails, the rocky walls were completely bare. Something caught her eye on the dusty floor – it seemed to be a scroll. Picking it up, she examined the sketch on it. It looked strangely familiar. Suddenly, she recognised one of the drawings. It was a map of the Mogao Caves, but was drawn upside down compared to her books. If all this belonged to Yuezun, this had to be his design. Perfect! Now I can figure out how to get out of here by looking at the map, she thought.

Except there was a problem. The map didn't show an exit or entrance; instead there was a large blot of ink where the chute should have been. Without another choice, she decided to climb up the chute. Lilly placed her hands on the dirty and cold edges of the slide, and tried climbing up. Clenching her teeth, she started to climb. Losing her grip, her sweaty palms let go of the slide, and she tumbled back down. Not ready to give up, Lilly tried again. Once again, she

failed. She tried again and again, yet kept failing repeatedly. Finally, Lilly gripped the edges of the damp chute so tightly her knuckles turned white, her face full of concentration; she succeeded.

Panting heavily after the long climb, Lilly clambered out, carefully shutting the trapdoor. Remembering how she had first gone into the chute, she groaned when she realized she would have to push the large Buddha back into place. To her astonishment, however, as Lilly looked up she saw the Buddha where she had first found it. Feeling excited about her magical adventure, she smiled to herself as she headed out of the caves. How impressed would her professors be when she told them about her discovery? Stepping out into the cool desert evening, Lilly took one last look at the Mogao Grottos and thought They might even name this cave after me!

The Mystery Of Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Hata, Mina – 10

Chapter One

I have hated my birthdays since I turned 6.

My 6th birthday was the last time I saw my dad before he went missing. My dad was a leading archeologist on Mogao Grottoes. He always told me fascinating stories of the mysterious place.

Today is my 11th birthday. I hate my birthdays — I always end up lying in bed wishing that I could hear the laughter of dad as he tells me stories. Stories that make my heart skip a beat. I wish I could at least see him one more time for at least one second that I would treasure for the rest of my life.

Here I am in dad's study looking through his old dusty books, the scent of old books always reminds me of him. I flip through the pages of the oldest book, and I notice pages 14 and 56 have red circles around their page numbers. "1456!!? What does this number mean!" I prance around like a cheetah "Bingo!" I realize it has to be the code to dad's safe box. I have always been warned by dad never to touch it, but I dreamt of discovering what's in there. I shout "Timmy come here. You better come now or else I will discover something spectacular without you!" My younger brother Timmy comes shouting "Coming Mariana!" I type the code into the panel of the lock..... "click!"

The lock flings open making a high-pitched noise as if someone struck a chime letting the ringing free into the air and fade away. Something glassy catches my eye. A blue gem. The gem is ancient stratified, with layers of rich blue, it is small and scintillating. We both stare at the extraordinary, beautiful gem. The gem is cut in half but the other half isn't here. I want to touch it but I'm afraid, what if it disappears into thin air like dad or maybe what if I dropped it. I clear the cloud of worries in my head. Timmy holds my hand encouragingly and I touch it. It is smooth and slippery and curved. I carefully place my hand on the perfectly rounded part of the gem and said to myself, dad.....

The gem suddenly trembles then ignites, illuminating the room light blue. "swish zoom!" A beam of light shoots through the room, it blinds us. I hear my mom shout "Mariana, have you practiced your piano yet?" but I blackout.

"Where are we? Why are we in a cave?" Timmy says. I wake up and realize we are sitting in a mysterious cave, no longer at home! "shhhhhhhh! Follow me." I walk carefully trying not to leave prints in the lush earthy grounds. As I walk through the dark gloomy cave I discover carvings on the cave walls, beauty in every corner. Painting rich with vibrant colours, there are also magnificent sculptures carved very carefully with each stroke. Then I saw the painting — deer with 9 colours. "That is my favourite story from dad, remember? The man who got saved from drowning by the deer, then betrayed the deer, to collect a huge reward from the king. " I said. "Then what happened? Tell me!" Timmy said. "Look at the painting on the wall....." I say. Timmy says "oh now I remember! The merchant got taught a lesson and in the end drowned. It's painted so well!"

I notice a man in the distance, wearing an Asian monk's robe. I walk towards him, my heart pumps with fear and curiosity, my hands trembling. I gently tap him, he turns around, I feel an electric wave shoot through my body, "Daaaaaaddddyyyyyyyyy! Is that really you?! I miss you so much!" The familiar face, the dark black hair, the broad shoulders. My brother's jaw drops. My eyes fill with tears. Dad looks puzzled and says "Who are you? How did you get here?!?" My heart drops, my excitement turns to confusion, even the Buddhist sculptures' faces turn pale. The vibrant colours in the paintings become dull and sombre—some. The nice ancient scent in the air turns cold and sour. I ask "Remember me? Your daughter and Timmy, your son." Dad's face turns pale and confused as if I said something in a different language.

Just then I heard footsteps coming. It was a Monk. He grabs my shoulders and tells my brother to follow him in an intimidating voice. We are brought into another cave, walls covered in rock concrete crusted with gold. Suddenly a blue light catches my eye, it is the other half of the blue gem! Dad probably needs this half to go back to our world! The Monk said "Give me the other half of this gem or end up like that man having no memory of past life. I am part of a secret society that has been protecting Mogao since 366 AD because it holds a great secret about Chinese culture. Every member of this society has 2 halves of a gem that allows us to travel through time. I had one too, but I somehow lost it in the battle of Dunhuang against the Mongols 10 years ago. 5 years later that man showed up, holding one half of MY gem, wearing weird clothes like yours. Now tell me where the other half of my gem is and what year you come from." the monk says. The battle of Dunhuang 10 years ago? So we are now in 1237! I realized. Should I give the other half of the gem to him? What if this scary monk travels to our time 2022, and mommy is home alone..... I wish mommy could be here with me. What should I do? What should I do?

To be continued.....

Surviving The Rockfall

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Ho, Jonah – 9

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Professor Archibald Atkinson and I am an archeologist. In 1907 I led a team of eight people to the historic Mogao caves in northwestern Gansu Province. This is one of the largest set of caves in China built into dates back to ancient times.

A little history first. These caves, around 500 of them, were hand-built around AD360 originally as a Buddhist temple. As a result, they were richly decorated with carvings and colourful paintings of the Buddha. Our team's task was to map the caves and photograph the detail of the art work inside them. Some of these artifacts have lasted extremely well over the hundreds of years they have been there.

Our team included myself, a speleologist, a geologist, a doctor, a surveyor, a mountaineer and two Chinese professors from Beijing University.

We took a cargo ship's passenger cabins to China via the Suez Canal, our destination being Tianjin. From there we met our Chinese colleagues to agree upon arrangements regarding transporting eight people with technical supplies and camping equipment. We travelled 1,790 miles from Beijing via Lanzhou to Dunhuang by train.

Next evening, we arrived at the site of the caves, excited about setting up our community tents and testing out our equipment before entering the caves.

In the morning, we entered the first cave we had already mapped. We noticed it had a crawling space to the next cave. We struggled through pulling all our gear with us. Unlike the smaller cave this one had no sunlight so we had to light it up before starting on our work of surveying the cave.

After about two hours work, we took samples and photographs of many carvings and commenting upon the advantages of this recent discovery. As we chatted away, we all noticed a vague but strange sensation beneath our feet. It was a very unusual feeling as if the ground itself were shaking and with it shaking us. Our Chinese colleagues assured us that light earthquakes were common in the region. For nearly all of the team this was new experience, one that made us rather fearful. There's no emergency exit in the Mogao caves.

As we were about to stop for lunch, we noted a few loose stones dropping from the side wall of the cavern, where we had entered it. This was followed by a sound similar to rushing water. We realized that this was another quake but a stronger one. Immediately we tried to take cover from the wall that was collapsing inwards on the cave.

During the wall collapse a thick dust cloud filled the cave and we had to wait for this to clear before we could understand fully the difficulty we were in. Firstly, we had lost some lighting in the collapse but more importantly one of our parties had suffered a broken leg. Our team doctor made a leg splint by cutting two wooden sticks in half and then injecting the patient with a pain killer.

Shocked by the situation, we sat down covered in dust and grime to think through our best plan for escaping from the deathtrap we were in. The rockfall was massive and it completely blocked our exit. It was a mountaineer and our caving expert [speleologist] who came up with what we all accepted as the best way to get out of the cave.

Jerry, our 'caveman' said that from the rock structure he felt that the top of the cave would not be very thick and that if we hacked at the rock, we would be able to clear an escape route into the daylight. I asked our mountaineer whether he could climb the 30 metres wall above us and attach a rope to the rock face with petons. He said he could do it and started out trailing rope up the wall every two metres or so with petons to give other team members the best chance of escape.

When Nick, our mountaineer, reached the top of the cave and use a sledge hammer chipping the ceiling rock away. Another discussion we had but decided against it, was the use of dynamite for fear of falling rocks that would crush those of us standing on the bottom of the cave.

Jerry and Nick continued to try and break through the cave's ceiling rock to make a large enough hole to allow us through into the outside world. In turns the team kept hammering away at the rock. Then in the late afternoon a ray of light shone through. There was great sense of relief and a lot of wild cheering. Nick climbed through and shouted to us to rope our equipment together so they could haul our gear up out into the opening.

With some anxiety each of us began the climb while two remained behind to stay with the injured team member. By now we had already made a sling and a home-made stretcher for him. Slowly but surely, we hauled up the sling. Near the exit clearing at the top, we had to turn the sling from a horizontal position to a vertical position to get our injured man through the tight exit hole. We managed this and were soon joined by the doctor who gave him another shot of painkiller.

The remaining members of the team started their climb up the rope to the safety of the outside world. We returned to camp, freshened up and over large mugs of tea and biscuits babbled on about our luck. The lesson of our experience that day was to remember the power of Mother Nature; tragedy is so often one false move away. Put simply we were lucky, very lucky.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. If you have any questions about our unexpected adventure or the remainder of our survey work at the Mogao caves I will do my best to answer them.

Yes madam, the lady in the pink dress ...

Treasure of The Magao Caves

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Kumar, Zara – 9

Long ago, an European pirate Black Beard was filled with greed in his mind. He definitely lived up to his fearsome reputation. After getting his ship and treasure raided, he was leftover poor and lonely. He had no money left. Then he found that he can be a billionaire if he steals the Buddha statues from Magao caves. Well he did not have ship with him (because it was raided) so he had to do it in the old fashion way on the foot. He and his mates journey began. They have to walk miles away to reach their destination. On the way to Magao caves, they saw another groups of Pirates and started to fight as they were also going to Magao caves in search of some treasure. Black Beard and his mates were about to win the fight but suddenly more pirates appeared from nowhere and joined the ongoing fight.

Unfortunately Black Beard and his crew got bashed up badly. Now they had to swim a very long distance. Dense grey clouds rise up in the sky, “ Boss, I think we need to wait for the storm to pass away” said Black Beard’s assistant. “No! we need to find the treasure before anyone else finds it” barked Black Beard fearlessly. Everyone got scared and they had no choice but to follow their boss’s order. After spending fifteen minutes in the water high tides rose up and it crashed on them. “Swim towards that Island” the fearless Black Beard ordered them.

Finally, they reached the shore but one of their mate Roger was missing. “Roger, Roger” everyone shouted for him. He was tired and struggling to swim in the sea. Everyone encouraged him to give his hand to them to hold on but it was too late. Alas! A gigantic tide hit him and the poor Roger drowned in the water.

When everything seemed hopeless Black Beard had an idea “We can cut the trees and build a boat! How does that sound?” he screamed

“ARRRR! Now that’s what I was thinking about” said the other pirate mate. They built a beautiful boat. The storm started easing and it stopped raining. Then they continued their journey for treasure of Magao caves in China.

After waiting patiently for a week they finally reached their destination. As they unloaded their boat and walk few miles to the Magao caves they couldn’t take their eyes off from the spectacular Magao caves. “Shiver me timbers” yelled Black Beard. Tears of joy poured from his eyes. “Let’s complete our mission” said the greedy man. He was planning to take all the treasure and did not want to give single penny to his mates.

When they went inside and was about to steal all the paintings and artefacts, A man in plain clothes with glow like moon on his face (Monk) caught him in the act. Politely he asked “ what are you searching for?”. The Black Beard froze in the moment and didn’t move a bit. “Do you want to take them?” asked the monk. The cave was dark and there was utter silence. “I know you are here to steal the most precious treasure” said the monk. All the pirates got afraid and they were sweating profusely. No, we are not They didn’t know what to say. Monk asked them to tour the cave with him, they were little hesitant but joined him to look around.

“ I was a pirate before becoming a monk” he said. Black Beard and his mates were shocked to know his truth. The monk continued “ Stealing does not make you rich and happy” he said. “Real happiness is not money”. I have experience how satisfying it is to be good human being said the monk in convincing a voice. “ I was once a greedy pirate! If today you don’t listen to me and disagree with me, you will regret later on” said the monk in calming voice. “The real treasure is to give happiness to others by helping them” said the monk.

What do you think he will choose ? To become a good person or remain a pirate? You are going to get surprised but he chose to be a good person and he decide to stay back in the Magao caves for rest of his life.

Tasha And The Holiday of No Escape

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Lam, Megan – 10

It all started in sunny California.

“Mom?”

“Yes, honey?”

“Can I go on a trip to the Mogao Grottoes?”

“Tasha, where is that?” said her mom, grabbing her phone.

“Found it! It’s in China! The Silk Road!” yapped Tasha, still scrolling on her computer finding more information to yammer to her mom.

“Well, I suppose you could—” advised mom,

“Yeah! I’ll go buy the tickets now!” cheered Tasha

“Tasha. I said you could but under one condition.”

“Awwwwwww. Mom!” whined Tasha

“You have to go with someone.” Mom said firmly

“Someone? Well, I heard Liz was free for the next couple of days....” mumbled Tasha.

“Great! I’ll call Jan and ask if Liz is free!” Mom said, scrolling to the bottom of her contacts to call her older sister Jan.

Tasha went back to her room and sat down at her cherry wood desk and opened her computer. She continued scrolling through Google, trying to find a website to find more information about her travel. She came across a site that said:

Visit The Mogao Grottoes!

Looking through the photos, Tasha was shocked. She knew the Mogao Grottoes were big, but she did not know it was big enough to have hundreds of caves, statues and even a library! She decided as soon as she got there she would explore these caves and explore their newly discovered secrets.

When lunchtime came along, Liz busted in, dodging all the pens and papers on the ground with Jan walking right behind her, both rushing to the dining table. When they finally started eating, Tasha told Liz and Jan all about the trip to the Mogao Grottoes, and surprisingly, Jan agreed!

The day had arrived...

As they boarded the plane, Tasha could not stop jumping up and down. It was the most excitement she had ever experienced in her 18 years of living!

—After the 12-hour plane ride—

Tasha became a walking, talking computer after watching too many Mogao Grottoes documentaries on the plane. Liz had to go through a 1,300-word presentation about the hand-sculpted buddhas.

On the way to the hotel, Tasha saw 3 people who were wearing black hoods guarding a rocky wall with carvings on the front, there were carvings of a piece of paper balancing on a rock with a buddha sitting on top of the paper with pure calmness plastered on his face. As they were walking, the amount of black hooded people they passed was increasing by two. First 3, then 5, then 7, then 9, and so on. Soon it reached fifteen. And the hooded people disappeared.

Soon Tasha and Liz reached their destination, with Tasha sweating from walking too long, but Liz looked fresh and excited for the look of their hotel room.

The next day, the cousins started their trip to the Mogao Grottoes and the black hooded people were back at their posts like they never disappeared. Tasha was not dumb enough to not know that this had a connection and decided to look into it once she gets back to the hotel. They set foot, walking towards the mountains with Liz's pace quicker than Tasha's.

At the sight of the building, Tasha rushed up the closest stairwell and ran in the small entry with Liz trailing behind her in curiosity. Suddenly, Tasha let out a loud squeak that echoed around the "room" and Liz saw what was going on. Tasha had led them into the library. She had pulled out a book from a cherry wood shelf that wobbled stiffly.

The bookshelf swayed side to side like it was dancing to a jazzy beat and revealed a hidden entry. Tasha caught a glance on this hidden entry and pushed the bookshelf to the side with a loud scraping sound and exposed the whole secret entry.

Tasha immediately stepped inside the dark entry then rushed out and dragged Liz in. It was pure darkness in there, with at least ten more steps, a hint of light glinted in the darkness. They continued walking, with loud echoing of their footsteps getting nearer to the light.

It was like a teleportation device but instead of portals it was the more classical way, walking.

Through the light, you could see it was a balcony. Liz wanted to stay behind and watch

It was the *seventh floor* balcony.

Tasha was staring straight down from the balcony when she heard thundering. It came from the door behind her, Liz was still inside the magical tunnel and Tasha did not want to alert her so she kept quiet.

She turned around and saw a wooden door bust open, all she could see was a dark shadow of a boy carrying what looked like a small satchel. The shadowy figure got larger and larger and she felt a stick crunch under her foot, then it was black.

Tasha slipped. She heard footsteps creaking against the floorboards and gripped the edge of the balcony, decorated with red paint peeling off the bars holding up the top plank of wood.

“Tasha! Hold on!”

The footsteps turned into leaping and leaping turned into thundering steps bouncing off the balcony’s platform. Suddenly a head popped out from over the balcony ledge. Liz lowered herself in a way that felt like a mother bear lowering her head to nuzzle her child. As she lowered herself, she reached out and tried to grab hold of Tasha’s bare hand. But then she slipped. After all that unpacking from the past day, her fingers had turned weak and she missed lousily, with Tasha still clinging on to the edge of the balcony. Liz shoved her body back up and gripped the top bar of the balcony and stretched her hand, trying to reach her younger cousin who was clearly struggling and needed help.

Then suddenly there was rumbling, The ground started bouncing up and down as if the tectonic plates were colliding like never before...

To be continued.....

The Mysterious Discovery

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Lam, Naomi – 10

The camel's rough hooves trotted against the warm desert sand. The fine sand was dark, tanned and golden. "Here!" Wang Yuanlu hollered, "I've found the perfect spot!" Wang tugged aggressively on the camel's long reins and led him to an old and mysterious looking temple. Wang was a Taoist monk who wanted to explore China. After carefully dismounting from his camel, Wang gently flattened out the creases in his dark saffron robe. Wang's tiny eyes stared at the temple for a while, then he excitedly jogged into the temple. The bright sun shone on his bald head. The heat resulted in sweat rolling down his wrinkled face.

At long last, Wang arrived at the ancient temple, panting heavily, his chest rose and fell as he tried to catch his breath. Not knowing what to expect, Wang carefully walked in. Clouds of dust filled the room while rust and mold lived in the grouts of the grey tiled floor. Curiosity and excitement twirled in Wang's mind. He looked down at his feet and then took a deep breath. Wang scanned the room for a bit. A couple of minutes flew by before he made his final decision to investigate the mysterious place.

Suddenly, something caught his eye. "A cave?" Wang was confused. Wang carefully entered the random cave, shoving the clouds of dust out of his face. Wang was right, it was a cave! The large cavity consisted of shiny, shimmering crystals and beautiful, rare rocks. Wang displayed a relieved smile as he rested his hand on a sparkling emerald. Wang was surrounded by crystals with vibrant, glowing colours. Wang's small eyes couldn't believe it! All of a sudden, he saw a glistening diamond in between two humongous rocks on the wall of the cave.

Wang decided to just pull the diamond out. "What can go wrong?" Wang confidently thought to himself. He gripped his hands on the smooth diamond and pulled with all his might. THUMP, BANG, CRUMBLE! Out of nowhere, the rocks from the walls came pouring down like an avalanche. "I better get out of here," Wang thought to himself, all panicked and showing a completely pale face. When Wang ran to the only exit, he noticed a huge problem. He didn't just cause a giant landslide, he built a colossal wall of heavy stones blocking the only exit! Well, at least that's what Wang Yuanlu thought.

Three cold nights slowly passed. Wang had to sleep on the uncomfortable cave floor. His oversized stomach growled like a vicious lion. Wang had no food for three whole days! He tried calling for help on multiple occasions, Wang yelled until his throat was dry, numb and sore. Unfortunately, there was never a response. Wang had lost hope, it was the end of him, or was it? Wang called for help ten more times, with no success. Suddenly, his little eyes spotted a vivid light shining through a crack in the cave's wall. Wang's heart was violently pumping, but his skinny legs couldn't resist kicking at the crack, while preparing for the worst. A camouflaged trap door creaked open. Wang was confused, what was happening?

Wang carefully entered the mysterious room. Was he the first one to discover it? The cave was filled with ancient books and scrolls, happiness invaded his entire body. Wang had just discovered a new cave! "The Library Cave" is what he named it. This cave had a wide opening leading outside. Wang was extremely relieved when he found his camel still conscious. When Wang finally returned to his hometown, a wave of questions lapped over him. "Was it scary?", "How many scrolls did you see?", "Were there any rooms filled with gold?" Everybody knew about Wang now. Wang's discovery was important because it helped the preservation of the ancient manuscripts and literature. Wang was like a bright star in the night sky and he lived joyfully the rest of his life.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Laracy, Maria – 9

It was a dark and stormy night. The wind was howling and the rain fell hard on the deserted Silkroad. There was a little girl who lost her way. Her name was Mayling. Mayling was delivering a birthday gift to her grandmother. Suddenly she tripped and fell over from the cliff and down, down until her body hit the ground. She realized she was standing in the middle of an abundant city. She looked herself and found some scratches on her feet but they are not so deep. She decided to take a couple of steps into the tunnel in front of her. She saw some old paintings and sculptures of animals and gods there! They are paintings of horses and mountains that she could recognize once she saw at the history museum. And she remember that was Tang dynasty exhibition.

Meanwhile at the village her grandmother lived people are worried about Mayling was late.

It was half day trip if she didn't get lost so Grandmother called Mayling's mother and father so now they are worried about Mayling, too.

Not knowing those facts Mayling was enjoying to look around paintings and sculptures inside the tunnel.

There are just like museum exhibition rooms and Mayling loves art and museum. She kept walking and went inside one of the cave.

It was right against of the wall of the narrow cliff. There was one painting on the wall it looks like China but from different angle it looks like other country. Just then Mayling felt the ground she was standing started to shake! The shake was coming from further distance and slithered up to her. She saw the ground had split! Mayling jumped and grabbed a rock and climbing up until she found another cave then there were so many monkeys staring at her. By the time the shake was stopped. She was so tired so lies down for a while. Mayling wished all of this was a dream. At that time monkeys are making noise because there was a mother monkey giving birth baby monkey. They were very busy and noisy. Finally a thin tiny baby was born. Mayling got closer to them. Suddenly one monkey talked to her. "Could you help this baby?" Mayling was so surprised that Monkey could speak! "What can I do for this baby?" she replied. "Can you take her to your place and look after? There is no food for this baby here."

"but I lost my way to grandmother's house." "She will help you." This time baby's mother told her.

So Mayling held baby monkey and said goodbye to other monkeys.

The baby monkey opened eyes and told Mayling "This way, just climb up rocks." Mayling decided

to think this is a long dream because it was hard to believe that baby monkey can talk. Anyway she wanted to get away from there so follow her instruction.

After climbing some rocks she went back to the road she was before. She was so happy and found

that the baby monkey turned into the amber stone. Mayling was happy because she lost birthday gift for grandma when she fell down to the tunnel. It was shiny and glowing. She brought that stone to grandmother's house and told whole story she had experienced. Grandma was smiling and listening and gave Mayling a bowl of red bean soup. It was warm and sweet and the stone was glowing in Mayling's hand.

Searching for The Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Lee, Cara – 9

Water? Check. Camera? Check. Notepad? Check. Chocolate? I rummaged through the junk, hoping to find chocolate. I was going to a trip to China, searching for the Mogao Grottos, so it's important to bring chocolate. "AHA!" I pulled out 2 packs of KIT KAT and M&M'S. As I was stuffing junk food and other food into my bag, the doorbell rang. I opened it to find my friend Margo. "Hi Margo! I'm just getting ready to go. Wanna help me pack up?" I asked. "Sure." Margo chuckled. Oh, I forgot to mention that Margo was going with me. Soon, we were at the airport. "RING! ATTENTION PASSENGERS ON FLIGHT 46, HEADING TO CHINA.YOUR FLIGHT WILL TAKE OFF IN 10 MINUTES." came the loudspeaker. I grabbed Margo's hand and together we got on our plane.

We got to China 4 hours later, then we headed to the mountains. We saw a store and decided to go there. A nice-looking lady greeted us. "Hi!" She called, "Are you looking for something? Or just to chat? It's fine. I like both the same." "Wowzers, I thought. This lady sure has energy." Margo spoke up. "We are looking for the Mogao Grottos. Could you tell us where it is?" The lady gave me a piece of paper. I read it out loud. "Remember your friendship ". I looked to find the lady to ask her what that means, but she had disappeared. I tucked the paper into my pocket. We decided to keep going and camp. We set up camp. It is hard work. Phew!

After a good night's sleep, Margo and I hiked up a trail. We came to a part where we had to choose whether to go left or right. "We should go right." I proposed. "No, we should go LEFT." Margo argued. Suddenly, we got into a HUGE argument. Margo and I ignored each other for hours. Finally, after we talked about it, we decided that I would go and find it, and if I found it, I would place a red flag and then go back and tell Margo. At that time, I still HATED Margo. I set off, leaving Margo behind. I soon started to miss Margo. She kept me company when we hiked. She was always there for me when no one else was. I stuffed my hands in my pocket. OUCH! What was it?

It was a piece of folded paper. I read it. "Remember your friendship." I gasped. Suddenly I understood. I ran back to Margo. I explained it to her and then, hand in hand, we hiked up until we stopped. The place looked kind of like a...face. There was some sort of puzzle. It seemed made for 2 people's hands. We tried placing our hands there. After a minute or so, the earth began to shake. A big Buddhist statue appeared. Then, a sign said: "You have reached the Mogao Grottos". We passed the test! Me and Margo both learned a lesson. FRIENDSHIP.

The Scroll

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Lee, Chloe – 9

The rising sun blazes down onto the sand dunes, rolling and unscrolling into endless glittering amber sand, like the pillows of the desert, soft and gritty under Ling Ling's trudging steps. The vibrant blue sky is dotted with wafer-thin white clouds, drifting lazily in the stinging breeze. Looming ahead is a giant cliff with dark and mysterious caves. She walks towards it in awe, and anxiously, she approaches one of the caves, hoping it is the right one.

As Ling Ling's eyes adjust to her surroundings, she sees a startling shadow, at least the size of four or five humans. She leaps back in horror, but soon realizes it is just a statue of a reclining Buddha, as a shaft of light beats down on the Buddha, unveiling the peaceful meditative look glowing in the light.

Behind the Buddha is an ancient mural, carefully carved, with rows of fading figures in robes. Upon closer inspection, the figures seem to become more vibrant, more alive. Some of them are vaguely bobbing their heads from the corner of her eye. One by one, they fix their gaze onto her, and chant in unison, "Ling Ling... you will face a set of challenges... to prove you are ready for what lies ahead. It's your time!"

With these monosyllabic words reverberating inside the cave, she stares into the distance, engrossed in the humiliating memory buried deep in her subconscious. "It's your time," goaded the other apprentices. "Get yourself into the vault and bring us the scroll. Now." With trembling hands, Ling Ling had fled. The next day, whispering about how she had not had the nerve to go into a vault had filled her school hallways whenever she was around.

A thump brings Ling Ling back to the present. Suddenly, her feet, faltering, sink down into a soft sponge, as if it was quicksand. Ling Ling instantly tries to yank her feet out of the moldy sponge, but her feet just sink deeper in, until she is enveloped in a vortex of sand, engulfing and tossing her like a dummy from left to right. Eight small platforms of sand are taking shape, dribbling away like cascading sand in an hourglass. She would have to jump with all her strength if she had to jump from one to another! One small misstep could cost her her life.

She shudders in fear, knowing what she has to do. The scroll. She has to try... She climbs onto the first platform. So far, so good. She bends her legs, grits her teeth and jumps.

Ling Ling barely clears the gap. Every second she is in the air, her heart starts racing, tension gathering in her chest. Suddenly, enticed by the murmuring of the figures, she looks down and pauses for a moment, mesmerized. How could humans have built this majestic sight? She comes back to her senses, clenches her fists, and leaps to the next platform. But on the last one, she wobbles slightly, and her hand hangs on the edge of the final platform. Ling Ling's mind seems to come to a stop. All her senses freeze. All she can think about is the whispering in the hall, the jeering stares. Right before she falls, she pulls herself up to the next platform, with beads of sweat pouring down her forehead.

"Ling Ling, congratulations, you've passed the first challenge." The strange voice comes again. "It's time for the second and final challenge."

She takes a deep breath, and steps forward. This is it. The platform slowly floats to the next room. She looks around cautiously, to see the next challenge. Luckily, she does not see animated murals or platforms of sand. Instead, she sees three pieces of parchment. The curious, unintelligible writing on the parchment looks like drawings.

"Ling Ling... for this challenge, you must solve this riddle. Look at this scroll."

There are ancient letters forming on the scroll, and slowly but surely, they morph into regular letters:

Encounters with the Buddha

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Ma, Martin – 10

Recently, I have invented a super paper plane that can take me to wherever I wish to go in just a few seconds. The plane can also change my size during the journey and restore me when I arrive at my destination.

To test the magic plane, I order it to take me to a desert that I have never been before. A strong wind blows and all of a sudden, I land in front of a big desert temple. I become my normal size again. I fold the paper plane and put it in my bag.

Wow! What a big temple! It is a very special 9-floor temple built by wood and sand. I can only see half of it because the other half is inside a big cave. They call this Magao Grottoes. The paper plane has already booked the ticket for me.

The leaflet says that there are 735 caves with so many wall-paintings and sculptures. This place is in the oasis city of Dunhuang area along the famous Silk Road. After listening to a simple introduction, I walk into one of the caves. It is rather dark and we are not allowed to take photos. I can see five Buddhas on the left and five Buddhas on the right. When I look at the middle Buddha, it is almost 100 feet tall! It is called Maritreya Buddha. It moves!

“What year is this?” the Buddha asks.

“It’s now 2021.” I answer.

“Oh My God ! I ‘m 1000 years old !”

“Cool !”

I go on to another cave. There is a very pretty Flying Buddha. The Buddha flies and swings her ribbons.

I ask her, “Why are you black? Do you come from Africa?”

The Flying Buddha replies, “ Oh! I don’t come from Africa. The reason why my face and skin are black is because when people first made me, they used man-made colours from India. After years and years of hot and cold weather, my face and skin are oxidised. They change slowly to grey and black. But look at my clothes! They are still red and bright! Don’t you know why? It’s because they used natural colours from our own country. It’s called Cinnabar – a kind of mercuric sulfide. It lasts for a long long time and is still beautiful.”

“Oh! I see.”

The next room I enter lies a very big Sleeping Buddha.

“How long have you been sleeping here?” I ask.

“ A thousand years, may be.” The sleeping Buddha answers.

“Are you tired by putting your hand under your head? And why are you sleeping.....”

“Stop talking! I need more sleep.”

“You look so big to me. Are you the biggest Sleeping Buddha in the world? When will you get up?”

“ Young boy, don’t disturb me!” the Buddha sounds a bit angry.

I walk quickly away from him in case he calls the security guard. I feel a bit tired after looking at so many paintings and sculptures. I know that I can never finish looking at these uncountable murals and statues. I decide to take my magic paper plane home.

Arriving home, I realise that I have left my iPhone in Magao Grottoes. I must go back to find my iPhone and view more Buddhas. Some paintings and sculptures look old and their colours are fading. I know that they need careful protection and preservation. Otherwise, this beautiful world heritage will disappear under the sand and wind of the Gobi Desert.

The Visit to The Mogao Caves

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Pang, Hailey – 9

“This place is amazing!” Katie said in disbelief as she boarded the airplane for the first time. She was a researcher in the US, but she had only been researching in the US. Katie hadn’t gotten a chance to fly on an airplane as her family was poor. As Katie was finding her seat, the plane started showing the safety video. She quickly hurried to her seat to watch the video as she had never been on an airplane. Katie squealed and her heart was racing as she explored the airplane and she was ready for this awesome adventure to start.

Hours later, Katie woke up and looked out the window and spotted a beautiful sunrise and moments later, the airplane had touchdown at her destination. She quickly hopped off the airplane and got past the immigration and collected her bags with joy. She exited the airport and could feel the cool breeze and got into a cab and headed to her hotel.

The hotel was neat, it was filled with daily use things. Was she dreaming? This was amazing! She rubbed her eyes, the view wasn’t gone! Maybe she wasn’t dreaming after all. Katie then changed into her pyjamas and went to bed as she was exhausted and needed to wake up refreshed and ready to go to her adventure that was waiting for her!

The next morning, Katie woke up excited for the day. She quickly jumped out of bed, got ready and headed down for her breakfast. After breakfast she zoomed out of the door to get a taxi. She quickly hopped into her taxi and headed towards the Mogao Caves also known as “peerless caves.” As Katie was closer to her destination she could spot the huge, festive caves exterior, it was awesome! Few minutes later, she had finally reached her destination. Katie was amused and shocked as she still couldn’t believe that she was standing outside the Mogao Caves in person.

After she signed in, she met her tour guide, Kayden. The guide showed her around the site, she was amazed! As they were walking, Kayden explained that Mogao caves were carved by hand starting from 1,700 years ago. As Kayden explained, Katie took lots of jot notes. As they were exploring they saw lots of pretty objects like wall paintings, painted sculptures, ancient architecture, movable cultural relics and their settings.

“Did you know that the cave was once very famous? After a few years, the cave was forgotten. Luckily, someone found it again and it became as famous as before and that is the cave you are standing right in front of, face to face!” Kayden explained.

“That’s awesome!” Katie said in a surprised manner.

The sun started setting and she headed back home. It was a long day for Katie. She couldn’t wait to go back to the U.S and write the article about her journey to the Mogao Caves. The sunset was beautiful, she sat in her taxi and headed back to the hotel.

Katie quickly washed up and headed to dinner. She couldn’t wait to try some new food! She ate quickly because she knew she had to get some good night sleep before she flew back tomorrow. She thought the food was delicious and she couldn’t wait to try it again. She did miss home though.

The next day she woke up late, her alarm was broken! Katie was sad to leave her wonderful adventure. She packed her bag, fast as lightning. Katie couldn't miss her flight.

She zoomed from gate to gate finding her gate once she got to the airport. She couldn’t find her gate! Finally, she found a guard and asked where the gate was and she made it to her gate in the nick of time.

Katie looked down the floor as she walked down the aisle. Her flight had been delayed for a few minutes because they were waiting for her. She thanked and appreciated the people who worked on the plane that waited for her.

After Katie got off the airplane, she instantly grabbed a taxi and headed for lunch! Katie was on her way to her favorite restaurant and she couldn’t wait to eat what she was used to eating. Katie met up with her boss and gave her the jot notes from her trip. Her boss thought the jot notes were good, so Katie started writing her article that night, as it was due tomorrow at 10:00 A.M.

Hours had passed by and Katie was still writing her article. She felt a bit tired, so she decided to take a quick power nap. Few minutes later, Katie got up and went back to it. Finally, many hours later, Katie's article on the Mogao Caves was nearly done. She sent her article for a quick proof check to her boss.

After her boss made quick fixes to the article and checked over it, she also couldn't wait to publish the article. The following morning, Katie's article had been published on the front page of the Newspaper Times. Later that day, all everyone could talk about was what Katie had written in her article. Out of her mind, Katie was shocked and couldn't believe it. Everyone kept congratulating Katie and telling her that they'd like to visit the Mogao caves someday too.

The day was almost over and Katie was overwhelmed with all the calls, messages and comments which she had received. Her tour guide from Mogao Caves had also come across the article and called her up and told her how proud she was of Katie for publishing such a successful article. Katie thanked her tour guide for all the information she shared with Katie during her trip to the famous cave. A week later, the article had received so many views from all around the world and people were so keen on visiting the Mogao Caves. Katie was now very well known and popular around the globe.

Tales from The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Pong, Danielle – 10

The strong wind blew in Qin's face as he stared into the mist. The silent moon came into view as it started raining heavily. Oh, how Qin wanted his family back, sadly Qin was as lost as the family. The feeling in his guts was overwhelmed with sorrow and guilt. He wished he hadn't run away from the small cottage. The warm feeling inside made his heart calm. The trust that he had from his family was large and almost unbreakable, yet he had chopped it up with a sharp ax. He felt spoiled. Qin had run away because of the angry wolf that attacked their cottage. He wanted to be the hero, the savior of the mother, father, and sister. But he failed. He failed to save them, unable to sacrifice himself for his sister, who had died from the wolf and had forgotten even to be a good son. The boy failed at everything, and he was sure that he would be a big disgrace when he returned.

He didn't know where to go. The tears were brimming in his eyes. The echoes of his mother were screaming at him, saying that he was a horrible son. "The buddha must be angry at you, waiting for you to perish so he can send you to the demons and eat you up like a sweet dessert." Qin thought. His imagination always got the best of him, seeing him as a naughty and playful boy. To think that he would be that naive to betray his family. Qin couldn't think of anything else but his guilt and his thirst. The saliva on his tongue was almost gone, so he was dehydrated. Qin walked sadly to an old abandoned shack and fell asleep, stuck with sin.

Qin woke up as the bright sun rose like a balloon. He felt a bit better but still had second thoughts. His footprints remained in the dirt as he trekked through the sandy path. His hope was disappearing like his survival. He was clinging onto a cliff of worries, and he knew the ground would crumble, and he would fall. His aching feet stumbled across a dusty path so dry that it seemed like a miniature lonely desert. His toes felt a bit wet when he saw the stream of the cranes, the rarest river in china. He ran like the wind and took a big gulp, his body refreshed and energized. He stood up and decided he would do his best to go home.

The old village of North China is called the ancient prophecy village. The first word that went into his head was emptiness. The houses were sloping sadly on a small hill, the shops were all closed, and there was no single person in sight. The wind whistled past his ear just as he noticed a dark cave. It was as black as midnight, as quiet as a mouse, and creepy as the corpses in a graveyard. He swore he could see Buddha's face, so he ran in and fell into a pit in the pure, dense darkness.

He woke up to delicate water dripping from the stalactites above. The squeaking sounds of the noisy bats echoed across the cave. Gentle water dripped from the sharp stalactites above as it landed delicately on Qin's face. You couldn't even tell the tears of pain apart from the water, about to give him something unimaginable. Qin wiped away all the water from his eyes and sighed. He was so deep in the caves he couldn't even see sunlight, or as a matter of fact, couldn't even see anything besides rock. The hurt boy bumped into something hard, something crafted or artificial. Finally, the scared boy came to his senses realized he had wandered into a lost city hidden under the surface when his eyes adjusted. The grottoes were so shady to protect the priceless treasures and still are. Jewels the size of Qin's head were scattered over a Buddha statue. Qin found gold jewelry and silver ornaments everywhere in this underground sanctuary. This city was now a secret treasure chest, and Qin had just discovered a mark of history, never to be forgotten. He saw the statue having a colossal dent right where the brain was. The Buddha's face looked gloomy and hurt. A sign by the feet of this god started to glow as if it wanted Qin to read it. He walked over and read the messy letters scattered over the paper. "Without a mind of intelligence or bravery, the alive will cease to exist. Help our god live and let us protect him as he protects us." Qin thought for a moment. He knew that the Buddha needed a brain, just a brain. The brain needed intelligence or bravery to let a god exist. Then an idea struck him. He needed to find a jewel-like brain that was blue because the color blue represented intelligence. Qin found a serene blue jewel, climbed the buddha's body, and stuffed the treasure into the head. Suddenly, the dome closed, and the buddha's eyes opened a sparkling gold. The god began to float upwards, through the cave roof and through the dark underground. The statue glowed a wondrous aura of shimmer and fantasy dust as it floated towards the sky and into the clouds. This gave Qin the warm and lovely message to himself: "*You will reunite with the dead soon enough, but live the life you can and make sure to beam a smile.*"

New Tales from The Mogao Grottoes

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Tsang, Andre – 9

Whoosh. Bang! Mike collided with the debris like two rocks smashing into each other. Sounds of terror, fear, and pain rushed through his head. 'Looks like this is the end' Mike thought as he closed his eyes in defeat. But just as his eyes shut admitting k.o, he caught just a tiny glimpse of something he only thought he'd see in legends.

Beep! Beep! Mike just hated that alarm clock. With its blaring noise blasting right into his ear, he slammed the snooze button. "Great, it's today," Mike said as he slowly dragged himself out of bed. "Mooring mom. Mooring dad." Mike said as slow and as tired as a sloth.

"Wake up sleepyhead. You're going trading!" Mom and dad said synchronized. "Eat your breakfast, and then you're heading straight out." Mike dreadfully managed to hold his body up without smacking his face on his food. 'Never thought I'd see the day when my parents kicked me out of the house to go shopping.' Mike thought as he held his body like he was holding a cup on his head.

As soon as he ate the final piece of breakfast, without warning, his parents opened the front door and shoved him out. Mike hadn't even managed to change out of his silly pajamas, or brush his teeth. All of his neighbors just froze in place as soon as they saw him with cold, blank looks. Then, they all just burst out laughing and pointing at Mike. 'What a GREAT way to start the day.' Mike thought.

The day got worse and worse, from getting blisters on his feet to going the wrong way. After what seemed like an eternity to Mike, the Silk Road came into sight. 'Finally, a place to rest my legs.' Mike thought as he trudged on and on. As he reached the trading center, he realized he forgot the #1 thing to bring: his shopping list. 'And I thought this day couldn't get any worse.' He thought as his exhausted body had to move step by step as slow as a turtle. Sadly, his memory was as bad as a concussed sheep, so not a single item on the list was recalled. Luckily for him, he could spend the money on all the things HE wanted but never got. Suddenly, the wind slowly started to speed up.

Whoosh. The wind started spinning in a circle faster and faster until everything started taking off. From fruits to machines, nothing could withstand the sheer power of this wind of utter doom. With barely any time to react, he sprinted out of the tiny trading tent and tried to figure out what was going on. There was just one problem: Mike has run into the updraft.

"Aaaaaaah!" Cried, Mike. However, nobody responded. They were all gone. Besides, all Mike could hear was the torrential wind blowing right into his body like slicing bread. Nothing was available to grab or even stand

on while floating in midair. That's when he saw a sturdy rock to hold on to. Mike tried to grab it, but it was heading for him. Aiming for a headshot.

BAM! Mike crushed through the rock as painful as spikes. His screaming sounded so loud even people living a whole mile away could hear him. Every part of his body hurt. His eyes slowly closed as he heard the roaring of the tornado howl in his ear. Just before his eyes fully closed, however, his eyes were just able to see the tornado ripping through the mountain. But it wasn't just ANY mountain. There was something inside.

Chirp. Chirp. Mike's eyes slowly opened, seeing the devastation on the trading center in rubble and dust. Not a single tent or person came into sight. It wasn't the destruction he saw; It was the mountain. As Mike looked closer, he saw not one, not two, but three different statues on what looked like the Buddha. In the center, there was a pagoda. This breathtaking sight was one to remember.

Bao heard the rumbling in the ground as everyone from his town came charging over. As they came into view, they were awestruck by the new art. It seemed to stretch on for miles, with probably more than 2000 sculptures across. All their jaws just dropped to the ground. Mom and dad came running as fast as a cheetah. "Are you okay?" They asked worriedly.

"I'm fine." I replied as we all walked towards the new art and admired it. Then, we walked home, leaving The Tornado on Silk Road behind us.

Mysterious Mogao

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Tsui, Brian – 9

It was a rainy day, a curious young monk named Hong Bian was searching through the caves to look around for his friends to play with. He discovered a creepy door and Hong heard tons of whispering people inside. ***Why is that..?*** After sitting there for a while, he decided to go into the door and see the real truth about it. ***Ah, it's hard to open! Is it locked..?*** He thought that the door was locked, but after some force... Creek! The door opened.

What... I- Hong thought that his place has never been discovered. But there he but there he was. Standing there with his monk friends looking at him weirdly. ***“Are you okay Hong?”*** One of his flustered friends said. ***“I... Yeah, I'm fine.”*** Hong walked to his friends awkwardly. Everyone started chatting again. Even his friends. They completed ignored Hong. ***“What's happening?”*** Hong said quietly. ***“There's been mysterious sounds lately. But we don't know what happened to this cave. To our home..”*** Hong was shocked. He wanted to check down with his friends.. so they sneaked out as quiet as a mouse to go check out the noises.

“Yes! We're out!” Hong's friend said. So, they searched all over the cave.. But couldn't find anything mysterious or weird in the cave. But Hong got a idea. To dig underneath the cave. It took them hours just to take one little pile of dirt out of there. ***“what a day, wasn't it..?”*** Hong said. They thought that they were never going to do that ever again.. And they probably wouldn't even if they wanted to. Then, boom. z

When Hong woke up, he was in pure shock. In the middle of nowhere. ***“Where's my family, where's my friends? Wh.. where's my home? I was abandoned wasn't I?”*** Hong decided to go search around for, his cave, the place where he lives, his home. He searched far and wide for his home. But it was nowhere to be seen. Then, he turned around just to realize that the cave was behind him. Broken, and never to be fixed. All the statues and monks that he met, the place where the good memories arose. Hong was going to get... ***revenge.***

Many things were on to him, he was the prey, but everything else was the predator. While searching for a place to stay, he decided to dig down even more. In the day and the night, he worked hard to find what the noise is. Click! Click! Hong heard light switches near the bottom of the cave. He dug hard to find what was happening underneath there. ***“Ugh. It sounds like a party is down there... What is happening..?!”*** He couldn't do this for any longer. Hong couldn't do that anymore, the sounds in the night was getting underneath his skin. Hong wanted to make a stop and start his own life again. But he couldn't without his family, friends, and fellow monks. He ***needed*** to make a change for his family so they could live peacefully for where ever they were. ***“It's time to help my monks.”***

Hong tried hard to make his dream come true, for who or what was down there. But he never figured out. But he knew that one day, he would be brave enough to go down that black hole, and start his journey again for finding that person. But for now... he was still trying to make a living off of his little messy home. So he took jobs and tried to be helpful for once, and for all.

Everyday, Hong worked hard to get what he wanted to achieve, he got what he wanted. But not so... though he wanted revenge, and that person to taste his or her own medicine... he figured that he would just let it go. He did start a new journey, still being a monk... Hong created more and more caves, so he could always remember that he worked hard, he worked hard, and let nothing stop him. And now, there's lots and lots of caves. He passed it down to his other fellow monks so they could work hard as well. Believe in happiness and humanity. But just to begin with, it was Hong.

The Selfish Snail

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Wong, Sophia – 9

Once there was a snail who was clumsy, fat, and selfish. At that time, he was getting more and more selfish even his friend Dudley can't stand it so Dudley went to a place where the witches live and ask for help.

The witches thought for a long time and decided to help. One of the witches will pretend to be Dudley, and the witch will ask to make the popcorn better, but she actually makes it so yummy by adding a potion to make the popcorn explode. When it explodes, it will make Mr. Selfish goes to a world where everybody is more selfish than him. When he learned his lesson and not being selfish anymore, he could go back to the world Dudley is in.

The night came when Mr. Selfish went to a world where everybody was so selfish and mean to him. He had no money to buy any food. After a year had passed, he finally learned his lesson, but he has to pass a test which lasted a whole day. Finally, he proved that he was not selfish anymore, so they had a party.

When his friend got home, almost every movable thing were gone! Then after awhile, he figured out that he has been robbed! But then another question popped into his mind: only Mr. Selfish came here but surely he can't carry that much stuff. So, he decided to go to sleep.

The next day more stuff were gone! Then, he quickly realized that his friend had a whole bunch of people helping him! He was shocked and mad at the same time.

A few moment later, he heard a sound: Ding Dong Ding Dong. It was the witches. It turned out that the witches had made a mistake. They had accidentally given Mr. Selfish the tip to be good. So, he got out in no time from that magic world. He didn't learn his lesson and became a robber.

Legend of the Mogao Caves

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Wu, Austin – 9

The wind howled in the stormy skies, as Austin headed for the Mogao caves. Austin was here in the Mogao caves to investigate some rumors about monsters. He headed for one of the caves and ventured deep into the depth of the cave. Austin had permission to enter the restricted zones, just for the case. Deep inside the caves, it was creepy and cold, droplets of sweat fell from Austin's neck. He saw the eerie glow of the torches in the caves. He shuddered. He nervously turned on his torch. "EEE!" There was suddenly a blaring screech, coming from the cavern below. A shadowy torso appeared out of nowhere. Austin screamed at the top of his lungs, he took off as fast as a rocket.

Austin stopped to look behind, luckily nothing was there. Austin took a big sigh of relief and continued exploring the cave. He stopped near a small lake and decided to rest there. Suddenly he heard a thudding sound growing louder and louder. Austin was shivering to the bone. The sound grew as loud as 1000 drums beating toward him. Austin saw a giant rocky monster, with bulky muscles and it was glowing red with hatred. It bashed toward Austin at full speed. Austin had nowhere to dodge and saw he jumped into the pool. "Splash!" Austin was in the freezing water, he successfully dodged the monster's blow. He swam as fast as he could and reached the other side of the pool. The monster was too heavy to swim and decided to jump toward Austin. Austin was on the run again, this time panting to catch his breath. The monster stomped behind and chased behind him. The monster lifted his hands to grab Austin. Austin wasn't so lucky this time he was grasped by the monster's hands and was choking to death. This was the most intense moment of Austin's life. He tried to breathe, but it was impossible. I guess this is it, thought Austin. He prepared for the worse when an idea struck him. He took out a torch and threw it at the monster's eyes. The monster howled in pain as he let go of his hands, and Austin dropped down. His first instincts were to run, he zoomed toward the opposite direction. He never looked back.

Austin found himself near a sculpture of Budha, he laid down. "OOOHHH!" A ghostly sound came out from the Budha sculpture. Austin was scared to the bone, his feet and arms felt like jelly, he wobbled backward to steps. He couldn't see anything. It's an invisible ghost! Austin thought. Austin ran as fast as he could, he could hear the eerie sounds of the ghost chasing him. He saw a shaft, near the cave. He ran in, not knowing what was inside. A shadowy body appeared out of nowhere. It was a zombie! "AAAAAAAHHHHHH!" Austin screamed with terror! They zombied its arms and tried to hit me. I opened the door and ran out at the speed of light! I stopped to catch my breath. Austin was looking at thousands of paintings about Buddhism, it was like a cave to the past. While he was admiring the clay sculptures, he noticed a small hole next to the cave walls. It was small. Austin decided to climb into the small hole because of his curiosity. It led to the outside of the cave.

Austin decided to never look back at the scary Mogao caves ever again. He thought this cave is so spooky and ancient, he shouldn't enter. Would you enter the scary Mogao Caves?

Trapped in Adventure

Chinese International School, Chua, Sophia – 10

I looked around the Mogao Grottoes as the tour guide stepped out of the cave to answer a call. The air was dark and misty. Each wall was covered with colorful paintings and thick dust. I walked towards the Buddha painting to get a closer look. I'd always been interested in Buddha. He was a prince in Ancient India who sacrificed his riches to teach people the path to enlightenment. It was almost time to leave, and I enjoyed the tour at the Grottoes.

Suddenly, the door slammed closed. I tried to pull it open, but it was locked. I was stuck in the cave by myself! I panicked, trying to open the door again, but I couldn't. Beads of sweat started dripping down my face. I hadn't even realized I was trembling until I looked down at my shaking hands.

Immediately, all the paintings started to move; the characters stepped out of them as if they were real people! I was terrified, thinking maybe this was a dream, but it wasn't. Buddha stared at me like I was an alien.

"What are you doing here, Lyla?" Buddha asked.

"The staff locked the door before I could exit," my voice stammered, not knowing how Buddha knew my name. He looked at me as if he could see through me.

"We can trust her," Buddha declared, and the other characters nodded, agreeing.

"We need to find a valuable stolen object that belongs to us. Can you help?" He asked.

I nodded, partly in fear and partly because I had no other choice.

"Wonderful! The valuable object is a staff that is used to do good deeds. It teaches people to learn from their mistakes. We tried to find it, but at the last minute, the enemy escaped with it." Buddha explained. I understood the urgency and worried this was the end of doing good deeds.

As if the Buddha could see my thoughts, he shook his head.

"No, it doesn't mean that no one will do any more good deeds. But, there will be a lot less of them," Buddha said.

My job was to locate the staff. Buddha and his companions would take it from there. Buddha handed me what looked like an ordinary string. He told me that if I found the staff and the enemy, or if I was in danger, I could pull it for safety.

"You will know that you have found it the moment you see it. But just in case, it's a normal golden staff with a carved wooden handle. There are the five main rocks encrusted on the staff: diamond, sapphire, ruby, emerald and rock. The rock looks normal, but it is the most powerful of the five. When you touch it, you will feel its aura and power," the Buddha said.

He motioned for me to step into a painting.

I felt the sun hit me and I suddenly felt warm. I saw a park with gigantic trees planted everywhere, leaving no free space. There were no flowers, but there were a lot of stray weeds. The sky was gloomy and dark, with rolling black clouds passing quickly. A roll of thunder boomed and lightning soon after. I walked around the park, trying to see if I could find the staff. An eagle whistled above me, the sound meshing with the wind. I looked up at it and a golden shimmer caught my eye. It was the staff stuck between the branches! It was the only bright thing in the whole park.

The staff fit Buddha's description completely. I pulled at the string. This job was so easy.

It wasn't until a monk came into sight that I knew the journey was not over. The monk was a slender and delicate-looking person with dark skin.

"I'm the great monk, Devadatta. What are you doing here?" he demanded, glaring at me.

I was too scared to say anything but I remembered the tour guide telling me about Devadatta. Devadatta hated Buddha for being so kind and empathetic, especially when Buddha had taken care of the swan Devadatta had shot down with his bow. The Buddha had warned me that the powerful monk Devadatta might have the staff because he wanted everyone to make mistakes and conquer the world with his evil power.

“Did the Buddha send you?”

I could only manage a quiet whimper. I hoped this would be over soon because my rescuers were on their way.

I was taken off guard when Devadatta grabbed me by the collar and lifted me up. I screeched.

“You make a sound, and you’re dead,” Devadatta growled.

He unlocked a big cage with his free hand, and threw me in. Suddenly, I heard a cry. I looked between the bars of the cage. It was a big and beautiful swan, standing right in front of the cage!

Devadatta came running in at the sight of the swan, took out an arrow and was about to shoot when Buddha appeared beside the swan. Devadatta aimed the arrow at Buddha.

“No!” I cried.

Devadatta released the arrow, but the arrow just ricocheted off Buddha's skin. Devadatta then sprinted away from us and in a second, he was gone.

Buddha held out his hand and I took it. I felt myself transported back to the Mogao Caves.

“Thank you for your help, you did a great job. I must make peace with Devadatta soon.” he told me.

I slunk down against the walls, exhausted by the mission. Tonight had been an extraordinary night, where I learned that the power of teamwork was an unbreakable spell. I heard a key turn and the characters rushed into their painting where they became lifeless paintings again.

A guard came rushing in and said, “I’m sorry, I thought everyone had already left. I didn’t notice you were here until I looked at the CCTV camera!.”

As he escorted me out of the caves, Buddha gave me a wink.

Tada

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Chan, Tsz Yiu – 10

Have you heard of the tales from the Mogao Grottoes? The impressive Dunhuang murals hide many interesting stories. Guess what my favorite story is? Let me tell you!

The story I like best is about the Nine-Colored Deer, a deer covered in nine bright colors, who one day, was walking by the river and saved a man from drowning. That person was called TaDa. TaDa was very grateful and vowed not to reveal the place where the Nine-Colored Deer lived to anyone.

Later, the queen of that place wanted to use the nine-colored deer's fur to make a piece of clothing. So the king posted an imperial order that if anybody who knew the nine-colored deer where to live or caught it, he could either get half of the land in the country or a bowl of gold and silver beans.

After TaDa saw the king's order, for profit, regardless of the promise to the deer, he went to the palace to inform the king and led the king to capture the nine-color deer.

Soon the king caught the nine-colored deer, and the nine-colored deer asked, "My lord, how do you know where I live?" "He told me." The king pointed to TaDa...

I'm an Explorer

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Chang, Ho Ching – 10

I'm an explorer. This morning, I visited the Mogao Grottoes. I've worn my best climbing shoes and in my favourite blue jacket for the world cultural heritage – one of the major Grottoes in China, Art Gallery of the World and Museum on the Wall. Why does it have that many awesome titles, and what is it famous for? That's why I decided to go in and discover those 735 caves of Mogao Grottoes.

I found out that there are 492 caves with sculptures or paintings and the rest are places where monks practice. Mogao Grottoes do not allow photo-taking as the lights of the camera will affect the colour of the original pigment on the sculptures. But don't be disappointed! I will tell my favourites here.

The first one is a sculpture in cave no. 148. It is a giant sculpture that looks like it's sleeping. Its hair looks 'wavy'. There's a 'mole' in its forehead. Around this cave, there are beautiful drawings that illustrate the great solemnity of the pure wasty world. This mural tells us a sutra story. In the mural painting, I can see a giant temple. There's a big terrace at the courtyard and also five mini terrace in front of it. In the middle, there are five audience halls. On the side of it, there are a total of eighteen cloister. Numerous buddhas and attendees were walking in the mural, reflecting the flourish scene back then. I've stayed there for a long time. I've been obsessed by the little details!

The second is a mural painting from Tang Dynasty. They show the beauty from Tang Dynasty. The painting in cave no. 320. It's called Celestials. In the drawing, two teams of dancers have ribbon on each of them, as they dance, they sprinkled flowers and swung their hands. Their dance moves were beautiful. The ribbon moved as they floated and flew in the air. There are clouds, faint flowers and more things below them.

Sometimes mural paintings tell us a story. One of which was about a little prince being Sakyamuni among the three princes once upon a time. One day, the three princes rode on their horses and went to play in the forest. The forest didn't have lots of animals. They saw a female tiger with seven baby tigers. The female tiger was as thin as a stick so she couldn't feed milk to her baby. As Little prince saw that they were about to starve to death, he took off his clothes and let the tiger to eat him but she didn't have enough strength to do that. Little prince went to the top of the mountain, cut his blood vessel and jumped down the mountain. He was dead and the female tiger ate him. The tigers were saved. This was a story of sacrifice.

I have stayed in the place for a long time. Even though Mogao Grottoes was beautiful, like the details of the murals and sculptures, and the amazing historcal scenes behind, it unfortunately is facing oxidation which turns the bright colours dark. Luckily, we now have some professionals trying to restore them. Also, we have a digital version of Mogao Grotoes so people can appreciate it.

I'm going to discover more grottoes here. Maybe I'll tell you more murals and sculptures another time.

Maybe That's True

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Chow, Yee Lam Tiffany – 11

‘Congratulations to the host for successfully binding this system,’ a voice rang in my mind. I looked at it in confusion, no one was around, so who was talking? The system seemed to have heard my question. He explained, ‘I am your system. As for why you are bound, it should be that you triggered a certain condition, so you are transferred to another temporal and spatial’. ‘Let me introduce it,’ said the system. ‘There are vast land and resources on this planet, and there is a lot of food. I want to go to every spot in the world to see...’ ‘Okay, stop,’ I said. ‘So how can I go back to the original temporal and spatial?’ The system says, ‘You need to find some things to get back. You are now in the Mogao Grottoes in China. It is the early 14th century now.’ After I listened, I walked around to explore, but suddenly, the system said, ‘Congratulations! You have found one of the things!’ I was shocked, because I just walked a few steps, how did I find it? The system explained, ‘Magao Grottoes is the thing that you have found!’ ‘I see.’ I answered.

I continued to walk a few steps further and plunged into the endless darkness. I was groping in the dark, but suddenly, I saw a light, I wondered if someone had already come in, and what was his purpose? I walked softly so that I wouldn’t make a sound.

After walking for a while, I heard a sound in front of me, I hid behind a stone and looked over there, there were two people arguing, one of them said, ‘How can you be so selfish? You don’t care about human safety!’ I was trying to talk to them, but their bodies fell into pieces! I calmed down and continued to move forward. This time, I saw two people were fighting, but I have never seen the way they used! I continued to walk. I saw many murals of Mogao Grottoes along the way. ‘Chinese culture is really extensive and profound! Monks came here to sculpt Buddha statues and murals 2000 years ago! It is incredible!’

Finally, I arrived at the Buddhist scripture cave. I saw there were many scriptures in the Tibetan scripture cave such as politics, military affairs, religion, history, and philosophy. There were also some books that were written in minority languages, ancient Tibetan, Xixia, Khotanm Turkic, Vyghur etc. The types of the books include Medical books, music scores, dance scores, chess classics, horoscopes, calendar calculation and religious documents.

Suddenly, I saw a person walked out of the Buddhist scripture cave, and the system that had been silent for a long time suddenly spoke, ‘Congratulations to the host, you have successfully collected all the items. This person in front of you is the one who can let you go home, please take the opportunity, no matter what he says, you must execute it. He will take you to find your way home.’

The man led me forward, and I saw a door. I walked in. After a moment, I returned to the reality and took off my VR glasses and said, ‘Is technology so advanced now?’ It’s so real! It’s just like the real thing!’ the teacher smiled meant unknown, ‘Maybe that’s true?’

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Lee, Wang Ho – 12

It was a Sunday morning when my family and I decided to go to the Mogao Grottoes. We packed our bags, checked everything, and we were ready to go. Half an hour later, we were riding the train to Gansu. After that, we rented a beach buggy and drove to our destination – The Mogao Grottoes. It was a magnificent sight. The Grottoes were built on a mountainside a few centuries ago. The walls were made entirely out of stones, and I could see many Buddha statues surrounding the Grottoes. “Let’s go in?” My dad said. We paid the entrance fee and went in. We went into each room. Some of them had paintings while others had statues of Buddhas. Even so, they all look the same to me. The same hair, face and clothes. Still, it was a spectacular sight. Suddenly, there was a rush of crowded tourists and they accidentally pushed me. I ended up barging into a room with a sign that said “Do Not Enter”. Lost for words and dumbfounded, I stood up. After I regained my senses and bearings, I looked around the room. The whole room was practically dark. I turned on the “flashlight” using my phone and scanned around. Still, nothing significant was there until I reached a lightless area where my light seems not to reach. “That’s odd, why is there no light?” I contemplated. I kept walking towards it taking baby steps but I stopped when I noticed that there was a hole in the room, and I was only one step closer from falling down. However, my curiosity got the better of me. I jumped down into the hole and heard screams and I realized it was coming out of me. Oddly, I fell out of the hole. To my surprise, I did not end up in a dark space. It was a wide and open area with lush green lands and massive trees. Then, I spotted something in the sky. It was flying, but it left a trail of smoke along the way, it was a phoenix! All of a sudden, a voice behind me and said, “Welcome.” I turned around and saw a monk. “To the world of magical creatures.” “Whoa.” I said. The monk then said this space is sealed for ordinary humans. A fox-like creature with nine tails suddenly appeared next to the monk, and surprisingly, bowed at him. Normal animals don’t do that, and mythical creatures don’t do that either. “Who are you, oh mysterious creature?” I asked. “You may not know me, but you can refer me as God.” The monk said. His eyes glowed and he suddenly hovered above the air! “You are the first one to see me, which no one has done before. Let me give you a gift.” He said and gave me a plant-like thing. He then shared “This plant is from the deepest of Mogao Grottoes which will never die. It keeps everyone away from sicknesses and natural disasters as long as you take care of it. That’s the spirit of these Grottos, they’re evergreen and ever giving”. I thanked the monk and took the plant back to Hong Kong. I wanted to plant it in Hong Kong where the spirit of Mogao Grottoes would blend in with the local ecosystem. The monk then said, “Goodbye. May I last in your heart forever.” And all of a sudden, I was awake. LEE Wang Ho Marcus P6A (11) I was in my bedroom, sitting up. My head was covered in sweat. “Whew!! What a crazy dream!” I said until I spot the plant next to me

Nine-Color Deer

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Tam, Yi Ki – 9

Mogao Grottoes is a famous tourist attraction in China. Everyone is familiar with its murals, so do you know any legends about these murals? 'Nine-Color Deer' is one of them.

According to the legend, there used to be a deer with gleaming bright fur and a pair of antlers that were white as snow. Since its hair can reflect nine colors of light under the sun, people call it 'Nine-Color Deer'. Nine-Color Deer is very kind and helpful. Even when some people went into the forest by mistake, it will provide them with directions.

One day, when Nine-Color Deer was eating grass, it heard a cry for help and found a man in the rapid river! The deer jumped into the river and saved the man. When the man was conscious again, he thanked the deer and was willing to be its servant. Nine-Color Deer refused and said, 'I don't need you to be my servant. But promise me no to tell anyone where I live.' The man nodded and promised it. Then he left reluctantly.

A few days later, the queen told the king that she had a dream the night before, in which she dreamt that there was a Nine-Color Deer in the forest. 'Its hair can reflect nine colors under the sun. I want to use its fur to make a coat and its antlers will be decorations on my bedside. If I don't have these things, I will die,' she said. The king said quickly, 'I can find it. You are my beloved and I won't let you die!'

So, the king put up lots of notices everywhere. On the notice, it says 'If anyone can find the Nine-Color Deer, I will give him half of the money of the kingdom.' The man that was saved by the deer saw this notice. He thought, 'I will be rich if I tell the king when the Nine-Color Deer is.' So he informed the king. The king asked the man to lead and the army followed.

When they arrived at the forest, they saw the Nine-Color Deer. The soldiers prepared bows and arrows and wanted to shoot it.

At this very moment, the deer asked the king, 'Did this person bring you here?' 'Yes,' said the king. 'My king, do you know that I saved him when he was drowning? He promised me not to tell anyone about me but now he betrayed me!' The man was very embarrassed. The king said to the man, 'Nine-Color Deer saved your life in distress, but you betrayed it because of wealth. You didn't thank it, you retaliated with no gratitude. Don't you feel ashamed?' The man ran away awkwardly. The king said to the Nine-Color Deer, 'I will order that all the people in the country cannot come here. I'll let you have a peaceful life.' The deer knelt down and said, 'Thank you, king.'

This story tells us that we should be grateful to everyone that helped us and repay them. Do you know any more legends of the Mogao Grottoes? Come and tell me next time!

New Tales from The Mogao Grottoes

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Wang, Qianyue – 10

I was reading in the library one day when a particular book caught my eye. It was about a place called the Mogao Grottoes. I took it off the shelf and started reading. I felt very surprised because the Mogao Grottoes was a series of 500 ancient temples, and all of them were built inside a cliff in a desert! There were a lot of pictures about the magnificent paintings inside the caves, attracting me a lot. It was about 1 month after I read the book about the Mogao Grottoes when the Summer holiday came. Everyone in my family was excited. All of us saw a fun holiday ahead. "Let's go somewhere to relax this year," dad said. We all agreed. "But where are we going?" mum asked. Dad gave her a shrug. "Perhaps we could go to the Mogao Grottoes!" I said. "What a great idea!" mum and dad said. Our conversation ended, and we did some research about the plane tickets and prepared to pack our bags for a tour. Before we could even realize it, we were already outside one of the many gates leading into the Mogao Grottoes. It looked very traditional with "Mogao Caves" inscribed on it. It looks very handsome with almond-colored temple walls as the background. "It looks fascinating!" dad exclaimed. We went inside quickly and began our tour. We walked 2 / 4 along a stone and dirt road, and visited only the temples which we considered were the most interesting looking. Some of the temples we visited had broken statues. Some of them had a smell of dirt. Some of the other temples had slightly-peeling paint. It was all so old and misty, as if it was a time machine from the past. I could feel how delicately the paintings were drawn, how carefully the sculptures were made, how hard the buildings were made. We visited quite a few temples and caves, but the only temples I could remember clearly after the visit were Cave 158, Cave 96 and Cave 257. First, let's talk about Cave 158. The light in all Mogao caves are dim, so it's a bit eerie perhaps if you're in the coffin-shaped Cave 158. When looked inside, I felt a bit scared. But after a while I learnt that the coffin-shaped design prevented the room to topple on itself when an earthquake occurred nearby. When I looked at the room clearly, I saw there a buddha, sleeping with his eyelids half-open. Dad told me it was the famous reclining Buddha. The Buddha was sleeping in an interesting fashion: even though he had a finely decorated pillow, he still put his right hand under his ear, causing him to tilt to the right, and so facing the person walking in. It looked like a position of some of the character in cartoons! 3 / 4 Next, there's Cave 96. Inside, there's the ginormous Maitreya Buddha. Mum told me that this Buddha is the third largest buddha statue in the world, and is the largest Buddha ever to be built indoors! It's so gigantic; you can only see his feet! The Buddha is in a very religious position, with one of his hand held up and the other in his lap. He looks so real! How long it took the sculptures to make this masterpiece, I don't even dare to think! 50 years? 100 years? Everyone in the room would gasp in awe at this breathtaking sight. This Buddha has been painted gold, and everyone must admit that this Buddha should be crowned King of the Mogao Buddhas. This room is so unbelievably tall, I even wonder how long it would take me to get from the top of the cliff to the bottom of it using a parachute. This is the heart of the caves, and everyone who comes here must get a glimpse at this statue. Finally, we come to Cave 257. This room is the most ordinary-looking of the three, but tells an important story to everyone. This cave has 3 small statues, with a board behind them. If someone were clever enough to go around to the back of the board, they would see a short tale with 7 scenes, each using vivid paintings to tell you the story. The story is about a nine-colored deer that helps a hunter escape from danger, and the hunter promises to keep her place of living a secret. However in the end, the traitor tells the king about the deer, and soon after he gets caught. When the deer tells its story to the king, justice comes into the 4 / 4 story and the hunter gets punished. From this story, we have learnt to help others in need, but also keep our promises. Trust is very important. After a long day, we finally headed back to the hotel. In the buzzing of the car engine, I looked back from one final look. "Goodbye, Mogao Caves," I whispered, then, turning my head back, I slept the rest of the journey.

The First Story of the Mogao Grottoes

Creative Primary School, Ching, Li Yi – 9

It was a bright, cold day in November. Kim Shi felt really drowsy for the whole day at school and decided to sleep early. In her dream, she saw the Buddha who told Kim to go to the Mogao Grottoes. Kim and her parents were devout Buddhist. They thought that the Buddha may have a mission for Kim in the Mogao Grottoes so Kim decided to travel there. Kim told her three best friends Chang (the scared cat), Ty (the bookworm) and Li (the fighter) about the trip. They insisted that they must go with her as they were really worried that the trip might be dangerous. Kim agreed and they returned home to pack their luggage and away they went. They climbed over the mountains, over the islands and finally reached the Mogao Grottoes.

They went into the Mogao Grottoes and found stunning pictures and statues but some of them were missing somehow. The four were determined to unravel the mystery of the missing art. They split up, walked around and jot down some interesting notes. Kim found a huge rock which was blocking something. She called her friends and they gathered around the rock and used their strength to push the rock aside. They all gasped. The entrance glittered and within every inch of the room laid gold and diamonds. There were also piles of fascinating Chinese novels. Kim looked all around the room and found a book. The book said, “The guardian of the Mogao Grottoes Wang Yuanlu was deceived by the expedition teams of different countries. The treasures and art in Mogao Grottoes were once stolen by a French expedition under Paul Pelliot in 1908, then by a Japanese expedition under Otani Kozui in 1911 and by a Russian expedition under Sergei F. Oldenburg in 1914.” Kim was shocked with these facts. She kept reading the book. When she reached the last page, the book shook. A portal appeared and sucked them all in. When they opened their eyes, they were outside of the Mogao Grottoes. But everything looked newer. Ty asked, “Where are we?” Kim answered, “In the past!”

They stood up and looked around. Kim saw the book and picked it up. She saw the words, “Stop the thieves”. “What does that mean?” asked Li. “We must stop the people who stole the art, the paintings and the statues.” Kim answered. “But we are too young.” Chang said fearfully. “We should at least try!” Kim replied. “Yeah! Don’t be a scaredy cat, Chang,” Li shouted with confidence. Then they saw Paul Pelliot. “I have an idea!” said Kim. Then she whispered to her friends about the plan. The friends all smiled and split up.

They gathered some rocks and climbed up the trees. Kim settled herself on a branch and waited for the right moment to throw the rocks at Paul Pelliot. Then, she shouted “Attack!” All at once, they threw the rocks at Paul Pelliot. Paul Pelliot screamed and ran away. Wang Yuanlu was puzzled, thinking where the rocks came from. Kim and her friends climbed down from the trees and clapped their hands. They cheered for the success of their plan. Wang Yuanlu was a bit angry and shouted at Kim and their friends for pulling such a prank. They stopped cheering and looked at him. Li tried to pounce at him but Ty grabbed her. Kim told Wang Yuanlu that Paul Pelliot was trying to scam him for the treasures and art in the Mogao Grottoes. They time travelled here to stop Paul Pelliot. It took a moment for Wang Yuanlu to understand what in the world was going on. After he realized the truth, he quickly apologized for shouting at Kim and her friends. They accepted his apology and warned Wang Yuanlu that some more people from other foreign countries will try to deceive him and steal valuable art from the Mogao Grottoes. They warned Wang Yuanlu that he should be cautious when he dealing with the foreigners in future. Suddenly, a Buddha came out of the Mogao Grottoes and thanked the four youngsters for being the guardians of the Mogao Grottoes. The Buddha said, “I would grant you a wish for your protection of the Mogao Grottoes.” Kim and her friends discussed for a while and said, “We wish that the Mogao Grottoes would be protected forever.” The Buddha smiled and said, “Your wish is my command.” In a flash, the Buddha disappeared.

Kim picked up the book and the portal appeared. They said goodbye to Wang Yuanlu and went into the portal. When they opened their eyes, they were back to the present. Kim was still holding the book. It seemed that the portal will not open anymore.

As they were leaving the caves, they saw that the once missing statues, art and paintings were now back in the Mogao Grottoes. These four youngsters played an important role in protecting the Buddhist relics in the Mogao Grottoes. They went back home and told their parents the remarkable journey they all had.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Creative Primary School, Fung, Tsz Kei Michelle – 11

“Just one more month and I’ll be home to visit, Pa!” I spoke on the phone. “Lin and I are still working on our history project that’s due two weeks later. Plus, I have your “special rock” with me, you always told me that it is a family heirloom that will be useful to me someday...blah blah blah...”

“Okay, but take care of that special rock, just like I did when I was the keeper of it. Passing it on—”

“Yes, yes, I know, Pa. I will take care of myself and the rock. Love you, bye!” I hung up.

“Fei Fei! Are you ready yet? We’re going to miss the train!” Lin called. I quickly rushed downstairs with excitement, as my friend and I were heading to visit one of the ancient architectures of China, the Mogao Grottoes!

When we arrived at the Mogao Caves, the whole place was covered in dust, seemed like a haunted house but with delicate paintings and amazing sculptures. Lin even found a library with antique books and the oldest dated, printed book in the world. We spent the whole afternoon reading books in the library.

“Fei Fei! I found something!”

I hurried beside Lin.

“It’s a book about souls in the Mogao caves... It says that an evil sorcerer back then had villages destroyed, killing every single villager and their families. For those who escaped the village, the evil sorcerer casted a spell, imprisoning the escapers in the Mogao Caves ever since...”

“That couldn’t be real.” I scoffed.

But when we flipped the page, a gigantic white smoke popped out of the book and surrounded us... ended up forming into a ghost!

“AAAAH!!! GHOST!!!” We screamed and ran across the room. When we ran, other ghosts started popping out and followed us, which left us more terrified. We ran left, then right and left until we came to a dead end... We huddled up together when a ghost came close...

“I can’t believe it... HUMANS!!! WE WILL ALL BE FREE NOW!!!” the ghost cheered. Followed by one and another.

“What is happening—” I asked, puzzled.

“Welcome to the Mogao Caves my friends! I am Yan and these are my friends. We are all overjoyed that you both are here to free our spirits!!!” They applauded once again.

“Free? But... My friend and I are just here to work on our history project... Wait... are you all the souls that were trapped here for thousands of years?”

“Indeed, we are,” Yan replied. She then told Lin and I her story. Yan was actually a woman who lived in 366 AD, the time when the Mogao Caves were built. The evil sorcerer back then had her whole family killed, she tried to escape but the sorcerer had cursed and imprisoned her in the Mogao Caves ever since. There were also other souls imprisoned too, they needed a special cure to free themselves so they could reincarnate. Afraid to tell, I explained why we were here again and that we have no power to free Yan and the other souls. Hearing this, disappointed looks hung on the souls, faces. Some even started weeping in tears. Seeing everyone so miserable, Lin and I felt bad... So, we decided to stay overnight and help find cure! After we settled down in a nice room the ghosts offered us, Lin and I rested from this anxious day.

The next day, we continued to search for cure. We searched the entire Mogao Caves, searched every room, every spot, every corner.

“Thud!” a book fell.

“What was that?” Lin asked. I walked and picked up the book.

“Cures For Curses” “Involving cures for the most difficult curses in the world”

“This book is perfect! There is definitely a cure for Yan and the other souls in this book!” I exclaimed in delight.

We flipped a few pages and found a page about cure for the souls.

For those who wish for cure to this curse—

Find a rock with ancient words.

Break the rock and let light spread—

Spirits will now have a future ahead.

“A rock? There could be thousands of rocks in this universe! When can we find the right one?!” I shouted, frustrated.

“Ancient words, special rock... Fei Fei, how come this sounds so familiar?” Lin hesitated for a while. “Do you think it may have something to do with the rock your father gave you?”

“You are right! How come I haven’t noticed?” I quickly ran to my bag, grabbed the rock and broke it. We all peered inside with excitement waiting for light to spread, but disappointingly, nothing came out...

“I’m so very sorry everyone...Lin and I tried our—”

Murmuring came from the crowd. I turned back and saw light coming from inside the rock. It automatically rose, bursted into tiny pieces flying to every soul’s body as they slowly floated up into the sky.

We quickly ran outside to catch the amazing scene. Souls floated freely in the air, jumping and leaping in happiness.

“Thank you, from the bottom of my heart!” Yan said before she floated up, slowly disappearing into the wind.

Proudly, Lin and I headed home. Turns out, this was an unexpected way to spend our adventure!

The Trip to the Mogao Grottoes

Creative Primary School, Lau, Tin Lam Denise – 10

Last summer, the Ming family went on a trip to China. They had gone through lots of different adventures but the most unforgettable one was the trip to Mogao Grottoes.

When they arrived China, it was already night time, so the family checked in to their hotel near the Mogao Grottoes caves. After the night, the Ming family went to find their tour guide of the day — Shang Lo. When they saw Shang Lo, the family greeted him with a nice warm smile. Shang Lo asked, “What are your names?” Ming Lam, which is the youngest replied, “Hello, my name is Ming Lam. I love history, that’s why I’m here on this trip.” “My name is Ming Lan. I am Ming Lam’s older brother,” Ming Lan said. Finally, Dad said, “I am Ming Lun and this is my wife Choe Kun.” “It is a pleasure meeting you all. There is a ten-minute walk until we could arrive to the Mogao Grottoes caves, so let’s go now,” Shang Lo said.

After a while, the family and Shang Lo arrived to the Mogao Grottoes. “There are a lot of caves here but we are only going to the one that has the longest history,” Shang Lo explained. As they walked to one of the caves, Shang Lo said with a scary voice, “I heard rumors about snakes with powers inside the caves.” “What kind of powers?” Ming Lam asked. Shang Lo thought for a moment and said, “Powers to close the caves and kill people. But we don’t know which caves they will be in, so we need to be very careful.” After Shang Lo said that, they were already in the cave. Just when they were looking around, they heard a loud bang and suddenly the cave was pitch black. “Oh no!” everyone shouted.

Suddenly Dad said, “In a movie I watched, four explorers were also trapped in a cave with a magical snake. They dug holes to escape from under the ground and managed to survive.” Mom said, “We could try that.” “But we don’t have anything to dig holes with,” Ming Lan said. Then Ming Lam shouted, “Mommy! I can’t see you!” Shang Lo pulled out a flash light and said, “Let’s make our own shovels to find our way out before the snake kills us!” Shang Lo picked up some branches from the ground and started teaching the rest how to make shovels. After a while, everyone picked up their shovels and started digging as the snake kept hissing. They dug and dug.

After a very long time, they were finally half way through. “We need to dig faster,” Shang Lo said. The snake kept trying to get its head through the hole they dug. It was really scary and horrifying for the Ming family and Shang Lo. Suddenly Ming Lan shouted, “I see it, I see the sunlight!” Everybody gasped when they saw the sunlight. “Ssssssss,” the snake hissed while the Ming family and Shang Lo were looking at the sunlight. Ming Lun said, “We need to stay focused, or else we will all be the snake’s lunch!” So, they continued digging and digging once again.

A long time had passed, the family and Shang Lo finally got their way out. After they patched up the hole, Ming Lam said, “I never thought that I would be so happy to see the sunlight!” Choe Kun nodded and said, “Yeah that was so scary yet exciting!”

After this scary yet fun adventure, the Ming family and Shang Lo went back to the hotel. They all waved and said goodbye to Shang Lo then went back to their hotel room. Once they arrived to their room, Ming Lun turned on the television. “Today we found out that the Mogao Grottoes caves were haunted by the snakes with the abilities to kill us humans,” the television host announced, “We are going to shut down the Mogao Grottoes, until we remove all the magical snakes from all the caves.” “Finally! They are removing the snakes from the caves!” Ming Lam said with a relief. “That means we can come back whenever the caves reopen!” Ming Lan said. The whole family cheered, “Yay!”

When the Ming family arrived home, they were all so happy that they were alive. Then the phone rang, Ming Lun answered, “Hello?” “Hi! It’s Shang Lo, your tour guide. I just wanted to inform you guys that our company is going to give your family a free trip to the Mogao Grottoes caves and the hotel stay because you guys helped China catch the magical snakes.” Choe Kun took over the phone and said, “Oh wow! Thank you and your company! But when will the Mogao Grottoes caves reopen?” Shang Lo replied, “Next year on the 4th of August. So, it’s right in the summer holiday. See you then, bye!”

When the Ming family heard the news, everyone cheered and was both excited and shocked. Ming Lam said, “This is so exciting!” Ming Lun replied, “Yeah!” After the phone call, they heard the doorbell ring. Ming Lun opened the door and saw their grandma. Ming Lun said, “Mom! We just came back from our trip.” Choe Kun continued, “Yeah! It was so much fun. We even got a free trip for finding the magical snakes. Do you want to go with us next time?” Grandma replied, “Of course! Bye!” Then she left.

The Ming family had a great trip. Not only did they help China find the magical snake, they also got a free hotel stay and trip to the Mogao Grottoes caves and also their grandma got to go with them. They all had an amazing time.

Save the Secret Caves of Mogao Grottoes

Creative Primary School, Lian, Yu Chi Linus – 9

Brrr! It was a dark and chilly night. Two children named Anson and Scarlet had read all the books they could find, played all the games that they could think of and were still bored.

Anson had spiky black hair, an oval face with a pair of sharp blue eyes. Scarlet had long, straight red hair, a round face with sparkling green eyes. Unlike Anson, she was very quiet and thoughtful. Anson and Scarlet were twins of nine years old. Anson was proud that he was two minutes older than Scarlet and called himself the big brother.

“Mom and Dad are at work and grandma is asleep in the living room,” Anson thought. Suddenly, he got a playful idea. “Scarlet, let’s explore the attic!” he suggested. Scarlet got a bit worried and replied, “What if we get scolded.” “Gosh! Scarlet, you worry too much.” Anson interrupted.

“Fine, if you want to stay here! Go ahead!” Anson said rolling his eyes as he fled upstairs. Scarlet unwillingly caught up with Anson. The attic was dark and cold but once the twins got there, they both stopped dead in their tracks because there was a brilliant light in the middle of the attic.

Anson and Scarlet ran excitedly towards the light. They found a chest, opened it and took a script that glowed with a blinding light. The script was a bamboo scroll with masses of unknown characters upon it. The moment they unrolled it, a portal opened up and sucked them in.

Scarlet screamed at the top of her lungs while Anson yelled, “Yikes!” as they teleported through a portal. When they opened their eyes, they found themselves in a dark cave filled with scripts and pictures related to Buddhism. They looked around and saw a beautiful golden Buddha statue in front of them. “Wow! How magnificent!” cried Anson with amazement.

As Anson took a few steps forward to take a closer look, he accidentally stepped on a lever. The gems on the statue immediately projected different holograms. Scarlet exclaimed “I recognized one of the holograms! I read it before in a book! We are in the Mogao Grottoes.” “The Mogao what—oes?” Anson said. “The Mogao Grottoes! O, Anson, I think you should read more.” said Scarlet.

In the first hologram, they saw a gang of thieves riding a horse—drawn cart. The second showed the thieves stealing valuable treasures including the Buddha statue and made a big fortune. The third showed the destroyed Mogao Grottoes and the last one showed the thieves causing chaos everywhere. The holograms were telling the future of Mogao Grottoes.

Anson and Scarlet were astonished. “We must stop them!” they exclaimed yet puzzled on what could be done. Suddenly, Anson noticed a colorful light around the statue. They walked closer and saw in the palm of the statue was a bright ruby ring. He told Scarlet to put it on. As she placed it upon her index finger, a bolt of shining red light appeared and dashed forward. “Run after it!” Anson shouted. As the bolt of light disappeared, they found themselves inside a maze. Anson said “What? A maze! Gah!” “Calm down or we will never find what we came for.” Scarlet tried to comfort him. They walked and walked; they came to one dead end then to another. Anson got impatient “When can we get out?”. He kept asking Scarlet and the conversation became more and more heated. Without looking, Scarlet almost bumped into a girl. They were shocked to see someone else in the maze and together they asked “Who are you? Why are you here?” “I am Kate.” The girl replied tossing her short, wavy, golden hair. “I am here to save the Mogao Grottoes.”

Kate joined them and together they walked for a long time. Anson noticed a loose stone near the side of the maze. He could not resist pushing the stone back in place. Suddenly, the ground beneath them gave way, Anson and Kate tumbled into a ditch. Scarlet saw her brother and her friend in trouble. She quickly looked around and found a pile of vines and platted them together. She lowered the rope into the ditch. Anson insisted Kate to climb up first. As Anson was half way up, the ditch began to crumble and the rope started to break. “Anson, climb quickly!” Kate shouted. “It’s ok, you guys just go on without me!” Anson called back. “I am not going to leave you behind!” Kate replied.

At that moment, the vines pulled Anson up and wrapped around his, Kate's and Scarlet's wrists and turned into three armbands. Anson's was orange and engraved with the word "courage"; Kate's was yellow engraved with friendship and Scarlet's was pink engraved with wisdom. As they touched the engraved words, a shimmering white Pegasus, a stout black dragon and fiery phoenix flew over to them.

"Magnificent creatures!" they exclaimed. They petted the legendary creatures and flew off on them. A few minutes later, they were back near the caves of Mogao Grottoes. They saw the thieves rummaging through the caves. The magical creatures roared fiercely. Swarming with fear, the thieves fled at the first sight of the creatures. With all the damage, the caves already became unsteady. "Run!" Anson shouted. The moment they got out; the caves collapsed burying everything inside. Tears rolled down their cheeks. The creatures bowed and turned into light and returned to their armbands. As the three friends said they goodbyes, Kate said, "I have a feeling we will meet again and we will make things right!" In an instant, the portal took them home.

Years later, Anson and Scarlet graduated from university and visited the Mogao Grottoes. In the shining sun, they saw a young lady with golden hair digging in the ruins. "Kate!" They shouted and ran over to hug her. After the reunion, they looked over and caught sight of the familiar palm of the golden Buddha, echoed by the shimmers in their armbands.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Creative Primary School, Mok, Aquila – 10

It was one peaceful morning at the British museum, the relics retrieval team was discussing inside the pantry, Karl heard from the curator that the Mogao caves were poorly damaged by bombs after the World War III, so are the dinosaur fossil spots sites nearby. Karl was an experienced explorer and dinosaur bone collector, he travelled across the globe and managed to escape the worst chaos including WW3. His eyes immediately lit up as the manager said they needed to send volunteers over to save the sites promptly. Karl was determined to go and strongly believed that the bombs dropped during the war might have revealed a fossil or two. Mogao caves? Why does that name sound so familiar? That's it! His childhood friend's grandfather who studied the history of those caves, what was the name again? Chang Li, that's it! Chang Li happened to be a descendant of the "Guardians of the Mogao Caves". He knew Chang Li was the only person he needed. When the two finally met again, both knew they were destined to fulfil this mission. In two days, the team was all primed and ready to set out. The expedition team travelled for months, by train, by sea and by camels, just like the ancient traders. Along the way, Karl and Chang Li had lots to catch up, they talked about their good old times and had endless debates on who was the worst teacher, which club was the most popular, what was the best school lunch, who was the most popular old boy and what was the cruellest way to prank the matron.

The two finally arrived, the magnificence of the caves and the abundances of artwork made their jaws drop. The curator was not lying, lots of caves had survived the bombs. To Karl's delight, there were also dinosaur remains. As they explored the caves one by one, there were countless artwork depicting gods from all religions, made by thousands upon thousands of men, which took centuries to build. They first walked into Cave 285, one of the earliest built caves. There were 3 partially damaged Buddha statues in meditating posts and a skeleton inside a nearby chamber; who might have been a monk that passed away while meditating or a deceased body from the war. Karl examined the caves one by one as Li admired countless paintings engraved on both sides of the endless corridors. All of a sudden, a spectral voice spoke to them that made their hair stand up. Karl froze for a second but Li was confused as he found that voice familiar. Karl snapped him back as they headed to the next cave. Soon they entered Cave 158, they found a gigantic Buddha statue laying sideways on a long bed of rock. There was also another Buddha statue in a regular standing posture, the remaining walls were filled with different drawings of the Buddha.

Chang Li was desperate to find Cave 17, the library cave and hopefully reveal secrets within it. However, meandering through the boundless historical site itself was a challenge, due to extreme weathers in the middle of the desert. The two felt hopeless after months of exploration until one day, Chang's grandmother, Shana appeared in his dream and showed him a hint of where to find the Library Cave. This time, they nailed it. Karl picked up a random scroll on the floor and opened it up. He was shocked to find out that it was the first book ever printed in history. The marvellous place was filled with artifacts and scripts written in many languages. The pair filled their backpacks as much as they could. All of a sudden, they felt a severe ground movement, the walls and ceilings were torn apart, the only ray of light inside the cave was blocked by shattered rocks. The boys starved for 3 days and felt almost hopeless because there was just no way of getting out. Suddenly, a voice spoke to Li, he immediately knew his grandmother Shana and great grandfather Shu Hong were trying to save their lives one more time. Along the way, they picked up historic artifacts which were extremely valuable as the war had destroyed most traces of humanity. The expedition was a great success, the pair only brought back treasures in quantity of the tip of an iceberg and still made a fortune. Several months later, the final batch of fossils that Karl retrieved were delivered to the museum. Karl was delighted to learn that his fossils belonged to a new species, he was proud to name it *Exelnoomoosoraus*. Years later, Li and Karl were catching up at a local coffee shop, even though it had been years, they still could not hide the grin on their faces. They could never get enough of the Mogao and hungered for more treasures. After a long debate, the two decided that the best way to preserve the caves was to leave them untouched and let history uncover itself. They nodded with gratification and continued to take sips of their coffee, as they lie in tranquillity knowing that the mythical Mogao Caves will forever remain safe.

Fast Backward

Creative Primary School, Yu, Lok Ching Diago – 12

As a British traveller, Peter has never been to China. For the destination of his first China trip, he picked Gan Su, where the famous Mogao Grottoes is located. One Christmas holiday, he walked into the Grottoes and was stunned by the spectacular view. He was especially surprised by the artworks and Buddha statues. He supposed there were not sophisticated building tools 1,000 years ago. It was difficult to believe how they were built. Appreciating them, he did not notice when the Mogao Grottoes closed, leaving him in the mysterious cave.

While Peter was observing an art piece, there was a beam of light at the end of the tunnel. He walked over out of curiosity. The closer he went, the clearer he saw. A wooden, dusty door appeared in front of him. Behind the door, there seemed to be a big mystery waiting for him to explore.

He put his hands on the door gently. Just then, a voice was heard. “What lays in front of you is the secret passage towards the Qin Dynasty. Only the selected kind ones are allowed to visit this secret passage, including me, a monk who discovered Mogao Grottoes. As you are being chosen, your mission is to secretly murder the evil Emperor Qin Shi Huang. However, if you go through the passage and do not return within the same day, you will become one of the buddha statues here.” The next minute, Peter’s mind came clear, the voice faded out right away and the cave was once again quiet.

Peter thought to himself, “As a ruler of China, Emperor Qin Shi Huang is well-protected by loads of guards. How can I possibly murder him secretly?”

Peter thought this idea was completely insane, but deep down, he always imagines himself as a superhero who fights for justice. He learnt about Emperor Qin at school but he never imagined himself as the assassin to kill Qin.

As if he was able to read Peter’s mind, the monk spoke again, “In order to kill him, I offer to help. But you must bring Emperor Qin into Mogao Grottoes, where the power of kindness from the cave will kill him.” And his voice vanished once again. Just then, Peter came up his plan.

He slowly opened the door and stepped in. Suddenly, he lost balance. The next moment, he was dragged towards the doorway by a mysterious force. He was magically sent from 2021 to the Qin Dynasty.

He was in an ancient market packed with household ladies buying groceries, students with scrolls on their back and someone practicing Kung Fu. Of course, phones and other modern electronic devices were nowhere to be seen. Walking down the street, he noticed people shooting weird looks at him. They were all staring at his clothes. A young man who dressed in guard’s suit even ran to Peter and wondered, “What are your clothes made of?” At that time, Peter was aware that he was wearing modern clothes. He immediately asked the young man to exchange his plain clothes with him so that he would not stand out in the crowds. The man agreed as he was curious of the fabrics.

He asked the man about the palace’s location, and soon he arrived in front of it.

In the palace, Qin sat on his throne and laughed, “When the Great Wall of China is built, I will be the emperor with the biggest achievements in the entire human race. Ha ha!”

Just then, Peter secretly sneaked in as a “guard”, ran in. He said worriedly, “My majesty, there is an Egyptian King in a cave who bad mouthed about you being brainless and cold. Would you come with me and take him?”

The arrogant Qin instantly fell into this trap. He stood up furiously and yelled, “Who dares to insult me? I shall kill him with my own hands!”

His servants told him it could be a trap and he might be tricked. However, Qin was too angry to listen to all of them.

A few hours later, Peter and Qin arrived in front of Mogao Grottoes. Peter had a cheeky smile on his face as he knew that this despot will soon be killed.

He asked Peter, “Where is he?”

Peter said, “Your majesty, he is deep in the cave. You may need to move forward a bit so you can catch him yourself?”

Peter was really nervous. He knew that there was no way to kill Qin unless he set his foot in Mogao Grottoes himself. He thought, “Come on! Go in the cave!”

Unluckily, Qin stepped back and just said, “Then why can’t I call him out and demand him to surrender?” Then he started to shout, “I am the greatest emperor! You, come out, now! I will destroy you with my sword!”

Peter was extremely worried. He started to tell Qin a made-up story about how the fictional Egyptian King was actually both deaf and blind. Just then, Qin started to be impatient and suspicious.

“Really? Then how did he shout?” he said suspiciously.

At that moment, Peter did not want to make himself in a bigger trouble as it was almost midnight. He decided to take a more aggressive move.

He lifted his leg and tried to kick Qin’s back. However, Qin did not lose his balance but dodged instead. He was shocked. Then he pulled Peter’s leg into the cave as defense. In fact, he had been secretly practising Kung Fu all these years due to the fact that many assassins tried to kill him. Just then, Peter turned into a buddha statue in the Mogao Grottoes as it had already reached midnight.

The Spirit of the Mogao Grottoes

Creative Primary School, Yuen, Hei-Yin Kayla – 11

“It’s rumored to be haunted and it wasn’t much fun,” said my friend Abbey, who was describing her recent trip to the Mogao Grottoes. I didn’t participate in this conversation with my other best friends because I, Sally Brown, was going to visit the Mogao Grottoes along with my pesky sister and over-enthusiastic mother for this Christmas break. And I was not looking forward to it.

Eventually, the dreaded day arrived. The car trip to the airport was fine. When we arrived at the Dunhuang Airport, Aunt Catherine greeted us with open arms. My cousin, Glory, grabbed me by my arm and started to discuss with me how fun the Mogao Grottoes would be.

The next day, we headed straight to the Mogao Grottoes. It was actually fun! The Mogao caves looked more like a palace from the Qing Dynasty. Glory said it used to have different colors of velvet, gold, brown and silver. However, over the centuries the colors started to fade. Inside, all I saw were Buddha statues, Buddha art and more Buddha. Then, I went to the library and relaxed there till our tour was over. When we went back to the hotel, a mysterious voice cried, “Help, help!” I decided to ignore it and enjoy the ride back to the hotel.

As I was getting ready for bed, I thought of the mysterious voice. I decided to ignore it again and flopped down on my bed. Just as I drifted off to sleep, a bright light flashed before my eyes. In front of me was a ghost! Yet, the ghost looked harmless and I wasn’t frightened! The ghost then told me why she was here. She was a former queen who once ruled a place called Alexandra. She had lost her crown and came here when she relocated the crown here. Also, she needed my help retrieving it. Her parents had chosen her to protect the crown and rule the kingdom, even though she was only thirteen. They died after because of a disease. Her life became harder and everyone was always throwing their problems at her. Just as she was starting to gain her subjects loyalty, she was ambushed by her guards in the library. They declared themselves the king and took the crown away. However, they shortly lost the crown due to their clumsiness. Then she threatened me to compromise and I agreed.

The next day, I sneaked off to the library. As I entered the library, I whispered, “Utah? Hello? It’s me, Sally. Where are you?” Before I knew it, Utah was in front of me! I started to speak but she rudely stopped me with a wave of her hand. “About time! Come, we have much to do but our journey will only take about an hour or so.” Utah levitated away to another room. It was hard to keep up with her but I eventually caught up. We went in so many directions, I couldn’t tell where we were going! We climbed up stairs and hallways that were hidden in plain sight. I saw symbols on the walls, cobwebs everywhere and some unrecognized objects. Then, Utah stopped in front of a wall, she started looking for something. She pressed on a tiny button and a hidden door revealed itself. Which was strange because ghosts usually couldn’t touch things. When the door opened, dust flew everywhere. The door made a creaking sound, I was beyond my words. Utah ushered me to hurry into the room, quickly following behind. When we entered, the first thing I saw were people. But these people had been turned into stone, vines surrounded them, their faces looked horrified. Surrounding the vines were little black wisp that circled. “Who are these people?” I asked anxiously. “These are the people before you,” Utah answered coldly. “They have failed me. Their hearts were filled with greed, so I could not retrieve my crown. But you will. Stop blithering and follow me.” As I stepped onto the long narrow bridge, I felt as if though something was watching us. But I quickly brushed that feeling off and followed Utah. On the end of the bridge, I saw a golden crown floating in midair, it was decorated with jewels and had an odd symbol on it. Unexpectedly, Utah pushed me! “What are you doing?!” I asked, panicked “This is the reason you are here. You see, I could retrieve the crown myself. But to get the crown you must offer a living being with a pure heart. You are the only one that had succeeded, I am grateful for that. Now with your help, I can retrieve what was taken from me so many years ago!” Utah responded; her eyes looked harsher than ever. I started crying, knowing my life would end in a few seconds. I inhaled my last breath, then, darkness.

Pain—that is what I remember. But yet, I feel like I’m alive, I could feel my heart beating. I saw somebody ripping out the vines that surrounded me. It was Utah! I was so glad I cried, but my tears were joyful. Afterwards, I fainted, for a long time.

When I woke up, I could see Utah smiling at me. But she was a human! “You’re a human!” I shouted. “Yes. After I saved you, I miraculously became human. I’m sorry I betrayed you and I promise I will make it up to you. But.....”

She trailed off, “But?” “What will I do now? Who will I live with?” I smirked convincingly, showing Utah I already knew what to do.

Rumble! Me and my sisters rush down to the dining table. We each grabbed a seat; Utah grabbed the closest one to the food. Utah’s a quick learner, she adapted to her new life with us well. Ever since Dad left, our family always felt like it was missing something. Utah was the final piece to our broken family. And I’m pleased that she’s the final piece!

The Secret Mission

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Chiu, Lok Man – 9

“Sam. Please travel to Dunhuang, China. We have a secret mission and we have sent soldiers over. As one of our “star” main generals, you are chosen to lead this investigation. We are plotting to arrest a criminal syndicate which has organised and committed a series of thefts in Mogao Caves. We will form a working team with China. I’ve already bought a plane ticket for you and your plane is about to take off in two hours.” Donald, who was the supervisor of Team A of the FBI in America, handed me the puny ticket. I felt a chilly draft blow across my skin, and a deep, resonant growl was whispering right at my ear. The only thing that I could feel was pressure....

I boarded the overnight plane to Dunhuang, China at midnight. I wore an undercover shirt and bulletproof gear for the sake of my safety. Oops! One thing was forgotten! I forgot to ask Donald who the criminals were and their particulars! I had no time, but fortunately, Donald, who seemed to have read my mind, sent me a text message about the criminal syndicate led by a UK criminal named Sammy Smith, and his photo.

Next morning, I landed in Dunhuang and wore my protective sunglasses. I was sun-drenched and the air was super humid. Plus, my sunglasses had a tiny secret function: it could blow cool air at any time!

I thought I had got myself well prepared, nevertheless, a chill went down my spine. With no time to think further, I whizzed swiftly to the airport lobby to meet up with my lads. Some of them were green and inexperienced, therefore I needed to brief them everything about this case and the strategy that we would adopt within such an exceptionally limited time.

After that, I had to find out the current whereabouts of the evil Smith. The useful information told me that Smith would not stay in the same place for more than two days. Thanks for the superb technology! We attempted to figure out Smith’s hiding spot using the fantastic Google Earth and spotted that he was hiding in Mongolia! How were we supposed to go there? All of a sudden, one of my team members said, “We can fly to the Gobi Desert by helicopter.”

True! We had three speedy helicopters and each could carry fifteen soldiers, together with our food and supplies.

It took us two hours to reach the Gobi Desert. We parachuted down and I whisked out my phone. Smith was hiding in a deserted hut in the middle of nowhere of Mongolia! We planned to rest in the creepy Gobi Desert for a lengthy night and then capture Smith the next morning.

As the golden sun peeped through the sky in the morning, we knew it was time to start our adventure. Everybody boarded the helicopters again. I checked Google Earth and made sure that Smith was still there. He was there! We set the massive helicopter to full speed and began our exhilarating journey!

After hours of searching and right before our helicopters ran out of petrol, we managed to ascertain the hiding spot of cunning Smith. It was close to one of the tiny villages in Mongolia and even luckier, I had a tourist guide friend named Johnny who agreed to lead our way to Smith’s hiding spot.

We refuelled the huge helicopters and travelled towards the dinky village at full swing. With Johnny’s assistance, we found Smith’s hut within seconds! We put on our bulletproof uniforms which were specially tested by the FBI. We were all set!

We decided to tiptoe secretly into the hut together, and arrest him. We wanted to capture Smith red-handed alive! We all chuckled heartily in the hope that our plan would succeed.

Having said that, I couldn’t help thinking if our plan might be too risky.. Perhaps Smith would have powerful weapons! But I then thought, No worries. We FBI were all well trained. Thirty-seven soldiers could definitely beat one person, right? We were all ready to sprint into the hut.

Oops. I made a farting noise. Despite how teeny it was, Smith sniffed it and zoomed out to check what's happening. Oh no, he noticed us! We were in humongous trouble. Smith, who was standing in front of us, was a muscular guy with sharp eyes. Fred whispered to me, "Did you know? He was a professional English athlete and the champion of the 100 metre races of the Summer Olympics in 2012 and 2016 in a row." Smith stared furiously and heard us, he ran at his full speed and lost sight in a minute.....

I told my fabulous team to dash back to the helicopters and chase Sammy. Helicopters were incredibly useful. We found him! Our helicopters followed Smith from high, and he was still visible with the naked eye.

You couldn't imagine. Smith, who was indeed a terrific runner, ran from the desert to downtown! But still, Smith was getting exhausted and came to a halt in a shopping centre. Smith might consider he had escaped from our pursuit. Without Smith's notice, I told fourteen soldiers to follow me while the others guarded the entrance of the shopping centre. We hopped off, snuck down the escalator and soon enough, we spotted Smith buying a drink at a local convenience store.

Leaving the store with a relaxing smile on his face, Smith turned right to the nearby bank. My team snuck from behind promptly and arrested Smith at his great shock. Smith got caught!

We handed Smith to the local police station and left the rest of the investigation work to the local police. In the meantime, we passed the stolen items from the Mogao Caves.

We took the helicopter back to our headquarters in Washington D.C. and got praised by our organisation. But little did we know that another case was coming, and only the FBI could crack that mysterious case.

The Wizard of the Mogao Caves

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Chiu, Yin Hei Trevor – 10

"Whoa, be careful there, Joe! One slip and you might break your arm, you know." The strong dude called Bob said.

"Right, I don't want to break that arm, cause that is my sword arm." Joe replied.

"Yeah, man, we NEED you." John said.

They kept on walking, with the help of the lampposts in the caves, they could see everything very clearly. The caves were gloomy and weird. There were tons and tons of Buddhist stuff and weird drawings about Chinese culture. The statues were also creepy since they could see them in every room they were in. They saw a HUGE buddha on a HUGE bed.

"Um, what is that? I thought I saw a flash of green light, grabbing a red stone." Joe asked.

"That is our clue. It must be the wizard of the cave. I remember the prophecy." Bob said

The prophecy is:

Three shall go into the Mogao caves,

They shall find the old treasure,

Guarded by the green wizard of redstone,

Three shall slay it and bring the treasure to camp,

They walked and walked and walked. And then? We walked and walked.

After three hours, Joe asked, "I am so hungry and tired, can we make our tents now?"

"Sure, man," Bob replied.

The fire crackled by their feet. "You know, we have been making progress in the Mogao Caves. We are close to the treasure. I can tell because I can sometimes smell some rusty odours."

"Me too, it is making me feel weird. I am afraid to admit it but you are the only one I trust." Bob replied with a terrified face and a whisper. "And I haven't told this to anyone. Before the quest, Mr D told me that a weird wizard guards the treasure we are looking for. He was a god, right? Mr D knows everything so there is no point arguing with him."

The wind blew so sharply that Bob thought that it was the wizard's magic. "You know what, I will go to sleep, man." John said sleepily. "Sure, why not? I said I'll take first watch, man.."

"Wait, I heard some weak moaning. Let's go wake Joe and check it out."

"Psst, Joe, wake up and get the tent. The wizard is near, I think. I saw a blinding flash of red." Bob said.

"Awn, can't a guy get some sleep? I am tired!" Joe replied with a scowl on his face.

A while later, they got on their feet and started to walk towards the wailing. Suddenly, the wizard appeared on the walkway and zapped Joe. He turned into a cute little pink pig. He had little pink ears, four stubby legs and shrieked "Reet!"

"Oh my god, who did that?" Bob squeaked.

"Slow and ignorant, just like all I have zapped with my ultimate ray. Hahahaha. Puny little children, you will not be able to get your hands onto the treasure today since this is the day I've been waiting for. Ten years of useless waiting will pay off now! Hahahaha." A raspy whisper came from their back.

They both drew their swords, ready to impale the dude who zapped Joe. The wizard appeared in front of Bob and John. They gasped. The wizard had a dry face with long talons on his fingers that she called "fingernails".

Bob attacked first, but the wizard disappeared. Then, the wizard appeared in front of John. John stabbed the wizard but he disappeared too.

"I understand. It goes invisible and walks to the next target!" John cried.

With one signal from Bob, both of them slashed and the wizard disintegrated into green dust and Joe returned to his own self.

"I am never, ever going to do a quest that involves a wizard" Joe said.

"Agreed, wizards are too creepy." Bob and John replied in unison.

They continued their descent. The only light they had was the light from Bob's imperial gold blade. After one hour of walking, they finally found the treasure. It has a wooden box with golden encrusted edges. It had a golden padlock with a key on it. It also had diamond handles. They already knew what was going to happen to camp if they brought it back to camp. They were going to be very popular.

"Let's bring it back to camp now!" Joe yelled. He was even happy, even to talk properly.

"Well let's open it first to see what is inside." Bob said.

"Why is there a green glow around the chest?" John asked.

"I don't know. Maybe that is the reaction if no one touched the chest for the millennia.

"Oh. Let's open the chest now!" Bob said. He was acting like the commander of the three.

When they opened the chest, they saw the unbelievable. Mr D was in the chest with a devilish grin.

He said, "I work for the wizard. Hahahahahahaha!"

They felt they were sucked inside the box.

"In fact, this box is a trapped chest. And also you are in a dream!"

"Dream, dream, dream..."The echo was horrendous.

" Make it stop! And, we are not in a dream!" Bob screamed.

But it was too late. They were sucked into the treasure chest.

Will this be a dream, or is this reality?

Transporting Trouble: Adventure in the Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Chung, Preston – 9

Tom and Charlie were best friends, and had known each other since kindergarten. They usually played in the park together as soon as they had finished their homework. This was one of those days. The two children were playing football when Tom suddenly kicked the ball a bit too hard, and the ball went under a bench. He reached his hand into the space under the bench, but strangely couldn't touch the surface of his bouncy round football, his hand touching a hard surface instead!

Tom felt curious, and muttered to himself, "What can this rectangular thing be? It feels like a tissue box of some sort..."

"Tom, where are you? What are you doing? Come back!" Charlie shouted.

Tom immediately replied, "Coming!" and pulled the object out of its hiding place. The object looked like a futuristic machine with dozens of complicated controls and pulsating bulbs sticking out of it. He showed it to Charlie and said, "I wonder if this is a machine that lets you travel to wherever you want. It looks like the machine in that cool sci-fi movie that we watched together!"

Charlie answered, "Well, let's find out!" and pushed a green button on the machine. "I wonder what this does," he said.

A second later, the machine seemed to reply to him. A twirling, swirling vortex appeared from a hole in the machine and sucked the duo into a winding multicoloured tunnel... The boys who were spinning around felt extremely dizzy and wanted to vomit, as the sensation was like going on the world's craziest roller coaster ever. They couldn't communicate with each other, because they were in a vacuum.

After a split second, Tom and Charlie flew out of the vortex and landed on a hard stone floor. Charlie exclaimed, "Wow! That was nauseating!"

Tom agreed, nodding his head. The two children looked around at their surroundings, and discovered that they were no longer in the park! They were in a vast cave covered with ancient Buddhist manuscripts, colourful sculptures of warriors and paintings with majestic gods and spirits sitting in countless temples and shrines. It was like being in a royal palace, only that the palace was in a cave. Tom said, "We must be in one of the Mogao Grottoes! I learned about this at school in my History class."

But before the duo had time to marvel at the wonderful sight, the whole cave trembled like a china shop with a bull inside it. DRR! A part of the cave crashed to the ground from the ceiling, blocking the exit. DRRR! Another part crashed to the ground from the ceiling, crumbling into dust. Tom and Charlie were trapped!

The two children desperately tried to find an opening to escape, running around and kicking rocks to see if they were loose. Tom said, "Oh no! If we don't escape quickly, we will not be able to breathe due to the lack of oxygen!"

Suddenly, there was a tinkling sound, and a man wearing an evil grin on his face holding a drilling machine materialized in front of Tom and Charlie. He cackled, and said, "My name is Conquerado, and I am from the future! You children can do absolutely nothing to stop my schemes. After I teleport these paintings and statues to somewhere safe, this cave will collapse with YOU inside it and be erased from history! I will be able to earn lots of money selling this valuable stuff! I..."

Tom whispered to Charlie, "He is getting distracted talking! We should do a surprise attack!" Charlie nodded and crept behind Conquerado. He silently picked up a broken piece of the statue, and used it to hit the head of the man. Conquerado clenched his fists tightly. His veins nearly popped out of his skin. He put on some metal gloves and aimed them at Tom and Charlie. Blinding green laser beams repeatedly shot out of the gloves.

The duo jumped out of the way, dodging the lethal lasers. The lasers blasted an enormous hole in the wall of the cave instead.

The children immediately ran toward Conquerado, knocking him onto the ground. “We must find a way to keep him down!!” hollered Charlie. This gave Tom an idea. He grabbed a rock and threw it at the ceiling and jumped aside, pulling Charlie with him. The cave ceiling was already vulnerable due to the drilling, and the rock was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Another piece of stone crashed to the ground, then the entire ceiling fell on Conquerado, eliminating any possible chances of his survival.

WHOOSH! A familiar machine appeared. It was the travelling machine! Tom knew what to do. He pressed the green button again, and he and Charlie felt the familiar sensation of being sucked into the portal. BANG! The duo had crash-landed back on the bed of Charlie’s bedroom! The two children looked around. They weren’t in the Mogao Grottoes anymore!

Charlie’s mum who was watching her favourite movie in the living room heard the commotion, burst into the room and said curiously, “I thought you two were playing at the park!

Tom stammered, “Um...We...We came back from the park just now,” and winked at Charlie. Charlie’s mum nodded unconvincingly and left the room. Charlie whispered to Tom, “Phew! That was close!” They both had enough adventures for a day. Or a week.

THE END

EPILOGUE (Thirty-two years later)

“Catch the ball!” said Matthew to his friend James. His dad was Tom, the famous writer who wrote an amazing story about travelling to China with a push of a button. Suddenly, he discovered a strange machine on the bench. It was like a rectangular object with mysterious buttons. He felt extremely curious, and pressed one of the buttons...

The Cave's Cure

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Lai, Yau Chai – 10

“There was a cave far far away, where they kept those potions which can heal everything...” Great-Grandpa, one of the brave archaeologists to search the Mogao caves in the 1900's, would tell the story again and again to his great-grandkids, Daniel and Alex. The twins were still seven years old, and loved great-grandpa telling that story. They listened with awe when he did.

It was the summer holidays and Daniel was at home watching a film. When the vampires appeared, he covered his eyes and turned it off. He was scared of everything, even insects, and people in his class called him scaredy-cat. He was determined to change that, so he could be brave and people wouldn't call him names anymore. Then, he remembered that the potion in Great-grandpa's story can cure anything, which he believed included bravery, and that made him want to go on an adventure to the cave.

He asked his sister, Alex, who was very smart and wasn't easily scared, to go with him and to help him with the challenges that he would encounter on the way. Insects? Traps? He shivered at the thought of encountering these. His sister agreed, and as he thought, she made a checklist of what to bring because his sister was, well, too neat.

As they set off, they encountered a dark, misty wood with pairs of glowing orange shining through the bushes. Were these the eyes of strange creatures? Daniel didn't want to find out. They hurried on and took the other road and ended up using more than an hour to get back on track.

His sister scolded him, “You shouldn't be scared! They are just owls hiding from sunlight! If you weren't, we'd be on the mountains near the caves already!

Daniel sighed. He just couldn't help shivering. Again, they walked and walked and they reached the edge of a great canyon. The ground lay 1,000 metres below.

Alex said, “Another dead end! Let me choose the route from now one.” While dodging cliffs and trees, Daniel wondered how dangerous it was to drop down.

After what seemed to Daniel a month, he finally went to the top of the cliff and saw a hangbridge that took them to the other side, and down to the special yellowish-greystone brick wall of the caves.

Meanwhile, Alex was still struggling with going up because she didn't train parkour with Daniel. “Hey! Give me a hand.” she said.

Daniel sighed and pulled his sister up. He decided to rest before he went on the bridge. Looking down, he saw an amazing sight: tall trees with red leaves, grass making a plain for cows and sheep all lying in front of his eyes. He was amazed by the sight, and couldn't wait and see what was going to be in front of him.

He stepped tentatively on the planks of the bridge and he heard Alex shout, “Hey! Wait for me!” Daniel forgot that his sister had still been panting after the last attempt to climb the mountain.

Alex was puzzled. She asked, “I thought you'd be too frightened to cross!”

On the other side of the bridge, Daniel saw a high wall and a sign that said the caves were on top of the wall. The wall was at least 30 metres tall, and Daniel thought, How am I going to get up there?

He was about to turn around when his sister laughed and said, “If your great-grandfather managed it, you can too!” There was no way he'd let his sister beat him, so he raced up, using his excellent parkour skills to go as fast as he could, even though he was scared he would fall. Still, he continued, not mentioning slipping a few times and dangling on the wall. Finally, breathing as heavily as a cheetah on a hunt, he reached the top, while Alex was still halfway. He rested for a while, then remembering this was not a race, but his sister was just trying to help him to NOT be a scaredy-cat. So, he helped Alex up by helping her find secure footholds and holding her up.

When they got up, they ate two thirds of their remaining food, since they were very hungry and were almost at the caves.

Finally, they peered into the cave's mouth. Colourful tiles and golden Buddha statues adorned the walls. Dust filled the air, and silence echoed. A lever hung next to him. He thought the lever might activate some traps or actually, the way to the curing water. He backed up so far, he almost fell off the cliff. But then, his sister pulled the lever, and a part of the cave became a door. Daniel walked to his sister and this time, nothing could stop him. Water! There it was. It looked so cool and refreshing. Before he realised it, he was drinking the water but quickly stopped himself. No change yet.

Then, he realised: the water was not the cure, but the adventure was. He now understood what his great grandfather said, and they travelled back to their house. Going back was a lot easier than going out, because Daniel was no longer scared of the rocky climb or the rickety bridge, and the animals that lurked in the woods.

Finally, they got home. It took a while for Daniel's friends to get used to his new personality, and at last he understood that he had been really scared of a lot of things. Now, he was a lot more easy-going, and laughed more easily. And most importantly, his sister didn't tease him so much for being so silly.

The Mogao Mystery

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Ting, Tsz Woon – 11

The bright sun shines down on the rock floor. The tall mountains are full of lively green trees swaying in rhythm to the light breeze. In front of me is the most breathtaking structure I have ever seen, the Mogao Grottoes. The tall red building stands tall and proud, the maroon roofs with precise craftsmanship held up by poles. I glance at my watch that says 1074 AD. I can't help but feel puzzled about what disaster is going to strike this marvelous landscape.

Since you don't know what that means, I'll fill you in. I'm a time traveler, I get sent to different places and time periods against my will. Through my thousands of years of this, I've learned to retain my memory, and I've figured out the details. And no matter how drastic the places are from each other, there are two common threads: There is conflict, and I will die during it. I've been soldiers in wars, servants to kings, I was even a dinosaur when the asteroid caused dinosaurs to go extinct. I remember that one the most vividly, because it was the most terrifying: a gigantic ball of rock hurtling at you a billion miles per hour. It was a sense of inevitability and dread, to the point where the build-up was more painful than the impact since I knew what was going to happen.

I walk into the temple and am blown away by the beauty of the art in the caves. Paintings of men and women, though my attention is all on an alluring sculpture. It is a queen sitting on a deep black throne surrounded by guards draped in a cloth in a very attractive shade of turquoise. I am confused because there is no hint of conflict here, just peace and quiet. Especially because these places are for worshiping, and it's supposed to be quiet, and everything is normal. Trust me, sometimes dead silence is stranger than ear-hurting noises. But now, there's nothing off.

Then I hear something that makes my eyes widen to the size of plums. Speaking. The Buddhist monks that inhabit these caves are only allowed to speak 2 words every 100 years, and apparently I landed straight on the 100-mark. I can't hear it that well, but I hear "doom" and the monk says it in a very worried tone. I run to the sound, and they are taken aback by my presence. One of them physically flinches and falls to the ground. I see a monk with a worried expression on his face, brows furrowed.

"What's happening?" I ask. He leads me to a different room and points to the tapestry on the wall. It's a king sitting on a throne embedded with jewels, and there are monks under him. That's slightly weird, but nothing big. However, there is something that sets it apart. He's wielding a sword triumphantly, and on the tip of the blade is a monk.

"Attack us," the worried monk grumbles.

Almost on cue I hear blade slashing. A man with shoulder-length hair and a mustache busts in. He's identical to the man on the tapestry with a couple differences. I'm astonished, but he takes a glance at me and suddenly he is startled. "Who are you?"

"I could ask you the same question," I retaliated, staring at his blade warily.

"I am Jalauka, son of Ahsoka," he says. "I am the sworn enemy of the Mogao Monks. Now since you do not look like a monk, I shall spare you if you leave right now," he said with a stern face.

"Uhhhh—" I bolt out the exit, ushering the monks ahead of me. One of them takes the lead and guides me to a weapon room. I grab on to a staff, and start launching rocks at Jalauka. I hear a monk get his foot caught in a doorway and trip, then I hear the terrifying sound of Jalauka's guillotine-esque sword come down on the monk's neck with a loud scratching noise that makes my arm hair stand.

I lose track of time as I keep on sprinting. I don't know how long I've been running for, but it's definitely been a while because my thighs are getting sore. I start to lose focus until the scratching noise snaps me back to reality. I turn around, I see one of the monks limp, and another has the sword above him, ready to come crashing down. There's this feeling I can't put into words. I feel helpless, which is ironic because my job is to help people, but not only can I not help the monks, I need help.

Then suddenly, it's like time slows, as I make a split second decision. The feeling is that I've been running from Jalauka, when I should be protecting others from him. I'm ready to run until I remember my true purpose here: To

end conflict, and to die. I'm not supposed to live this battle. My duty, my job is to protect others, even though it costs me my life.

I jump—tackle Jalauka to buy me a couple seconds. I am ushering the monk to run before I die instantly with one swing. I don't know why it feels so different this time, I've done this over fifty times, so why am I getting emotional? What's so dissimilar? Maybe because I failed my job, letting two monks die already. Maybe it's because of how sudden it was this time, I only lasted an hour. Maybe it's because this place is so beautiful, and the fact that something so pretty has such a deep conflict already has me choked up. I don't know. But I do know that this will hit me harder, and cut deeper than the dinosaur one ever will. As I warp through a wormhole and I start my next journey, I feel a single tear roll down my cheek...

The Secrets of Old

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Wan, Yat Hei – 11

Gabrielle had been travelling through the sandy desert for more than three hours. She was hot, she was sweating, and twice she had seen mirages of a fountain. Gazing at the horizon, she saw an oasis.

Is it a mirage? She wondered as she trekked forward. The oasis was real! She drank a few ravenous gulps and peered at a dune a hundred metres away. Almost instantly, she knew that it was exactly what she had been looking for.

It was the opening of a small grotto. She stepped curiously onto the threshold. Inside was a cluster of Buddhist wall murals depicting different moments in Buddhism and shining bronze sculptures of the Buddha. She longed to take them back with him to a museum, but knew that it was illegal. Tearing her eyes from the statues, she glanced around. There were flaming torches mounted on the walls of the caves. Suddenly, an eerie voice made her jump.

“I am the ghost of the Mogao Caves. I am not forcing you to find its secrets. You may leave if you feel you do not want to.”

She started to struggle. Many generations of explorers before her had claimed that they had heard a disembodied voice before they vanished without a trace.

If I follow the voice, it may help me uncover the secrets here, but I may die. If I don't, I'll have come here for nothing. Easy choice, isn't it? She thought sarcastically. But eventually, her curiosity took over. With a rush of anticipation, she whispered, “Yes, I do!”

A map shot out of nowhere. Gabrielle pounced and caught it in mid-air. Unfurling the fragile piece of parchment, she saw a detailed picturing of the Grottoes and an arrow, leading her. At the bottom it said in tiny words: *Ultimus sum ad specus Mogao attingendum. Magno pretio labefaciet ac secreta velata.* She started walking in the direction of the arrow and suddenly she noticed something moving on the map. It was a pair of footsteps labelled Gabrielle Miyazaki.

“Wow!” she whispered, glowing with discovery, and moved on, checking the map every so often. She descended down intricately decorated stairs, past monumental illustrations, lit up by torches flaming on the walls, and twice she thought the human-like statues could move.

An hour later she arrived at a heavy emerald-and-ruby door. It was perched on the end of the map. She breathed. Through or back? If she went through she would discover the secret but be faced with dangers mankind had never seen before. Back she would be safe.

Hesitantly, she opened the door a crack. There seemed to be something glittering ominously at the end of the hall beyond. Taking a careful step forward, she started advancing— then heard footsteps echoing around the room. She looked backward but there was nobody. She stepped forward again and suddenly heard a hissing sound reverberating in the wide corridor. Glancing at her foot she jumped at the sight. Bright green acid was rapidly filling the hole her foot had created: a trapdoor. However, the acid level remained at ground level. She thought fast. It had been a piece of wood. Looking again, there were lots of these wooden tiles paving the ground, while stone pieces formed a line at the perimeter of the hall. She quickly ran to the side, the floor disintegrated behind her: but she had made the stone path. She tread carefully, for the track was narrow. Her head bumped softly against something. There, right in front of her, was another door.

She opened the door. Light suddenly flooded the room to reveal thousands of rusty metal pieces strewn across the floor. She sprinted forward but the next door was locked. Apparently they were keys. She glanced up: the lock had patterns of sparks on it. She started searching feverishly. Suddenly she jumped: the clinking of keys had stopped, for everything had vanished! Her heart thumping, she looked down: she had trodden on a key with patterns of fire on it! Instantly she sprinted forward and the door burst open at her touch.

There was no door. Instead, a portrayal of a glowing, fiery phoenix opened its beak and said, voice thundering, “Deliver the code.”

Gabrielle whipped out the map but it was gone.

However, being the careful person she was, she had memorised the password. Calmly she whispered, “Ultimus sum ad specus Mogao attingendum. Magno pretio labefaciet ac secreta velata.”

The wall cracked in the middle, splitting the phoenix. Then the two halves slid, with an ominous hiss, aside.

The Chamber of Treasures was nothing like Gabrielle had thought, even beyond her wildest dreams. Pile upon pile of diamonds, rubies, and glittering stones lay in mounds. The wall was decorated with trails of jade and bronze, giving her an impression of a giant wearing a necklace.

But she only had eyes for the ancient documents that lay in the centre of the room. She reached for it just when the reek of gunpowder drifted towards her.

“Don’t you move,” said a gruff voice.

She revolved slowly on the spot. Behind her stood a man with bulging muscles and hideous tattoos, holding a gun that was pointed at her heart.

Suddenly she understood: It had been this robber all along, luring her into the depths of the cells and ambushing her. It had been him, the ‘ghost’ who had taken her here.

The robber stopped abruptly as a huge chunk of rubble descended from the ceiling and exploded. He gave a howl of rage and started running as the heavens collapsed upon them. Gabrielle seized the documents and charged for the doors. Behind her came a scream.

She charged out past the key-room, past the hall of acid, past the doors and up the stairs, jumping steps that exploded as the ceiling crumbled, trusting her sense of direction—

She burst out into the sunlight, just in time. The sands below gave a mighty groan as the Mogao Caves were buried forever.

The Last Stand of the Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Wong, Long Hei Adrian – 10

Huang Gao was a governor of the Tang Dynasty. He achieved this by ranking in the first place of the Tang Imperial Examination. He progressed through the ranks until he became the Governor of Gansu Province.

The Tang Dynasty was weakening in power. They had lost Mongolia and retreated out of Korea. But the Umayyad Caliphate was growing stronger by the day. They had just beaten the Byzantine Empire in the war between them. The Caliphate had taken the great city of Constantinople, and controlled the Bosphorus. They went on to take protectorates of the Tang Dynasty and expanded their influence.

One day, the Tang Dynasty received a piece of intelligence from a spy: the Caliphate was arming men along their border! The Emperor ordered that troops be sent to Gansu province and fortify the area. However, the Dynasty was low on manpower and they couldn't send any more soldiers. Despite this, Huang Gao chose to defend against the Muslims at the Mogao Grottoes. He was scared: he only had a small force of a thousand men but the Muslims could call on men from Anatolia to Tibet! He thought, "the Mogao Grottoes is a good place to defend because his soldiers could hide in the caves, and I have the high ground to put my archers."

Not long after, the Muslims arrived. They faced wooden barricades, high wooden towers, and a stone curtain wall. The Muslims decided to siege down the Grottoes, as they thought they had far more numbers. Huang Gao thought, "I have far fewer men and less grain! I may most likely lose this battle. But I will never give up!"

Some soldiers tried to debate against Huang Gao. They said "There is no way that we will win this battle! We have far too little of a force to combat the enemy!"

Huang Gao replied with "If you are so scared, go ahead and escape! The art and literature here is just too ancient and valuable to be thrown away with that decision. Besides, if we run like cowards, the enemy will continue after us and invade China. They will massacre our families, the peasants, and the nobles! We have to hold this point!" The soldiers were convinced, and they never refuted Huang Gao's commands again.

At the Muslim camp, the main General of the Muslim army, Callid, an old, wise commander, decided to starve out the Chinese. However, An Shidi, a young, reckless, eager-for-glory General, wanted to take the grottoes in a swift charge. Callid said, "We should just let the Chinese starve to death!"

An Shidi shouted, "No! That's too slow, we need to act fast to take charge of the Grottos!"

"Who is the commander here, Shidi? Starve them and we will win this battle! Just do what I say!" Callid roared back.

However, the Muslim army made more siege weapons to siege down the Grottoes. An Shidi was not planning to follow Callid's plans. An Shidi planned a surprise invasion of the Mogao Grottoes at night with an army of Muslims that were loyal to him. They readied some ladders to climb up the stone walls of the Grottoes.

Huang Gao had no idea when the Muslims would attack. He trained the soldiers he had, and commanded the infantry to hide in the caves of the Grottoes, while his archers patrolled the walls every night and day. There just simply weren't enough soldiers to assign to him. He equipped his soldiers with the best equipment available, and sent some soldiers to farm for food. He was scared, scared that after the Grottoes had fallen, it would make way for the Umayyads to conquer the entirety of China!

That night, the Muslim soldiers climbed the ladders and up onto the walls. The Chinese archers began to call for more help from the sleeping Chinese soldiers. All the while, they tried to push down the ladders so no one could climb up the walls. Huang Gao heard the call, then ordered his soldiers to fight back the Muslims, and personally fought with his men. He yelled "Men! Let us stand in the face of danger; put up resistance against these dogs; Die as heroes and be remembered forever!

Men that had never witnessed such bloodshed had to fight. Chaos was everywhere. Huang Gao thought: This is pointless! Why must the enemy fight for territory, which is non-living, and sacrifice for it with human lives?

The attack was relentless. As time went on, the soldiers crowded near the walls and fought for victory. The Chinese couldn't hold back the Muslims anymore so they retreated to the inner part of the caves. Arrows rained overhead, the sound of swords colliding filled echoed all around the caves, and men were everywhere. As the Chinese retreated, the Muslims became a horde that only aimed to take the grottoes.

As the Muslims climbed up the slopes of the caves, more Chinese soldiers came out and fought. Seeing this, the Muslims panicked and tried to fight back, but the Chinese had swiftly encircled them in one maneuver. Huang Gao saw An Shidi and began to duel with him.

The duel became a dance of swords. As one General struck his sword out, the other stepped back and dodged. The Generals moved side to side, ready to lash out a flurry of strikes against the opponent. After a while, An Shidi lost the duel and fled. The Muslim soldiers saw their General flee and also routed and started to escape. The retreating Muslim army withdrew from the siege, and ran back to their home base.

Huang Gao was happy and ecstatic. He had successfully defended the Mogao Grottoes and the art and literature inside it!

He went on to train up more soldiers, as he believed that the Muslim army would return again. The soldiers rejoiced, as they had won against a major power. But they too knew that the day would come when they must fight once more.

The Emerald Spike

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chan, Yuen Kay – 12

“We’ll never find it!” cried Annie.

A lace of clouds masked the gibbous moon at midnight in winter solstice. The biting breeze with an arid smell of the desert froze Lisa Watson, Annie Jenkins and Mike Hunter to the bone. They stared at the ancient Mogao Grottoes— dancing on the cliff with its body as a nine-storey wooden temple, with its arms stretching over 1500 meters long, with its eyes: 735 grottoes facing East. Cold sweat was trickling down their back as they needed to look for the lost bunny in Mogao Grottoes.

The rosy toy bunny was bought in the morning during their history field trip, but Annie had misplaced it in one of the caves.

“Calm down Annie, just try harder,” murmured Mike.

Instead, Lisa, being indifferent, took out a mirror to check on her make-up. Annie’s mouth twisted into a snarl toward Lisa. No sooner had they heard a screeching sound from cave 158 than they tiptoed inside. A 15.6m long Buddha sculpture was sleeping across the whole hall. Annie frightened, collapsing in a heap.

“LOOK!” roared Mike, a bookworm crazy for Chinese History. “A Nirvana Buddha was constructed during Tang dynasty! I kn—”

“Shut up!” interrupted Lisa.

They looked at where Lisa was pointing.

“My bunny!” jumped Annie.

Not until Annie lifted up the bunny did she realize a strange tunnel, leading to somewhere mysterious...

Bang! A body was lying on the floor. It was the stubborn Mike. His head hit the cave 736.

“Why 736? Aren't there only 735 caves? questioned Annie.

‘AH! My bunny is glowing?’ howled Annie.

BOOM! Rosy mist cropped up. The bunny vanished in thin air...

A mysterious, tall, old-fashioned man stood before their eyes. He was wearing an amber-yellow robe with a dragon symbol, covering himself with a charcoal cape, putting on a vermilion hat dangling with nine emerald spikes, but one was missing. Mike freaked out. He was the Emperor Taizong of Tang Dynasty!

The Emperor looked at them, without a squeak. A piece of torn paper was swinging down...

Find my lost Emerald Spike from her, shone

at the first daylight

of the longest night.

To my original life,

I might return,

and you shall leave unconcerned.

If you fail,
Mogao Grottoes won't be alive,
And none will survive.

“That means tonight—the longest night of the winter solstice. We have to find the emerald spike. Or we will die!” Mike stuttered.

“NO!” Lisa shrieked, turning to Annie. “IF YOU HADN’T LOST YOUR BUNNY, WE WON’T HAVE BEEN HERE!”

Lisa and Annie started howling.

“You’re selfish! Only care about making-up with your dumb mirror!” Annie exclaimed, snatching Lisa’s pouch, dumping her mirror on the ground.

Lisa shivered with anger and stomped away.

“WAIT!” yelled Mike...

Annie and Mike were completely clueless at where to start. Mike focused on the murals: the rich were dancing in the fragrant banquets; warriors were galloping in the battles; monks were murmuring in the Buddhist chant.

On the other side, Annie stumbled upon the change of the sculpture colours. Before Tang Dynasty, pale was the colour that faded out secretly. During the glory of Tang Dynasty, vivid was the hue that made the caves glow. After Tang Dynasty, dull was the shade that marked its decay.

The more caves they saw, the more dizziness they felt. They started seeing moving murals and sculptures—fairy maidens flying above their heads, the crowd chatting with them, musicians performing arts. Mike and Annie thought they were going insane!

“We’re never going to find it!” grumbled Mike. “We have been searching hundreds of caves! It’s almost dawn. We couldn’t even see the shadow of the emerald spike!”

Mike shocked Annie. He had never given up easily.

“Calm down Mike, just try harder,” comforted Annie.

Suddenly, they bumped into a body. It was Lisa, standing inside cave 96—the nine-storey wooden temple.

“Lisa!” hugged Mike with his short arms.

“Follow me,” said Lisa. “The emerald spike is here.”

A 35.5m high Buddha, as tall as Mount Everest, was sitting in front of them. The biggest Buddha sculpture was built by Empress Wu Zetian. Gazing at the Buddha, Mike shuddered at the thought of her evil deeds in history.

The emerald was between her eyebrows. Annie thought only Lisa could find it because makeup was her basic instinct. Annie wanted to thank Lisa but she had already climbed up the Buddha. Shortly after reaching her shoulder, Lisa silently took out two lipsticks and STABBED into her eyes. The Buddha roared, and turned into the real, ruthless Empress Wu Zetian! In a fraction of a second, Lisa pulled the emerald off and tried to escape. Unfortunately, Empress Wu caught Lisa’s neck, and shot out a blaze of fire from her mouth. Annie and Mike trembled.

“NO!” they wailed.

All left was Lisa’s pouch. The emerald spike hit the ground with a ding sound. Annie’s hot tears were pouring down her cheeks.

A light of dawn seeped into the cave.

“ANNIE! WE DON’T HAVE MUCH TIME!” shouted Mike. Mike dragged Annie out of the cave. If they didn’t make it on time, Mogao Grottoes would shatter into pieces.

Mike and Annie took to their heels with torn shoes.

A glimmer of light pierced through the top window into the cave 736. The Emperor Taizong was still waiting for them. Annie immediately put the emerald spike to the place.

“We did it!” Mike exclaimed.

Nothing happened.

“Shine the light to the emerald,” yelled Annie. But the daylight wasn’t shining upon the emerald. “Use the mirror to reflect the light!” Annie commanded. Mike passed her the “dumb” mirror from Lisa’s pouch, holding back his boiling tears.

BOOM! Rosy flashes engulfed the cave.

Mike and Annie appeared outside cave 96. They found Lisa was alive. Annie saw the Buddha become a statue again. Everything returned to normal. Mike and Lisa were leaving.

“Wait for me,” chased Annie, grasping the rosy bunny and the mirror.

A Lesson To Remember

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chong, Yi Sum Mary – 11

The morning sun rays broke over the horizon. May rubbed her blurry eyes and jumped excitedly like a puppy. She had been waiting for this moment for donkey's years. It was the first time she was going on a school field trip. There were still three hours before the trip began but May was already wide awake and in her seventh heaven.

When May arrived at the campsite, her classmates started laughing at her, "Who would ever wear such a baggy, old t-shirt on a field trip? May would!" Short-tempered May, offended by her classmates, stalked off furiously, muttering. No sooner had May gone into the Mogao Grottoes, a magnificent treasure trove of Buddhist art, than she found herself lost in an unfamiliar place, alone.

May's stomach was gripped with anxiety and apprehension, like a volcano erupting inside of her. She desperately tried to find her way back, but she couldn't. May looked around the new environment and started exploring in the caves.

The wandering wore May out. Her hands hung by her side like noodles and her legs could no longer support her. No sooner had May decided to flop on the filthy floor than something caught her eyes.

A dazzling and aesthetic sculpture winked at May and greeted her with a gracious smile, whispering to her to come forward and take a look. May was stunned by the beauty of the sculpture and inch by inch, her body was drawn to the sculpture like a magnet. Little did May know, a memorable lesson was awaiting her.

May was absorbed in the sculpture. It was fascinating how the details were drawn and every image in the sculpture organised itself into little stories about a person. Then May noticed that person move. She stepped back immediately and felt the heebie-jeebies in her body. The person moved from right to left, and then towards May. May wanted to run away but her legs were shivering. All of a sudden, the person jumped out of the sculpture and stood right in front of May. May jumped out of her skin and shook like a leaf. She screamed.

"Don't be afraid, May. I am Siddhārtha Gautama, also known as Buddha Shakyamuni. You are in The Thousand-Buddha Caves. Buddhist monks made this place because they saw a vision of me above the cliffs." While Gautama was gently talking to May like an angel, the surroundings changed in the blink of an eye. The cave was crowded with pilgrims of Gautama all over the world. They heavily engaged themselves in worshipping Gautama, creating sacred art and literature of him in the cave.

May was astonished and eventually able to ask, "What? How do you know my name? Am I dreaming?"

"Young lady, you are not dreaming. I am here to punish you. And how do I know your name? Well, I know everything, which is also why I know that you have violated the precepts of not lying and stealing of Buddhism, at a total of nine hundred and eighty-nine times. Sinners should go to hell."

"But I don't want to—" May moaned.

"But you don't want to go to hell," Gautama finished her sentence. May nodded in fear. "I knew you would say that, so I will give you one chance. After all, one of my teachings is showing kindness. True to my word, I will show kindness to you and you may not suffer in hell."

"Yesterday, you lied to your parents and acted against a precept of Buddhism—" Gautama said and formed a bubble shape with his hands. In the bubble were her grumpy parents. "If you don't want to go to hell, you have to enter this bubble and—"

"Please don't!" May pleaded like a poor beggar.

"There is no choice," Gautama said, "you will either suffer in hell or face your worst nightmare. Now, go in there, do not lie like you did yesterday, and be quick, before I change my mind of sparing you!"

May sighed. She knew that she must bite the bullet. She closed her eyes and jumped inside the bubble. She opened her eyes. In front of her were her parents screaming their heads off.

"May, for the hundredth time, come back home before five o'clock in the afternoon!" her father roared like a hungry lion.

“May, oh May! Listen to your father, please! We were so worried about you! Where have you been so long?” her mother wailed like a maniac.

“I—” May hesitated. She knew that if she told the truth, her parents would go ballistic, but if she lied to them, it would be the end of her. She let the words slip out of her mouth, “I went to Kitty’s house.”

“Kitty’s house? Again? May, this is—” her mother’s voice was now as loud as thunder. It was as if she had swallowed a microphone.

May closed her eyes. A gust of wind blew May back to the Mogao Grottoes and then she was face to face with Gautama.

“What did you learn?” The question suddenly popped out of Gautama’s mouth. May looked puzzled. Gautama continued, “May, lying isn’t just about going to hell. The direct consequence of your lying is that your relationship with your parents will be broken.”

“Look at this,” Gautama pointed at one sculpture. “That was when I said: Honesty is always one of the best keys to make a good relationship. May, remember this and don’t make me see you lie again.” Then Gautama vanished into thin air.

May turned around and saw Gautama sitting with a smile in the sculpture. May touched the sculpture and said, “And since you know everything, can you tell me how to get out of here?” Silence greeted her question. May went out of the caves and looked.

“May!” her friends ran towards her like bunnies and hugged her. “Where were you?”

“In the Mogao Grottoes.”

A Mysterious Date with The Buddha

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chow, Cherlin – 10

Darkness settled over the dunes, with the stillness that accompanies silence. A spirited wind coursed through the Mogao caves, leaving sand in its wake. Millennia passed. Over time, sand filled every crevice, and the wind howled no more.

Until the year 1900, the caves were well-buried. It was thus pure luck when a monk named Xijin rediscovered them. On this night, Xijin was left behind by his peers as they traipsed over dunes, towards a warm fire and hearty supper. Although Xijin was a monk, his heart belonged to archaeology. On this trek, he was determined to find hidden caves in the region. Legend said the caves had been visited by Buddha himself!

Clutching his belongings, he squeezed himself through a promising gap between two rocks.

As he stepped into the space, the entrance collapsed, leaving him in darkness. Briefly bewildered, his instincts kicked in and he rummaged in his bag. Coughing, he lit his torch and gasped in amazement. Slowly, he traced the light along walls covered in magnificent Buddhist artwork that had not been seen in millennia. The walls were covered in intricate murals. They told vivid stories of ancient times when people worshipped the Buddha. The vibrant images brought history to life.

With a start, Xijin remembered that he was trapped in the cave with few supplies. He could not remember his last meal. Suddenly, his stomach lurched, but not from hunger. An earthquake shook the walls of the cave. Rocks tumbled down and one particularly large one struck him on the head. Xijin fell to the ground in a crumpled heap, unconscious.

Groaning, Xijin opened his eyes. He could not see! His breath quickened. He realised that his head was sore, his vision blurred, and his torch had long-since flickered out. Over the sound of his heart drumming in his chest, threatening to break through his ribs, he gingerly squeezed his way out from under the stones that had fallen.

A shimmering, indistinct light appeared in his vision, and he heard a voice say, “Xijin, The Great Buddha wants to see you. Begin walking West, towards the light. You will find what you seek in that direction.”

Xijin gasped at the voice, which washed over him like icy water, chilling his bones. Was he hallucinating? He touched the painful lump on his head thoughtfully and winced. Standing on shaky legs, he decided he had nothing to lose. Despite barely being able to see, he followed the fuzzy glow. He often stumbled and fell, grabbing the walls to support and guide him. Following the light became a meditation in and of itself. Nothing else mattered, except reaching the destination.

Abruptly, the twinkling light began to fade, and panic set in. Blinking in puzzlement, his heart slowed when he realised the surroundings had not darkened. His eyes widened when he realised that the temple was lit by the Great Buddha’s body, himself! Xijin stood, dumbfounded, with his mouth hanging open. He pinched his arm and the Great Buddha smiled benignly at his astonishment. Then, he spoke.

“Xijin, I bestow upon you the honour of being the one to tell the world about these caves. You, my special one, have discovered the Mogao Caves, filled with long-lost art and precious literature. You will spread the word to worshippers, to appreciate the history of Buddhism, and to provide a place where the previous generations’ hard work and talents will receive respect forevermore. Do as I say, and you shall be rewarded.”

Xijin stared at the Buddha, and replied, his voice quavering, “Great Buddha, I will do as you command me. However, I am but a mere monk, and I have lost my vision. Oh, what I would not do to be able to see your divine presence!” Xijin’s eyes filled with tears. When he wiped them away, his vision had miraculously returned! He thanked Buddha profusely for his benevolence.

Xijin, now able to see, could not stop staring at his surroundings. He stood at the feet of a colossal Buddha figure, larger than any he had ever seen. Xijin trembled in awe as he paused at its base, staring at the marvellous workmanship. He moved further into the holy space, admiring the fine architectural details that covered the ceiling and walls of this sacred temple.

All around, there were life-sized sculptures of Buddhas and monks, each exquisitely carved from their eyebrows right down to their toenails. Their expressions, too, were delicate, each one different from the next. Xijin could not stop admiring the divine craftsmanship that had created these splendid masterpieces.

He lowered his torch and uttered a cry of delight, spotting piles of ancient books, documents and literature scattered around the room. Reaching down, Xijin was soon engrossed in the long-lost manuscripts. He smiled at the fluttering pages, imagining the faces of his peers when he told them of his discoveries. With a jolt, he realised he had turned his back to The Great Buddha. He stood quickly and noted the Buddha patiently watching him uncover the caves' marvels. With joy, Xijin said, "Oh, Great One, I will do as you command, and spread the word about these wondrous caves and their treasures within!"

The Great Buddha nodded and declared, "For honouring this place, you shall be granted the power of levitation." Xijin stared at The Great Buddha with incredulity. He felt his body lighten. His view drifted downwards to see his feet lifting off the dusty floor. He was, indeed, levitating! His eyelids fluttered, and Xijin fainted from shock.

A bright, dusty band of sunlight shone through the window onto Xijin, revealing that he was no longer in the cave. He was safe in his room, surrounded by a myriad of hushed voices. As he regained consciousness, his memories floated hazily to the forefront of his mind, causing him to come alert. He looked down and saw that he lay, floating, above his bed.

It had not been a dream after all.

The Buddha's Calling

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chung, Hei Kiu Osanna – 11

The night was cold and dark and the monastery was quiet. The only sound was the rustle of robes when Shifu patrolled the rows of cells, making sure all the young monks were asleep.

"Come on," whispered Shangkung to Jetchi, the only friend he managed to acquire in his years of monk life.

"Shh, Shifu is coming our way," Jetchi hissed. The two young monks flattened themselves against the wall and crept along it, carefully avoiding the path of Shifu.

"Follow me," Shangkung put a finger to his lips and crouched low. He moved swiftly through the labyrinth of dormitories and halted at the kitchens. He can see the large entrance of the monastery.

"What are you doing? Go before Shifu finds out we're gone!" Jetchi urged him.

"Alright."

The two boys sneaked out of the monastery, eager to enjoy their newfound freedom.

Shangkung still couldn't believe that he managed to escape the monastery. He was very happy with his freedom now. "Rascal!" He heard the street vendor yell behind him in fury. Shangkung laughed out loud, knowing that the vendor wouldn't be able to catch him in the crowd and bit into the steaming, sweet red bean bun he had stolen.

Shangkung ran through the busy streets of LuoYang and ducked into an alleyway, while Jetchi was sitting cross legged on a broken straw mat on the dirty ground.

"How was lunch?" asked Shangkung, licking his lips for a last taste of the delicious bun.

"I ate pork for the first time," Jetchi said, grinning.

Shangkung returned the smile and lay down on the straw mat beside Jetchi. He closed his eyes and defied the white-hot glare of the afternoon sun. Gradually, Shangkung fell asleep amidst the bustling sounds of the city. He dreamed. There was a massive, golden staircase that led to the skies, Shangkung let his eyes wander up the steps and saw a huge Buddha sitting high amidst the clouds. Immediately, he knelt down reverently, his palms and forehead touching the ground.

"Rise, Shangkung," a deep, calming voice reverberated from the skies.

"Oh, great Buddha, why have you called me?" Shangkung asked, awed by the Buddha's presence.

"I want you and your friend Jetchi to journey immediately to the west, where you will find a special oasis. Provide shelter for future travelers and I shall bless you," the Buddha commanded.

"Majestic Buddha, I obey you," Shangkung replied.

"Beware of the dangers of the journey, young monk," the Buddha warned before Shangkung woke up.

"Jetchi!" Shangkung shook his friend awake.

"What?" Jetchi said drowsily.

"Get up! The Buddha spoke to me, we have to journey west to an oasis," Shangkung said, impatient.

"Don't be silly, let me sleep," Jetchi protested.

"Fine! I'll go without you!" Shangkung said angrily, stood up and walked away.

"Wait, Shangkung, I'm coming with you," Jetchi called out after a moment.

Shangkung smiled to himself and said to his friend, “Well, hurry up! We have a journey to go on!”

“Are you sure we’re going in the right direction? All I see is sand,” Jetchi complained.

“We’re going in the right way. The sun is setting in front of us, see?” Shangkung pointed at the ball of fire that was sinking into the sand dunes.

“What’s that?” Jetchi nudged Shangkung. Shangkung stared at the horizon, a brown stripe that wasn’t there a moment ago was eating up the sky by each second.

“I don’t know,” Shangkung replied worriedly. “Get behind that tree.”

Shangkung crouched behind a scraggly branch and, on a better thought, tied himself to it with a strip of cloth. In a few heartbeats, the desert became a ferocious monster, sand and stones were flying in every direction, Shangkung squeezed his eyes shut and covered his face with his sleeve. He knew he was going to die; he just wished his death would be quick. By some miracle, when Shangkung finally opened his eyes, everything was still again but the landscape had changed a lot. Shangkung stood up and shook off the sand on his clothes, his arms covered in small scratches of red.

“Jetchi!” he shouted. “Jetchi, where are you?”

“Jetchi!” Shangkung called again, desperate.

“Shangkung,” a deep, calm voice said, it seemed to be coming from above.

“Jetchi?” Shangkung asked, but he knew it wasn’t Jetchi.

“Jetchi is dead, young monk,” the voice said again.

“Buddha, help me!” Shangkung cried, threw himself to his knees and gazed up to the skies, tears rolling down his face.

“Continue your way, Shangkung, I will bless you,” the Buddha replied serenely.

Shangkung wiped away his tears and staggered along the desert, with the pain and grief of losing his only friend weighing down his heart.

“Welcome to my humble abode,” Shangkung said to the man who looked so tired he might faint.

“Thank you for offering me shelter. I am forever in your debt,” the man replied gratefully. Shangkung laid out a straw mat for the man to sleep on and left the room or more accurately, cave.

Shangkung went back to his own room and knelt by the small statue of buddha at the corner. He began to pray, meditating in his own world.

“Shangkung,” he suddenly heard a voice penetrate his meditation.

“Jetchi?” he asked, recognizing his friend’s voice immediately.

“Hello, my friend,” said Jetchi.

“It’s been four years since you passed. How are you still here?” Shangkung asked, surprised and elated.

“I’ve been reborn as a spirit, Shangkung, and I’ve committed my soul to this oasis. Whoever passes near will be guided here by me and if they meditate here, they will have their chi become purer and more powerful,” Jetchi explained.

“I’m so glad to have your presence here, Jetchi,” Shangkung said.

And so, more and more travellers find shelter at this sacred place and they meditate and worship the Buddha in this hallowed spot we now know as the Mogao Grottoes.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Ho, Ava Ho – 10

As my footsteps echoed along the concrete floors of the British Museum, my eyes flitted across 50,000 manuscripts and scrolls containing ancient wisdom, handwritten manuscripts of the Tripitaka and I was mesmerised by the ancient wisdom being showcased in the Mogao Grottoes Exhibition. However, I felt an inexplicable sadness weighing down on my heart.

From across the room, the words 書經 lit up mysteriously, I approached the legendary Shang Shu. The scroll scintillated, as if it wanted me to touch it. My heart beat louder every second I stepped closer to it, my hand stretched towards the enchanted scroll. A cold tingling touched my fingertips and I pulled my hand back in fright.

I was too late. In a bolt of lightning, my world turned white and I was sucked into a spinning void.

Year 700.

I struggled to open my eyes, but I immediately gasped when I realized that I was in a place filled with sand and stones until I figured that I was standing before the legendary Mogao Grottoes. It was clear that I had arrived during a period where Buddhism was flourishing and Dunhuang reached its creative peak.

A kindly-looking monk approached me and bowed. “Do not be afraid. I am YueZun. This is our heritage. Impressive?”

I nodded eagerly.

“What you saw in the British Stein Museum has already been taken away from the Mogao Grottoes, from you and from the Chinese people. These cultural artefacts have already lived for nearly a thousand years.” The monk looked downhearted.

My heart felt heavy. “Monk YueZun? Please, tell me how I can help!”

A warm smile stretched across his face. “You are courageous, young one.” His smile immediately vanished from his face, “First, prevent Kashgar from destroying the caves. Second, stop Abbot Wang, the traitor who sold Shang Shu and other precious artefacts to other countries. Hold onto the ShangShu in your hands tight, and you shall time travel to the future.”

I pressed both hands together as in prayer and performed a small bow, but when I stood upright again, Yuzun disappeared. I held up the magical scroll in my hands tight, in a flash of light, I was pulled into the blinding white portal.

Year 1006.

I gasped in horror when I stood in the very same spot before the Mogao Grottoes, but this time, everything was chaos.

“Help! Help! The nearby Buddhist kingdom of Khotan had fallen to Kashgar! And we are next!”

“Stop!” I cried, catching the attention of the panicking crowd.

Everyone looked stunned and stood frozen to the spot.

“Come on! We haven’t a moment to lose! Who is with me?”

“I am !” came a brave voice. “Me, too!”

Together, with thousands of Buddhist monks, we constructed clay out of sand and water, then sealed the caves to prevent it from being raided, destroyed by the Islamic conquerors.

Satisfied, I touched the scroll once more and was pulled into a time void.

Year 1907.

I blinked furiously, I heard soft snores rose from what looked like the shadow of a bed. Was I in someone's chambers? Why, of course! Abbot Wang's!

"WAKE UP!" I barked, stomping my way over towards him, "I have a grave message for you from the past, present and future!"

Abbot Wang bolted up right with terror. He was about to call for his guards, when I put my hand onto his mouth and shoved the glowing scroll in his face to silence him.

"Hold your tongue!" I continued. "You are the discoverer of the hidden Library Cave, one of the greatest discoveries of all time, aren't you not?"

Abbot Wang whimpered and nodded meekly.

"Then, how *dare* you even consider selling these priceless, precious pieces of our history for a few gold coins?" my voice raised in a scream.

"But... but...I didn't..."

"Oh, don't you but me! I know that you are in talks with British archaeologist, Aurel Stein, and that you're considering selling Shang Shu for a handsome sum!"

The man covered his pale face with his hands and wept with shame.

But my heart was not moved. "China's heart aches because of your greed. If you hadn't been so much of a gold-digger, our statues, ornaments, silks, and invaluable manuscripts that contain the very history of China wouldn't be on display in the British Stein Museum in 2021!"

"Wha-what?" stuttered the bewildered man.

"You heard what I said," Narrowing my eyes and prodding him in the chest with my index finger, I rebuffed, "Mark my words, you had better think twice before your thinking of handing over these treasure to French explorer, Paul Pelliot in the summer of 1911 and Russian explorer, Sergei F. Oldenburg in 1914."

"Yes, madam..." Abbot Wang cowered, mumbling, "S-sorry..."

"So stop betraying your people by selling the stolen Magao art, PROTECT THEM!"

"O-Of course ! I'll give you my word."

I maintained my stern gaze until the very last moment before vanishing and hurtling forward in present time.

Year 2022.

I swept my gaze across the Mogao Grotto exhibit once more and a smile stretched across my face as most of the artefacts were missing.

"I guess Abbot Wang did keep the promise, then!"

But it still bothered me that there are still some remaining chinese artefacts in the museum. I frowned while sighing in sadness.

My eyes lit up. Of course! I would write a letter to The British Museum Director, Hartwig Fischer and to him to return the remaining artefacts to China and restore the Mogao Grottoes. I have also learnt that it is important to preserve our heritage at all costs and we should feel pride for our history !

The Quest

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Ho, Ming Shum Anna – 9

It was the start of the summer holidays, and my parents were packing for the trip to the Mogao Grottoes in China. I was so excited and didn't help my parents pack at all. After the plane trip, I rushed off the plane like a speeding bullet. Suddenly, a gush of hot air slapped my face and I started to choke and cough as I accidentally inhaled a breath of dust. It was very hot! Even though the walk to the mountains was hot and tedious, it was worth it. My jaw dropped as I stared at the magnificent temple.

I sniggered a bit as I saw that the door handle was a ridiculous dragon head with a hook through its nose. My mother's brow furrowed in anger.

"Honey, don't do that! It's rude to the ancestors and it is not nice to laugh at it," she lectured me. I rolled my eyes childishly and ignored her. However, I felt queer as I touched the handle, almost as if it was sending an electric shock up my arm. After that, I was reluctant to go into the temple, while my little sister, Charlotte, was practically bursting out of her skin.

I shivered a bit as I stepped into the dark and scary temple. I pretended to be very interested in the floor, but I simply couldn't ignore the call of my sister.

"Hey, Anna! Come and look at this picture!" I finally looked up from the floor and looked at what my sister was so interested in. Indeed, the picture was very funny. It was a picture of a very fat emperor sitting on his throne, sneering at some prisoners begging for mercy. I couldn't help but giggle. However, as I did that, the emperor seemed to stare at me and his eyes started to glow. Before I could even scream, me and my sister got sucked into the picture!

When I opened my eyes again, I saw that I was in a begging position, and in front of me was the emperor I saw in the picture! Next to me, Charlotte was also shivering with fear.

"Bow before me!" yelled the emperor. "Either death, or save Li Bai from the horrible dragon in the mountains. He went to the mountains to get inspiration, when he carelessly dropped into a pit with the famous dragon inside. "

"Li Bai...?" I murmured. Li Bai was long gone! Unless...

"Yes, Li Bai! Are your ears stuffed with cotton? Or are you still stuck in the 4th century? This is already the 7th century!" the Emperor fumed.

"Y-y-y-y-yes, your Majesty!" I stammered. Making the emperor angry was the last thing I wanted.

Pulling my sister's hand, I hurried towards the exit.

"Wait!"

I turned my head around, and saw that the emperor was holding an old scroll.

"This map will guide you and lead you to the mountains," said the emperor.

"Well, good luck!"

I took the map and thanked him. Then, without turning back, I went out of the palace and began searching for Li Bai.

I found out that there was a test. I needed to go through the Cave of Temptations. Lastly, I had to, well, what else? Battle the dragons.

I went into the Cave of Temptations. I read the instructions on the map carefully, and found out that I had to go through the cave and retrieve the Sword of Justice, while not touching any other treasures. Easy! I thought. I had no interest whatsoever in treasure. However, it was much harder than I thought it would be. One thing was that Charlotte was so fascinated in an amethyst necklace that she would not continue. The second thing was that even I was reluctant to leave a magnificent sapphire amulet.

Taking a deep breath, I dragged Charlotte towards the exit. There, I saw a sword lying on the floor. The Sword of Justice! I gasped and picked up the sword. It shined brightly and gave me courage.

I took a very deep breath. I told Charlotte to stay there and continued walking to battle the dragons. My palms were cold and clammy, and my heart was beating as fast as a cheetah running. Besides, I had my weapons to protect me—

“Roarrrrrrrr!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

The blood in my veins froze and I didn’t want to venture any further. But, I wanted to find a way to get back to my parents and save me and Charlotte from death.

I bravely went out of the exit and out into the sunlight. I saw Li Bai trapped in a cage and an emerald green dragon guarding him. It was the dragon with its face as a door handle that I laughed at! I tried to creep around the dragon and slay it from behind, but I stepped on a twig and made a loud crunching noise. Upon spotting me, the dragon began charging at me

“Hey! Dragon! Look over here!”

I saw that the one who called was Charlotte! The dragon heard her and whipped its head around. I took the chance and jumped onto its back and slayed the dragon.

As soon as the dragon dropped down dead, the cage opened and Li Bai was free! He thanked us and began to recite one of his famous poems – Quiet Night Thought.

I suddenly began to spin and found myself on the plane!

I learned not to make fun of our ancestors’ traditions and respect them even though you might think it is silly. Instead, we should think that the ancestors’ traditions are very special and inspiring and always respect them. This journey was exciting, yet scary, but I enjoyed it very much!

A Spine-chilling Mystery – Revealed

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Jap, Hoi Man Catherine – 10

The navy blue carpet spread wide and the blazing sun cast its golden rays on the land. Mustard yellow sand extended across the land for miles and miles, but the striking building that caught people's attention was Mogao Grottoes. The maroon poles of the temple, the curly top at the end of each roof and the traditional design of a Chinese temple made it stand out from the monotonous sand and soil.

Jason was an experienced tourist guide for the famous Mogao Grottoes for decades. There were many historical paintings, priceless sculptures and fascinating literature that were created from the 4th to 14th century. Many legends and secrets about the caves had been passed down from centuries and Jason's dearest wish was to validate whether these legends were true.

As he was sauntering back home, pondering about all the myths and legends, he suddenly heard a cry from afar.

"That's weird," he thought, "I have never heard such a sound before."

His conscience told him to go back home and ignore the sound, but his burning curiosity got the best of him, and he was dying to see where the whimpering came from.

"It sounds like a baby's cry," he muttered.

He followed the sound and it led him to a small, dark hidden cave.

"I have never seen this cave before," he thought with a quizzical look on his face.

Nonetheless, he walked inside the cave which was deep, dark, and mysterious. It was just tall enough for Jason to pass through. Not only did the whimpering echo throughout the cave, but it now sounded like a ghost's cry. He began to feel frightened by the haunted cries and the dark cave. When he was still pondering the matter, he suddenly heard a 'hi' from behind him. He peered around, and gasped when he discovered a little girl sitting in a corner. She looked like she was 5.

The girl's skin was as pale as moonlight, but something about her skin made her different from other normal girls—she seemed almost ghoulish, her body translucent and you can see through her. Her mouth curled into a smile and her eyes twinkled, brighter than anything you can imagine. She just wore a simple long white dress.

"Hi, I am Vicky! What's your name?" she said in a soft, angelic voice.

Jason was petrified. His eyes bulged out and his body froze in shock.

"Ummm... who are you exactly? I am Jason!"

Jason stuttered, he had a thousand questions he wanted to ask but just managed to state one simple question.

At first, Jason was frightened, but as they started to talk more and get to know more of each other, they started to become friends. Jason still had many questions about why the girl was translucent, but he kept that to himself because he didn't dare ask her. The girl said something that left Jason feeling puzzled and perplexed. She had told him, "You are the chosen one!" but he didn't understand and wasn't sure what that meant. After several days of talking, they got along very well, and Jason didn't fear her anymore.

One day, the girl told Jason, "I am going to show you a secret about this place, Mogao Grottoes. It will be beyond your wildest imagination. You will be amazed at what you will see, but whether you choose to believe it or not, it is up to you. I have only one warning for you: after I show you this letter, I will disappear, and all will return to normal because time is frozen right now."

Jason agreed. She pointed towards the wall and touched it with one finger. A letter instantly appeared.

Jason read out, "Dear reader, you are the chosen one. I am a member of the Ancient United Famous People. This group includes all the artists behind the great paintings and literature. At that time, we knew we were soon going to die but we wanted our legacy to be passed down from generation to generation, so we came together and discussed. After many discussions, we finally formed a plan which was to build the Mogao Grottoes and let future people discover and learn from it. We put guards there, but human eyes were just not capable of seeing them. Those guards were called the Spirits of the Ghosts. Their jobs were to show themselves to only people who had brutally destroyed some treasures of Mogao Grottoes. They would haunt those thieves forever and eternally torture them in different ways. This was the true story of why Mogao Grottoes was built—to let future people know about the famous paintings and literature and to warn people not to steal any treasure of Mogao Grottoes. Thank you, dear reader. Treasure what you have just read out. We will meet again. Some time one day."

Immediately after he finished reading the story, the girl disappeared in a flash of light. Perplexed and baffled, he gaped. He had trouble comprehending the story.

"Is it really true? Should I believe the story?" These kinds of thoughts raced in Jason's mind.

Finally, he decided to tell his son about this and let this story pass from generation to generation. Today, it has become a legendary story to tell when people visit the Mogao Grottoes. Most of them obey the rules and do not steal. Is this story really true? Whether you believe it or not, it will one day be discovered and proved to be true.

The Final Arrival: Nirvana

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Kong, Ho Yan Alisha – 11

“Stop daydreaming Andy! We need to move to the next spot!” whispered Tom.

“Sorry, but I just can’t help it! This tour is so boring. It’s the opposite of what I had imagined.” Andy said. Teenagers Andy and Tom were on a school educational trip to the Mogao Grottoes. They had thought that the trip would be interesting and they could learn more about history, but it turned out that the tour guide was pretty dull and the tour was too slow for them.

“Please move forward and now we are going to look at the Maitreya Buddha in cave 96 constructed in 695 under the edicts from Empress Wu Zetian ...” the tour guide said in a monotone voice like a robot.

Andy, the more mischievous boy, grinned and suggested, “How about we leave the group and explore the caves ourselves?”

“Umm, wouldn’t it be too risky? What if we got caught? What if...” Tom was hesitant.

“Oh come on! It’s still better than listening to the guide, right?” Andy argued.

“Fine, I’ll come with you.” Tom agreed reluctantly, touching the new bracelets engraved with Chinese words he had bought from a night market.

They sneaked away from the tour and excitedly explored the caves. Soon, they reached the “Thousand Buddha Caves” where replicated small Buddhas, flying apsaras, and celestial beings were depicted in the ceiling, and they were enraptured as they stood below huge grottoes carved out of stone so many hundreds of years before by hands of those long dead. From cave to cave, they used flashlights on their phones to see the incredible murals.

Half an hour after they left the group, the floor suddenly seemed to crack. A huge layer of dust fell from the cave roof. Earthquake! Now little bits of rocks were falling from the ceiling. The boys’ legs trembled and sweat dropped from their chins. The roof seemed like it was about to collapse. After a few minutes, with a large crack, a piece of stone toppled from the side wall, revealing a space behind it. After a few more rumbles, the ground became firm again and no more rock fell. The earthquake was over, but it had created something new; a crevice in the rock, just large enough for a person to walk through. As the boys dusted themselves off, relieved to be still standing, Andy spotted the opening.

“Tom, look! Just now that opening wasn’t there. Let’s go inside,” shouted Andy with excitement.

Without waiting for Tom’s response, Andy pulled Tom down to examine the dark space. A few feet inside the crevice was the start of a descending staircase. Throwing caution aside, in single file they entered and started to descend the dark stairs with only the lights from their phones.

The walls on either side of the thin staircase were gloomy and devoid of art. The thought of being the first two people to discover this passage thrilled them and they couldn’t wait to arrive at the bottom of the staircase, which seemed to wind deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth.

Finally, they arrived and found themselves in a chamber and with the help of their flashlights, they found some flaming sconces. Suddenly, the flaming sconces were lit up one by one naturally, until the whole room brightened.

Then, the two boys spotted an old man with a long beard meditating with his legs crossed. Suddenly, Tom’s bracelet began to shine.

“Finally, it led you here!” exclaimed the old man, opening his eyes.

“What do you mean? There was an earthquake and we found a staircase down here,” Andy explained.

“You!” The old man pointed at Tom, “You have his bracelet. The bracelet on your hand belonged to a respected monk, Zhi Kong. He passed away many years ago and he was supposed to go to the final stage of a monk—Anupadhisessa—Nirvana, but his spirit was trapped in one of the murals here. Zhi Kong told me that there would be a boy in the future wearing the bracelet which belonged to him before and that boy could help him.”

Tom scratched his head and asked curiously, “How could he tell you if he was trapped in a mural?”

In reply, the old man said only, “I am Dun Wu.”

“Are you a ghost? Your friend passed away many years ago. How can you live for so long?” Andy interjected. Shivers ran down their spines as the thought of seeing a ghost appeared in their minds.

“No time to ask questions. Be quick to release Zhi Kong!” Dun Wu commanded.

Tom and Andy were understandably puzzled. And also, they were just two ordinary boys, how could they save Zhi Kong? They really had no idea about it, but the bracelet seemed to know what to do.

The bracelet’s magical force suddenly jerked Tom forcefully and took him before a mural with a gigantic devil attacking people with a butcher’s knife. The devil was stepping on something—a person—a monk! The monk looked like he was in pain: he was wincing and his face was all twisted. He was wrestling with all his might but he just couldn’t get away.

“Zhi Kong!” the two boys exclaimed in unison.

Now, the bracelet was shining as brightly as a star. Having examined the bracelet carefully, Tom found some words on it. “Fang xia tu dao, li di cheng fo(Put down the butcher knife and become a Buddha),” read Tom slowly.

In a flash, the mural cracked and a wisp of smoke was released and whirled around the room.

“Thank you for freeing me!” said a mysterious voice.

When the smoke faded, they couldn’t see anyone, but they all knew it was Zhi Kong. When they turned around to find Dun Wu, he had also vanished.

They looked at each other and smiled, this would forever be a secret that only both of them knew. DunHuang is really a place full of mystery.

The Blanket on Her Shoulder

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Kwan, Chui On Charlotte – 11

Every conclusion of the school year, on the streets nearby the Gifted Arts Academy, would walk a pretty girl, carrying various gleaming trophies. She was particularly famous for her awesome masterpiece.

“Annabeth, the Musee Du Louvre is such a fantastic place, always providing you with inspiration! Let’s visit it again!” beamed her parents.

Annabeth shrugged half-heartedly since she was getting fed up already. So this time, even when Annabeth had stood in this museum for ages, her mind was blank. Annabeth twitched the edges of her blue blanket on her shoulder to overcome the boredom. She loved this nineteenth-century, old-fashioned cashmere blanket so much that she wore it on her shoulder every day, which made her feel protected and cozy.

Suddenly, an occult voice whispered, “ hold me tightly, I’m taking you to a mysterious ‘Art World’.”

Without ado, Annabeth touched it, which instantly curled around her tightly, lifting her higher and higher towards the sky. She felt gusts of strong wind blowing past her ears, whistling loudly and powerfully. The next thing she knew, lying on the foot of the cliff, she faced the unusual brownish-yellow sky and the sand that was sweeping across. She narrowed her eyes and tried to focus on the mighty temple in front of her. The eight-storey building seemed as though it was carved straight into the cliff. Its pale yellow roof was made of glazed tiles, the four corners of each one lifted upwards to the sky. The floors were supported by several reddish-tan coloured pillars.

“ Oh wow, this is so...amazing...that’s... art,” she stuttered, at a loss of words to describe it.

“Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes,” the blanket introduced.

Curiously, Annabeth crept into the temple. As soon as she turned the first doorknob of the corridor, her eyes sparkled. Intricate, colourful and brilliant murals appeared on the ceiling and walls. There were paintings about landscape, animals, architecture... Each life-like mural was like a summarised story, reflecting on the different dynasties of China, like the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties. The characters’ expressions were rather peaceful.

“They lived happily, didn’t they?” Annabeth asked the blanket thoughtfully.

The blanket nodded by patting Annabeth tenderly on her shoulder. During this warm interaction, the beautiful dyes of Annabeth’s velvet, blue dress gradually faded, the softness disappeared and what was left was a ragged, brown robe. Just as she was gazing at her clothes, with her jaw dropped in shock, a thick puff of smoke floated into her nose. Then, the whole building became stuffier and stuffier.

At that moment, Annabeth heard a gruff voice ringing in the corridor.

“Take away all the Buddhist statues and scriptures. Be careful. Each statue is worth billions of dollars if we sell them to Europe! Continue setting the murals on fire. Quick! Quick! ”

“What are they talking about?” Annabeth wondered, her mind racing speedily. “Wait—what? Wasn’t that the breaking news which had happened in the 19th century? Robbers indeed tried to steal the sculptures and ruin all the paintings in the Mogao Grottoes! But where am I now? My blanket took me to the past?”

Unnoticeably, smoke began filling the air, aggressively sucking in oxygen. Fire danced everywhere, flying past and missing by inches. At that instant, Annabeth thought of nothing but the burning murals and really couldn’t bear to watch their splendid colours fade. Annabeth felt more and more anxious, as if her own life was contained in the murals. She looked around the room, “No water, no sand, no blanke—huh, blanket?” Annabeth looked at her blanket, “ Sorry, that might hurt you, but I know you have magic and you are the only one who can help.” Without any hesitation about her own safety, Annabeth waved the blanket over the fire, fanning it continuously. Such a loud flapping noise attracted all the thieves to rush into the room. Their eyes and Annabeths’ met and were glued on each other, feeling stunned. Everyone gasped, shocked by each other’s presence. “ KILL HER!” They bawled. Robbers charged, brandishing their swords.

In a flash, a silver knife had already thrashed and pierced into Annabeth's delicate, vulnerable skin, straight at her chest. A searing pain spread across her throat. Annabeth's eyes widened with agony and she plunged into eerie, dead silence.

She knew she was dying.

Suddenly, the blanket zoomed out of Annabeth's grip. It swooped gusts of windstorm at the robbers. Brownish sand flew everywhere, all towards them. Leaving only a strangled cry of astonishment, they stumbled backwards, crashed onto each other and toppled down the cliff like a domino set. When the room was back to normal, like nothing had happened, Annabeth gave a thankful smile to the blanket tearfully. The murals and the blanket were safe eventually. Her eyelids drooped down, lower and lower...

It was a nice and fresh morning, the sun was shining all his light into a fancy room in a five-star hotel in Paris. The soft wind blew through the window, patting one's head. A pretty girl, wearing a blue, velvet dress, awoke. Opening her eyes slowly, she rubbed her eyes, feeling confused, "Am I still alive?" As her eyes darted to the blanket, lying on her bedside, her face lit up, she murmured, "Thank you, my friend..."

She stood beside the window and twitched the edge of the blanket on her shoulder. An idea kept repeating, "Make a mini-sized Mogao Grottoes." She really did. And not only did she make a detailed model of the Mogao Grottoes, she also restored the exact part of the Buddhist statues, scriptures and murals that were ruined by the thieves. Except there was a little girl with a blanket on her shoulder, standing in the first room of the corridor.

Today, a copy of this artwork is displayed in the Museum of Art, attracting billions of visitors for admiring the whole version of the Mogao Grottoes. And dear readers, I bet you know the artist of this wonderful artwork? Yes indeed, it's the girl—Annabeth!

Bowerbird's Last Bow

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Li, Lok Yee Rachel – 11

I did not want to go to the Mogao Grottoes, although they date back to over one and a half millennia ago, and they are home to an uncountable number of ancient literature pieces and artworks. I considered refusing the assignment, due to my history with anything called a cave or a grotto. In the past few years alone, I had nearly drowned and been lost in dark caves more times than I could count. However, when I was told that the oldest printed book in the world was located at the Mogao Grottoes, my speluncaphobia gave in to my love of ancient history.

Therefore, armed with little more than a pen, some rope, and an unsharpened sword, I was sent to west central China. Luckily, my friend May was also coming on this trip. She was much more competent than myself. The only reason that I could join any of the missions was that I had bested Bowerbird's leader on my first. Bowerbird was the name of a scheme organized by an unknown criminal organization. Its goal was to seize as many famous landmarks as possible and dominate the travelling industry.

We took a plane to Gansu Province and landed a few miles from the Mogao Grottoes. From there, we took a bus. Then, a small group of people from our organization joined us, so that we could pretend to be normal tourists. It worked, and we arrived without anyone ambushing us. I was starting to think that it might work – that we might be able to surprise the people sent to capture the Mogao Grottoes and arrest them without a hassle.

When we finally arrived at the Mogao Grottoes, I was awestruck. First constructed in 366 AD, it was a place with rich history. The Caves of a Thousand Buddhas contained the largest collection of Buddhist art, but out of the fifty thousand documents found there, there were also many texts of several other religions and in multiple languages. Easily, it was one of the most magnificent places I'd ever been to, and it was hard to believe that they were all carved out by hand. On the inside, there were numerous stunning murals and more spectacular sculptures than stars in our galaxy. Unfortunately, we couldn't explore all of the caves but May promised that we could complete our tour when we were finished with Bowerbird.

I never thought that I could be so intent on protecting 1700-year-old caves. It was because I wanted to see all the caves, and I was not going to let Bowerbird control them. I sharpened my sword, which was a souvenir from the first time I defeated Bowerbird's leader, determined to stop the train in its tracks.

We decided to use the element of surprise to our benefit, so we hid, waiting for the team that would be sent to take the Grottoes. Our plan was for me to talk to the leader of Team Bowerbird while my team surrounded them. As we were waiting, we concocted a few other backup plans, one of which included challenging a person from each side to a contest.

Finally, eight hours after we arrived, we were greeted by the small team sent to take the Mogao Grottoes. We stayed still until the leader ordered everyone to put their hands up. Then, I stepped out and said politely, "Hello there, I notice that you want to seize this tourist attraction and archaeology site which is over a thousand years old.

Unfortunately, I doubt that it's legal, so kindly put away your guns."

Recognizing me, the team's leader snarled like an angry lion. "I see you're messing with us, as usual. Ever since your first assignment, you've been stopping me from doing my job. You broke my reputation! You're going to lose me my job! This is my last mission, and if I don't succeed, I'll be demoted to the same rank I had when I first joined Oviraptor!" He was spitting with rage. I made a mental note of their name.

"Get out your guns and shoot her!" the leader roared. His team raised their guns and aimed them at me. I was terrified. I felt like a cockroach, seeing the giant shadow of an enormous shoe, and watching helplessly as it sank down.

"What are you waiting for? Do it now!" screamed the leader, losing every bit of restraint he had. He grabbed a gun and aimed it at me. He pulled the trigger, but nothing came out. Looking murderous, he nearly strangled one of his own men and demanded to know why there wasn't any bullets in the gun. His victim was quaking in fear as he explained that all of them had only three bullets each and they had used them all because they were ordered to shoot insects on their way to the Grottoes.

"I'll tell the boss to fire all of you," grumbled the leader bad-temperedly, turning to go. However, he had barely taken a step when a policewoman handcuffed him. Evidently, May had called the police when she saw the group approaching.

A month later, I found out that the leader of Bowerbird was sentenced to twenty years in prison for threatening me with firearms. I felt like a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders. Finally, I could wander about freely without any fear of attack, at least for a while. After losing one of its leaders, we guessed that Oviraptor would be out of action for a few months.

May kept her promise. Once I was out of danger from being murdered by the leader of Bowerbird (we learnt that his name was Jack Sloane after his arrest), she borrowed a plane for our visit to the Mogao Grottoes. It was as if I'd time

travelled back a millennia, through a tunnel to the ancient world. Being back to the caves again was just like reliving an old memory, one that would never be forgotten.

Travelling to the Past and Beyond

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Lit, Chloe – 11

As darkness settled upon the tired city, people were hurrying onto the last trains and rushing home to make it just in time for dinner. The whole city was falling into slumber, except for one sitting in the library, absorbing the magnificent light of books. This one was an enthusiastic monk, who was sitting on a chair in the corner of the library, reading about Buddhist culture. He was a curious monk who had always wanted to get to know more about his culture. Currently, this monk was reading about the Mogao Grottoes, a group of caves which were built in the times of 366 AD, the caves that are currently home to Buddhist art. These caves are located in Dunhuang, China – a place the monk dreamt to go when he was given the opportunity to.

The monk was so absorbed into his book, he didn't even notice his surroundings. In front of the focused monk appeared a spectacular blinding light. Once the light slowly faded out, a dark figure could be made out, one dressed in clothing that looked from the Northern and Southern dynasties in the 4 to 14th centuries. "Where am I?" The figure coughed to catch some attention from the monk. Slowly, the monk looked up, staring at the dark figure who had interrupted his reading session.

"Who are you? Why are you in the library at this hour?" The monk said, as he got off his chair.

"I could ask the same. Why am I here?"

"I'm not sure, but you seem to be from the era I'm reading about."

"Oh, that's odd. What are you reading about?"

"The Mogao Grottoes. You look like you might know lots about it, do you?"

The ancient man furrowed his brows. "Hmm, that doesn't make sense. When I went to see it yesterday, it was just half built. Is this some sort of trick, or have I time traveled into the future? What year is it, for you don't look like anyone from my era?"

"Wait, the only way this could have happened was if you time traveled, but I thought that only exists in books? Well, I guess weird things do happen, it's the year 2021 by the way."

Just then, the ancient man saw something sparkling in the corner of his eye. As he crouched down to take a closer look at the object, it disappeared. The ancient man stood up again, only to see a big portal in front of him. *This portal will lead you to the Mogao Grottoes in the period of time where it was still under construction, step in?* The two looked at each other before stepping into the portal together at the same time.

A light flashed in front of the pair's eyes, and in a second they were exposed to the work-in-progress Mogao Grottoes. A mechanical voice greeted them, *I see you have time traveled, what would you like to know about the Mogao Grottoes?*

The ancient man took this opportunity to talk about the Mogao Grottoes. "How about I show you around? After all, I know quite a bit about this."

The monk considered for a moment, he said, "Alright then, lead the way!"

The pair walked for a while, as the monk noticed something.

"If you don't mind, I have a question. Why are the caves built on a cliff?"

"Oh, that's because the Mogao Grottoes serve as a temple for Buddhism activities. Temples are a place of worship, which is why the environment is to be kept quiet and clean, free from the interference of secular life."

The ancient man walked in through the entrance of a structure and the pair ended up in a big empty space. The workers were busy setting down the statues, so they didn't quite pay attention to the two of them.

"Here, as you can see there are statues in the Mogao Grottoes. Currently, the most famous one should be the Buddha statue. If you look at the walls, wall paintings are what you see. Mogao Grottoes is actually a group of caves, 492 caves to be exact. I believe we are in an art cave, which is why there are statues and paintings. Of course, along the journey, what you see isn't the end of it. The caves are not complete, so there's more to come. There are also different texts and manuscripts in the library cave, we could visit it quickly if you like."

The two left the art cave and went into the library cave. As they walked past manuscripts filled with texts of different languages, the monk asked, “There’s so many different manuscripts here, are they all Buddhism texts?”

The ancient man stopped in his tracks, he thought for a second before answering, “Ranging from Christian to Zoroastrian texts, some of the texts from those cultures are also kept here.”

The two were about to go towards a third cave, but a metallic voice stopped them. *The portal is ready, step in to time travel back into the present. I hope you learnt more about the Mogao Grottoes.*

The monk took one last glance at the work-in-progress Mogao Grottoes before stepping closer to the portal. Of course, he didn’t forget to wave at the ancient man who stumbled into the present by accident, if it wasn’t for him, the monk could’ve never had this meaningful journey into the past. The monk knew he shouldn’t bother the ones in the past, so he bravely stepped into the portal. A gust of wind hit the monk’s face before he was transported back to the library. He stood there stunned for a second, before the book he was previously reading gave a small “bonk!” when it hit the monk’s head. The monk rubbed his head, feeling embarrassed.

“Not only was I able to travel into the past, but also to learn what’s beyond the printed text on books. This really is a journey *travelling into the past and beyond.*”

An Adventure Through a Card

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, So, Clara So Yui – 11

The warm, bright sunshine was beaming through my window as I was reading 'Around the World in Eighty Days'. While I was flipping through the pages, something in it caught my eye. It was a glittering card, the vibrant, radiant sunlight making it shimmery as crystals. Why was it there? On it was a picture of a red building. I stroked the card in bewilderment. Strangely, I couldn't take my eyes off it, as if it were putting me into a trance, hypnotising me. Suddenly, a vortex of a million stars was somehow pulled out from the card, and it swirled and whirled and twirled in front of my eyes. I got disoriented. Everything went pitch black. I was losing all my senses...

The darkness lightened, gradually I could see again! Where was I? Observing my surroundings, I realised I was in China, without a person in sight! It looked like I was on the Silk Road, and according to history books and websites, it was a network of trade routes connecting China and the Far East with the Middle East and Europe. Right at that moment, I saw the red building! As I strolled closer to it, thinking it looked boring, I noticed a plaque with 'The Mogao Grottoes, 366 A.D.' written on it. So that was it! The Mogao Grottoes. I strode towards the entrance. It turned out the 'entrance' wasn't really quite an entrance of, say, an old museum. Actually, that was no entrance at all. There, I saw pitch black caves. I had an eerie feeling. But, maybe they say curiosity kills the cat, it was certainly winning over my fear.

I edged to one of them, ventured into it—and screamed! I had caught a glimpse of a shadow. Standing outside, I let my eyes get used to the dark. I realised it was the shadow of a buddha statue, with priceless murals behind it. Forget about the outside, the inside of the Mogao Grottoes was as precious as diamonds. I made a mental note not to judge an object or a person by the outer appearance, but to look inside first.

When I came out of the cave, I noticed that beside the cave hole, there was a tiny number '1' carved on the wall. So I jogged along the isles of caves, often seeing ancient artifacts in them. I was gasping for air by the time I reached the last cave, as there were a lot of caves—four hundred and ninety-two ones, so I stopped breathlessly in front of the last cave.

I then remembered reading, on an informative website, that the Mogao Grottoes served as a marketplace for more than a thousand years. It was always a weary traveller's stop and religious shrine on the Silk Road. It was inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites in the year 1987. Thinking about time and place, how do I get back home, or will I be stuck here forever?

I started to explore the place again. I randomly got into Cave 3, which had a mural in it. The mural seemed to fascinate me, there was a Chinese dragon in it. Again, I was bursting with curiosity. I approached it, stretched out my right arm and felt the dragon with my fingers...

All of a sudden, a geyser of boiling hot water from nowhere shot on the mural, the heat of it burning my fingers. Mist swirled around the place, and I couldn't see a thing. In milliseconds, my eyes widened, my arm shrank back, and I felt myself jerk backwards. After some time, when the water and mist had disappeared, I blinked, and... gasped! Right in front of me, was a magnificent creature, with strong claws, a snake-like body, and sharp teeth. The dragon! I shrank into a corner. What was going on?

'I am the dragon of this mural. People believed that my kind was a symbol of authority, and that we had control over water, so this is why I'm here, and don't be afraid, I know you want to return home,'

'H... how did you know that?'

'I can hear your thoughts, but I prefer to speak,' the dragon smiled. 'I'll get you back home.'

'Thanks, but how?'

Mist sprayed from the great beast's mouth, and a scroll floated in front of me.

There was something written on it:

'Cave two hundred and fifty seven x Cave two hundred and eighty-five = ?

A portal in a particular cave, the

Very clues near statues, murals, or

Even in scrolls.

Simply there'll be hints in the caves above.'

'People back then were skilled in astronomy, mathematics and much more, so that's why this is a math problem. Come back after you solve it.'

I went to Cave 257. There was the Maitreya Buddha statue. Just then, I saw a piece of scrap paper with 'clue: 48' on it right next to the huge statue! Then I dashed to Cave 285. There were murals of apsaras. I noticed that in one of the apsaras' hands, there was 'clue: 2'. It was ' $48 \times 2 = 96$ '!

Then I went back to Cave 3 and told the dragon the answer. Smiling, he gestured for me to follow him. So we went to Cave 96—the cave where there stood the Great Buddha statue. The dragon roared, and a handprint with the words '*Place hand here*' appeared on top of it.

'Place your right hand here, and a portal shall be activated. It will transport you to anywhere you should go. Now I shall say farewell,'

'It was nice to meet you.' I said with mixed feelings. I took a deep breath, and pressed the handprint.

A spinning kaleidoscope of stars appeared. I was back home, card in hand. Was I seeing things? A dragon appeared next to the building! I smiled and put the card in my safe. I will never forget this adventure.

The Revelation of the Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Tam, Hong Yan Janna – 11

Qing was an average Chinese girl, with short ebony curls and a shy smile, complemented with a cornflower blue Qipao. However, she had a dream like no other girl did, as all they dreamed about were charming husbands of whom they would work for in the future. But Qing was different — very different, an independent soul who wasn't someone who followed orders if she had the ability to do it her own way. She wanted to become an explorer and see the Mogao Grottoes — a famous place in her hometown, Gansu — but her mother always refused with tears in her eyes. Qing found it most confusing — there wasn't any harm in going there, was there?

Her mother finally let the cat out of the bag when Qing was seventeen. It all started when news of a certain Wang Yuanlu found the Library Cave spread far and wide. "Please, Qing, go to the Mogao Grottoes and bring Wang Yuanlu back, for he is your father, but I can't go since Amah needs me," her mother said, gesturing at Qing's grandmother. Then, she swiftly drew a picture of Wang Yuanlu with her ink brush and handed it to Qing, who put it in her sack with food and water, then set off, walking along the cobbled streets and the narrow, deserted alleyways of her village.

Darkness reigned in the Mingsha Mountains as Qing stumbled towards its eastern foothills. Her mother's voice echoed through the midnight sky, but fatigue drowned it as her eyelids drooped and she drifted off to sleep. A blazing light which she recognised as the rising sun awoke her, and her eyes fluttered open. But it wasn't — a glowing tunnel bright as the morning shone around her, and a booming voice resonated through it, "Arise, Wang Qing, and follow the path your father took." Qing felt herself trembling as she got to the end of the tunnel and looked up at the majestic architecture of the Grottoes. But there was no time to lose; she had to find her father — and fast. *I'll have to go to the living quarters — the northern caves*, she thought. But how? Her father found the Library Cave; perhaps she could look there. Qing gathered up her courage and started to climb the stairs towards Cave 17 — the Library Cave. She stepped in and saw an array of Buddhist scriptures, ranging in rolls of thick and thin. Then Qing looked closely at the murals — Buddhist subjects were painted most, but there were some with mythical animals and there was even one of the victories of General Zhang Yichao over the Tibetan Empire. But still no sign of her father... *Am I seeing things?* she thought. *Why would there be this mural of the daily lives of monks?* But Qing was — at the back of the room was a mural of monks meditating, walking around town barefoot for offerings and some even worshipping a buddha. The Chinese written on the side of the mural meant "Ordination is the sacrifice to be made" and as Qing put her finger on the word "ordination", the hidden door behind the mural slid open as Qing stared with wide eyes and her mouth open, unable to believe what she saw. As she stepped inside the room, she immediately knew where it was — the northern living quarters. Qing looked from her left to her right, then from her right to her left. "Excuse me," she said to a chanting monk after a tap on his shoulder. "May I enquire where Wang Yuanlu is?" Everyone else stared at her and the monk.

"Follow me, young lady," croaked the old monk as he beckoned Qing to follow him. "What's your name?"

"My name is Wang Qing, and I come to request my father to return home," said Qing.

"Well, Qing, that means you're on a quest," said the old monk with a twinkle in his eye. "You don't have to know as long as you feel compelled to do it — the impossible, the important. See here, we are already at your father's chambers," said the old monk. "Goodbye and good luck, Wang Qing!" Qing waved him goodbye and gulped as she knocked on the door. This was the moment of truth...

"Who is it?" questioned Yuanlu as he opened the door.

"My name is Wang Qing, and I believe you're my father, Wang Yuanlu. Mother asked me to find you with this," Qing handed him the picture her mother had drawn. Yuanlu gasped.

"Come in, my long-lost daughter, and I shall explain to you over a cup of tea," said Yuanlu and Qing followed behind him. Yuanlu felt connected with the girl almost immediately at first sight.

"I'm sorry, Qing," said Yuanlu when they were both seated, "I left before you were born because of my own interests in Buddhism. Your mother, who was pregnant at the time I left, refused, but I persisted. We had this terrible argument and I left, telling her I would return someday. But oh, 17 years had passed without meeting this beautiful, intelligent daughter of mine, I feel terrible deep down inside. I'm sorry, Qing, I really am. But once I enter these doors, I'm forced to stay here forever."

“Please, Father. I understand how much Buddhism means to you, but we all need you — especially Mother. You promised her you would return, but she’s been waiting these 17 years for you to come back! Even I need you — I’ve always wanted a complete family myself! Please, Father, do consider it,” begged Qing. Yuanlu saw the hope in his daughter’s eyes — oh, how would he have the heart to refuse?

“I’ll have to stay here, Qing, but there’s no harm in coming back to visit every week for an hour or two,” said Yuanlu and Qing nodded. They left for the village and the practice continued. The Wangs may be separated physically, but they are never separated by heart.

Secret Within the Caves of Mogao

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, To, Man Kiu – 12

The humble saint crouched in the corner of the cave, dimly lit by flickering torches that hung beside sophisticatedly framed illustrations and meticulously carved sculptures. These artworks seemed to be the only things accompanying the man, who was frantically scribbling words on a piece of parchment – or so he thought. Bony fingers snatched the parchment.

“What’s this? A cry for help?” The demon scanned the parchment, dismissing it.

“You may have reincarnated, Mara, but you’re not going to be stronger than you once were,” The saint challenged the demon.

“We’ll see.” The demon hissed and with his fingernails, he pinched the paper and tore it into three pieces before thrusting them onto the cave floor and, the shredded parchments, they caught on a breeze and snuck away from the cave.

A single piece landed gently on the floor and met a young yet curious girl who hurried and scooped the parchment up, and mumbled the words to herself.

“In the Mogao Chinese Buddhist cave,
An imprisoned saint you need to save.”

Curiosity got the best of her and the next moment she found herself hopping off a shuttle bus and arriving in front of the ancient structure — the Mogao Grottoes. She waited until sunset, when the sky would take on a golden tint and when the crowd would have departed, she snuck to the entrance of the caves and to her surprise, two familiar silhouettes stood there – her two younger siblings.

“So, Sister Xiaoli, you’re the third one,” Xinyi said.

“Third one — what?” Xiaoli replied, confused.

“The three parchments – haven’t you read it? It said, three heroes would save an imprisoned saint by reciting an ancient poem, written in the parchments,” her brother Xinyi continued.

“The saint is in danger as we speak – we have to act now. C’mon,” Shenfei interrupted her siblings.

They ventured into the unknown darkness of the cave.

The moment they set foot in the cave, it felt as if they had been brought to another dimension. The cave was hot, yet they felt cold all over with terror. That moment, the girl noticed a faint, dark shadow flashing before her and quickly vanished; she ignored it.

The three looked around in the room: dark, daunting, deadly. Perhaps because it’s under the demon’s curse. They looked at the paintings on the wall. The artworks were so precisely created and so intricately detailed; they seemed so realistic as if they were alive and moving – the characters in the painting slowly shifted their gaze towards the teens, as a warm smile grew on their faces. Their hands moved around gracefully like a butterfly and slowly pointed towards their right. They stared at the painting, mesmerised by its magic.

“They’re guiding us to the saint,” Xinyi recited his clue aloud. “The paintings have come alive, to the chamber they will guide. We have to follow it.”

Without hesitation, they entered the next chamber and found themselves presented with numerous overbearing statues, intimidating them with their size as they glared down towards them. Xiaoli felt it again: a similar sensation of the cold, threatening shiver when she met a dark shadow at the entrance, trailing behind. The statues appeared to also

be aware of this shadow. A deep voice sounded from the statues in unison, echoing around the chamber, “Are you the three saviours for the saint?”

Hesitating, they blurted out, “Yes, we are.”

“Read the parchment each one of you holds. Your final clue will be announced to you.”

They all frantically searched and fished out their parchments from their pockets, unrolled it and realised their previous clues had vanished. The parchment crumpled up. It rustled and shook in their palms as black inky texts appeared on the parchments, one letter at a time, and read, “Call it Māra. Use its name – now! Summon the demon and ask this question: what is greater than darkness and death?”

The mysterious source of voice continued, “Follow the instructions we have given you. Free the curse and free the saint.”

Xiaoli nodded and started, “Demon Mara, come—”

The cave was rapidly filled with a black mist before she could finish and flooded the room and every corner was extinguished of light. Amidst the darkness, Xiaoli noticed the same dark shadow like an eagle circling in on its prey. The dark shadow landed in front of them and transformed into the malevolent beast they have been searching for – Mara.

“Who has summoned me?” The dark, raspy voice demanded.

Shenfei took a deep breath, and blurted out the words of the riddle, “What is greater than darkness and death?”

Mara chuckled, “You know nothing of darkness, gullible foolish humans.” He laughed. “Nothing is greater than darkness. Darkness is everywhere, your eyes just can’t see it.”

“Māra, you are blinded by darkness. Your negativity has covered all the light in the world within your eyes. Light is greater than darkness.” Shenfei said. “Lord Buddha, share your love and light upon this cave and all things within.”

Light then poured in through every gap in the walls. The statues and carvings on the side moved slightly, rumbling, and opened their mouths, speaking the words “Light can dispel darkness, but darkness cannot dispel light.” The light glistened like butterflies, gleaming and fluttering in every edifice of the cave, destroying the darkness within. The demon slowly withered like a dying rose in the light, shrieking and screaming until the last drop of his darkness was brought away.

The saint’s chains crumbled on the stone floor as dust. The saint stood once again as a young man.

“Thank you. I was imprisoned here for the past thousand years and my cries for help were finally heard. You strangers are a blessing and I am eternally grateful.” And with that, the saint floated away and into a mist. He turned back and smiled gently at them before disappearing. He was home, at last.

Mogao Magic

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Tong, Tsz Yan – 11

Juliette scanned the monument standing in front of her. She thought of her father's uncanny face when he told her and her little brother about the magical road trip to an ancient temple in China. She wanted magic, not boring caves such as the Mogao Grottoes. Shuffling, she dragged herself towards the stairs. How could a road trip go so wrong?

As soon as they got into one of the caves, she was panting and gasping for air. "Juliette, stop being so dramatic," said her little brother Leo, who fancied Chinese history, "Let's go and check out that silk road painting!" The tourists indulged themselves in the historical masterpieces, but Juliette had completely no interest in the history of the silk road, so she wandered around the grottoes to check out the more eccentric masterpieces. There were lots of buddha statues with multiple limbs and wall paintings with many colours. She studied a painting, and it was a scene where two characters were fighting. She touched the paintings gently with one hand and traced along the delicate lines of the characters. They were perfect— wait, no. A crack. And it wasn't there a second ago. Juliette leaned closer to inspect it. Suddenly, there was a deafening gush of wind, and Juliette was off the ground.

Juliette opened her eyes, and she was kneeling on the floor. She used a hand to steady herself and get up, then fell back again at the sight of a huge Buddha bigger than ten elephants, lying on a stone bed with his eyes closed peacefully. Juliette gave out a yelp and tried to move herself away from the statue. Suddenly, his stone eyes stirred. Juliette watched in fear as the eyes of the Buddha creaked open. Juliette was too shocked to scream or run. This living statue could crush her as if she was a concussed fly. It sat up. Juliette gasped: when the Buddha sat up straight, his head scraped the ceiling, so he had to use an elbow to thrust himself upward slightly so that he wasn't wholly lying down but was still able to move mildly without touching or hitting the ceiling. And then, it boomed, "What brings you here to Mogao cave 158, child?" His voice was deep and intoned, but kind.

"I...I don't know!" Juliette explained frantically, "a second ago I was checking out a... a crack! A crack on a painting that nobody noticed, and... and then a gush of strong wind blew me here." The Buddha looked confused but shrugged. Juliette was dumb-founded about how the Buddha would believe such an unreasonable thing. She gathered the courage to ask "Um... Mister Buddha,"

"Call me Śākyamuni," the Buddha said,

"Okay, Mister Sa—— never mind, can you tell me how to get out of here?"

"You'll have to learn about the history of this place first." Perfect, Juliette thought, oh how exceptionally perfect. She sighed. As long as it gets me out of here.

"Tell me about the history of this place."

She awoke in the middle of nowhere. Around her were ochre hills of sand. Obviously, it was a desert. The sandstorms were strong. Luckily, the wind was merciful. Juliette only trotted through a few mild sandstorms. Over the horizon, she saw a monk. He had orange robes and was bald. She asked, "Mister, where are you going?" The monk looked surprised when he found out what Juliette was wearing, which was a normal shirt. Still, he answered, "I'm a humble monk, Lezun. I have arrived at Dunhuang to build caves where I will draw and carve all the myths and legends I can remember. Hopefully, the people of the future will find out the artwork and gain the precious knowledge." Juliette suddenly understood, like an old man awakened from a deep, deep slumber, that this was the creator of the mogao grottoes, and that the Buddha was using a special way to bring her home. A flash of light flickered before her and the monk was gone.

Now, she was in a cave. She saw the same painting that she found the crack in, but the colours weren't as timid. She heard two men speaking and hid behind a pillar. "Dear me, ain't this a beauty! The scene, it looks as if it's a real battle!" said one. "Oh ain't we lucky that the Taoist priest informed us about this ancient beauty! I heard that he told the Qing government abou' this too, but they didn't care!" Remarked the other. Juliette came out of her hiding spot.

She needed to know the information in order to get home. “Who are ya?” shouted the men. “ I mean you no harm, I just want to know what happened,” said Juliette. Then men exchanged glances. One started, “A taoist priest found out about the mogao grottoes and he told us, Western explorers, and the Chinese government about this. The government didn’t care, but we came here to study them. They are gorgeous!” Another flash of light brought Juliette somewhere else.

This time, Juliette was in a room, and she saw a French man and a taoist priest, which is indisputably the one mentioned from the last scene. The French man bellowed, “I want these six thousand relics from your caves!” “ I told you, that would be 500 taels of silver,” said the priest. The French man sighed, “Those relics are worth no money, nothing can be worth such fine beauty. Here, take these 500 taels of silver and go!” Again, Juliette organized the information. A French man paid 500 taels of silver to the priest to remove 6,000 relics from the caves. The flash of light shone once again. Juliette had an outburst of joy— she was going home.

The next moment, Juliette could feel herself lying on something soft. She opened her eyes to see the ceiling of her bedroom. “Mom, Dad, I’m home!” she cried.

Memories of a Manuscript

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Tung, Wing Kiu Elizabeth – 9

I looked up and saw lots of humans staring down at me. I remember thinking ‘What are these strange moving creatures?’, but now I know. They are a nefarious, inventive and wonderfully interesting species. And they are my creators, the ones that breathed life into me.

When I was created, I did not understand people at all. I was surrounded by people talking in Chinese and I was so young that I thought that everyone in the world would talk in the same language. Eventually, I had learned enough of the spoken language to understand this species. And from then on I knew lots of things about this particular place named China. I thought China was a weird name for any place.

One day, I overheard that they were going to take my friends, the other books and I to different places. Some of the books moaned and complained. Some of them wept. Some of them were ecstatic. We all felt differently. But one thing was for sure, we would be separated from one another.

Early the next morning, the humans were very excited and were all smiles. Along with some of my fellow books Gung Ho, Xiao Ming and Zi Tong, the gigantic creatures forced us into an extremely stuffy sack. The sack was tied to a camel that was not only exceedingly sweaty, but also tremendously smelly. “Phew!” exclaimed Xiao Ming, “I have never smelt anything this retched and it’s even making my pages curl”. “This is nothing” said Zi Tong, “I used to live next to a pig farm, on a summers day the smell would turn my pages yellow”. My travelling companions and I swapped stories as our bumpy journey continued.

Eventually, the humans forcefully pulled us out of our small sack, our journey next to the insanitary, putrid camel was finally at an end. I heaved a huge sigh of relief, it had not been a pleasant experience being stuck in a tiny stuffy bag for a week and my friends and I were happy to be in the fresh air at last. I opened my eyes and the crimson sun shone down on me. I had expected that I would be taken to a different place, but not as different and exotic as this.

After a good night’s sleep I awake in a cool dry cave surrounded by many other books and scrolls. I asked the book to my left where I was but received no answer as the book was snoring and deep in sleep. I turned to the right and repeated my question but the scroll sharply rebuked me and told me that ignorance was bliss so I should stop asking questions. I was very frightened but after being told off I did not dare ask any more questions for the rest of the day.

The next day I talked to the bookshelf, it sounded really old but wasn’t as grumpy as the scroll. It told me that I was in one of the most beautiful caves in northern China. She said that I was very lucky that I was not one of her kind, when a bookshelf rots it will be dragged out and broken up for fire wood. I felt sorry for her and told her that I hoped that she would not rot so early.

Occasionally, some people would come to the cave and admire my friends and enemies. First of all, there were the rocks. They looked like people and were very colourful, but they were not real people. I mistook them for real humans, but then when I tried to talk to them in Chinese, they thought I was just showing off my language skills and they felt very offended. “Who do you think you are talking to, Book!” demanded one of the statues, “I have been here for more than a century, show some respect”.

Devastated, I left them to complain about me to the metal statues. This was a mistake, soon the metal statues hated me too. Fortunately, I was on a bookshelf with lots of other books and I managed to hide from their prying eyes.

After a while I had made some good friends and a couple of enemies with the other books on the bookshelf.

As time passed less and less humans would come to visit us in the library until the trickle of visitors dried up completely. I felt so alone with only the sounds of the other books snoring and the wind whistling through the caves. One day the sound of crashes and screams reverberated in the air and then they stopped as quickly as they had started. The time passed in endless darkness.

Light! suddenly a beam of light shot from the doorway and roused me from my dreams. For the first time, after what seemed like an eternity, I could hear the sounds of human voices. Rapidly the beam of light opened up to reveal a group of strangely dressed human being. They inspected all the books in the cave and I soon found myself in a yet another sack.

I was swiftly transferred from the sack to a strange looking oblong box surrounded by papers and strange black tubes. My journey away from the caves was just a bumpy and rocky as my original journey but had the advantage of being far less smelly.

Finally I arrived at my current home. I was respectively unpacked by a man wearing white gloves and was housed in my own small room made from glass. My room was one of many in an enormous man made cave. Every day visitors would come to visit me, the Diamond Sutra, but I remained undisturbed behind the walls of glass.

Surrounded by foreigners my soul aches to return home. I wish to hear the melody of my own language and to be surrounded by a civilisation of 5,000 years. Most of all I miss my friends Gung Ho, Xiao Ming and Zi Tong.

All For Dad

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Wong, Chi Ching Ankie – 12

“Dad’s missing! Dad’s missing! The guards must’ve taken him for revenge! Dad’s missing, Kyle!” Kyle was woken up by his brother, Karl, who was frantically shaking him while screaming so quickly, Kyle could barely make out the words.

Kyle jumped out of bed and rushed out to take a look. It was true. His dad was missing. The only thing left in his room was a piece of paper. One which wasn’t a normal piece of paper, but from his early ancestor, who he could trace back to Gautama Buddha’s own apprentice. It was a map, which only his family could read. This map could tell you where his family members were, including his father, and it would soon prove its own purpose for Karl and Kyle.

“No!” Kyle shouted while reading the map. “How could they have taken him so far away for such a short span of time? They’re—they’re in the Mogao Caves!”

Karl snatched his bag and grabbed the ancient sword that had been hanging on the wall in the house for centuries. Kyle was angry about his brother for disrespecting his ancestors, but it wasn’t the right time. He dashed back to his room, slung his bow and arrows in his back, and wore his bandolier, then ran to the teleporter their father made in the garage. The brothers rushed into the neon blue cylinder tube and, with a push of a button, they were there — the Mogao Caves.

“Good afternoon, young men, would you like a tour around the Thousand Buddha Grottoes? This place is made out of 500 temples, and is an oasis located at the silk road—” a robot monk said, doing as it was programmed for.

“Kyle, over there!” Kyle snapped his head to where Karl was pointing. Then he saw it, on top of the mountain, beyond the Mogao Caves. Kyle heaved a short sigh of relief. At least they could see that their father was alive. But one problem is always followed by another.

Their father was stuck.

He was stuck on the top of the mountain, with nothing but himself.

To make matters worse, there were guards around him, not letting him have even the slightest chance of escaping.

“Hello monk, do you know the quickest way to get up to that mountain over the tall trees?”

“—some of the finest examples of Buddhist art, which spans a period of 1,000 years. It’s best known of the Chinese Buddhist grottoes and is one of the three famous ancient Buddhist sculptural sites of China—”

“Nevermind,” Karl shook his head and started walking towards the Mogao Caves. “So we are in Gansu province in China.”

“Affirmatively. To be more exact, 25 kilometres southeast of the center of Dunhuang—”

The duo ignored the robot and started their way to the cliff. The mountain was tall and it took them two hours to reach midpoint.

“Karl! Look, the guards are moving Dad into one of the caves!” Kyle started to run back down. The sun was setting and it could be dark anytime soon. They had one life to save, two vulnerable lives exposed to danger, and an unknown number of fights to come.

The sky was becoming dark, with no signs of moonlight lighting up the night. Karl knew; Kyle knew; everyone knew about the ancient danger. Everyone knew that whoever was stupid enough to come out at night under the full moon would be burnt to crisps by the egregious Dark Monk. But they had something more important: saving their dad.

The stars faded and black paint colored the sky.

BAM!

The Dark Monk had found them. He was as tall as the mountain, with his hands replaced by two guns, footsteps breaking even diamond, and armor made out of titanium. He was the shade of the moon.

The sound of firing guns was so loud that it had torn your eardrums apart. One of its bullets just missed Karl's head by a centimeter. BAM! Another missed his left ear by an inch. He ran at full speed, dodging bullets while trying his best not to ruin the caves while saving himself and his father, though the library cave had been destroyed, wall drawings and ancient scrolls were burning away.

"What do you want?" Kyle shouted above all commotion.

"You. Him. Anyone." The gargantuan monk boomed.

He summoned a swarm of dark monks. Normal humans, but with red eyes. One took a blow on Karl. He barely dodged it but managed to attack back with his sword. He defended it with his sword, which made a deafening clang. Karl tried attacking his chest, which only ended up making a small dent in the enemy's sword. The enemy dodged it, ran towards Kyle and attacked his right shoulder. Karl threw himself forward, just managed to save his brother. His enemy saw a chance and attacked his chest, but Karl dodged and turned to his back, trying to take a blow behind the enemy. He turned around, and took the blow on his sword. Karl took another attack on the enemy's foot, who dodged it, did a side roll and attacked Karl's foot. Karl jumped up just in time and was about to attack on the enemy's head when the enemy suddenly crouched and dodged the hit.

Kyle was able to find a way towards his dad under the chaos around him. The guards were too busy trying to fight off the robots that they left Dad unguarded. After Karl had saved him from a lethal hit, he used all his strength to run towards Dad, ignoring the helpless cries, piercing screams and deafening clangs. Once Kyle reached Dad, he scooped him up and pressed the neon blue button on his bandolier...

—

The father and his two sons swung the door open, like three soldiers who just fought a war. What confused the neighbours most, was why they were exhausted before noon. Well, they would never know, would they?

The Unbelievable Choice in Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Yip, Tsz Kwan – 9

Peter was in awe. Just like the other tourists, he stared at the wonderful architecture, amazed. Peter saw sculptures, statues, paintings... all kinds of flabbergasting things. Although all the historical architectures looked appealing, one painting attracted Peter the most. It was a picture of a smiling Buddha with a praying gesture. Eager to take a closer look, Peter leaned forward. Suddenly, the Buddha started to glow, so bright that Peter had to squint. Slowly, Peter retreated. But as he got further away, he felt a gust of strong wind blowing him towards the Buddha. And then... *whoosh!* Peter got sucked into the painting.

“Oooof!” Peter landed hard on solid ground. Waiting for the dust to go away, he opened his eyes and looked around cautiously. All the other tourists were gone! Peter could only see workers in old-fashioned clothes, digging and building a weird looking structure. Besides that, there were only rocky slopes and Mogao Grottoes was nowhere to be seen.

Soon, a worker noticed Peter. He walked over to him and muttered something under his breath. Peter thought he should seize the opportunity to ask the worker the time. “Hello... May I ask what time it is?” *No answer.* “Okay... then what is this sculpture?” Peter asked again, pointing to the building. *Still, no answer.*

After a short period of time, Peter realized that this worker didn’t understand a word he was saying. Suddenly, he recalled something that he studied for Mogao Grottoes. It was built long ago... in 366 AD! Now that Peter knew, he was so terrified that his legs started to shake frantically, and large beads of sweat were rolling down his face. “How could I be back in time? And how on earth am I supposed to go back to the future?”

Feeling helpless, Peter sat down on a small, dusty slope, thinking of how he would live in such a horrible place. Suddenly, the smiling Buddha’s face flashed into Peter’s mind. “*Would it be the very special Buddha picture that brought me here?*” he pondered.

Immediately, the Buddha picture appeared and glowed brightly, just like before. The light and dust blinding him, Peter heard a faint voice. “*Good job. Now, you will go to the time when Mogao Grottoes was completed. There, you shall find everything a tourist could ever wish for.*” With that, Peter was teleported to another place.

Peter’s head hit painfully onto the ground, but this time, it seemed harder than before. He got up stressfully and explored the area around him. The floor was no longer made of sand and soil. Instead, it was covered with bricks. When Peter lifted his head, he saw the tall, majestic architecture standing in front of him, exactly like the one in the future! At once, Peter’s heart was pounding against his chest. “Am I back in the future?” He wondered aloud. But something was wrong... it was still so early, where did all the tourists go?

Soon, Peter remembered what the Buddha said. Slowly and carefully, Peter stepped into Mogao Grottoes. The only light was the sun shining through small windows. Peter was excited — this could be his only chance to explore the history of Mogao Grottoes, with no other noisy tourists. He might even find some historical treasures! Instantly, Peter searched his dusty backpack and found a torch, a notebook, and a pen. His quest was about to begin!

Peter found a narrow staircase leading to the second floor. Holding his torch, he hurried up the stairs and found himself in a gloomy hall. He wandered around curiously, looking for some clues that might lead to something exceptional. All of a sudden, something caught Peter’s eye — a small mouse scurrying across the hallway. *Squeak, squeak!!* Peter gazed at the mouse, and a sudden thought struck him. *What if the mouse knows the way?*

He started to follow the mouse, but it ran faster and faster... until Peter broke off into a run. The mouse dashed into a tiny mouse hole, the size of a tennis ball! Peter gasped. “Hey! Little mouse, wait up! I can’t fit through that hole!” Magically, the mouse heard Peter. It scampered back out of the mouse hole, carrying a small sheet of parchment. Taking the yellowish paper, Peter read aloud, “*Here is all the information of Mogao Grottoes, containing the most original map that leads to all the secrets and hidden treasures, mysteries, and so much more. Written by Wang Yuanlu, the founder of Mogao Grottoes.*” He turned the paper over. Everything was there!

Peter went to the top level and found something amazing. In front of Peter stood the finest examples of Buddhist art, spanning a period of 1000 years. The statues, structures and models were gigantic. Peter sketched them on his notebook carefully. "This is priceless treasure!" He exclaimed. At the same time, Peter realized that the mouse hole was the place where the founder of Mogao Grottoes chose to hide the secrets.

The little mouse who followed along nodded and smiled at him. Finally, Peter understood his mission. The Buddha wanted him to find the secrets and save the mouse! If that was the case, Peter felt a strong urge that he must take this mouse home... it's too cruel to leave such a smart and adorable creature in this old and dusty place!

Like before, the glowing Buddha picture reappeared. In a split second, Peter pocketed the parchment and scooped up the mouse. *Whoosh!* To Peter's relief, he returned to the future, in the new and polished Mogao Grottoes, packed with noisy tourists. It was great to be back! When he turned to the Buddha picture, it winked at him. Peter beamed and opened his cupped hands. The little mouse peeped its head out, and Peter stroked his fluffy head. When Peter and his new pal saw the small mouse hole among the tourists, they shared a secret smile.

Apsara Acapella

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Yung, Yi Kiu Belle – 11

The caravan of camels plodded across the dusty desert, carrying loads on their backs. “Halt!” shouted Yakshim, a monk who was fleeing from the Monastery of Jaipur. “YAH! I command you to transport me and my followers to China,” he said to the merchant who was shivering with fear. Yakshim was a corrupted monk who had robbed the palace. He also abducted twelve young girls and twelve craftsmen to be his slaves. On the way, he captured six pilgrims who were travelling homeward.

Soon, they saw the silhouette of an oasis in the distance. It disappeared as they came nearer. It was a mirage!

After a tiring journey, they finally reached an oasis. Everyone jumped out to drink the refreshing water and climb the palm trees to pick the dates. What a discovery! Yakshim saw a grotto and entered. To his astonishment, he found numerous caves as he ventured further. That night, they stayed there. The next morning, Yakshim was shocked to see that the merchant and camels were gone.

Yakshim was a hideous monster with bulging eyes like a pair of purple sparks. His yellow teeth were sharp like a shark’s. They held their noses as they walked near Yakshim whose body stank like a skunk and his breath reeked of rotten radishes. He was a brute with no conscience, no scruples, no anything.

Yakshim ordered the young girls and men to perform different tasks. The girls had to grow vegetables, clean the caves, and cook vegan meals. The men had to decorate the caves with colourful paintings, carve statues, and the pilgrims had to write books on Buddhist teachings. The poor slaves worked from day to night and were beaten up by the cruel monk. Dejected and distressed, they longed for freedom and hoped someone could rescue them from the drudgery.

Sita, the most beautiful girl among the slaves, was a singer and dancer who used to entertain the Rajah, the Indian King. She taught the girls traditional Indian songs and dances.

“How could we sing without the sitars, flutes and drums?” they asked.

“We could roll our tongues and purse our lips to make music,” said Sita.

One day, a newcomer arrived, a handsome young man holding a basket full of drawings and paintbrushes. “My name is Mang, I’ve been painting the landscapes of Dunhuang when the evil monk caught me. He commanded me to paint pictures of Buddha to brighten up the caves,” he told the slaves. He showed them the beautiful drawings of the desert wonders: spectacular sand dunes, the magnificent Mingsha Mountains, the crystal clear Crescent Lake, the blazing sunrise and the flaming sunsets.

“They’re gorgeous!” everyone exclaimed. Mang was upset when Yakshim made him paint statues of Buddha on the walls and the ceiling. As agile as a monkey, Mang seemed to clamber up the walls easily. The girls admired him and kept offering to do him favours.

One day, Mang let them in the secret. “Actually, I possess a sack of magic powder given to me by my Master. The magic powder could make me fly high and low.” Everyone was eager to try out the magic powder. Shaking his head and wagging his fingers, Mang refused.

The girls pleaded with Mang every day. “We want fun because it’s so boring here.” Touched by their tears, Mang agreed to help them to fly.

“Seraphims and cherubims have wings. How can we fly without them?” the girls asked.

Winking warily, Mang said “You’ll see.”

Presto! The girls were lifted in the air and felt as light as feathers, swishing and swaying, sashaying their sashes.

Suddenly, they heard a booming sound. “YOO! What’s the hullabaloo?” Yakshim hollered. Quickly, the girls untied their sashes and descended to the ground.

The girls made a plan to escape while Yakshim was sleeping.

“Fly to freedom! Fly from boredom!” “Fly to reunite with our fathers and mothers!” “Fly to reunite with our brothers and sisters!”

Alas! A sandstorm arose and they were engulfed in dusty clouds. They were swept in different directions, battling with a whirl of sand. Coughing and choking, sneezing and wheezing, the girls felt desperate. The prickly sand stung their faces like tiny daggers.

“Help! Let’s return to the grottoes,” they wailed. They pulled their sashes, struggling to fly in the opposite direction.

Sita was sitting on top of a dark cloud, waving farewell to them. “I’ll miss you. I’ll be back in India soon.”

Meanwhile, the slaves were plotting to get rid of Yakshim. They tied him up while he was asleep and Mang splashed the magic powder on his head, hands and legs.

Up, up, up he soared. Awakened, Yakshim was shocked to find himself in mid-air. “YAH! YOO!” he screamed, flinging his arms and kicking furiously.

The slaves doubled up with laughter. In no time, Yakshim vanished in the billowing dust clouds. That night, the slaves celebrated their victory. However, they missed the girls and dreaded they would encounter any danger. To their amazement, they heard the sweet sound of singing as the girls flitted into the caves.

“We’ve decided to stay here forever. Where’s our cruel master?”

“He’s gone forever.”

“He’s become a feast for a brutal beast.”

The grottoes were filled with music and laughter. “We’re a blessed and blissful family.” “Let’s live here forever!” The girls found that the ground was too damp for their liking and moved to sleep on the ceilings. There they remained to adorn the walls of Mogao Grottoes.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Diocesan Preparatory School, Fung, Yat Hei – 11

About 1600 years ago, pilgrims dug many caves, and spent time putting treasure, writing scrolls and building sculptures. They believed in Buddhism and painted a lot of images of the Buddha. One morning, a pilgrim named Granham found out that he does not have any food because he was very poor and lacked money. He went out to work, which was digging caves with an empty stomach. He haven't eaten for two days. His employer was in a really bad mood that day. When he saw Granham digging a hole, he growled, "Would you please speed up? You've been working for an hour and you only dug 1 metre! Stop slacking around!" After an hour, the employer decided to fire him. As Granham left, he realised that he was unemployed and will not have any money. After 2 days, he cried in desperation for food. Suddenly an idea popped up in his head. Since he worked in the caves before, he knows every path and shortcuts inside. He could steal the treasure and sell it!

That night, he was busily planning his evil plan. Legend says one of the treasure holds the secret of Buddhism. Although he did not believe in the Buddha, he still wanted to steal it and sell it. He put on a mask and snuck out. There were two guards guarding the cave, and he used his shovel to hit them on the head. The guards fell down and fainted, while Granham snuck in quietly. He started to regret what he had just done, but he still continued the mission. He knew that it was a bad idea but he told himself that if he turned around, he will starve to death. So, he thought he is dying either way. After some paths and shortcuts, he finally reached the treasure room. He looked around the room and found out that all the treasure inside worth a fortune. There were Buddha sculptures made of gold, some books made out of clean white paper, and some coins next to the Giant Buddha statue. He climbed down the rock wall. Suddenly, his pants ripped open, and echoed through the room. He chuckled to himself, "I guess I haven't bought any new pants for 2 years." He knew his humour came in the most inappropriate times, but the word inappropriate was like the understatement of the century for the situation he was in right then. He slid down the giant Buddha sculpture to get the treasure. He looked around the room and laid eyes on the jewellery first. He shoved a handful of diamonds inside his leather bag. Then, he spotted some books laying beside the rock wall. There were scrolls, books and bamboo strips. "Hmmm," he thought. "So I wonder where is the legendary treasure. It must be a book. Maybe it's in another cave!" He decided to look for it. He noticed that one of the scrolls were sticking out. He pulled it out, and had trouble reading the scroll. WATCH OUT – the scroll says. Suddenly, a chest fell down from the roof and almost hit Granham. Granham opened the chest. It was the legendary treasure! He knew it was a book. The guards started to wake up, and walked in the cave immediately. Granham realised that he was in deep trouble. The guards called for more backup since they thought Granham was holding a dangerous weapon. In fact, he has left his shovel outside the cave. He panicked and ran into a hole next to the giant Buddha statue. The guards came in with bright fire on their torches and warned Graham to come out. One of the guards spotted Granham's leather bag sticking out of the hole, and said that if he doesn't come out, he will throw a torch into the hole and burn him alive. He was kind of spooked out but he believed that the guards would not burn the treasure. He waited and waited but the guards did not leave. He realised that he had to get out one day, because he was losing oxygen in a small hole like that. The guards slept on comfortable hay in front of the hole while Granham was cramped in a tiny space and scared to death. He threw his shoe out to see what will happen, and heard chopping and dicing. The shoe was thrown back into the hole, sliced into tiny bits. On the next day, the guards were still there. He decided to bet his life, and ran out with all his might. The guards instantly chased after him. Because he have not eaten for so long, he was weak, and the guards slowly surpassed him. He threw down his heavy load of jewellery and only took the book. One of the guards tripped over the leather bag and fell down. It gave Granham a speed advantage. He ran out of the cave and is kind of relieved to see the sun again. He thought he'd never make his way out of there alive. A few seconds later, the guards caught up and continued chasing Granham. He ran and ran, waking up all the pilgrims in the village. When the pilgrims had known what happened, they started chasing Granham too, while saying "Stop thief!" He paced around frantically. Even if he can go back home safely, the villagers will still hand him to the guards. He ran into a cliff, while villagers and guards climb up slowly. He realised that he had nowhere else to go, and decided to die by falling. He'd rather die in peace rather being burnt alive. He jumped down with the book and was never found again.

Until now, explorers say that there is a missing piece of Buddhism that may not be revealed ever. They claim that they could not find it. It will remain a mystery forever. Perhaps one day, they would find the book and will know the entire story.

Dunhuang Grottoes

Diocesan Preparatory School, Han, Michael Jude – 10

The Mission to Uncover the Ancient Caves

It was finally time. It was the year 2599, there were almost no more dangers known to mankind, Earth was finally a dream planet, wonderful things that you could only see in fictional stories thrived. Then, the government of the planet allowed 18 people to lead an expedition to discover ancient caves in Dunhuang. Before the explorers embarked on the journey, a legendary seer rumored to be 1000 years old, warned the explorers of the danger of an imposter attempting to hunt them down. The imposter's purpose was to guard and protect the spirits of the dead, for it would not listen to the creators of the grotto, and had a murderous desire to slaughter people who passed by the caves instead of simply driving them away. The imposter refused to listen because he found waiting only to drive people away who come too close to the grottoes was too dull, so he decided to take it one step beyond and murder innocent people near the ancient caves. After hearing the news about the imposter, four explorers were too frightened to continue with the journey and turned around. The remaining 14 traveled together to the ancient grottoes.

When the expedition team voyaged to the Dunhuang caves, they entered through one of the caves leading deep into the mountain. They soon came upon Cave 17, also known as the Library Cave, which contains all of the ancient manuscripts of the builders of the grottoes. One of the explorers accidentally stepped on a hidden button which, revealed a dark and mysterious tunnel leading deep underground. The surveyor was startled by the howls of the dead. He was scared and spooked, and out of panic, stepped on a button. The other seekers searched for secret entrances. They were relieved when an entrance was revealed to them and organized a plan to gather courage and enough lanterns to travel down the tunnel. As they went down, the door shut firmly behind them. The explorers knew that it was the spirits of the dead builders.

The explorers kept venturing forward, and soon enough, they finally saw the light. To their surprise, it was the ancient builders' graveyards. Legend has it that on the first and second day of November, the spirits of the dead builders of Dunhuang Grottoes would come back to life to haunt anyone that comes close to the caves in an attempt to protect their treasures and manuscripts. There were still more tunnels leading deep underground, and the explorers sensed they were very close to bedrock level. Suddenly, the Library Cave tunnel roof collapsed, blocking the way to the surface. Luckily, there were pickaxes and shovels on the ground, most likely left by grave builders during construction. The explorers could utilize these tools to dig their way back to the surface. One of the tunnels led to a giant Buddha shrine, which held power to summon Poseidon, god of the seas. All that was needed to summon him was an ancient artifact made by one of the earliest builders of the Dunhuang Grottoes.

Then, the imposter finally revealed himself. A tall and skinny man with red and blue hair, blood dripping from his eyes and mouth, and a creepy smile sprawled across his face. With a violent swing, the imposter chopped off the heads of several explorers, leaving only ten alive. The remaining tried to fight back with their tools while one went back to find the ancient artifact. This particular explorer had to dig in the graves because the artifact was buried with the monk who created the legendary item. The item looked like a tiny yellow man with green and blue eyes, short arms, and curly legs, and holding a magical staff in his left hand. After some treacherous work, the explorer brought the artifact up. He tactfully avoided the imposter's attacks and suppressed the anxieties caused by the spine-chilling howls of the dead builders. Poseidon came to life with the artifact carefully placed and lightning striking the ancient shrine. With a deafening shriek, the imposter was gone, and Poseidon disappeared. However, a deep voice that befitted the voice of the water lord boomed, "You are welcome for saving you. Do not worry. You will not have to return the favor." After mining through rocks blocking the exit, the remaining men re-emerged from underground with their mission finally complete.

Legend has it that the entrance to the graveyard remains sealed after the explorers left. However, the imposter and the spirits continue to haunt anyone that comes too close to the grotto

Mogao and Grottoes

Discovery Bay International School, Jayal, Mrinalini – 10

Hundreds of years ago in the northern part of China, there was a cave in the middle of dense woods. A troop of soldiers were resting there after a very long day at the battlefield, some of them were injured yet full of energy.

Amongst them there were two brave soldiers, Mogao and Grottoes, they were very good friends and fearless soldiers, “Mogao , Grottoes, how did you both get so close ? ” asked a soldier.

Mogao was very good at horse riding and Grottoes was good at archery. Both grinned at each other and started their story.

“When we were young, we both used to live in the southern part of China. There we would practice our hobbies in the afternoon. Grottoes used to go to the woods daily to practice” Mogao said.

“One day I went to the same woods. I did not practice archery but I did practice horse riding. The very first day I went into the woods I went deep inside while riding my horse. I was really not expecting to see a panther coming towards me. I was so frightened I turned numb and could not move ,but unexpectedly an arrow wounded the panther. The arrow was shot by none other than Grottoes. When I got my voice back, I thanked him. And you know, when a person just saves your life you cannot help but become friends with him and after that day onwards we were friends. We had a short conversation about our names and hobbies after that.”Mogao said.

“This is not the only reason we both are friends,” said Grottoes. “I was not the only one who saved someone’s life,” he added. “After a few years we both were chosen as warriors. In one of the battles my horse got wounded and I rolled off it. Mogao drove his horse towards me and the very next second, I was on his horse. He saved my life as well and we became best friends.”

Preparing themselves for the next day, everyone wished each other good night and drifted off to sleep.

Next day the battle ended, with a triumph. Many soldiers had lost their lives, amongst them were Mogao and Grottoes.

Both of them had fought fearlessly and defeated the enemies. When the rest of the troop got to know about their sacrifice, they named the cave where they spent the previous night as ‘Mogao Grottoes’. The ‘Mogao Grottoes’ is still present in silk road Dunhang , China and now is a memorial of two brave warriors who fought selflessly for their kingdom.

The Continue of Mogao Grottoes

Discovery Bay International School, Tasli, Oyku – 10

The secrets of the international scholar caves have Lead people to the treasures and a key to a very special castle. The travellers have heard the news they were on their way to the treasures. But there were only 3 people looking for the treasures so let's see who will get the awesome prize. Once upon a time there were 3 people called Sparkle, Silly and Willy.

They were all 10 years old. One time Willy decided to open the tv to watch cartoon films but when he opened it was news in front of him. Sparkle said close these news it is boring but they heard the treasure thing. They were super excited since their mom was outside and their dad was at work they had an idea!! They packed their stuff and headed to the treasure. But Silly said but we don't have the map. They were so sad . Until they found a book that was sparkling it was something important I think said Sparkle. They opened the book and saw a map. Is there a ghost here that brought us this said Willy. Let's go now!! Said Silly. Ok! Said Sparkle. They headed to the treasure. In the map there were a lot of clues. The first one said find a boat that leads you to the key. What key said Silly. Maybe a key that opens the treasure. Oh maybe there is a sea really close to our house. Maybe it is there, said Sparkle. They headed there and there was a boat !!! They went in and there was a pirate. He said what are you doing here. We are here for the treasure. Omg you are here for the treasure. Yes they all said. Let's go to find the key. The pirate knew where the key was. Ok I will lead you guys there . They were soooooo happy. After They arrived at a forest. Where here said Sparkle let's go. After they said bye to the pirate they headed to the treasure. But there was a mistake when they saw that the treasure was under the ground. Oh no. But there was a clue that said go look at the back of the trees. They looked for hours for the clue they found it. It was a shovel so they could dig. The map said dig next to the tree that says Mogao Grottoes. They looked and looked and looked and they found it. It said to dig underground next to the tree they found a gold treasure. OMG they said at the same time. They opened the treasure without a key. There was a key inside. The map said you found it that leads you to a very special castle. They went home and showed their mom. Their mom was so happy. That was the end of a really great adventure.

Tale Of The Abandoned Caves

Discovery Bay International School, Wong, Liann – 11

This story takes place thousands and thousands of years ago when the goddesses and buddhas still roamed the world—

Beads of sweat were running down from his head, he was tired and so was his dog Lotus. After miles and miles of walking, they finally came across a luscious and stunningly flourish patch of green in the distance... ‘Alas’ he thought, ‘shade, and maybe water’. He found a small shallow river flowing from a pond and immediately drank. Just as he finished drinking, he noticed that there was a little river flowing from where he was drinking. So he decided to explore. “Where are you going?” Moaned the old man, they had already been walking for twenty minutes and the sun was setting upon the mountains of sand. “We have to stop here Lotus, it’s getting dark.” Declared Lotus’ owner. Soon after their slumber, the old man woke up at dusk as the sun awakened behind the dunes of sand. The pair ate some nuts and drank some water and they were off. When they arrived at an end to the river, they looked up and discovered that they had reached an end and were standing in front of a colossal wall of rocks. There was a temple in front of the wall of rocks and was decorated with statues of goddesses and buddhas. As the pair entered, the old man felt a gust of wind swirl around him making him shiver. They came across a room with paintings, pots, gold and jewelry all over the place, dust, words and pictures drawn on the walls and cobwebs covered them. It felt, ‘*Abandoned*’. The old man stared at all the glory surrounding him, imagining how rich he would become with all these treasures. And so, he moved on down the echoing hall. He reached another spacious room filled with sculptures and pictures of buddhas. Then, he went back to the room with treasures, gold and more. ‘Maybe, the gods won't mind if I take a piece of gold or two he thought. And so, his hand and trembling to reach the gold ingots. The gold ingot felt cold as he brushed off the dust and grime of it. Then he realized that there was a marking carved on the front “Let’s go now, Lotus.” Instsited the man. Just as they headed out the entrance, the old man heard thunder roar behind them...

“Where do you think you're going?” Boomed a voice behind them. The old man turned around shaking. He was standing in front of a statue that he had seen in the treasury room, it somehow came to life and was talking. “What are you doing here?” The statue roared again. The old man was in trouble... “Uh, nothing, definitely not trying to take one of your treasures!” Stammered the man. “Not so fast,” Demanded the statue. “You are coming with me.” With that, he pulled the man and Lotus into a dungeon. Never to be seen or heard again...

The Secret of the Mogao Grottoes

Discovery Mind Primary School, Davis, Jayden – 9

International archeologists exploring the Mogao grottoes cave found this creepy story. It was found in a small box, guarding the entrance

Once upon a time in a village of the Mogao Grottoes, a few children were playing catch. A girl threw the ball to a boy. But the boy couldn't catch it. The ball rolled into an old cave behind them. The boy ran into the cave to get the ball. As soon as he entered, he heard a scary voice, "Leave this place and never come here again," screeched the voice. The boy was terrified. He quickly grabbed the ball and ran for his life.

The word spread about the spooky voice in the cave and a world-famous explorer named Tad heard it. He decided to investigate the mystery. He traveled all the way from America and spent days looking for the Mogao Grottoes caves. He thought about the mystery of the spooky voice and what it was hiding. He was looking forward to the new discovery and that it would make him world famous in the world.

Tad finally arrived at the cave. He slowly walked inside the dark and gloomy cave. At first, he felt nothing strange. But when he got inside, it was not dark or scary like the rumors said. Instead, as he walk deeper inside, he uncovered a golden, bright, and stunning temple! It was made of gold and had many statues of Buddha and other gods. It was nothing like he had seen before." Why was it here? Who built this? Tad wondered?" Why was this a secret for all these years?

As he walked through the temple, he heard voices. "Leave at once or die!" screeched the voice. As Tad continued walking, he saw a Misty figure appear. He was stunned. The misty figure was all white and had no face. It started chasing Tad. Tad ran and ran but the figure kept chasing him. Thankfully Tad found a corner and he hid there. Inside a glass bowl in the corner, Tad saw something shining. It was a golden ball; it was shining so brightly that it blinded Tad. He took it and put it in his pocket. Tad thought he could figure out what it was when he finally escapes from this cave. He ran as fast as he could to the exit, but the figure stopped him.

The figure locked the exit of the cave with a boulder that only a 500-soldier army could open. Tad was trapped. Tad asked in a shaky voice, "Why are you chasing me and who are you?" The figure said, "I was once a Monk who came to this cave to meditate. While I was here, I found a golden ball. I uncovered the secret of the ball, as I wished for a golden temple in the cave while holding the ball. The ball is a magical wishing ball. I knew it could destroy the world if it got in the wrong hands. So, I wished that I would become a ghost after I die and protect the secret of the Mogao Grottoes and the magic ball."

Tad did not believe the ghost at first, he realized that he had a ball too. He decided to test if the figure was telling the truth. He wished that he would be able to see the people outside this cave in front of him. Then he saw a strange vision of people outside a big cave, he realized they were the people outside. Tad understood that the ball he had was the ghost's ball. He also knew the ball could do harm if it got into the wrong hands. Tad gave the ball to the Ghost and promised that he would keep this spooky and creepy experience a secret. The ghost removed the enormous boulder and let Tad go free.

Tad left this story here for the secret ball of the Mogao grottoes of the Mogao Grottoes. But he knew he had to do the right thing for the ghost. He kept his word to the Ghost and never spoke a word about the secrets just he uncovered. It would remain a secret forever and ever.

The Story of the Cursed Boat

Discovery Mind Primary School, Leung, Jenson – 9

Once upon a time, a witch bought a boat but she put a curse on the boat and sold it to a merchant called Huang. Huang's greatest wish was to be wealthy. Huang went aboard the boat and sailed off to Rome. While sailing to Rome, Huang discovered gold and jewels in the boat's storeroom. He thought he was now abundantly rich and wanted to go back home.

The sailor onboard agreed, but only if Huang gave him a share of the money. Huang agreed to give him only a fifth of the share. The sailor agreed to this. Both men didn't know that the gold in the room was cursed. A leak sprang in the boat and it began to sink. Huang had an idea. He collected some wooden planks and hammered the wooden planks over the leak.

Unfortunately, the wooden planks didn't stop the leak. He decided to collect barrels. He fetched a wooden chest and put all of the gold and diamonds into the wooden chest. He collected more wooden planks. Next, he got 10 fishing rods, some cloth, and a wooden stick. He then attached the rope to the two wooden sticks. He then attached the cloth to the L-shaped sticks. Then he attached it in such a way that it made a raft. Then He gathered all of the food in the kitchen and put it in another wooden chest.

Huang and the crew jumped on the raft. Huang fell into a deep sleep. One day later, the crew woke Huang with a stick and said that all of the gold had the number '4' imprinted onto it!

In ancient China, people believed the number 4 was unlucky because death and four nearly sounded the same. When they reached the harbor, they discovered they were in Iran. Soon the police came and Huang told them to go back to the raft. Two days later they arrived at a village. On the top of the village, there was a farm. Huang told the crew to go to the house on the farm and ask them for food.

They went to the house and knocked on the door, then they waited. After a while, he was surprised to see his friend open the door. He was invited inside where he saw a feast piled on the table and his friends were all there. He explained his journey to his friends, telling them of his misfortune and how he had ended up here.

After they ate lunch, Huang's friend gave Huang a small chest of coins. Huang told them he didn't need the chest of coins and that he needed some food instead. His friends gave him enough food to last for a few days.

Huang made his way down the hill back to the raft. He sailed to an island with a hill on it where Huang asked the crew to dock the raft. He found a cave on the hill. Deep inside the cave, there lived a dragon.

The dragon woke up and Huang ran away. When he ran down the hill to get to the raft, he stumbled over a hard object. He looked closer and saw that it was a diamond! He put the large diamond into his bag. The crew escaped the dragon and sailed off to India. A rich woman met the crew at the harbor in Delhi. She was kind and sheltered them. Two days later, she organized him yurts from Mongolia to bring him back to China.

Three days later when the crew reached Vietnam, they saw rice paddies. After that, they arrived in Beijing. While in Beijing, Huang gave the diamond to a large diamond wholesaler and offered him lots of money and Huang was finally rich!

The Golden Tiger

Discovery Mind Primary School, Lorraine, Apple – 10

Over a millennia ago, before the stars existed, there was once a village near the roaring flames of the sun called Lao-Hu. The reason it was called Lao-Hu was because of a legend surrounding their sacred grounds; the Mogao Caves. It was believed that a tiger would come and heal any villagers that became sick or hurt, but when two sisters were born nobody believed this myth anymore as the sister's mother had died after giving birth. She had not been healed by the tiger. The children were with their grandmother and she named the children Ai Lung and Shi Lung.

One day, their grandmother fell so ill that she could barely eat, talk and walk. The sisters sought help from the village doctor, who gave them many herbs and medicines, but these never helped her get better. They even went to the neighboring village but the medicine from there didn't work. That night, Ai Lung and Shi Lung had stayed next to each other with their grandmother, hoping she would get better. Then a thought came into their heads, they remembered a story their grandmother had once told them.

Their grandmother told them about the golden tiger. She described that the tiger was 6 feet tall and had eyes so bright they were like pure blue crystal. The tiger's skin was glimmering gold, it was so shiny you couldn't even stare at it for long or your eyes would burn. The fangs were sharper than the sharpest thing in the world and were the colour of silver. The tiger's paws were so silent you couldn't even hear him coming.

Ai Lung and Shi Lung began to plan their visit to the Mogao Caves. They packed some mooncakes for a snack and a lantern to guide them. "That's the only thing we're going to pack, because we can't carry too much, can we?" whispered Ai Lung. They crept out of the house and made sure no one was watching them, by being vigilant. The path going there was steep because of rocks protruding out of the broken stone pathway. The further they walked, the smaller the village seemed and the windier it became. Finally, they reached their destination, panting heavily.

The Mogao Caves structure was incredibly beautiful and had amazing architecture. The sisters gaped at the building like hungry crows before something caught their eye. A figure of light was walking through the bushes, every step glowing light as it moved. The sisters both stayed as still as statues as they realized it was the tiger walking through the heavy doors of the cave. Suddenly, the tiger grinned and lightly smirked, "I can see you through the dark, you know?" The tiger then disappeared into the cave.

The sisters followed the tiger into the cave and watched his golden tail lighting the way. The golden tiger didn't see them because he was more focused on the crystalline embroidery guiding his steps. Ai Lung made sure they were as quiet as mice, balancing on their toes. Then, Ai Lung heard a loud crack, she turned around to see her sister stepping on a heavy branch that had fallen and blown into the cave. Ai Lung stared at her sister in shock. Shi Lung was saying something, but the sisters had ducked under a red carpet above the embroidery. The tiger swung around and surveyed the area.

The sisters stayed very silent until the tiger had turned and walked away. They leapt out of hiding and rushed to where the tiger was. To their surprise, he stood still. All of a sudden, a shining, purple light blinded them, causing them to stumble. When they woke up, they saw lots of glowing, colorful bottles; filled with strange liquid substances. They couldn't move, because there was a strange bright orange bubble covering them. Eventually, they saw the tiger standing only on two paws brewing a multicolored liquid.

Both Ai Lung and Shi Lung stared at him in fear. The tiger had long and sharp teeth that looked like they would bite you if you weren't looking. The skin of the tiger was bright gold, it blinded them again and his eyes were glistening like a pale, blue moon. The tiger walked closer and closer, slowly moving to them. The sisters were terrified of the tiger itself. They both closed their eyes, hoping this was a dream and they fell asleep next to grandma. They opened their eyes to find the tiger was looking at them.

"Hello, you two, it's so wonderful to meet you, my name is Ha Lung," quipped the tiger. "Wait...Ha Lung? Isn't that our ancestor's name?" Questioned the sisters in unity. "Yes, it is true, I am your ancestor. I was hoping I could

save your mother, but I wouldn't just walk out and pretend I haven't been there for a thousand years and heal her." murmured the tiger. "This is all I can do to apologize for being late. "He then took out a glowing elixir, giving it to them, "Take this, it will heal all the infections and diseases she has in her body, but hurry, soon she will wake up and die trying to find you," the tiger stated. They ran out of the passageway watching their ancestor looking at them. The cold winds grew harsh and it felt like they were going to freeze. Ai Lung grabbed her sister's hand and quickly ran to their cottage in the village. They had made it in time and quietly sat next to their grandma. Shi Lung poured the potion into their grandmother's mouth, patiently waiting for her to awaken. They heard a silent muffle and turned to see their grandmother, curiously peering at them. "Am I alive?" she asked. Both sisters ran to hug their grandmother. "We met our ancestor" they both cried in unison. "We will be eternally grateful to him."

The Girl from Mogao

Discovery Mind Primary School, Pillay, Manha – 9

A long time ago, there was a girl called Mogava living on a farm in Mogao. She lived with her mean older sister in a hut near a beautiful botanical forest and some large old caves. Her sister was lazy and kept telling Mogava to do all the housework. Mogava's sister would not do anything, she would only lie in bed all day and rest. One day when Mogava went out to fetch a pot of water from the clean lake near the botanical forest in order to make her sister some tea. Suddenly, Mogava tripped on a big sharp rock! The rock rolled onto its side into the grass and pushed against a hidden, olive colored, round button. Mogava was standing near the large caves, but the cave's entrance had never opened, it was as though they were glued shut. But now they were opening to reveal a brown desk and chair. Mogava thought that she would come the following day and have a closer look at the intriguing desk.

The following day, Mogava woke up extra early to go to the caves. There were different things on the table: old books, poems, art and art supplies. Mogava picked up a drawing and scanned it with her eyes. She turned the paper over to see if there was a signature or some more information about the artist. She was surprised to see that there was! 'Zhao MengFu, Eight Horses, 25/6/1368'. Mogava was very curious.

When Mogava arrived home later, her sister was sitting on the couch. Mogava was surprised because the furthest her sister ever walked was from her bed to the kitchen in order to get snacks. The kitchen was right outside her room! She fiercely asked Mogava, "Where were you?"

Mogava calmly replied, "On a morning walk. It's a new habit of mine. Wake up bright and early in the morning, maybe even catch some fresh air, clear my mind and basically enjoy myself." Although in real life Mogava was going to the caves.

"Fine, it must be so lame anyway," said Mogava's sister. The next day, when Mogava visited the caves, she decided to name the caves, The Mogao Grottoes which means, in Mogava's language, 'ancient historical caves'. She took some black paint and a paintbrush and painted the new cave name on the wall. When she got home, she was covered in black paint and that's when Mogava's sister started to become suspicious.

The following day, when Mogava was just about to leave, her sister came running out of her bedroom wearing green. "What are you doing?" asked Mogava.

"Some Yoga," replied her sister. But Mogava's sister was actually following her! When Mogava was approaching the cave, she heard some rustling near the bushes. Mogava thought it was the wind as there was a slight breeze in the air. Mogava became suspicious as her sister would always arrive home after Mogava. Mogava's sister said that she was going for a run, but Mogava didn't believe that. Two weeks after her sister started doing this, Mogava realized what was happening and spotted her sister behind a bush. The following day, Mogava had set a trap at the exact same bush her sister hid at and it worked! Mogava heard a thump. She walked over to the bush and saw her sister caught in the trap. She made her sister admit what she had done. When she told the truth, Mogava helped her get out of the trap and go home. Mogava's sister was so embarrassed and ashamed of what she had done. She had learnt her lesson!

Moral: The moral of the story is what you put out into the world will always come back to you.

The Identity of a King

Discovery Mind Primary School, Shetty, Thea – 10

Hundreds of years ago, there was a nomadic tribe in Mongolia. One day when they were in the Gobi desert, they stopped to rest near a cliff face. The tribal chief looked at the sun and saw that it was about to set. He told the others they could spend the night there. The next morning, the tribe got up early to look for an oasis so they could have some fresh water and food. The chief told a person named Wang to look after the livestock while they were away. Soon the rest of the tribe set off in search of the oasis. A long time passed and there was no sign of the Chief and the rest of the tribesmen. While Wang was taking care of the livestock, a restless young mare started running around. It ran through a gaping hole in the cliff!

Wang secured the rest of the livestock and ran after the young mare. The hole was just the right size for him. Once inside, he found the mare kicking at a painting on the wall with its hooves. Wang decided to have a look around. The cave was filled with beautiful works of art. There were sculptures, paintings and murals of kings, apsaras, Buddha and the Silk Road. Wang was awestruck he had never seen anything like this before! Suddenly the mare ran off again, deeper into the cave and entering a second cave. This time it stopped in front of a painting. Wang ran towards it. He looked at the painting the mare was standing in front of, something was very strange about it. It was a painting of four men who looked like the king's advisors and there was a throne in the middle which was empty! The mare looked excited and jumped into the painting! Wang just stared, he couldn't believe his eyes! Without a second thought, he too jumped into the painting. There he saw the four advisors he had seen before; he was about to ask them if they had seen his mare but then he saw it running towards him. One of the men asked him, "May I know your name?" Wang responded saying "I am Wang".

The advisors told him the following story:

"A long time ago, when the king was young, he was to be married to the most beautiful girl in the kingdom. A day before the wedding, a shaman came knocking on the castle doors. She said it was urgent and she had important news to give to the king and his future was at stake. She was taken to the throne room where the king was in discussion with his advisors. She marched towards the king and stood in front of him with a stern face. The king, though taken by surprise, knew of her strange powers and hence allowed this interruption and asked everyone to leave.

The shaman told the king he should marry her and not the other woman and by doing so he would be the most powerful king. Hours passed and the king still refused to change his mind. The shaman stomped her feet in rage then she took a bottle which contained a yellow gold liquid. She poured the liquid in her hand and splashed droplets all over the king while chanting a spell. The king cried out for help. The advisors and guards came running into the room but it was too late the shaman had disappeared and the king was shaking violently. Suddenly, he was surrounded by a vortex of cherry blossoms and he vanished leaving only petals on the floor which formed the shape of a mare."

Now while the advisors were telling the story the mare was standing near Wang the whole time as if listening. Wang looked at it and asked "is this mare the missing king?" He asked the advisors how to turn the mare back to the king. They gave him a scroll which had a map on it; which would lead them to the potion to break the spell and bring back the king. Wang took some food and water and then set off with the mare.

The mare and Wang were almost at the place where the potion was. They were climbing a steep hill, and on top of the hill was the potion. Finally after a day of climbing they reached the top. There they saw a small cave inside it was the bubbling potion in a huge pot. Wang took a bottle and filled it with the potion. Next he looked for the book of spells which he found hidden under the rocks. They headed back to the castle as the advisors had told him the spell would break only if the mare drank the potion at the place where it turned its form from human to animal.

They arrived at the castle and everyone was eagerly awaiting their return. The advisors took Wang and the mare to the throne room where they opened the book of spells and started reading it while Wang made the mare drink the

potion. Suddenly, the mare was surrounded by a vortex of petals and when it settled, they saw their king smiling back at them. The king and the advisors thanked Wang and bid goodbye after rewarding him with huge bags filled with exotic food.

When Wang returned to the Gobi desert, he saw his tribe waiting for him. They all welcomed him wondering where all the food came from and were eager to know about the mysterious Mogao caves!

Finding the Lost Statue

Discovery Mind Primary School, Strelow, Luiz – 9

A long time ago, a few explorers were walking in the Dunhuang Province in China searching for loot and several other useful items. When they arrived at the Silk Road, there was a very large cave right in front of them. After a few minutes, they stepped foot into the pitch black cave. The explorers lit up their torches and went deeper inside the magical cave.

After walking inside the cave, the explorers saw a locked door. The tallest explorer grabbed his lock picking set and started to unlock the door. The door creaked as it slowly opened and revealed a massive statue of a golden Buddha, it was so shiny that the whole room lit up. They also found gold coins, paintings on the wall and ancient scrolls. They took one scroll and left the cave.

The sun was setting and it was getting dark so the explorers started walking all the way back to their camp. At camp, they discussed the golden statue and wondered why it was made. They thought and thought but they couldn't figure out why. They turned to the scroll and searched for the information. The information said that it was built by people called Monks who built them because they believed in a god called Buddha.

The explorers decided that it was enough information for the day, and went to bed, sleeping silently below the beautiful night sky. In the middle of the night one of the explorers heard a horse riding outside and people talking outside their camp, but it did not worry him. The following morning, the explorers went back to the cave with more information than they had ever known. When they arrived there, something was strange, it felt emptier. When they came across the locked door, the golden statue had disappeared. They were confused, shocked and extremely scared that someone might have taken the statue away. The explorer that heard the horse at night said that maybe the people on the horse took the statue away. After they left the caves, they saw marks of horse footprints, human footprints and a lot of sand. The explorers followed the trails until they reached a village with a lot of people.

The explorers asked the people if they had seen a horse. A few of them had seen the horse. One of the villagers said that they were carrying something golden on the horse. This made the explorers highly suspicious about the horse. Most of the people were awake outside their houses and the explorers were told that one of the villagers saw a horse with the Buddha galloping towards the South-East.

They went back to camp and took their chariot and started driving South-East. The drive took eight hours and forty minutes to get to Chengdu. They continued asking people if they had seen a horse. The explorers saw more pandas than horses in Chengdu. Almost everyone said they did not see a horse, and the campers went to an inn and slept there for two nights.

After they had breakfast, they hit the road again to continue their search. They drove a short distance before reaching Chongqing. They asked more and more people and thankfully most of them had seen a young horse with something golden. They now knew to keep an eye out for a young horse!

After three days in Chongqing, the explorers saw a young horse! They immediately got into their chariot and started driving behind the horse. They drove for twelve hours nonstop on a long road and finally took a break, the place they were in was Dongguan. The town was large and crowded and full of street markets. They waited behind the horse and saw the Buddha, shining as brightly as it had in the caves. The horse started to move towards the exit of Dongguan. It was heading to Hong Kong. The explorers climbed onto their chariot and continued following the horse, they drove for a long time. The explorers were keen to get the Buddha back to Dunhuang. Once they reached Hong Kong, they found themselves in Central. There were many wet markets, farms, trading routes and of course horses.

They traveled for a short while before beginning their search of the Buddha, and where it might be going. One of the explorers looked at the scroll and started searching for information. They found two areas after searching, one of them was the Ten Thousand Buddhas' Monastery situated in Tai Wai and the other one was Ngong Ping on Lantau Island. The explorers saw on the map that the Ten Thousand Buddhas' place was closer to them, and decided to go. At the Ten Thousand Buddhas, they searched for a long time to find the golden Buddha from the Mogao Caves, but they were unlucky because every single Buddha was golden! This confused the explorers and they left for Ngong Ping.

At Ngong Ping they couldn't believe their eyes when they saw the Buddha. They sneakily took the Buddha. They drove all the way back to Dongguan, Chengdu and finally arrived at their camp. The explorers felt proud and excited. After having a small feast in celebration, they headed off to the Mogao Caves. When they arrived there, the explorers parked their chariot and pushed the heavy twenty five kilogram Buddha back into its original spot filled with gold and other valuables. They looked at the golden statue once again before they headed out of the cave.

When they exited the magical caves, they saw a person, not an ordinary person, but a monk! The monk turned around and started cheering and dancing. Soon after, more monks started to cheerfully dance. The explorers were proud of themselves, they had restored the golden Buddha to its rightful place! The beautiful treasures of the cave remained untouched and sacred, waiting for future explorers to discover its secrets in the years to come.

The Golden Apple

Discovery Mind Primary School, Yio, Chen Yi – 9

I have carved on this wall a story about a particular day. There is a secret that lies in this cave and if you find it, it shouldn't be revealed to anyone. It is more precious than all the gold in the world. Now I will tell you the story.

It was a hot summer's day and everyone was breaking their backs on the rice fields. Everyone on the field wanted to earn more silver but I was there because I believed that if you worked hard you could be sent to the gods. After coming home, I was exhausted. On the bright side, I earned two silver and gold ingots.

Suddenly, the king's guards came in and told me that the king had a problem. The king always makes me solve his problems because I'm the most trusted person in this kingdom. The king had strange thoughts and always wanted me to solve the problems he thought about. I expected this to be another bizarre problem but it was much more serious this time. The king had been robbed! I came to discover that the king had indeed been robbed quite a number of times!

I embarked upon a journey to find the thief. I walked for ten hours until I saw the thief. I found him in the forest and he ran away but The Yellow River had flooded, causing the bridge that was meant to bring us across the river to become unusable. The thief became confused and I soon caught him. I saw a gold glint in his bag and removed the glistening object. It was a golden apple that was as bright as the sun.

All of a sudden, the thief disappeared but a Buddha appeared in front of me. The Buddha told me to take a bite of the golden apple. I took a bite and my skin felt like stone and I felt stronger than before. The Buddha told me the apple would make me immortal. I immediately knew the apple could be dangerous so I hid it in the cave I had carved this piece of writing in.

A few days later, I went outside and the village was in chaos. I knew the news of the apple had spread beyond the village. Now the tribesmen were trying to take the golden apple by force. I wanted to protect the apple and when I reached it, I had an idea. I stuffed the apple into my mouth and tried to run out but I was stuck! I couldn't do anything! I seemed to have turned to a stone statue.

It took a while to get used to being a statue but I realised I could move items using my mind. I started to carve pieces of writing all around the cave. I thought my role was very important because I was guarding the golden apple that was in my stomach.

The Mogao Caves

ESF Bradbury School, Chau, Dante— 10

The Mogao caves, also known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, were built by 366 AD, and then slowly forgotten. In 1990, they were rediscovered by a Chinese monk, Wang Yuanlu. He had a vision of a thousand Buddhas on the cliff face, and thus, that's where it got its name. It was a network of an enormous 500 temples. Moreover, they were really worshipped in the Sui and Tang Dynasties.

The Secrets of the Mogao Caves

From behind the scenes, the Mogao Caves can date back historical events that happened in the far past, as there are thousands of statues and paintings of long past occurrences. One of these paintings is from the late Tang Dynasty, another is in the 9th century, and yet another is about Buddha etc. These paintings and statues are relatively important because they can help archaeologists a lot to investigate the evolution of Buddhist art in a region in China. The highest quality of the paintings and writings dated back to the Tang dynasty.

Recent Discoveries of the Mogao Caves

There are secrets discovered constantly in the Mogao Caves. Carefully tiled, paintings and sculptures lure through this cave. However, recently, scientists discovered that not only paintings and statues dwell, and even faded pieces of writing as well. What I mean by “faded” is that they are not visible to the naked eye, and hence, highly developed technology is necessary. The writing was used in different writing techniques – actually materials. They are used in different pigments, and as inferred, they are made in different times as more ways of writing have developed. The pieces of writing can explain the different ways of astronomy imaging, machine learning procedures etc. From these pieces of writing, we can learn about the previous techniques of processing and machinery.

The Stories of the Mogao Caves

Stories written and drawn in the Mogao caves are just outstandingly brilliant. A variety of people have traveled here to add paintings, sculptures and pieces of writing. There are also stories that are told and written mysteriously on the walls of the caves. But, the written stories' authors remain unknown and anonymous.

Teachings of Mogao Caves

What the Mogao caves can teach us are from pictures, paintings, structures and pieces of writing. From these, we can clarify facts. Most of these revolved around Buddhist art. They also did narrative and Sutra paintings. The paintings explain the ways of life in the current time when the painting(s) and writing were made, such as politics, religion, economics, culture etc. The writing was about narrative legends, Buddha and such. It serves a similar purpose to paintings and pictures. A cluster of statues are scattered within this cave. The statues are replicas of different Buddhist gods and had very specific expressions.

As you can see, the Mogao Cave is an extremely fascinating destination for everybody to admire. It lived for thousands of years and still remains important and inspiring today. Hundreds of scientists and archaeologists travel long distances to just investigate this vast canvas.

The Secret Land in Mogao Grottoes

ESF Bradbury School, Tsang, Emma – 9

The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes, is a heritage. One day, a little girl called Emily was visiting Mogao Grottoes with her family, including her fraternal twin sister (Chelsea), their father (Wester), their stepmom (Tina), and Clacity, their elder stepsister. Tina and Clacity hated Emily at the first sight for no reason, they scolded her as if she was a slave and made her do all the chores when their father was away for work. Chelsea dared not to confront with her stepmom and stepsister, but when they were not aware, she would sneakily help Emily out.

When Emily and her family reached Mogao Grottoes, they went in the biggest cave crowded with people. Suddenly, the floor started to shake and rumble, the Buddha woke up from its bed and said loudly with an echo, “Hello people!” A thousand gasps filled the cave. The Buddha continued, “Today I will take three people on an amazing journey to a secret land!” Lots of people raised their hands up high in the sky. Tina and Clacity even wiggled their hands and snapped their thumbs and fingers to grab the Buddha’s attention.

The Buddha first pointed at Chelsea and said “Well, I’m picking you.” Chelsea jumped up high in the sky and shouted “Hooray!” Next the Buddha beckoned Emily and Wester over. Emily looked down at the floor as she walked calmly over to Chelsea, but deep inside her heart, she was leaping so high that she almost touched the sky! Tina scowled at the Buddha “Why would you choose Emily? She’s a brat!” Not a single sound was to be heard, the Buddha said solemnly, “Maybe you are mistaken, madam, I can see that it’s the opposite way around though!” Tina’s face turned as red as a pepper and her eyes almost popped out! Emily walked closer to the Buddha and whispered to the Buddha’s ear. After that, the Buddha said again “I will bring you and that lady beside you, because Emily begged me to bring you two along.” Tina crossed her arms and murmured something into Clacity’s ear, she didn’t even feel thankful for Emily and the Buddha.

Following the Buddha, Emily and her family one by one squeezed through a narrow passage. The Buddha started, “Well, here is a secret passage to the caves underground with more hidden treasures, paintings and lots more!” The click of the Buddha’s fingers opened a secret passage behind one of the sculptures.

Everyone’s (except for the Buddha) heart was pounding with happiness and their soul started dancing as they entered the secret entrance, and Emily tapped her chin and questioned, “So, did the Monks make all these sculptures? What about the paintings and the treasures?” The Buddha praised Emily, “That’s an incredible question! Yes, the Monks made all the sculptures and paintings. The treasures are both from Ancient China and Europe because the Monks used to travel along Silk Road and collected the valuables.”

Tina and Clacity’s eyes went wide open when they saw the shimmering golden jewels and precious gemstones with ruby, emerald and blue diamond. Emily focused on the paintings and sculptures. A sculpture that looked like a snake with four legs and shimmering scales caught her eye and she asked the Buddha, “What is this creature?” The Buddha said, “This is a dragon which symbolizes the emperor and power. Together with the tortoise, phoenix and qilin, they are the four sacred animals of Ancient Chinese tradition.” The Buddha told the animals to introduce themselves and some Ancient Chinese heroes who risked their lives to save China. Emily’s jaw dropped open when she saw the animals came to life and talk. However, Tina and Clacity were not interested at all and just rolled their eyes and kept yawning.

As they moved on, Emily covered her mouth and gasped when she saw the magnificent paintings, so she asked the Buddha what they represented. Suddenly, the Buddha teleported them to the past where the Monks were doing the paintings. The Monks explained to Emily that paintings were mostly about Buddhism and told them the tales of the merchants, the Monks and others who lived in the ancient oasis town of Dunhuang.

Emily spotted some noodles and dumplings on the paintings and asked puzzledly the Monks “Why does these look like spaghetti and ravioli?” The Monks explained because of Silk Road, Westerner and Chinese somehow share their culinary culture and tradition.

Tina stomped her feet and shrieked at Emily as she thought Emily was wasting her time with stupid questions. The Buddha suddenly made Tina temporarily mute and said, “Only if you be nice and respectful, I will give your voice back.”

The Monks took them to another cave with magnificent wall paintings and started telling them a story – A millennium ago, there were 500 bandits doing all sorts of wicked things in a small Ancient India kingdom, so the king sent out a troop to capture them. Then the bandits were sentenced with a brutal punishment, gauging their eyes

out. They were sent out to the wilderness forest and suffering in sore pain. They got down on their knees and begged for help. The Buddha showed up and the 500 bandits admitted what they did wrong and promised to become better people. The Buddha forgave them and gave back their eyes. They followed the Buddha and became the Monks.

After listening to the Monks, Emily and Chelsea knelt with begging hands to beg the Buddha to give their stepmother's voice back. Tina's eyes filled with tears and was mouthing the words, "Sorry, I have been doing wrong, but everyone still cares for me and helps me. Please forgive me. I swear I will never do it again!" The Buddha heard Tina's sincere regret, so the Buddha gave her voice back.

They were teleported back to present. Tina understood how Emily felt when she treated her crudely. And they all lived happily ever after.

The Decline of Evil.

ESF Glenealy School, Aniruddh, Nihara – 9

PROLOGUE

“I’m so close, yet so far. ” Lucy said. Why did it have to be her chosen to brave the dangers of the Mogao Grottoes? Why couldn’t it be Jack instead? Jack (Jackie) Montgomery was her worst enemy at school, he was rude , smelly and annoying. “Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” Lucy suddenly screamed and she was never seen again.

CHAPTER 1: The Beginning

She was running, running as fast as she could just to save herself , she didn’t care where she was going and where she was headed, she just wanted to go. Suddenly, she bumped into a wall and the demon came closer and closer until there was nowhere to run . Out of nowhere, a sudden burst of light appeared and a sword burst down from the sky, smiting the demon's minion and letting Jade run past. Then the sword flew into her hands and latched itself there. “ Why did this sword choose me, I wonder?” she thought.

CHAPTER 2 :The Dragon

She found an egg in a forest which was the colour of a galaxy in the night sky. She built a campfire and put the egg over on a stick to put over the fire. Then she went to find a few more sticks for the fire ,when she heard a sickening crack and a little head popped out. Jade was in awe of the little baby dragon. he was perfect in everyway, when her little horns and the eyes were little slits but not slits of malice, just slits of curiosity , its eyes were the daintiest emerald green, Jade squealed because the dragon was just so cute. She decided to name it Emerald because of its glowing emerald eyes. “I mustn't get sidetracked, I am on a secret mission.” She looked mournfully at Emerald. “I suppose it wouldn’t matter if I took her with me.” So off they went and they walked day and night until they came to a series of caves saying the same thing “ Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes.” “How welcoming this sign is.” She thought. Then she noticed something tiny beneath the words. “ You can come in but you might never come out.” She gasped with horror, she had been expecting the demon in the Mogao Grottoes to be horrid but she never thought he would be this horrendous to kill people. She reassured herself many times to get a grip because everything would be fine, right?

Chapter 3: The Mogao Grottoes

She entered the Grottoes feeling confident of herself, then her hopes sank when caught sight of the demon. It really was horrible, it’s eyes were blood red and it had horrible hairy tusks and disgusting horns covered with blood and moss, and its face was wrinkly and sagged with a horrible expression. She was about to turn tail and flee but the sword pulled her closer, then the sword pierced the demon in his heart and the demon screamed, a scream that echoed around the whole country, maybe even the whole continent.

Chapter 4: Paradise awaits.

A portal appeared at the back of the caves , glowing with periwinkle blue light beckoning for her to go in and the sword kept drawing her closer and closer until she was sucked in.

When Jade came to after being knocked out from the force of the portal, her eyes beheld a great sight. She saw a lush green forest with a street paved with Jade and sapphires as well as signs with blue and green writing on them. One of the signs with green writing on it said “ [To the Jade Emperors Palace](#)” So she set off that way hoping to ask the Jade Emperor for directions to get back to the caves. So she hopped and skipped and la-di-da-ed on the road hoping to find her home.

Chapter 5 : The Jade Emperors Palace

She finally reached the Jade Emperors palace but when she went to the gate there were two big, brawly guards who were really mean to her. Emerald was growing big now so Jade had an idea.

She climbed onto Emerald and they discreetly flied over the castle and she landed in the throne room, luckily the Jade Emperor was having breakfast in the dining room so she hid behind the curtain until he came back. When the Jade Emperor came back, he was in a fairly good mood , so Jade decided to come out then. She went in and broke the news that she needed to go home and the Jade Emperor said yes but Jade only then noticed how alike they looked so she said “ I think you might be my father.”.....

Peter And The Statue

ESF Glenealy School, Armstrong, William – 8

Long long ago there was a boy called peter. He loved to explore caves, especially Mogao caves. He also liked to play games and run. One day he was walking back from school, when he saw a cave that he had never explored before. He thought his mum wouldn't mind if he took a small peak. When he looked around the corner he saw a massive cave, he had to explore this. Without thinking he ran off into the cave. When he did though the entrance came crashing down. With no hope of escaping he continued to travel deeper into the cave. He had been walking for hours And he was starving. He thought to himself "I won't escape, I'll be trapped forever, no one will help me" But he still walked. He finally decided to stop walking but suddenly He saw a gloomy and dark hallway. He decided to walk through it because he thought it was an exit but it wasn't. It was a magical statue. The statue shouted with an angry voice "if you answer my riddle correctly i will let you pass if not you shall be trapped here forever. Peter was not sure about his answer but he decided to answer anyway. He took a deep breath and answered. His answer was wrong! The doors slammed shut and the statue disappeared. He was stuck there for hours wondering if he would get out. He looked around the room to see if there was a hole but he saw nothing. He looked one last time in every corner. He was looking and then he saw the tiniest hole imaginable. he started chipping away at the hole with a rock he found on the floor. After a few minutes it became big enough for him to fit through. He crawled through it and ended up in a forest nearby. He wandered around for a minute then he saw a familiar road. Then he saw his mother, he rushed towards her. Peter learned his lesson and promised he would never wander off again

The Fairy Summer

ESF Glenealy School, Aspetti, Matilda – 8

This story took place in a town called Far far away, South west of Italy. There were two

friends called Joss and Skylar, they were both in school at the library. Joss found a

book about a magical fairy cave “ Sky” said Joss “yeah” replied Skylar “I found a

a book that tells a story about a fairy cave is real, “ said Joss “Should we go visit on the summer break.”

Said Skylar “ Ok “replied Joss.”You finished packing” asked Skylar “ Yes” replied Joss. They started walking in the forest Joss said “ I'm so excited “ “The map says that we need to go here “ Said Skylar “ okay” replied Joss. After a few weeks they arrived at the cave” We're here” said Skylar “Yes” exclaimed Joss Two fairies came to pick them up “ hello” said one of the Fairies “You need a go to the Queen fairy” said the other fairy “Ok” Surprisingly said

Joss “come this way “said one of the Fairies “hello” said the Queen fairy ‘How may help you” Said the Queen fairy “Well we just need a place to sleep” said Skylar “ok “ replied the Queen fairy” we will give you a sweet is that okay” said The Queen fairy. once just and Skyler arrived in the room they settled for the summer the Queen the Queen fairy came

twice a day. On e morning they went to breakfast and had a huge surprise that they weren't expecting because it was Joss is birthday they all have cake and a and had a very nice games, Joss love the cake because it was Vanilla cream cake she was very happy .They sang happy birthday to Joss and opened presents, Her favorite present was the travel set.

“Thank you everyone, thank you very much. I really appreciate everything you've done for my birthday” exclaimed Joss “anyways how old are you Joss” asked Skylar “ well I am 17”

replied Joss “Well then happy 17th birthday” said the Queen Fairy “ Why thank you” said

Joss “Next month is my birthday” Said Skylar “really” said the Queen fairy “yes it is’ said Joss .Next month, “I'm so excited tomorrow's my birthday “ exclaimed Skylar. Next morning

with a wonderful smile.

She went downstairs for breakfast and she had a huge cake! , it was her favorite chocolate

icing and cream cheese filling, They all sang happy birthday to Skylar, “ thank you so much everyone, this is a great birthday” “ You're welcome” replied the Queen fairy. How old are you “ well I'm 17 to “ exclaimed skylar.

“ I'm so sad we have to we have to go back too far far away because of the summer holiday is finished” sadly said Joss “well maybe we can go back next year or even for the winter break” Said Skylar “ that would be wonderful” exclaimed the Queen reFairy “ we really can come back” ask Joss “ sure why not “ said the Queen fairy. The fairies builded a magical ride to go too far far away.

The Dragon Adventure

ESF Glenealy School, Chaeng, Jun – 8

Once upon a time, there was a squad of four teenagers who loved to go on adventures to fight dragons. The squad named Apios lived in 2000 BC. At that time, people usually fought dragons. One day, Zach, one of the boys in Apios, went on a journey to find dragons to fight them. His other teammates, Daniel, Ryder, and Jack followed him. While they were walking in the woods, they got lost.

They tried hard to get out of the woods so that they could reach their destination. However, they could not find a way out. Luckily, they packed food and water in their backpacks. Zach even brought a tent! Soon, it was getting dark. Jack and Zach built a campfire while Daniel and Ryder set up the tent.

As it got darker, the squad could hear frightening noises around them. They could hear snakes slithering and wolves howling near them. Immediately, they rushed into the tent and held their weapons in their hands tightly. However, the wolves did not pay attention to the squad and just left them alone. Zach heard his stomach rumble, so he unzipped his backpack and started eating the food that he packed before the squad fell asleep.

The next day, the sun peeked behind the mountains. It was a beautiful morning as the squad could hear larks singing in the clear blue sky. The squad had a mission to complete, so they quickly packed their belongings and set off to a tower where the dragons lived. When they arrived, the dragons looked furious and frightening. The dragons had red and black eyes, a long tail, and green skin. They were almost as big as a house.

At that moment, the teenagers could hear a terrifying sound, one that was between a snarl and a roar. The squad froze in fear, and they were as still as statues. The squad took out their armors and bats. They positioned themselves to be ready to fight their enemies. Suddenly, a monster-like creature swooped down from the sky. It was a bigger version of the dragons. It had two straight horns that thinned down to the sharpness of a needle and a long flickering tongue like a snake in a mouth full of razor-sharp fangs. The creature was flapping its enormous wings that produced strong gusts of wind every time it flapped them. The demon approached the squad as the squad's eyes widened in terror. Every step it made shook the earth. The squad could not help but tremble in fear. Zach wondered, "Who is that?" Daniel whispered, "It's the Demon that created these dragons." Zach gulped and squeezed his eyes shut, hoping the Demon would not end their lives instantly.

Within seconds, the Demon cast a spell. A vast green glow surrounded the dragons and miraculously, they seemed to become bigger and stronger. The Demon laughed and muttered, "We, Demons, will defeat all human beings one day with all our might." At that moment, a large amount of smoke erupted which made everything smoky and foggy for the squad to maneuver. While that was happening, the Demon vanished without a trace. Without notice, the squad heard a loud growl. The squad turned around and saw two other teenagers attacking the dragons. They were also holding bats and shields. One of the dragons used its long whip-like tail and threw the two teenagers up in the air. Luckily, they landed in a bush. All the teenagers continued to fight against their enemies, but the dragons were too strong. They were invincible.

Suddenly, Zach thought of a brilliant plan. He said, "While the dragons are trying to attack us, we can hold up our shields while cuddling up like a ball and protect one another. We can then run as fast as we can to smash all the dragons as a group." The others agreed willingly. The two other teenagers joined the squad. Soon, they all gathered, holding up their shields and bats. They took a deep breath at a synchronized pace, plucked up their courage, and began charging towards the dragons with all their strength. The dragon growled at them. They were not so lucky because the dragons broke their shields and bats so there was not much hope left.

Out of nowhere, a weird-looking eagle flew past them and dropped a wand. Little did they know that the wand was the answer to stopping the dragons from being aggressive. When Zach held up the wand, the dragons froze like statues. The dragons were acting strangely. They were walking around as if nothing had happened. The squad wanted to attack the dragons, but then they thought, "Mmm...I want to harm the dragons, but they are living things like us. We shouldn't harm them". There they said. No, they did not want to harm the dragons, so they took the dragons to the Dragon Cave to rest.

A few hours later, the dragons woke up and began to act aggressively, baring their fangs. Fortunately, Daniel already knew that there could be a possibility of the dragons harming them again, so he created a potion that would calm the dragons and make them friendly. Daniel fed the dragons some of his potions. Everyone wanted to play with the dragons, so they took them out of the cave and flew on the dragons! Weeeeee! Off they went.

Flying on the friendly dragons was the perfect way to end their mission. When it got darker, they

brought the dragons back to their home and chose to keep them as their pets! Everyone learned that they should not harm animals because they are, after all, good living creatures!

The Last Grotto

ESF Glenealy School, Chaki, Adhiraaj – 8

19/11/500

(November 19, 500 BC)

Smack!!!!

A flying newspaper catches Yan Zhang on the head! He sees an article about pilgrims making grottoes and thinks “not too bad – seems like a good way to get rich and famous...let me get in on the action too” and he decides that he is going into the grotto making business.

He sells everything he owns to the grumpy, dusty old man in the village and with that money, he buys himself a horse called Yue. He saddles up and sets out towards the West Silk Road.

Neigh!!!! Yue wonders why the tiny, wrinkled man wants to head to the grottoes. He’s angry at all the galloping he’s having to do so he tosses poor Yan around who gets nauseous and horse-sick. Some free advice at this stage – badly planned and last-minute gallops into nowhere – strongly NOT recommended especially if your horse is wily and naughty like Yue.

After 5 days of riding, a tired Yue and saddle-sore Yan arrive in a city called Jinan near the Yellow River. Yan hated how loud the people were – storming around noisily as if it was mandatory to be so loud. Also disrupting everything and bumping poor tired & sad-eyed Yue every 2 minutes! Sigh....

The plan was to stay there for 10 days but Yan was starting to have second thoughts – the city was just too noisy. “I am not sure if this dig-a-grotto-get-famous plan is any good” he thought miserably. “Neigh” Wined Yue – he was telling Yan that everything was going to be OK and that Yue & Yan were going to be very famous soon. So famous that a young boy would write a story about them one day in the future!

So do you think something changed? Nope – the usual continued until 2 days later Yan was resting when YET ANOTHER flying newspaper caught him on the head. The headline said, “Grottoes are out – no more grottoes!” Yan panics, scampers about packing & loading up his belongings on Yue and charges off towards the grottoes.

Now let me introduce you to another character – a pilgrim called Fai Cai. He is posh for a pilgrim – fancy clothes, shiny jewelry and lots of money. But he is greedy and wants to be famous too and when he reads the headline about the grottoes being out, he decides that he will be the one to build the last grotto and dig for treasure.

Off he goes towards the grottoes and since he was used to travelling on horses, he did not get horse sick or saddle sore.

So let’s check on Yue and Yan. They’ve reached the Gobi Desert but they look confused and unhappy. They are staring at a HUGE, unending wall.” How do we get to the other side” they both think as they sit down in despair. Suddenly Yan sees a small hole – he starts to dig around it. A few hours later the hole is big enough for him to crawl to the other side. AND THEN MAGIC HAPPENS – Yan finds a way to open a secret door and then Yue gets to the other side too. After a quick celebration dance, they decide to take a quick nap only to wake up 2 full days later. Yue gets up with a shriek, saddles up and charges off towards the grottoes.

In the meantime, Fai Cai decides to hitch a ride on a flying balloon. Well, he does save time for sure but now there is problem – how on earth do Fai Cai and his horse get back on earth? When he can think of nothing else, Fai Cai cut the basket off the balloon... CRASH..OUCH – and they are finally on the ground. Fai and his horse had landed right outside the giant wall in the Gobi Desert except that the wall now had big holes in it. If you think it’s from Yan & Yue, then you are correct. Fai & his horse get to the other side of the wall, and they also decide to rest. They too fall asleep for 2 days and wake up and panic – there is no time to waste!

Meanwhile, “Clip clop” Yue galloped at great speed towards the grottoes! He entered from the North side (front) and admired it “It is beautiful” he said, with tears in his eyes. He can’t believe his dream is almost about to come true.

Fai entered the grottoes from the southern or back side. “What’s the big deal? These grottoes could have been better.” he muttered. He went inside and started digging, sniffing, looking for the treasure but sadly, he didn’t find any. This made him furious – his hands started trembling and he started to yell & throw punches around in the air. He sort of goes insane.

“What was that, who’s shouting ?” Yan thought when he heard Fai’s screams. So he went in and investigated “HELLO.. WHO IS IT ... WHERE ARE YOU?” he called out. Then he saw Fai who was drenched in his own blood and behaving like a crazy person. “AH...blood !” Yan said. He whistled and immediately blacked out. Then Clop! Yue appeared on the scene and kicked Fai off into a valley far far below. Seeing this Fai’s horse runs off. Yan now starts to dig and slowly build the last cave. It takes him 2 months to make the last cave. By then, people from the nearby villages start to tell everyone about the last grotto he was building. Soon everyone on the silk route had heard of Yan. Finally, Yan was FAMOUS and a celebrity. When he went back to his village, the villagers proudly lift him on their shoulders. To thank him for making the village so famous, Yan is gifted 1 million gold coins.

Yan & Yue are now retired because they are rich. They spend their time telling everyone of their great adventure in the race to build the last grotto.

THANKS FOR READING !

The Mysterious Cave

ESF Glenealy School, Cheung, Owen – 8

Ring–Ring–Ring! The school bell rang while the kids raced to go home. One of those kids was Ming. Ming was a boy that everyone knew. Ming was in 12th grade, the oldest year group in the school. Ming raced out of the school as quickly as he could. However, Ming wasn't going anywhere near home. He was going to the cave which he found not long ago. However, he has never gone into this cave before. Ming was pretty excited to see what was in the cave.

Ming was jogging until he found the entrance to the cave. "What would be inside it?" "What if there was treasure inside?" Ming's mind was racing.

The moment Ming arrived, his face brightened up. There were numerous magnificent sculptures and beautiful paintings inside the cave. Ming slowly walked towards the art to feel the texture of the art. The area was bumpy and dusty. However, Ming suddenly felt the ground shake. "What was happening?" Ming thought. Suddenly, the ground cracked open! Ming was now falling from the sky! Then, everything went pitch black!

He slowly opened his eyes. However, he realized that he wasn't in the cave anymore. Ming slowly started worrying. "Where am I?" he thought. Suddenly, Ming stood up; and when he looked back, he saw a boy standing still, looking very surprised. The boy was wearing a dark furry jacket and blue jeans. The boy finally spoke. "Who are you? How did you get here?"

Ming replied worriedly. "Where am I?" "You are now trapped in a secret place made by a dark wizard. You are in this place because the dark wizard put magic in the paintings."

"Then, who're you?" asked Ming, still very worried. "My name is Fang, and I mistakenly entered a cave, just like you." "Is there any way to get out of here?" Ming asked. "Yes, but I will need your help," Fang replied. "Okay." Then Fang talked in a mysterious voice. "This place is made by a powerful wizard. He wants to trap many children to assemble an army. There is also a dragon that guards a secret palace. Nobody knows what is inside the secret palace. We need to get through the dragon, sneak inside the palace and find a way to get out of here." When should we start, then?" Ming asked. "Tonight," Fang replied. "Tonight!?" Ming asked, very surprised. "Yes, that is that time when the dragon is sleeping," Fang answered. "Fine," Ming replied.

It was 7:00 in the night. The night was silent with the sea waves softly crashing to shore. Ming and Fang worked together to make a fire to cook food with, with some twigs, leaves and some rocks. Black smoke was coming out of the fire into the dark sky, and the smell of burnt twigs covered the air, bothering Ming. Fang brought Ming some fish and some seaweed. "This was all I could find around the shore," said Fang. Ming stared at the food, looking disgusted. Finally, Ming took a small bite of the fish and seaweed. "Eww!" said Ming, spitting out the fish and seaweed. "Don't complain!" Fang told Ming. "I'd rather eat nothing," replied Ming.

After trying out the fish and seaweed, Ming set off to sleep on some leaves. After a few minutes, Ming drifted off to sleep.

"Wake up!" shouted Fang. Ming slowly opened his eyes. "Wait, what?" Ming said, very puzzled. "It's time to get out of here," answered Fang. "Oh, okay," said Ming.

Ming got out of bed and got out with a start. Then, Fang threw an item of pitch-black clothing into Ming's face. "What was that for?" Ming asked. "We have to wear black clothes to get past the dragon." "Fine," Ming said and quickly put the black clothing on. After Ming put the dark clothes on, Ming and Fang slowly went out to a dark forest.

Swoosh! "What was that?" Ming whispered. "I don't know," Fang replied. Ming and Fang started slowly creeping closer into the forest. Swoosh! "I think there's something near us!" Ming said with his voice rising. "Just keep quiet and stay still," Fang replied. Suddenly, a roaring sound came from behind! ROAR! "Run!" Fang shouted. Ming and Fang were quickly running forward, hoping they would escape. Wooosh! A huge wave of water appeared under Ming and Fang!

Ming looked behind and saw a blue dragon shooting water out from its mouth. The dragon had beautiful scales with a curled moustache. Now, Ming and Fang were swimming on the wave that the dragon had made. However, the

dragon was catching up! Ming and Fang had to think of something to stop the dragon, or the dragon will kill them. Suddenly, the dragon was about a meter behind them! Ming and Fang both ducked and got under the dragon. Ming and Fang both escaped from the dragon! The dragon was going out of control, crashing into a tree. Crash!

After escaping from the dragon, Fang found a temple! "I found the temple!" shouted Fang. The temple was red and green with a door made out of wood. The door had a golden handle, which looked like a ring. "Great!" Ming replied. Ming and Fang slowly crept closer and closer to the door. Then, Fang slowly opened the door. ERRRRR! The door screeched. Suddenly, a wizard with a red coat and a long, black beard appeared on a green chair! "What are you doing here?" a low voice boomed.

Fang and Ming quickly ran as fast as they could! However, they found themselves floating back to the wizard. Suddenly, the wizard cast a spell on Ming and Fang! Ming and Fang were now floating on a purple bubble. Then, Ming thought of an idea! Ming suddenly took a water bottle out of his pocket and poured water on both of the bubbles. Poof! The wizard disappeared!

The Escaper

ESF Glenealy School, Ching, Natalie – 10

Gold was unhappily strolling with his pride over the savanna. Oh, how he wished something exciting would happen during these boring Saturdays. When they finally reached some shade, Gold's slender body slumped onto the rough bark of the tree. The heat licked forcefully at the lions' fur. The pride quickly recovered, and rising to their feet, they trotted on, looking for water.

"Come on!" roared his best friend, Sandy, "Don't you want some water too?"

"No, I'll stay." murmured Gold, wanting more than anything to spend this time somewhere else.

"See you later!" Lemon called back.

He laid down, wanting to sleep. Gold loved sleeping. He was just about to drop off, when a beautiful lioness went past his direction. He sat up straight in awe. Just as he was about to greet her, a humongous elephant galloped toward him. Gold desperately rushed out of the way, but it was no use. The elephant charged Gold towards the giant brick wall. He scurried up the towering wall quickly. Peering down at the elephant that awaited him below, he knew he would be safe. What a narrow escape! He curled up and lay his head down, tired. His eyelids dropped and his eyebrows relaxed. He slept comfortably, unaware of his surroundings.

Bang!

A sudden loud noise awakened Gold from his sleep. Not knowing what was happening, he jumped about frantically, hoping something bad wasn't going to happen. He thought he had experienced enough last night anyway, and didn't want that to happen again.

Bang!

This time, the frightening noise shook the solid walls, crumbling it into scree. Gold felt himself dropping, and telling his mind to concentrate, he flung himself at the top of the crumbling bricks and held on for dear life. His eyes closed in tiredness, and he felt numb all over. He was almost certain that he had died. Even though he tried so hard to feel the floor and open his eyes, no part of his body would move. Very little did he know what had happened to him.

Light seeped through the cracks of the wooden hut that he woke up in, pointing out that he was alive. As soon as his eyelids opened, Gold darted to the bolted door, only to find his paws shackled to the floor. Frustrated, he banged his hands against the floor, hoping to get the metal traps off, but only making his paws throb and bleed. Now he was stuck, and hurt too. He paused for a moment to think, not wanting to damage his body again. Then he remembered the teleporter he had somewhere in his messy mane, and reached up to get it, but as he did, the metal chains tugged down on him, not allowing him to get it. Then he froze. For, outside he could hear footsteps.

Creak!

The door joints rattled open, revealing a tiger. Quickly, Gold placed his hand down, trying not to be suspicious. The tiger, whom had been sent by some evil villain, as far as Gold could tell, smirked at him and said, matter-of-factly:

"It is my very sad duty to report here to take you to the boss. Come here, and I shall take off your shackles"

Gold approached the stranger, allowing the tiger to unlock his shackles. Then, the tiger took Gold by the paw, and dragged him into the Mogao caves.

Gold had a faint memory of falling into this majestic cave, but he couldn't be sure if he had made it up or not. Giant walls decorated with old paintings stared at him from their great height, looking mysterious and cunning. Statues

surrounded him, and a chill slivered along his back. Buddhas stood proudly against the hard stone walls, painted with a variety of colours. The ceiling was tall and the cave was vast, and if he didn't know that something dreadful was going to happen, it could have even been a magical place where he could meet other lions.

Thump!

A dragon landed heavily, shaking the ground. Gold found himself face to face with a ugly, bad-smelling dragon, and almost shrieked in terror. His face was huge, a sick-green kind of color, with shiny scales that danced in the light. His eyes were piercing and sharp, with a glint of mischief in his eyes. His small ears flapped menacingly in the air. He inspected Gold closely, then shouted:

“Guards! Come here and take the lion away!”

A rush of flying lizards lifted Gold into a pitch-black room, slamming the door behind them. Outside, he could hear them talking.

“Where key?”

“What! You no bring key!”

“Boss no give key”

“Ugh”

As the lizards departed, Gold peeked out and crept into the grand speechroom, where the dragon was speaking. He just managed to hear the end before it ended.

“to conclude, I am going to earn thousands of dollars, all for me! ”

As Gold tiptoed out of the auditorium, a large fist grabbed at his fur. He yelped helplessly, not knowing who had caught hold of him. He felt the oily claws flinging him. No, it couldn't be. Heat prickled against his skin, much hotter than the african savanna. Just for that moment, he regretted whining about the african heat. He scrambled and squiggled, to see a large curved object coming toward him. It was coming closer and closer, almost able to touch the tip of his nose, now. Knowing this would be the end of his life, tears trickled down his face like rain pouring onto the earth. A large object closed in on him, blackening out every spot of light. His body was coal, and as lifeless as a rock. Resting his head in his arms, he wished he had known better.

He knew he had made a big mistake, and as much as he wished to undo it, he couldn't.

The moral of this story is to stay with together, because you never know what is around the corner.

The Mogao Caves

ESF Glenealy School, Gilham, Alessandra – 9

PROLOGUE

In another time, many years from now, everyone thought that Siberian tigers were extinct. Our heroes in the story, Safiya, Hallie, Rachel and Lainey decided that they needed more proof. So they went to the Mogao Caves because they were known for giving answers. They set off on their long journey up the tall, jagged mountain. At the top, they set up camp. During the night, Safiya heard horrible growls and whines of terror coming from inside the cave. She lay there in the stuffy tent, petrified until the morning. During breakfast, Safiya slumped down. “I don’t feel very well.” She admitted “Think I should go home.” “I could take you.” Rachel offered. “Well, if you really want to.” Lainey sighed. “Yes please.” Safiya responded. “Ok, you should probably go now then.” Hallie put in, disappointed that Safiya would not be able to venture on with them.

After that, Hallie and Lainey decided to go in when the sun was up. They went up to the entrance and stepped into the dark, gloomy cave.

1

As they walked around the cave, the whispers of *She still lives* and *She is here* floated into their ears. A few minutes after the whispers stopped, they heard a terrible growl coming from the next room. They're hesitant to go in, but in the end they do. There, they saw a majestic Siberian Tiger. She had beautiful gold fur and was standing proudly with her head held high. They realized that they couldn’t take her out or she would be killed to make rugs and coats. Then, they discovered that she was pregnant because she does not move around as much as a normal tiger, so they chose to inquire.

They decided to call her Grace as she was so proud.

Months later, Rachel arrived back just in time to see the cub born. No, not the cub, the twin cubs! She had one male cub and one female cub!

They knew Grace did not trust them, so they built her trust over the next few weeks by moving slower around her until she let them get near her. She then let them lead her to hunt animals outside of the cave for her cubs and herself.

The friends then decided to take Grace and her cubs out of the cave, but they couldn’t. There was a giant boulder. It must have rolled in as there had been a storm while they were in the cave. Safiya came back and tried to get in, but realized that it was on a slope. So, she shouted at the girls inside the cave to push, and the boulder rolled... *down the hill?* So they tumbled down and there, they found the tiger poachers – uh oh – squashed by the boulder!

2

The girls then became tiger breeders and the population of tigers grew slowly but surely as they made sure that there is always one tiger couple to give birth to more tigers. All went well – until word got out about it. Some tiger poachers that had stayed well out of the picture until now come overnight and steal all of the tigers. All except one. The youngest, Yasmin, had hidden as best as she could, and so she was ready to track down her family. So she, Safiya, Rachel, Hallie and Lainey went with Yasmin to find the other tigers.

They searched for ages, but they couldn’t find the tigers. They kept searching for them for weeks, but they heard not a word from any of the villagers and not a growl near their house.

3

They visited the cave again, saying “I hope they are here” and “They must be – where else *would* they be?”

And they were right. The tigers were in the cave. But they hadn't had any proper meals since the tigers were taken away, so they're all extremely skinny, not at all majestic like tigers are meant to be. They were starving to death and in desperate need of water. So the girls soothed them, saying "Don't worry, Grace, we're here to help you." And "Tiger, it's ok." Or "Yasmin helped us track you down – she's so amazing!"

The caves started to whisper to them yet again, saying *They will be here soon*. Grace came to them and growled. She could tell that something bad was going to happen too.

4

The people who stole the tigers suddenly turned up to bring the tigers out to sell them, but when they saw the girls standing there with the tigers, they were horrified. The girls made them tell what they were doing, so they had to explain to them. Later on, they brought them to the King and Queen and explained what they had done, and the King and Queen put a ban on tiger skin rugs or tiger skin anything, and the tigers were free to go back to their ecosystem. The girls then realized that they are the only ones who the caves trusted to talk to and that they are very special. The caves are magical and can give them, and only them, answers.

5

The girls don't know how to thank the caves, so they asked the caves what they wanted. The caves magic whispered that the best thing in the world was them, so they requested that the girls visit the caves every month. The girls agreed, as they loved the caves just as much as the caves loved them, so from that day onward, they visit the caves every month. And during one remarkable visit to the caves, they found a dinosaur, and the whole story started over again.

The Secret Caves

ESF Glenealy School, Hajasi, Kaydon – 8

It was one fine day when... decided to go to china! 'I know a place!' said Jay/

'The mogao caves in china!' said Sam. 'is it far?' said Jay 'oh!' 'we need a detective in case something weird happens!' said Sam. 'good idea!' said Jay. as all of them went to their friendly detectives house on a plane! To China. (that was where the detective lived.) 'It is such a coincidence that the mogao caves are in China, and the detective!' said... when they landed at the shanghai international airport, they had a problem! 'We forgot the sheet of paper that contained the detective's address!' said... then suddenly... 'I FOUND IT!' said Jay very loudly. 'Found what?' said Sam, 'obviously the address!' said Jay duh?! As the 3 of them carefully followed the directions on the A4 sheet of paper, they finally got to the detective's house. When they opened the door, before any of them could say anything, the detective said 'what a surprise my dear friends!' said the detective. 'Now can you please tell me, my dear friends, what are you doing here?' said the detective, confused. 'We wanted to see if you want to come with us to the mogao caves!' said all of them. 'Sure!' said the detective. so all of them walked to the shanghai international airport, got on their private plane and took-off! After exactly 52mins they landed at the Beijing, China international airport! When they got off their own aircraft they headed straight for the taxi! It was a long taxi ride to the mogao caves! When they arrived they made sure they had everything checked! Water bottle, check emergency food, check walkie-talkies, check (for communication) and lastly weapons! You never know fully what is in there... right? After they made sure everything was checked, they tested radio contact. 'Can you all hear me?' said the detective. Yes everyone said! Good let's move on! 'When it gets quite dark ...' 'Turn on your torches' 'Ok?' Said the detective on the walkie-talkie. When it got dark, everyone turned on their torches as the detective said. When they all turned their torches on, they suddenly noticed something out of the dark! There were two tunnels, 'uh witch one?' 'the one on the left!' said... as they went deeper into the tunnel, one of them said 'Uh is it just me i'm seeing CCTV's everywhere (closed circuit television). Everyone immediately paused 'Uh I think you are right!'. Someone said 'Uh we are not the only ones here!' said Sam. 'Should we go back?' said Jay 'No it is too far from where we started' said Sam. 'Besides we have all been walking for roughly 2hrs. 'Ok...' 'but can we at least shoot down these CCTV's?' 'sure!' said Jay as we continued walking in the next 5 mins of walking we shot 30 CCTV's! 'The person who built this sure would have 0% of blind spots because there are so many CCTV's! After the next 20 mins of noisy gunfire we saw 4 machine guns on the floor! We each picked up a machine gun and hid it well in case the person who built this CCTV army sent out any guards or anything else (it would be best to keep the machine guns hidden so if a guard saw us they would think we were not armored) In the next 30 mins of noisy, machine gun fire we saw a 4 astonishing F-22 raptors! 'Great god!' said Jay. we each got in one of them, and when we all got in, lights came out of nowhere, and a giant runway appeared right in front of us all! 'OMG!' said Jay. 'This is great!' said Sam. 'should we take-off?' said Jay. 'sure!' but one thing first!' said Sam. 'what?' said Jay. 'the fuel level!' said Sam. 'oh yeah!' said Jay. Almost forgot! 'Now let's start the take-off!' said Sam. 'apply full throttle!' said Jay. TAKE-OFF! said Sam. To be continued.....

The Quiet Whale

ESF Glenealy School, Hayden, Rory – 8

1

Whale

A long time ago there was a whale who lived in a cave. This cave was next to another cave. Many said this cave next door was the place of death. The cave was as old as time and crumbling down. Now, fish from all over know how deadly it was. It was said if you go in, you will never come out.

Our story starts here!

“What was that?” asked Whale.

“I don't know,” said another voice.

“Oh, sorry, I made that sound,” said a third voice.

The three voices were: Whale, Shark and Orca. They had been friends for as long as anyone could remember.

“It's been five minutes,” complained Shark.

“I'm going home,” said Orca.

“That's only three hundred seconds. Am I right, Orca?” Whale asked.

“Yes!” confirmed Orca.

“ORCA, STOP SHOWING OFF!” said Shark.

“Fine. We'll stay for one more min...,” Shark replied as he was interrupted by Orca mid sentence.

“Sixty seconds! Why did you call us anyway?” said Orca.

“There are nine fish who are saying I am eating other fish again. I've never done that in my life! I only live next door minding my own business,” Whale explained to the other two.

2

Please don't tell me

“Please don't tell me you want us to go down to the sea bed and shout to everyone that Whale is not a big eater,” said Orca.

“How did you know?” said Whale.

“We do it about 250 times per year!” said Shark.

“You need to do it yourself,” said Orca.

“Okay,” said Whale.

“To prove you are innocent, move to a different house,” suggested Orca helpfully.

“You may be right,” Whale said sadly.

“Well, I'm going home,” said Shark.

“Me too,” said Orca.

3

Whale's story

Once Orca and Shark had gone, Whale thought to himself it was so long ago that he was not on the run. Perhaps it had been 9 or 10 years. Whale had no parents; he was an orphan. Shark and Orca weren't orphans and they didn't understand him. In the orphanage, it had been quiet so Whale had learned to be quiet.

Shark was heading home when he saw a shadow behind him.

“Whale?” Shark said, but it didn't look like Whale (or any whale he had ever seen). It was like a ghost. It seemed to be growing. “What is that...?” he muttered, a little frightened. He swam all the way back to Whale's house and there Whale was.

“Shark, what’s up?” said Whale.

“Stop fooling around! I know it was you... That whale I saw was you,” said Shark.

“What are you talking about?” asked Whale.

Just then, Orca came passing by and said “ Shark, I thought you were going home,” Orca continued.

“Well, maybe. If this prankster didn't do what he did,” Shark replied.

“What do you mean, Shark? I have been here with him the whole time,” Orca confirmed.

“Thought you were going home,” said Shark.

“I was but I was so curious about Whale, I decided to stay to listen to his story,” said Orca.

4

Who was that?

“Well, if it wasn’t Whale, who was it?” wondered Shark.

“ME....” came another voice deep from the caves.

“Who is that?” Orca whispered.

“The thing that lives in the cave next door. This is bad,” said Whale.

“What should we do?” said Orca, shivering.

“Try not to be eaten!” said Shark.

Just then a big shadow appeared from the cave.

“Swim for your life!” shouted Shark.

“What is that?” said Orca, now absolutely terrified.

“I am... the monster from the caves. Everyone fears me. I have ended the lives of many,” said the voice.

The voice was small.

“Are you a piranha? And if so, how do you kill all the big fish when you are so small?” Shark, Orca and Whale asked in unison.

“I don’t. They die of heart attack and I just finish them off,” said Piranha.

“How do they all die of heart attack?” asked Whale.

“They are very scared of me,” said Piranha.

“How do you look so big if you are a piranha?” Whale asked.

“I’m not,” said Piranha. “My shadow appears to be big in the light but I’m not big in actual size.”

“Well, you should apologize to Whale. Poor Whale has taken all the blame while you have been feasting on fish the size of a school bus!” said Orca.

“Well, I have never apologized to anyone in the past, and I am not planning to do that anytime soon!” said Piranha.

“We could tell the police on you,” said Orca.

“Who would believe you? Everyone thinks Whale is the culprit!” laughed Piranha.

5

The big eater

Orca swam off to call the police while Whale and Shark talked to Piranha. When Orca came back with the police, he told them all about Piranha. Piranha did not kill the fish but had eaten them after they died.

The police agreed that was not against the law. However, the police also agreed with the trio that there should be a new law that one could not eat others. Piranha was thrown into jail but he had a plan B.

Piranha had some fish treats. Once he got to the sunken prison ship he lured the fish guards out of the ship with his fish treats. He got out through the air vents on the ship thirsty for revenge!

Piranha swam back to Whale’s cave and as soon as he got there, he started to eat through the wall before he finished off all of Whale’s food while Whale was out.

“I cannot wait to see Whale’s face,” Piranha said menacingly as he chuckled.

6

The E.A.F.

As Piranha waited for Whale to come home, he ate more and more of his crumbling house cave until there was nothing left.

But after he had finished eating, he felt sick. Worse still, he was becoming fatter and fatter until he EXPLODED INTO SMITHEREENS!

When Whale got home (or at least where home used to be), he could not believe what he saw and wondered what on earth could have happened.

Dark never Turns to Light

ESF Glenealy School, Jastreboff, Maleha – 10

The ragged edges of my prison, the boulders clapping together, sealing me in my inescapable prison. I watch the spiders as they come closer and closer in my tomb. I slowly venture off to marvel at the old walls and dust creeping up to me. The oxygen level was low. What was I to do?

Hello my name is Chun Ton and this is the tale of the gruelling plot to sabotage me in my very own kingdom. However if things happen outside what will happen inside. In my own words this is the story of how dark never turns into light.

Walking with the guards behind me I gaze into the light exhausted as we finally reach the kingdom, famished from being chased and escaping the snakes. Hastily the guards take the carriage back to the castle. Lying in the comfort of my bed exhausted from what has happened. The war lasted for 5 years and finally we triumphed. But I had not known that coming back to the kingdom would turn out to be a careless idea. Citizens of the village of Mogao always ask me why go to war if we can live here in peace? There is only one answer to that; this is what I was born to do. I pondered questioning my every move but then, It all happened so fast. First I was sitting peacefully in my room then I heard a noise coming from my closet . As I emerged to the closet, opening the doors. My world went blank as if I were in a room with no windows.

My eyes flicker open to look up and see muddy and dusty cave walls. I could hear the boulders slamming together, sealing me inside of What? As the oxygen was slowly becoming lower and lower. I knew I did not have much time. Soon I shall die from thirst but I made the best of it. The only way to survive was to face my fears. Ripping up my clothes to create a layer of protection from the creepy crawlers that live below me. I still have one tool to entertain me. I use my shovel to slowly pick away at the walls creating the sculptures of the future. Using my tears and the rocks I create paint to smear my personality across the walls of my cave. I give my sculptures personality. The caves of the mogao grotto are not so blank any more, they are at least not as blank as my heart. I paint my emotions on these walls bursting them with sadness, betrayal and regret. My feelings are destroyed knowing that the people I trusted the most betrayed me when I have been loyal and compassionate. My heart has a wound that is tearing my soul apart because I was left here to rot.

Slowly my body breaks down. Dehydrated, hungry and in need of energy. I lie there on the cold floors of the grotto. I close my eyes slowly remembering that they will never be opened again. My final words shall be something you should all know. Dark never turns to light.

The Alicorn Who Never Gave Up

ESF Glenealy School, John, Natalie – 8

Once upon a time there was an alicorn named Stella. Stella lived in a cave and enjoyed living in the cave. Stella's colour of her body is purple. Stella had a few friends named Alex, Barbie, Elle and Ana. Alex loved to eat watermelon, Barbie loved to eat cupcakes, Elle loved to roller blade and Ana loved to dance. But Stella missed them so much each day. Every day Stella would meet her friends at the cave and they would play. They would fly in the air, read books, sing and dance. The cave was a very fun place for the alicorns. Their whole life depends on the cave. Stella's friends stayed in other caves in other parts of the town.

The cave was at the top of a mountain, this allowed the alicorns to fly into the sky.

But one day, the earth shook, stones started falling, and Stella was in deep sleep inside the cave. Stella woke up to see that the cave was going to collapse. Stella found some bricks so Stella used them to hold the walls. Stella found some rocks and saw some walls that didn't have any bricks so Stella used them to fill them up. Stella knew that it wouldn't hold but she found some glue to stick it together.

Stella saw it was still collapsing so she used her horn to make it stop collapsing but it needed concentration. Stella took a few minutes to try to fix the collapse. She couldn't do it so the cave collapsed even more. The bricks and rocks were getting closer so Stella tried to stick it again. Stella found some tape. She used it for the walls. The walls closed even more. So Stella used her horn and wings to hold it all together. The earthquake had woken up Alex, Barbie, Elle and Ana and they rushed to help Stella. Together using their wings, glue and hard work they were able to fix the cave. There was only one stone down and Stella picked up that stone and hit the hardest and then it stopped collapsing. The cave was saved after all. All the friends together soon cleaned up the cave and it was more beautiful than before.

Stella and her friends had saved the cave and their gathering place and would spend many Christmases together with their family and friends.

The Magic In Mogao Caves

ESF Glenealy School, Kwan, Yenny – 8

Chapter 1

The Secret

A thousand years ago,in the Mogao Caves,there was a secret.There was that secret is because Buddha wanted the devils to have a lesson.More than a thousand years,the secret was already here and the devils wanted to find out what is the secret and steal it.But every time they sneaked in,the soldiers stop them from getting it.If you want to find the treasure, it's going to have a long adventure in it.

Chapter 2

Devils Stealing

A powerful magic inside the secret room which only Buddha and the soldiers can go in.Every day,the soldiers check and see if the magical powerful magic is there.There was a map for them to follow but no one knows where is the map and how to read it.The map was actually the paintings on the walls which the Monks create it very hard.(The paintings is a map to find the directions to the treasure box.)Another year passed and the devils were coming to try to steal the treasures again!But that's not gonna happen because Buddha knows that they are coming so she had well prepared and Buddha said:this is going to be the most fabulous year ever!At night when everyone's sleeping,the devils were quietly coming in and got in!It was dark and sacred.And then when the devils was slowly walking,trying to find clues.SUDDENLY.....one of the devils step on something and a sound came up!Out it came,QUAKE!It was a rubber duck!Ohhh!It was Buddha!She put the ducky on the floor so when the devils step on it it'll have a quake sound so all the soldiers will come out to catch them!And the soldiers did!All they come to catch them!Later at midnight they were back!This time they were checking the floor and everywhere.The devils want to steal the powerful magic because the powerful magic is the key to open the big treasures boxes.They were trying to find some clues.After one-and a half hour,they finally found out that the paintings are the maps and they followed the paintings to the secret room and stole the key successfully.One of the devils said:Now is the time to follow the instructions and get the big treasures.And then they worked out how to get to the big treasures.They sneaked out the door and thought that they could run away from them!

Chapter 3

Come Back Here

But Buddha was smart!She put an alarm on top of the door and when the alarm rings,that means the devils are getting out to escape or steal things.The alarm rang as loud as it could!Everyone rushed out and attacked the devils.Buddha sent more soldiers to attack them because the devils are too strong to attack!Finally Buddha hit them on the wall to be a painting and they can never come out ever again.I think the devils should be happy because there are many more devils that were hit on the wall and they can be together now!Everyone smiled at Buddha and said:WOW!I am AMAZED!Good Job!Buddha said:Thank you!You guys did well too!Buddha said:I said it will be the best day ever!And so it did!

Dragon Devil

ESF Glenealy School, Lamba, Samaira – 8

One day, in the city of Hong Kong, a unicorn called Crystal was playing with her toys when suddenly..... Spotty, the city's most evil dragon landed outside Crystal's house (which was a cave) and cackled, "ha ha ha ha! I am going to trap you with this boulder and you will never escape in your life!" Yelled Spotty. Then, the evil dragon pushed the boulder into the cave entrance and left. Crystal sat on the floor staring at the boulder in shock. "How am I going to get out?" She wailed. Suddenly, a small voice said, "need some help"? Crystal turned around and saw a small mouse. "Yes please", said Crystal. "But how can you help me if you are so small"? Oh you just wait and see", said the mouse mysteriously as he slipped through a small gap in between the wall and boulder. A few minutes later, he returned with hundreds of mice. Then all the mice leaned against the boulder and began pushing. "Push, push, push and one more push", Crystal yelled. Finally, the mice managed to heave the boulder out. "Hooray", cheered Crystal. "Thanks". Then the mice left. A minute later, she got a message. It turned out that Spotty was so mad he failed, that he began crying with anger. Crystal laughed and she and the mice lived happily ever after.

Reckless

ESF Glenealy School, Lau, Wing Sze – 10

8:00 am

“Kids, wake up!” Haoran & Ying Yue's mother yelled. “Mmmmmmmmmh” was all their mother could hear. Yue was 14 and Hao was 15. “I don’t wanna wake up...” Yue whined. “Well, we have to,” Hao said as he got up from his bed. Hao grabbed his clothes and walked to the bathroom to change his clothes. “Oh well, I better go change.” Yue thought.

The siblings went to the kitchen as their mother was cooking their food. “Brilliant, you’re here!” Their mother applauded. Their mother placed 2 plates of dumplings (5 on each) in front of the 2. “Enjoy~” The dumplings surprisingly tasted so good that they stuffed them all in their mouths at once.

9:00 am

“Hao! Hao!” Yue screamed. “What do you want? I am right next to you.” Hao replied. “I found this place online! It is a M–mo–Mogao Grotto.” Yue said confused. “Mogao Grotto? Psh, that place is ancient. I had an exhibition on that. I– Why are you asking, anyway?” Hao questioned. “Oh, let’s go there! We live close to it!” Yue said excitedly. “Are you crazy?! It is dangerous! It was made in 366AD!!” Hao whisper–yelled. “I don’t care, let’s go! It’s just a 25–minute walk!” Yue said as she dragged her brother out of the house. “Ridiculous! Utterly ridiculous! I will not risk my dear WiFi just for this stupid adventure!” Hao protested & whined.

“Here we are at the Mega Greta!!” Yue said, amazed. “Mogao Grotto–” Hao corrected, “This place is awesome!!” Yue said, stunned. “Eh, not really. Kinda boring to be honest with you.” Hao protested. “Don’t be so boring, Hao! Can’t you appreciate that this place even exists?!” Yue whined. “No, actually not really,” Hao replied. “You–” Yue was about to punch her brother’s face just as he distracted her by saying “Let’s explore the outside of this place!” Hao said excitedly. “Oh! Right, about that!” Yue said as she started to go around the Mogao Grotto. “Tch, ridiculous,” Hao murmured.

“Okay brother, let’s get into it! Lemme just text mom real quick–” “No Yue, we have no WiFi here, it is pointless.” Hao said as he cut Yue off. “O–oh...” Yue said as her head went down. “Tsk, reckless girl” Hao whispered. “Let’s go in anyway!” Yue said. “Fine, but if we get in any mess, I’m telling mom that it was your doing,” Hao said trying to make a deal. “Deal,” Yue replied.

The 2 somehow got in and started exploring. Yue thought the gate was left open for a few, but she realized she was wrong. A loud bang seemed to hit the floor. “H–Hao?!? W–What was that?!” Yue said worriedly. “Oh, the gates went down,” Hao smirked. “Told you it wouldn’t be a good idea.” “This isn’t time for jokes, Hao! We are trapped!” Yue whispered. “Kay, kay, fine,” Hao murmured. “Well...well, what do we have here, hmm?” an echoey voice crept up the 2’s spine.

“Why, hello there.~~” An anonymous voice echoed “Who are you?!” Hao shouted. “Oh, how rude of me,” The anonymous voice chuckled. “I’m a dragon, she is a dragon. We’re here to become your friends!” The 1st dragon echoed. “REALLY?!” Yue exclaimed. “No, of course not. We’re here to attack you.” Those 2 dragons quickly came from a statue to life. The first dragon was a deep blue, the second was a vibrant red.

The first one went for Hao, the second chased Yue around. “HAHAHA, THIS IS GETTING FUN!!” The first dragon said as he punched Hao. The second dragon was elegantly violent and was not to be messed with. “My dear, you are both badly hurt! Hah, we might as well make you die right now!” The second dragon barked. “I’m sorry Hao! I’m so sorry! This is all my fault! If I hadn’t become so reckless, none of this would’ve happened! Because of me, we are now doomed!!” “YEAH, I KNOW THAT! GOOD THAT YOU KNOW.” Hao replied. As the war was going on, Hao & Yue were heavily bruised & hurt. Yue broke her arm, Hao was coughing blood. They were in heavy, heavy pain. They thought they couldn’t fight anymore. So they said their last words. “KIDS! QUICK!

ESCAPE! I'LL HOLD THEM OFF!!!” A statue figure said. They both ran out of the Mogao Grotto and went back home.

“OH, MY WORD! CHILDREN! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?!” Hao & Yue’s mom cried. “Sorry mother...I guess I was just too reckless..” Yue exclaimed softly. “Yeah, no joke. If you ever plan to do something stupid like this again, don’t pull me in it. Hao joked. “Sure thing, brother,” Yue said, right before she fell asleep.

Lexy and The Cave Dragon

ESF Glenealy School, Lee, Chae Young – 10

Once, there was a lovely adventurous girl called Lexy. She loves to explore and visit other places she especially likes to explore caves. Summer break was coming soon and she decided to go to a cave called Mogao Grottoes. Lexy learned about that in school and she thought it would be exciting. She dashed to her mother and asked about her idea. “Mother, please can we go to China and go to a place called the Mogao Grottoes?” she asked. Mother thought for a while. “Are you really sure you want to go? I thought we could stay here and have a nice holiday with friends and families.” said Mother. “Yes! I want to go more than anything.” Lexy replied quickly. “Very well we may go,” said Mother.

The next morning Lexy and Mother were off to China. ‘Lexy finally got to go to China!’ Lexy thought happily. In the plane Lexy totally forgot that she was so air sick. She barfed in the toilet three times. When the plane arrived Lexy quickly rushed outside first and got to smell the fresh air in China. Mother found a small Inn where they could stay in. “Are you ready to explore China?” Mother asked. “I am ready to see everything, especially the Mogao Grottoes!” said Lexy confidently.

In the early morning Lexy and Mother went to look at the caves. It was like an old small tall tower cave. “Wow!” cried Lexy. It was so old that paint of grey stripes peeled out in the walls. Mother went inside the caves and Lexy followed her. Just then there was darkness. Lexy wandered everywhere in the caves, then she realized that she was stuck inside the cave. “M—Mother, where are you?” Lexy asked, feeling so scared. There was no sound. Lexy wanted to cry but she tried to be brave. She saw two flint rocks and she made a small fire. Suddenly she saw a very ugly painting. “Ahhh!” Lexy screamed. She tried to be calm again. ‘It’s just a painting, it’s just a painting, it’s just a painting.’ she thought trying to calm herself. She felt much better before she could move on and she heard a noise. Then a figure came out of the shadows and Lexy realized that it was not a person. It had a horn, razor sharp teeth, big wings and a horrible stinky fire breath. “Dragon!!” Lexy screamed. “Calm down, I won’t hurt you,” said the Dragon. Her scales were brown and grey like the caves. “Who are you?” asked Lexy. “My name is Caveslayer. I live in this cave. What is your name?” asked Caveslayer. “M—my name is Lexy,” answered Lexy. It was her first time meeting a dragon in a cave. The Dragon looked kind of upset. “Are you okay?” Lexy asked. “I came from heaven and I am here on earth to protect the caves but I miss my home. I want to go back to heaven.” replied Caveslayer sadly. “Why don’t we get out of here together?” asked Lexy. “Are you sure?” asked Caveslayer. There are many traps in the caves.” said Caveslayer. Soom they both agreed and went on their adventure. They went left, right, straight and back. Finally they found the entrance locked. In front of the caves there were puzzles of maths. ‘Darn, I hate maths. I am so bad at it.’ thought Lexy. There were so many questions in maths. “Are you good at maths?” Lexy asked. “Nope, I have no idea what maths means, well dragons learn gaths. It is similar to those problems but much easier.” replied Caveslayer. The first question was 6×7 . “I will give you a tip, use a stick and do the calculation on the floor. It will be very useful.” said Caveslayer. She calculated and got her answer 43. She carefully put the number into the puzzle. However she was wrong. The cave began to shrink and squeeze together. Lexy and Caveslayer were almost being stuck.

Caveslayer tried to think but she couldn’t find an answer in her head. “Think again,” Caveslayer said. Lexy concentrated then put the number 42. The answer was correct but it was half closed. There was another question. 9×5 . “I know this one!” Cried Lexy. She put the number 45 and the door opened. Lexy rode into Caveslayer’s back and squeezed out of the door. They were free. However Lexy realized that she had to go find her mom. Caveslayer landed on the entrance of the cave. “I will miss you. I hope we can see each other again.” said Lexy. “I will miss you too, I will always remember you.” replied Caveslayer. Then they gave each other the last hug and she flew into the sky and disappeared. Lexy went off to find her mother. She found her mother sitting very tired. ‘She must have looked for me.’ thought Lexy. She ran to her mother and they gave a hug. “Where were you?!” Mother asked. “It’s a secret,” said Lexy. “But I wasn’t far.” Mother sighed in relief. Lexy would never forget the amazing daring adventure she had done with her dragon friend Caveslayer.

The Gem Stone

ESF Glenealy School, Lee, Henie – 8

One day there was a girl called Elizabeth. She LOVED animals especially Non – Real creatures like mythic creatures! Elizabeth always shows everyone kindness and she is always respectful. Her house was on Braemar Hill road with a lot of trees! That's how she now loves nature! One day she wakes up and sees a beautiful bunny in a tree so she takes a picture with her favourite camera! She loved art and her family. She always adventures all around the world with her little sister called Misty! They went out on an adventure to find new things and experiment new things. They saw a lot of pets like: Puppy, Cat which are all different types! But in the meantime her little sister saw a Mogao Grotto! Then Misty said “Elizabeth! Look there is a little thing there, what is that?” Then Elizabeth said “Oh my! Goodness me it is a Mogao Grotto! Let's have an adventure!” Misty asked, “ Do you think it is a great idea?” Elizabeth said “Duh Misty we need to find out new things!” So they went on an adventure. When they went in they said “ WOAHH OMG” .There were traditional Chinese statues and there we're one tunnel to go somewhere else so they went in and walked and there were obstacles. The floor was turning red and turning..... HOT! Misty said “ AHHH” Elizabeth said “ get on the obstacle! It is LAVA!” So they jump and do obstacles and the floor turns normal. Then they entered the room and saw a magical effect and then it damaged Elizabeth's magical necklace! Then they saw glowing bright as a hot morning sun then it was a..... MYTHIC CREATURES!

Then Elizabeth said “ OMG! Hello mythic creatures! My~ name is Elizabeth and this is Misty. What is your name?” Then Kitsune said “Sorry to break your necklace! This is my friend's. My name is Ruby the Kitsune and this is Kiren the Phoenix and Luna the Simurgh, Rose pink the Birthstone, Crystal white the Birthstone, Amethyst purple Birthstone And lastly Lucy the Green Birthstone which is the youngest.” Elizabeth said “ Oh wow what a wonderful name! Do you want to join our group and adventure all around with your power?” Then Everyone said “ YES! Please we will be honoured!” Then they became a wonderful group and always adventures all around the world!

The Heartbreaking Breakup

ESF Glenealy School, Nair, Ira – 9

PROLOGUE

“I love you more” “No, I love you more,” teased a happy couple. But of course, they thought that a middle school couple wouldn't even last till high school, but it did— and they got married! They knew that what they had was special.. “Surprise, I’m pregnant!,” cried the woman. [BABY CRYING] “I’m gonna name her Miley,” said the woman. What they had was special, and they didn’t know it then, but they had a whole adventure waiting for them!

The room was surely filled with tension, for no one noticed young Miley laying her eyes upon the situation. “You are so self centered that you forgot your own daughter's birthday!,” Miley’s mum suddenly rebuked. And with that, off went Miley’s dad— and down came Miley. “What were you fighting about!? Where has dad gone? Did he really forget my birthday!?,`sobbed Miley. “I’m sorry sweetheart, you're dad and I should have told you what was going on earlier,” admitted Miley’s mum “You're dad and I have been fighting for a while now, we just thought it would be safer to not tell you. We decided to have our family adjourned for a while.” The room was silent, as Miley and her mum gazed up at the inky night sky, Miley in tears..

The next morning Miley woke up to find her and her mum sitting at the kitchen table, where they had left off last night.. Suddenly, the door slammed open and Miley’s mum woke up. “Miley, Miley!,” Someone screamed, “I didn’t know your parents were getting divorced, why didn’t you tell me?” Miley was confused “Ralia, is that you? My parents aren’t getting divorced, they’re just having a break,” Miley replied. Ralia, the girl calling Miley, was Miley’s BFFAE. (best friend forever and ever.) “What? But my mum said...,” but Ralia stopped right there, and realized that Miley didn’t know “Know what?,” asked Miley, her mum replied, “Your dad and I are thinking about getting divorced”

“Ralia, I’m sorry but I think you're gonna have to go now because my mum and I have some sharing to do, or more like she has some sharing to do with me. So can you please leave now,” asked Miley. So she went, and Miley opened her mouth, but then again, she chose to shut it... “I know, I know, I’m gonna have to do all the talking and not you. Because I’m the one who kept a secret and I usually do that to you when you're the one keeping the secret. We just thought to keep a secret, for the better of course,” Lulled Miley’s mum. Just then, Miley burst into tears and ran out of the door as fast as she could, hopped on the bike, and cycled away..

Miley’s mum quickly called her husband, or more like her almost ex husband, and told him everything. “I came as fast as I could, let's go look for her.. They too ran out, hopped in the car, and drove in Miley’s direction. Miley, on the other hand, had now reached the one place her dad used to tell her to ‘never enter, or else..’ But she did enter, and little did Miley know that she was reading about this place earlier today: The Mogao Grottoes! She hopped off her bike, and ran in..

When her parents reached that far, her dad was terrified. He knew Miley had always listened to his warning about The Mogao Grottoes, but it seems not today. They called and called until it was night.. But that didn’t stop them! They kept on calling, desperately. “Miley, come out! This place is dangerous. Trust us!” Finally, they heard a reply, “Why should I trust you? You betrayed me!”

“Miley please! We’ve been calling for two hours now, please just come out!” “At least we know she replied, that means she’s safe,” Miley’s mum assured her almost ex husband. But that wasn't it, Miley realized how much her family loved her, breakup or not. She was finally starting to rethink the ‘hideout forever’ thing. But it wasn't just her, her parents, still calling, were also starting to realize how much Miley, and each other meant to them, basically, how much the family meant to them.. “Do you think that us calling for so long is the reason this is taking longer and that we should give her some time and space to figure this out?,” asked Miley’s dad. Miley’s mum replied, “Maybe..” But just as they were leaving, Miley ran out of the cave and gave them a big hug and said “I’m so, so sorry for running away. And dad, I’m so, so sorry for not listening to your warning. But most of all, I’m sorry for not respecting your decision.”

“Oh no Miley, we’re sorry. We should have told you the truth,” replied Miley’s mum. And her dad added “And you shouldn’t be sorry for ‘not respecting our decision’, breakups take time to get over, and we’re still figuring it out ourselves.. That’s why we didn’t tell you. And there is something we would like you to know,” said her dad. Miley of course was curious “What?” Her mum replied this time, “We also, while you were in there ‘realising’, we also realised that our family means everything to us” “so you’re not getting divorced?,” asked Miley. “No,” her mum replied, “No, we’re not!”

Miley sniffled, “I love you guys so much!”

[HUG]

EPILOGUE

Miley happily skipped down the stairs, gently humming a song. Her family was back to normal now! “Hey mum, can me and Ralia have pancakes for breakfast?,” asked Miley. Of course, her mum was weirded out, “What, but Ralia’s not here” “LOOK OUT!,” called someone anonymously. But it was too late, the table had been crashed— by Ralia! “Skates again, Ralia?!,” scolded Miley’s mum. “Sorry,” she replied.. But she wasn’t mad, this had already happened eight times before this one! Okay, maybe better!

The Story of Fairies in a Cave

ESF Glenealy School, Oladokun Piguillem, Sade – 8

Sade was a 10-year-old girl, that was living in a small town in the mountains where the Mogao Caves are, in Gansu Province, China. She was very adventurous and brave.

One rainy day, she wanted to go out. Her parents stopped her from going out because it was very foggy, stormy, very cloudy and you could not see anything outside. So, the whole family went to sleep. When Sade heard the lightning struck, she went out of bed and checked on her parents if they were sleeping or not. Her mom and dad moved a little bit but did not wake up. A second later, her dad saw her peeking at them and thought it was not real and he was dreaming. She rushed back to her room. Her dad went to her room to see if she was there and saw her sleeping. When her parents went back to sleep, she got dressed and went out. But before Sade went out up the hill, she saw a huge blue light. She was so curious about what it was, that she went up that hill. It had so many rocks that she even thought it was called ROCKY Mountain, but it was called FAIRY Mountain.

On Fairy Mountain there were Twelve bits. It took one hour to climb every single bit of Fairy Mountain. There are Twelve bits of Fairy Mountain, and each part takes one hour to get there, so the answer is all together how many hours Sade is going to walk is Twelve hours. Sade never gave up on walking and it was so rainy and cloudy she could barely see a thing, but she still did not give up. Sade did not know that there were Twelve bits of Fairy Mountain. Sade arrived at the first bit of Fairy Mountain. It was a creepy forest that made weird noises. Sade almost got lost in the forest, but she got back on track thanks to a map she had in her backpack. Sade made it to the second bit of Fairy Mountain. There was two Bigfoot in the second bit. It was so cold that Sade got frozen. Luckily for her, the two Bigfoot came to save Sade. Sade was screaming while the Bigfoot were waiting for her to stop screaming until Sade fainted. The Bigfoot could talk, and Sade was freaking out and she almost fainted again. It was so scary because the Bigfoot had cracked the ice and almost cracked Sade. After that, Bigfoot wanted to hug Sade, but Sade woke up and instead of getting a hug, Sade started running while yelling:

“I run for my life!”

Sade was also screaming: “someone, help me!”, “someone help!”, and Bigfoot put their hands down because they were sad that Sade did not hug them and did not show gratitude. The little girl knew that it was not right, not to be thankful, so Sade decided to stop running and wait for them to show them gratitude. They started hugging and then she could not stop because their fur was very soft and fluffy.

Sade was lucky because she has been practicing Bigfoot language, so if Sade ever sees a Bigfoot like now, she can talk to them.

She only needed three minutes to practice Bigfoot language, and when she was done, she told them if they could help her if she ever gets in danger again. They said: “DALA” (which means yes in Bigfoot language). So, they went of to find out what the blue light was and why it was there. The Bigfoot followed Sade to the third bit, and they saw many warning signs saying: “do not continue, go back down or some dangerous things can happen”. They wanted to ignore the signs and continue until the twelve bit, which was the top.

At the end of the third bit, they saw a magical, weird door. The door was blue and cracked. They went through the door and bad things started to happen and they started running: on the forth bit spears were shot at them, on the fifth bit the floor crumbled, on the sixth bit the walls were squeezing in, on the seventh bit there were mini knives falling from the ceiling, on the eight bit huge dogs attacked them, on the ninth bit rocks were falling from the mountain trying to knock them off, on the tenth bit there a huge fire started, on the eleventh an earthquake started until the twelfth bit ... the survived!!

They could see three huge caves.

The cave on the left was dark and cold. A monster was living inside that will eat you if you dare going inside.

The cave on the right, was red, full of lava with bubbles.

The middle cave had a bright light inside and it also led to the blue light and if you went in that cave all around you will turn into rainbows and flowers and things that are so, so joyful. So, after one hour of thinking which cave they should go through, they finally finished thinking they said that they were going through the middle cave and they were so lucky they went through the middle cave because this cave was leading to the top. When they finally got to the top of Fairy Mountain, the twelfth floor, it was incredible!

It was so amazing!! It was full of colourful flowers, magic rainbows, and FAIRIES! It was worth going through so many dangers to be there.

There were thousands of them! They were singing, dancing, playing, laughing, and hugging. In case you don't know, when fairies hug, they make a blue light... the lightnings you see during storms!

So, if on a rainy day you see a blue light or lightning, don't be afraid to go out on an adventure, as you might see fairies hugging. And if you are very lucky, they might hug you!

New Tales From The Mogao Grottoes:

ESF Glenealy School, Pang, Avery – 10

The humans constructed me a few thousand years ago. They formed holes in the mountain and painted over the walls. Over the years, I was decorated with Buddhist Art. But slowly, I was forgotten. People found other routes in the silk road. I was slowly left alone, until all I could hear was the wind rustling in my ears. I fell asleep from boredom. Then, I had a vision...

Darkness loomed over the vast desert, as it covered a soft, dark blanket on the smooth landscape, leaving no trace of light. Altan walked slowly, intimidated by the stunning landscape. The full moon glowed so dim that it was impossible to see without a torch in hand.

A slight movement on the corner of Altan's eye triggered a reaction of fear. Gradually, he turned his head around, trying his best not to stir. Something was moving underneath the sand, lazily towards him. He retraced his steps, alarmed by the sense of unease.

It moved closer. 50 feet, 20 feet, 10 feet. That was when Altan started to run. He didn't dare look back. He navigated around the endless dunes of sand, only to find a jagged hill that was as big as an elephant. Altan climbed up anxiously. When he looked back, he saw a red worm-like creature, five foot long, that was attempting to grab him and feast on him until satisfied.

The grotesque critter had blood red skin which looked like tubes connected with each other by a 100 layers of rusty duct tape. The front of the creature had a mouth like a lamprey's, a conveyor belt of teeth spiralling down into a never ending abyss of darkness. If the rock wasn't there he would be erased from existence. Although Altan's hands and legs were scraped by sharp rocks, he survived.

The sun began to rise as Altan once again was travelling on the barren wasteland of the Gobi Desert, that was when I saw myself. The cave. I was no longer alone, was I?

I woke up in shock, and found Altan in front of him. He was awestruck by the size of me. I stared back at him. For so long, I had never seen someone in such a long time, it was almost impossible to recall when. But now, I appreciated the fact that there was someone.

Some hours later, Altan had left. Once again, I was alone, and fell asleep from boredom. I had a vision again.

A giant, powerful monkey was terrorizing the heavens, throwing fireballs at every single structure he could find. Warriors from the heavens were throwing spears, rocks and fireballs at the monkey, but nothing seemed to work. Below the monkey, there were monkeys and humans, fighting with each other. Bigger monkeys were sailing in boats, firing an arrow that would eventually land precisely on their forehead. Underneath the fighting, someone was plotting revenge.

Not soon later, a few explorers walked towards me, marking the end of my solitary confinement. More and more people came, and finally I was not the cave that was once alone.

The Legend of the Mogao Grottoes

ESF Glenealy School, Sreeram, Avantika – 9

“Ooh so close!” whispered Carlos as he was walking through the forest. Carlos was an 18 year old boy who had an obsession with treasure. He also loved to explore. Not too long ago he found a map that led to the Mogao Grottoes. The Mogao Grottoes was an old cottage owned by a very wealthy family. But for at least a century this family had been missing. Legend says that the treasures the family owned cursed them and that whoever owned or touched the treasure shall turn into a demon. Carlos was in search of that treasure. He didn’t believe or care about what ‘legend’ said. Suddenly something started to glow not too far away from him. He started walking closer and closer to the cottage until he finally reached. At first Carlos thought that he must have been dreaming so he pinched himself. “OW! Definitely not dreaming” cried Carlos, he was absolutely stunned. He couldn’t believe how much treasure was right in front of him to take. He was just about to pop some gold coins in his bag when ZAP, his arms started to feel lighter and turned black, his legs started to fade away and he could fly! To Carlos it felt like a good thing but later he didn’t feel great at all. He took out his mirror and saw his face! The legend was true. He had turned into a demon. He couldn’t say a word! He looked hideous, as if his face had melted and then hardened to stone! He was terrified!

The Legend of the Mogao Grottoes (Avantika Sreeram)

It was a gloomy morning but something felt special about today to Andrea. Andrea is a 9 year old girl who goes to Sycamore Valley Primary School. She is just about the brightest person at school and loves to research and explore. Today was the day her class would start their projects on Mogao Grottoes, in Andrea’s opinion this was the best part of the day! “YAY! It’s time for Mogao Grottoes research,” exclaimed Andrea. So off she went with her friends to research. Later on that day after school, she was dying to ask her parents for something huge. Finally once she got the chance, she ran to ask. “Hi mum, hi dad! You know how we’re researching Mogao Grottoes? Well I thought since you used to be explorers we could go look for the treasure or something. PLEASE!”. Andrea’s parents were bewildered, they hadn’t been exploring since they moved to the city. “Of course not! Don’t you know what legend says? Whoever touches the treasure shall perish or turn into a demon!” cried her parents. Andrea was furious, she couldn’t believe her parents who had been amazing explorers a long time ago were refusing to help out their daughter for a very important school project. She thought this was very unfair and unreasonable but she knew herself she couldn’t let this happen. She had to come up with something to go and explore. Right that minute Andrea got an amazing idea, it was risky but worth it. She had to sneak out tonight and sneak back in 2 days after midnight. Andrea wracked her brain to think of a much easier idea but it whatever it was wouldn’t fulfill her desire. So she had no choice but to start packing for tonight. Later at night when her parents were asleep she slipped out with her bags. First thing in the morning her parents realized what happened but very vaguely. They didn’t understand why Andrea would have run away, but then it struck them, she went to search for the Mogao Grottoes. Exactly at 12:00 that night Andrea was walking through the Sycamore Valley Park. It felt unusually cold and quiet without the lights on. In that split second she suddenly started falling down and down and down. Everything was a blur until she heard a very faint squawk, “Finally! SQUAWK! You have opened your eyes!” Squawked the unusual parrot. “Hi! I’m Leo! Are you a human?” “Yes.” replied Andrea weakly. Leo tried to pick her up with all his might but she was too heavy. Once Andrea felt better she got up. She asked Leo where she was too busy checking some kind of ragged and old map. At last he told her where she was. “We are in China, just a few miles away from the Mogao Grottoes. The Grottoes is a large cave which has a demon lurking in it” said Leo excitedly. “I know what the Mogao Grottoes are, we are researching them in school,” replied Andrea irrationally. Suddenly a bush near them started shaking. Andrea went to check it and observed that there were hardly readable words carved into a stone under the bush. Andrea was about to touch the carvings when in that split second she was whizzed into some kind of green portal. “AAAHHH! Help! Somebody HELP!” yelled Leo. Andrea was at last able to calm him down. Andrea was confused and unsure where she was until she saw the glowing treasure. She was almost about to touch the treasure when she heard a soft but slithery voice saying something to her. “Stop. Don’t touch it,” said the mysterious voice. Andrea stopped but was really curious. “Who are you? Why shouldn’t I touch it?” asked Andrea quietly. “Don’t scream or run away if I tell you who I am,” said the voice “I am the demon from the legend. Around 20 years ago I came here to explore like you. I was silly enough to not believe the legend and when I touched the treasure I turned into this hideous creature. By the way I’m Carlos but my demon name is Whistler.” Andrea was astonished that she was right in front of a demon but wasn’t getting attacked. “I have to tell Leo! Leo!” called Andrea, but he wasn’t there. Andrea turned around and Whistler was gone too... TO BE CONTINUED...

Max the Wolf

ESF Glenealy School, Sze, Darren – 10

Crash! A statue has been broken again in the mogao caves. The workers inside the caves can only see a shadow. No one knows who breaks the statues. People say that it was a phantom, some say it was a thief. But no one truly knows who is doing it.

Once, there was a wolf boy called Max, he lived in a forest, and he is a bad wolf, because ever since his parents were lost in a tragic storm, Max has not been taught to be polite and be kind to other people, so every day he just does nothing, and he likes to eat other wolves' food without asking.

One day, Max was taking an afternoon nap, then there was a lot of talking on the other side of the forest which broke the silence. It turns out that there was a new attraction which was discovered in the forest, and it is formed by a complicated underground tunnel system interconnected inside to a lot of caves. Each cave has different buddha statues. Max is now angry that there will be a lot of voices when he is sleeping and resting. He wants to stop it. Max thought of a plan, at night, he will break all the buddha statues in every cave and will do it sneakily and silently.

The night after he planned it, he went to the caves at midnight, all the people who work in the mogao caves as well as visitors have gone back home. When Max stepped in, there was no one. He smashed all the buddhas in the first cave, second and the third. Then he went back to the forest to sleep.

The next day, he woke up to the voices of the people, but this time, the news crew was there. They were reporting that there was a break in into the mongao caves, and all the statues in caves one to three have been broken. The police are trying to find who broke the statues, and they are going to every house in the town. Max knew that he did something wrong, but he did not admit it.

One night, as he was destroying the statues, Max suddenly heard a loud alarm that blared all over the caves, and security guards came rushing into where he was. But Max dodged left and right, and he ran as fast as lightning back to the forest.

The next morning, Max woke up to the news crew's voices again. They announced that the caves have made a foolproof security plan, and it includes a trap, where at night, if anyone trespasses the caves and doing suspicious activity, they will be caught and brought to the local police station. Max heard the announcement, but he just ignored it. In the night, he crept into the caves, but when he stepped in, he saw that he accidentally crossed a laser sensor, there was a noisy alarm. In 2 seconds, Max found himself inside a cage attached to the ceiling, then he felt that he was being lowered, when he finally got out, he was happy that he could escape. When he reached the exit, he was stopped by the guards. They took Max to the police station. Max was so nervous, and he passed out.

When Max woke up, there was no one in the room except him. When he tried to open the door and sneak out, the door was locked. As there were no guards outside, he tried to kick the door lock but after he did that, the lock started to flash red, and Max knew that it wasn't a good sign. So, he just gave up and sat tight.

Suddenly, a monk opened the door. He is bold, kind with a facial appearance like a buddha and he told Max to sit down with a nice and soft tone. He gave Max two magic beans, and said a magic word, after that, all Max could see was colorful smoke.

When the smoke disappeared, Max discovered that he was inside a cave with a few buddha statues alive and looking at him kindly. They suddenly spoke, and said "Max, you are a bad wolf, but there is good inside of you, we can help you to achieve that goodness. Our names are Wisdom, Kindness, Generosity, Patience and Compassion." Max is very surprised at first, but finally came to his senses. He is very happy that someone can help him to become good again. At first, when the buddhas were talking to him, he was daydreaming for the first few days, but after a week, he finally listened to the buddhas, and he learned something. After a month, he got a test from the Buddhas about being good. When he finished the test, he hoped that he would get a full score, and he did! He is very happy, but he needed to stay there for two years to learn how to become a good person.

The two years have finally passed, Max is now a very good boy, the buddhas used magic to return him back to the mongao caves. After he arrived there, he left the caves and went back to his home in the forest. He was very tired after two long years, and he slept for a long time. After he woke up, he went to the mongao caves' recruitment center as he wanted to get a job to renovate the mongao caves. With his good and sincere attitude, he got a job as a cleaner. Since then, he goes there everyday to help clean and dust the statues. When tourists come to the caves, they heard the story about how Max turned from a bad wolf to a good one. This wonderful story has been propagated to other villages and people enjoy listening to it all the time.

The Descendants of the Grotto Guardian

ESF Glenealy School, Szeto, Abby – 9

XiuYing jumped. Enough to skip over the lava in the stone hole in the ground. “It is not that far!” She yelled out to her friends, Daniel and Stacey looked underneath their feet. “It’s literally ONE METER long!” Stacey yelled across the lava. It leeches up, heat steaming from the stone above. “Fine, if so, use this.” XiuYing focused on the pulse underground. There was something that reached for the surface, that wanted to touch the sky. And so it did. XiuYing imagined pushing it upwards, towards the surface with her mind. “WOAH!” Stacey cried. “What is that thing!?” a block of bridge was pushing upwards. “RUN OVER BEFORE IT BLOCKS OUR PATH!” XiuYing cried to them. “Won’t it block our temporary EXIT as well?” Daniel asked, worried. “JUST GET OVER. NOW!” XiuYing bellowed. Stacey and Daniel hurried over the slabs. Suddenly the rising speeds up. The stone flushed up, flying through the skylight. “Oh.” Daniel gasped, awestruck. “How in the world of flying pudding did you do that?” Stacey asked, as she gaped at the sky. “I do not know. Unless I have some amazing—giblety things, what do you call them? Ah, yes. SUPERPOWERS.” XiuYing retailed. “It is unlikely I have SUPERPOWERS.” ”Um— YES YOU DO!? THAT WAS HISTORY’S MOST BRIEF MOMENT IN THE FABRIC OF TIME, BREAKING ALL THE LAWS OF GRAVITY BY LITERALLY WEDGING A BRIDGE!” Stacey hollered, looking like a chicken who was trying to fly. “Guys, can we get going?” Daniel asked. “Yes.” XiuYing pushed ahead. “Aggggggggh!” “XiuYing!” Daniel and Stacey cried in horror. They couldn’t see anything. It was too dark. Who knows what had happened. “Well, there’s only one option. We go forward.”

Chapter two

“MORE LAVA!?” Stacey looked SO ANNOYED. “How did you get over it again?” Stacey asked. She stared out over a pit of lava, surrounding a giant stone pavilion. “Hmm, maybe we can do something ourselves this time.” Daniel unzipped his backpack and pulled out a big waterproof sac that said ‘1MM WATER, LAVA EXTINGUISHER’ “okay, that should do it.” Daniel carefully let the water out of the sac making his way through, to the pavilion. “Woah!” Stacey cried. “Yes, I know very well stored treasure, even throughout the years.” XiuYing said, as she placed her palm in the centre of a golden lectern, surrounded by diamonds that leached out like wind-tipped spears. Her palm fit, like it was made for it. “*What is this sorcery?*” XiuYing whispered to herself. Suddenly, an immense glowing started. “WHAT???” Stacey yelled. “AHGGGGG!” Daniel suddenly cried. A big hole opened beneath their feet. One by one, the stone pillars of the pavilion fell, forcing XiuYing to run, and leap from the platform that the pavilion was on. “NOOO!” Stacey cried, her voice slowly fading. What had happened? XiuYing ignored the tears and carried on focusing. Waitaminute. Wasn’t she falling a few seconds ago? She looked to her feet to realise she was on a small stone platform. “What?” she said, suspicious. Was there someone watching her? She looked at the lava that surrounded her and noticed something shiny near her. Maybe it was some treasure, or something that had fallen off the pavilion with her, but no. It was a golden plaque with words engraved on it. 為了拯救你的朋友，你必須通過測試 it read. It was in Chinese! *Chinese*. She KNEW this language, more than anything else. “Hmm... in order to save your friends, you must pass the test...” XiuYing gasped. How did whoever or *whatever* was in the pavilion know about her friends, or herself? She paid it no attention, and walked off into the next room. She rolled her eyes. The next room was a pool of water, with a long distance, much too far to swim. So she conjured the stone bridge, and immediately ran over. And just like that, she had passed the test! Her friends emerged from under a stone slab. “You saved us!” Stacey yelled happily. They ran to the next room. It was filled with paintings and decorations. Stacey and Daniel gasped. And XiuYing suddenly said, “we must be on guard. This place is full of—” click! Daniel stepped on a pressure plate. XiuYing, the brave girl who dared to go into danger. XiuYing, the girl who wasn’t afraid. Now, she couldn’t imagine that she was falling into a void.

To be continued...

The Secret Box

ESF Glenealy School, Tsui, Jeremy – 8

Once upon a time, there were two investigators who needed to go to a cave in China because it was creepy, dark, and scary, and people who went there all disappeared after they go into that large cave. The investigator was Nate, and his assistant was Chloe. Lots of investigators went there but they were disappeared in the cave.

They were going there to find out what was in the creepy large dark cave. When they arrived there, they saw a big creepy treasure box. The cave was dusty too with a foul smell. It was disgusting. They wanted to open the large box. After a while, they opened the scary treasure box. Suddenly they fell asleep. When they woke up, they saw an old filthy note and it said: Dear friend you are captured by the monsters. You must fight every single creepy monster! Caution there are lots of people who died here or didn't want to fight. There are three monsters who are good at fighting. There was a shiny key on the sticky floor. Next to the note, there was a super dusty key hole. Do you know what was inside, they were soon going to find out what was inside. When they turned the lock with the key, the door opened itself and it was like a ghost opening an old door with its hands. When they went inside, they were in a park and it was nighttime. They saw a man and they became friends. His name was Ice Man and they went to the creepy, dark stadium where they fought the filthy giant. The first giant was called Dragon Man. He had muscles that were as big as a giant van. The Dragon tried to smack Nate but Dragon missed it.

Then Ice Man shouted "freeze power" and shot a lot of snow. Then the dragon blew fire and it made the ice become water. Then he shot the dragon again and this time the dragon was slow and it made the dragon freezed. Then they went to the next match and it was against Bomb Man. Bomb Man kept shooting bombs at them. They all dodged at the bombs and Nate kicked Bomb Man but he was not afraid of that but got less power. Then he kicked him a few times and he was dizzy then they pushed Bomb Man. Then they went to the next level where they met Balloon Man. It was the last level. He was very fat but could float. He was popping the balloon. It was noisy so they all covered their ears. But then Chloe was angry because Balloon Man was hurting her friend's ears. She jumped on Balloon Man and she somehow made him fall down so they got out of that treasure box. They told everyone about what happened inside the treasure box. They became a team that fights bad guys.

Living The Dream

ESF Glenealy School, Wang, Henry – 15

I'm just an ordinary twelve year old kid. I live in an ordinary street, in an ordinary town, in an ordinary city, called London, everything about me is normal, well, except that I am living an absolute DREAM

It all started the year before last year, when I was adopted to this unordinary family, a snooky rich one, at first I was so absolutely relieved to be part of a family, hoping that they would love and take care of me, but no, it happened to be the exact opposite, did they love me? NO. Did they take care of me? NO. Did they spend time with me? NO! So what happened exactly?...

Roughly one year after settling in with the rotten family, the parents went out for yet another fancy dinner, leaving me in for a whole dumb afternoon. And at the very same moment I heard the main door slam, I thought of something not like anything I've thought of before, so my mum and dad always forbade me to go to their luxurious bedroom, so whilst they were gone, I thought, why don't I sneak in?

And that's the moment, where my very own eyes met the most shocking but at the same time most amazing thing I had and will ever see. A portal. No I'm not playing around with you, I saw a portal, but what was inside was even better, inside such a portal stood none other but the worldwide famous Mogao Grottoes !

Obviously, I stepped inside, I checked out many of the caves, they all looked so cool and ancient , until I began thinking about my family, of how mad my mum and dad will be, how they'll hate me so much more, how they'll bully my non stop for sure, and man let me tell you, I began to get angry, I mean WHY? WHY are they so mean to me? WHY? JUST WHY? But the anger only got better of me, each time I thought about them my fists will clench up tightly, my face would go up in anger, and my eyes would stare out madly, and finally I knew enough was enough, why couldn't I go to a family that wants me, huh why? And then something happened , something happened, a thundering voice came out of the sky “ If you manage to defeat the last witch in the fantasy area then you shall be rewarded with what you wish, love” the voice boomed.

So there I was, in fantasy area fighting the last witch, both summoning our own dragon that is good/bad ready for battle, then casting spells on each other, dodging lasers. The witch was good, but I was faster, stronger, fiercer, togher... you get the Idea, but the witch managed to keep on track, until I thought of something, light, LIGHT! That's it, witches hate light! I shouted the correct spell and did it! I was so happy I began dancing and I nearly fell off the dragon! Then I was back in the mogao grottoes, and a cool heart layed in my hand, and sighed a relief not knowing what to do next, FOR THE PORTAL WAS GONE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Then I woke up, I was lying in my bed breathing fast and heavily, and finally came to my senses, “I did it for nothing!” I cried, I buried my hands in my face sobbing, but then lots of unusual things happened. My brother asked if I'm okay, my mum put her hand over my back, and my dad said what's wrong? Am I crazy I thought, or if the dream came true!

So everything became the exact opposite. Did they love me? YES! Did they take care of me? YES! Did they spend time with me? YES...

So here I am, I'm just an ordinary twelve year old boy, I live in an ordinary house, in an ordinary street, in an ordinary town, in an ordinary city, called London. Everything about me is normal, well, except that I am living an absolute DREAM!

The Mystery Cave

ESF Glenealy School, Wat, Jamie – 9

(You'll never guess what happened to me!)

One sunny morning, Angus, Benjamin, and I met up to walk down the woods together to have a nice picnic. So on Sunday morning, we gathered our hiking equipment and a picnic box. It had two juicy submarine sandwiches, two cans of lemonade, and a healthy salad. We chatted together what we were going to do in the woods.

"We should explore a cave!" I said. "Or we could go back home and grab camping equipment to go camping!"

Angus exclaimed.

Suddenly, we reached a left and right hand fork. One said: "Campsite" and another said: "The scary woods." After few seconds of thinking, we decided that we going to the woods. We encountered few thorny bushes, some thorn scratches and a furious hive of bees. We made good progress through the woods, but couldn't find a single place to eat. So we made a makeshift table with rocks and wood.

When we were eating our delicious submarine sandwiches, we saw a monkey. We thought it was cute, but it suddenly lunged for Benjamin. "HEY!!!" Benjamin shouted. The naughty little monkey thief had snatched the tasty sandwich out of his hands! We quickly packed everything into our picnic box to avoid the monkeys from taking our food. Just before we thought it couldn't get worse, the monkey called his whole pack to join in the thievery of our food. They took the entire basket with them and ran away. "Never come back!!!!" I shrieked.

We tried to trudge our way back home, but we soon got lost. We looped around the whole forest and couldn't find our way out! Dawn was soon falling. The pink sky was the only source of light that we had. My heart jittered nervously while we tried to find our way out. Suddenly, a gust of wind held us back. "AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH!!!!!" screamed Angus. "Incoming hurricane!!!!" He exclaimed. We ran and ran trying to find a shelter to stay for the night. Just then, we spotted a cave. We dived inside, for that was the only shelter that we had found. We wandered inside, going into the deep, dark, murky depths of the mysterious cave...

Grabbing a stick on the ground, I used my survival skills to make a torch. A soft glow full of sparking yellow embers filled the cave. The cave seemed very quiet and gloomy to us. Angus thought this was a bad idea, but he bravely followed me. Suddenly, out of nowhere, there was a antique panting on the cave wall! Who had came here before us?

We were getting scared, and we used a stick and got ready to fight whatever that would come in our way. Then we found a dark, dusty and gloomy room. Brushing away century old cobwebs, we stepped inside...

We saw a soft glowing candle on a coffin that said: "Li Tai Zhen ". Our curiosity got the best of us, so we used a shovel to creak the coffin open, and saw a chinese vampire with blood stained fangs. "AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH!!!!!" We screamed. We were so horrified by this monstrous creature we dropped the lid and ran away. Which was the biggest, fattest mistake that we had ever made in our entire lives.

The vampire had followed our footsteps and tracked us down. So we ran and ran to the nearest prison to try and evade capture. The prison was called Gold Warrior Fort and stayed there, thinking that we could evade capture. We were right! But only for a while...

Once the vampire arrived the castle, we figured out something spectacular. The fort had made a magical force field that magic COULD NOT WORK ON, just in case any magical beings were daring enough to escape the deadliest castle on Earth. "YEAH!!!!!" we cheered, thinking that the chinese vampire would get outwitted. But when we realized that the vampire summoned all of the magical and deadly creatures to fight the great Gold Warrior Fort, we were out of luck.

The deadly army of vampires smashed the fort's force field until great big cracks appeared. Then the leader used all his rage, curses and magic to smash the shield into great big pieces. His vampire armada of deadly killers swarmed inside. The Gold Warrior Fort soldiers fought to their deaths using all their power, strength, weapons and skill, but still got wiped out by a punch to the chest, an acid breath to the lungs and a slash to the skin. While all this chaos was happening, we ran and ran to the forest, and built a hut around us, camouflaged by leaves and twigs.

Unfortunately, the remaining vampires had followed us in our tracks, and was now starting to swipe and scratch at us. It wounded Benjamin, and he tripped over a tree root. We saw him getting swarmed by the vampires; it was a horrible sight. We had no choice but to leave him to his untimely death. We hated it, but we had to leave our trusty and kind friend. Reluctantly running away, we spotted a abandoned mine, and ran down. While we ran and ran to evade the coming vampires, we found a fork! So we led them down the mine, and cunningly took the fork that led back us back up. The we blocked up the fork with old mine carts and tools left by the workers. Angus found a dynamite and took it in his hands, thinking it would be useful. When the vampires busted through the mine carts, pickaxes and blockages, we threw the sparking dynamite down, down, down to the mine, hearing the great satisfactory BBBBAAAANNNNNGGGG! The death of the vampire was relieving, seeming that we didn't have to continue fighting the seeming immortal vampire.

We went home, never looking back. This is the worst day of my life! I wish that we will never ever encounter a situation like this **EVER AGAIN!!!!!!!!!!!!**

The Mysterious Thief of Houston House

ESF Glenealy School, Wat, Janice – 9

On a bright sunny day, I strolled through the thick bright green grass as I went for a morning walk. The sun was rising from the mountains slowly, and the sky started to become brighter. The birds that were perched on the great oak tree were singing a joyful melody. It was such a lovely day!

As soon as I arrived back at my house, I ran up the rickety steps and opened the door to my room to find a big mess. “AHHH!” I screamed. An intruder had been in my room! My Aunt Vernisa rushed to my room in a hurry, “What happened, dear?”. I said, “An intruder had been in my room”. “Oh dear” said Aunt Vernisa. She quickly rushed through the room looking for clues. Then she saw that the jewelry was missing from the bookshelf. Then told me “We’ll wait and see if there are any intruders trying to sneak into your room again and steal our precious family heirlooms.” Then she ushered me out of the room without a word. So, I decided to go to the garden to calm down. But, when I went down to the flower beds I saw a huge mess of mud. I showed Aunt Vernisa the huge mess in the flowerbed and looked everywhere. Suddenly I found a strange spade left there and it appeared to be our farmers. And they have stolen our precious family heirlooms!

After the delightful dinner, I went back to my bed thinking how to trap the farmer that stole the family heirlooms. But soon, I felt sleepy and my eyes drooped, and I fell asleep thinking about a strategy to trap the farmer. At midnight, when the clock struck twelve. I heard some hushed distant talking: “Here boss, here is the precious family heirloom that you wanted!”. It sounded like the voices from the garden. Slowly I rose out of my bed to open the window. A huge rush of cold air came through the open window. I tried to see who was talking, but I couldn’t see anyone in the dark night sky.

The next morning, when I went down to the garden, I saw two large footprints imprinted on the garden bed. I ran excitedly up the rickety stairs and to my Aunts room. I opened the door slowly to tell Aunt Vernisa, but when I opened the door I saw Aunt Vernisa sobbing inside the room. “Aunt Vernisa?” I asked carefully, not wanting to hurt her feelings anymore. She slowly turned around, revealing her puffy face and red eyes. “What is it, my darling?” She asked sadly. So I explained to her. “I found some clues that will lead us to the person!”. Aunt Vernisa brightened up and said: “Can you show me the clue?” We rapidly ran down the rickety steps and to the flower beds to show her the footprint. Aunt Vernisa stood there studying the footprint: “Hmm, it looks like farmer Bert’s or Liam’s footprint. We should measure their feet!”

When it was lunchtime, I asked Aunt Vernisa: “Any luck?” Then she briskly replied: “No luck because they wouldn’t let me measure their feet. Disappointed, I walked back onto the garden to cheer myself up. After playing for a while it seemed clear that the person would never be seen. But, suddenly I heard nearby voices coming from under the garden. Confused, I kept on searching. Soon, I followed the trail of sound into the well! Eager to find out more, I decided to climb inside the dry and narrow well.

The well came down into a deep dark cave. Fascinated, I went back up the well to collect a flashlight from my bedroom so that I could. After getting the flashlight, I lowered myself down the narrow well and into the darkness. When I clicked on my flashlight I saw spades, our lost family heirloom and boots. I sneaked around the cave and I heard footsteps coming toward me. I rushed up the narrow opening and went up the ladder, back to my garden. To be sure that they didn’t follow me I ran back to my own room, locked the door and closed the curtains. I was so thrilled now I could work out how to catch the thief and send them to the police! So secretly, I decided that I would go down to the well in the morning.

The next morning I hurried down the rickety stairs to the garden and climbed into a narrow well. There I found the lost family heirlooms, happily I reached forwards to get it but suddenly, two men leaped in front of me, it was Liam and Bert! Angrily I asked them, “Why did you take our precious family heirloom?” They replied, : “None of your business you rude girl!”. Since they wouldn’t tell me I took my phone out of my pocket, and called the police so that they could catch them. Panicked, they chased me to the corner of the cave and tied me to the wall and demanded for my phone. But soon, time was running out for them. I heard the police siren and immediately knew that they had no chance of running away again. With a sigh of relief, I waited for the police to arrive.

But when I saw the police, I was devastated. The police weren't police officers, it was Bert's and Liam's gang of thieves ! They came and gagged me so I couldn't yell for help, helplessly I stared down at my feet ashamed , what should I do?

T. B. C. (to be continued)

Will she succeed in trapping the thief's or will she fail?

The Cursed Caves

ESF Glenealy School, Yang, Justin – 10

“One time only” Sam shouted at Sally when she wanted him to cover her when she went to John's Party but Sam couldn't because their mum and dad wanted them to fetch some fish from Finn's, The Fish Store. They walked swiftly to Finn's. At Finn's, Patrick the shop owner welcomed them to his shop. For a while Sam and Sally wandered around the shop looking for the perfect fish. Then All of a sudden, Patrick suggested they go to the back of the store. At the back of the store Patrick asked them “What do you know about the Chinese Caves?” Sam responded with “I know a little bit about it from history class. Sally on the other hand doesn't know anything. Patrick let them go back out to buy some fish. On the way home Sally and Sam chatted about how weird it was. When they arrived home no one was home then Sam Remembered how he saw no people except the squirrel on the tree. Sally Screamed “MUM DAD WHERE ARE YOU???” Sam was worried too but then suddenly Sam and Sally teleported into a random chinese looking temple then a hologram appeared saying “Whoever enters this temple is now responsible for that mess over there.” Suddenly Sam and Sally blacked out waking up back in their house with everything normal. Sam and Sally were talking about how was it possible that they shared the same dream. Their mum started calling them to come downstairs to eat dinner so they quickly ran down the steps to the kitchen. They quickly swallowed down their eggs and bacon and quickly ran outside to go to Finn's. When They arrived the shop just wasn't there it was another store called Juno's when Sally and Sam opened the door to Juno's, Daniella the manager greeted them to her shop. Quickly after that a girl named Karen pushed hardly on the door and shouted “let me speak to your manager immediately” Daniella replied “I am the manager what can I assist you?” Whoosh, Sam and Sally Teleported Back To the Chinese caves but this time A young man appeared with a panda and said “Hello I am alex how may I help you I am here to serve and protect you from the evil me and my panda, Himsu” “Wait what evil Sally” asked The Kanrit evil of course don't your parents tell you?” “No?” Sam Replied “Well Drink this potion” said Alex Suddenly Everything turned normal forever and forever.

Mogao Caves

ESF Kennedy School, Ang, Sya – 9

“Attention passengers, we are coming in for a landing, please make sure your seatbelt is on.” a voice groaned.

“Oh my gosh! It's been so long, Hung!” Langxiao screamed in a person's face.

“Langxiaoooooooo!” A voice answered.

“Is this the cave?” questioned Kayla.

“Yup, it is,” replied Hung

“Ow!” Rasped LangXiao.

“Look, a sheet of music!” Beamed Zilla.

“Weird, why would there be a sheet of notes in 277 the Mogao caves that your grandfather found, Hung?” Langxiao asked curiously.

“I dunno, Something probably happened in the past and yeah, they left the tune there.” predicted Hung.

“Wait... Look closely, Kayla. Can you help me with this?” Inquired Zilla.

“Looks like an old mechanic puzzle, pretty sure it still works. I can handle it.” claimed Kayla.

On the wall Hung was reading “如果你進入，你們中的一個人必須有魔法血，否則這可能會失敗。播放一首古老的曲調，在你面前的樂器。這樣，你可能會進入一個過去的世界，一個古老的世界。擁有神奇血統的10個家族分別是冰家庭、水家庭、火家庭、森林家庭、空氣家庭、皇家庭、星家庭、龍族家、時間家庭。這一切你很快就會發現。”

“What does it say?” blurted Kayla.

“It says If you enter, one of you must have magic blood and play an ancient tune using the instruments in front of you. In this way, you may enter a past world, an ancient world. The 10 families with magical bloodlines are Ice, Aquatic, Fire, Forest, Air, Royal, Star, Dragon, and the Time families. You will discover all this soon.

“Complicated, but puzzling. This is not needed. We don't even have any magic blood in us. But let's try it anyway,” Hung told the group.

“Look! A Yangqin! A jiahu bone flute! Erhu! A Chinese drum!” Pointed Zilla.

“I guess this is what we have to play with.” chimed in Hung.

“Okay, then. Pick your instruments, people,” Heaved LangXiao.

“What! Where are we?” asked Kayla.

“Looks like one of us does have magic blood.” exclaimed Hung.

“Oh, look who we have here?” Humans from the Earth! Let's take them.” acknowledged a light voice. They turned around to see a block of floating ice cube. As if this was set up, they followed the floating ice cube .

“Who dares to enter?” asked an unrecognizable voice.

“Jianghang, my queen. Jianhang.” the levitating ice cube replied.

“Come in, dear. I'm just writing a letter.” The sound declared.

Zilla looked around. Behind the lady was a vault. Zilla thought: Probably a puzzle for gold or something. They entered, not expecting to see a human with black hair, mythical snake eyes, and a dark blue dress. She could have looked like an Enchanted elf, only not for the raging expression on her face.

“RUUUUN!” Shouted Langxiao fearfully.

“Wait... I NEED TO GO BACK! Kayla, come with me. Trust me!” Screamed Zilla.

“Okay! I'm coming!” Shrieked Kayla.

“Let’s see... Kayla, can you solve this?” pointed Zilla. Kayla looked at the puzzle. It looked like a mechanical puzzle, just like the one in the Mogao caves that was carved earlier, except that instead there were strange characters in the boxes.

“Hmmm, I think I can.” answered Kayla.

Kayla stared at the mechanic puzzle. It looked like a Chinese story she had heard when she was younger.

“Long long ago, Houyi shot down 9 suns. The queen of the west gave him an elixir of life, but it can only be used for 1 person. His wife, Chang E, kept it safe. The man became more and more famous, and he taught youngsters his archery skills. One of Houyi’s apprentices went to Chang E’s home and said “Give me the elixir or die!” So Chang E drank the elixir and flew away to the moon.

With that, the safe cracked open and a giant bird flew out and chased them.

“We’re doomed, aren’t we?” asked Hung, panting.

“I guess we are. I can’t believe that bird ate half of my right leg” replied Langxiao.

“Look, humans. I am not allowed to kill you, but I have something else in mind instead. I will make you immortal, with one condition.” The bird clarified for them.

“Where are the girls?” thought Hung.

“Stop, Chang E!” Kayla panted.

“They made it!” cried Langxiao.

“Did you just call me... ChangE? Asked the bird. I guess I’ll tell the story, then. The elixir sends me to the Mogao caves, not the moon. The elixir made me a new magic blooded family. The Phoenix family. I became the ruler of the Mogao caves, but I was never found. The other families comforted me, but it was not enough. Langxiao is part of the Star race. Goodbye!”

With that, the kids found out that the Mogao caves were magical, and left.

“Uhh...” Trembled Langxiao

“Y—yes?” Stammered Kayla

“My leg is still halved. Can we find a water source? I’m kind of thirsty. Also, it might help my injury,” Pleaded Langxiao.

“Look!A waterfall! And it’s right below us!” Yelled Zilla.

“The myth Longmen...is here to...” Muttered Hung under his breath.

“Let’s go and patch up LangXiao,” Quipped Kayla.

“A little more...on the left.Yeah, a bit more... perfect!” Articulated Langxiao.

Kayla stared at the leg, mouth open. It was healed! Kayla whispered something in Zilla’s ear and started to stare too, in shock.

“Hung? You said this may be Longmen... I think you’re right. The waterfall, ChangE. I think I know. Langxiao, look at your leg,” Mumbled Kayla.

Langxiao gasped in surprise. “I knew it!” Langxiao boomed.

“ChangE probably fell in the waterfall, but she can stand on water because of the pill for the elixir So she slides down to the Mogao Grottoes, when she didn’t know she was supposed to be in the Longmen Grottoes, where immortals with the elixir or the west queen can get to!” Figured Zilla.

“Makes sense,” reported Hung.

“Wait, the waterfall! We can use the waterfall!At least I can. I can use it to check on ChangE!” Elaborated Langxiao.

“I guess that will be our plan for life until the next generation,” Smiled Zilla.

Everyone took their things and left, remembering the Mogao Grottoes and Longmen Grottoes forever.

The Hidden Treasure

ESF Kennedy School, Bondada, Arianah – 9

In 2004 a young monk was sleeping peacefully in an old temple dreaming of finding an old but beautiful treasure. Aki was a young monk who was very diligent, he wore a dark red robe and brown sandals.

The next morning when Aki woke up, he was a little shaken up from his dream. However, he thought that the dream could be real. After all, he thought, wasn't anything possible? He put on a delicate robe and went to sit with the other monks. Aki almost always enjoyed breakfast with the other monks because they would always chat about their remarkable adventures and just how much fun they were.

During breakfast Aki mentioned his dream to the others but they just laughed and said, "Such things could never happen Aki." After breakfast, he went to his room in the old temple and thought to himself – are the other monks right? However since Aki was such a brave and optimistic spirit he decided to see if his dream could be true.

So Aki packed his bags and left. He wanted to find this amazing treasure to prove to the other monks that anything could happen. In just a couple hours, of travelling, Aki was already regretting leaving the temple because it was scorching hot. He knew if he turned back now then everyone would think of him a coward. Besides, if he turned back he would only reach the temple by nightfall.

So Aki continued his journey to the hidden treasure. He reached a sandy, dry and hot place. It was a desert with lots of thorny lizards and deathstalker scorpions. Even though Aki hadn't been in the desert for even 30 minutes he was as sweaty as a pig. Aki tried to find shade so he could cool down but there were barely any trees. Aki sat down on the hot sand and took out a huge bottle of water. He drank gallons of water but nothing stopped him from sweating. Days flew by but Aki had still not left the desert. Everyday Aki was boiling. It was like he was standing on a frying pan being sizzled to death.

One day, Aki was looking at his map and it struck him that if he left the desert it would lead to the China and Hong Kong border. Aki felt certain the treasure would not be there so it had to be in the desert.

Aki unloaded all his tools and opened his tent. At 7 o' clock Aki decided to have some food, but there were no trees so there was no fresh fruit! Aki decided that he would have some of his emergency crackers. He ripped open the packet and he ate them joyfully.

Aki decided he would call it a night so that he could have more energy for tomorrow. There was no point looking for the treasure when it was pitch black. Early in the morning, even before the sun was up Aki heard a high-pitched bleat. He wondered what could be making that strange and unfamiliar noise. Cautiously, Aki stepped out of his tent. He saw a large camel bleating on top of its lungs. Aki was excited to be face to face with a strange looking creature for the first time.

It had been 8 hours and Aki still hadn't found the treasure! He was frustrated and downhearted. As he was going to his tent to retire, Aki saw a dim light. Aki was very confused because no humans were in the desert. Could this really be true? Aki thought his mind was playing tricks on him. With the smallest glimmer of hope he decided to follow the light. As he got closer what seemed like a small dim light became a beaming light that shined bright like the sun. It was coming from inside a cave.

Aki decided to have a look and walked into the cave. As he approached he just knew – It was the well-known ancient Mogao caves! Aki went inside and it was beautiful – there were lovely paintings all over the walls that told ancient stories. There were even some magnificent statues of Buddha.

Aki looked at the masterpiece in admiration; it looked like it must have taken years. Aki saw a painting of two angels flying along a small meadow while holding hands. He wondered what it was like to have a true friend, someone who was always by his side. When Aki walked into the next room there was the treasure, it shined gold like the sun and it

made Aki's eyes hurt. When he finally got a glimpse of it, it was an old and delicate gold robe. He didn't take the treasure because he realised that all he really wanted was a true friend.

Aki decided that there was no use in taking the treasure because he didn't need it, what he needed was a true friend. When Aki arrived at the temple it was already breakfast. He felt apprehensive as he went in as he thought everyone would laugh at him for not bringing the treasure.

When he arrived at breakfast all the monks had a new mindset. They congratulated Aki on having such an amazing journey and they all told him about why they changed. They said "Aki we weren't good friends and even though we weren't encouraging you, you did not listen to us and let your heart be your guide." Aki was spellbound that they had changed because of him! Aki decided to accept that he was an inspirational leader and if he ever led the monks he promised to god that he would always let his heart be his guide.

The Dragon Stone

ESF Kennedy School, Carmona Cringeon, Juan Francisco – 9

Once upon a time, dragons lived free in China, roaming the land causing terror and havoc. One day a group of monks got together and trapped the dragons into a single stone and they hid it in the Mogao Grottoes near the Silk Road, a route used to trade spices from Europe to China. However, now the stone seemed to be breaking and shadows of dragons swept the land causing minor havoc. If the dragon stone breaks, how will it be sealed again?

Dusk, a brave, tall 14 year old boy woke up in shock from his disturbing dream. Was it true that there had been dragons? No, surely not! He decided if he had sense he would not believe in dreams. So he got ready for another day of helping at the temples. “Wait up guys!” he yelled, “I’m coming!”

His friend Frank shouted “Seriously Dusk, that's the third day in a row that you have got up too late. Wake up earlier!” They walked up the steep marble road to the ornate temple where they worked but instead of seeing their peaceful temple, they came upon a terrifying scene. They found a dragon with a look that was menacing and frightening. As soon as they saw it they ran for their lives wondering how the dragon got there. The group ran down the mountain to the mainland where they found hundreds more ferocious dragons and thousands of houses and shops were floating above a wild pool of energy, a strange force having uprooted them from their usual tranquil streets and avenues. Luckily Dusk and his friends found a cave with other people inside and dived inside then rolled a boulder into the door preventing dragons from eating them.

“What on earth was that!”, they said with exasperated and frightened looks. They didn't know what had happened. How did all this happen in one night? One of them even fainted with fear at what he had just encountered. The group were so used to the quiet life that they usually enjoyed in the mountains where they lived safely and without such terror.

Suddenly Dusk remembered his dream. He thought he might know what to do to stop the terrible dragons but he was not sure he would be clever or strong enough to seal them away. However he was courageous and he told his friends the dream and while he was talking he noticed some minecarts in the deep dark cave and on top of a wall there was a sign saying Mogao Grottoes. “This is where they sealed the dragons in my dream”, he told his friends. “Hop in!” he said to his friends. The ride was so fast that it was hard to enjoy, especially when he did not know how to seal the dragons away in their stone or dimension. How was he supposed to know how to banish them? Suddenly the ride ended and a sign said to take the golden staff and banish the dragons. Dusk was about to reach out and touch it but suddenly an arrow flew by his head almost killing him. Quickly, he grabbed the ornate staff with an aura of power and ducked. Suddenly a barrage of arrows flew out. Frank quickly pulled the lever and they went back to the cave in the speedy minecart.

When they got back to the cave the ground shook. Was it an earthquake? No, it was the dragons battering the cave. Everyone got some stones and sticks off the ground to attack the dragons. Suddenly a dragon came in but froze in the vicinity of the staff and then the dragon became a blue sphere fizzing with energy and then the sphere went into one of the stones that became the new dragon stone where the dragon was sealed for all eternity. Then Dusk and Frank and all the others began using all their weight to push the heavy, round stone blocking the exit away and ran out.

“Guys!” said Dusk “Lure the dragons to me, the staff will stop them from harming you.” That was how they spent the rest of the day getting the dragons into the magic stone. It was easy work with the magic staff. When they got back to the cave there was a pedestal where the dragon stone was. Dusk placed the staff on the pedestal and then there was an almighty BANG and then there was no more dragon stone or staff and the floating houses and shops turned the right way round and went back to where they belonged. Everything was right again. The villagers could continue their peaceful life.

When they got to the temple, Dusk and the other workers found something strange. The temple had a red energy above it. Dusk and Frank investigated the source and found another dragon, but they didn’t have the powerful staff to protect them! They were so scared when the dragon stared at them. Luckily the dragon was friendly and greeted

them and then the dragon flew into the red energy and disappeared. Finally there were no more dragons. The adventure was over and Dusk and Frank could now continue to tend the temple quietly all the time knowing they had saved China from a dreadful fate.

Mogao Grottoes

ESF Kennedy School, Chau, Sheung Sophie – 9

莫高窟的故事 оповідання Гроти Могао

One ordinary day, Emma was so bored that she decided to play with her little brother Liam. Liam is seven years old and he is in primary school grade 3. He is in 3W, Ms Worringham's class. He's annoying most of the time, but he's very perspicacious.

Emma entered his bedroom door and bolted inside. He was studying a book by his study desk and he was very focused. Emma steadily wandered to his desk. Liam spotted Emma in the corner and welcomed her.

"Emma! Hi, I'm reading about Mogao Grottoes. It's awesome entertainment!" he declared. "Only to you, I don't understand why you like these things... but although they **do** seem a bit interesting" pronounced Emma. Liam cackled "But you don't know that Mogao Grottoes is in China and it's awesome" commented Liam "you want to go there with me?". She knew that mogao grottoes is in China, so it wasn't possible to go there today since they were not old enough to go to the airport themselves. But, she was interested. "Okay, How" said Emma trying not to sound believed. Liam chuckled, he tugged Emma into the storage room which was inside Liam's room. The room had a sign which was taped on top of the door that said "NO ENTERING" with a little tiny skull drawing on it.

Anyway, no one had been in that room after Liam had owned it, not even Mum or dad. Liam gripped Emma harder and harder on the ankle with his sweaty hands, Emma waved off his hand as if they were playing yoyo. "OW!" shrieked Emma "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU!". "Oh, sorry" hummed Liam, his cheeks were red in embarrassment. Emma's cheeks were also red and sorry, but she never showed Liam her feelings very much. Liam took a deep breath and locked his eyes shut. Once more, Liam hooked Emma's ankle softly, But this time, Emma paid no attention to his sweaty and stinky hands. But it didn't last long either, once Liam entered the room, he dragged Emma with him and that was the first time Emma had entered the gloomy, misty room.

They strolled into the room until they reached a lengthy, narrow pathway with barely any light. Liam paused and searched the grimy wall, soon, he paused and found the miniature flashlight hanging on the wall. He unfastened the mini lock on the flashlight, and it opened with a 'CLICK'.

Suddenly, in a blink of an eye, a spot of light appeared on the shown spot. Liam kept marching deeply into the thin and narrow corridor expecting Emma to follow him. But as he continued, Emma gulped and slowly came to a pause. Liam was demented and turned around in confusion. "I don't think I want to continue" Emma uttered as she scratched her head. "And why would you think that?" questioned Liam as he started to start an evil smile.

Liam quickly dragged her along the narrow path. They came to the end where there was a weird looking floating bubble in the ceiling. Emma shivered, Liam briskly threw Emma off the sling shot into the bubble. Liam followed her and soon, they both landed dreadfully on their backs. The floor was rough and full of pebbles and stones, Emma stood up to see her surroundings, It was extremely cloudless, and the bright morning sun woke everybody with a huge bucket of light.

Soon, Liam sat up as he stared at Emma with his 'can I sleep one more minute before I go to school' eyes. Emma rolled her eyes, Liam hopped up and scanned the lovely view. "It's Incredible!" yelled Liam, "It worked! My teleport machine worked! Yippy yip yip!". Liam hopped around in excitement, But as he turned around, A huge shadow covered the wonderfully lit sun. A huge building stood in the center of the shadow. It was the Mogao Grottoes! "Exactly where I wanted to go! YEEEEEE!".

Suddenly, a police officer stomped towards the kids. "你能不能不要喊年轻人" Shouted the officer. Liam stared at the officer in the eyes in confusion, he tilted his head so the officer could tell he was not from China. "I take Chinese lessons" declared Emma "The officer just said: *can you not shout, young man?*" "Oh, I bet he's gonna catch us to his office" called out Liam as he sounded not surprised. But Emma, on the other hand, panicked in absolute fear. She bounced around and sprinted away from the officer. But she did not go far either, she was just whizzing in circles around the platform. Liam and the officer rolled their eyes in annoyance as their heads spun round and round following Emma.

The officer decided he was not gonna wait, he grabbed Emma by the shirt collar and reached to grab Liam. Liam sprinted away and dashed behind a sculpture called the nilima sheik. The officer handed Emma to his partner and raced in to find Liam.

Suddenly, a loud speaker on the ceiling turned on and there was a very important message. A man, about 34 years old, put his mouth to the speaker. He said : *fellow customers, it is almost closing hours, please leave as quickly as possible.*

Liam wanted to scuttle away, travel back home and roll in his warm blanket, but he couldn't leave if the police were still searching for him. But he then overheard the police argue with the museum manager, the manager shoved the police out of the gate with a 'PLOP'. Desperate to leave, Liam hurried away from the museum which was now dark and gloomy in closing hours, he sprinted but he was too late, the gate locked, and Liam fell on the floor with a 'CRASH'.

Liam stood up and was sure of his surroundings, the place was dark and gloomy, like a haunted house. Suddenly, a large shadow of a humongous creature stood behind him...

Mysha and the Cave Monster

ESF Kennedy School, Doni, Mysha – 10

A girl named Mysha and her older Brother named Xavier, are young partners solving unexplainable mysteries around the world. Mysha is 10 years old. She has long straight black hair, and black and turquoise glasses. Her eyes are as black as her shadow, her smile shines bright as the sun. Xavier is 17 years old. He has short black hair, and big, black glasses. His eyes are as black as coal. Mysha was watching the news to find more interesting mysteries to solve, while Xavier was playing games on his phone.” Mysha did you find any mysteries yet?” asked Xavier.”No, but I found that a baby panda from China is missing, maybe we can solve that later.” impatiently shouted Mysha. Suddenly Mysha’s phone was ringing, Mysha picked it and asked.”Hi this is Mysha what can I help you with?” Asked Mysha.” I have a mystery for you, someone saw a monstrous shadow in our cave in China.” worriedly whispered the man.” We will be there by tomorrow morning” excitedly shouted Mysha.

While Mysha ended the call she felt a few taps on her head she knew who was doing it, when she turned around she saw Xavier smiling while play with his phone.” Xavier stop tapping me on the head you monkey!” shouted Mysha.” What did I do?” lied Xavier. “Xavier, please stop doing that or I will slap you on the head instead of tapping!” warned Mysha.” Ok.” sighed Xavier,”So where are we going?” Asked Xavier.”We are going to China!” shouted Mysha. and solve what is in China’s cave that is scarring the people!” Mysha shouted. When it was the next day they packed what they needed and took a taxi to get to the airport for their long flight to China.

While they were in the plane, Mysha was on her Ipad to search for more information about China's cave and search for more images of the monster, But she just saw shadows of the monster. All of the shadows Mysha saw on her Ipad were small, Mysha wondered what it could be. When they arrived a Man stood in front of them “Hello, thank you for coming to help us, my name is Tom.” Tom happily replied.” Do we know you?” asked Xavier. “ I am the person that I called on the phone to Mysha.” whispered Tom.” Oh, yeah remember you on the Phone.” Mysha whispered. “ Follow Me please.” Tom shouted. They arrived at a small house, Tom opened the door and he gave each of us a torch light. Then we followed Tom to China's cave. The cave was big, dark, wet, and cold. “ Be careful ok, and be quiet so we won’t scare the monster.” whispered Tom.

They were walking slowly though the cave until there was a crack then they saw the cave monster shadow. When we looked behind the rock, it was not a monster, it was a baby panda!” So cute!“ Mysha whispered. “ That is the panda that has been missing in China, Mysha can you carry it while we get out of the cave !” Xavier whispered. Mysha slowly walked to the small baby panda and carefully picked the baby panda. After Mysha got the baby panda, Tom joyfully whispered” let's get out of here and bring back the baby panda.” When they were out of the cave Tom announced that the Mysteries of the cave monster was solved and their missing baby panda was found.” And we will have a party tonight for Mysha and Xavier victory!” Tom happily shouted.

At the party there was food and decorations everywhere. After everyone was eating, Tom announced that Mysha and Xavier are going to put the baby panda. Everyone gathered the baby panda was placed on a golden and red big soft pillow, then Msha and Xavier step forward Mysha and Xavier gently and carefully carried the small fluffy baby panda to it’s cage. The cage had soft light brown colour and thick green baboos. There were small panda toys on the sand. Mysha and Xavier kindly put down the baby panda everyone started to clap for Myha and Xavier. A few seconds later there were big, bright, colourful and beautiful fireworks exploding in the dark night sky above them. Everyone was distracted by the bright fireworks.” Wow, pretty” Mysha calmly commented. The fireworks brightened the big, grey clouds up in the sky.

Then a few seconds later suddenly the fireworks slowly faded away in the dark sky. Then a man suddenly shouted after the fireworks faded away in the dark sky.” Hey, everybody let's have a dance party!” Then everyone started to go on the dance floor, one by one, before anyone was on the dance floor one of Tom’s friends started to turn on the

music. Then everyone started to dance, some wiggled, jumped, and skipped around. Mysha started doing a little dance, while Xavier was moving a bit while playing on his phone.

Then a Man with a white chef's hat and white shirt with long, blue jeans, with brown buttons, and a short, thin moustache. Carried a large, yummy, chocolate cake for the party then the man slowly put the large cake in a big space to put the large cake. Everyone was surprised by the large cake behind them. After the dance everyone started to get a piece of cake. After a few minutes the party ended.

Mysha and Xavier went to the hotel to their room. When it was morning, Mysha and Xavier got up and had breakfast then they packed and went downstairs to say goodbye. When they were down stairs they said goodbye and hugged each other. Tom walked them to the airport. Before they went off the plane Mysha and Xavier hugged Tom goodbye. Then Mysha and Xavier went on the plane to Hong Kong and flew back to their home. Mysha and Xavier missed their new friends but it was ok for them.

The Legend of Mogao

ESF Kennedy School, Hannan, Natasha – 9

Chapter 1: The cruelties of the Red Dragon

Two thousand years ago in Gansu a ferocious red dragon arrived from the North and occupied the Mogao Grottoes. People called him Hong Long because he had red eyes and skin, shot fire bolts and had razor sharp claws and teeth. All the Buddhist art that was hidden in the depths of the cave was now in the dragon's territory. Since then nobody ever spoke about it again, but everybody knew one day he would rise.

Chapter 2: The beginning of the journey

In a village called Xi'an along the route of the Silk Road, lived two twins called Sun and Sand. Their stepmother hated them and one night she took them far away and left them in front of the Mogao caves, hoping the dragon would eat them. When they woke up, they were in a strange place. "Where are we?", asked Sun. "I don't know," replied Sand, "Why are we here? Where is our house?" "We should start walking or otherwise we will never make it back home", replied Sun. As the daylight was fading, and they couldn't find their way home, they decided to take shelter for the night inside the caves.

Chapter 3: Exploring the caves

They were extremely tired, but after some rest they discovered something new. "What is this on the walls, and what are these statues doing here?" asked Sand. "Let's have a closer look," suggested Sun. "They look like they're very old, maybe even ancient!" exclaimed Sand. The drawings on the walls showed some ancient kings and queens, small villages and a fire shooting dragon. Many of the paintings were covered in spider webs, "Agh so many spider webs, ugh!", said Sand in disgust. Suddenly the wall started to rumble.

Chapter 4: The Battle begins

There was a growling sound coming from the other side of the wall. It got louder and louder every second, there was no time to spare! The ceiling started to crumble and the structure started to wobble. A fire bolt shot through the wall, Sun and Sand grabbed some gold armour and a shield from the armour stand and got ready to fight. The dragon exploded from the flames roaring as loud as he could. "Help! What is that monster?" screamed Sand. Sun grabbed a sword from a chest and began to strike the dragon. Luckily, Sun had a shield or otherwise he would have been a mountain of ash!

Chapter 5: The army of phoenixes

Hong Long stopped for a moment and made a high pitched screeching sound and sent an army of angry phoenixes towards them! "Ouch!" cried Sand, as one of the phoenixes clawed his leg. Sun ran as fast as he could and helped Sand up. "We need to get out of here now, before we get killed". The phoenixes were chasing them out of the grottoes, but because the sand was so thick, it slowed them down. The phoenixes were catching up!

Chapter 6: The golden coffin

Far in the distance they saw flames erupting from the grottoes, while the phoenixes were still chasing them. Sun started throwing sand in the phoenixes eyes and Sand tactically took them down with the sword. As soon as the phoenixes were all dead, they sprinted back as fast as they could, towards the fire. The Mogao Grottoes were nearly destroyed. Sun and Sand ran straight up to the second floor and saw a shimmering gold coffin. "What is that?" Sand asked suspiciously. "It looks like a coffin", replied Sun. "In the grottoes? Are you sure?", asked Sand.

Chapter 7: The heart of the Hong Long

"What do you think is inside?" asked Sand curiously. "Let's find out!" exclaimed Sun. When they opened it, an explosion of light was shining in their eyes. "What is this?", screamed Sun. "It looks like a heart!", exclaimed Sand. "It must be the dragon's heart!", whispered Sun. It looked wrinkly, with a red-orange colour, and flames coming out of it. They looked around the room and saw many ancient scripts written on the walls. One of them showed that the dragon could be killed by destroying the heart with a special sword, the Sword of Spirit!

Chapter 8: Searching for the Sword

They needed to find the sword quickly. The script indicated the place where the sword could be found. “ This way” Sand commanded . They needed to go to the next level, but the only way there was to climb a steep wall. They found long bamboo sticks lying on the floor nearby and they used them to pole-vault up to the next level. Immediately in front of them was a giant labyrinth of passageways.

Chapter 9: The Sword of Spirit

They ran into the giant maze and had to weave their way through thin alleyways. They turned right, but it was a dead end, so they turned left, then right, then forward and finally arrived at the chamber where the sword was kept. It had taken them a few hours to get to the end, but finally they had managed to succeed. “There on the platform stood the Sword of Spirit. It had a netherite handle, that was glowing in the darkness, and a sharp blade. Now as the sword was in their hands, they needed to return to the cave with the golden coffin and destroy Hong Long’s heart.

Chapter 10: Victory

They raced back to the lower level and ran to the cave with the dragon’s heart. The dragon was there to protect it. Sun got in some good hits on the dragon, while Sand tried to get closer to the coffin. The dragon was furious. Sand dodged all the fire bolts, slid underneath the dragon, ran to the heart and stabbed it! Hong Long made a thunderous sound, slowly collapsed on the sand and disintegrated. Sun and Sand sighed with great relief. They saved the Mogao Grottoes from the ferocious dragon.

The Adventures of the Silk Road

ESF Kennedy School, Holden, Hugo – 10

Xia Zhong and his friend Coco Larson, were wandering in the Chinese desert, far from their homeland of America. Xia was born in China but moved to America at a young age where he met Coco. The two had quickly become best friends. Xia and Coco had been wandering in the desert for a few hours when they realised their water bottles were empty.

When Xia was a child his grandmother had told him stories of hidden treasure in the desert, but he had never believed her. What changed his mind was when his grandmother died. Her last words were “go to Gansu Province and find the cave, inside you will find something your ancestors left behind for you.”

Back in the Gansu desert, Xia and Coco were becoming desperate and would do pretty much anything to get water. Far in the distance they saw something that looked like a cave. Not knowing whether it was a mirage, they sprinted towards the cave. As they got closer, the cave became clearer. Appearing out of the sandy haze, it started to take the shape of a temple. It had thousands of buddhas and looked like an abandoned place of worship. It was in fact a ruin of a temple from a forgotten time. The temple looked like it would collapse at any second, but that did not stop them from going inside. It was their only hope of finding water and shelter and maybe the treasure that Xia’s grandmother had told him about.

As they arrived at the cave Coco stuttered “should we go in? We don’t even know what is in there”. “We may as well try,” Xia said optimistically. Coco nodded slightly. They entered the cave slowly, peeking around every corner. The cave was bare. Just as they were losing hope, they saw something amazing. It was a small puddle of water and in it was what looked like a book. They scooped up the water, drinking some and saving the rest for later. The water was so sweet, it tasted like nectar.

After they had drunk and stored the remaining water in their water bottles they looked at the book that was soaked in water. Its cover read “The Treasure of the Silk Road”. Xia slapped himself in the face to make sure it was not a dream, then Coco reminded him that it could be dangerous. Xia ignored her. Excited, he opened the book imagining his grandmother’s mouth open in awe. The first page read “*If you follow the Silk Road you will find the treasure you seek, if you survive – Lucas Zhong*”.

Xia could not believe it. It sounded just like the stories his grandmother told him. Coco was not willing to take the risk but Xia was. Xia raced out of the cave. Coco walked behind, not as excited as Xia. “Let’s follow the map,” Xia exclaimed. “Ok” Coco stuttered.

They started walking away from the ruins. They walked until the ruins faded into the desert haze behind them, after what seemed like an extraordinarily long walk they arrived at what they thought was the Silk Road. Coco was shivering with fear while Xia was jumping with excitement. Excited, Xia looked at the book, the words on the book faded and now it read *the journey has begun, once you see it you must show no fear*. “What was it supposed to be?” shivered Coco. “*I don’t know, but what we do know is to not be scared*”, Xia said as though he was reassuring her.

Off they went on a journey with which Xia was tingling with anticipation and Coco feared they might not return. The Silk Road looked deserted because there was no sign of life. They kept walking. Then Coco whispered “*let’s find a place to stay and we can eat our food then sleep*”

By now it was already 9pm and it was slowly getting dark. They found a place to sleep near the Silk Road. They ate their food which tasted off then they went to sleep, they had no sleeping bags because this was supposed to be just a day trip. Eventually they fell asleep. When they woke they were ready to continue their journey. They got back to

the Silk Road then they kept walking until they saw something amazing. It was an oasis, it had water and what could possibly be food, it even looked like people lived there. Xia and Coco ran to get there, once they got there they drank some of their water and wandered around until a figure emerged behind them. He was a big tall man who was offering them food. The food was roasted fish. Xia and Coco picked up their fish and said thanks to the man, “*better get moving*” Xia said politely.

Then they ran back to the Silk Road. As they walked it got darker and darker until all they could see was their hands. It was a cold night. They heard a distant noise and instantly showed no fear as a giant spider came closer; they both assumed the spider was what the book meant by it. They were both trying to hold in their fear, then they thought they should start walking and maybe the spider would leave them alone, they started walking but as they got closer to the spider it was harder to hold in the fear. Coco let out a scream and the spider sprinted towards them. They thought they were dead until Xia grabbed Coco’s hand and started to run. Suddenly they were outrunning the spider and as they went along the Silk Road the spider disappeared and they could see a treasure box through the sand haze they sprinted towards it and inside it was Ruby’s, Gold, Diamonds, and many more expensive ancient crystals. Xia had done it, he had achieved his grandmother's dream.

The Myth Of The Mogao Grottoes

ESF Kennedy School, Kavanagh, Addie – 10

“...but when the boy stepped on the ground, it turned to lava and he started melting until he was no more than a puddle of coal. After him, no one else wanted to go, so the gold stayed where it was, the evil witch protecting it.” Mum finished.

She got up and asked them,

“Who gets the couch tonight?”

“Me!” Both kids said together.

“Liam, you get it tonight. Marie, you can get it tomorrow.” Mum told them wearily. The family was too poor to have actual beds in the house, so mum slept in the living room, while the kids (Liam and Marie), took turns sleeping on the couch.

“Goodnight mum!” Liam yelled as mum closed the door.

“Goodnight mum.”

“Tomorrow is Thursday, right?” Marie asked Liam.

“Yeah, why?” Liam answered.

“Mum’s going to be at work.....” She trailed off.

“Marie, what are you thinking? Get to the point.” Liam told her, getting annoyed.

“In the morning after breakfast, I am going to go get the gold mum was talking about.” Marie replied, sounding more confident than she actually was.

“Yeah right. It’s not like *you’re* going to get some gold from the witch. Besides, it will probably be a crazy strong guy that has lots of weapons.” Liam tried to crush her confidence. Marie knew what would convince him. She turned away and smiled.

“I bet I will get it first.” The words barely escaped her mouth when Liam shot out,

“What time do we leave tomorrow? Where is the gold? Do you have anyone helping you? We need to plan quickly.”

“Ok, it’s 11:21. Mum is asleep. We need to plan for tomorrow,” Marie was sitting down on the rusting floor, a piece of paper and a stubby pencil in her hand.

“The gold is in the Mogao Grottoes. We need to travel on the silk road to get there. It’s going to be hot, but we will be prepared.”

“What is the silk road?” Liam interrupted.

“The silk road is a road that villagers used to carry goods from one place to another to trade and get money.” Marie explained.

“*Used to?*” Liam looked confused.

“Yes. Used to. Until the witch came. No one knows her name. She heard there was gold in the caves and she stopped other villagers from getting it by setting booby traps around the caves.” After a long time, they finally had a plan. They lay down to sleep and closed their eyes.

The next morning, Marie was busily packing everything they needed in a big bag and triple checking they had everything. After a tiny piece of toast, the hopeful kids set off. It was 1 hour until Liam drank a whole bottle of water and asked for more. Marie was too tired to argue. They dragged their sore feet across the smooth sand and eventually came to the end. Even though they were exhausted, Liam still ran forward and leaped across the big crack from the silk road to the Mogao Grottoes. He made it across easily and looked back at Marie.

“Come on!” Liam yelled across the gap. Marie charged forward and jumped like a rocket across the gap.....and landed smoothly.

They crept across the cave silently, their eyes peeled for any sign of movement. Liam squealed as a shadow moved across the cave, but it was only a rat. Soon they came across a bridge of glass. This was their first booby trap. "It looks like we have to walk across." Marie gulped. She did not think it would be that simple. Liam cautiously put his toe on one piece of glass and drew it back as it shattered and fell into the lava below. "We have to run together." Marie told Liam. "You go in front of me and I will go behind you. Hurry, we have to get there before nightfall." Liam started sweating. His heart beat faster as he cautiously took a deep breath..... and started running.

Marie did not miss a beat. She bolted after him, careful not to slip into the lava. The two gave a final leap and landed safely on the other side. "Quickly, we have to find the gold. It's almost night." Marie whispered.

As they walked on, it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Suddenly, Marie saw a glint of gold in the corner of her eye and then pointed it out. They crept towards the gold and saw the witch! She was hideous. She was all crinkly and grey. The witch looked at the children and started running towards them. Liam shot right and the witch followed him.

"Marie! Get the gold! Quickly!" Liam yelled behind his shoulder. Marie bolted to the gold and grabbed a chunk of it. "Come back you little brats!" The witch shouted brandishing her stick at them threateningly. Marie grabbed Liam's clammy hand and they ran together out of the cave. The witch was close behind. She was just about to throttle them when she evaporated into smoke.

The sun was shining on them. After they regained their breath, they set off again for their house. It was 11 hours after they caught sight of their village. They returned home later with massive bags under their eyes. It was dinner time, two days after they left.

"KIDS!" Their mum almost killed them with the massive hug that she gave them. "WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN!?"

"Mum? You know the gold that you told us about three nights ago?" Liam's quiet voice came from his mouth.

"Yes Liam." Mum replied.

"We got it."

"I don't believe you. Tell me where have you *actually* been Liam." Mum scolded. No one answered. Marie cheekily slid the chunk of gold onto the wooden table and looked at her mum. Mum did not think twice. She swept her two kids into a big hug and was silent.

The Myth of the Silk Road

ESF Kennedy School, Kavanagh, Bella – 10

Once upon a time, in the small town of Rosewood, Lucy and her American Fuzzy— Lop Bunny Cinnamon were packing their bags for a more special trip than their usual ones. “Okay Cinnamon,” said Lucy, “I’ve got the peanut butter cookies and the chocolate milk ready!” She went through the schedule one more time to Cinnamon, who was sniffing hungrily towards the cookies. “We will head up North east, turn right, turn left, then continue down the Silk Road for another hour.

She beamed at Cinnamon, who unfortunately wasn't paying attention due to the tempting peanut butter smell wafting from the bag. Lucy sighed. “Come on then!” She said, and they set off.

Without warning, and after about 5 seconds of walking, Cinnamon grunted and started to waddle back to the house. Lucy groaned as she picked up the overweight bunny, sagging slightly with its weight.

They came to the fork at about dawn, when the sky was still rich with colours. “Right,” said Lucy, “ We go right.” She glanced down at the now snoring fuzzball in her arms. She bent down to kiss Cinnamon lightly on the head. They then continued walking.

They met a psychic in a caravan on the way to the second fork. “Hello dear,” she said, “I sense something good in your future, only 50 pence for a session!” Lucy declined politely. “Though I must ask if you know anything about the Silk Road?” The physics face clouded over. “ Well, yes I guess I could spill something,” she winked with a sugary attempt at a smile. Lucy stood back. “It is rumoured that there are a number of species guarding the treasure in the cave the silk road leads to,” she said. “Pixies, Merpeople, Ghouls, Sphinx, and Griffins.” Lucy swallowed. “Okay,” she said, “Thank you. Well be off now.”

They turned left on the fork and walked down the smooth path of the Silk Road. After nearly half an hour they then stopped for a break and sipped on their chocolate milk. They walked on for another half hour until Lucy suddenly safety rolled to the nearest cover, a stone pillar, and held Cinnamon to her chest. A Pixie with a trident was guarding the entrance of a large cave. “The treasure is in that cave,” Lucy whispered to Cinnamon, “Don’t worry, I’ll get you in safely, then you know what to do. The bunny sniffed in approval.

Lucy rolled to another pillar, counting the pixies steps when it went right and left. She takes 10 steps each way, giving you approximately 12.6 seconds to crawl past her. “Go, go, go! She yelled. The bunny galloped at a hundred miles per hour, whizzing past the unsuspecting pixie. The pixie, Lalia, heard paws hitting the ground behind her. She gave an exclamation, raised her trident, and gilded towards Cinnamon. The bunny signaled Lucy, who fished out an empty carton of chocolate milk from her bag, and hit the pixie over the head. Lalia got knocked back, and when she looked around Cinnamon was gone.

Lucy jumped in a bush as another pixie approached the door. Lalia yelled in the fairy language. “*Acone rela! Acone rela! Ei bunv wajusasha golsilve!* Translation: Code red! Code red! A bunny has approached the treasure! Lalia’s friend exclaimed and shot off towards the cave. Lucy held her breath.

Meanwhile, Cinnamon was levitating rubies, gems, and gold with his mind. He was then on the run from a very angry ghou, kicking the dust back into his face. He came speeding out of the cave and knocked and approaching

Griffin, who was there for more backup. Cinnamon ran to Lucy, who picked him up and ran. They ran and ran, and did not stop until they came back to Rosewood.

The Maze Cavern

ESF Kennedy School, Ko, Alden – 10

“Chaka—chaka—chaka—chaka toot—toot....” The train slowed down as the brakes sparked and the whistle blew. The train came to a halt as I stepped out of the train. When I left the station, I went to look for the ancient Mogao Caves to finish my investigation. After many hours of travel, I arrived at my destination. My jaw dropped. The cave was ten times bigger than I ever imagined.

I walked into the caves, amazed by all the beautiful artwork of the meeting between Manjusri and Vimalakirti. The curiosity was coursing through my veins as I ventured deeper into the caves. A well—preserved hallway was eventually bestowed upon me. Blue and gold tiles were finely placed around the walls and crimson planks enriched the floor as I wandered through it. When the pathway finally led to a room I was left in awe, the room that was upon me was Cave 1. Marvellous tiles engraved with paintings flourished the walls, six beautiful altars were carved into the walls and three majestic Buddha statues were placed on the main praying site. Sure, it was quite damaged, but I could still see the beauty that it once was. As time flew by, I realized it was time to leave. But then suddenly, I tripped on a loose tile and fell into the underground cave below.

I woke up in pure agony, blisters on my arms, legs bruised and scapes everywhere, but I mustered up the strength to get up but was limping on one leg. I tried to call for help, but I was in vain. Nobody heard me. Eventually, I gave up, but something caught my attention, a deep and suspicious hallway. I took out my lighter, looked up and saw 10 Chinese characters reading, “Welcome To The Chinese History Maze.” My face turned stone cold as my mind was trying to process everything that had happened. My only thoughts were to get out of this maze and everything would be okay.

At first, I tried to get out, but I realized I had already gone too far in. I was dead—lost. The place had three paths, each lit up by near burnt torches. I shouted into each one of them, hoping to see which one had an echo. I did that after about ten tries, and it led me to a dead end. Just when I was about to give up, a vortex from the wall sucked me in.

When I finally stopped being pulled by the vortex, I saw a Buddhist monk in bright orange robes, wrapped around him. He was standing, stroking his beard, smiling and admiring what seemed to be a pre—built cave 1. “Where am I?” I asked.

“You are in what I call the Mogao cave. It’s my latest discovery, though, do I know you?” He replied.

Didn’t someone already make the Caves? They already made thousands, in fact? So why would he say that? “What year am I in?” I asked.

“You are in the Jin Dynasty.” He replied. “My name is Lè Zūn. What’s yours?” He inquired.

“Oh my god, it’s you! Lè Zūn, the creator of this cave! Wait, then why haven’t you built this cave?” I yelled.

“I only just found it? But I have plans for rebuilding this cave, now that you mention it. I saw a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light in this cave, hence inspiring me to try and build a temple here.” He said.

“Oh, no! I’m on the wrong timeline!” I gasped under my breath.

“So, what is your name?” He asked,

“John, John Sebel.” I replied, trying not to act like I was in the wrong timeline.

“Well John, would you like to take a walk with me?” He asked.

“Um, okay?” I replied. He led the way as I followed. We walked around for a bit until we finally came to a stop as we approached the near-back wall of the cave. “I plan to create marvellous tiles engraved with paintings on the walls. Carve six beautiful altars into the walls and make three majestic Buddha statues to help encourage Buddhism.” He explained.

“What’s that?” I asked, wondering what those half built Buddha statues were. We then walked closer to it, and he explained.

“Well, that is the concept of Buddhism, it states that people are reborn after dying. Most individuals go through many cycles of birth, living, death and rebirth.” He explained, “you should always have a kind and virtuous heart. You should also have good behaviour to others and yourself because good behaviour in each life is the way to help achieve Nirvana to keep the process of rebirth going.” He said.

I thought about what he said for a while and realized that, though I may have not fully understood it; I agreed that what he said was rightful and everyone should have a good heart. We continued to walk around the place, asking each other things and talking about Buddhism. Suddenly, I felt extremely dizzy and collapsed on the floor. “Beep beep, beep, beep beep...” was what I heard as I regained consciousness, “Inject the ketam— Oh, you’re awake, Mr. Sebel.” A doctor replied.

“What happened?” I asked in pure confusion.

“Well, a local explorer found you under severe cardiac arrest outside cave 16. If it were not for his CPR skills, you would’ve been a goner. He then rushed to the nearest hospital, and here we are now.” The doctor replied, “now we won’t put any anaesthesia, but you better take some rest, okay?”

A Few Weeks Later...

When I finally got discharged from the hospital, I immediately went to find the cave that I fell into. I searched for days until I finally gave up. Perhaps that temple was cave 1, and was my time with Lè Zūn a mere mirage, or was that reality...

A Trip to the Past

ESF Kennedy School, Lee, Julianne – 10

‘Yesss! We’re *finally* here!’ Huang jumped out of her seat as her brother rubbed his eyes; he had been sleeping.

‘Let’s go!’ Huang dragged her brother out of his seat and off the bus.

‘Hello, Mogao Grottoes!’ Huang declared, spinning around on the spot.

Zhi looked around to find his camera, and noticed their class leaving. ‘Huang! We gotta go!’

Huang stopped, a bit dizzy, and hurried to join them. Zhi blinked for a moment and then ran to catch up.

‘Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes’ the tour guide said, in a calm, clear voice.

‘WOOOOOOW!’ Huang exclaimed, completely ruining the quiet vibe.

All the parents turned towards her and glared. ‘SHHHHH!’

But she was right. The Mogao Grottoes were beautiful; there were amazing mosaics of people and animals covering all the walls, and statues of Buddhas everywhere. It was obviously an old place, but still beautiful. It did deserve a ‘wow’. The tour guide stepped forward. ‘As you can see, there are murals and paintings on the ceiling and walls. Some show Chinese myths or legends, and some show important figures, like emperors or noblemen.’

Huang yawned ‘Ugh, this is so BORING! Zhi, come on! Let’s explore!’

Zhi looked at their teacher worriedly ‘Are you sure? Ms. Chan said—’

‘Who cares about what Ms. Chan says? Let’s go!’

Zhi took one last look at their class, then gave in. ‘Fine, but let’s not go *too* far.’

The siblings wandered through a maze of caves and tunnels, full of statues and murals. Zhi was getting more bored by the minute when Huang saw a flash of movement in one of the smaller caves. ‘Zhi. Did you see that? There’s something moving in that cave. We have to go look!’

‘You can go, but I’m not.’ Zhi sat down, tired of walking through the endless tunnels.

He noticed his sister leaving, sighed, and reluctantly followed her. They crept through the doorway into the room. It was...empty. ‘Seriously Huang? There’s *nothing* in here—’

Huang ran over to a dusty box lying in the corner. ‘Look! A *treasure* box! And there’s a *watch* inside!! It has our *grandpa’s* name on it!! Right here, see?’

Zhi went to look at the watch his sister was holding, and found that she was right! It said, in big letters at the back “Jing Wei” ‘We should keep it... Here, put it on!’ Huang said, as she strapped it onto his wrist.

‘This watch is really out of date. We should wind it forwards to our time.’

Huang reached out to turn the dial, but as she did, a cloud of dust surrounded them. When the air finally cleared, they were both lying on the ground in a cave full of gold and shining gems. ‘Zhi’ Huang said, turning to look at him ‘Where are we? And where’s the watch?’

Zhi peered around. It looked like the dusty old cave they had found the watch in, except for one thing: There were gold sculptures and shining jewellery lying everywhere, almost covering the entire floor! As he examined a sculpture, Huang called ‘Zhi! I found the watch! And there’s a note too! Come look!’

If you have this note, you must be my grandchildren, Huang and Zhi! I made this watch to take you back to the past. You see, I made a sculpture with a precious rock and hid it from the greedy emperor. But he found out, and your grandmother and I are going to be executed! Please save us, not for me, but for you; If we die, you two will not exist! And the watch only works for 2 days. Good luck.

Your grandpa,

Jing Wei 静伟

Zhi turned to Huang. ‘Now what?’

‘Now, we do what he told us to. We go save our grandpa.’

‘Come on, Zhi. Let’s just sleep for now. Tomorrow we can figure out how to save grandpa and grandma.’

All night they tossed and turned on the rocky cave floor. The next morning, they woke up to footsteps outside the cave entrance. Someone outside the cave entrance spoke. ‘Can you believe that the head architect and his wife are going to be executed?’

‘...Yah, I *can* believe it, we’re going to bring him to the execution right now. Remember?’

As the footsteps faded, Huang turned to Zhi. ‘They’re going to the jail cell! We can probably convince them to free grandpa! C’mon, let’s go!’

Huang ran off the same way the guards had gone. Zhi had no choice but to follow her.

Huang peered around the corner and, seeing the guards, stepped out of the shadows and sauntered over to them.

‘Who are you, and what are you doing here!’ A guard pointed his sword at Huang.

‘I am from the future. You must set these prisoners free.’

‘But they disobeyed the emperor!’

‘If you let him execute these innocent people, you’ll be next.’ Huang threatened.

‘I don’t want to die!’ The guards exchanged alarmed glances and ran away, dropping the keys as they went.

‘Grandma! Grandpa! We’re here to set you free!’ Huang said, her eyes welling with tears.

Her hands shaking, she unlocked the door, and two figures stepped out. Grandpa slowly walked towards them, his arms outstretched. ‘My wonderful grandchildren! You saved us! But you must turn the dial back and leave now. We can escape the palace on our own. Goodbye! I will always remember you!’

He hugged them. Huang twisted the dial, and once again, a swirl of dust surrounded them.

They landed in a heap in the same dusty cave. But this time, their class was there! They were all sitting down, eating cookies. 'We decided to take a break,' Ms. Chan said, smiling at them. 'Where have you been?'

'Well we—' Zhi began

Huang interrupted him, 'We just went exploring. The sculptures we saw really brought us back in time.' She exchanged a grin with Zhi 'And... Can I have a cookie?'

The Decendancy

ESF Kennedy School, Lee, Summer – 10

Cecily was very excited for her next school trip. They would be going to the Mogao Grottoes! Cecily packed up all the things she'd need. Her water bottle, lunchbox, sketchbook and a pack of colored pencils to draw any important details.

That night, Cecily could hardly sleep. She was so excited! When the day came, she double-checked everything was packed and went to the bus station. They went directly to the Mogao Grottoes from the station. They were told that the actual caves were crumbling.

The temple was very big! Cecily sketched the temple as they took a short break. Then they entered the caves. 'Wow!' Cecily thought. 'There was me thinking the temple outside was big!' The temple was titanic, and it wasn't crumbling as much as they were told. There were many beautiful statues of Buddah and all sorts of artwork and poetry. Blue and white tiles covered the floor and banners covered the walls. It had a big domed roof that was also covered with tiles. It seemed to be sort of falling, but it was still amazing. Cecily immediately went to examine the artwork first. Her best friend, Christina took a look at the poetry.

Cecily was tracing a painting of Buddah with one finger when she heard a shriek. She whipped around to face Christina being grabbed by a statue of a demon. But that wasn't possible was it? 'I must have fallen asleep,' Cecily thought subconsciously. She slapped herself only to find out that she was not dreaming!

"Tina!" Cecily screamed, reaching out to her friend.

"Help! HEEELP!! WHAT IS THIS THING?! STATUES CAN'T MOVE! Someone help me!" Christina panicked. "Em! Via! Tia! Help me help her!" Cecily called to her friends. Emma, Olivia and Tiana came rushing over and tried to help, but the demon grabbed all of them with its many arms. It sucked them to another dimension.

All five girls were still screaming when they landed in a sunny meadow which made Cecily feel pretty stupid. Then the demon abruptly appeared next to them and the screaming got louder. The demon inched towards them. "Cecilia... Cecilia wang..." The demon moaned. Cecily screamed as it got closer. It reached out and grabbed her. Her eyes closed tightly with fear. The world churned around her as she felt her friends being grabbed as well. She was suddenly jerked up into the sky and the world spun around her twenty timeless, the spinning sensation continued for what seemed like ages. Before she knew it, she was transported along with her friends back to the Mogao caves.

"Are you alright girls?!" Cecily's teacher, Ms. Jones demanded.

"Yes ma'am," Emma told her.

"We're OK," Olivia murmured.

"Perfectly fine and unhurt. Well, physically," Tiana added. Cecily remained silent. "Are you alright, Cecilia dear?" Ms. Jones asked.

"I'm alright," Cecily lied. Why had the demon howled her name but not her friends'? Why hers?

The demon appeared shortly after, grabbing only Cecilia and taking her into a portal. "Why are you taking me here?!" Cecily demanded. The demon pointed at a scene among the swirl. Cecily squinted at it.

A woman that resembled Cecily but older stood in the middle of a road, looking up at the sky. A car zoomed right at her. The woman took no notice. The vehicle hit her. Cecily screamed, terrified. Then it struck her. "That's my mother, isn't it? Father told me she died in a traffic accident." The demon nodded.

"Can't you talk?" Cecily asked impatiently.

"I can, but I prefer not to," the demon replied quietly.

"Alright. Is this why you took me here?" Cecily asked.

"To show you your family that you barely knew," The demon said.

Cecily frowned. Her mother died three months after she was born and her father died five years after that. She had never been close to her father. He was mostly working in his office and often left her with a babysitter.

The demon dragged her through the swirl. There was a little boy sitting in the grass that had Cecily's sharp electric blue eyes. He was wearing very odd clothes. "Is that my father?" Cecily inquired. The demon shook his head quietly. "A shame he died, though," it said "He was one of the only decent ones of his kind."

"Don't you have a name?" Cecily asked.

"I go by the name of Oni Rick but you may call me Rick," The demon replied.

"Well Rick, how old is this boy in this image?"

"Twelve. He is Wang Yuan Ku, the one that discovered the Mogao Grottoes. He breathed life into me. Told me to seek his descendant. That is you. You must stay in the Mogao Grottoes"

"WHAAAAAAAAAAT?!?" Cecily hollered.

"Yes," Rick replied calmly.

"So I need to stay there. But why?"

"Your fate is tied to the temple, it's crumbling, it requires your presence in order to survive."

Both were silent for a moment. "You choose, Wang.," the demon told Cecily, "I will stay, I'll protect the temples, besides, who else could do it?" Cecily decided after a long moment of silence. "Good choice," Rick said, smiling since the first time Cecily had ever seen him.

Soon enough, Cecily was transported back and did a lot of explaining. How the demon had explained to her about her descendancy. Rick chimed in a few times to give more precise information. The teachers understood, but a bully, Brooke, seemed jealous. She shoved Cecily from behind, "Come on punk, you're just a little runt, this place will just be worse with you." "Get out Brooke," Cecily told her. Amazingly, the statues dragged Brooke out. From then, Cecily lived in the Mogao Grottoes with the guidance and protection of all the living statues, and every time a school came over for a field trip, she helped the teachers. She grew up and became a guard of the Grottoes, which she was meant to be.

The Hidden World

ESF Kennedy School, Liang, Noah – 10

One day, four teenagers set out on a summer road trip around China. There was John, the leader and Max, his younger brother. There was also talkative Lucy and Celina, the quiet one.

“Let’s take a break from school and have a relaxing time before school opens again,” said John. “I’ve heard about these amazing caves called the Mogao Grottoes in Gansu Province in West Central China.”

“Gansu? It’s a long way from Hong Kong,” said Lucy.

“We should meet the challenge then.” Max smiled.

They took the train for 36 hours over two days and arrived at a beautiful oasis in the desert.

“Are we dreaming?” asked Max as they saw a peaceful lake shaded by palm trees in the middle of the bare desert.

Just on the other side of the oasis, they saw a gigantic cave. Inside, they found a stairway going down into the darkness. They took out their flashlights and went down the steps together. At the bottom was a heavy door. Max pushed it open.

They entered another world. Definitely not modern China but somewhere with busy people in ancient Chinese clothes working everywhere.

“This looks just like pictures I’ve seen in textbooks describing life in the Song Dynasty,” shouted Celina in amazement.

Their sudden appearance caught the attention of cave workers who were building this new cave community to be free from invaders and outside wars. This is the hope of all workers who want a peaceful life away from the world. The workers led them to the site’s manager who questioned them.

“We saw a cave and it led us here,” said John.

“Huh?” said the leader in confusion.

It had been a long day, so a worker just invited them to stay with him.

The next morning, there was a sudden rumor of hidden treasures nearby. The curious youth asked about this. The manager immediately said they must go find it, providing them with four fine horses. They set off to find the treasure with a Buddhist monk as their guide.

The monk went because he wanted the treasure for himself. The hidden treasure was a book containing powerful spells along with a magical spear-like sword and protective armor. Whoever owned this sword and armor would be invincible, indestructible! The monk wanted the book, weapon, and armor so he could rule the entire world.

Now, an ancient myth foretold that only the kind and pure hearted four friends could carry the treasure without harm. Anyone who took the treasure with evil intentions would turn to stone for eternity. Seeing the four youths, the monk understands what that means.

So, the youth traveled and arrived at another cave as the treasure map pointed out. Celina stepped in the cave first and they found yet another endless steps of staircases. They walked down the stairs until they were too tired to move. When they reached the end, they saw a gigantic moving Qilin.

“We are here for the treasure,” said John.

“I have sworn to protect the treasure with my life, and no one can get the treasure from me,” howled the Qilin.

“Please, we can only return using the treasure that no one can find,” said Max.

“Can you help us?” said Lucy kindly.

“Get lost and get out of here!” growled the Qilin with rage now. “You will destroy this world’s peace with the treasure if it falls into the wrong hands.”

Sensing the evil monk nearby, the Qilin froze the time so the monk stopped and could not hear. Only Qilin and the four teenagers are moving. Qilin relaxed and spoke in a kind voice towards the teenagers.

“Did you know that this evil monk was with you the entire time you entered this world?”

The teenagers saw the monk hidden now.

“Oh, we didn’t know he was following us,” said Max.

“I have sensed a great force of evilness and this monk has been contacting the War god,” said Qilin.

“They’ve been wanting to get their hands on this treasure to destroy our Song dynasty to become the highest master of the land controlling all its people as he pleases.”

The teenagers now understood.

“What can we do to stop him from this evil plan?”

“Now, before I unfreeze the time, I will make an invisible wall so the monk cannot see you while you get the treasure. Return quickly and I will let you pass. In future, be careful and make the right choices,” said Qilin.

With this, he unfroze the time. The monk who cannot see the teenagers now returns to the cave entrance to meet with the War god saying he has lost the four teenagers.

The War god shouted furiously at the monk. “You dumb–dumb! I trusted you and you lost them.”

“It wasn’t my fault,” said the monk, “I felt some invisible wall that I cannot pass. And I believe that was done by the guardian Qilin.”

The four teenagers found the treasure and returned quickly to the worker’s cave as Qilin advised. They told the workers to form an army to defeat the evil monk and his followers.

They used the power of the magic treasure to create swords for everyone. The workers and four youths fought against the evil monk and his followers. After a short battle of swords and lightning, the monks were forced into a cave corner and turned into big stones to remind people to not be so greedy for power.

The youth returned the treasure back to Qilin.

It saw their kind hearts and said, “The door is opened for you. Thank you and go!”

The four teenagers thanked Qilin for his wisdom, went through the door and back to the side of the road. Everything was still the same as if only a few seconds had passed. The teenagers went back home thinking about this timeless summer adventure.

Treasure of the Caves

ESF Kennedy School, Oh, Tay – 10

In the early 1900s, there was a British family trying to find treasure in a cave that was forgotten in time, around the sandy slopes of The Silk Road. There was the father, a cartographer, twins that were in charge of the horse and lastly there was the daughter of the cartographer. She had glinting, cerulean eyes and had blond glossy hair that hung gently across her waist, she was the cook.

After months of travelling in the extreme heat, they found a small opening on the side of a rocky wall.

The older twin exclaimed “Could this be the cave we’re looking for, father?”

“It could be!” The cartographer replied.

“Then what are we waiting for, start digging everyone!” Excitedly, the younger twin shouted.

When the sun was at the highest point in the sky, they had removed most of the rock that surrounded the opening.

“Alexandra, you can sit down there and play, we’ll take it from here.” said the cartographer.

This irritated Alexandra, she was thirteen and she was *still* being treated as a child. This gave her the urge to push past and yank out the rock that was stabilising the opening. The wall shook and rumbled as if an earthquake was about to happen, the rocks started to tumble down the wall. Panicking, she ducked down and managed to roll to the opposite direction of where her father was. Out of nowhere, a boy slipped into the opening. The opening had closed.

Alexandra couldn’t help but fall into tears, she thought she would never see her father again. To break the snotty weeping of Alexandra, the boy screamed “Stop being a baby and help me get out of here.”

He pulled out a torch and lit it using a flint, the flames danced in front of Alexandra’s face.

She was standing on a broad hallway, entirely made from rock. The roof of the cave was smooth and almost shiny. The cave looked like it stretched for miles. She then took a closer look at the bandit, he looked like someone her age and a foreigner. He had tanned skin, round black eyes and a scar that stretched across his cheek.

Her eyes swollen red, she sobbed “Who do you even think you are?”

“I am a bandit that has come for treasure in these caves, and if you don’t help me out you will regret it.” the bandit threatened.

She slowly nodded her head.

They wandered around for hours, then she started to notice some markings, “What does this mean?” She asked curiously.

Shocked, the boy said “It’s *Chinese*, it’s a *language*. It *means* ‘you are nearing where treasure lies. Beware there’s traps.’, wimpy girl”

Offended, Alexandra pouted “Will you not call me wimpy girl, my name’s Alexandra, wimpy boy?”

“Don’t you call me wimpy!” The bandit tried to push her, but instantly she dodged to the side. The bandit fell down on his bottom, she laughed hysterically “Oh sorry, did you just happen to fall?”

When he got up, pouting his lips, the jagged tile that the bandit was standing on, lowered. Alexandra could hear a rumbling, tumbling, low sound. A towering boulder came into sight, it rolled down destroying the walls, it was chasing them.

The bandit grabbed Alexandra and ran as fast as he could, facing the way they had come. He remembered that there was a sharp turn in the tunnel, and he knew that the boulder couldn’t turn in that momentum. The boulder was right

behind them. When they had reached the turn, they drifted to the left, and rolled onto the floor. The boulder crashed into the wall. Breathing heavily, Alexandra could only make out two words 'Thank' and 'you'.

They had rested for hours, every single bone of their body ached. Then the bandit just noticed an opening the boulder had made, there was a light that shone brightly there, almost as if it were the treasure. Barely, he got up and limped towards the opening, Alexandra followed him. As they approached, the floor became more and more even, almost as if it was a pathway. Finally, they reached a room filled with scrolls, breathtaking paintings, gorgeous vases, humongous sculptures and tall temples made from wood. They looked older than a millenia. It was fascinating, the room was so gigantic and exquisite, it looked as if a giant had built it. Looking closer at the relics, nearly all of them had a person crossed-legged in robes. The temple structure had at least four temples, each temple stacked on one another. At the edges of the room, there were dozens of hallways, perhaps leading to even more rooms. The bandit and Alexandra were speechless.

Whilst they were awestruck, a familiar voice cried out "Alexandra!", it was her father! The boulder had smashed through the walls and created an exit. Alexandra ran and threw herself into her father's arms.

"Where have you been, young lady!" Her father questioned, happily.

"Father, I've missed you so much! And that's the treasure room!"

"Let's start packing!" Her father exclaimed joyfully.

"Wait." It was the bandit's voice "Stop what you're doing. This is our culture, you can't just steal it."

"Pardon me! Who are you? " His hands balled up into fists.

"I'm an adventurer, sir. And this treasure is my people's culture, so please leave." he said calmly, as he blocked her father's path.

"Don't fight! He's right, father. It may be priceless but it's not ours. We can't just steal." She yelled, eyes glistening.

"But then we would've come here for nothing."

"We can work hard, and earn money, not steal it."

"All right." Her father sighed.

"Thanks Alexandra," The little adventurer said "and sorry for pretending to be a bandit. I just wanted to save our culture."

"It's fine, goodbye adventurer" Alexandra beamed.

The family trotted off to the distance as the sun set. As for the adventurer, he had discovered the Mogao Caves.

The Mogao Grottoes

ESF Kennedy School, Wright, Jake – 10

It was 11am on a Wednesday morning in Gansu, 1907 and the heat of the sun was scorching hot. He was already sweating profusely. He couldn't take the heat. Every 20 minutes he would have to have a drink of water from his flask. To make sure he didn't run out he had 7 x 1 litre bottles. China's harsh desert weather was surely a lot different from England's wet and dreary forecast.

Peter wanted to get to the Mogao Grottoes. There he would study the artifacts and documents. Hopefully he would take some home to add to his magnificent collection which consisted of Ancient Aztec, Incan, Egyptian and more. After 30 more minutes of driving he was there and it was beautiful. There was a huge, majestic temple carved into the dusty yellow walls of an old cliff. The materials used to make it were a red colour that had faded slowly away over the thousands of years it had been there. He couldn't wait to explore.

He got out of his seat wearing his gigantic rucksack full of water, a torch with spare batteries, a camera, and a shovel just in case. The ground was full of heaps of sand and it was going into his shoe, but it was the desert, what did he expect?

When he got to the entrance it felt as if he was as small as a mouse compared to the temple. He walked in and turned on the torch, he was stunned. There were dozens of beautiful sculptures everywhere. Some with colour while others had faded away partially or completely. Before coming to China he had read about the caves and found out that this was built by Buddhist monks and used as a library to house old scrolls. Another thing that fascinated him was the hundreds of wall paintings. There were a variety of exquisite colours and there were so many details in the drawings. They were everywhere and even on the ceiling! There were lots of elaborate patterns with swirls, pictures of Buddhist monks and Buddah himself. Peter walked on through the gloomy tunnel, lit up by the dim light of the torch. As he did he got more and more amazed by everything inside it, this had to be the most interesting place he had ever visited by far.

After walking steadily onward for 30 minutes he came to a room and inside it were hundreds of old scrolls and documents. "They must be thousands of years old," he said to himself, he was in awe at the masses of scrolls. No one else was in the room so he grabbed a scroll and started reading it. It was in a language he didn't know but there were lots of colourful drawings of Buddah. It had been preserved so well that the colour had hardly faded. Peter carefully opened his rucksack and slipped the scroll inside. "This will make a wonderful addition to my collection," he whispered to himself. He grabbed more and observed everything, the colours, the ink and the paper to estimate when the scrolls were made. He roughly guessed around 1500 years ago. He was so absorbed in his work that he didn't notice he had been there for 3 hours!

He finally noticed after finishing examining his tenth scroll. His legs had a cramp and he found it difficult to stand up. When he did he nearly fell over but had to hold onto an unlit lamp to ensure he didn't. Suddenly the lamp tilted down and one side of the wall slid to the left and a hidden corridor appeared! Peter was astonished, what could this lead to? He rushed towards the entrance and ran forward looking for something big. The corridor was long and he had been running for 15 minutes. He was still doing so but then he suddenly stopped. He was completely mesmerised. In front of him was a gigantic, golden Buddha 40 meters high and behind it was a shelf as high as the Buddah with scrolls and documents in all of them. It was a massive library! He inspected the enormous Buddah and found out that the sculpture was real gold! This was an archaeological breakthrough. He grabbed his camera from his bag and took photos of everything. He needed to leave and share this discovery with the world.

He ran out of the corridor as fast as he could and got to the room where he had found the secret entrance and ran to the entrance of the cave. On the way he thought about what would happen when everyone found out about his discovery, would he get rich and famous? Would he go down in history books? Then a thought sprang up into his mind, what would happen to the structure and the documents when it was discovered? Humans had been known to destroy monuments like this, he couldn't risk it. If he did then it might be demolished and the beautiful sculpture destroyed with all of the work around it. He just couldn't show it to the world even if he did get rich in doing so. This part of the cave must be kept secret for as long as possible. So with that thought in mind he ran out into the open world.

He instantly stepped back, the sun shone brightly into his eyes, too bright. It took a while for his eyes to adjust but when he did he hopped into his truck and drove off into the desert. "I hope I find more stunning things like that," he said to himself, "I have lots of time to, I'm still only 24."

The Tale of a Buddha Statue

ESF Kennedy School, Wu, Jayden – 10

Ting! Ting! Ting! When I opened my eyes, I saw a thin, bald man with a yellow robe chiselling my toe! I didn't know what was happening until he told me later.

My name is Sakyamuni. I am 16 meters tall and lying on my right side. My head rests on my right hand, my left hand rests gently on my body, and my feet stack up with the upper surface of my feet facing outward.

My hair has snail-like curls with a high bun, my colour is greyish white. My ears seem to touch my shoulder. I have long eye lines, but small pupils and my eyes are barely open. I have a subtle smile. I also have a bindi—The dot between the eyebrows represents the third eye to feel the world. I can fly so I don't have to walk.

I was created by a monk named Yuezun in a place called the Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang. "I have a vision of a thousand Buddhas, and that inspired me to build caves here as I was passing this region." He told me while he was chiselling my future relatives. Once he created a brother and a sister for me, he went to dig a cave around us. I live in cave 158. It was 366 AD.

After his death, other monks followed in his footsteps and created more than two thousand siblings for me! The whole site is like a magnificent mansion with many rooms housing different buddhas. Some rooms have windows where sunlight beams into rooms. Corridors and stairs are connecting different spaces.

Day after day, birds are chirping. Long lines of traders riding on camels zig-zagging the desert. Monks and visitors enter my room to worship me.

After sunset, my siblings and I read precious handwritten scrolls in the library cave and doodle on the walls and ceilings. My favourite drawings are those where people are flying in the sky and fables about Buddha's teaching. When it's late, we party and play hide-and-seek.

But in the Yuan dynasty, nobody came at all. I asked a shepherd what had happened. He said there used to be a major trading hub nearby but trading via sea-routes began to dominate.

A monk told me in the Ming dynasty "The silk road was officially abandoned." My life has become tranquil. After a few decades, I found it as dull as dishwater. Every day I just read and draw. My siblings and I felt like being quarantined in a pandemic.

One starry night, while I was drawing myths of buddhas on the wall, I heard a sound. "Whoosh!" I went out to investigate. I saw an egg-like object flying in the air, flying lower and lower every second.

Out stepped a skinny person with green skin and a pair of big, black eyes. He said "Hello, earthling, I am Charles from Mars. I left Mars with my family and friends because of the large dust devil or you can say, the large spinning devil." "Can I come into your room?"

I replied "Ok."

He came in and commented, "Not a bad place you have here!"

"You can stay until the dust devil stops if you want." I told him.

"Great, thank you!" he replied.

During his stay, I taught him how to make small stone statues and he taught me how to fly the egg-like flying object—they call it a spaceship.

Two months later, the dust devil stopped and Charles left. He said while he was boarding his spaceship. "I had a good time here. Can I return in the future?"

"Of course, come whenever you want!" I replied. Seconds later, he was gone.

Things changed again in 1900 when our library cave was “discovered” — though we have never lost it! Suddenly, numerous foreigners flocked in and took away our favourite books, my siblings, and wall paintings! They are now scattered in museums and collectors’ homes around the world.

In 1961, I heard that the government had declared this place a specially protected historical monument and would restore it to its glory. More than two decades have passed since then, this place has become a UNESCO world heritage site.

In 2013, the government proposed a grand vision called Belt and Road Initiative (OBOR) which links China with European countries through high-speed rails. Six years later, the railway was completed with a stop in a nearby town. My cave was flooded by tourists again. Children were yelling, pushing and running around. Adults were talking on their phones, snapping pictures and sharing on social media. This is a big contrast to tranquillity for the past 500 years. But soon I got used to it.

This is the year 2180. The earth is a fireball with no water in sight. Humans used up all the fossil fuels. All trees and plants died out. Rubbish piled up everywhere. The planet is no longer habitable. Only aliens have set up a trading post near my home, or the “space silk road” as I call it. Visitors now come from all around our galaxy. Every day I see strange, funny, scary and unusual-looking visitors.

I get woken up by a sand storm and the sound of a spaceship landing. Someone suddenly comes to my cave. It’s Charles! We chatted for a while and I told him how the earth has changed since his last visit. He invited me to move to Mars. I don’t want to leave my birthplace but the earth is so different that I cannot recognise it anymore.

In the spaceship, I look back on the cave one last time and the few thousand years flashbacked in my mind. Tears flow through my eyes.

The Day the Monk Became Rich

ESF Quarry Bay School, Gao, Annabel – 8

More than one million centuries ago, there was a young and kind hearted Monk.
He helped everyone in need that he saw with a kind heart everyone loved him.
BUT one day when he was crossing the dessert near the famous and lovely silk road of China.
Something caught his eye, then he felt a spark in the deepest side of his kind heart.
First, he wanted to see what was inside that deep dark cave, but suddenly horror over took the excitement
After long hours of standing, he gave himself a super hard punch and knew it was time to go inside he bravely walked
inside the huge cave and surprisingly saw that the cave was magical.
There were lights on the top of the cave and made him feel safe.
Then beautiful young girls came and brought him to a genie the Monk felt safer and in front the genie said "Can I
help or do something for you".
The genie then slowly said "you can take over the gold because of your kind heart".
The genie granted five of the kind monk's wishes.
From that day on people went to that cave looking for fortune.

The Dragon in the Bowl

ESF Quarry Bay School, Zhang, Emily – 11

A long, long time ago, in Xian Yang, Wuhuo, a general, went on a hunting trip. He traveled for three days and nights, frequently stopping to hunt. When he reached Yulin, he stopped again to hunt. Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of something shiny under the ground. *It might be something precious!* he thought. So he began to dig; after a few minutes, he saw what it was — a crystal bowl! On it were engravings so delicate it was almost life-like. One showed a picture of a dragon burning down a tower, another showed it getting sucked into something round.

Wuhuo picked it up: inside was a strange substance — it was neither gas, liquid nor solid. Curious, he touched it. The substance cracked. The bowl started to tremble. There was a burst of light, and when Wuhuo opened his eyes, he beheld a horrific scene — a snow-white dragon stood in front of him. It did a somersault in the air and flexed its dagger-sharp claws. Its scales were like pearls shining in the golden sunlight as it gazed down at Wuhuo with its amber eyes. It had two heads, each with a mouth and fangs as sharp as needles.

“Wh—who are you? Where did you come from?” stammered Wuhuo. “S—stay away from me!”

The dragon grinned: “Why, I believe you have just freed me.”

“From what?” asked Wuhuo.

“The bowl, of course,” said the dragon. “That Arhat trapped me in there. Is it still the Shang dynasty?”

“No,” said Wuhuo: “it’s the warring states period now.”

“Oh well, but since you have freed me, you may have whatever you want. What do you want more than anything?” asked the dragon.

I have always wanted a horse... thought Wuhuo. “I wish for a beautiful horse as fast as the wind, a horse who will never be tired. I want a horse who is able to fly.” he said.

As soon as he said these words, a mare appeared before him. It was beautiful and chestnut-colored, with two white hooves. Overjoyed, Wuhuo lept onto the horse and tugged the reigns. She immediately set off, quick as lightning, then rose into the air. The dragon smiled and vanished in a puff of smoke.

That night, Wuhuo had a strange dream. He was walking in a village. Smoke was rising from a tower. *Fire!* he thought. He ran to the site but was stopped by a falling piece of wood. Wuhuo recognized the carvings on it, but he couldn’t grasp where. Suddenly, he spotted something in the sky. It was a two headed dragon, exactly like the one who he had freed that day.

“*This is why the dragon was imprisoned in that bowl.*” said a voice from behind. Wuhuo spun around — it was the great Arhat himself. “*You have probably heard the story of how I caught a dragon.*” he said: “*That was the one. I have come to warn you of great misfortune. You must finish what you started. The dragon sleeps in the old cave. Bring him to me.*” Then, everything began to blur as Wuhuo woke up.

The next morning, Wuhuo woke up early and prepared his things. He mounted his horse: “Go quickly and quietly,” he told her: “be prepared to run.” He set off at the break of dawn. An hour later, he arrived at the old cave — sure enough, the two headed dragon slept soundly inside. *I’ve got to the cave,* thought Wuhuo: *what do I do now?* Then, as if answering his question, the voice of Arhat rang in his ears: “*Take his magical marble and wake him up.*” He took a step forward — in the lap of the dragon was a shiny marble.

As Wuhuo picked it up, a strange sensation took over — he felt safe and protected, like nothing could ever harm him. He looked down at the marble: images flashed inside — pictures of him in a palace of gold, pictures of people bowing down... then suddenly, a flash of bright orange took its place, and a sharp pang of pain ran through his body. Wuhuo yelped, then realized it wasn’t real. He let out a sigh of relief and put the marble in his pocket. He was just thinking about how to wake the dragon when a snarl sounded behind him — the dragon was already awake.

“How dare you steal my marble!” it roared, pouncing on Wuhuo. He swerved to the right and hopped onto his horse. Wuhuo grabbed an arrow and shot at the dragon. Both heads dodged, and it hit the spot between them. The dragon roared in pain. Wuhuo turned around to see that he was flying in the air. The dragon was gaining on them. Suddenly, Wuhuo remembered Arhat’s words: “*Bring him to me.*” He turned and headed towards Yulin. So, the dragon chased him all the way there.

Arhat stood on a smooth rock: “So, we meet again.”

The dragon fixed his gaze on him: “You can’t capture me this time.” he snarled.

“Oh really?” asked Arhat. He leaped up onto a cloud and soared towards it. The dragon snapped at Arhat. They battled for a while, until suddenly, the dragon dived at him and whipped him with its tail. Arhat fell off balance and was immediately pinned to the ground. “I’ve got you now,” said the dragon: “this time, I’m going to end you for good.” It leaned back, preparing to strike. Then, in a split second, Wuhuo spotted the crystal bowl lying on the ground. He picked it up and threw it at the dragon.

The dragon began to shrink. “NOOOOOOOO!!!” the dragon was being sucked in! Finally, there was a burst of light, and the dragon was gone. Wuhuo dug a hole and put the bowl inside. As he covered it, he sighed — finally, it was over. Wuhuo turned around to apologize to Arhat, but he had disappeared. And so, he went home.

The Mogao Caves

ESF Sha Tin Junior School, Kwan, Aden – 9

After several thousand years when the Mogao Caves were forgotten, a scholar explorer named Bing, decided to find the ancient cave of Mogao. Bing lives in Dunhuang of the Gansu province in China, where the Mogao Caves was located. He and his scholar friends have been searching the caves for a month-long, one day, one of his friends named Kun-Cha discovered an ancient painting inside an enormous cave.

‘Look! There is a painting here!’ yelled by Kun-Cha holding a lamp, others rushing to see what is it. Everyone was amazed at the huge paintings on the wall. The paintings were drawn by some lines mapping the direction of the cave. It showed there were many chambers inside the cave-like a maze. ‘Hey what’s this Blue dot in the middle?’ puzzled Bing, he wondered it might imply something important hidden behind a wall.

‘Let us use our bombs and cannons to knock down the wall’, suggested Kun-Cha. BOOM! The wall crumbled to pieces. As Bing and Kun-Cha move out of the smoke, there was a blue glowing light...It was a diamond! ‘What’s the diamond for?’ asked Bing. A scholar, Dun-Ming, found there’s a dusty book and read it. He said ‘This diamond is to safeguard all the ancient sacred art and literature inside a chamber.’ Then Bing went closely near the diamond and touched it. Suddenly, ZAP!!!! Little did they know they should not touch it, as it released a dangerous dragon into the sky while a chamber was wide opened!

It released an evil Ancient Dragon and reviewed all of the ancient arts, literature and some weapons as well. The scholars did not know how to fight, luckily there was a Chinese scroll to teach them how to use the ancient weapons. They got all the swords, bows and armour ready and tried to fight with the dragon. The other scholars named Pola and Debi were terrified and ran out of the cave and warned the whole town that there is an Ancient Dragon on its way. But it’s too late, ROAR!! The dragon could fly and it was so furious and started breathing fire to everywhere. The dragon even had special power like laser-eyes that could destroy big rocks and buildings, wherever it went all tumbled.

Bing, Kun-Cha and the dragon were fighting across a snowy mountain using overpowered swords to defeat the dragon. The King of the Dynasty heard the call for help from Pola and Debi, he then ordered his soldiers to get all-mighty spears, blades, swords and armour to fight with the dragon. At last, they defeated the dragon finally. As a reward for killing it, the King awarded them all the ancient sacred art and literature that they have entitled to. The scholars were thrilled.

Soon after, all scholars came together to help the King to rebuild the city, Dun-Ming the famous builder, followed some blue-print paintings that he found in the Mogao cave by using all the broken stones and big rocks that the dragon devastated, then they started to build many long and huge walls along the stretching mountains, they named it ‘The Great Wall Of China’.

In a wish to protect the Dynasty not to be ruined by another evil dragon that may come out again, they build as many walls as possible across different provinces of China. The shape of it resembles a dragon lying across the high mountains. The scholars wish: Be a good dragon to protect our Dynasty! Here comes today, the Great Wall of China. Thanks to the scholar’s bravery and their teamwork, and the tale of Mogao Caves.

The Secret of Mogao Grottoes

ESF Sha Tin Junior School, Lee, Dominic – 8

Mogao Grottoes

On a mountain, on a cliff, in a cave, there was a temple, called Mogao. One day, four explorers from different cities, two from Hong Kong and two from Shanghai, came to have an adventure. They were named Frank, William, Merry and Minnie. When they went inside the cave, they saw lots of ancient paintings on the walls, ceiling and floor, as well as many different sizes of sculptures. Minnie said they were made thousands of years ago.

The Secret Library

Four explorers were so amazed that they all of a sudden found a secret place. When they entered a room of the cave, Frank accidentally closed the door by mistake, they found there was another door behind it! When they opened that door, they saw piles and piles of books in front of them. They had discovered a secret library! So they settled down and read the books together for many days and nights. Two weeks later, they still haven't finished reading all the books in the library. But there was a problem, they didn't have enough food left, so, they read as fast as they could.

Treasure Room

Finally, they have finished all the books. They put the books neatly like nothing ever happened, but when they put them back onto the shelf, an image appeared on the books' side. That image was a bunch of words, it looked like a code that told something very important. Then, they followed the instructions to a trapdoor that looked like a book.

When they went into the trapdoor, they found themselves in a treasure room! They saw a lot of diamonds, gold, gemstones and other jewellery as well. William referred to one of the books he read in the secret library, and said, all this jewellery belonged to the ancient royals of different countries hundred years ago. When the countries were having wars with each other, people took all their valuable belongings and hid them in this secret place.

The secret Message

The explorers took photos and immediately sent an email to The Director of the National Museum of China to study, as well as the journalists about their findings. When the explorers came home, everyone welcomed them back with pride and a smile, many media interviewed them and asked lots of questions about their Mogao Grottes adventure.

One of the questions was, have you taken anything from this valuable place? Merry replied to the media with a smile, we have gained lots of fun and experiences from this adventure. Frank grinned, he stole the limelight and said, we have learnt don't put all eggs in one basket! Everyone laughed.

Thereafter, they became very very famous all over the world and became an adventurous team of four.

A Journey with the Nine-Coloured Deer

ESF Sha Tin Junior School, Shi, Iris Sun – 9

The deer was gone. We searched everywhere but failed to see the merest shadow of it. My younger brother Martin was heartbroken, while I eventually spotted a piece of bark with a sentence.

“If you miss me, stand under that oak.” Martin read aloud. “Let’s go, now!”

Within 10 seconds, Martin and I were under the oak. Something white flew out of the sky.

“Hello, friends,” the deer said affectionately, “Climb onto me.” It lowered the front half of its body.

“Are you the legendary nine-coloured deer?” I asked in disbelief.

“Yes, I am the deer of nine colours. 2800 years ago, I promenaded on the bank of the Ganges. 1700 years ago, a painter brought me to my new home in the grottoes.” it muttered.

It flew like an angel, but with no wings. We felt puffs of air rising and falling. I gripped Martin’s waist tightly. Those incredible past few days flashed back into my head...

The Forest

Martin and I played in Midnight Forest until the sun was only a hazy orb going down. Suddenly, a small, saddening, desperate whimper echoed through the forest. It sounded like an animal weeping.

Before I processed the noise, Martin was already dashing into the forest like a crazed lightning bolt. When I ran deep into the wildness of the forest, Martin was crouching down, patting a deer and trying to feed it with a sandwich.

Martin made a hush sign, pointing at the deer’s right leg. It was bent at a strange angle, with a few drops of blood on the ground. Its eyes were wide with fear as it shuffled away. It was a unique deer with bright red, chrome yellow, lemon yellow, mint green, sap green, turquoise, sky blue, ultramarine, and violet spots on it.

“It is okay, little deer! We will help save you.” Martin raised his sweet baby voice. The deer did not appear to trust him. I stroked its back gently, and I was shocked by this deer’s soft, fuzzy, and silky coat.

In the following days, we were keen to go to the forest. Martin usually fed the deer with wild berries. I chatted with the deer to comfort it. It seemed to get more relaxed. On the fourth day, unexpectedly, it spoke.

“I’m sorry if I didn’t trust you at the beginning.” It said gently to not startle us.

“It can t-t-talk!” Martin shouted. I hushed him, taking notes. I used to bring a notebook everywhere with me.

“I once saved a drowning man. He swore to hide my whereabouts, but he broke his promise. His king chased me desperately, but I conjured my powers to wield off the sharp arrows. This encounter made me suspicious about humans.”

Then it whispered: “Thank you for taking loving care of me. I’ll show you the wonders of my caves.”

The Caves

After what seemed like a long ride on the deer’s back, we eventually arrived at the deer’s home. There were thousands of half-hidden caves on the cliff. They reminded me of termite holes, so cramped together. The place must have been Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang.

“Here it is. 60 years ago, my cave was named No. 257.” It declared. “Let’s go to Cave 428, home of my 240-year-younger self. People called me Prince Mahasattva at that time.”

Cave 428 was a marvellous place, with a meticulous, super-detailed roof, complete with flying apsaras. Inside of it, I saw tigers licking a pile of bones.

“Were Prince Mahasattva eaten by that starving tigress?” I asked.

“Well, the story was a twisted one. I went hunting with my brothers one day. We saw starving a tigress who was about to eat her own cubs. I offered myself in exchange. However, good intentions alone would not save a life. The tigress refused to eat me alive, so I sacrificed myself. The tigress, in tears, ingested my body.” the deer uttered.

“Wow!” cried Martin, staring at the deer for a trace of Prince Mahasattva, as I scrawled down notes on my notebook furiously.

A second later, we landed on Cave 285. It was as marvellous, with its intricate painting of gods and flying fairies. There was also a coffin-shaped ceiling.

“What happened?” Martin asked curiously.

“500 bandits who committed horrible crimes were captured by the King. They were sent on trial and were given the cruel punishment of having their eyes gouged out. They met me. Well, another 240 years after being Prince Mahasattva, I was incarnated again and this time named Siddhattha Gotama. My disciples called me buddha. I brushed the air, and the bandits had their new eyes back and received enlightenment.”

The deer clapped his hooves, and people and animals started to emerge from the walls. Martin and I stared at them with our mouths open! Apsaras flew and played sweet, joyful music, scattered colourful flowers. Some fluttered rainbow wings and swung on clouds, and some had chicken legs and cloud tails. They were so lively! Prince Mahasattva strode in a single, intact piece, and buddha opened his eyes and slowly sat up. The 500 bandits were chatting, with goblets of wine in their hands.

We joined the party. I danced in the air, as light as a feather. I played the Chinese lute gracefully, and Martin blew a panpipe, bringing jolly laughter. I heard hooves sound and saw Tang Sanzang riding a grey horse.

“Where’s the Monkey King?” Martin could hardly hide his excitement.

My watch abruptly beeped. Oh, it was already ten! Mom would be so worried about us! The deer understood and nodded. We rode on its back home. The deer glowed in the moonless night sky like a crystal radiating nine colours.

It was time to wave goodbye to the deer.

“Where have you been---?” cried Mom’s voice from behind.

The deer disappeared, leaving three small fragments of a lotus petal drifting in the air. Martin and I turned around and winked at each other.

A Brief History of the So–Called Monkey King & More...

ESF Sha Tin Junior School, Wong, Joey – 10

If you live in China, you would have heard of the Monkey King. Now, there's something behind this story that not many people know about, giving me the obligation to inform you about it. There's another story. Buried deep within the barriers of Mount Huaguo. Although it sounds like a pleasant place to stay in, I think you need to know that this mountain is anything but that.

The Demonic Paradise. That's the alternative name. After hearing that, doesn't a wintry wave of shock wash over you? What's going on in your head? What can you picture? Over the gruesome screams of monkeys, I can hear the unobtrusive sound of creaking wood. Discernable slashes of knives. It was a grisly sight. However, this trepidation was the consequence of something unthinkable. To start off, let me introduce you to the main character here, Sung Wu Kung.

Let's rewind to thousands of years ago. On the top of a fruit mountain, Huaguo Mountain rested a magical rock. Since it was created, the rock had collected the magic of Heaven, Earth, and stars. As years passed by, this miraculous rock gradually grew into a stone egg that bore a devilish spirit.

Suddenly, the rock burst open, giving birth to a monkey. But little did the residents of Huaguo Mountain know, this monkey was anything but ordinary. At first, the monkey plays among the regular apes on Huaguo Mountain until one day, he puts his courage on display by jumping through a waterfall and accidentally discovering behind it, a special cave, not like any other. The apes followed him into the cave and decided to live there, crowning him as their "Monkey King."

Long story short, he found a master.

The monkey quickly becomes the master's favorite disciple. In no time, he learns magical powers like the 72 transformations which allowed him to become anything he wants and the ability to fly 96560.64 kilometers in a single somersault! The Taoist names the monkey "Sun WuKong," meaning awakened to emptiness.

At that time, his name was on the Hook of Death, and he went down to the underworld in an attempt to remove it. Remember when I said that he left Huaguo Mountain to seek immortality? When his name was taken off the Hook, he would have exactly that.

After getting tortured by him, the gods flew up to Heaven in order to register a formal complaint with the Great Jade Emperor. Hoping to keep him from causing any more mayhem, the Jade Emperor bestows upon the monkey the title of Protector of the Horses in the imperial stables. He was satisfied with that position, but when he found out that when he's nothing more than a stable boy, he returns home and calls himself the Great Sage Equal to Heaven.

Unable to stomach this, the Jade Emperor sent countless heavenly warriors to capture Sun Wukong. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, they were no match for his abilities. Realizing that he could never defeat Sun Wukong by violence, he decides to play nice and give him a new celestial post, "Guardian of the Immortal Peach Orchard." After receiving that information, Sun Wukong is as arrogant as ever.

After he wreaked havoc for some reason, the Jade Emperor sends 100,000 heavenly warriors to arrest Sun Wukong but nobody is successful. Only the combined powers of the three Great Deities and the Great Taoist Lord is enough to capture him at last.

Finally, after all the gods' powers had been used, the Buddha challenges someone called to a dare. Wukong has to get on the Buddha's hand and jump out of it. After so many years, Sun Wukong has finally met his match. When he flew to what he thought was the end of the universe, he found 5 pillars. To prove that he was there, Sun Wukong wrote on the pillar: "Sun Wukong was here." He then peed on one of the pillars and was preparing to fly back, ready to boast, when the Buddha showed some contact.

Turns out, the pillars were actually his fingers, and it's common sense that you're not allowed to pee on the Buddha's hand. He then turned his hand over, trapping Sun Wukong under a mountain called 5 Finger Mountain where he remained captive for 500 years.

The time came for a Buddhist monk to go on a dangerous journey in search of sacred scriptures. He would need protection as he travels from the ancient town to what is now known as India. The Buddha arranged for the Tang monk to free Sun Wukong.

Sun Wukong was willing to obey and remain faithful to his new master monk for his mission but his personality had not changed. The Buddha gives the monk a magical golden headband to place around the monkey's head so that when Sun Wukong needs to be controlled, the headband would squeeze until his head was about to explode.

Sun Wukong went on his journey, protecting his master on his journey. But this group would face 81 trials on their way to find the scriptures as well as cultivate themselves.

After completing their mission, Sun Wukong returned to Huaguo Mountain. He was filled with anger. He wanted to wreak havoc. He wanted revenge.

Throughout sleepless nights, he racked his brain until he thought of an idea. He dug out all of the weapons he used to signal to the demons that he was in Huaguo Mountain! He placed these objects in the most exposed locations of the magical mountains. His plan worked and the demons were attracted to Huaguo Mountain.

But by the time the demonic creatures had arrived, Sun Wukong had already fled the mountain and had flown up to the Heavens. What happened next cannot be described, you had to be there in person. Legend has it that all the villagers of Huaguo Mountain were taken to 5 Finger Mountain and trapped under there...

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Choi, Cheuk Chi – 10

In the early days of 1864, there was a monk called Shenzu. Shenzu was a monk who loved to study Buddhism every second in his life! One day, Shenzu finished reading all the books about Buddhism, but he wanted to know more. 'It's not enough, I am so interested, I'd never get bored about it. But a lot of people don't believe in Buddhism.....I know! I shall travel to sky Temple to study more Buddhism while I spread the message of Buddhism! I'm so smart! Ha! Ha! Ha!' Shenzu laughed. 'I can't wait! After this trip, I will be the smartest person! How did I not think of going to Sky Temple in the past? I will not leave that temple until I learn every last bit of Buddhism there.' An older monk overheard what Shenzu said. He quickly told Shenzu, 'Shenzu, I heard and it is not easy to go there. You must take enough safety equipment to go there! Or else you might get hurt.' Shenzu said, 'Yeah, I can protect myself. I do not need any safety equipment to protect me.' The old man replied, 'I'm doing this for your safety, Shenzu. I don't want you to.....' 'I'll be fine, trust me.' Shenzu didn't wait for him to end his sentence. 'As long as I have my water and food, I will return safely.' So then, Shenzu packed his things and started his journey.

When Shenzu left the Buddhist temple, he took out his map. 'According to this map, I will have to pass the Raging Storms, The Melting Volcano and Fogs Of Mists. It doesn't sound easy at all, so I must have enough energy to pass every stage. I will just find some caves to rest in.' he said to himself. He walked and walked and walked! Shenzu finally encountered the first stage. 'Woah! The lightning almost struck me! And the weather is so cold.....I'm scared!' Shenzu looked everywhere, then he saw a cave. He quickly ran into it. 'Huff.....I need something to cover my head to protect me from the storm. I should've listened to the old monk. I should've brought safety equipment! But first, I must calm down or I can't think.' Shenzu explored the big cave and found a half broken umbrella. 'What? Why is there a half broken umbrella here? But it might help me.' Shenzu rested for a bit then went out of the cave. He ran and ran, he finally reached the end of stage one. 'Oh my! My clothes are wet! It's so uncomfortable.....But I must continue. Stage two must be harder than stage one, I must prepare myself. There's no turning back now.' He murmured. As he walked to stage two, the weather was getting hotter and hotter. Just then, Shenzu saw something pointy from a distance. 'It's getting as hot as ever! It's like as hot as.....a volcano! Wait.....could that pointy thing be a volcano?!' Shenzu took a deep breath then said, 'It's fine, I can do it.'

Shenzu stopped walking when he stepped in the start of stage 2. 'I feel like my whole entire body will melt. It's so hot! But stage 2 must be more difficult. The volcano is going to do more than making the weather hot.' Shenzu thought. He looked through his backpack, 'A small fan and a little water. I'll manage.' When Shenzu ran and tried to reach the end of stage 2, something was shot out of the volcano. 'Lava! I mustn't touch it, or I will burn into ashes! I have to get out quickly!' Shenzu looked in the direction the lava was falling to, but he was so focused that he tripped on a small rock! The lava fell next to Shenzu, and when it splatted, tiny bits of lava fell onto Shenzu's leg. 'Ouch! It burns like crazy! It hurts!' But Shenzu stood up slowly. 'I'll do something with my leg later. But this place is too dangerous. I must get out.' Every step Shenzu took hurt so much, but he finally made it. He sat down and used a leaf to bandage his leg. He ate some food after. 'I can't feel my leg yet. And the weather is still hot until I get to stage 3. Well, the longer I stay, the longer time it will take to get to Sky Temple.' Shenzu continued his journey. He walked to stage 3 with one leg. It hurt so much he wanted to scream, but he didn't. Not long after, fog started to cover his way. He knew he need a lantern or something bright to help him light up the way. But the more he walked, the more lost he became.

Soon, he was afraid. He was terrified he would end up in the fogs his whole life. But then, a mysterious light had appeared in front of Shenzu. Shenzu followed the light carefully, he didn't want to get lost again. Soon, the fogs were starting to disappear, that would mean he finally reached the end. 'Ho! Ho! Ho! You've made it.' A mysterious voice murmured. 'Who are you?' asked Shenzu. 'I am the temple master. I guarded this place for my whole life now.' It said. 'Those stages that you've passed were to test you.' He laughed. Shenzu was confused, 'to test what?' The mysterious voice replied, 'Your determination. At first, you wouldn't have passed, but through this journey, I noticed you changed.' 'You may enter or leave anytime.' Shenzu thanked the temple master then went in the temple.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Chu, Hiu Yan – 10

Once upon a time, there were two brothers, Tom and Jack. They lived in a poor village in China.

One day, Tom and Jack were playing football on the top of a hill. Suddenly, they were attracted by a flash of light under the tree. They ran over there and found that the light was emitted from the soil. So they poked the soil until they saw a wooden box. In curiosity, Tom opened the box. There was a piece of paper inside, it said, 'Go to the 712th cave of Mogao Grottoes. There are 100 gold bars!'

Jack said, 'I think it must be a prank!' Tom replied, 'I don't think so. Maybe it is true. I want to prove it.' Jack shook his head and said, 'How can we prove it? We don't have any money to go there. And also, the Mogao Grottoes is very far away.'

At that moment, a pile of smoke spouted out from the box. Tom dropped it on the ground hastily. There was a little Buddha that appeared behind. The whole body of this little Buddha was golden yellow and he was wearing a red robe. Tom and Jack shouted together, 'Oh! I've never seen something like this.' The little Buddha said, 'Don't be afraid! I come from Mogao Grottoes. Do you want to go over there? I can help!' Tom answered at once, 'Of course! We want to go. Please!' Then, the little Buddha said, 'Okay. Let's close your eyes! M-O-G-A-O!'

'We have arrived, you can open your eyes now,' the little Buddha said. Then, Tom and Jack found that they were inside a cave. It was full of murals. They were bright and colorful. Most of the murals were mainly of women in beautiful dresses. And some of the women who were flying seemed as fairies in the sky. Tom said, 'Fantastic!' Jack agreed with a nod. The little Buddha said, 'Shh! Don't speak so loudly! Otherwise, you may wake up the Nine Color Deer.' He kept saying, 'It is responsible for guarding this place. And also, it especially hates people who want to take away the treasure from here.' Jack felt very scared and said, 'Oh. No!' But Tom said excitedly, 'It is really dangerous. But since we are here now, we must continue. Please help us again.' The little Buddha smiled and answered, 'I regret that I can't go with you. Because I have only two hours to become a real boy every day. I will soon turn back into a statue.' Jack said, 'Huh..... My God!'

The little Buddha pointed to one of the corners and said, 'Go through this secret passage and you can arrive at the 712th cave. But you must remember to keep quiet. Oh! Time is up. See you tomorrow!' The little Buddha didn't move anymore after finishing the last word. Jack asked, 'What shall we do now?' Tom replied confidently, 'We go now.'

Tom and Jack walked into the secret passage and found there was a light coming from the end, making the whole passage very bright. Tom led the way, Jack had to follow him.

After walking for a long time, they finally found a cave. Tom said, 'This should be the 712th cave. Let's go in!' After walking in, they found that the cave was very large. But there was only one huge Buddha statue inside. That statue was estimated to be fifteen meters tall, and it was wearing a red robe. The most special thing was that it was lying on its side, with its eyes closed and a smile on its face. Jack said, 'Remember to keep our voices down! Let's find out where the 100 gold bars are!'

But besides this big Buddha statue, there was just only a stone inside the cave. So Jack went over and moved the stone away. He found a paper underneath. It said, 'I have taken the gold bars. In 1921, Pirate Don!' Jack whispered, 'Tom! You come and look!' Jack showed the paper to him. Tom read it and felt very angry so he shouted, 'Oh my God! The gold bars were preempted by the pirate!' Jack covered Tom's mouth with his hand at once and said, 'You forgot.....' At the same time, a voice came from behind, 'Who's talking?'

Tom and Jack turned their heads and found that the sleeping Buddha opened his eyes. They shouted in horror. When they wanted to escape, a voice suddenly came, 'Bellow –' and the Nine – Color Deer appeared. It ran a lap around them, then they were tied by a rope. They could not move and say a word. The Nine – Color Deer said, 'How dare you come here to steal the treasure? I trapped you here! Sleeping Buddha, what do you think?' The Sleeping Buddha yawned and replied, 'I'll sleep first. Let's talk tomorrow!' The Nine – Color Deer left. Jack and Tom started to cry.

The next day, when Jack and Tom woke up, they finally saw the little Golden Buddha. 'Please let them go! I want them to have a good life after they took the gold bars. It is because they are poor and miserable.' The little Golden Buddha pleaded. The Sleeping Buddha replied, 'For the sake of your kindness, I let them go now.' After he waved his hand, the rope disappeared. Jack and Tom were able to speak too. Tom said sincerely, 'Thank you very much, Sleeping Buddha! We won't covet other people's belongings again!' The Sleeping Buddha said, 'Little Golden Buddha, you take them home!' Then the Little Golden Buddha said, 'M-O-G-A-O!'

After Jack and Tom arrived home, the little Golden Buddha said, 'I took you a trouble!' Tom immediately said, 'It wasn't your fault! It was my greed!' At last, the little Golden Buddha said, 'All right! We shall meet again someday. M-O-G-A-O!' Then a pile of smoke spouted out and he disappeared.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Ho, Lai Ting – 11

In the Gobi Desert, the sun was shining very brightly. A monk, named Chan Leung, stopped and drank some water. Then he kept walking. He had to go to the Mogao Grottoes and learn why they were made, according to his master's wishes. The Mogao Grottoes were ancient caves from more than a millennia ago, and they are in China, Gansu, Dunhuang. They are so ancient, which makes them a UNESCO World Heritage site.

After a long walk, Chan passed the Gobi Desert ... passed the Sanwei Mountain... passed a lot of land... and finally arrived in the Mogao Grottoes. He stood in front of them, staring at the millennia-old caves. He had arrived.

There, he saw a tourist group, to which the tour guide was explaining how the Mogao Grottoes were discovered. Chan sat nearby and heard the whole story. He was fascinated by the history of the Mogao Grottoes, which made him more excited about visiting them.

He went to the queue to get to the Mogao Grottoes. It was a very very long queue! But he thought that it was worth it. Time passed, and after ten minutes of waiting, he finally got inside. The Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Mogao Caves, was really grand. Chan looked at the walls of the caves and could see that the paintings and sculptures were, indeed, ancient. He and a lot of other visitors oohed and aahed when they saw the paintings and sculptures. Chan examined them, slowly and carefully, so that he would not miss a single detail. He took a magnifying glass from his pocket and re-examined them again. Then, he learned the wonderful story of why the Mogao Grottoes were made.

Chan marked the story into his notebook, and also, he tried to draw the paintings in his notebook too. He could imagine what his master would say, "Very good, Chan! You are the best!"

But, first, he had to begin the long journey from the Mogao Grottoes back to his hometown. He went out from the caves and sat for a short break. He was drinking some water when he saw two men arguing. The first man seemed to be demanding something.

"How rude," Chan thought, but he was curious, so he crept nearer to hear what they were saying.

"Buddhism makes me sick," the first man spat. "These Mogao Grottoes are useless, and the story is a lie."

"You can't say that," the second man said. He seemed angry. "There are many people who trust in Buddhism, and for the last time, Wong Sum, I am not going to demolish this antique just because you want to build your resort."

"Who cares about Buddhism when you can build a luxury holiday resort for everyone to live in," the man called Wong Sum shot back.

"I care," Chan interrupted him. He had enough. "How rude of you to say that."

Wong walked away, saying "You'll know it when you see it..."

Now Chan was even more curious. He repeated Wong's words in his mind. "You'll know it when you see it"? Will he really go and build the hotel? Wong was so suspicious that Chan felt like he had to follow him. But Wong turned around and saw him!

"The monk who ruined my plans!" Wong growled.

"I'm doing this for many people in the world!" Chan shot back. "You stubborn, selfish Wong, just because you don't trust in Buddhism doesn't mean you can demolish this antique!"

"I do what I want," Wong said stubbornly. "It's none of your business!"

Chan went away, thinking of a plan to convince Wong. But it had to wait until the next day.

“Two million dollars!” Chan was rudely awakened by the sound of Wong. “I’ll give you two million dollars to build that resort,” Wong was bargaining with a man again.

Just then, someone tapped Chan’s back. He turned around to see his monk friend, Chau Ting.

“I’ve came to help you,” he said. “We must stop Wong as we can never let the Mogao Grottoes be gone.”

Chan was relived. At last, he would have an ally to help him against Wong!

After some time, Chan and Chau had agreed on a plan. They went back to the caves to find Wong.

When they got there, they saw Wong making a resort map. Uh oh, they have to act soon!

“Minks,” Wong spat as he saw them.

“Hi Wong!” Chan greeted him. “How are you?”

“Don’t bother me,” Wong grunted. “Get out.”

“Whoa, we just wanted to take you see a movie,” Chau cut in. “We want to apologize for our behavior. I like a holiday resort too!”

“Yup!” Chan said, playing along.

After some time of persuading, Wong bought some popcorn and gave in.

“The movie you show me has to be good,” Wong grumbled. Otherwise... beware!

“OK,” Chau said then winked at Chan. The first part of the plan is a success!

The movie was about Buddhism. It interviewed most of the people who trusted in Buddhism and how important the Mogao Grottoes were to them. “The caves are truly a wonderful antique, a tunnel to the past. I’ll kill myself if the caves are broken or demolished,” one man even said.

Wong finally gave in. He knew how his action were selfish. Without a word, he left the caves and never went there again.

After a big “Thank you!” to Chau, Chan went back to his master. His master was so happy that he gave Chan a holiday. Chan went back to the Mogao Grottoes, hoping to uncover more secrets about it.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Kong, Chi Ting – 11

The Mogao Grottoes Caves in Dunhuang is both solemn and well-known to have amazing historical value. Far back to one and half millennia ago away, there was a monk called Yuezun who had a vision of a thousand radiant Buddhas on the cliff face, which inspired him to begin excavating the caves. Later, with the development of Buddhist activities, the number of caves increased day by day, and the cave making was booming and lasted for more than one-thousand years. The monks back then created many rare and precious artworks, and even the world's earliest printed dated book was discovered there too!

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, because of historical changes, the Mogao Caves were gradually forgotten and left untouched and the entrances were choked by sand from the Gobi Desert. Finally, in the 1890s a Daoist monk called Wang Yuanlu had settled down there for a few years. He was cleaning the Mogao Grottoes when he found many ancient books and art works. The news spread around the world and attracted many explorers to come and bring sculptures from their own country. The Mogao Caves have been popular since then and are considered to be priceless as the artworks are uncommon nowadays. The Mogao Grottoes are highly respected from historians since they hold a rich collection of manuscripts, documents, and many more things.

One day I read a story about Yuezun's life living in the Mogao Grottoes. He was drawing artworks with other monks peacefully when suddenly some thieves entered. It was the worst nightmare of Yuezun! He and the other monks started chanting to protect the caves and it worked! The atmosphere scared away the thief just like magic.

Everyone loves the Mogao Grottoes, but do you know anything about what it has gone through? When Yuanlu looked after the caves, he was careless and didn't know some of the explorers were sneaky and stole up to 13,000 pieces of the artworks and documents. That's why the Mogao Caves were shut down unfortunately since Yuanlu didn't feel trustworthy anymore.

As I have mentioned many times before, I love the artworks a lot. Are you curious about which painting I like the most? It is the Mural of Avolokitesvara. This is the definition of simple yet elegant. It is my dream to create such an outstanding piece of art, it stands out to me the most among the others.

Have you ever been to the Mogao Grottoes? I have been there when I was little. The experience was unforgettable and fascinating. My favorite cave is the Library Cave (Cave 17). There are many ancient manuscripts, silk banners and paintings. I was amazed by the creativity of the artists. The most remarkable artwork for me was the Tribute Horse and Camel painting. It is a sketch of two grooms leading a horse and camel along the Silk Road. This painting tells us about the transports in the ancient time which is very captivating.

There is a connection of the Mogao Grottoes and the Silk Road. Many people who tried to go all the way from east to west had stopped in Dunhuang which also became a valued gateway to the west and the centre place for the Silk Road. In Dunhuang, people traded silk which is used for making clothes for royalty. Also, people there before exchanged different rare materials such as china, animal fur and food. Dunhuang became very well-known and crowded for trading and soon the Mogao Grottoes attracted many people to believe in Buddhism. In a twinkling of an eye, the number of the monks rose quickly. The caves' numbers leapt up day by day and there were more and more fantastic artworks.

An extraordinary example of a monk is Xuanzang. He and another monk, Faxian, passed through the Silk Road to learn more knowledge about Buddhism. In Cave 17, there is a painting called Travelling Monk. It is a picture of a monk with some scrolls on his back. Beside him, there is a fierce tiger and a Buddha sitting on a cloud. Many believe the monk is Xuanzang and he was about to give a speech about Buddhism in public which is his experience in different temples around the world.

Growing up in a family that believes in Buddhism, I've been told about many tales about many wonderful temples, Buddhist monks and of course the Mogao Grottoes. In Hong Kong, I've visited countless of temples like Pak Tai Temple and Wong Tai Sin Temple, but the trip to the Mogao Grottoes was still the best and most memorable for me. Inside the place with the world's largest collection of Buddhist art, which is really shocking to me since I love to learn more about Buddhism. When I visited the Mogao Grottoes, I felt like I was travelling in a time machine, I was

like being back in ancient times with the other monks, facing the problem they had before, it was like a dream come true for me! The most exciting part is that you can look at the lovely paintings and sculptures very closely unlike seeing it online, it is a whole different world to me! You can see the texture of the artworks and the amazing techniques they use. On the other hand, if you are not interested in artworks, the cinema is always welcome for you. At the cinema, you can watch films about famous monks. My favourite one is about Faxian, he brought so much pride for the religion by translating Sanskrit texts for both Indians and Chinese which helped them to learn more about different cultures back then.

After all of my many tales and facts about the Mogao Grottoes, I hope that my writing can make more people to boost their interest and knowledge about the Mogao Grottoes as it is a treasure in China and should be valued forever.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Lai, Ka Lam – 11

I remember in one of the school vacations my parents and I joined a tour of the Silk Road. Firstly, we got a flight to Xi'an China, as Xi'an is situated in the eastern end of the Silk Road. When we arrived at Xi'an, our journey started. After visiting Xi'an city, we went to the famous museum of Emperor Qinshihuang's Tomb figures of soldiers and horses. After that, we followed the route the Silk Road to different places for sightseeing. When we arrived at Dunhuang, the tour guide brought us to the well-known Chinese Buddhist grottoes ---- The Mogao Caves.

The tour guide told us that more than a thousand years ago, a monk had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathes in golden light, inspiring him to build a cave at the oasis in the desert of Dunhuang. From that time onwards, the site gradually grew, the monks built the caves and painted the Buddha pictures on the walls. To pass the Buddha's message, these caves were elaborately painted and serving as aids to meditation. A large number of the caves and two large statues of Buddhas were constructed with funds from different donors. During the Tang Dynasty, Dunhuang became the main hub of commerce of the Silk Road and a major religious centre. As time went by the Silk Road changes into another route and the Mogao Caves were gradually abandoned.

The tour guide showed us the way to Mogao Caves. A nine-story temple first came to our sight. Inside was a giant Buddha Statue. "Oh! How could the people build such big and tall brought is to see some of them. In those caves, I could see different pictures painted all over the walls and ceilings. The paint was made from different plants. Some paintings even used gold for the decorations. Furthermore, the sculptures were also brightly painted. All these features represented the art of Dunhuang coming from different periods, cultures and nations. Because Mogao Grottoes was on the path way of the Silk Road, the style of the paintings and sculptures were influenced by different cultures and places, for example, Central Asia, India, even a part of Europe. The tour guide also mentioned about the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras (Feitian). Those made me think of the angels of western religion. "Would the Feitian and the angels were the same but with different presentation and appearance?" I murmured.

Lastly, we went to the Library Cave. This cave was accidentally discovered by a monk called Wang Yuanlu. Unfortunately, shortly after the discovery, many explorers and archaeologists from the west, Japan and Russia rushed in for exploration, so many of the ancient manuscripts, silk banners and paintings were taken away and distributed all over the world. At the same time the wall paintings were also damaged by the explorers. It made me feel sorry about what happened at that moment.

After that, we went back to hotel. My brain was fully occupied by the images of Mogao Grottoes. I had a lot of questions about Mogao Grottoes: How could the paintings and sculptures keep for so many years? What were the meanings or messages that the murals wanted to pass? Will there still be some caves that have not yet been discovered? Was the Library Cave not the only cave? According to the history, there were so many people who donated money and gold. Will there be any "Treasure Caves" that haven't been found yet? So I decided to find out the answers. I started to search from the Internet and planned to go to the museum the next day.

From the Internet, I found that one of the murals told us to sacrifice ourselves and become a selfless person who could help most of the creatures in the world. Some of murals told us about the Buddha, Heaven and the Earth. The others murals mentioned the living style and the utensils in different dynasties. I could also find different musical instruments in the paintings. The most impressive was that mural that showed the twelve Zodiac Signs and the ancient Chinese astronomy. The more information I found from the Internet, the more I was curious and wanted to know further. At night, all my dreams were full of murals of Mogao Caves Visitor Centre Museum. When I saw the museum "Wow! Are we on another planet? It looks like Mars." I cried out. The outlook of the museum was the great sand dunes looked like covering a UFO. We watched two digital presentations in a domed theater. The virtual images brought me back to the caves again, not just the experience being in the caves but also a closer look to the paintings.

Under the digital images, we can pass through so many caves, I could learn much more the stories and styles of the murals and know them according to the time-line. After the breathless virtual presentations, I suddenly realized that I had already found the "Treasure Caves". "The Mogao Grottoes is the treasures. Oh! I find it! I really find it!" I shouted excitedly. At that time, people around me smiled at my excitement.

I thought that those treasures should be known by the world. We should let the people come and see the most valuable cultural heritage. However the change of climate, the large numbers of the tourists, the light and air pollutions could damage the murals. So they used the virtual reality technology to replicate the experience of being in the caves. Those techniques can be shared and shown the murals of Mogao Grottoes around the world.

I was so glad that I had a journey to the Mogao Grottoes. And I finally got the “treasures”. I would recommend people to go and visit Mogao Grottoes to discover their “treasures”.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Leung, Lai Yin – 11

More than one and half millennia ago, there was a monk that lived at an oasis in the middle of the laziest monk in the group. He never prayed or helped find water. His master was dissatisfied by his actions, so he decided to order the lazy monk to go to the Silk Road as a punishment. Well of course, the monk disagreed. But his master told him that if he refused to go on the journey, he would be trapped in a dungeon forever. The monk had no choice and decided to go to the Silk Road.

He packed his backpack with some supplies and went on the Silk Road disappointedly. He walked and walked for days until there was a serious sandstorm. The monk wasn't hurt but he saw a tunnel appear in the desert. He was shocked and he didn't believe his very own eyes. However, he still went in the tunnel. The sandstorm stopped as he went in the tunnel. He wasn't dreaming, it was really a tunnel. He saw a blinding light at the end of the tunnel. He walked there and found something amazing—a cave. He found a pickaxe on the floor with a note on it.

The monk read it which says, 'Grab the pickaxe. It will be useful.' The monk grabbed it. 'Bang!' The tunnel that he went in was blocked by heavy stones. The monk tried using the pickaxe to break through them, but it was useless as they were too hard and thick. The monk was sitting in the cave, helpless. He said to himself after a while, 'I need to do something.' Suddenly, he heard a strange voice echoing in the cave, 'It is useful.' The monk was puzzled, 'Who are you? What is useful?' Then, he remembered the note. The pickaxe is useful! He eventually tried digging another way around. So after hours of digging, he found a big place with water surrounding it. The most shocking thing is that there was a Buddha in the centre. The monk couldn't believe his own eyes. He said, 'I've got to tell this to the master.' Then, he remembered the track and went back to the oasis, but he fell in a deep, dark hole. He was lost! He tried to call for help but no one heard him as he was in the middle of the desert. He was trapped for days with very little water and very little food. He was even attacked by wolves for several days. His skin was covered with scars and wounds. 'I can dig my way out with my pickaxe!' However, he unfortunately lost his pickaxe. He had no hope, but sitting in hole, he saw some skeletons next to him. He said, 'If there are skeletons, that means that some other people fell in here, helpless.' Just at that moment, a long, thick rope fell in the hole. The monk looked up, confused. It was his friends! He climbed up the rope and thanked them, 'Thank you, but how do you know I'm here?' 'Oh, we were just exploring the desert and saw you in a cave.' One of his friends said. 'And by the way, how is your adventure?' the monk's friends asked. He replied, 'It is a long story so I'll just say the most important things. I saw a Buddha in the middle of a shining lake.' The other monks were surprised. On the way back to the oasis, the monk told his friends about what happened. He thought, 'Actually, I don't think this is a punishment after all.'

They went back to the oasis. The monk told everyone his journey. He said, 'the Buddha is in a cave. Let's dig it up together!' 'The other monks thought for a second and eventually agreed. The monk led them to the location of the Buddha. They monk led them to the location of the Buddha. They made their shovels and dug. After days of digging, some of them decided to give up. The lazy monk seemed to be still digging. After some time, everyone gave up except for the lazy monk. Finally, the monk dug the Buddha up. However, it was too heavy that the monk can't get it. In a sudden, the Buddha floated to the air and said, 'I like your perseverance. You did a great job.' The monk was rewarded a chest full of gold. The monk was happy, of course. However, he never gave up on his 'dream'. He explored around the world. Found precious jewelry, paintings and some more statues.

Until now, the things that the monk found are either in the museum or a famous tourist destination.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Lo, Tsun Lung – 10

China is one of the most mysterious countries in the world, especially the Mogao Grottoes and Terracotta Warriors. There are many things that I want to know such as Buddhism, the culture of the ancient cities, etc. I hope that I will have an adventurous journey at Mogao Grottoes with my friend.

One day, I went to Disneyland with my best friends Raynald and Raydon for the celebration of my birthday. We played on the roller coaster at the “Space Mountain”. It was very dark inside the tunnel. Many children were accelerating very rapidly. Suddenly, our cart flew out from the original track and entered into the other “bright tunnel”. Raydon shuddered and asked us, “What is happening and where are we going?” Then Raynald squinted at me and two drops of tears formed in his eyes. My lips were trembling and my mind was racing at that moment too.

We seemed to fly back to the past and saw a lot of pictures on the wall of the tunnel about ancient cities and people. We passed by many countries and saw Mogao Grottoes. I shouted, “Stop, it’s my beloved place!” Raynald and Raydon said, “That’s good, let’s go down there.” At once the cart stopped and left the “bright tunnel”. We were thrown out from the cart and fell to the ground.

Raynald was surprised and shouted, “We are staying in Mogao Grottoes now, that’s amazing.” Then we walked around. We saw a cave over there. Then Raydon was shivering and pointed to the cave and said that a big Buddha statue was walking towards us from the cave. The Buddha asked, “Little boys, where do you want to go?” I answered, “Mogao Grottoes is our dream place. We want to visit here and know more about the history of Mogao.” The Buddha statue said, “Then come with me because I have stayed here for a very long time, so I must be the best tourist guide for you.” We followed him and went into the caves. That was a wonderful place. We could see those dancers were dancing in the air. When Raynald and I looked at the wall pictures closely, it was so funny that Raydon tried to imitate the dancers’ movement with his jacket. Suddenly, they flew out from the pictures and became real creatures too. We ran wildly scared and screamed loudly but those dancers were chasing us. The Buddha statue shouted, “Don’t worry!” But we were so afraid to control ourselves, we kept on running because it was terrible to be chased by so many flying dancers. “Step on it!” I shouted. “It’s a fuse!” In front of us was an open trap door. Then we were falling in a dark space. Our body hurt. We hit the ground and felt agonizing pain. Raynald yelled, “Who can save us?”

It was dark and cold there and we couldn’t walk well because we were injured. We were crying and shouted, “Buddha statue, please help us! We need your help!” It didn’t come even though we had waited for an hour. Raydon hugged Raynald and said, “I am so hungry and cold.” We looked for the exit but in vain. We sat down to take a rest. Then, we saw a mysterious book which was in the crystal box that was about the history of famous persons in the world. It included many beautiful paintings and interesting stories, like Mona Lisa, Van Gogh, Kongzi, Emperor Qin Shihuang, Journey to the West, etc. When we read the final page, Raynald was surprised and read it out, “If you call them out just to say the magic words together with their names. Raydon whispered, “Mona Lisa, please come out.” I yelled, “No, she is not strong enough to save us, she is only an elegant woman in the famous painting.” At the same time, she appeared in front of us instantly. Raynald said, “Oh my God, we need a troop of soldiers instead.” Suddenly we heard noises of horse’s footsteps coming down there gradually. I screamed and pointed at our left side, “It’s great! They are Terracotta Warriors. They are marching towards us.” One of the soldiers lifted us and Mona Lisa up to the horses. The dancers were chasing us closing. Fortunately, the Buddha statue appeared and helped us to fight all of them.

While they were fighting, Mona Lisa led us and the troop of soldiers left the cave. Raydon shouted, “What’s going on?” I heard the Buddha statue said, “Please help me, I can’t beat them.” I suggested, “I call for an army general to help us, his name is Patton who is a famous general, please come out and lead us to fight out the dancers.” Raynald was surprised, “Woo...he is coming over there.” Mona Lisa led us to hide behind the big stone. The Buddha statue was injured and the dancers were flying to our side. General Patton’s army was ready! Make ready! We must beat out all of them.” Then his army faces the dancers, and the army shouted, “Go, Go, Go, we fight now.” Suddenly, all the dancers knelt and pleaded for forgiving them. The Buddha statue started to walk towards the dancers curiously and asked, “What is your meaning?” They answered “Why are the soldiers and you fighting at us?” We are no malice to

you.” Raydon, Raynald, and I tried to approach them. They pointed to Raydon and said, “We saw you were dancing in front of us, but you danced wrong so that we just wanted to teach you.” We looked at each other and laughed out loudly. Then, we danced with each other happily, it’s a wonderful time.

When we were engaged, the mystery book dropped on the floor and opened, all the characters were dissolved into the book. I said unwillingly, “It’s time to back home.” We finally took the roller coaster and back to Disneyland.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Tsai, Man Hei – 11

‘Ding Dong!’

The school bell rang and I walked home with a heavy heart. This was the second time I failed my history tests. I must be scolded tonight.

After I took a bath, I was dazed in my bed. Suddenly someone knocked on the door.

‘Can I come in?’ said the boy.

‘Who are you?’ I asked.

‘I am Dorabobo, an AI-robot from the future. I know that you are worrying about your tests result. I can help you.’ I was wondering was it like the famous cartoon character called Doraemon. I jumped out of bed and opened the door immediately.

‘Hi! Aiden. Nice to meet you.’ Said Dorabobo.

‘Hi! Dorabobo. I hate History very much. Today the teacher taught us about the Mogao Grottoes. So boring!’

‘Aiden. Actually the history of Mogao Grottoes is full of mysteries and interests. Let us go and find the hidden secrets there.’

‘How?’ I asked.

Dorabobo took out a door from his backpack. ‘It’s an anywhere door, when you think about that place in your heart, you can reach that place after opening the door.’

Dorabobo opened the door and called me to go inside. We were not in our house!

‘Where are we?’ I asked.

‘We are at the Mogao Cave 275. This Cave was constructed during the Northern Liang regime in the end of the Sixteen Kingdoms period. It is one of the earliest extant caves at Mogao. It belongs to the category of Hall Caves.’

Then we saw a statue. It was very big, Dorabobo told me that it was 3.4 meters high, sits on a Leo seat with crossed feet, and casts a wish seal with his left hand to express the satisfaction of sentient beings’ wishes. The triangular backrest behind the Bodhisattva was shaped like a brocade with the technique of floating sculpture, which is also seen in the caves in Xinjiang and Afghanistan. This kind of cross-legged Bodhisattva is generally considered to be a statue style from Western Regions.

Dorabobo took out a magic wand and pointed to the statue. The statue started moving! Dorabobo explained that anything pointed by the magic wand will become alive. It was interesting!

We walked for a while, and saw a mural. It was painted on the north wall.

Then I asked Dorabobo, ‘How about this?’

Dorabobo used the magic camera to take a photo of the mural. The camera was talking! It said the name of this mural was Jataka and the idea behind this mural was telling the countless stories of Sakyamunis good deeds in his previous life. All stories of this life depicted on the north wall are designed to show the protagonist’s comfortable attitude in adversity and emphasize his self-sacrifice and perseverance to pain.

After admiring this mural, we went to the south wall and we saw a statue which was in the queue-shaped niche and sitting with crossed feet. Dorabobo told me that Queue-shaped niches are one of the forms of Buddhist niches. Above the front of this niche is the roof, and there is a high and low fault on each side. Queue refers to palace gates, palaces, and residences of emperors, symbolizing the supreme imperial power. The supreme imperial power.

The combination of the Han Que and the Buddhist niches to show the Tusita Temple where Maitreya Bodhisattva lives is the first in this cave.

‘Oh! The architectural features of this statue are really special!’ I said.

‘Of course! The mural and the statue are all very meaningful. They all have a long – term story behind it. Let’s continue to visit another mural.’

Then we went to the north wall and we saw another mural, it’s called ‘King Sibi Jataka’

‘You said there’s a long –term story behind each mural and statue, what is the story behind this mural?’ I asked Doraboba.

‘Let me use the magic wand to help us!’ Dorabobo answered.

After Dorabobo use the magic wand pointed to the mural, the people in the mural became alive!

‘What is the story behind you?’ I asked the mural.

The mural answered, ‘My name is King Sibi Jataka. The story behind this mural is King Sibi was the ruler of the Sibi Kingdom in ancient India. As a devout Buddhist, he pledged to save all sentient beings from suffering. In order to test him, Indra and his minister Visvakarman transformed themselves into a hawk and a dove. The chased after the dove trying to eat it. The dove sought refuge in King Sibi. However, the hawk begged the king to let him eat the dove otherwise he would die of starvation. In order to save the dove as well as the hawk, King Sibi decided to offer his own flesh to feed the hawk. The hawk accepted the offer with the condition that the amount of flesh he received from the king be equal to that of the dove. King Sibi promised and let a butcher cut out his flesh, which was placed on one side of the scale while the dove was placed on the other side. However, after cutting out nearly all his flesh, the scale still showed that the dove was heavier. Then King Sibi sat on the scale to indicate that he was offering his entire self. Moved by King Sibi’s virtuous deed, Indra finally restored his flesh.

‘Oh! It was an interesting story!’ I said.

‘Yes but it’s time to go home now.’ Said Dorabobo.

‘Oh...Can we come here again?’ I asked.

‘Yes! Let’s say goodbye to all statue and mural first!’ Dorabobo said.

When we went through the ‘anywhere door’ again. My room appeared behind the door again. Dorabobo said, ‘Aiden, I have already finished my mission, I need to go back to the future.

‘Goodbye!’ Dorabobo smiled and disappeared.

Next week, it was the history exam again. I was very excited since the exam was all about Mogao Grottoes in cave 275. I like history now.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Tsai, Tsz Ching – 10

A long time ago, there was a monk named Yuezun. He grew up in a poor family and made a living by growing fruits. When he was five years old, his parents died. Since then, he became an orphan, begging everywhere. One day, it was raining heavily outside and the sky was freezing cold. Yuezun hid in temple to escape the cold. After he entered the temple, he felt an incomparable strength in his body. He didn't feel hungry or cold anymore. He thought it was the Buddha who cared for him, so he decided to become a monk.

There was very little food in the temple, but Yuezun was extremely tenacious. He “ests what people don't eat, and lives doing what people don't do.” He practiced in this difficult situation. One year later, in order to be able to further search for a place for meditation, Yuezun decided to leave the temple alone with his simple clothes and hike to the west to seek Dharma. He walked to an oasis on which there was a cave. Yuezun was there. He decided to use this cave as a safe place and began to sit in meditation and recite the Buddha. He didn't know, this cave was originally the residence of tigers. When the tiger came back from hunting and saw a monk in the cave, he could not help but let out a low growl threat. The monk was so scared that he fainted. At this time, the place in the distance was shining. At first glance, it turned out to be a Buddha statue. After Yuezun saw the Buddha statue, his body was full of power again.

He plucked up the courage to shout at the tiger ‘Amitabha Buddha, Amitabha Buddha, this is not your activity place! You should go to your own place. Please leave here immediately!’ After the tiger heard that, it turned its head and left. Yuezun believed that this was all the power of the Buddha, so he determined to stay there and promoted Buddhism, and that place was the famous Mogao Grottoes later on.

After discovering a Buddha statue, Yuezun wiped the Buddha statues one by one with a cloth every day, and all the Buddha statues were bathed in golden light. It might be that the Buddha had mercy on Yuezun who was a diligent young man. It seems that Yuezun had the help of the gods overnight. Many Buddhist stories appeared in his mind. Yuezun then used words and pictures to carve these stories on the rock wall of the cave on by one. Above, thanks to Yuezun's efforts, the entire stone wall of the cave was filled with statues and murals of the Buddha, and stories of all sizes were recorded on the wall, which was more like a museum that promoted Buddhism.

Yuezun had a strong belief: to promote the Dharma. It was a pity that even though he worked hard to sculpt the cave every day, no one had ever passed through there, not even a person who had entered the cave, so how could he spread the Dharma to the world? So he decided to build more and build more and bigger caves, hoping to let more people know the Buddha.

Yuezun wasn't afraid of hard work. Every day he transported soil from the mountain to build caves. Unfortunately, the people who lived there believed in their religion. They couldn't allow Yuezun to go to build temples. They secretly destroyed the caves that Yuezun built. The things were built by Yuezun would be razed to the ground as soon as possible. Yuezun was very discouraged.

Once, the villagers even asked officials to remove the cave where Yuezun was hiding. They also planned to remove a statue of Buddha. When Yuezun saw a large number of officials coming, he was unable to resist. When the situation was critical, it was magical. What happened: more than a dozen armies wanted to work together to remove the Buddha matter how hard they moved, they wanted to send more armies to move the Buddha statue, They couldn't move forward. Seeing that the armies who entered the cave hadn't come out too late, the leader of the army decided to bring more armies into the cave for fear that they would have danger. Soon, hundreds of armies gathered in the cave, and they all found that a statue of Buddha would glow brightly. They were so frightened.

At the time, an army officer suggested that since the Buddha couldn't be moved, it would be better to burn the entire cave with fire. They all thought that was a good idea, so they lit a fire and set fire around the cave, but no matter how the fire burned, it was useless. Therefore, the Buddha or even the entire cave, had no trace of being burned by fire, frightening all the armies to flee the cave desperately.

That incident quickly spread though out the country, and soon, the emperor approved Buddhism to spread freely in the country.

Ten years later, Yuezun built more caves in Mogao Grottoes. He divided Mogao Grottoes into the north and south areas. The north area is mainly composed of monk's rooms and meditation rooms, used by past practitioners to meditate, cultivate, eat and live. The southern area retains caves, murals and colored sculptures. Yuezun sat on the ground and meditated and passed away with a smile.

This Mogao Grottoes has become a familiar place for the world. It is a collection of paintings, sculptures, architecture and East and West. An artistic treasure house of culture.

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

Farm Road Government Primary School, Tsai, Tsz Yau – 11

More than one and half millennia ago, there was a monk named Yuezun who wanted to practice Buddhism in Gansu. Yuezun was bald and the clothes that he wore favoured the right shoulder. As Yuezun walked to an oasis, he found that there were as thousand golden Buddha statues there. He thought that was the Buddha's manifestation and talked to him, hoping that he would stay and do something for Buddhism, so he decided to stay there and built the cave, hoping that people could use this place to concentrate on Buddhism.

Yuezun was not afraid of hardships and built caves day and night, so the caves were quickly completed. The Buddha saw Yuezun did a good thing, so he used his divine power to help him dig more caves, and this beautiful places is named as Mogao Grottoes. The Buddha not only helped Yuezun build the Mogao Grottoes, but he also gave Yuezun a maid and guards, hoping to help him transform Mogao Grottoes and promote Buddhism. It was a pity that Yuezun couldn't resist the glory and wealth in front of him. He only played every day, completely forgot the reason why he came to the oasis, and even forgot to build a Buddhist temple in Mogao Grottoes so that more people could worship Buddha. The Buddha was very disappointed, and decided to take back all the things Yuezun had, and then turned the magnificent Mogao Grottoes back into a dilapidated, plain cave. Yuezun lost everything suddenly. He had only a pair of tattered straw sandals, a tattered straw robe, and a Buddhist scripture in his hand. Yuezun did not reflect on his own fault at all, but instead blamed the Buddha for being cruel. He made a lot of noise in the cave and even threw the Buddhist scriptures in his hands far away. The Buddha saw that Yuezun was blinded by the material nature, and he shed tears in sadness. In an instant, the shy changed from bright to dark, a strong wind blew in the sky, and there was a squally heavy rain. And this violent storm lasted for a full week, and Mogao Grottoes were washed away because of the tprrential rain, and everything changed back to the appearance before the arrival of the moon. Yuezun did not know where to go, and the straw shoes on his body were also washed away by the water. Yuezun walked back barefoot to the Buddhist temple where he lived before.

Yuezun's deeds quickly spread to the ears of all the monks in the temple. Everyone felt ashamed and angry at Yuezun's greed and vanity. When everyone saw Yuezun arrived at the Buddhist temple, everyone threw eggs and rubbish at him, and some even slobbered at Yuezun. Yuezun originally thought that he world stay in the monastery for the second half of his life and continue to be an ordinary monk. He never thought that he would be treated like that by other monks. After he arrived, his body was all dirty, he was shocked and scared somehow. But also because of that encounter, Yuezun began to deeply reflect on what he had done. Suddenly a picture appeared in this mind that seemed to be replayed, as if God approved the world. The wrong things that Yuezun has done in his life were broadcast back completely, and Yuezun felt very regretful for the wrong things he had done.

Yuezun regretted his greed and vanity. He was willing to be punished and decided to stay in Mogao Grottoes for the rest of his life to build more cavs. He changed it sincerely and rebuilt the caves. That time, the Buddha did not give him anymore court ladies and attendants to help him build the cave together, but Yuezun became more diligent because there was no help. He hurried to work day and night without sleep. When he barely fell asleep, he even sculpted exquisite murals and statues in each cave, and copied Buddhist scriptures. He hoped to make up for everything he had done in the past. On the other hand, he hoped that more people could know the Buddha and promote the Pharma. Yuezun suffered a lot during the construction process and was often injured, but he did not give up. He went to the mountains and the sea to find wood and building materials, and designed more beautiful and magnificent caves for the Mogao Grottoes.

The Buddha felt that Yuezun could correct his mistakes, so he returned what he had lost before, hoping to make his mission smoother and Mogao Caves more beautiful. Yuezun was very happy and quickly thanked the Buddha. Because he learned his lesson, he was able to endure the temptation before him that time. In addition, he also promised the Buddha to build more beautiful caves for him and to promote the Pharma everywhere. Finally, he made that place the largest and most abundant Buddhist art site in the world.

This story gave me a deep reflection. We are like Yuezun. We have a goal at first, knowing that we should study hard to gain good achievements in the future. But after a while, we will not able to stand the temptation from outside, completely forgetting that our most important task now is concentrate on study. At last, we waste time every

day. Until we see our exam results are not satisfactory and our parents are disappointed. We realize that we have done something wrong. But there are many things in the world don't have a second chance. For example, if you don't be filial to your parents and always hurt their hearts, when you grow up and want to repay them for your time, maybe your parents are old and you don't even have a chance to repay them. Therefore, we should always remind ourselves, do what we should do, stick to our beliefs, and don't be tempted to do improper things.

The Legend of the Mogao Caves

French International School, Hong Kong, Miller, Alexander – 9

A.D.460

The sun lashed Octavius' skin until his blood boiled, but he was determined to keep walking. Right now it was more like hobbling. There were no other travellers on the Silk Road and Octavius' sandals were broken and ripped to shreds. He was an undefeatable overlord Roman soldier but he was left behind by the General because they had an argument. He was still a Roman soldier inside but outside he looked ragged and tired.

Now Octavius was breathing dust, and carrying a precious bag." When I get back to Rome, I will sell the silk and spices, and buy a farm," he said to himself. Octavius' mouth was hot like an oven and he had a painful blister. The few precious drops of water from his canteen cooled his lips. He only dared drink a few drops at a time. Suddenly, Octavius heard rumbling under his feet. It grew louder and louder. He saw the sand like a devil rising from the ground and rolling towards him. The sand devil rose up suffocating the sky. Octavius ran blindly as the raging sandstorm licked his feet, and then engulfed him.

He ran towards the Mogao caves and squeezed into a crack. The caves cooled his body in the tranquil darkness. Octavius had heard about the Mogao caves but now people took a new route so he did not meet anyone. He heard the sound of crackling echo in the caves that had many chambers. He followed the sound to an inner cave when he saw a campfire.

Octavius saw a young man with black hair, kind almond shaped eyes, and wearing fine silk clothes. "I am Chang. I am travelling back to my village. I did not see a living soul for days," said the young man standing next to the fire. "I am Octavius. I am glad to meet you," replied Octavius.

"Where are you going?" asked Chang.

"Home near Rome. I have been lost many times because I do not know the land. I might never get home," sighed Octavius. Tears filled his blue eyes. Chang said, "Life is about discovery. A journey may be bad but it might take us somewhere good." Octavius scratched his head and looked confused.

"I don't usually take this route. But I am glad I did. I met you. We can be friends," said Chang. That warmed Octavius' heart. He had not had a friend for a long time. The fire crackled and lit up the cave walls to reveal its secret. "These are beautiful drawings of the Chinese paddlefish with their long bodies and extended paddlefish snouts. They are as ancient as time," said Chang. He admired them and took in every detail.

"Have you ever seen one?" asked Octavius.

"I can only hope," laughed Chang. "But I know the Emperor has seen them."

"This is the desert. We won't see any fish here," said Octavius. "There are no plants and there is no water." Chang shared his water with Octavius and he was so happy.

Octavius was tired and sat down on a rock. Then he saw something in the corner of the cave. He picked it up and it was covered in black misty dust. He used a cloth to wipe away layers and layers of black to reveal a mirror

with paddle fish carvings on the border. He held up the mirror to his leathered face and curly blonde hair. “ I cannot see my reflection in this mirror,” said Octavius. He passed the mirror to Chang but there was no reflection.

“ It looks useless,” said Chang. He tossed it into the fire but then it bounced out by itself. The cave suddenly lit up magically revealing a map of tunnels on the cave ceiling.

Chang and Octavius followed the map in their memory deep into the caves, twisting and turning in tunnels until they entered the deepest cavern. A magnificent sight greeted them. They saw an enormous crystal clear lake with sparkling water. Octavius and Chang gulped down the sweet refreshing water. Suddenly, something swooshed between their feet. They looked down into the water and couldn't believe their eyes. “ Paddlefish! They are real!” shouted Chang. Octavius said, “The sandstorm was bad but I discovered that there is a secret lake hidden in the desert with paddlefish.”

Chang smiled and said, “ Journeys must be discovered, good and bad. “ They swam with the paddlefish and they both agreed to take one paddlefish each. “ I will help you return home,” said Chang. “ It is always good to have a friend on a journey. I can't go with you all the way but you will know I will always support you.” Octavius hugged his new friend, “ Journeys must be discovered, good and bad.”

2022

The tourists flooded into the Mogao caves admiring all the drawings on the walls. Suddenly, there was shouting. “ Amy ! Amy ! Where are you ? “ shouted a woman. She ran deeper and deeper into the caves until she saw a little girl. “ I told you not to wander off by yourself,” cried the woman. “ I went exploring. I heard the fish calling ,” said Amy.

“ Fish? Oh, those are just cave drawings. They are paddlefish and they are extinct,” said the woman. The girl held something in her hand. “Mummy, I found a magic mirror . Look, I can see fish inside.”

A Man and an Emerald

Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School, Cheung, Wing Yin – 10

“Cough! Cough!” shouted Tang San, a slave whose job was to carve Buddha statues in Mogao Caves. Every time he slowed down and rested without permission, his supervisor would whip him. “Whoosh!” Tang San bit his lips. He secretly muttered revenge in his mouth. As he was about to leave Cave 53 for the next cave, he saw an emerald stone underneath the ruins. He looked round, made sure nobody was looking, and hid the stone in his pocket.

After a long day of work, he sat on his bunk bed, which he shared with another slave worker. While everyone was sleeping, he carefully took the emerald out of his pocket. Strangely, the emerald was shining with bright light. He tried to cover the light with his shirt, but the light was simply brilliantly bright. Eventually, it raised the guard’s suspicion. He thought Tang San had stolen from the cave, so he seized his arm and took him to a dark torture chamber specially used for punishing slaves who misbehaved. He made Tang San take off his clothes, and whipped him hard. He also had to stay in a dark cave for one night. There he saw someone being tortured because he hadn’t worn his clothes properly. He shook with anger, or maybe it was because of the unbearable humiliation. He didn’t say a word for he knew it would only bring him trouble. The next morning, he went out from the cave. He looked down and saw his blood-filled wounds glisten in the sun. Luckily, one of the guards was merciful to let him rest for a few hours. As he sat down, he felt something hard in his pocket – the emerald. After a few hours, he continued the gruesome work.

On the second night, he attempted to throw away the emerald. However, every time he threw the emerald, the emerald would come back in some way. Tang San thought for a while and came up with a conclusion that it might be useful for an escape.

At sunrise, all of the slaves went back to work. At Cave 54, Tang San nearly finished the carving. Unfortunately, he accidentally broke one of the statue’s ears. Just when he was about to be pulled to the punishment cave, the emerald appeared. The emerald zoomed around, miraculously ‘punching’ the guards in the face. The other slaves realised that this was their only chance for an escape. Therefore, they rushed in the confusion and aided the emerald to an escape route. In 10 minutes, the victory was won by the slaves. The slaves stole the guards’ weapons. The moment the guards saw the slaves holding their weapons, they fainted. The slaves seized this opportunity to escape from this ‘hell’.

When they arrived at the city, they suddenly realized that they had no money! Just when they were about to discuss what to do, the emerald flew out of Tang San’s pocket and stole a handful of coins from a store next to him. They used the coins to buy three apartments. Nevertheless, the three apartments were way too small for a hundred people to share. Therefore, they reached a compromise that half of the people would sleep inside the apartments while half of them would sleep in the streets. The next day, they would switch places. This cycle would repeat until a new apartment was bought.

One bitterly cold and windy night, Tang San woke up. He slept-walked back to the cave that imprisoned him. He did the carving for days without waking. The moment the statue was finished, he woke up. He looked round and said to himself, “Where in the Buddha of the world am I?” To his surprise, the cave rumbled slightly. His whole gang was sick-worried about him. They searched for days and nights. Suddenly, the emerald came out, showing a holographic version of itself, and bellowed, “I am a cursed gem created by the space beings that you humans assume as ‘aliens. To the fact that I am cursed, you will be buried alive beneath this wretched cave.” The holograph vanished without a trace. The cave continued to rumble, burying the group alive. The emerald also lost its cursed power.

One and half of a millennium years later, a group of archaeologists and scientists rediscovered the Mogao Grottoes. They saw a lot of dead bodies exposing in the cave. It took more than a bit of time to unveil the truth, but after the truth was revealed, it changed more than a bit of history.

The Mogao Caves

Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School, Wong, Hoi Ling – 9

“Every Sunday, I stay home and clean the basement floor. One day, while I was mopping, I found a tiny and bright button located on a wooden table my great-grandfather had crafted. I went and picked it up, to see that there was a dusty surface, displaying a carving of monks, mountains, and temples. These carvings on the button reminded me of history. I was never intrigued by any history stories. So I just set the button aside. But once I placed it down, a small but cone shaped cloud suddenly came out from a small compartment of the button that suddenly opened, and started to float right above my head. All of a sudden, the cloud sucked me into a room of darkness. I panicked and flipped around, but something hit me and then I fell unconscious.

When I woke up, I slowly opened my eyes, I saw an enormous purplish-pink creature standing next to me. “Hello, I am Quinky. You summoned me. I guess you would like to explore the Mogao caves.” He asked with curiosity. I was terrified and trying to run away from him. But he caught me and tossed me right onto his back for flying to the Mogao caves. When we arrived, Quinky slowed down and landed to get in line with other monsters that were also carrying little children the same age as me.

“This is the Mogao caves,” Quinky introduced calmly. I observed that there were many caves in here. Quinky brought me into one of those caves and I saw different carvings, paintings, and some antique vases. “The word, Mogao, means “peerless”. These caves were constructed about 1,700 years ago. These caves actually contained the world’s largest collection of Buddhist art!” Quinky exclaimed. After he said that, I noticed that he had taken out a book in which he had sketched some scribbles and begun colouring it.

“Wow! Tell me more!” I exclaimed. It started to realize that history could be interesting!

“Have you heard of the Silk Road?” Quinky questioned.

“No, please tell me more about it,” I responded eagerly.

“The Silk Road was related to the Mogao caves as there were many documents about the Silk Road inside the caves. The Silk Road was a network of trade routes that connected China and the Far East with the Middle East and Europe. Although it has been nearly 600 years since the Silk Road was used for any international trading, the routes have a lasting impact on commerce, culture, and history that still resonate now.” Quinky explained. “Still, some considered the Silk Road had some drawbacks. They believed that Black Plague was spread along it. Bandits and thievery were a serious problem back then as well. Bandits would raid merchants’ caravans and outposts, and often murdered the merchants as well, which made travelling the Silk Road alone very dangerous and risky. It was also difficult for citizens from other countries to buy goods in the past! Mountains, rivers, valley, deserts, and plains were some of the geographic barriers for the travelers, which allowed traders to mark up the price of the goods. The other reason was that the longer the merchandise travel, led the more expensive they became.”

After I heard that, I decided that I was going to the Silk Road. Quinky agreed, and he bought things that were called the Timer Rope and the DO opener. Quinky and I walked through a portal, and we were on the Silk Road!

We were exploring around, when a roaring of horse gallops and men shouting started to come closer. We tried to fight them, who we discovered were thieves, but Quinky was captured and I had to hide. He had dropped the Timer Rope and DO opener, and I could remember his last words: “Timer Rope capture, DO opener shape open slice!” Those were simple words, and I had the chance to escape! But I couldn’t leave Quinky there, so, I used his words to figure it out! Timer Rope would bring the enemies back to the past, while the DO opener will open a portal for us. I was once a winner at swinging around ropes, so I followed the thieves, had a really fierce battle with them, and finally rescued Quinky. We soon drew the shape of the portal with the DO opener and got back to the real world. Quinky thanked me, and soon the end of the day came.

I got on a special bus from Quinky, and there was a little book about the remaining facts of the Caves and the Silk Road, with the pictures (handmade) by Quinky. The present, which was the book, soon encouraged me enough to learn more about history, and become a history teacher to teach students more.” I smiled, as my mind pictured Quinky, and as I, a real history teacher, tell the whole story to my own class.

The Mogao Caves

Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School, Wong, Hoi Yee – 9

Yesterday, I watched videos about the Mogao Caves for my project at home. I heard jingling near my bed. I looked around my bed but saw nothing. I got more and more scared. I tried to ignore the sounds but I couldn't pay attention to the video. Suddenly, a fairy appeared in front of me. I rubbed my eyes but The fairy was still there. My eyes immediately widened.

She said, "Don't be scared. Would you like to go to the Mogao Grottoes? I am the tour guide that you are looking for. My name is Lily. It's located in Dunhuang, Gansu, China, which is not very far from here." I thought for several seconds, "Mogao Grottoes! Here I come! Yay! I just can't say no to a great adventure," I whispered happily to myself,

"Cool, let's go!" I answered Lily.

Lily took out a green cape quickly and asked, "Would you like to become a bird or do you prefer remaining in human form?" Transforming into a bird was always my dream as birds always looked very cute. So, I decided to become a bird. Lily made use of her green cape to wrap me up. In the blink of an eye, my body changed, especially my hands and legs. My hands had turned into a pair of flappy wings and my legs were much shorter. When I looked into the mirror in my bedroom, I could not believe that I was transformed into a blue bird. Then I followed Lily and flew all the way to Dunhuang. At first, I was very happy. My excitement faded as soon as I realized that being a bird was really tiring.

I saw a lot of temples in the Mogao Caves. Lily told me that there were about five hundred temples altogether there. I could not believe it. Then I looked around the area and discovered many caves, where the inside temples were located. I got more and more interested until I could not hold it in anymore and said, "Tell me more! Tell me more!"

Lily was not able to understand me because I tweeted like a bird. Luckily, Lily had an idea of putting on her Birdy Translator to understand what I said. She explained to me, "The Birdy Translator is like a real translator, but for birds. It also pairs up with the Birdy Headband to hear what the bird is saying. When the bright red light flashes on the Birdy Translator, you can point the Translator to the bird you want to listen to. Then, you can hear and understand bird language through the Birdy Headband."

Later, we flew around the Mogao Grottoes and she said, "One of the most famous caves here is called the Library Cave. It was discovered by a man named Wang Yuanlu. It is located at Cave 17 and was originally used as a memorial cave for a local monk, Hong Bian (from a wealthy Wu family) whose death was in Year 862. During his lifetime, Hong Bian. was responsible for the construction of Cave 17, and he decided that the Library Cave would be used as his retreat after his death."

"So who was the first one to discover the Library Cave?" I asked. She explained, "Well, the first one to discover the Library Cave was priest Wang Yuanku. There were around 50,000 books inside the cave. In particular, a really precious book was found. Can you believe it?" I was confused, "What is so special about this book?" I queried curiously.

"It's the world's oldest book!" Lily screamed. Then she shared some information about the paintings and temples inside the major caves in the Mogao Grottoes. It allowed me to learn some unforgettable historical knowledge about this area. Lily also gave me a model of the Mogao Grottoes.

Suddenly, my stomach grumbled. Lily and I laughed. I asked, "Can we go back now? My mom would be very worried if she found me missing. By the way, I'm really starving." She quickly transformed me back into my human body. "Poof!" She took away her green cape, and I returned home to enjoy my lunch. I was wondering, "Was that adventure real?" When I got back to my bedroom, I found the model of the Mogao Grottoes. "It wasn't a dream after all!" I realized with surprise.

Immortality

Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School, Wong, Kin Long – 10

Lang clasped his grandfather's hand for the last time. His grandfather heaved his final breath, then drifted to the world above. "He's gone," thought Lang sorrowfully. Lang hugged his grandmother tightly, in tears. Lang's grandparents had been looking after him for the past ten years – ever since he was born.

One month later, Lang decided to find the Elder of the village, the wisest man there. Standing right in front of him was the Elder's house, perched on top of a high hill overlooking the circle of houses of the village. From there, Lang could see the huge fountain at the centre of the circle, grand and powerful. Lang took a deep breath. Just as he wanted to knock on the door, the Elder already greeted him, "Welcome child, come in – what brings you here?"

Lang's eyes gleamed, "I want to become immortal!"

The Elder furrowed. "Is that what you really wish, child?"

"Yes!" cried Lang.

"Very well," replied the Elder. He looked as though he knew what Lang thought. "Travel towards the Mogao Grotto caves and enter through the main entrance. You shall discover the Pearl of Immortality in the depths of the cave."

After showing his gratitude to the Elder, he couldn't wait to start his journey to the Grottoes. The Elder sighed quietly, "Youngsters... soon this child shall discover that immortality is a curse, rather than a blessing."

Thunder roared. Rain lashed like a thousand knives from the sky. Lang was treading through the water, his eyes drooping and his shoulders falling, but the path was only getting more and more arduous. On the coarse and rocky ground, he couldn't control his legs anymore. HWOOF! Warily, Lang gazed up. Snow and hail fell from the sky. The arms of the wind choked him, stopping him from going any further. Panting heavily, Lang wanted to stop, but he couldn't. He needed the Pearl.

Lang sighed. Memories came back to his mind: past days when Lang would sit on his grandfather's lap and listen to his stories. Back then his grandfather trained him in Kung Fu, they used to go up on the hills to find wild-flowers. In his grandfather's final days, Lang took care of him lying in bed – all of these memories made his life a life.

Why did a person finally have to part with his beloved ones? Why does a man have to vanish from the world at the end? What is death really for? From his blurred memory he remembered a story about a never-aging man from his grandfather. "Grandfather already guided me!" Lang unhesitatingly moved forward.

Another gust of wind. A large shadow seemed to appear out of the fog. It caught his attention. He whipped around abruptly. Then a giant figure landed in front of him.

"Wh-wh-what?" Lang stuttered.

Standing in front of him was a colossal dragon. Its entire body was sapphire-blue, dotted with amethyst and silver scales. His eye sprinkled with an emerald scale, like a teardrop. "He looks like a majestic creature," Lang thought, "Authoritative, but kind."

Suddenly, the dragon's eye narrowed. "You look familiar..."

The dragon's eye shimmered with a glow. Lang found himself whisked into a vision. These were scenes of someone like his grandfather, as young as Lang was now, determined to find the Pearl of Immortality, scaling a mountain, covered with sleet and dirt.

Lang gasped. "Is this my grandfather? Have you met him before?" "Tell me more!" But just as he wanted to look up at the dragon, the dragon was gone.

Lang was bewildered. Tears welled up in his eyes. All of a sudden, thick mist enveloped his body, interrupting his thoughts. A magical and mesmerizing sight formed in his eyes.

He arrived. He was surrounded by the spellbinding caves of the Mogao Grottoes. Evergreen trees covered the area, circling the entire place like a guardian. Majestic temples came out from jagged rocks, and the highest pagoda rose imposingly to the sky as if to reach the heavens.

Swiftly, Lang ran into the largest temple, racing down the stairs. He was getting closer to the Pearl— he could feel it. He felt his grandfather was leading him along the way. He went in deeper and deeper, for he knew the Pearl must be in the depths of the cave.

Abruptly, Lang halted. There was another cave entrance in front of him. It was seven feet tall, vast and intimidating. Two giant statues were on both sides of the cave. They seemed like the sculpture of a dragon. Words were sketched onto stone: “MAY THY TRAVELER SEEK IMMORTALITY STONE HERE.” “Finally!” he thought excitedly. His eyes were glowing. He exhaled, nonetheless, his heartbeat still drummed unstoppably. He rushed into the cave.

A bright light shone. The cave was decorated with gemstones and diamonds. At the centre, perched on a rock pedestal, was the Pearl of Immortality itself, luminous and bright red.

Triumphantly, Lang held the Pearl up. He has beaten Death!

When his heart was filled with joy, he saw a rusted-up scroll. Why would there be a papyrus in the middle of the cave? Curiously, he picked it up.

It read:

Love is eternal. But time is not.

“Love always wins.”

“Love prevails.”

“The loved ones are always with you, no matter where you are.”

His grandfather’s words came flooding into his mind. The dragon appeared again. He growled, “You’re correct — this was written by your grandfather.” His eyes glowed once more.

Lang saw from the dragon’s eyes that his grandmother was dying; then, one by one, all of Lang’s friends were passing, and he saw it all. At last, where his own beloved wife and sons and grandchildren and great-grandchildren all had passed away, leaving him behind.

“No.” He put down the Pearl. And with that, he ran as quickly as he could back to his house, wrapping his arms tightly to his grandmother in a warm embrace.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School, Yan, Ho – 9

It was a bright Sunday morning when Lucas and his best friend, Marcus, set off for their uncle's house. Uncle Robert was watering the plants and waving to them, "Come in! Come in!" When they went into the house, they discovered a book called "The Mogao Grottoes".

"What's in it?" wondered Lucas. They flipped open the book; there were some pictures of Mogao Grottoes and a sculpture of Buddha. Suddenly, a gust of wind enveloped them, their heads started spinning and their hearts started racing.

After felt like a millennium, a beam of sunlight shone on their faces, and they wiped the sleep crust out of their eyes. They were startled when they woke up as they were no longer in Uncle Robert's house. From head to toe, their bodies were covered in sand. They sprang up and found themselves alone in a pure sea of sand. It took a few minutes for Lucas to realize where they were. They were in a desert stretching out in all direction without an end in sight.

Marcus exclaimed, "This is the Gobi Desert that we had just read about in our uncle's house, near the ancient oasis town of Dunhuang, China. The valuable Mogao Grottoes must be nearby!" Lucas nodded in agreement.

After that, they kept wandering around until they saw hundreds of caves which were cut into a side of the cliff. Each cave was about two kilometers long. Marcus and Lucas glanced at each other and realized that they were standing at the entrance of the Gigantic Mogao Grottoes.

"Let's go in!" suggested Marcus with a grin.

As they walked into one of the caves, there were some sculptures in three small niches and some inscriptions carved on the wall. The words were written vividly. Besides the inscriptions, some figures were painted on the wall.

"Look at this mythical figure— It has a human head with a snake body," Lucas pointed to the painting.

"Yes, I also see a figure which has three heads and six arms. This is amazing!" cried Marcus.

After a while, they walked into the second cave; they spotted an enormous Buddha sitting cross-legged on the throne and there were some small statues sitting beside the big Buddha.

Lucas exclaimed, "What a fantastic scene!" They gawked at the historical murals and touched the sculptures. Suddenly, a shriek came out from the cave and the statue came alive. They were scared out of their minds and they started to run frantically. They kept running until the statues were out of sight. Something unexpected reached Marcus's ear when they were about to sit on an ordinary rock.

"Hey Lucas, do you hear a giggle behind us?" asked Marcus.

"Don't freak out and stop tugging on my shirt!" scolded Lucas.

"I didn't. Oh my goodness" denied Marcus.

The vivid sculptures started to move.

"Help! Help!" they yelled at the top of their lungs. The echo bounced on the walls of the cave. They scurried and scurried around until they were out of breath.

They had stepped into another cave. In this cave, paintings of Pure Land Paradise were fantastically depicted on the wall. They saw an old and lonely monk who was sitting in the cave holding his beads bracelet.

“Who are you?” asked Lucas.

“My name is Yuezun. I built this cave in 366 AD,” answered the monk. “Why did you build this cave?” questioned Marcus.

“It is a long story. One day, I had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light here and this inspired me to carve my own cave for meditation. I live here and keep praying for my family’s happiness,” Yuezun said.

“I understand now. The painting on the wall is fantastic. Do you know what this is about?” Marcus asked.

“It is believed that God lives in a Pure Land Paradise in the Far West and he will bless those who are pious followers. This is the entrance to the Pure Land Paradise and the painting on the wall is describing the life there,” Yuezun smiled.

“This is a haunted place and we were almost attacked by the sculptures. It is horrible!” yelled a terrified Marcus.

Yuezun patted both teenagers’ shoulders to ease their anxiety.

“Calm down. Calm down. Those moving sculptures you saw are actually protecting the caves. These caves have remained undisturbed for centuries, preserved in its original beauty. In the late nineteenth century, people discovered the caves and the peace of this place was ruined. The caves were damaged and vandalized. Hence, God has transformed the sculptures into the gatekeepers to guard the caves. They won’t hurt you if you don’t damage the caves.” explained Yuezun. The boys nodded.

Suddenly, a flash of light lit up the cave and Yuezun mysteriously disappeared. They heard a deep rumbling as the cave began to collapse and rocks fell everywhere. A swirling cloud of dust surrounded them.

“What’s happening?” they shouted over the dust.

Then, they saw an open door. They ran through it without any thought.

“Where am I?” Lucas mumbled.

He looked around and found himself in Uncle Robert’s bedroom with Marcus sleeping next to him.

“Wake up, Marcus! Wake up, Marcus!” Lucas shouted at Marcus.

Marcus yawned while he was opening his eyes, “Where is Yuezun? What happened to the cave?” “How come we are in Uncle Robert’s bedroom?”

At the end of the day, Lucas and Marcus had to go home. Uncle Robert bade farewell and waved goodbye. To the kid’s amazement, on the right-hand wrist of Uncle Robert was beads bracelet which looked extraordinary familiar.

“Is it the same bracelet the Monk wears?” whispered Lucas.

“Yes, yes ...” echoed Markus.

“Do you believe it is a dream?” asked Lucas.

“I have no idea, but one thing I’m sure of is that Mogao Grottoes is a truly extraordinary place. We have to visit once again!” answered Marcus.

The Treasure of the Mogao Grottoes

Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School, Yeung, Elizabeth Yi – 9

It was nearly midnight, Victoria was lying under the bed covers, reading a book. Her bedroom door opened suddenly, Victoria didn't even bother to look up from her book as her younger brother, Jim, peeked in. "Oh hi, bookworm!" he smirked. "What book are you reading?" He plonked himself onto the bed and stared at the book cover, "Wow... I want to go to the Mogao Grottoes too!" As the words left his mouth, he caught a glint of glow in the corner of his eye. Before he could see the source of the light, he and his sister were swept from the room, along with Victoria's book and toy camel.

Victoria blinked open her eyes, she and Jim seemed to be in some sort of desert. It was very hot and a bead of sweat trickled down Victoria's cheek. She nudged Jim hard in the ribs and he sat up at once, looking blearily around. "Hang on," he muttered, "This place looks familiar..." But as his eyes met the massive, boulder-like caves not far from them, he suddenly understood. "We're in China? At the Mogao Grottoes?" With a yell of excitement, he leapt up and grabbed Victoria by the shoulders. Victoria winced, she knew how adventurous Jim was but was not feeling the same excitement. She had no choice, Jim was already dragging her towards the entrance of the caves. "Come on," he shouted, "Let's go inside and explore!"

As Jim and Victoria neared the main entrance, something large and fat slithered out to meet them, causing Victoria to step back in shock. It was a bloody, red snake, gliding towards them as if on wheels. Its icy, emerald eyes widened in surprise as it saw the children. "Stand back!" Jim cried, drawing out a paper sword and pointing it threateningly at the snake, "Don't go another step closer!". The snake's eyes contracted with disappointment as it stared unblinkingly at Jim, "I'm not going to hurt you!" it said in a surprisingly gentle voice, "I would not even dream of it!" Jim let out a snort of disbelief. The scarlet serpent took a rolled up piece of parchment and handed it to Victoria. "Read this message when you enter a bare chamber with nothing but an empty sawdust pit," it told them, "and remember, you cannot ever be greedy when you see a treasure chest in front of you." From behind a clump of dead bushes, the snake drew out a ball of green wool. "Take this," it said, "let the string drag behind you so that you can find your way out." The snake threw the ball of thread at Jim's feet and with a loud sizzling sound, vanished into thin air.

Jim half dragged, half pushed Victoria through the many caves, examining the glorious display of paintings and sculptures. Victoria however, was not even glancing at them, she was thinking about the red serpent at the mouth of the caves. It was not until they reached what felt like the 350th cave that she finally discovered that they were lost. Jim, who was blissfully enjoying the arts of the cave walls, was posing with the sculptures, grinning joyfully. Victoria seized him by his arm, spinning her brother around so that they were nose to nose with each other. "Where are we?" Victoria demanded, glaring at Jim, "You promised

that you would be the one to keep an eye out for where we're going!" Jim was speechless, "Let's go to this cave." he muttered, pointing into a large opening.

As they entered the cave, they noticed that it was not an artistic one, but with plain walls that were coated in sand and dust. Inside an empty sandpit however, was a big treasure chest. Jim reached out his hand to touch it but Victoria seized him by the collar and pulled him back. She took out the parchment the snake had given her and read it out loud.

Dear friends, listen to my story,

When you think it's time for glory.
There's nothing worth it inside this treasure chest,
For your hard work and courage on your quest.
Only darkness awaits you,
Now I warn you two.
That when you approach with terrible greed,
You'll only get ten times less than what you need.
So forget about necklaces, bracelets and rings,
And other things you'll find with the richest kings.
For Magao is not famous for silver and gold,
But for paper and others you can easily fold.
Portraits and arts dated before
Any human had ever appeared to be poor.

Good luck,

Snaria

(P.S. Look at the walls!)

They quickly searched the walls, hammering against cracks and thumping on holes. At last, Victoria's hands felt soft fabric and she pulled out a pink bag that was made from what felt like rabbit fur and peered into it. She gasped, inside was hundreds of art projects by many different artists from the ancient world of Asia. "Hooray!" cheered Jim, "We can get those to the Hong Kong Heritage Museum for display!" "The only problem is we don't know how to get home!" Victoria said dryly. "There is a way!" a voice said, Jim and Victoria jumped and spun around, Snaria the serpent was holding Victoria's toy camel and the ball of wool in her mouth, "You dropped these when you entered the caves." she said, "Just make a wish and you'll be back home in no time!" Victoria took the camel and placed it carefully in front of her. "Goodbye," she said to Snaria, who winked, "Thanks for everything!" Jim made a wish while Snaria waved her tail in farewell. There was a blinding flash of magenta light and the siblings were soaring in cold night air. Back to the place they loved most, home.

And that was how the treasure of the Mogao Grottoes was found by two youngsters who journeyed to the Mogao Grottoes alone.

The Hidden Secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Belal, Joseph – 10

My heart started to race with excitement as I entered the unknown and spooky caves. I had planned to go on this quest, as a priest from my homeland told me of the Mogao Grottoes, and told of amazing treasures buried in its depths. I had listened to him raptly and was so fascinated by his story, that I had decided to go on this once in a lifetime adventure to the Dunhuang district of Gansu province myself.

The dust settled in these not so appealing grottoes, and glimmered, catching the light of my torch. The place was lifeless and without the light that I had, I would not have seen a thing.

I slowly crept into the dank cave. I wondered how the vast network of tunnels had come to be here. I walked further into the cave and saw the entrance to a room. Holding up my slowly fading torch, though still glinting softly, I stepped in. The room was stunning. By firelight, I could see everything. It had colour everywhere I looked. The awe-inspiring stone walls were cold and rough to the touch. There were incredible statues of people standing on a ledge on the single, highly decorated pillar of colour and life, directly in the middle of the room. The people seemed to be worshipping the largest person. Buddha. It was a shrine, I had cleverly deduced.

I snaked through a slim passageway at the back of the room, camouflaged by the overload of brightness and colour. It seemed to go on forever, but I knew to keep going.

Very soon, I found something that I wanted to investigate further. A small spot of light shimmered at me teasingly. I crawled forward desperate to see what was at the end of the passage and saw light up ahead. I stumbled out of the slightly large but cramped tunnel and stepped clumsily into the room. There was a huge window through which the sun's rays flooded the room. I could see a breath-taking view of many tall and sturdy pines and steps leading up to the place that I was in. I looked down and I realized that I was standing in a towering palace! I must have come in through the back entrance instead.

It was beyond anything that I had ever seen in my life! I was about to return to my tunnel to continue exploring the caves when I saw something; a small box in the corner of the dusty old room. Since everything in the room was brown, the little chest was camouflaged perfectly. I picked it up but I could not open it. It was locked. I had decided to keep it out of curiosity about what might be inside the box and whether it was anything valuable or not.

I clambered hastily back into the tunnel and realized that I had been so intrigued by the light, that I did not notice the smaller tunnels leading off the main one. I crawled into one of the passages branching off from the snake-like tunnel and had to kneel as it was very tight.

At the end of the tunnel, I saw another room full of colour and thought that I was just leading myself back to the one that I had started in. I tumbled out of the tunnel and found myself to be in another incredible chamber.

'The rooms were all so lively and colourful; they all looked so similar!' I thought to myself in an incredulous state. In this room, the walls seemed to stretch up forever into an endless sky and were just as colourful and intricately detailed but there were fewer statues. Buddha still seemed to be the main attraction in the middle, but all these statues were life-size and were much more impressive.

I checked in my bag for the mini chest and took it out. Surprisingly, I found that I could open it, as if by magic, and saw a small pile of purple powder. I looked up to process what I had just seen and was so startled by the seemingly alive and angry faces of the warriors surrounding Buddha, that I dropped the chest. The mystery purple powder sprayed all over the statues and I could no longer retrieve it. I screamed in despair as now, no one could study it, but the statues seemed even more lifelike, in fact, too lifelike . . .

Not only had the statues seemed to come to life, but they had actually done so right before my eyes! Gradually, what had seemed to be terracotta, turned to soft, silky robes, pale, smooth skin, and for some, cold hard armour. I backed away from them, not knowing what they could do to me. I tried to tell them, "don't hurt me, please!" however, the only thing that escaped from my mouth was a small terrified squeak, though barely audible in the gargantuan room.

At this, however, the statues seemed to be very taken aback and in a stern voice that was surely not meant to be on purpose, they said in unison, "If you are here for the treasure hidden and guarded very safely by yours truly, then we cannot help you." I had just realized that one of them hadn't spoken and I was intrigued as to why.

Suddenly, that very statue, the most realistic of them all said, "but surely, master, he was the one, was he not?" I hadn't the faintest idea what the 'one' even meant so I continued to listen. "He returned us to the natural world and so we have to serve him and his one command."

After this, there was a lot of muttering and they all decided that they would take me to the treasure and that they would let me take as much as I wanted. My heart raced with jubilation. Suddenly, the caves shook and all of the tunnels collapsed, along with my hopes. Would we ever get to the treasure?

July 1975

... We walked on and on, not stopping because of the scorching heat or the freezing cold. I, Emma, was really hoping to get a result soon, as we had been on this expedition since March. As we trailed along the Silk Road, I thought about how my surname got missing when I was a baby and how I agreed to come with this team on a voyage to find hidden secrets in China.

Just then, I heard a shout of joy, for someone had unearthed a cave, full of ancient treasures from top to bottom. We excitedly got inside, unaware of what would happen next.

Unexpectedly, we spotted a gleaming, golden door. On the door, there were carved words saying:

*Open me if you dare,
but do beware,
of what lies ahead over there.*

Once we read that, Paul, one of the other explorers cried, "Whatever it says, let's go in! We're explorers! We face our challenges."

We all agreed. The next moment, we were all in.

Before we noticed, the door was locked, and we had no way out. A scroll dropped down out of nowhere. It said:

*This is the Land of Nothingness
There is only one way to
get out of this place:
Select the right key.
Here are the four keys you can
choose from on the table beside you.
Each one has an inscription.
If you choose the one with the right inscription,
you will successfully get to the Hall of Everything,
which holds all the secrets of the universe.
If you choose the wrong one, then
the whole place would go up in flames.
Choose carefully.*

Silence.

One minute later, we were looking at the magical keys to our left. One said, "*If you choose me, you will always have success for the rest of your life.*" The second one said, "*If you choose me, you will have infinite beauty.*" The third said "*If you choose me, you will have limitless wealth for the rest of your life.*" Finally, the last said, "*If you choose me, you will not get any significant rewards, but you will see the good in life after this.*"

Which key should we choose? It was hard, as each key had a temptation.

Hours later, after lots of discussion, we already forgot where we were. We just wanted to get out of there and continue. We did a final vote: there were ten people in total. After careful consideration, I voted for the last key with another five people. That meant the last key was chosen! I cautiously picked it up. What was going to happen?

The moment I touched it, everything went dark. I held my breath and closed my eyes. It seemed like forever. When I opened my eyes again, we were in a place with shining stones and swirling blue portals. We were in the Hall of Everything! I had a sudden urge to explore the place. I noticed that memories were displayed on stones. There was a section for everyone in the world, even for those who passed away or were not born yet! That's when I found this huge stone, with a wooden sign above it saying: *your truth*. I was so curious that I peeped over. As quick as a flash, these words showed up: *Hello Emma Bradley, what would you like to know?* It was really cool! It was like a magical computer! I was even more curious when it said that my surname was Bradley. So, I typed in with a keyboard that popped up on the stone: *What is my surname?*

The result was: *It is confirmed, **Bradley**.*

I didn't know what to do next. I checked a few times, but I always got the same answer. I was delighted! I finally got my surname back! I typed a few more questions in. Soon, it was time to leave.

We found a portal to get out. We jumped in one by one.

Once we all got in, a voice menacingly said, "It seems like you have arrived."

It was a cursed portal! That's when we found out who spoke. An enormous statue loomed over us, twenty metres tall. Its vicious laughter sounded like thunder. "Err, can we leave, please?" Angeline, another teammate of mine, pleaded.

"Never!" the statue boomed. "You will stay with me forever!"

With that, the evil statue pulled a hidden lever, and we all came falling into this glass sphere, which rolled down a wide tunnel. The sphere was three metres tall and three metres wide. While we were rolling down, we were screaming. Not like if we were on a roller coaster. At that moment, we came tumbling out into a wooden tray. What I saw was a surprising and horrifying sight: the surprising thing was that there were many other glass spheres containing humans in them, but the horrifying thing was that some contained the dead bodies of people and starving people. As I looked further in, there were bones too! That's when the giant-like statue opened a tiny slit in the top and shoved a loaf of bread and a bottle of water in. Though we had that, it wasn't enough. We needed to escape! Everyone went paranoid but I tried to calm down. I started breaking the glass and finding anything that could help in my backpack.

Presently, I found the key from before was glowing in my hand! I noticed there appeared a button that said, *press me in peril*. I pressed it right away. The statue started crumbling and everyone was set free. The next moment, we found ourselves on the Silk Road. Now I knew that place was a part of the Mogao Grottoes!

May 2025

"Grandma, we're setting off to the Mogao Grottoes!" That's my 24-year-old grandchildren calling me. So, I told them my story there. After an hour, I finished with: Wherever you are, always remember:

Face challenges with
courage and determination.

The Lost Paintings of the Mogao Grottoes

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Coatham, Annabel – 11

Walking towards the caves, the sandy path under my feet, I realised I felt something like almost holiness. The warm summer breeze lifted the folds of my robes, the silk flapping. I looked behind at the imperial palace, my mother's garden with the lake full of white cranes and shimmering, scarlet fish.

I saw Ping, my maid, going out of the palace stepping onto the stone steps. I knew I had to come back here.

"Princess Shiori, it is time for afternoon tea." she called from the steps.

But I didn't want to go. After feeling that sensation of holiness, returning to the palace just wasn't an option. Using the jade hair clip in my hair, I tied my long, black hair into a neat bun, hitched my robes up and ran towards the caves, ignoring Ping shouting at me. Suddenly, I tripped on a stone and the last thing I saw was the floor come to my face.

A voice echoed far, far away, encouraging me to wake up. As I opened my eyes, I gasped in shock. On the cliff face, the same place where I was looking before, there were a thousand buddhas radiating a heavenly light. Falling to the ground, I was bathed in this glow, its warmth wrapping around me. I heard the voice again, calling my name. Until the vision disintegrated. Blinking the dust from my eyes, I was back in the original world. I knew there was something special about this place.

As I stood at the foot of the cave, I heard faint whispers telling me to go in, drawing me in. Slowly, I walked, then ran into the entrance, closing my eyes so I wouldn't fear the dark. Drip drip drip, the water ran down from the roof of the cavern and the drips echoing through the cave. Slowly, step by step, I walked forward, using my clammy hand to trace the mossy stone wall. I tripped over what looked like an extinguished torch. Using the pocket flint in the pockets of my robe, I lit the torch; the flames roared up, bathing the walls of the cave in a faint orange glow; I gasped. Breath-taking murals covered the walls, so beautiful that the Mona Lisa was just a scribble. Paintings with so much detail, my eyes hurt. So many colours that the paintings seemed to just fly off the wall. But they weren't just drawings, the colours seemed to tell a story. All I could hear were the vibrant colours in my head. I reached tentatively to touch the murals. Ripples spread through the paintings, distorting the colours, leaving me spellbound with awe. Then, I realised what I had done. The paintings were not paintings anymore; they were just puddles of muddled colour. I had ruined them. Letting out a cry of pure grief, I sank down on the floor like life did not matter anymore. I had ruined them. They were gone. Suddenly, a tiger as large as life bounded out of the shadows, roaring angrily. I screamed as loud as I could as the tiger ran towards me, its roar becoming louder and louder. Frantically looking around, I forgot how precious the paintings were. I broke free from the spell just as I realised that my hand had gone through the ripples, meaning that... Without thinking, I leapt into the ripples letting the paintings take me into their story.

Landing heavily on my back, I found myself in a small village in the depths of a bamboo forest. Feeling light-headed and dizzy, I walked to the nearest house. Wits Shiori, I thought as I walked towards the house. What would a mother do in this situation? That's right, she would ask someone. Good job, Shiori. I thought to myself. Realising later, I was actually wearing different clothes, but I guess I was too dizzy to realise.

"Why hello traveller, what brings you here?" asked the villager

I looked down at myself, Surprise, Surprise; I was not dressed in the same clothes. Instead of my soft red dress, I was wearing a long, golden embroidered robe tied with a white satin belt and a sword attached to it. Suddenly, a deep rumbling sound came from the mountain above us. The villager swore, "That's the tiger," said the man, "Every month we need to give him enough food or he will burn the village down".

“Has it ever happened to you” I asked

“No, but legend says that someone from another world will slay the tiger,” admitted the villager

I froze. “What?” The villager repeated his sentence. Then asked me if I wanted to stay at his house. Before he could say anything else, I took off, heading up the mossy stone steps to the mountain.

I was soon breathless. The spiralling steps seemed to go on forever. I slowed to a stop and looked down. Below me, a bamboo forest stretched for miles and in the heart, was the village, just a tiny speck from my sight. Smelling the crisp, fresh air from this height, I noticed a dot of orange and black – the tiger. It was prowling around the steps about 10m above me, looking for prey. Then, he noticed me...

I recognized this tiger. It was the one in the cave. Before I had time to think, the tiger lunged just as I thrust out my sword, closing my eyes tightly. My life flashed before my eyes just as I heard a loud boom.

“Princess?” Ping’s voice rang through my aching head... Blinking the dust from my eyes, reality dawned upon me.

It was all a dream.

The Mystery of the Mogao Grottoes

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Gao, Luna – 10

More than one and half millennia ago, a monk (name unknown) decided there was something special about a cave he found at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, digging more caves, and spending their time creating sacred art and literature.

But time passed, and more than 1000 years later, travellers started taking other routes. The Mogao Caves in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

I was just a little child, living a normal life when the Mogao Grottoes were discovered in 366AD July the second by a mysterious monk. He did not leave his name. He had a hood over his head all the time. He spoke in an almost alien-like voice ‘I discovered a cave. I call it the Mogao Grottoes. Do not change the name. You can use it but never, EVER destroy it, Understand?’ Then the mysterious monk left without a trace. Most people believed that he was a God, but who knows? A few days later, the villagers found a piece of paper soaked in blood that said ‘My Name is Le Zun. A second monk named Fa Liang will join me. Goodbye.’ Next to the paper was a body. That is when the village knew we were cursed.

After that little incident, the townspeople made prayers in every 500 caves everyday for at least one hour and sacrificed a sheep to all the gods. No one dared to steal or make any mischief because they knew that it would upset the gods and that would make things worse. They continued it for a few months before disaster happened.

One day, it was my family's turn to make a sacrifice. I woke up as usual and ate some breakfast, then I went outside and had a little walk when I bumped into the village priest. He insisted that my family should go to the sacrifice today. I agreed. I regret it.

I went inside the Mogao Grottoes and found myself in paradise. I saw incredible paintings of Buddhas and fairies; unbelievable temples and about 2,000 painted sculptures. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was beautiful. I walked into the first room that was full of buddhas and sculptures that looked phenomenal. The next room was even more impressive. It was a Library! The walls were full of stories of battles and people fighting to live and the rights of women. There were tables full of things that had a hard cover and you could flip the things inside it. I did not know what it was called but I named it a ‘book’. It was pretty nice and I kept it.

The next room was not that pleasant. It had a sculpture of a girl and her family being slain. The girl looked a lot like me. There was a painting of a Buddha trapped in the mountains, trying to get out but failing. The painting looked like it was screaming for help but no one could hear it. That room gave me the shivers. I quickly made a sacrifice and just when I was about to head out, a gigantic boulder came out of nowhere and blocked the entrance. I panicked. I did not know what to do. I was about to scream for help when the paintings came to life and grabbed me by the throat and slammed me on the wall. I fainted and hit my head. Hard.

When I woke up, I found out that I was tied to a chair and a cloth stuffed in my mouth. I tried to scream but no sound came out. Thoughts came to my mind. “Why am I here? What am I doing here? Why can't I be home and eat with my family? Why did the paintings kidnap me?” I had so many questions that were not answered. What is going to happen to me?

I tried to get out of the chair but instead, I fell on the floor. I hopped over to a wall and bashed the chair against it. To my surprise, the chair broke to pieces and splinters were flying everywhere (I got a splinter but nevermind that). I brushed the wood of my dress and I was just about to scream when a mysterious guy dressed in black came out of nowhere. He spoke in a ghostly voice “You will never escape my child. You are mine now.” “I will never be yours,” I scoffed at him, trying to slap him or at least make a mark. “First you kidnapped me and now I will be yours, what's next? I die?” He was about to say something when I lunged past him and tried to run.

I sprinted like never before and tripped. He followed me. I picked myself up and ran as fast as possible but I had

no idea where I was going! Was I running in circles? I swear I saw those statues before. I kept running. “Keep running,” I told myself. “I need to keep running.” After what felt like forever, I found a rusty door. I didn’t know if it led to freedom or something but it’s worth a try to open it. Locked. I tried again. Locked. Have I come this far just to meet disappointment? I think not. I kicked the door as hard as I could but it must’ve been made out of steel or something because I didn’t even make a dent. I chose a statue I was going to bash to pieces and I threw it at the door. The door shattered to pieces and I was free. I ran outside as fast as possible. That is the end of my story. After that little incident, the mysterious monk was never, EVER seen again. And after all these years, I wonder where he is now...

The Mystery of Mogao Grotto

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Gidumal, Devyn – 10

Walking along a dark corridor, caves lined the walls on either side of me. Cautiously I stepped into one of them. The space was dark, lit only by a candle that flickered weakly in a corner. There was a strong earthy aroma that wafted around the room and stung my nose. My hand slipped and it pressed against the cold hard wall of rock that surrounded me on all sides as if it would suffocate me that made the cave even colder as if no light could penetrate the darkness. I tasted the rot and decay that filled the room. Not something I wanted to try again in a hurry. As I turned around I saw something I hadn't seen before. There were intricate carvings cut into the stone. Then the candle went out and filled the room with darkness and shadows.

Before I start, I just want to say something my names Jake. As soon as the light went out. I started running. I had never been a fan of the dark and that room scared me out of my skin. I stumbled on the uneven dirt path. I didn't know where the path led but I knew it led me away from the caves. Soon I came to a stop, checking my bag to see what I had. I had my water and a box with a little food in it but not much. As soon as I stood up I noticed something different about the place I was in. It looked like a palace entirely different from the caves. When I tried to walk my legs fell and I fell on my back and blacked out.

I noticed that I wasn't looking through my own eyes anymore. I was a warrior standing in front of a throne. Standing in the same room but a hundred years before. I turned my attention back to the throne and saw a man sitting there. I didn't know who he was until I realised that was a king. Then I realized something else: the man was my father in a past life and I was this soldier before. I noticed something else when I stared up at him. I saw he was just a cruel evil man with nothing in his heart but jealousy. As soon as he saw me the dream exploded into a million pieces.

I decided after that to leave and find something else. I came across a huge iron door. I would never get inside then from the corner of my eye I noticed that there was a crack in the iron. Just big enough for me to slid through. I squeezed inside and my jaw dropped to the ground. It was a massive room where statues as big as skyscrapers lined the walls. Beautiful paintings stared down at me from the ceiling as if watching my every step. I started up to the heavens and kneeled down praying to the gods. But as soon as I did, all the statues in the chamber moved at once except for one and I ran toward it for cover.

As soon as I reached the statue one of its hands started to reach down and tried to pick me up. At first I thought I was hallucinating but I wasn't. The hand scooped me up and placed me on its head. This will surprise you as much as me but a chair appeared on top. I sat on it and like I had hit a pressure plate I started to lower into the head of the statue. I thought that the head would be solid but it was actually hollow! And when I got inside the head a video game controller appeared out of nowhere in front of me! Looks like the people who made this place were more advanced than I thought. Where eyes would have been there was a giant glowing screen on it where the words ready pilot. I sat on the chair and the controller flew into my hands. The screen turned on and I saw things about the statue I hadn't before. This statue had a sword and a bow while others had spears and shields. I started moving the joysticks and the statue seemed to rumble and move as well. This was just like a videogame! I played loads of them so this would be easy. The screen had all of the controls on the side and I studied them carefully. After a minute I was ready. I walked toward one of the other robots and slashed at it with my sword but it fought back with deadly accuracy and the model of my robot started flashing red. I shot my bow and pierced its arm with an arrow. But I tripped. Before I could lose my balance I used the sword to push me back up.

I was about to take a sigh of relief when the other robot threw a spear at my robot, almost impaling me. How did he throw it with such accuracy? Then when I tried to block a sword something popped up on the screen. It was an upgrade. That's why they were so strong. I looked at my options. A chameleon that lets me go invisible or a dragon which lets me do fire damage. I chose the dragon. I didn't know what had happened but when I shot my bow the arrow turned into a scorching inferno that burned everything in its path. I was awestruck. Out of nowhere I saw a blade about to kill me but something blocked it. Did someone else save me .I was scared but then that suddenly melted away . I fought for hours until I was the only one left standing. I had done it. I won the battle of Mogao Grotto. I had won the cave!

The Walking Statue

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Kan, Kaitlyn – 10

The caves stretched across the sandy ground of China, the musty air blurring the scenery making it seem like you couldn't see the end. The many ancient doors on the caves surrounded me. The treasure map swayed with the slightest breeze. I gripped tighter on the map as I glanced at the doors, begging me to come visit. But the treasure map only needed me to visit one door. As I put my hand on the doorknob, I felt a rush of warmth and excitement tingling through my whole body. Slowly, the door opens with a nails—loudly—scratching on chalkboard sound. I rubbed my ears, feeling like they would never feel the same after that screeching sound. Stepping into the musty, dark chamber, I lit a candle and realized all the walls were covered in strange markings and paintings. I reached to touch them but the second my fingertips brushed the wall, the door slammed shut. “BAANNNNNGGG!!”. Feeling faint, I told myself, Okay. I'm still going to get out. I have to. But it was no use lying. I carefully made my way across the gloomy corridor. After probably 10 minutes, and what felt like hours, the path split between two directions. As I eyed the map for help, it didn't show anything about the forks, and my mind pondered, “Left or right, left or right, LEFT OR RIGHT!?”. Well, right could work cause it's right but that could be a trick. I took a deep breath and trusted my instincts as I made my decision and cautiously walked towards the right path.

★ ★ ★

I found myself in a room with a humongous statue in the middle of the room. The statue was laying down on its right side, with its head resting on its right arm. Many statues of little people, compared to the big statue, and mostly men, were positioned to embrace toward the huge sculpture. I turned my head to the left, and there were mice scurrying across the room, towards a door I never noticed before. I headed towards the mysterious door that was covered in pictures and carvings and runes that I couldn't decipher, but that was fine as I was way too eager to discover what secrets lay behind it. I twisted the knob to realize that it was another chamber with statues. This time there were 3 statues in the centre, side by side, and the middle one had arched eyebrows and was looking directly at me. Weird. I quickly pushed the thought away to concentrate as I noticed another door. Then another chamber of statues. Another door. Another chamber of statues. Again and again, until the rooms stopped appearing at the 12th room, which, unsurprisingly, was locked. I peered at the map to notice that it is the treasure room. I looked into my pocket and saw my keys. I tried them all into the lock, including my special keys, but none of them worked. I came up with a different tactic. I searched the whole room, trying to find a clue on how to open the door. One of the walls was covered in strange markings. With a hunch of what these markings mean, I went back to the second room and sure enough, I found that the middle statue there was looking at the statue on its left. My eyes widened. I blinked my eyes. I tried rubbing them. I forced myself to think that my eyes were playing tricks on me. But the statue still stared at the left structure. “Eeeeeeeeee” a sound filled the room. It went off again. “EEEEEEEEEEEE” louder this time. I scanned the room as I tried to step back but my legs were frozen in shock. The statue moved again. This time I stepped back as my puzzled brain tried to understand what I was seeing. The statue moved faster towards me as my scream pierced through the air, like a sword's slicing through butter. The statue's legs started separating outwards and walked slowly as its mouth opened to talk. “I know this is scary, but don't be scared,” the statue said. Of course I just screamed louder. “It's okay,” it said, trying to calm me down, “My name is Xi and I am the protector of the tomb,”

“Wha... what tomb?” I asked with my voice barely coming back, still shocked by what I have just seen.

“My master's tomb, in the last room,” he replied. “You will need a key to open the door, but I will only give you one clue.” he paused for effect and said, “Look on the door. That is all I can say”, then he closed his eyes and opened them again when he went back to his original position as though nothing had happened. I checked all the doors, stopping on the 4th one that was engraved with some symbols. Wait a second, I thought I recognize that. It was in the 12th room! I pumped my fist into the air with victory and ran towards the 12th room. I rushed to the wall with the strange markings and skimmed the wall with my fingertips. A low, rumble sound started coming from behind me. I turned around to notice that the ground beneath me was shaking ever so slightly. I looked at the door which was locked as something shiny and metallic dropped down. Stepping closer, I realized it was the key! Let's go! My brain cheered as I kneeled down to get the key. The second I was about to hold on to the key, the shaking shock

even more, knocking me off balance. Small parts of the ceiling started coming off, like a rock avalanche. The last thing I could see was rocks falling down as my eyes slowly fluttered shut.

★ ★ ★

I finally came back out safely. But you might ask why did the Tomb protector help me by not doing his job? It turns out that I'm the grand-grand-grand-grand-grandchild of the ancient King!!

The Griffin of the Mogao Caves

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Mo, Charlotte – 9

He stared down at the compass and remembered the embarrassing moment he had with his friend David Livingstone. His cheeks had burned like fire when the national hero who had named an African waterfall after Queen Victoria saw the hideous flying pig that he had etched on the family heirloom when he was little. He had no idea why he had chosen to etch a most peculiar pig on something so special, and it was special, instead of having letters to show the directions, (North, East, South, West) the face of the compass had mystical symbols. The heirloom was an ancient compass passed down from generations and generations. His ancient grandfather had bought it back with him from his travels to Central Asia. Apparently he saw the legendary cave of the thousand buddhas but had to cut his trip short and returned home because of illness. He passed the compass down to his son before he died from what was known as the Black Death.

David had gone off on another expedition in Africa, so he decided to go on an adventure of his own. He wanted to feel the golden light that bathes on the buddhas. Perhaps he could also find something from the lost city of Central Asia and name it after their great Queen too. Surely the mystical symbols on the compass will guide him to something glorious?

Full of excitement and hope he set off through an enjoyable journey through Europe, (from crossiants to spaghetti). He loved sniffing the air filled with olives and cypress scents and enjoyed the salty ocean spray of the Mediterranean Sea. Warm Turkish spices flooded his nostrils once he set foot on land.

Little did he know things would take a turn for the worse. After a few weeks he didn't care for the exotic food and smells as he was evermore determined to find the Mogao Caves. Weeks turned into months, some of his men got ill and even the camels grew disobedient with the sun and heavy load beating down on them. Even his beard was beginning to itch.

They travelled through tall mountains and dry deserts. Just as they thought they were too tired to go any further the wind whispered that he had arrived. As his men sat down to rest alongside the river, the camels drank from the cool waters, begging for a longer rest. He asked and asked his men for their company to continue their search. However, his men were not willing to go, not yet, not until they had some water and a nap. So he decided to go solo.

He grabbed a backpack with a renewed sense of hope. He scanned the river and an unusual grey hill behind it searching for a cave opening. After a long time of walking alongside the flow of the water, he thought that he should climb the hill as he might get a better view. He welcomed the cool wind blowing across his face, making his hair wild. He did not see any hints of a cave and he plodded on. A few days passed and his hunger grew and his feet were sore but STILL no cave was to be seen. He felt frustrated, his ancient grandfather was an explorer, who had sighted the caves. Why couldn't he find the Mogao caves? The symbols on his compass were useless, they were meaningless and there was nothing mystical about them, or so he thought. He threw the compass angrily and it slipped between two rocks and disappeared. As soon as he had done that he regretted it. Why had he done that? The compass was precious, possibly valuable and the only heirloom his family had. He put his hand through the crack but could not feel his compass no matter how he tried.

Feeling gloomy and extremely upset he made his way back to his men and set off home. The journey back was cold and stormy and the waves crashed against the boat wildly. Rats scuttled across the uneven planks of the deck looking for food. He felt dizzy and sick from the swaying of the boat. He was miserable and sad and grew quiet and quieter on his long journey home.

When he finally arrived home, he found out that his friend David had died. That discouraged him even more from talking about his journey. He never even thought to mention one word about it until about forty years later, when he was old and frail with no heirloom to pass down, he read about an explorer named Aurel Stein who had found the Mogao caves. Stein had brought many items back from the grottoes. Items like old scrolls, beautiful sculptures and wooden prints. Stein had found many caves he even had been to a secret cave named the library cave. In this cave, Stein had found a special item that excited Stein the most. It made everyone think that people from

ancient China knew of or had seen the mythical, magical creature of a Griffin as it was said to have been etched onto one of the items that had been found.

When he saw a black and white drawing of this special item bought back by Stein, he gasped and his eyes grew wide when he realised what it actually was. He knew it was not a Griffin... it was HIS ridiculous-looking flying pig!

The Secret of the Mogao Grottoes

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Pollard, Freddie – 10

A long, long time ago, in the year 366 AD, along the old and beautiful Silk Road somewhere in the Gobi Desert, an old monk stumbled across a temple dug into the side of a mountain. This temple looked ancient and mysterious, and so with a sense of trepidation and fear, he decided to explore.

He stepped inside cautiously and gasped. Because he had found the most beautiful paintings he had ever seen. They were of Buddhist Gods flying in azure blue skies, gods walking amongst lush green fields – the vibrant colours took the old monk's breath away. The statues that looked like they had been carved just the day before were so life-like that the monk had to prod them softly to reassure himself that they weren't real. The statues were of gods, animals and soldiers, and their eyes seemed to follow the monk as he walked around the cave in amazement. There were piles of books and scrolls that told the story of Buddhist history which were handwritten in beautiful Sanskrit language. The old monk had spent his whole life helping the poor, feeding the hungry and following the teachings of Buddhism. Now, he was surrounded by the very teachings that he had lived his life by. He was so overwhelmed by it all that he had dropped his bag onto the floor. THUD!

After spending days wandering around the caves he finally left, astounded and astonished at what he just found. He was in such a daze that he even forgot that he had left his bag behind. The bag which was full of his life's work. Meanwhile, in the grottoes, a fluorescent, green light burst out of his bag.... then, like a tornado, swirled around from statue to statue! And amazingly, the statues came to life! Stretching, yawning and blinking as they got used to moving around. The monk's bag, full of his own learnings, full of the goodness and warmth of his heart and full of magic enchantments, had awakened all the beautiful art and they were ready to have fun!

From then on, every time they were on their own, the statues came to life. But if anyone was exploring the caves, they stayed still and silent.

A long time passed since the monk had made his extraordinary discovery. He had told many people about it and the caves had become popular with visitors. However, gradually as the years went by, people forgot about the caves until in 1907, a man called Marc Aurel Stein came across the grottoes in his travels. He was a Hungarian – British explorer and lecturer, known for his Central Asia Explorations. Just like the monk, he was fascinated and moved by what he saw. Paintings that looked like they had been freshly painted. Sculptures that looked like real, breathing people. There seemed to be an air of magic, peace and tranquility around the statues. Marc had never experienced anything like this before and he decided there and then that he should tell the world about the beautiful Mogao Grottoes. He explored every inch, and tried to capture the essence of the caves by drawing pictures of the wonderful things he found inside. Everyone loved his story and went to visit.

Over time, Marc began to think something was strange. He noticed that paintings had moved. Statues were in different positions. What was happening? Was he mistaken? So, he decided to visit the caves late at night when he could investigate by himself in secret.

One cold night, Marc hid outside of the caves and kept watch. Just as he was about to drop off, he suddenly smelt something smoky. Startled, he looked into the caves and he saw a fluorescent green light weaving its way through the caves and what was that? The statues were moving by themselves! They were moving fluidly and elegantly, smiling and chatting happily with each other. The animal statues grazed around the feet of the Gods and soldiers contentedly. Marc stared and was filled with a sense of wonder and calmness. He had found the secret of the Mogao Caves! He did not want to interrupt the magic so he slipped away quietly.

Back home, Marc kept his secret until he was on his deathbed. His four favourite students whom he had taught were crying around him – Lando Tremblay, Ellie Wartod, Garcelle Russel, and Jack Eghead. Lifting his weary head, Marc comforted them saying, "Please do not weep over me. I have had a rich, peaceful life teaching wonderful students like you four. Go visit the Mogao Grottoes at night and find its secret..."

So the four students decided to make the journey to the caves along the same beautiful Silk Road. Just like the monk. Just like Marc Stein. And they too waited until the cover of dark. Their patience was rewarded – they could see a fluorescent green light weaving its way through the thousands of grottoes that made up the Mogao caves.

They were in disbelief. Then they felt terrified. What on earth had they just seen? Ghosts? Aliens? Whatever they had seen, it was not something anyone had ever seen before. This was not normal!

The quartet began to run away, but the statues cried, “Stop!!! We just want to talk to you!” The four looked at one another and slowed down. “Please listen to us!” The statues cried again.

“Whhh.... What do you want?” Ellie asked, nervously.

“We want to tell you our story...”

And with that, the four students sat down in the Mogao Grottoes and watched and listened as the statues talked to them about how the goodness in the monk accidentally gave them the power to move.

And today, the statues lead tourists through the grottoes, telling everyone its history and how goodness can bring happiness and peace on earth.

I mean, who needs Disneyland when you have the Mogao Grottoes?

Book

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tang, Hailey – 9

Once upon a time, there were two travellers. They were eager to travel around the world to find stories about the past. Andrew liked going everywhere. He is very energetic; he always gets really excited about going on adventures. But Alexander is really calm. he is the complete opposite of Andrew. He just looks around and doesn't want to think. They had heard about the ancient Mogao caves along the old, bumpy silk road, they got excited and set off on the silk road with all their equipment: a tent, a sleeping bag, enough food and water and a camping mattress. They camped on the dry dessert, talking about how they could get to the caves. Until one day, Alexander said "I'm tired. I can't even see any caves. We've been walking for months" "Come on, I'm sure we can find them if we keep going." urged Andrew. But, they had completely no idea, that they were on top of the Mogao caves. Of course, there are other explorers, historians and archaeologists around the world. A few months later, a team of explorers also heard about the mysterious Mogao caves and decided to find the caves themselves just like the two explorers. A few weeks later, they found that they were looking at two pairs of footprints. There was also a very narrow slope leading down to ... somewhere. One of the explores called Fred suggested that half of the team should go down the slope. There were twelve people in the team, so six people each group. Each person turned on their bright torch lights and went down the steep, narrow slope.

It was a very long way down. It got darker every silent step they took. Some felt very tired of walking down the steep slope. When it was completely dark, they turned on their torches and realized that they were only half way down. About one hour later, they slouched to the very end. The floor was flat. They turned on their head lights. Still, it wasn't bright enough. So, three people lit their candles. Now it was better. They could see three giant dim holes. This must be Mogao caves! They got so excited that they forgot to tell the other group on their walkie-talkies. They found the Mogao caves. Again, they split up into three groups. 2 in each group. They hoped good luck to each other and stepped into the caves. What an amazing sight it was! The paintings were so beautiful! There were also sculptures and marvellous literature written and carved inside the caves!

Meanwhile, the other group was walking nonstop. They searched in mountains when they could find one. "I'm pretty sure they can find one." Panted Fred.

"Yeah! Me too!" sighed Aaron. "I've told them to send a message to as if they found the caves!"

"Do you think we should rest a bit?" asked Cecelia.

"Yeah, we should. The sun is already setting." Said the Fred. So, they set up a small camp somewhere flat and talked about what they might see when they find the Mogao caves.

Deep down in the underground, the three groups definitely do not know that it is evening already. So, they kept observing at the fantastic paintings and sculptures. One group found a book lying on the floor. The explorer was called Illa. She opened the book and "AAAAGH!" she screamed.

"What's wrong?" asked Ginny, the other explorer next to Illa.

"There was a big spider." stammered Illa shakily.

"It is just a spider." said Ginny, as she picked up the book. "Wow, this book is really old." Muttered Ginny, flipping through the pages. "This looks like the oldest printed book!"

"I'll tell the others," said Illa excitedly, holding her walkie-talkie. After they all got out of the caves, they set up a fire in the darkness and put torches all around the camp.

Up outside the other group had been arguing if they should go back to the slope or not. Some of the group wanted to go check on the other group. But the other part of the group protested that they walked far away from the slope. "Okay! We need to have a decision. Rock-Paper-Scissors shoot. They were excitedly showing what they saw in the caves.

"I saw paintings of monks. They were sitting down." One of them said.

"I saw a sculpture holding a book!" shared another.

"Hey guys, guess what I found!" cried Illa.

"What!"

She put down her rucksack and took out the ancient book. "Cool!" exclaimed George, one of the explorers. They kept talking and discussing what the book might write inside. When they got back up to the ground, they headed to

where the other people were. The team got back together and went back to their headquarters to write down what they found out. "It was like a hole to visit the past." Said Ginny. Do you remember the two travellers that tried to find the caves? Well, they were shocked when the team found the caves. If they couldn't find it, how could the team find it? So they contacted the team and asked how they could find it. So, the team told them they had to go down the slope.

One of the travellers had seen the slope but thought it led to danger, so he didn't tell the second traveller. The team went on to more successful adventures. So that's how I've found the Mongao caves.

The Secret of the Mysterious Mogao Caves

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Wong, LongLong – 9

Recently, I was going on a trip to the Mysterious Mogao Caves (莫高窟) in *Dunhuang* with my mum and dad . According to the Explanation of the Mogao Caves , it was one of the most mysterious places of Buddhism in the world and an important Chinese landmark . We went on the shuttle bus that will ride us to the caves from the Mogao Caves Digital Exhibition Center. I was so excited that I jumped up and down because this was my first time going to a place with so much Buddhist culture in China. We arrived at our destination very quickly and got off the bus . I looked at what I was seeing , there were hundreds of grottoes carved into the grey stone walls , a gigantic nine floored building that looked like a temple , and some Chinese artifacts to make prayers to the Buddhas for example , *Ding* (鼎).

After a while , I was bored of looking at the outsides of the caves so I decided it was time for me to go inside and take a look at some legendary sculptures and maybe even take some glorious photos of the Buddha and me! Dad was taking photos of the outside of the Mogao Caves . I asked my mum eagerly if I could go inside and explore a bit . She said “Okay , but you must promise me that you must come back RIGHT HERE at THIS point after you finish what you want to do inside the Mogao Caves . Also , you must come back here before 11:30 because we need to get lunch or else we’ll be STARVING!!! Also we need to get Dad back from taking those crazy photos of the caves .”

I said okay and headed off immediately for the insides of the Mysterious Mogao Caves .

In a short amount of time , I arrived inside the Mogao Cave . It was pitch dark inside but at least I had my little blue flashlight that made it a little brighter . This feeling made me feel like Great Howard Carter who discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun , in Egypt , this made me feel like the Great American archeologist Hiram Bingham who discovered the ruins of Machu Picchu , the ancient Incan settlement in Peru ...

I continued to venture in the caves and soon , I gasped at one of the most magnificent sights I have ever seen in my whole lifetime . Pillars with bright Buddha carvings that were carved very carefully , ceilings with patterns of lines and suns and flowers , walls with detailed paintings of buddhas and bodhisattvas , sitting around the Big Buddha ... Then, I took a photo of a Buddha and me . CLICK! The picture was taken . I checked the time , PHEW , there was still half an hour left before I needed to get back outside . I put my hand on one of the bodhisattvas and took another picture when the sounds of ancient Chinese music came running into my ear .

Ahhhhhhhhh!!! I landed in a thump and I muttered “Oww!” I looked around , monks wearing all sorts of ancient Chinese clothing were painting and carving on rocks . I looked at myself, I was wearing a blue and pink *Tang Dynasty* (唐朝) female dress with a golden hairpin in my hair . “This is so strange , why am I wearing a Tang Dynasty dress now ? It isn't a Mid-autumn festival or Chinese New Year , let me ask someone.” I thought . “Umm, excuse me mister monk , what Dynasty is it today ?” I asked an old monk . I knew it sounded totally ridiculous to the monk , but that’s the only way I can know where am I in the world .

The old monk chuckled “Silly girl , it is the Tang Dynasty . Look at your beautiful clothes , you’ll recognize it immediately , ” he continued to chuckle disgustingly, “ by the way , it is a year when emperor *Tang Gao Zong* (唐高宗) is ruling .”

“ What , the great Tang Gao Zong ! He is a very important emperor in Chinese history ! And his wife *Wu Ze Tian*(武则天)

is the only female Chinese emperor in Chinese history ! So I guess I’ve been teleported to the famous Tang Dynasty !This is unbelievable! But how do I go back?” I wondered urgently.

The another old monk chuckled and continued the other monks sentence with lots of things I didn’t understand about the Ancient Tang Dynasty government about advisors and ministers but his last sentence made me shiver with fear , “ Little girl , Little girl , beware of the dangers out here in the desert , you must go back to *Chang An* (长安)and live a peaceful life . Not in the threatening Gobi Desert where people share death together .”

And when he finished the last word of his sentence, fierce wind circled around me and in the blink of an eye , I was back in the Modern Era . No more chuckling monks , no more Tang Dynasty and no more fear . I stood up to my feet , took the last picture of the bodhisattva and walked out of the cave in exhaustion. When I got out of the cave , I asked my mum “Can we have some chicken and corn for lunch ?” My mum nodded and smiled , and we went on the shuttle bus and went to eat our lunch .

Ten years later, when I was 19 , during my summer vacations , I went to the Mysterious Mogao Caves again with my friends Ivy and Jasmine , but that is completely another story.

The Spirit Caves

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Yeung, Jacqueline – 10

More than a thousand years ago, a monk was riding on a miserable donkey on the long path of the Silk Road, while feeling quite down and depressed himself. After miles of pain, suffering and sunburn, he had no high hopes for the journey ahead. Instantly, as if the weather could read his thoughts, his eyes widened he stopped abruptly at the foot of a tall, slender cave. The monk immediately knew that this cave stood out from the rest. It was different somehow. As he entered the cavern, he felt connected to it somehow. This puzzled him deeply. He knew that there was something special about the cave, he just didn't know what it was. Drawn to this palace of wonder, he spent days in it, gradually discovering the cave's majestic secrets. 'The world holds many secrets,' said the astounded monk. 'But this cave must be the biggest secret of all.' And it was. However, the monk had yet to discover it. Before his departure, he vowed to find this cave again. The monk felt his sorrowful spirits lift. It was the last happy thought he had before he flew up into the Heavens.

Years after the monk's death, people came to find the cave the monk had talked about in his will. They brought valuables, including gold and crystals to honour him. Then, in the same place the monk had stopped at many years ago, they thought to themselves, 'Could this be it? The cave of magic and wonder?' They had this thought as they entered the cave, eagerly and slowly. All their questions were answered as they walked into the cave. 'What the monk said was true. This really is a cave of mysteries and wonder.' And it was. The people soon also felt drawn to the cave. It was a time of hobbies, stories and legends... it was magical.

Everything they created had a destiny. Each fortune alone would be buried for centuries to come. The spirit cave soon became lost in history and no more than a dusty legend down as people took other routes. In less than 100 years, the spirit cave stood there buried in the dirt. This couldn't be the end, could it? There had to be more to the story. And there was. But not until a thousand years later. Then, as time unfolded itself, the miracle happened. It was re-discovered.

The spirit cave was re-discovered by a young maid. Her name, Mabel, and her job: cleaning the castle. She was a hard worker, but wasn't as good as she looked. Every night she would steal food or rubies from the palace and rush back to her house by the hill to serve her family, as they were very poor. She was also a very mischievous girl. Back to the cave, as it was soon to be re-discovered. It all began on the hot, humid day of May 1956. Mabel was given her first and last task of the day. To dig up the Queen's ancient ruby bracelet. Mabel knew, as well as the rest of the staff, that the Queen was a magpie. She would always be very specific about her jewellery, always addressing them like people. 'Mabel', she had begun, 'find my 1000-year-old Chinese dragon, ruby red jasper bracelet. And then you shall be dismissed. Oh, and it should be by the hill side. Dear me, I must have dropped it when I was taking my morning stroll.' She gave a small grin then. 'Now off with you!' She waved her hand, and Mabel walked stiffly out of the royal's room. Mabel carelessly strolled through the Royal's enormous, emerald garden, walking straight onto the grass instead of the stone pavement. She plucked a ruby from the golden chair and put it into her pocket. Mabel wandered into the gardening shed, allowing her mind to stretch its thoughts as she absentmindedly grabbed a decidedly large shovel. A butterfly flew past her and towards the direction of the mountain, reminding her of her family. The hill might be a good place to start, Mabel thought to herself. After all, that is where the Queen said her bracelet would be. And that was where her great discovery was made.

After digging for many hours, her shovel hit a hard surface. Now what might this be, she wondered. Eager and puzzled, she decided to dig around the strange rock. Later she found out that it wasn't a rock after all. It had a small opening on the top, but it was very tiny. Mabel called loudly, for the castle miners. They came in a hurry, bringing their finest gear. Her mouth still wide open from the shock of the discovery, Mabel stepped back, afraid to get too close to the noisy, dirty drilling machines. As she did, her pocket came loose and the ruby came tumbling out. It rolled onto the top of the cave, matching the ruby that was already there. She saw in her mind a civilisation of people in that cave. She saw art, people telling stories and so much more. Mabel immediately picked it off the floor and ran to the hillside, by the river. She cried out to the waterfall:

“Oh river, I know that you are old, but please tell me where this ruby is from. I feel like there is something special about this gemstone, even though I plucked it from a chair. How is it connected to me? Why is connected to me? What have I got to do with it?”

When the river did not answer, Mabel burst into tears. She was crying for her future, which did not seem so bright in her eyes. Her tears dripped into the river as it carried them along.

“Do not fear, young girl”, a voice said back, “The ruby in your hands is part of your future. There is nothing wrong with that, is there?”

Mabel’s eyes widened.

“It is? But why? Why me?”

“You have been chosen to bring on the fate of the holy spirit cave.” answered the river.

Upon hearing this, Mabel ran back to the palace, back to where she started, and back to her thoughts, where the cave had been newly dugout. The miners stood by it, looking very proud of themselves. The scientists researched the cave, digging out many things that were said didn’t exist. Mabel never did find the Queen’s bracelet though. A legend states it was demolished along with the ground. Nobody knew what happened to it. As the sunset that night, Mabel let the ruby slip into the river, it was better than the scientists found it. After all, it was her little secret, and she was determined to keep it. She no longer stole from the palace. As the ruby drifted out of sight, so did the thought of Mabel herself being unimportant.

Curse of the Abbot

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Zhu, Ethan – 10

The Abbot

He had been travelling for ages in search of the perfect place for literature. Envisioned with the image of a thousand Buddhas bathed in shining golden light, yet with no place suitable to display them. And the fact the emperor had justified the means of building underground. A meaningless action to stop the spread of so-called mysticism when they concocted those themselves! Digging the caves, one hand at a time filled everything with elaborate masterpieces. He printed books and, most importantly, had a thousand gold buddhas in gold in the vicinity. The area became a monastery, and a grant from the ruling families raised the cave count to a thousand. But he could not stop there, this was his creation! Of all shares, he would be the sole owner of this wonder! The History Books! Printed with his name everywhere and anywhere! Desperate for some glory, he took a drastic measure and left.

As everyone was starting to leave for the last time, he gathered all the white sand he had collected from the Gobi Desert that had blown here and started to seal up the caves with the power of the Wind and Water helping, cursing anybody who dared to enter again. As the light started to set on the world, the next time it would encounter light would only be a few thousand years. As the red hue gradually faded over the horizon, the Abbot slipped and fell to his death.

The Middleman

A day in Tokyo started as usual for people, but Otani Kuzui was not a normal person. And he was not in Tokyo either, he was in the conquered territory of the enemy, exploring recently discovered caves filled with literature, art and porcelain. He was just entering with his group when the doors slammed shut. The air was filled with a cloud of musty dust.

The light disappeared.

Otani Kuzui was not a coward but rather the risk-taker, he was always the one who led the group and took chances. The maze-like corridors were unforgiving and twisted into complex patterns of levels. The treasures distracted everybody, having everyone wander in different directions.

He found himself, no group, no companionship, in front of a glowing door with serpentine patterns. The hole in the door gazed at him as if expecting this day. It was a creepy sight, but curiosity got the better of him. Upon entering, he saw gold, jade and opal pottery shatter before his eyes. The impact blinded him. But he could not stop from a minor injury.

Hobbling back into the outside, he slipped on a rock and fell over the cliff. The last thing he would ever experience was a blinding pain all over his body, intense heat roasting him from all sides for a split second before everything turned black.

The Explorer

A mote of dust that may have sat for a century floated down and sparkled as it contacted burning flames. Howls of the night echoed through the intricate chambers as a small light weaved itself through the corridors and hallways. The Daedalian paths made every step treacherous, yet the magnificent carvings and statues urged at it, invited it, even dared it to venture deeper.

As the burning flame started up a flight of stairs, he could no longer hold in its excitement. Footsteps reflected onto the walls at a rushing pace as it raced up and up, ghosts and spirits seemed to stir and darkness took hold, but it seemed not to care, it kept going and going. Running with such determination, he didn't notice the burnt torch.

Finally, he stopped, wheezing and panting like a pug. The atmosphere was off, it seemed as if something had placed a magnet inside of the hall. As he checked the walls, he noticed a sealed-off door. Red light glinted in the intricate patterns and arrangements, but one small detail escaped his attention, a hole, ominously staring at him.

The door swung open.

The room was stuffed with the most exquisite and astounding art and porcelain he'd ever seen. There were treasures everywhere. Gold, Jade, Opal and much more were scattered around, but it seemed unusual. It was unnatural. There was a decayed mess in front of him pierced with gems. Glancing again, he realised to his utmost horror everything he was looking at was destroyed, looted and razed to the ground.

The burning hope that had kept rising in his heart extinguished seeing the destruction that had presented itself so abruptly. His knees fell and shoulders slackened as his heart stopped mid-beat, and the one thing that had kept him carrying along shattered. As he turned to leave the room, he saw the one thing that had not been touched, a book, dismayed, he dropped the manuscript and left the room untouched.

As he retraced his steps through the corridors, he felt his empty heart slide between his ribs. His muscles ached as the tiring steps seeped the strength out of him. As he fought his way up the pathways, he saw the exit. With a final nudge, he was in the open, the breeze billowed as the light fought its way through the darkness. The smoke in the distance marked the campfire, returning, he fell straight into a cliffside and tumbled down to his death.



Fiction

Group 2

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Cheung, Bernice – 12

Forget about the caves, I may not even make it out of this desert alive. Few months ago, I set off on a quest of seeking out the mystical, historical Mogao Caves after a shriveled up, almost—reduced—to—skeleton monk very generously offered me his faded and severely crippled map. Now in this vast land of sand, how I hope that this piece of paper tour guide would magically carry me to wherever it says the caves are, but no point in making pointless wishes. Stuffing the map back into my bag of supplies, I gulped down some water, feeling at least better before trudging on to continue my expedition.

As if walking wasn't tiring enough, the sand acted as claws, tugging at my heels, pulling at my shoes. With my worn out and shabby, sandals sinking ankle-deep into the sand, with every step wearing me out more than the last. At this point, I already wanted to dig a hole, curl up and die in it. After failing to perish in sand, I tried Plan B: Keeping myself busy by making up poems such as 'Oh, the great Mogao Caves, where in this desert do you lie? It is your knowledge that I crave, and I want to get there before I die!' or 'Hello stupid desert, I'm just a knowledge seeker. Here to find the caves though I can never. Holding this useless map in hand, I hate sand', things like that. That went on for a few tedious hours before I spotted movement on some dunes in front of me. Horns of triumph blared loudly internally, and I rushed towards the camel as fast as my sand-clad feet could carry my exhausted body. 'Camel man! Hey! Help me!' I enthusiastically waved my hands, shouting.

Good thing he noticed me, but as soon as that, I passed out from the heat, falling face-first into the sand. Next time I opened my eyes, I, in shock, discovered that my clothes were covered in camel spit and sand, which meant that camel man either dragged me across the desert or hauled me onto his mean-looking camel. Before I could get mad at him, he had already left, leaving me yet again stranded on this desert, in the middle of nowhere. I was sure that my mission was in vain. I was tired. My food and water were a few mouthfuls away from none. All hope was lost in this situation, and for the first time in months, I collapsed and lay on the ground, with nothing but sheer desperation running through my body.

I stared at the starry sky, glowing dots peppered across the ink blue sky. Yes, pretty, but yet so hollow. Prettiness won't save me, I thought. Almost at once I was proved wrong as an unmistakable snout of a Kirin appeared right on top of me. I scooted away from it, taking in its elegant and delicate features, its turquoise and gold maw and body.

I allowed the creature to lead me across the desert, coming to a stop in the morning. Ginormous stone doors appeared, elevated by a cliff with regal engravings, sitting magnificently in the middle of an oasis. Could these possibly be the entrance to the long-awaited Mogao Caves? The doors creaked and scratched at the ground as it opened. I took a step back and stared—this wasn't just a library. This was a monument of knowledge. Towering shelves stood tall and proud at almost all sides of the cylindrical room, and about a dozen situated in the middle. A floating image caught my eye, making me more awed than ever. Dragons of all colours glided gracefully near the ceilings, weaving between shelves of scrolls, writings, books and drawings. Sunlight streamed through the ceiling window, which reflected on their multicolored scales, shining under the light and rippled as the dragons moved, casting faint rainbows on the dull yellowish stone walls, running and dancing along with them. Rows of vines hung in bunches from the ceiling, lavender flowers braided within their olive-colored greens, vibrant as set against rather dull green, but blending strangely well.

If the Kirin didn't pull me back into reality by bounding into the caves at alarming speed, I would've just stood there, probably my whole life, transfixed, at the sight. I took a cautious step towards the caves, trying hard to ignore enormous discomfort surging through my feet and legs as I did. Since I had to go through so much to get here, I didn't waste another minute to sightsee. Quickly settling myself down in front of one of the shelves, I pulled out a thick volume and skimmed through the pages. Occasionally catching information not yet known to mankind, I allowed myself to sink deeper into this book's mysteries. I returned to the book's first page and started exploring knowledge from scratch, and the more I read, the more amazed I felt. There wasn't a single picture, but the words alone were alive, and stories throughout history played scene by scene in my head. Sieges, parties, revolutions—the whole bunch of them. Drowning in them, I extracted book after book, scroll after scroll from the piles, reading, taking notes, ignoring the stinging and searing pain in my eyes from all that reading.

After no one knows how long, I rubbed my eyes for the first time and blinked, realizing just how dry and tired my eyes were. As worn out as I was, I moved onto the next shelf, scouting the weighty, ancient tomes. My eyes flew over pages, my hands cooperating perfectly with my eye's speed. I still lived in the fantasy world of the books, or I should say, I lived on the fantasy of the books. They filled my mind with overwhelming thoughts, visions, and it was addictive, soothing. I soon built my own fortress with my read books, enveloping me in a newly emerged pile of reading material.

And I've read on since then, forever in this wonderland.

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New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Chung, Shanese – 11

“Gah!” screamed Nicholas! He had found a hallway completely lined with skeletons and the worst part was, they still had their intestines stuck between the bones! Gross! So they were just dead people with no hair, skin and most of their organs at all. No wonder he was so freaked out! Some the intestines still had a slight pink colour in them! Then he heard a noise, ‘Who goes there? Who dares to disturb my peace?!?’ A shadow jumped out and Nicholas’s blood splattered on the wall, marking the end of his life.

Twenty years had passed since Nicholas’s death, and it was yet still the talk of the town. However, since many years had passed, the story now had multiple versions, each even crazier than the last! But one of the craziest versions was that he had died from fright and his scream had sealed the entrance and exits to the cave. He knew there was no way of escaping so he took a huge piece of sharp rock and plunged it through his chest! But only one person knew the truth to the real story, and that person was my grandfather. He had attached a mini camera (that was a new and rare invention back then) to Nicholas’s helmet and he saw what had really happened. He refused to tell anyone what he had seen, and he only told me in secret on his deathbed three months ago....

After entering the cave, Nicholas was immediately faced with a cross path. He flipped a coin, heads for left, tails for right. To make sure he would not get lost, he stuck stickers (that he had brought) on the walls. They were glow-in-the-dark green colored so he could find his way out even if it was completely dark in the cave. After making a total of five right turns and six lefts turns, he had reached the hallway lined with the skeletons that had their intestines. It seemed to go on forever, but as he walked along the hallway, he found two doors. Again, he flipped a coin. It landed on tails, so he got ready to enter the right door. But before entering, he hesitated. What if that door would lead to his demise? He eventually chose the right door anyway. But when he entered, the room was completely dark except for a pair of bright, yellow eyes. Then, someone lit a candle. The flickering light just allowed Nicholas to see the owner of the bright yellow eyes. It was a basilisk. The creepy thing was, it could talk! It even had lips like a human! Since microphones were not yet invented yet, my grandfather read its lips. It growled, ‘Who goes there? Who dares to disturb my peace?!?’ Then it opened its humongous mouth that had at least fifty-six razor-sharp teeth and chomped him up alive! My grandfather could see inside the basilisk’s mouth! My grandfather said Nicholas even threw up inside the monster’s mouth since its breath was smelly enough to knock out a grown standing thirty kilometers away! I would probably throw up too!

Then, the basilisk spat Nicholas’s body through the ajar door. It landed against a wall before sliding down, leaving blood stains in a vertical line! When Nicholas’s body hit against the wall, the camera probably shattered since the connection was lost right at that moment and the screen went black. A week or two later, another team of explorers (from the same group as Nicholas) went into the cave. They followed the stickers into the hallway. At the end, nearest to the door on the right, was Nicholas’s body, or now skeleton, with his intestine and mysteriously, an empty bottle of poison. The team decided to try check on the basilisk, and this time, since they did not want to end up like Nicholas, they had brought weapons. Machine guns, ammo, poison darts, and rifles. However, when they peeked into the room, they saw the basilisk dead! They took some photos of the dead monster and took some saliva samples from its mouth that, luckily, was wide open. When the report came back, it turned out that the basilisk had died because of Nicholas! The scientists believed that based on the reports and what the explorers had seen, that Nicholas was about to die, so he took out the poison bottle (that he packed just in case, you never know!) and poured all the contents down the basilisk’s throat. So while it swallowed Nicholas’s skin and organs, it also swallowed the deadly poison!

We may never know what was behind the other door. We will just have to wait and see if there will be anyone else brave enough! Also, I am not planning to tell this story to anyone else, so please do keep it a secret. This is just one of the expeditions my grandfather witnessed while he and his team explored the Mogao Grottoes. Apparently, he said, his father went on the Silk Road too!

New Tales from the Mogao Caves

Heep Yunn Primary School, Ho, Elise – 12

Have you ever heard of the Mogao Cave stories? You might have been there, but you may not know about the spooky stories that are hidden in the caves.

Many centuries ago, there was an evil scientist named Master Google. You might not know who it is because he works in a secret underground laboratory. Master Google had a huge dream since he was little which is to rule the world. He had been planning it for a long time. After six hundred and five hours of hard work, he invented a potion which could make dead objects alive. Master Google found out that all the statues of the Buddhas are kept in the Mogao Cave. He knew where his target is at.

He had never been out of his laboratory before got lost. At first, he went to Eiffel Tower. Then, he went to Statue of Liberty. He also went to the Great Wall, and Sydney Opera House by mistake. Finally, he found his way to the Mogao Caves entrance.

He wandered around the cave, exploring the secrets about it. He found many paintings, drawings and statues. Master Google poured the mixture of potion into each and every stone Buddhas' mouth. Magic is happening. All the statues came alive. They look like they have just been awoken from the dead. Master Google grinned for the first time in years, 'The world, the universe will soon be mine! Ha Ha Ha!'

Master Google ordered The Stone Statues to destroy the cave. They smashed and kicked, they drew on the walls, destroying the paintings. They stole all the gold from the chests. They marched out of the caves, ruins to be exact. Master Google demanded them to build a giant fort for him. They spent day and night, days and weeks, months and years, decades and centuries building it. Master Google even named himself the king of the world. The citizens were unhappy as they have been treated unfairly. They demand a war and their wish was granted.

Just then, a monk walked by and saw a war happening, he sighed. He decided to give them a piece of note which said, 'Read this and you will be granted, read this and you would win.' Master Google and the citizens read it and unexpectedly was sent to Mars.

Until today, the story still haunts people. So, beware! Do not read the note from the monk.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Kwong, Hayden – 12

The feeling of being included, tangled around in a long ago dusty old legend, a mystery, an adventure perhaps arise spontaneously, in a ocean of confusion. Been recently invited by a spirit connection tingling in my soul, a message clearly inviting me to the world of the Mogao Grottoes.

It has always been such a history—the Mogao Grottoes, considered one of the most important collections of Buddhist art in the world. Discovered in the 1900's, one thousand years later it was built. Containing wall paintings, painted sculptures, ancient architecture etc. Even the oldest dated, printed book in the world.

It felt kind of magical, dreamy, like hanging in a fantasy, never ever have felt this feeling before. Never actually went in the Mogao cave, confusingly it has brought up the whole place through a 3D video likely to appear around me, exactly like those VR glasses we have nowadays.... But it wasn't just a video tape shown, it has put a magic spell on those 1000 Buddhist statues, and the paintings on the walls. Making them move all of a sudden. The floor was erupting, I could feel it, lost balance and fell into a hole of darkness eventually.

When I open my eyes, everything has changed. I was in one of the caves of Mogao Grottoes. Statues went talking, chatting. Wall paintings did the same thing. Instead, some stared at me, eyed me with curiosity, whispering ear to ear.

'Welcome to our world!' the sleeping Buddha has been well awoken by the noise. 'I have invited you to be the one we deeply trust against all the people in the world. We, Buddha believe in Buddhism—generally regarded, with good reason, as the most peaceful of world religions. We hope you could proclaim Buddhism all over the world and bring world peace. This is your mission we give you. Please, make us proud!' giving me a paper roll full of instructions in Chinese. The floor erupted again, this time harder.

A bit lost, but back to what I was doing: scrolling along the pictures of Mogao Grottoes on my iPad as a preparation of the Hong Kong Young Writers Competition, who would have known that I have been into all this. Indeed, I will make the Buddhism proud!

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Lau, Sophie – 11

More than one and a half millennia ago, there was something special about a cave which was found as an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China. Thousands of pilgrims and scholar-explorers discovered that there were a lot of breathtaking secrets unlocked in the cave—including the oldest dated, printed book in the world.

One of the greatest pilgrims had recorded a memorable news for all people. About twenty years ago, there was an 18-year-old archaeologist called Lork Amanda. People think she is a genius nowadays because she had devoted herself to exploring the mystery of Mogao cave. Lork was a curious and erudite person and she even read numerous books every day, especially books about Mogao Cave. She always wanted to visit this place but unfortunately her parents died when she was five and she had been an orphan since then. However, a scientist named Crook Brown took care of her and showed much care for Lork as if he was her dad. Doctor Brown was an intelligent and kind scientist who was working on a project about the Mogao Cave with Lork too.

One day, Lork decided to start a dangerous adventure to the cave and find the mystery of the art, paintings and books discovered by ancient people. Doctor Brown thought that it was too risky for Lork to travel by herself because she still didn't have enough knowledge and experience so he decided to go with her.

They set off as soon as possible and when they arrived at the cave, they were shocked and startled, because what they saw at that moment was as enormous as a blackhole. There were some huge buddhas around the Mogao Cave. As they walked carefully deeper and deeper, it was also getting darker and darker, just like playing in a haunted house.

They used the torch to find the path and suddenly they found a treasure box in front of them. Inside the box, there was some old parchment paper with a bunch of unidentified words on it. Lork realised that it must be a code which can unlock the curse of the Dragon Warrior as the book said. Doctor Brown and Lork eventually broke the curse by reading that language aloud.

However, they heard a strange noise coming out from the dark, strong wind howled and mice escaped as fast as they could. Something was wrong! Zombies and mummies were rushing out like the scenes in a horror movie. Both of them were freaking out and escaping from this terrifying area.

They dashed along the path and finally got out of the scary cave. Those ugly zombies and mummies still couldn't step out of the cave. Doctor Brown and Lork headed home and wrote about this awesome and fantastic journey.

After years, they translated into books with different languages and every single person in the world would like to read their books. Obviously they became rich nowadays but they shared their happiness with poor people. They often donate money to the needies. Even though this adventure nearly made them die, it was all worth it to let them have an opportunity to be famous and help people around the world.

The Three Uninvited Guests to the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Li, Charmaine – 12

The room was illuminated with strange lights shone out from the peculiar sculptures. The atmosphere was becoming more bizarre and full of terror. They collapsed in fear, leaving the room in total silence...

Back in the 1800s, ManKeung was a Chinese tomb raider on the most wanted list. He was proficient at scheduling flawless burglaries, meanwhile sneaking into tombs. He had encountered and solved countless mazes and stopped at nothing to make his steps towards success.

Today, ManKueng was secretly gathering with his raiding partners. His companions had heard of Mogao Grottoes. They assumed that valuable antiques must have been placed there. ManKueng, ChiMing, LeeHo organised a team. Their brains soon whirled rapidly to ponder for a perfect plan...

The next week, the team started their journey to Dunhuang. They had complete confidence in their mission. ManKueng undertook the leadership and manfully took all the burden. They were totally perplexed when they arrived at their destination — the tower was antiquated and mystic, it must be invaluable — but there was scarcely any guard at the entrance.

Yet they didn't have a moment to lose so they just moved forward. They entered the cave and admired the elegant murals which were carved on the walls. They couldn't help being enchanted. But on top of that, the more they explored, the more they became bewildered. They gazed around but there were only dazzling murals. Nothing other than that was in glimpse...

With all the doubts, their intense desire to hunt treasure gradually faded. They were afraid that their efforts would turn into vain. They were about to give up when strong winds blew into the cave. Their hair was blown into disarray. A scroll rolled to ManKueng's feet. It nearly went out of sight because of the unstable wind. Instantly, LeeHo swiftly ran after it and he barely caught the scroll. The raiders were intrigued. They felt a yearning for it. They opened the scroll, their longing eyes were glittering...

Inside the scroll was a treasure map. The map explained the route to the mysterious valuables. The team was surprised but based on their raiding experiences, extreme joy begets disappointment and sorrow. Hence they restrained their excitement and decided to proceed with their journey.

The team walked deeper into the cave. After an hour, they started to feel tired. They took a brief rest and that's when they found themselves in a murky cave, contrasting with their starting point. They all sensed the weirdness. They glanced at each other and observed the place for a moment. The stillness in the air filled them with dread.

Even so, innumerable raiding experiences had instilled braveness into the team. In order to hunt the treasure, they were determined to move on and became alert to every movement around.

The cave turned inkier as they walked along. The route was extended and seemed immense. After half a day, the team was fatigued. Not much provisions and beverages were left. They were all weary. Despite that, ManKueng led the others to go on. The team was targeting the treasure, thus they were clear that they had to persist.

They trudged with exhaustion. But before long, they ran into another challenge. They walked into an impasse. LeeHo checked the map attentively, realising that they were on the right track. The team was puzzled.

ManKueng took a look around the cave and discovered that there was a drain cover. They opened it and found a secret underground passage. ChiMing jumped down without hesitation. He didn't even take a close look at the secret tunnel! ChiMing disappeared in the tunnel without a trace the next second. The others were both distressed... Yet, they jumped in to rescue their teammate.

The secret tunnel was actually a slide. It was pitch dark inside. 'Argghhh!' Everybody was panicking. Even a few seconds seemed like an eternity. After a while of startles, they landed on the underground with a strong relief.

Meanwhile the team noticed themselves in a spacious room. It was brightened up by a few blazing beacons.

‘Oh dear! I think I lost the scroll when I was sliding down the tunnel!’ ManKueng yelled as he was rummaging through his bag. LeeHo was desperate. On the other hand, ChiMing remained calm and comforted his teammates, ‘It’s okay, I remember the content on the map. The slide was leading us in the right direction.’

The room was nearly empty, with a delicate treasure chest placed in the middle of it. The three raiders took notice of the chest. They were exhilarated! ManKueng opened it with a great hankering...

They were dumbfounded — there weren't any precious metals or jewels inside the chest, but numerous Buddhist scriptures, a book and a note. The book was titled ‘Secrets of Mogao Grottoes’. Written on the note was ‘Greed is the root of all evils’. At first, they just ignored the message.

Absorbed in curiosity, the team were oblivious of their surroundings. Meanwhile, there were some subtle changes in the buddhas sculpted on the murals. LeeHo was sharp-eyed and saw the abnormal gleams shot out from the Buddha. He was agitated but doubted whether it was just his illusions. After a while, his partners noticed that in succession. Terror substituted depression. The team was petrified! They split to find an exit to withdraw from the awful place but failed.

They remembered how many endeavours and dares they had in this journey in Mogao Grottoes. But it turned out to be futile. They were eager to get away at the moment. Yet things went contrary to their wishes. Their minds were preoccupied with the statement on the note. They were guilt-ridden, but the die had been cast...

They had challenged myriads of demanding tombs in their careers yet beat them all. Nonetheless, they were defeated by their own avarice this time. They got nothing in return, and even ventured their own lives. Their journey turned out to be a harsh lesson for them...

New Tales from the Mogao Caves

Heep Yunn Primary School, Li, Efa – 11

Caves around the world are timeless. Among the many caves in the world, the Magao Caves are the most mysterious. The Magao Caves which are also called “Library Cave” were formed more than one and half millennia ago. The scholars said that it was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past. Be prepared as I am going to lead you to an adventure.

Before my visit to the mysterious Mogao Caves, my parents told me not to go there because some legends say that after you go there, you will disappear. But I was sure that I could protect myself at that time, and I was wrong. There were a lot of vigorous, magnificent murals and lifelike statues for me to admire in Mogao Caves. I walked around for a few hours and I was worn out.

After a while, there was finally a place where I can take a rest. I spotted a rock under a Bodhisattva statue and it seemed like a decent place to rest for a bit. Suddenly, I felt that everything around me was moving, including myself. The drawings fell onto the ground and the statues were shaking. I fell into a hole and there were sharp lights around me and I was spinning very fast. I was very dizzy and I felt like I was transferred to another world. After a while, I was thrown out of the hole and I fell onto the ground.

Ouch! I looked around and thought that I was in the Tang Dynasty. Around me, there were some temples and monasteries and monks were uttering some scripture inside them. I did not know where I was so I decided to go into the temple next to me to find some help. Since they were too concentrated in uttering the scriptures, they did not notice me at all. Then, I saw a shocking thing—one monk became a dragon and looked like preparing to fly away.

Immediately, I shouted at the top of my voice, “Hey! What are you doing? Why did you become a dragon?” The other monks were surprised to see both the dragon and me. At once, the dragon grabbed me and flew quickly and crazily up into the sky. I kept yelping and yelling for help but nobody saw or heard me. I wanted to get away from the dragon but I would die if I dropped high up in the sky. I was really desperate until I saw a Bodhisattva in a beautiful ring floating in the sky, who looked very familiar to the one I saw in the Mogao Caves in Gansu. The Bodhisattva uttered some words and then threw something onto the dragon. Then, it flew next to the Bodhisattva and we landed safely on the ground.

Phew! I was relieved. I thanked the Bodhisattva so much for saving me and she told me that the dragon was hers. The dragon was naughty and it flew away without her allowance. I told her that I was from the 21st century and I really wanted to go back there. I really wished that she could help me. I also told her that she looked exactly the same as the one I saw in Mogao Caves in the 21st century and how I came here. She said that she really wanted to help me but she was impotent. What she could only do was to let me live with her and take me to Mogao Caves to see if she can help me.

We went to the Mogao Caves together and they were exactly the same as the ones I saw in the 21st century. She told me to sit on the rock again to see if I could go back to 21st century. However, it was futile and nothing happened. Oh! I was tremendously disappointed. Why did this happen? Why didn’t I listen to my parents? Had I not been to the Magao Caves, I would not have needed to live here forever!

As I am a female, I could not be a monk. What I could do was to watch the monks uttering scriptures round—the—clock. And eating, drinking, sleeping and walking around every day. My life without phone, email and internet is very boring. I am almost bored to death! I miss my family and friends and my favorite tiramisu very much. My birthday wish this year is to go back to 2021. Can this come true?

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Lo, Elysia – 11

Let's just not talk about the caves right now, I am very lonely in this weird place. You might ask where exactly I am, so I'm in a famous Chinese ancient painting named 'Qingning Riverside Map'. I have no idea how I got here. I think it's because of the exact painting in the caves that I've been exploring just now. How odd, cause it just sucked me in within a second.

I assume that while I'm in the painting, my partners will be stranded since we lost our contact in the desert. I think they will most likely die as well because they don't have enough supplies to survive, not even a week.

I'm now questioning my life. Like why am I even here in the first place, I shouldn't be here, especially the painting. Anyways, back to my view. I'm seeing piles of people who are wandering around and buying stuff. I stretched as I knew this adventure would be boring, also seeing myself wearing a historical outfit. I sighed and followed where the people were going. After walking for an amount of time, I was walking beside a river and I saw some big boats on my right. 'Woah, that's a big boat...' I thought to myself. I stepped towards the middle of a bridge and glanced at the river. Sure that's a long river, I can't even see the edge of it. Okay, that was an idiotic sentence, I admit it. Then, I walked past the bridge and I saw more people on this site. They were paying for stuff like food. The food smells amazing. I got near the tiny counter over there and guess what? The man who was selling food was very kind, he gave me some of it and let me try it, it was so, so delicious. Unfortunately, my Putonghua sucks so I can only give him fingers to show him how many I wanted to buy. On the way, I bought so many kinds of tasty treats. I didn't stop eating for once. When I almost finished my treat, I got teleported back to the cave system.

'Why won't you let me finish my food!!' Then I was teleported to a different dimension. The place I am currently in was twisted and abnormal. I soon figured out that I was in a painting called 'The Scream'. This place is not even suitable for humans to be in. My vision was twisty and I felt so dizzy that I almost fell down the highway, I was just gripping onto walls the entire time. 'Hello! I've never seen you here before, who are you?' I turned to my left and saw a whirly guy whose voice sounds like he turned on autotune. 'GAH!!!!' I cried out and I saw myself also being 'whirly'. 'No, no, no. This cannot be true!' I yelled at myself and slapped myself to try to wake myself up from the 'dream'. I can see a confusing expression on the guy's face and I feel like puking right now because of the dizziness.

'Em..you okay?' 'Y-Yeah I'm fine, it's just you're the first one who's talking to me,' he gave me another look of confusion before going away. At the next moment, I felt myself losing consciousness. Around an hour later, I was on a wooden bridge and I saw a guy in front of me who was being shocked and he opened his mouth. I was disturbed because he looked hideous and I thought 'Wasn't that the scene in the painting?' Then he started running around and I got teleported back to the cave.

I've eventually learned what happened in the famous and ancient paintings and that meant a lot to me. Although when I was in 'the Scream' painting I almost wanted to vomit because of the dizziness that had caused me. It was kind of confusing as well but I sure had some fun during the journey at the Chinese ancient painting 'Qingning Riverside Map'.

The Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Tun, Valerie – 11

‘More than one and a half millennia ago, a monk decided there was something special about a cave he found an oasis in the desert of the Silk Road in China.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, taking more than caves, and spending their time creating sacred art and literature.

Time passed, and more than 1000 years later, travellers started taking other routes. Then we’ll go case in Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

Then, in the 1900s, local and international scholar–explorers rediscovered the caves. They gradually unlocked its breathtaking secrets. There were hundreds of current containing some of the world’s finest paintings, sculptures, and literature— including the oldest dated, printed book in the world.’

I read from the book in front of me. ‘Wonder why the Mogao Grottoes were abandoned?’ I heard Lori, one of my friends say. My friends, Lori, Cassidy and I were gathered in the library. I happened to stumble upon a very dusty book on one of the shelves, called ‘The Mogao Grottoes’, and my curious self couldn’t help but read it.

‘Well, Lori, the Mogao Grottoes were probably abandoned because the travellers found easier roads to walk through.’ A sweet voice replied. I turned around to see Mrs. Tang, the old librarian. ‘If I’m not mistaken, there is an exhibition of the oldest dated, printed book in the world mentioned, tomorrow.’ With that, Mrs. Tang left. ‘Hey Lori, Cass, do you want to go with me tomorrow?’ They both nodded their heads, and with that, I left the library.

The next day, we all met up at the exhibition, and we went inside, all of the different things exhibited were interesting, but the Diamond Sutra caught my eye. It was full to the brim with beautiful calligraphy and a drawing of different people and skeletons. I was so intrigued that i took many pictures.

At home, I showed my sisters the different pictures of the Diamond Sutra. They were both intrigued with it too, so we spent the rest of the night discovering facts about the Mogao Grottoes. It was a night to remember, and whenever I see the picture of the Diamond Sutra, I think about all the different things about the Mogao Grottoes that scholars have yet discovered. It is indeed a tunnel to a lost world in the past.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn Primary School, Yeung, Peony – 11

Long ago, a monk found a special cave in the desert on the Silk Road in China—the Mogao Caves. In the 1900s, scholar-explorers rediscovered the caves. They found the sculptures and paintings made by the pilgrims. It was like a tunnel to the past, they said.

What was so special about this cave? For all we know, the Mogao Grottoes could be just like any other ordinary cave. The monk might have been tired, and decided to rest in this cave. Once others heard about it, they must have thought, ‘This cave has to be special for a monk to rest.’ and as rumours spread, it became a temple for the buddha. There are 492 caves in the Mogao Grottoes, though no one can be sure.

A man walks into the caves. ‘Sacred, huh?’ he whispered to himself, ‘I guess this might be the right place after all...’ he has spent his entire life searching for somewhere like this, to find what kind of antique treasures lie. Cautiously, he walks. He steps toward the entrance cave—it is decorated with carvings and paints, though most have worn and faded. His sharp eyes scan the room for anything suspicious. Slowly, still, he walks.

Suddenly, he hears voices coming towards him, and he gears into panic. ‘...to the Mogao Grottoes. I’m sure you all know a little something about here, but let me introduce you to its background,’ a lady said. Phew, just a tour guide. It’s so easy to forget that the Mogao Grottoes is still a national park. They should pay more respect to it, instead of letting everyone trample on these sacred floors, the man thinks. He continues on.

As soon as the tour guide is out of earshot, the man quickens his steps. He stops every now and then to admire the intricate artworks on the walls, illustrating buddhas and monks and villages. At the end of a particularly beautiful cave, he sees it—in the tunnel, haloed in light, sitting with hands held up in prayer. So, without hesitation, he runs.

Bright. Too bright. His eyes hurt from looking at the light. He scrunches his eyes tight and rubs them. At least, tries to. His hands are not there. His eyes start to water, and he blinks it away. ‘Where...’ he says, but his throat is dry. ‘Relax. Inner peace, young monk.’ Taken by surprise, the man jumps. He can’t see anything, but he suspects that it is a test of sorts. He can still hear that mysterious voice echoing in his head, ‘Inner peace, inner peace...’. Once again, the voice said, ‘What do you want, monk? You are here for something, I can feel it.’

The man frowns, deep in thought. After a while, he whispers, ‘What is my purpose? What is my goal?’

It rumbles, ‘That’s easy. Your path, your choice. It is not set in steel, you know.’

‘But how can I be sure? I always feel as if I don’t know what I’m doing, like I’m running in circles with no point of end—’

‘Yet here you are. You came here for a reason, did you not? Come, monk, and I will show you.’

And so he did. The man walks out of the caves, heart feeling lighter than it ever has. What happened in the cave, we may never know. The Mogao Grottoes contain more than treasure. It is a place of learning and teaching. It guided many pilgrims when they prayed at the foot of the Buddha.

I guess what I’m saying is, there are many things you are unsure of, but sometime, anytime, you might know yourself a little better—you just need to find the right place.

The Tales of the Long Lost Mogao Grottoes Book

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School,

Chan, Hin-Kiu Max – 11

More than one and half millennia ago, when the Mogao Grottoes were just built, a monk who had gone rogue put a book with ancient evil spells in a secret room that he built himself. He casted one of the spells, only heard in legends and stories, in the secret room. The monk was called Snake Eyes, his spell cursed whoever entered the room. Legend says that one day Snake Eyes would be reborn and destroy the entire planet, and only one person would be able to kill him with a sacred sword beside his place of rebirth.

BEEB BEEB! The alarm clock just rang and Anthony was late for school. Anthony rushes out of the house and barely catches the bus back to school. When he arrives he usually meets up with his friends Jim and Fred who have been acting strangely recently like going to the toilet for a whole hour together! But today there is a field trip and guess where the class is going... The Mogao Grottoes! Anthony was bursting with excitement to go to the caves. He has been fascinated by the grottoes ever since his mother told him bedtime stories about the grottoes. Anthony shrieks with joy as he receives the news, but Jim and Fred are not at school.

As the class began boarding the school bus, Anthony noticed a green light shining in the distance which coincidentally was in the direction of the Mogao Caves. Anthony thought to himself how exciting it would be if this was in fact a gemstone from the caves with special powers to do something unspeakable! They finally arrived at the Mogao Grottoes and were greeted by a tour guide. Anthony was filled with anticipation until it was announced they are not permitted to go inside. His life was leading up to this very moment but it was ruined. Anthony weeping in sadness suddenly heard a voice, he did not understand what was being said but was drawn to it and left the group.

Anthony, fooled by the voice, was led into the Mogao Grottoes, blinded by curiosity and the draw of the voice, he followed it deep inside the cave. While he walked, the bedtime stories came to life. He saw rooms with chubby-faced buddhas and faded paintings, and also a huge buddha lying sideways looking into the void with his big stone eyes. He was surprised by how people from one and half a millenia ago could build these statues. He walked until he could not hear the voice anymore, only then he realized he was lost in a huge cave. Out of the darkness he heard two familiar voices, it was Jim and Fred! Fred spoke, "You know how the two of us are kind of suspicious lately, do you know why we spend so many hours in the toilet? We have infinite lives given to us by our master, Snake Eyes. We are his loyal servants. We were making the emerald for Snake Eye's rebirth through a portal in the school toilets." Anthony was stunned to hear the voices of his friends in the darkness. A green light lit up, and Anthony was scared and shocked at the same time seeing his friends hold up a green emerald the size of a human! Jim and Fred put the emerald inside of what looks to be a mold of a human. Anthony is horrified by what's happening, probably rethinking his choices that he made throughout his life. Then he saw at the head of the mold there were snake eyes. Anthony soon realized that the legend, the bedtime story is true, Snake Eyes was going to try and take over the entire world!

The emerald melted away stretching through every nook and cranny in the mold and the mysterious object began to take its shape. Jim and Fred started chanting a language Anthony did not understand, when they finished chanting a green coloured human figure, Snake Eyes came out of the mold. Snake Eyes in an unknown language asks Jim and Fred, "Did you bring the sacrifice for me to take complete form?" Jim and Fred nodded. As they stared at Anthony, he backed up to a wall looking for something to defend himself with and fortunately stumbled upon a sword. Anthony looked at this sword made out of gold and coloured diamonds on the side, picked it up and swung it around until he got the hang of it. Snake Eyes looked towards Anthony and nearly fainted since the very thing that could kill him was in his hands. Snake Eyes charged towards Anthony wanting to take the sword away from him. Anthony dodges the attack and jumps up prepared to deliver a lethal blow but Snake Eyes puts Jim and Fred up front making them take the blow. Anthony looks to Jim and Fred realizing what he has done, but still remembers that they have infinite lives and shrugs it off. Anthony picks up the sword and stares at Snake Eyes with fury. He makes a

pretty weird battle cry and with all his might stabs Snake Eyes in the hands. Snake Eyes shrieks with pain. Anthony takes a final sweep of the sword sideways to end the rebirth of Snake Eyes.

After catching his breath, Anthony looks at Jim and Fred and helps them get up. Snake Eyes' hold on Jim and Fred was broken. The friends used Anthony's map of the cave system to hurry back to the teachers and tour guide. They apologized to the teachers who did not even realise Jim and Fred joined them.

(Twenty years has past) Anthony went down to his basement to look for very old family photos or drawings, then on the wall there was a family tree. Anthony, curious of who his ancestors were, started searching until he bumped into a drawing of Snake Eyes on the tree.

Tales of Mogrotte Caves

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School,

Lai, Hei Yan Joanne – 11

"Ah!" yelled Qing and Ming. "Stop yelling you animals! The angels will hear you from above you idiots! So stop yelling for help!" shouted the evil god of aliens. Then the evil god put a spell on them, and poof! And that's all ancient history. My name is Josephine. I am the princess of China. I have 2 brothers, my brothers are Qing and Ming. They're sent to go to the Mogao Grottoes cave. I was very worried about them. They started their trip in the early morning. Every night I prayed for their safety and arrival, but it never happened. Finally, I can't take it anymore! I told my parents that I'm going and I quickly changed to my warrior outfit and started my journey to find my brothers.

Once I arrived, I went in there and saw beautiful art and sculptures. Before I go I went to the library and they said it's over 400 years of history! I went inside and immediately it locked the door. I took the box of matches from my bag and quickly lit up. I saw beautiful paintings and sculptures. They are all very distinguished-looking. I looked closer at those paintings and saw paintings that looked quite funny and weird. Suddenly, I stepped on a booby trap. Firebombs started counting down to blow up. Darts flew from one side to another nonstop. A few moments later finally the booby traps have stopped. I carefully walk past it on my tippy toes to walk to the next room. Once I walked into the next room, I felt surprised by the buddha sculptures. It was as enormous as the temple in Egypt. Then I saw prestigious art and literature. I tried to see the literature and saw haiku poems. It says...

Follow the blue line,
Then, find a weird special clock,
There will be two sides.

Choose a side and walk
Animals waiting for you
You'll find your brothers.

I thought, "How did this piece of paper know I am going to find my brothers?" I then followed the blue line and saw a very special clock. "It has an alarm clock function, you can fix the time and you can time travel." said a very adorable puppy. I suddenly realized I was talking to a puppy, but how it's possible? I freaked out and I passed out immediately. A few moments later, the puppy woke me up. The puppy picked me up with his cute little paws and carried me to a 5-star hotel for me to stay. The next day, I felt all woozy, it's like I'd been drinking all night long. After a refreshing bath, I started my journey again. "Wait!" I said. "Why will there be a talking puppy and a 5-star hotel inside a cave?" The puppy and I then followed the clock.

We then saw a gigantic lion in front of us. I quietly go behind the lion, but the lion woke up and roar in front of us. I saw a hurt scar from the lion. I took some holy spiritual water from my backpack and poured some into the lion. Then I prayed to God to heal this innocent lion. After a few seconds later, the lion is healed, the lion thanked me and joined my trip to find my brothers.

We walked and walked to the end of the 2 o'clock side and saw two roads. One in the left and the right. We chose the right side and saw a parrot talking to other parrots. Suddenly, the parrots looked at us started flying in our direction and preparing their claws like we're their lunch for today. The lion roared and the room went silent for less than a second. The parrots settled down and said, "This cave is full of mysterious things. You must be very careful! If not you will get hurt very easily. Here are so my items for you. This is an iPhone, a translator, tracker, and some advance spells all with an instruction book. Now off you go and good luck on your trip."

We went into a machine which the animals said it's called the elevator. I scroll through my new "iPhone" and I saw my brother's face and a weird-looking person. Then the puppy told me that is the evil god of aliens. "Now it all makes sense! I said," the technologies, the funny clocks and you animals talking! You guys aren't animals, y'all are just animal look-alikes but actually, y'all aliens! But why are y'all, good aliens? Aren't all aliens monsters?" The animals quietly exclaimed, "At first, our job is to sabotage you from finding your brothers, but in the end, we don't want to be monsters anymore. We want to be good aliens like the angels from heaven. That's why we didn't listen to our boss's orders." I didn't think aliens wanted to become angels. We arrive at our destination and I saw my brothers captured in a cage-like stupid bird."

Ah! Help!" yelled Qing and Ming."Stop yelling you animals! The angels will hear you from above, you idiots! So stop yelling for help!" shouted the evil god of aliens. Kapow! I immediately opened the door with my feet. I took a frisbee from the bag, its swing, and my brothers were free from the birdcage. We battled the god together even with the animals. Kapow!Bang!After a long time of the battle, still, the evil god didn't give up. Qing and Ming used 5 bows and arrows and 10 ropes to wrap the boss around. The animals performed a very deadliest spell. The animals then gave me the potion, I went up into the boss's arms poured the potion into his eyes. I quickly punched him on the stomach and seconds later the god has fallen and melted into a liquid.

In the end, my brothers and I went back home. Because of our courageous act, I became the new queen and the animals became angels now.

Journey Back to the Mogao Grottoes

HKUGA Primary School, Huang, Zi Shan – 12

“We are going to Mogao Grottoes for Monday’s field trip; your homework is to find information about the place and write a short description.” Mrs. Bone announced to the class.

After school, Amber went to the library. She loved Chinese History and wanted to know more about the Mogao Grottoes. She met Paul on the way. “Hi Paul, I’m going to the library to do research for the homework today, you should come too”. Paul hated history class, he always got a C, so he agreed to go with Amber, as she was an A student.

“It’s too hard!” Paul complained. Even though Amber taught him very patiently, he was still very confused. “Why did Mrs. Bone decide to go to Mogao Grottoes when my brother’s class went to Disneyland?” Paul complained again. “Disneyland is more fun, but Mogao Grottoes may not be as bad as you think.” Amber replied.

“My grandmother gave me this book about the Mogao Grottoes a long time ago, it looks interesting.” The book was like an ancient treasure, Paul carefully opened it and a bright flash of golden light shot out. They felt a mysterious power coming from the book, before they had the chance to think, it sucked them straight in.

“Where are we?” Paul asked in a raspy voice. “We’re in a cave.” Amber’s voice echoed; it was gigantic. Paul stood up and saw different kinds of buddha statues and colorful murals. They found the exit, it was fresh outside, when they turned around, the cave they were in was now hidden among hundreds of similar caves. The view shocked Paul, he thought it was the coolest thing he had ever seen! Amber cried: “We are in a book about Mogao Grottos! We should explore!”

Amber dragged Paul into another cave, he soon tripped on a piece of giant rock. Amber shone a torch on him to see what he’d stumbled on. She couldn’t believe her eyes... They had unearthed the ruins of an ancient temple! The color had faded over time. They made their way up to the temple stairs and went through the door. They found a big rusty bell in the entrance, Paul thought it was fascinating and rang it. The most enchanting noise came from it. Suddenly, they heard footsteps coming. A monk came around the corner and greeted them, “Welcome to Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, I’m pleased to finally meet you.” Amber and Paul were stunned, how could this monk be living inside a book?

The monk showed them to the grand hall, the floor was sky blue marble, the walls were covered with diamonds that sparkled like stars. At the end was a gigantic gold buddha statue, it was sitting cross-legged and wearing a golden crown, around the buddha were patterns made by emeralds and gold, it was a fascinating sight. There were three crystal chandeliers hanging from the towering ceiling. Amber and Paul were astonished. How was the temple was so aged from the outside, but so pristine on the inside?

The monk saw the shock and admiration on their faces, “Your grandmother liked this room too, Amber.” The children were shocked. “H—how do you know?” she grunted; her voice trembled. The monk laughed. “Your grandmother came here when she was just like you. She told me to be ready for you one day.” Amber still felt unsure but wasn’t so scared anymore.

The monk led them to another room. Inside, Amber and Paul could see a terrifying statue of buddha with many arms it sat on its throne wearing fiery red clothes and bright crown. The patterns on these walls were as blue as the ocean, as black as nightmares, as green as fresh grass after the rain, and as orange as pumpkins. Amber and Paul were amazed that the colors stayed so bright.

“I can’t believe that Mogao Grottoes still has a living Buddha” Amber mused. The monk sighed, “This is a book, Amber.” Amber felt a bit sorry for the monk, she had a crazy idea: “I was wondering...” said Amber, “if you know how to go back to the real world, you could come with us and see my grandmother.” The monk was delighted and agreed.

They went back to the entrance and the monk asked for the book, he murmured something to it. Paul guessed it might be a spell, like Harry Potter. The familiar flash of golden light shone out of the book, Paul and Amber felt dizzy and their vision went black.

There was a loud scream. Amber quickly stood up; she was still dizzy but could faintly see a woman standing in front of them. It was grandma! She walked towards her and explained everything. She took the message calmly and the monk went up to her, "Hello, old friend."

Amber and Paul left the two friends talking about old memories and went to watch television. "Breaking News! Statue in Caves of the Thousand Buddhas was robbed! The Monk of the Thousand Buddhas has disappeared! It looks like this." The picture of the monk showed on the screen. It was the monk at grandmother's house! A cold icy sweat ran through Amber and Paul. "Grandmother! There was a robbery at Mogao Grottoes! They are looking for your friend!" shouted Amber. "It's nice talking to you, hope to see you all again," said the monk, he sighed and disappeared.

On Monday, the teacher declared: "Students, this is the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas, you can have free time now." Amber and Paul rushed to find the Monk's cave. They searched for a long time. They found him as a statue; he had a bright smile on his face. Paul and Amber were delighted to see him again. "Oh, that statue was stolen last week, when it came back, there was something written on it in an unknown language," said the tour guide. Magically, they could read the message: Thank you Amber and Paul, please come back again.

The Mogao Grottoes

HKUGA Primary School, Wong, Sin Kwing – 9

My tools scraped against the rock floor as I shifted from place to place. “Hey boss, look what I found!” I turned my head around just to see my colleague Harry picking up a mirror framed with gold and strange carvings in it. He inspected it as if it was a fine piece of art, fiddling with it playfully.

I quickly shot him a look, and was all it took for him to snap his head around and study other things in the grotto. I found other things like old paintings, paper, sculptures, and even porcelain cups that were still surprisingly intact without a crack even after more than a thousand years.

As the other members of the team were still scraping rocks and stone, Harry was finally helpful and started collecting things like mammoth fossils, old collector coins, and even older coins that China used in the Qin Dynasty.

I was so snowed under with work that I hadn’t realised that the weather here was scorching hot even though we were in the middle of the desert, so I clapped my hands multiple times to call attention to all the others for a lunch break. All the sandwiches were gritty with sand and they were all soggy so there was no competition for better ones.

The grotto was surprisingly big, so there was no time to lose. More jewels, gems, and gold coins were laying on the cave floor. When I bent down to think why all this treasure was here, I saw something yellowish in a small cranny that was barely poking out to the sunlight. *Huh, what’s this?* I pulled out the thing and what I saw was breathtaking.

An...ancient scroll? Found by me? No way. My hands trembled to untie the old rope around the scroll and slowly revealed its contents.

‘Long ago, a diamond was found in a deep cave. Many have searched for this object but have failed, and this diamond was said to hold wealth and prosperity to its owner. The man who found this diamond was very humble and offered it to a rich merchant, who didn’t know of the diamond’s power.’

“So what happened to the diamond after?” I quickly widened the scroll to continue the text.

‘People said the merchant passed it onto more people, and it eventually passed onto a rich and powerful emperor, but he barely cared about his own citizens. When an unloyal guard saw the emperor inspecting the diamond, he told many people and passed a rumor. Many citizens were furious and thought that the emperor did not deserve such a good object, so a large group of people planned to steal the diamond. Alongside them was the guard who betrayed the king in the first place, and he gave the group guard armor so they could go in with disguise. People say they successfully stole it and hid it in a wondrous place... the Mogao Grottoes.’

My eyes widened at the last sentence and hastily wondered where that diamond could be in this grotto as I paced around impatiently. “Uh, maybe, I guess they wanted a good life so they hid it somewhere that would be good? Like, maybe they prayed or something?”

Bingo! They wanted a good life which they didn’t have in their own town! So they stole the diamond, ran here and prayed! But they hid it! So if they prayed... the only statues here are Buddha statues, so they must have hid it somewhere near a statue!

I ran around the grotto, looking near every statue, and even though I don’t really have many goals in life, I could say I was pretty determined to find the diamond. I didn’t say that I wasn’t really greedy for money though! But still, I’m not that greedy.

Already out of breath, I circled around the last Buddha statue on the last floor. I didn’t see any trace of a diamond anywhere. I threw my jacket off me in frustration, and continued the search. I quickly noticed a small hole at the pillar holding the Buddha’s feet and bent down. I didn’t dare believe what I saw.

I rubbed my glasses, and hoped that I wasn’t dreaming. I took a deep breath, slipped the diamond into my pocket and tried my best to handle this in a professional way. However, I felt like something was wrong. Terribly wrong. I suddenly felt like there was a red ball of anger and fury inside me, waiting to erupt at any moment.

“It should be mine! It belongs to me! I found it!” I reached for the diamond, then gazed at it with an addicted look. I felt like holding it made me feel different, sort of a powerful feeling.

“Hey, boss!”

“Harry?”

I snapped out of my trance and I’ve read enough stories to know what this diamond meant, but I can’t say these things exist. I felt like holding the diamond drives people mad and greedy, so I nodded my head to myself and put the diamond back in my pocket, gathered the rest of my crew, called it a day, and searched for a place where nobody would find it. Or at least I hoped so.

The Secrets of Mr. Buddha

HKUGA Primary School, Wong, Verena – 9

One day, my English teacher suggested that I participate in the Hong Kong Young Writers Awards (HKYWA) competition featuring the theme of Mogao Grottoes. Without any clue of this theme, I decided to dig into my school's library during recess to collect more information and inspiration before I could plan my writing. Before long, I discovered a chronicle in a dusty corner with exactly the Mogao history. Feeling like having hunted the treasure, I couldn't wait and one second later I was flipping through the pages. It was then that I discovered a yellowish piece of cloth tucked in the ridge between two pages, imprinted with something like a Chinese magic spell. Being a studious and curious student, I uttered the sentence word by word (thanks to my good grade in Chinese I did know them word by word).

It was as if in a legend that my surroundings started to shatter, and all clay on the walls peeled off like my mum peeling onions. I held my tears as I was courageous, and also because I had watched some films before with similar happenings. It didn't horrify me at all. What followed was a massive cave that resembled the illustration of Mogao Caves I just picked up from the book. I thought to myself, "What a wonderful way to travel without the COVID quarantine!"

The next thing that caught my eyes were the amazing paintings spanning all the way from floor to ceiling. Having attended many visual art lessons attentively at school, I noticed something strange. The paintings and patterns appeared in columns and they didn't belong to the same age: I could even tell there were scenes from Jurassic Park and then also Star Wars! I pinched my chin to make sure I was conscious. Something even stranger was that below every column, there sat an hourglass with fine golden sand trickling like glittering rivers.

I reached out to one of them as if I was being drawn to it. Indeed, that hourglass was the most delicate one in front of some drawings that seemed to depict the construction of Mogao Grottoes. At the moment my fingertip touched that little gem, the ground began to jitter, first rocking gently and then severely bumping up and down. I guessed that it was more precisely called an earthquake.

Having learned the tactics during earthquakes from my General Studies teacher, I instantly scurried up the stairs inside the cave and scampered onto the rooftop. All of a sudden, a flash of light was blasting out in the distance. I immediately took a step back and the next moment there was a gigantic stagnant Buddha in front of my piercing eyes. I wore a quizzical frown and gently closed my eyes.... and then I reopened. Nothing had changed, so I understood it wasn't an illusion. I once visited the Big Buddha on Lantau Island with my family, the only difference was that I was alone now, and no one could give me useful tourism advice.

Before I could think of anything else to do, an insidious villain emerged behind the immense Buddha. I didn't know if he spoke English but I instinctively screeched raucously, "Stay back!" The secretive villain might have been multilingual as he vanished at once, and that huge Buddha also disappeared at the very same moment. It wasn't really a total vanish because I found on the floor some shimmering, puny buddha relics I once watched on National Geographic documentaries.

I scratched my head hard. It was obviously too much for the day. When the villain reappeared furiously in mid air, I felt a bit upset because usually it should be my tea time for relaxation, not exclamation! "Give me those relics!" hollered the raging villain, and that moment I confirmed he spoke English and he knew imperative. Before I could figure out the real owners of the relics, these little stones rapidly turned into a colossal Buddha who powerfully grabbed the villain, incinerated him into ashes, and poured them into a brand new hourglass.

Next up was the Buddha giving me a lecture about his role as a time cop, and his traveling in time and getting rid of crooks and nuisances in mankind history, from the past to present and into the future.... Something like a janitor to keep the harmony and cleanliness of the world, but not to an extent that the Buddha would lose his job. To keep his track record for promotion purposes, after every mission, the Buddha engraved and colored the caves with stylish paintings of his heroic acts, and placed the hourglass in front as a holographic recorder which got triggered when someone touched it.

He explained everything, including the piece of cloth that cast me here, which was accidentally torn off from his robe he once bought in a flea market in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province.

Finally, I decided I had more-than-sufficient content for my HKYWA fiction, and I should go back to school before the recess ended so that my teachers and parents wouldn't panic. I politely asked the Buddha to tear off another piece of magical cloth, so that I could read the scripture decoration on it in reversal.

I was immediately tunneled back to my school's library, both hands still holding the chronicle, but now with extra understanding about this universe. That night, I made a little request to my mom that puzzled her, "Could you buy me an hourglass?"

A Mogao Odyssey

HKUGA Primary School, Wong, Yang Vania – 11

Trudging exhaustedly through the remote Gobi desert of Dunhuang, striding over sandy hills, a small shadow moved like an ant crawling on the floor. The shadow wasn't a Buddhist monk nor an explorer, but Yang who longed to steal the treasures inside Mogao Caves to make money to cure his old, weak mom's disease. He gazed across the exotic ground, took a glimpse at the map and sighed miserably, "Still a long way to go..." He followed the compass and kept walking without a groan, finding a way to the Sanwei Mountain in the boundless desert. Beads of sweat rolled down his shoulders, feeling worn out, he still insisted on climbing up onto the cliff for his destination -- Mogao Caves.

After countless hours, Yang finally reached the Mogao Caves. He stood motionless in front of the stunning architecture, and gasped like a goldfish in stunned disbelief.

It was a tall wooden building embedded on the rocky cliff, and the structures were built with rammed earth. Heaped up with layers, red ceramic tiled roofs with wide eaves and slightly upturned corners overhung the tan walls with intricate frameworks. The delicate wood carving surrounding the red pillars showed the gist of Chinese architecture. Moreover, in front of the building were antique pots covered with exquisite patterns. His eyes sparkled in delight as the desire to steal filled his mind, "These pots would make me tons of gold...." Yang glanced around, afterwards, he carefully placed the fragile vessels into his box. A tiny spark of light shone from a cave, it seemed like his selfish act was witnessed. "Phew..." he let out a sigh of relief, as he carried his precious treasure and continued checking out the Mogao Caves. To this very moment, Yang didn't know an unexpected adventure was awaiting him.

Yang was extremely agile as he started climbing up the building. He scrambled up the red pillar like a slithery snake, held his hand onto the wide ceramic eave, then pushed himself up and leaped onto the roof nimbly like a ninja fighter. At a lightning speed, he immediately hopped from one floor to another. Eventually, he reached the highest floor, landed and silently tip-toed into the mysterious cave.

Stepping into the cave, a pungent and moldy aroma filled the room. Despite the unpleasant smell, his eyes soon stopped and fixed on the captivating drawings on the walls, it was covered with vibrant and radiant colors, showcasing Chinese Buddhism relics and ancient patterns. Besides the huge, breathtaking painting, there were vessels and sculptures of the Buddha, the Guanyin and the Monk. His eyes bulged as the desire to steal those intricate artworks surged, "Imagine how much money I'll make..." He couldn't help but scanned around the cave, gently held a fine China, and placed it into his treasure box. There was a glint of sparkle in each sculpture's wise eyes. Their expressions and poses looked alive, as if every one of them were witnessing his terrible act. His legs felt like rubber as his heart was overwhelmed with guiltiness.

Suddenly, numerous vessels and artworks emerged from nowhere. Yang was totally drawn to them, he immediately grabbed as many treasures as he could, not bothering to hide his greed. He held them all in his arms, but when he attempted to place them in his box, a colourful vessel dropped onto the floor and broke into million pieces. Butterflies swirled in his stomach, as his heart beat like a hammer, "Uh oh! I am so clumsy!" A radiant beam of light shone, the mud on the sculptures cracked and peeled, they came to live!

Yang was taken aback, his face turned pale, what a legendary scene! A glorious golden Maitreya Buddha floated in mid air, as Guanyin and the Monk hovered beside her, all looking cross.

"Who...who are you?" Yang asked in great fear, trembling. Buddha answered in a loud and deep voice, "Who do you think I am? I am the Maitreya Buddha, the owner of the Mogao Caves!" Yang realised he was in severe trouble, so he begged. "We all witnessed your crime, you stole the pots before you broke in, then you stole vessels and artworks," Guanyin continued. Yang remained speechless, he was culpable for his felony. "At first, we thought you had a repentant heart, we trusted you will realise your misbehaviour. It was extremely disappointing that you not only didn't stop stealing, but further crossed our bottom lines by grabbing more and more. That's no difference to a thief." Maitreya Buddha sighed and shook her head, "We have decided to punish you!" "Oh, please! I

am sincerely sorry! I will return everything!” Yang pleaded, but it was already too late. Buddha held her humongous hands and mumbled a long scripture. Walls cracked, floor shook, all the treasures and the three gods in front of Yang disappeared in the dust, it was an intense earthquake! “Buddha...? Buddha?” he shrieked as he leaped onto the unstable podium, as bricks and rocks started crumbling. He realised he had to be a trust—worthy and kind—hearted person, so he dashed into the caves, returned the treasures and slid down the doorway, first things first.

As soon as he returned the valuable treasures, the earthquake ceased. The building stood nicely in front of him, everything was the same as before. The only thing that wasn't the same was Yang's heart, he was no longer a greedy thief, but an honest and trust—worthy person.

Five years went by fast, a book named “Mogao Cave Adventure” was published and it was one of the best sellers in China. That's by Yang who returned to his home and wrote a story book, full of wonders and magic, and sold over 600,000 copies all over China. Of course, he earned enough money to cure his old mother's sickness; but what he truly earned was the importance of honesty.

The Forbidden Mystery

HKUGA Primary School, Wu, Sun-Yu Alvina – 9

“We’re going to visit the Magao Caves this year,” Mom said excitedly. “As I always say, a new year is a new adventure!”

“We’re going to the Magao Caves!” said Dad.

Before I was born, both Dad and Mom were tourists, but they gave up being tourists to take care of me. That’s why they love to travel. We’ve got everything prepared, so pack your things and get ready! We’re going to the Mogao Caves *tomorrow*!” called Dad.

We have gone on an ‘adventure’ each summer, according to Mom and Dad. We’ve went all around the world.

“I rushed to my room and packed everything. Even though it was only seven p.m., I climbed onto my bed and fell asleep. Since tomorrow was an ‘adventure’, I decided to go to bed early and wake up tomorrow, nice and energized. I fell asleep, dreaming about the Mogao Caves.

“Alvina! Wake up! We need to take the train to Dunhuang!” It was Mom calling me.

“Okay!” I rushed out and got dressed. I couldn’t wait!

Soon, me, Dad and Mom got on the train to Dunhuang.

We reached the Mogao Caves. I gazed up at the majestic structure and gasped in awe.

“Inside, more than 2,000 statues are regarded as the greatest treasures of Buddhist art to exist in the world.” Dad told me.

“6000 tourists are allowed in every day. We’re one of the first people here, so we get to go in!”

I rushed in eagerly, my heart pounding as I glanced around. I saw many statues, each carved delicately. I could see every detail on the statues. The works of art were enchanting. I stepped closer to have a look at one of them.

“Dad! Mom!” I shouted. “Look at this picture!”

No one replied. All I could hear were echoes. I saw a sign hanging on a door. It read: “FORBIDDEN ENTRY”. I gulped in horror. Why would it be forbidden? Was something wrong? I was all alone. I tried to push the door open, but it didn’t budge.

“How did I get in, if I can’t get out?” I thought. I felt a cold shiver tracing my spine. I took a deep breath. “URRGHHH!!!” I shoved the door with all my strength. It still didn’t budge.

Suddenly, I heard a slight sound. It seemed to be coming from a picture. I walked closer.

“Mom and Dad?!” Mom and Dad were inside the picture!

“Alvina, you are a Chosen One.” The picture whispered. “We are not your parents, but your ancestors. We are your great-great-great...well, that’s too much. I’m your grandmother and that’s your grandfather.” A woman in the picture said. “Just call us Grans and Gramps.”

I was stunned. My mouth fell open in shock. “How did you get in here?”

“Can’t reveal that,” said Gramps casually. “How did YOU get in here?”

“I...I don’t know, I just walked through a passage. I guess I was too excited, and I wandered here. But I don’t know why I got in here. If it’s forbidden, how did I get in?”

“Forbidden!?” Grans and Gramps gasped in horror. “We forgot! This is the Forbidden Mystery! The Chosen Ones were sent here to solve a mystery! There are three riddles to solve. If you don’t get the answer right, they would die here! The past Chosen Ones are all dead.”

“What? Why am I chosen?”

“No time to explain! You’re being timed! Solve the riddles before time’s up!” cried Grans. She pointed to a wall with three riddles there.

I had 30 minutes. I read the first riddle. It read: *What lies in the middle of the Mogao Grottoes?* “Well, this place is filled with murals and statues and pictures,” I thought. “The answer would be...art!” Immediately, the word *art* appeared below the riddle.

The second one was: *How many lives do I have?*

“Whoever thought of the riddle must be talking about itself,” I thought. “How do I figure that out?”

“I know! It’s asking how many lives *I* have. I only have one.” ‘One’ appeared on the wall. I had sixteen minutes to solve the last one. *What lies at the end of every being?*

“What lies at the end of every being? What lies at...” Voices in my head screamed the riddle repeatedly, louder each time. I couldn’t think. I desperately tried to fight off those sounds bothering me. I only had four minutes left!

“What would it be?” I wondered. “Only four minutes! Focus, Alvina!” I took a deep breath. I felt a sinking feeling. Would I fail? I ignored the voices and focused. I was interrupted by a rumbling sound. One minute left! Suddenly, I saw a skeleton. That deceased person must have been a Chosen One. Wait! That was it! The answer was

death!

The rumbling stopped. The door opened. I turned to leave, but I heard a voice.

“Are you going to leave without saying a word?”

“Oh! Will I ever see you again, Grans and Gramps?”

“Maybe...in the future,” They shared a wink. “Goodbye, Alvina.” The picture of them gradually disappeared from the wall.

“Wait! But...why was I a Chosen One? Why...” But they were already gone. I walked out and looked at the cave for the last time. The cave disappeared. I smiled.

“I’ll miss you, Grans and Gramps,” I thought.

“Alvina!” I heard Mom’s voice calling me. “Where are you?”

“Here!” I followed her voice. “Mom! Dad! I missed you!”

“Huh?” Mom and Dad looked at each other.

I saw them secretly smile. Their smile looked exactly like Grans’s and Gramps’s smile. Aha! They knew where I had been (And also the trouble I was in)! Or maybe they were just happy to see me. Either they had knew about the mystery or they were simply feeling good, today was a really unforgettable experience. My head was still burning from the unanswered questions. But still, life is much more exciting with a few mysteries.

The Monk of the Mogao Grottoes

HKUGA Primary School, Yiu, Jodi – 9

It was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past, scholars said.

There were enigmatic, demented samurai defending the entrances to the Mogao Grottoes, keeping travellers from entering the caves. They were also manning some ancient things in a hidden chamber, but no one knew where, until one traveller discovered them.

One day, a traveller, named Aric, was hiking through the mountain trails when he suddenly changed course and stomped through opaque ravines. By instinct, he came upon the Mogao Grottoes, obscured by some well-placed branches, and covered with blood-stained corpses that were strewn around by ravenous, orange-streaked tigers. Aric's curiosity got the better of him and he batted the positioned branches away with his colossal machete, used predominantly for hiking, and entered the caves cautiously. Upon entering the caves, the traveller got evicted by some armoured, liver-spotted hands that snaked around him and threw him out. Aric landed hard on his back but leaped back up in his boots. He grasped his machete tightly in his strong grip, his veins tight to bursting. He attempted to storm the Mogao Grottoes again, but like the last time, the skeletal hands tossed him away. Aric straightened his collar, turned his clammy sleeves up and decided to go to more extreme measures.

Aric sprinted inside the caves and faced a platoon of sombre samurai. He stumbled back, and flattened himself against the wall, as the samurai encroached on him. Aric remembered his machete and brandished it at the samurai. The samurai kept their dead eyes on Aric, and he panicked, sweat trickling steadily from his hair into his ice-blue eyes.

Suddenly, the samurai halted and backed against the walls.

A shadowy silhouette appeared on the floor. Aric traced the shadow to a towering, lean Buddha with a colossal Urna in the middle of his forehead. The Buddha wore yellowish robes. He spoke in a resounding, rumbling yet husky voice, as though he had been crying, "I am the guardian of the Mogao Grottoes. What in Buddha's name are you doing here, plain, and lowly traveller? You shouldn't have got past my samurai. Guards! Remove—"

"My name is Aric, not the 'plain and lowly traveller' you refer to." Aric interrupted. "I was hiking through a mountain trail when I had the sudden urge to change direction and my trekking route. I headed towards your cave by instinct. Something was leading me here, and here I am."

The religious Buddha-like being nodded, almost in agreement. He gestured with his wrinkled hand at the samurai, and they marched back to their respective places where they manned the cave entrance from intruders.

"Come. I will show you what we are," the Buddha retorted. He grabbed Aric's machete and whisked it away, placing it with a CLANK on a steel tray. A samurai whipped the tray away. The ancient wheels spun clunkily as the guard pushed it away like a lunch lady serving sloppy food.

"No—" Aric countered, but the Buddha forced his finger to Aric's lips. Shaking his head, the Buddha took Aric underground, following the sounds of a distinct heartbeat thundering at the bottom of the endless passageway.

After what seemed like millennia, the Buddha and Aric finally reached the end of the tunnel. What Aric saw then made him widen his eyes as big as two gargantuan boulders.

There were a dozen of different compartments in front of him, each compartment containing a perplexing riddle printed on a piece of yellowed parchment. Beside each piece of parchment also sat a scroll which included the answer to the mystifying riddles.

The Buddha dragged compartments out, but every riddle didn't seem to satisfy him until one drawer with strange patterning seemed to interest the Buddha. The Buddha wrenched the drawer out with all his might, as the compartment appeared to be jammed, wedged between two wooden boards.

"Traveller named 'Aric', I sense logic and wisdom in you. If you can deduce the solution to this befuddling riddle, I shall uncover the many mysteries in this cave that many a scholar has attempted to discover, but failed momentarily."

The Buddha beckoned to the scores of skeletons hanging by tightly packed sand on the walls. Some had no heads attached or were severed from the ribcage. It was a chilling sight, though, and silenced Aric in a moment. The Buddha handed the riddle to Aric, and he snatched it.

"The needle soars, lost in flight. I see all, while you have no sight. What is the scenario?" Aric recited from the paper. After pondering the question for a moment, Aric roared in understanding,

"A god? No, a fortu— FORTUNE—TELLER. That's it! A needle soars in flight, and it flies into someone's eye, triggering the 'while you have no sight' line. The 'I see all' line is about the fortune-teller being able to see the future, while the person cannot see anything at all. There you go."

The Buddha frowned at the parchment as he rubbed his chin, and announced, "Yes, you are correct, traveller. Farewell."

The samurai grabbed Aric in their bony hands. Suddenly, a muffled voice rocked the caves.

“The Big Buddha has awoken!” The startled ‘Buddha’ concealed himself under a wooden table, but Aric had other ideas. He dived under the table and leaped back out, yanking the ‘Buddha’ behind him, and roared, “I thought you were the Buddha!”

“Where is the Monk?” the growly voice thundered. The Monk nibbled on his shortened fingernails and faced the wall in front of him. The wall crumbled apart to reveal the Big Buddha, clad in rich red robes, and dark bags under his eyes. Aric gripped the Monk firmly by the wrist.

“You had better do as I say now, if you want to make it out of here alive!” Aric spoke with unnatural calmness, gesturing the monk towards a small opening in the floor.

“Going somewhere!?” The Big Buddha bellowed, as he made a desperate snatch at the tiny bodies frantically clambering for the escape.

Long and Yan

Hong Kong International School, Charoensiddhi, Kornsuda – 10

There wasn't much to see. Through squinting eyes, dust and literature were the only things that Long could make out. The night had crept in, blanketing the environment in a sheet of blackness, with only moonlight and several stars to light the way for someone who was lost and alone. Long smelt the familiar scent of the cave, creeping into his nose and spreading warmth and the feeling of safety into his body. He felt tired as his tail slapped the mischievous floors of the Mogao Caves. The same ones that gifted him his power and brought him new findings every day.

Long was a dragon. One who lived in the Mogao Caves. It was a nice place for a little dragon to live, but it could've been better if his twin sister—Yan—could enjoy it with him. Yan was *almost* the exact opposite of Long. She was adventurous, while Long stayed close to their home in the Mogao Caves, so it wasn't long until Yan had raced out of the caves to see what the outside world looked like. Meanwhile, Long stayed at home, longing for a little company. He had been alone for a little more than nineteen years.

Morning came, filling the Mogao Caves with bright sunlight, which contrasted to the black-painted night sky. Long's eyes cracked open and he found himself where he had found himself every morning since Yan had gone—curled up with his little Word Book.

When Long and Yan were born, they were each gifted with a special talent. Yan was a shape-shifter, while Long had the power to automatically print every word he spoke into an ancient book which he soon named his 'Word Book'.

In the warm morning breeze, Long weaved through the many sculptures that the caves displayed as he made his way to the front entrance. With just one glance, Long thought there was something out of the ordinary about the beautiful scenery—the sky was too blue, like the color of the skies in fairytale books. Long paused for a second, then scampered back into the caves.

Dragons had the power to make food and water out of their very own hands. Even the hardest meals to cook were immediately served if a dragon made them. Long loved this special power that every dragon got. That morning, he merrily made a plate of juicy, boiled dumplings and some warm green tea.

As he was finishing the last dumpling off of his plate, Long felt a shadow looming over him. He whipped around and found a girl with shiny black hair and eyes, wearing a red shirt and a pair of yellow leggings. But the girl didn't shriek when she saw Long; she just smiled and left.

Very peculiar, Long thought, making his cup of tea and plate disappear—for dragons also had the power to make things vanish. Something peculiar about the girl made Long think of his family. Long thought for a while, digging for his lucky herb. At birth, Long had been given a lucky herb from his mother. He liked to rub it against his smooth, scaly body as he thought. Suddenly, it hit him.

The herb! The girl and Long had identical herbs!

That night was a stormy night. Thunder was rolling and raindrops were paddling in. Long thought that perhaps one of his cousins who could control the weather was furious and had made the sky erupt into a heap of rolling rain.

The next day, as Long was preparing lunch—a plate of fried soy sauce noodles and a cup of green tea—a shadow, once again, loomed over him.

"Long," the shadow whispered confidently. "Long, I've come back." It was the girl talking. The girl shapeshifted into a scaly yellow dragon, the color of shiny gold pebbles sparkling along the sidewalk.

"Yan?" Long asked, curious. "Yan, where have you been?" Yan slithered around and sat on the floor.

"Look, it's the Buddha with the instrument! And look, it's the Buddha in the fancy clothing!" Yan cried, looking at the many sculptures, and ignoring Long's question. Then Yan eyed Long's 'Word Book'.

"Long, how thick is this 'Word Book' of yours?" Yan asked.

"Thick, quite thick." He brushed off the little fluffs of dust clouds laying on the brilliantly large book. "How was the outside world?"

“It was beautiful. Birds chirped, mountains were emerald green, and the clouds reflected off brilliant waters!” Yan immediately blurted. “Do you want to see?” Long wasn’t sure. He took a deep breath and bowed his head just an inch.

“Let’s go!” Yan cried, pulling him into the outside world. Yan was right. There were hills as tall as the sky, and ocean water that was swift and beautiful.

“Wait until you see my village!” Yan cried, pulling Long towards a red painted sign, with the Chinese characters *Long Cun* in gold.

“Dragon Village,” Long breathed. “I’ve never heard of it before.”

“It’s a secret village,” Yan explained, taking him in to see the friendly villagers. Surprisingly, the villagers weren’t afraid of the two dragons racing into the village. A roadside stall owner, with a name tag that read ‘Li Ai’, tossed two oranges to Long and Yan. Yan easily used her sharp nail to rip the skin of the orange off. Long, however, struggled.

“Dig your finger in, and pull!” Yan said, popping the orange into her mouth. Long, after five minutes, had a nice, fresh orange. It tasted even more delicious than the oranges that dragons made. Then Yan showed him all her favorite places she’d been to in the past nineteen years. Yan’s favorite was a fountain with goldfish, displaying illusions in the water. At last, dusk fell, and the dragon twins went home.

Long was a dragon. One who lived in the Mogao Caves. It was a nice place for a little dragon to live, and it was even better because he could share it with his twin sister—Yan.

Angry Statue

Hong Kong International School, Ching, Tse Tin Christie – 9

Kim unlocked the front door, entered the living room, and found piles of clothing and large suitcases strewn on the floor. She saw her brother Tim sitting next to a large open suitcase.

Kim joined Tim on the floor and leaned over to whisper, “Do you know anything about this? What are they doing?”

Tim replied, “I think we are going on a vacation!”

Kim said, “Vacation? That sounds fun! Mom, Dad, I’m home!”

“Finally you are home!” said Mom. “We are going somewhere awesome! The Mogao Caves of China!”

Kim yelled, “Woo-hooooo!”

Tim questioned, “What? Where is that?”

Dad shouted, “China! They are famous! We don't want to be late for our flight!”

The flight from Hong Kong to Dunhuang City was short. After checking in their hotel, they got a good night’s sleep. In the morning, the family was ready to join the tour group and boarded a bus to take them to explore the caves.

“Good morning everyone! Here are some guides and a map for today’s adventure!” the tour guide announced with a creepy smile. A small group of tourists was gathering around the guide to listen to instructions, as Kim and Tim grabbed their matching hats. Mom applied some sunscreen and smeared it all over Kim and Tim.

Kim thought, “Ewww this sunscreen is sticky....and why do we need sunscreen in a cave?”

“Are we going to walk around this gigantic cave in one day?” inquired Tim in disbelief.

Mom replied with a giggle, “This is a large cave complex. It would take a month to see this area!!”

Relieved, Tim said, “Thank goddess! I would die if I had to see this whole cave in one day!!”

The tour guide explained the tour would be a half day of exploration and then a return back to Dunhuang City by bus. The group followed the guide into the dark cave complex. As they entered the cave, the guide turned to the group and said, “Welcome, you just never know what you might see in these caves!”

The main entrance to the cave was a massive series of wooden tiled levels. The structure was ancient and impressive! Once inside, the guide walked them past cave paintings of Buddha. The paintings were very colorful and detailed. The tour continued toward a large gold Buddha sleeping on its side.

“It-t-t-t-t’s so dark!” quivered Tim. He was getting more anxious as the tour moved deeper into the cave.

Kim joked, “Hey, look at that statue Tim! Imagine if it could speak and tell us all about his useless, sleepy life!”

Tim, Dad and Mom gathered around the large statue to take a better look. As the family gathered closer to the statue, the rest of the tour disappeared. The family was now separated from the rest of the tour group!

The family laughed and joked about the statue disrespectfully. Suddenly, its golden eyes opened, and it sat up and said, “HEY, Back off! How dare you talk about me like that! You are so rude!” The family froze in shock and disbelief. An ancient statue was speaking to them!

Kim gasped, “What is going on?”

Tim, in a high pitched voice, screamed “AHHHHHHH!, SOMEONE HELP!!!”

The family quickly glanced around and realized that they were alone! The tour was gone, and they were dealing with an angry statue that had come alive! Mom quickly grabbed Tim and Kim in her arms while Dad stepped in front to protect them.

Dad addressed the agitated statue with a shaking voice. “Excuse me, we didn’t mean any harm. We didn’t realize that we were being rude or disrespectful. We apologize.”

All around the family, the entrances and exits began closing off with large stone gates. They were now trapped in this chamber with the angry statue! The family had to think fast to escape! The angry statue had triggered the entrances and exits to be blocked!

The family ran toward one of the exits and pounded on the rock barrier. It wouldn’t budge. The statue stood up and started slowly moving step by step toward them with heavy golden feet. The family ran to try another exit. It was also blocked by a pile of stones! Extremely frightened, Dad grabbed a stone and tossed it quickly to one side. Mom, Tim and Kim followed Dad’s example and started grabbing stones and tossing them aside. The statue continued to move step by step closer and closer to the frightened family!

Then, suddenly Tim noticed a small stone statue to the left of the blocked entrance. He quickly ran over and grabbed the statue calling for help from Dad. Dad and Tim carried the statue towards the pile of rocks to help push them away. As they picked up the statue, Tim noticed a button hidden where the statue had been lifted. Thinking quickly, Tim pushed the button, and one of the other blocked entrances suddenly reopened! The large stone door had moved aside, and an opening was created.

Dad shouted at Tim, Kim, and Mom to run toward the opening. Dad ran to the other side of the chamber to distract the statue while they ran toward the opening. The statue changed direction and started moving slowly toward Dad as the rest of the family ran for safety through the opening. As he ran, Tim turned and shouted at the statue to distract it so Dad was able to run through the opening before the statue could grab him. As the family continued through the small opening and down a small tunnel, they could hear the statue moaning in frustration. The statue was too big to follow them through the tunnel.

The tunnel led the family back outside to the main entrance. Once outside and safe, the family was relieved. They hugged each other and decided to return to Dunhuang City immediately. They had seen enough and they learned the importance of never judging others!

Turning around, I look at my friends. There is Soo Yung Park, known for her amazing ability to hold her breath for a long time while free diving. The confident Vera, who climbs steep mountains like stairs. Quinn Jonson and Heather Jonson are twins and share not only identical looks, but a passion for hiking. My name is Ava Harvey, and I am the leader of our group. I blow my hair out of my eyes and trudge forwards as my party follows. Today our destination is the Mogao Grottoes on the Silk Road in China, located on the cliffs above the Dachuan River. They were discovered by a monk named Yuezun in 1900. A few scientists have gone, but they have only found little buddha sculptures, the sandy remnants of ancient art and rocks and dusty walls of stone with long cracks that seemed to never end.

Kkksss! The wild wind thrashes the golden sand grains and sends them flying everywhere. Peering into the dark, mysterious tunnels, curiosity sparks. I find myself running my hand over the cracked but smooth rocks, as if they were the most amazing thing in the world. “Woah!” Quinn gasps, tripping over a submerged mossy rock. I rush over to see if she’s okay, when a small glint of green catches my eye.

I head towards the rock and look closely, but it isn’t a rock! It is a finely carved jade dragon! I get a firm grasp on it and pull it out. The cave fills with a deep rumbling noise that is like the roar of a lion.

The sound intensifies, echoing and bouncing around the walls of the cave. Then, as suddenly as it started, it abruptly ends. The horrible sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach vanishes, but the cave’s job wasn’t done. Where the jade sculpture had been, an enormous trap door swings open.

“Should we go in?” squeaks Soo Yung, her usually flushed face now pale as snow. I give her a grave nod. “It’s okay, I’ll go first, and I’ll let you know what I see, ‘kay?” They all nod, too shocked to speak. I uncurl my handy rope ladder and begin to climb down slowly until I reach the ground. It’s pitch black down there and I grope around for my powerful torch. As the strong beam of light shines, I call out, “It’s okay! You can come down now!” One by one, I make sure that everyone comes down safely, and their feet have to touch the ground before the next woman descends. We all turn on our torches, and the combined light fills the whole cave with brightness. To our dismay, the room is bare. I half expected something extraordinary, something worth all the work we had put together. Vera kicks the wall with all her strength in frustration.

Rubbing her sore toes, she looks up as Heather squeals in excitement, pointing at the wall Vera just kicked. “Look, I think you found a pathway, Vera!” I look over and discover, she is right! A large tunnel is hidden in the wall. This is so thrilling!

We crawl into the tunnel single file, hardly able to contain our excitement. We find ourselves in a spacious room, filled with a giant mountain of gold coins, beautiful jewelry, art, bamboo scrolls filled with Chinese poems and remnants of past life. I smile at my friends, watching them try out jewelry and gaze at everything in awe. What interests me most out of all the other treasures is a pure gold, jewel encrusted crown that sits on top of the mountain of coins. As I grab it, the floor opens with a CA-CHUNK and as the howling wind in my ears muffles me and my friends’ screams, I find myself falling into the darkness.

Simone

Discover hidden tunnels with jewelry and treasure, bamboo scrolls(poems?)and remains of the past(find out how people of the past lived (in china))

Everything happens in one day, keep short, detail, not way too much. Keep short but still interesting

A Journey In Time

Hong Kong International School, Lin, Arianna – 9

I hear my dad's voice, I turn around but he's not here. My dad is a world-famous scientist, and right now he's giving a speech to other scientists on TV. How do I feel about this? I don't know, I've got mixed feelings, at least that's what I tell others. In fact, I hate it, I hate it that he can't come home, I hate it that he loves his science more than his family, and most of all I hate it that he cares about his stupid projects more than coming home to see me. Suddenly I hear him say something. He's invented a time machine? So that's what's behind our house in his lab. Maybe once his machines will be useful. A smile crosses my face, I think I've just got a way to get my dad's attention and possibly the whole world's.

I look at the towering time machine, bright orange and round with a silver metal streak. I inhale then exhale, trying to calm myself. This was something I never would have done. Before I could step in I looked at an assemblage of knobs and switches, I pressed a green button, but it didn't work, then I clicked a red button, nope. Finally, I pushed a pink button. To my surprise, the door to the time machine slid open. In front of me, I see an array of buttons. I'm not sure what to do, so I click every button in sight, that was probably a dumb move. Now I have a bad feeling creeping into my stomach. I knew this was the wrong thing to do, it's too late to go back. I open my eyes and see I'm standing in front of a cave. Not only that, but I see a person, carving on the stone, could this be the Mogao Grottoes?. I hide, fearing he will see me. "Shoot" I mutter, then reconsider and stay quiet, I'm terrified. The person seems to be aware of my presence; as he slowly turns, the hairs on my neck stand on end. I run back to the time machine, panting. Soon I click the next button but when I step out I'm still not in my dad's lab. I saw the cave where the person was, though now it has been finished. The man wasn't there anymore. In his place hundreds of pilgrims were bustling about the magnificent Mogao Grottoes, one making a sculpture, one was writing a book. When I looked down, I was dressed just like them, I wore a loose robe that went down to my feet, almost like a dress. When I speak my voice comes out different as if it was a whole new language, and soon I figure out the rest of the people aren't speaking English, though I couldn't quite place it. Throughout the breathtaking architecture, delicate and exquisite embroidery, and thrilling stories. One thing caught my eye, a colorful painting on silk. It was so beautiful, I couldn't help but admire it. I reach out to touch it. I put it on my neck and think "wow, this is so pretty" I loosen the knot on the cloth, almost instantly I see a book for all I know it's the first book to be printed! After a while, I decided to head home before it gets too late. I climb back into the chair and press a button to go home. When I press the button, I notice the cloth is still around my neck, Oh no, I brought something back from the Mogao Grottoes!

Once I get back, I see my dad at home and confess what I have done. I expect him to scold me or at least give me a lecture, but he just laughs "my time machine isn't real, it's a virtual reality simulation. And I designed the experience for you. Do you remember what day it is today?" "Ummm..." I reply, "It's your birthday! And the scarf is a present for you" I run up and hug him, "Thank you. That was such a wonderful surprise to see, and I learned so much about the Mogao grottoes

The Mogao Grottoes

Hong Kong International School, Sanchez, Margaux – 9

Once, a long millenia ago...

Hi I'm a monk, and I am going to tell you about my journey to The Mogao caves...

Once I was walking on China's Silk Road and I suddenly saw a cave, walking by, I stopped to take a peek so I walked inside and soil grains were falling down " PLOP! PLOP!". There were echoes while I walked. I heard the sound of bats flying around. I walked deeper inside the cave. I was starting to think that the cave was not as special as I thought it was, so I decided to get out of the cave.

The next day I was eating breakfast and I started to think that the cave was actually magical or even more interesting, so I finished my breakfast quickly and went down ,back to the cave on the Silk Road.

This time I went even deeper into the cave and then I saw something,something shiny peeking out and even other shiny things, and murals on the walls!

I dug until I saw the whole thing. I brushed off some rust and the dust and I put them back in the cave and not in my hands, and I buried them again because they were once someone's, I will let them keep their possessions.

Suddenly I thought about burying my own stuff in the cave since it might be a tradition, I'm not the one who's going to break it.

I ran back home and gathered some of my stuff and buried it. I was NOT going to put my favourite things in there!

Then I ran back while setting up some booby traps so no one would steal them or whatnot.

In The morning. I thought that other people should have a go at burying their stuff so I asked some others to help me make more caves so we dug and dug and dug...

And finally we finished. "Thank you everybody for your help" I told the people.

"You're welcome" they replied and walked back home.

"Everybody!" I shouted "we just made new caves for you guys to put your stuff in, so if you want to you can!" People started to stare and get stuff, and now people started to actually do it and my idea had worked!

Some caves were full by the end of the day.

"Can someone help find something to block people from taking the stuff people put in here?" People started to run in the windy and flaky weather.

After a few minutes, people were running up the hill. Rocks were flying everywhere as they ran and ran up the hill, they were carrying a velvet rope, protecting it as they ran, the golden metal was shining in the sunlight. Sweat was trickling off their forehead , they were tired and hot, I decided to go down and help them. I grabbed a side and we lifted it up and finally, we got it up the hill.

Then we went into the cave and saw...

Everything gone! All there was was traces of footsteps and

Someone running away! Someone went past the booby traps too! I started to follow the person. Once I caught up to the person ,I pulled off their mask and saw that she was a girl, she had blue eyes and long black, silky hair. I tried to get the sacks but the girl pulled it away and kept running away. I ran as fast as I could. I tried reaching the sacks but was just a millimeter away, I looked behind me and saw the others trying to catch up. I found a stick on the ground and picked it up. I used the stick to try and reach it but then it was too late, the bridge suddenly broke with a loud “SNAP!” But the girl jumped off right before it broke.

I remembered when me and my mom used to watch the Olympic pole vault event, they would use a pole and run then jump and they would see how long they could jump. I thought of doing it and thought it was a good idea,so , I walked back so I would have enough space to run then I started to run as fast as I could and then at the end, I used the pole and jumped I almost made it but, I was hanging on the corner of the ground. Rocks and soil were falling down and made a sudden thud noise. I climbed up and kept on running, the others passed me the stick and I caught it but it almost slipped out of my hand. I saw a few horses on the side and hopped on and started to ride it.

“today might be my lucky day!” I yelled in happiness.

“ Maybe not,” replied the girl. She started riding another horse. My horse went as fast as lightning and we charged as fast as we could. I used the stick to poke through the hole and carried it back to me.

Once I got back to the bridge I patted and left the horse and jumped back to the other side of the broken bridge.

“Hey guys can you come over and help unpack” I called them over and they came and helped. We unpacked everything and we did it all before tomorrow and before I needed to get back to my mom.

Finally, I returned home and went back to my mom and pretended that nothing like what actually happened, happened.

The next morning, I was thirsty, I drank some water, I saw the girl who tried to steal their possessions, I realized she was lonely like me, I decided that we could be friends. I walked up to her, and before I could say anything she said “I’m sorry for what I did”

“It’s okay,” I replied. “Want to be friends?” I asked. She shrugged, I took it as a yes.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Hong Kong International School, Yao, Brian – 9

One day, Adrian and his friend James had a vacation from school. Their parents decided to go to the Mogao Grottoes for the week. Adrian had thought that caves wouldn't be much fun to visit but little did he know, the Mogao Grottoes were different. Their moms and dads had found a nice hotel in Duhang, and announced that tomorrow they would be visiting the Mogao Caves. When tomorrow came, Adrian found out that the Mogao Caves were a cool underground system of old Buddhist artifacts.

"I guess the Mogao Caves may not be as boring as I thought they were." Adrian thought.

When they came in, the tour guide said, "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I would like to make sure that none of you wander away, because these artifacts are priceless, and I would have to take responsibility if one of them broke."

But James, being James, whispered to Adrian, "Hey, Adrian, let's get out of here. I want to see one of the murals."

Adrian replied, "But James, didn't you hear what the tour guide said? We would be in big trouble if we got caught wandering away."

James stubbornly insisted, "C'mon, let's go!"

Adrian hesitated but at last acquiesced to James's request.

After they broke off the group, James said, "Okay, according to the guide map, murals should be a straight walk then a sharp right. Then, we should be able to see the mural of King Sibi, a king who was so kind he gave his entire body to a falcon to replace the flesh of a magical sparrow."

Adrian said, "That is very kind!"

So the kids walked forward for some time, but then, just as they were about to turn, James's watch vibrated. "Oh no! My mom told me that they just had a roll call and we weren't there! What are we going to do!?"

Adrian urgently replied, "Quick! Put your watch somewhere. It has a GPS tracker!" So they ran back, ran up some stairs, threw James's watch there, and hurried back to the mural of King Sibi

"Look, there's King Sibi!" James said.

"Also, there's the butcher that cut King Sibi's flesh!"

"And there's the scale used to weigh King Sibi flesh!"

Just as they were talking about King Sibi, they heard a *scratch-scratch* sound coming above them. They realized they weren't going to be alone in the room.

Adrian whispered, "James, what is that noise?"

James replied, "I don't know! Could it be the ghost of King Sibi?"

The *scratch-scratch* sound got louder. And louder. And then, "AHHHH!!!!" James and Adrian screamed.

The scratching stopped.

"Whew!" Adrian sighed.

"Wait a minute..." James said. "It says in the guide that in the old days, robbers would pillage rooms and take things, then sell them for money! It adds that sometimes in the present day, people will rob these rooms too, as the older they are, the more valuable they are."

"Could it be possible that the scratching was robbers trying to get in?" Adrian asked.

Meanwhile, Bart and Harry were up on the surface, figuring out how to rob the mural of King Sibi without alerting people.

Bart said, "Harry, I heard someone scream down there. That place is haunted!"

Harry said, "Well, I'm going to get that mural by hook or by crook!"

Bart said, "Fine! Whatever you do, I'm not going down there! You go by yourself."

So Harry began to dig again.

Back in the caves, James said to Adrian as they hid in a corner, "I bet that our parents are already searching far and wide for us. They'll probably be here in about five minutes!"

Then, the *scratch-scratch* began again.

“Shush!” Adrian shushed James. “My gut tells me that the scratching is coming from thieves, who are above us, planning to steal the mural! Also, my gut is almost always right!”

“But then what about the time when you said the ice cream store was north, but it ended up being east? You said that your gut told you it was north!”

“Shush! Listen!” Adrian said.

They heard voices above them. They seemed to be arguing over who would get the larger share of ... something...

Suddenly, a chunk of stone broke off from the ceiling. A ladder dropped down. Two men climbed down.

Adrian said, “I was right! There were robbers!”

This time it was James’s turn to shush Adrian. “Shhhh!”

“James? Adrian?” A worried voice shouted.

Then, 4 people walked through the doorway.

James saw both of their parents. James’s dad said, “And who might you two men be? Workers, trying to move the mural? Guide?”

The tour guide rushed through. “Yes?”

James’s dad said, “Are these men supposed to be here?”

The tour guide looked at them carefully. “Absolutely not! They’re robbers!” He grabbed his walkie-talkie and said, “HQ, I am in Cave 275. Robbers present! Send reinforcements!”

The robbers ran to the ladder, but it was already too late. Adrian’s dad had blocked them.

Not long after, the police came and secured the robbers inside the prison outside of the Grottoes.

Adrian said to his mom right as they were leaving, “Can we come here next time?”

Her mom replied, “Sure, honey, we sure can.”

Lost in the Mogao Grottoes

Hong Kong International School, Yu, Soohyun – 9

“Bye mom!” I said before closing the door behind me. Oh, yeah, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Ping, and I am 10 years old. I live in Beijing. Today I am going on a school trip to the Mogao Caves. When I arrived, I was in awe of the caves. There was a bit of a building built in the traditional Chinese style, which was built into the mountain. I assumed that behind it was the entrance to the caves.

When we entered the cave, there was a musty old smell lingering in the air. On the walls to the side of us were paintings that were almost fully dissolved into nothingness. I could barely make out a painting of a monk. I was in such awe of the paintings and statues that I didn’t notice that I got side stepped from the group and after a while, I stopped to look around me. I started to panic, and ran back the way I came. But it was no use. I was lost. But something stopped me in my tracks. It was a door, an old fashioned Chinese sliding door. I wondered what was on the other side. But what if it was not safe? I thought. Eventually, curiosity got over me and I opened the door. I don’t know what I was expecting, maybe some ancient monster or a room filled with treasures from the past. But whatever it was, this room wasn’t it. It looked like any other room. Many rooms away, stood a figure that looked human. It was probably a statue, I thought at first, but the thing was, it was moving! It was facing a Buddha statue and it seemed as if it was praying. Weird. Once again, curiosity controlled my actions and steered me towards this person. When I arrived, I noticed a few things. First, he was a boy not much older than me and was still praying and it would be rude to interrupt. Second, he was wearing old style clothing. Third, the paintings around him were suddenly in good condition. So I waited for him to finish and then said, “Excuse me?” He turned around to face me.

“Hello... who are you? Where did you come from?” he asked.

“It’s Ping Chan.” I replied.

“You can call me Hongbian.”

“Also, I came in through that door.” pointing to the door I came from.

“You came in through that door?!” He exclaimed, sounding surprised “Umm... that’s weird. But there’s no time to think about it. You need to get out of here, fast.”

“Why?” I asked.

“This part of the Mogao Grottoes is in danger of bandits. I can help you get out.” He walked towards the door. I followed. But when we got to the door, Hongbian could not open it. I tried but I couldn’t either. I was both confused and scared. Hongbian then told me that we could go to a wise man called Master Lu for help. Hongbian seemed like a smart boy. And he was. He talked on and on about all the treasures here, such as the first printed book in the world. He also described a type of magic called ‘long mo fa’ (龙魔法) . He said that it could enchant, control, attack or be used as defense on anyone or anything. I didn’t believe him until we came to a room where a very, very old man was meditating. As soon as we stepped into the room, he opened his eyes and smiled with wrinkly eyes. Hongbian introduced me to Master Lu. Hongbian explained the problem with the door.

Master Lu nodded and said, “I know how you can open the door. You must go to Master Fen. She holds the key, but you also must give something in return. Like the Ring of Light that is heavily guarded with bandits. We can start by enchanting the knife in your backpack.” I had no idea how he knew about that, but I did hand him the small knife for lunch. He took it with both hands and whispered some words I couldn’t hear. After a few seconds, the small knife grew in size to become a sharp, long sword. He handed it to me.

Did he expect me to handle this?

“Go to the end chamber. Bandits are approaching from there and that is also where the ring is. Good luck.” Master Lu handed us a map. We followed the map and after a while, we stood at the end chamber. I held my sword tight and Hongbian pulled out a dagger I didn’t even notice he had. After a bit of walking I saw it: the Ring of Light. But it was heavily guarded. Hongbian whispered a simple battle plan in my ear. He would distract the bandits while I took the ring. So it worked. He approached the bandits and said a few things I didn’t hear, and the bandits charged after him. I came out of my hidey place and, with all my strength, slashed through the glass case and grabbed the ring. I put it into my pocket and darted

off to help Hongbian. I surprised the bandits with a few thrusts of my sword as well. Finally, we got away from the bandits and I was surprised I didn't have a scratch. We made the deal with Master Fen, who gave us the key. It finally opened. Just when I was about to leave, I mouthed thank you to Hongbian and was gone. When I stepped out, my sword shrank back to a knife. On the other side of the door, a school tour was still going on. When I was back with my school group, they thought I had been gone for only a minute, which surprised me. What an amazing adventure that was!

The Vision of the Mogao Buddha

Island Christian Academy, Arai, Milan – 10

Legend says, a young monk named Yuezun had a strange vision in the Gobi Desert in Dunhuang. This legend had happened in 366 C.E. When Yuezun laid on an oasis, he had a vision of one thousand Buddhas gazing at him. He was blinded by the glory of the Buddhas lined up symmetrically and glanced from Buddha to Buddha with glowing eyes. Although they did not do or say anything, he could feel the greatness of their souls. Yuezun knew he had to worship them for their superiority.

The Buddhas wanted a cave, which had millions of unique murals, paintings, and statues to represent their memorable importance. Before long, other monks had arrived at that oasis and had the same vision. For years, they built the cave and painted the walls of the Mogao Grottoes. After they worked hard, the caves were full of magnificent or even exquisite paintings and statues detailedly carved by the tireless monks. They dedicated themselves to pursue higher wisdom through their compassion. At that moment, their visions became a reality and the paintings the monks had designed were the most noble Buddhist art in the world. This is the legend my mother had told me.

Out in this dry, barren desert, I was running away from home. My mother had died after I turned five, and my father was extremely ill. However, since my family are the leaders of Xining, I must go to war myself. Still, if I even tried to go, dread would sweep through me like a tidal wave. I knew that if I had escaped, I could live the life I've wanted. But I didn't know that this journey would change my entire life...

I sprinted through the scorching desert, the aggressive sandstorm invaded the whole horizon. Covering my mouth, I struggled to take each step without getting dragged by the murderous storm. My long, silky black hair drenched in sweat. The blazing desert was baked by day and frosty by night. I was in a boiling valley full of rocky hills and coarse, rusty sand. I could almost taste the heat of the desert. The wild wind howled ferociously whilst the reckless sand tried to shove me away. My heart pounded, I felt as if my entire body was numb, paralyzed. Cold sweat trickled down my back, my pulse started to race. I wanted to go home. Yet, my instincts screamed to me to continue. I fought back the urge of anxiety as I desperately tried to find a shelter for the night.

Still sick in the stomach, I kept walking. Out of nowhere, the merciless sandstorm uncovered something. It shimmered in the sunlight, and I could make out buildings in various sizes. Of dunes there were none, only a long, wall-like stretch of sandy foot-hills stretching away to a hazy distance eastwards. The grottoes were covered in luxuriance. It was the Mogao Cave. Some may describe these dwellings as odd or unfamiliar. However, to me it felt like I knew my mother was right beside me.

A drop of tear slowly dripped down my face. My pulse had stopped racing. Instead, my face softened, and I noticed that the sandstorm had gone away. The gentle breeze tickled my cheeks as I gazed silently at the cave. I thought back to the prominent legend my mother had told me, ricocheting in my mind. I suddenly felt weak after the long hike. Even so, I stepped into the cave.

It was pitch-black and far from empty. Although they were clearly ancient, they were filled with heavenly, artistic murals all preserved in these forgotten rooms. I walked around the place to find a Buddha, but it was nowhere to be found. Moreover, I felt nauseous. Colours started to fade. I couldn't take it anymore. And that's when it happened. I—

It was silent. I felt cold as if I were in a mystical heaven. Like a dream. I didn't know where I was or who brought me here—.

“Ju,”

I let out a gasp. I was startled by this voice. It wasn't a voice I could recognize. Not my dad, and obviously not my mum.

“Ye... yes?” I spoke. My heart missing a beat, thoughts of consequences urged me on. Was I in trouble? Did I do something wrong?

“Can I... help you?”

The voice did not reply, which made shivers tore down my spine and rack my body. I clenched my fists and I tensed my body tight. Then finally I heard something.

“You need help,” the voice said.

I suddenly released the tensions and slowly turned my head to reveal the voice. I expected a person but no, it was not. I saw something twinkling in the dim light. Something magnificent. With a closer look, it was no other than a Buddha. The dignified serenity of its features, the simple yet impressive gestures, the grateful richness of its folds. Just perfection! I quickly kneeled down onto my knees and bowed.

“How do you know me?” I asked.

“I have been watching your whole journey here,” the Buddha replied.

A look of puzzlement spread across my face, as my eyes bulged out of my head.

“Follow this spirit, and you will find a solution,” said the Buddha.

I took a glance at it. It was so whimsical, delightful, and humble. It started to move in different directions.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

A few moments later, I saw a tiny speck of colour. There were paintings of... me.

I glanced at every painting on the wall. They were all so beautiful and so... familiar

“Your mother painted these before you were born,” the spirit said.

“What?” I said, astonished. “But how?”

“She often came to this cave and wondered about one blank wall. After years, she finally decided to paint on it. She was in the same situation you are in now when she was young, and she wanted to paint the whole story of the war so that you won't make the same mistake as her,” the spirit explained.

All the facts raced through my mind.

I looked carefully at each painting. Then I finally realised.

“Her people suffered because she ran away?” I guessed.

“Precisely,” the spirit replied.

I let out a long sigh, “What have I done?” I said to myself. “Thank y—.”

The spirit had vanished. I gasped.

Suddenly, I felt everything coming back to me. A drop of water fell onto my face. Was this all a dream? A vision? Then I remembered everything that happened.

Strong confidence ran through my body. I was the only one who could lead my city and not let my people suffer. My selfishness was going to destroy my citizens. This was my chance, (my only chance) to save Xinging.

I took a deep breath and stepped out of the cave.

Meeting A Buddha

Island Christian Academy, Chan, Avelin – 10

The winds howled savagely. Sand dunes were towering over the Mogao Grottoes, blocking the blistering rays of the sun. Some tried to journey on, and others cowardly quitted. Yet, Arya saw adventure! Although she knew she might not make it, at least she would try. But her Dad wouldn't allow it. Honestly, there were so many hidden things and mysteries waiting to be uncovered! The only adventures she went on were the ones Dad told her about. Her favourite was the Red Stone. A legend about an enchanted stone that would fix everything with its power. But never mind that. It wasn't real.

Obviously.

If it was, it would already be discovered by someone else.

She knew she would never be able to set foot outside the caves. Not under Papa's watch anyway. Arya thought her Papa's rules were like a giant wall, blocking her from all the things happening around the world. She hated the caves.

When Arya was younger, her Dad told her that the Grottoes were the safest place in all of Dunhuang, but Arya wasn't looking for a safe place to stay. She wasn't looking for a buddha to paint, she wasn't looking for a stove to cook on, she wasn't looking for floors to sweep. She was looking for an adventure! She had spent the first 11 years of her life living in the grottoes. And Arya was dying to know when she could finally leave this place. Arya longed to be an explorer! One that would become a hero.

"Hey Ari, why that dull face?" asked her Dad, walking in.

"Leave me **alone**," sighed Arya.

"Why should I?"

"Because, Mom would!" she snapped, shooting a blistering look at her dad.

Her Dad let out a sigh. "Ari, I know, your mother——"

Suddenly a soldier came running out.

"General! There's enemies outside the Caves!" he cried

"Soldier Xiyu, how did this happen?" Arya's Dad cried

"I don't know, one second it was all sand, the next moment, they already appeared! We're overrun, Sir! If you don't come out now, our men will not be able to defend the grottoes.

"I'll get there in a second."

Soldier Xiyu bowed his head with respect and rushed off. Arya's Dad turned to her.

"Ari, listen. I want you to find a safe place to hide. Run. Now!" he urged desperately.

Before long, Arya found herself running into a room. Dust was dancing everywhere. The room was almost empty, only a few cobwebs and holes decorated the walls. A carpet laid on the floor and Arya stepped on it. Suddenly, she tumbled down the tunnel and landed on hard ground. Then she realised. This carpet was a tunnel that led down to a cave! A *secret* cave.

“Hello? Anyone here?” she echoed.

Silence.

She sat on the ground, blinded. Then, out of the corner of her eye, a small gleam ignited the dark scene. She looked around her. *Was the light coming from a candle? Maybe she could use the candle to find a way to get out!* Nervously, Arya followed the dot of light. As she moved nearer, the light seemed to fade a little. Then she stepped on something fluffy. A earsplitting yowl broke the silence. Arya froze. *What was that?!* She turned her head to the direction of the light. It was completely gone by now.

“That’s weird,” she muttered. “I could’ve sworn that I saw that light shining somewhere.”

Blindly, she stuck out her two hands to find out what she stepped on. She felt something wooden and something that seemed like a... furball. Suddenly, a sharp glow pierced her eyes. Arya jerked her head away. Slowly, she turned it back. *Oh! So the light didn’t come from a candle.* It came from an old wooden box and next to it sat a sand cat! The cat circled around Arya as she opened the box. Suddenly, eerie, magical mist came pouring out of the box and a buddha made of rock appeared. Its chest was rising and falling, as if it had lungs and an actual heart. But, certainly it had to be her imagination. Obviously. Maybe the darkness was already making her go crazy. Arya rubbed her eyes and shook her head twice, just to be sure. When she opened them, She saw a *giant* toe. Arya looked up. The buddha was five times as tall as Arya now! Its stone-like body seemed even more human-like now. Its skin seemed to be shining like the rays of the sun and a mystical sensation seemed to surround it.

Arya fell to her knees and began coughing up all the things that were respectful to a Buddha

“O great buddha—erm, it is a pleasure—uh... no, *honour* to meet you.” she said, struggling to remember.

“Arya,” boomed the buddha. “I see you have some troubles going on in your mind. Let me take you out of this secret cave and go back into your reality.”

With a flash of light, Arya, the sand cat and the buddha disappeared.

They appeared on the battlefield, as Arya stepped on the bloodstained ground, she heard the buddha’s voice ringing in her ears.

“Arya, take this sword, find the red stone and plunge the sword in its heart. Then all your troubles and this battle will end.

Arya nodded and a golden sword fell in her hands. Arya dodged, dived and ducked everything with her sand cat padding behind her. She saw a big, red stone through the clearing! It was old and rusty. *Wait, wasn’t that the red stone that appeared in Papa’s stories? How on earth did it appear here*

“Oh well,” she breathed and clutched the sword tightly.

Arya’s legs ran as fast as they could and she plunged the sword into the stone. Beads of sweat trickled down her cheeks. Suddenly, all the enemies started fading away.

The soldiers started murmuring. “What happened?”

As her father limped up to her, Arya smiled.

“A...Ari! What happened? How did they all fade?”

She smiled, “He did all this. The Buddha. You should thank him. Not me.

Her Dad hugged Arya tightly.

“I...I can't believe it, you stopped the battle! As a reward, I think... I think you should be free to journey wherever you want to go from now on.”

Arya hugged her Dad back. "Thank you!" she whispered.

"Three cheers for Arya! Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray!" cried out the soldiers.

Arya grinned. She had never felt happier in her life.

Then on the highest floor of the caves, a buddha sat there calmly and smiled, his magic had worked. Peace was fulfilled to his people. No more fighting, no more killing. His job was done. And then the buddha started to fade away into shining pieces of golden sand, accompanied by a gust of magical wind, flying towards the setting sun.

Going Away

Island Christian Academy, Chu, Kasley – 10

“No! I don’t need your help, I can do it myself!” shouted Yuanlu.

“What happens when you get lost?!” said Yuanlus’s mother. He always had a cheerful face. But then, he stormed out of the living room and went to his room throwing his pillows out of his bed. There was a knock on the door. *Knock knock*. Yuanlu went to his door standing beside it. “Come on, sorry. I just don’t think you’re independent!” said his mom.

Tears drenched his face. He was torn by the fact that his mother did not think he was responsible. If he would even say a word, his eyes would swell up with tears.

‘Go... I promise...’ Yuanlu heard a voice that was not his mother’s. It was too deep of a voice to be his mother. He heard it outside slowly fading away.

Then he walked outside and he opened the door. Instantly, his face turned pale. Shivers ran across his body. The cold breeze made him white, almost paralyzed. He quickly wiped his tears while still sobbing. He was devastated. The lights turned off. It was 12:00 pm. Owls were howling, a bus went by and a gigantic—grey fog swept by. The lights were flickering at the front porch, little drops of water fell down making a silent splash on the hard stone.

Chapter 2

As he was walking, he found a bus station. There were bats staring into his soul. There was a dark alleyway right beside the station. He stared at the rustic clock. He could hear the tick every second. He sighed. The lights were going to turn off in 10 minutes, the sign said. He saw a bus waiting for him, so he entered.

“Where am I going?” he asked the bus driver while looking around. The driver stood silent. It was noiseless. Yuanlu was somewhat affected by the slow chirps of the crickets in the bushes.

“We’re here in Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Gansu, China,” said the driver.

“No WAY!!” shouted Yuanlu. It was his dream place to visit. He would fight with his mom just about going.

Yuanlu had never been here. He didn’t recognize it, but somehow he found a map. A strange guy gave it to him and he asked, “Where are you going?” in mandarin while giving more maps out.

“Uhm I’m going to Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Gansu” replied Yuanlu.

He was frightened and then he ran away. The guy who gave him a map shrugged.

“Good luck!” shouted the man. Yuanlu ran as fast as he could. He was running away from the newspaper guy chasing him. his heart was pounding, his heart rate rose and he thought to himself, what if it would happen? He quickly erased the thought from his mind and ran as fast as he could as if someone was chasing him.

He sat down while he was out of breath. Sweat was dripping down him.

He sat up from his chair and started walking to the rental camel shop.

Yuanlu rented a camel and rode it to the desert. It turned to night, the wind was howling, you could hear it swaying all around. Suddenly, a gigantic sand storm blew, it was golden—colored. The sand was everywhere like it was a sea. He tried to find cover but he failed. His hand was covered in a cold sweat. Sand kept on blasting powerfully like it was murderous.

Chapter 3

He woke up feeling sick and dizzy. He wondered to himself, what happened? Then he got up and looked around. “Where am I?” He saw multiple doors wondering which one to go into. All the doors were red. They were laid out in a straight way. He walked inside, dread crept around his body. He found a flashlight on the floor. He wondered if someone was here before him. Yuanlu thought that it seemed like the person ran away leaving their flashlight on the floor. He looked, already feeling the horror. Then he walked away, disappearing into the darkness.

He turned it on and off because it was not working. The walls were stone—like but at the same time, they felt like mud. Paintings were surrounded by him. They were laid out like a forset, massive amounts of buddhas. If you would touch them it would be hard as a rock and cold as an ice cube. The texture was rough, it had tiny holes that would make a bad texture. He was 14 so he could understand the paintings. Yuanlu didn’t want to go that far but then he

looked back. He had a feeling that he should go deeper... Then he followed his guts and took a big gulp. "Okay, I can do this!" He still went even when his heart screamed no. Horror struck him. He stopped. He had a feeling he was going to regret this. He promised not to go but he disobeyed his mother and left.

He kept looking around, Yuanlu thought he was going in circles but he didn't realize that he just kept ongoing. He brought an axe in case. He ripped open paintings. Yuanlu had found something shocking...

Chapter 4

It was a library. The walls were moldy, and it was dark. The library was filled with documents and other stuff. There were about 1,100 scrolls and 15,000 books that were written with very little information. Yuanlu kept on digging and coughing suffering to go further. Then he found something, a book which was the oldest book in the world (diamond sutra) The pages were ripped into different pieces. After he held it he felt a shortness of breath, his heart was pounding and he almost couldn't breathe... He felt an urge to get out, he ran but it was too big...he couldn't get out. Then he fainted on the floor.

He woke up and started looking "Where is it?!" shouted Yuanlu. He thought the buddhas could help him, but it was just his imagination. The buddhas glared at him. Yuanlu jumped in surprise. He tried to talk to them but they sounded like they were just mumbling. "How can I get out?" asked Yuanlu. Then there was not a single sound.

"Left," said buddha.

Yuanlu gasped. "Any more?" asked Yuanlu. He wondered if he should just keep on going left.

"But should I?" asked Yuanlu, "Okay then!"

He thought saw the same tunnel, the one where there was a blackness that never ended. He entered. Yuanlu woke up on the side of the street on the walkway. Yuanlu's mother saw him and rushed and started sobbing out like she had lost someone. He woke up, brightness flashed into his eyes. 'Mom?!' said Yuanlu.

'Yes it's me!!!!' said his mom.

Yuanlu walked into their home crying to his mom while apologizing. He learned to be independent and trust his mom.

Invasion of the Cave

Island Christian Academy, Eyres, Paxton – 10

It was the last day of the school year, Luke and Ella Foxin were just saying their goodbyes when dad showed up with exhilarating news. “Hey guess we need to get to the plane, I’ve packed up already, hurry up!!” Dad said with excitement as he pushed through the crowds of hugs and kisses.

“Say what???” sprung Luke.

“We’re hedging for the gobi, besides you’ll make new friends at lightning speed.” Dad added, hoping for the best response from his children.

The children hopped on the plane yet again expecting different for the journey. As well as that it was long and the boardman seemed to spread for miles but Dad’s new invention was worth the fall for it was to an answer to prayer, you see it was a gadget of the heavens, it was a water bottle that could generate water out of the condensation in the air.

“Where are we?” asked Ella as she watched the sand flow pass the side of the jeep blocking the nearly impenetrable glow off the horizon hours later.

“Well we’re at our new home.” replied dad.

“Wu...wu-wu-wate, that’s our new home!!?” Luke excitedly questioned as he astonishingly guessed upon the oasis of a mansion in the middle of the desert.

“O, right that’s the gift from the Chinese government for letting them be the sponsor of the amazing water bottle.” answered dad.

Chapter 2: The mansion

As soon as they entered the dazzling mansion they began to make their acquaintance with their servants and maids. But suddenly dad’s phone began to ring. “Hello sir, Mr. Foxin speaking.....ok.....ya...all of them?....ok.” he hung up. “Alright guys, it looks like I need to go to an urgent meeting but John will look after you.” Dad continued and winked at John.

“All right lads we’ve got, we have a lot to do and I might as well take you someplace special.” added John.

“Ok fine with us dad,” replied Ella.

“Same here dad, off to your meeting.” announced Luke and off they went.

Chapter 3: The cave

John led the children to their room. “Here it is, your room but I’m taking you guys somewhere else so put your stuff down so we can go.” John told the children and so they did.

Soon the children found themselves in the Jeep once more. “So were we headed?” Asked Ella

“Well I’m not Chinese.” responded John

“So?” cried Ella

“Well me and my brother Joe (the diver) are Israeli and we are the descendants of Mary, Joseph and Jesus.” stated John

“And would you like to meet the others?” asked Joe

The jeep pulled up to a certain rock formation with a small opening. “Here.” said John

The group approached the cave and after a while of searching through it they found a village of people living amongst the grottos hiding behind shadow of the polarising art of the monks. The people were set into tribes by either descendants of Jesus or versus disciples. The village had what seemed to be a magnificently clean water supply which roamed the cave full of endless miles cave to discover.

Chapter 4: Descendants of the holy sceptre

For the rest of the day the children introduce themselves to the hidden city hiding from the monks of the Mogao caves. The people of the cave knew the truth of Jesus, loyal to it and so Luke and Ella would too.

It was around 6pm when John gathered the children. “We must go now, but we may return tomorrow with supplies for the village.”

So suddenly while the party left the cave a monk spy watched and reported the sight to his leader. But by mistake trespassed against the group of monkeys by mentioning god's name and was killed before he could tell the leader the location of the city. Thus a spy from the city called Conner killed them all and covered the gap between the caves of the monks.

Followed by the treacherous decision of Conner the monks in rage killed Dad and all the servants who had come with him.

Soon it was time to return as promised by John yet when the children retired part of the city had already been executed. “What has happened?” John and Joe continuously asked the people until finally their sister J.C. told them of the story. “Conner was rejected and executed by the city last night and so was mother and father for they believed in forgiveness, but of course only the elderly were included for the vote and even the entire descendants of St. Thomas were included too.

“Oh my we must go and inherit the invention or else the Chinese will!” exclaimed Ella.

Chapter 5: End but yet the beginning

The children did just that after 20 years past and they eventually opened it to the public sponsored by the villages profit. And as for the city it became a museum of biblical history founded by John and Joe. As for the people of the cave they would soon find themselves in refuge hiding amongst the world scattered throw out it.

However the monks blinded with rage, trapped because Conner closed the hatch managed to infiltrate the museum and eventually after thriving through the caves now hunt the people still waiting for revenge on the descendants of Jesus.

The Historical World of the 1000 Buddhas

Island Christian Academy, Laight, Joshua – 11

The glorious sunshine from the towering sun glazed upon the Mogao Grottoes, like a god shining its cleansing eyes. A monk called Le Zun saw this beautiful sight. It cured his mind from the dark spirits hunting him. In this moment of clarity, he received the divine inspiration from the mystical buddhas that had appeared to him...

It was once just a barren cliff with arid and dense layers of sand and above it a bone dry top, as a result a monk called Le Zun forged and shaped the mystical Mogao Grottoes because it was his destiny to do so. The one thousand buddhas inspired him to save the barren cliffs from its misery. Therefore, the mostly dry be grottoes were, I had thought of the amazing statues and majestic paintings inside the Mogao Grottoes but the first challenge of getting to the Mogao Grottoes is getting through the Gobi Desert, the harshest desert in all of China where the winds are the strongest and the sandstorms are barbarous and deadly.

After I had arrived at northwest China by boat and train, I borrowed some camels from the locals, then when I got my stuff ready I had settled on my journey to the Mogao Grottoes. Then I had reached the desert so far there were no sandstorms but since it was night it could get pretty cold. Luckily I had brought a thick jumper to keep me warm otherwise I would have frozen to death.

Halfway through the desert just a few more miles until the Mogao Grottoes, a humongous sandstorm, which was as hot as a raging furnace and could stretch the whole desert with its furious, impenetrable sea of wind and could blast anything in its trail, hit me! I had to hide behind a huge boulder so that I wouldn't be covered with sand or get blown away.

Whilst I was stuck in a sand storm behind a huge boulder, I drank some water trying to wait out the storm. Then after twenty minutes of waiting around I had got tired of waiting so I chose to go out and fight the storm. It was tiring but I had made it to the Mogao Grottoes!

Once I had arrived at the outstanding mogao Grottoes it had seemed still intact after 1500 years of its presence. I wonder how they made the grotto still smooth and pure after so long. Its walls were rocky and jagged.

Then when I went inside the Mogao Grottoes it was filled with purifying painting, the colours really fitted all of the paintings in the Mogao Grottoes. Then There was a room that had lots of buddhas and ... wow! The room had a gigantic and towering buddha. It was the height of the whole grotto but ... all of a sudden the ground started shaking, I had seen the gigantic buddha move one of its hands ... Am I dreaming? Out of nowhere the buddha's other hand had started to move, after that the hands started to chase me as if they were trying to grab me so I had no choice but to ... run!

As I was running to the exits, all of a sudden all of the exits had got blocked off because of all of the rubble that had fallen from the walls and ceilings from the shaking of the ginormous buddha ... I was trapped! I had nowhere to go!

When I had gotten stuck in the room with the ginormous buddha it grabbed me I was shocked with fear. Will it kill me?! A shiver had come down my spine. What were the possibilities of what the ginormous buddha will do to me? I had to do something but ...I was too late, a stone door had opened up out of nowhere, is this a corridor that the ginormous buddha will send me to?

Then the ginormous buddha placed me inside the hidden corridor, so I walked forwards into the corridor and all of a sudden the stone wall started to close up behind me! I guess I will have to find another way out of this grotto. Once I had walked for about 5 minutes I saw a door straight ahead

of me so I rushed towards the door so then I could open the door and see what was behind it's remains.

Once I had reached the door I tried opening it but I was not able to open it! So I tried again and again and again and then the door opened so I peeked inside and saw ... A tsunami of old documents! The room was stacked with old documents. There were the oldest books in here, like no other mysterious hidden room! I could make a fortune with all of these documents! So there I took them... I was filled with greed. I'm so very sorry ... I had to.

After I had taken the old documents I tried to find an exit out of there but this whole room was ginormous. I couldn't see an exit anywhere. I was doomed! Then in the corner of my eye I saw the desert sunlight so I rushed to see what was on my left and you wouldn't believe what I had seen ... It was Le Zun but he seemed different... he was almost transparent like a glass of water and his skin was as pale as a marble floor but looked like it was made of leather. Surrounding him was a colourful ghastly presence just like paintings. His hands were lifeless and dead, his movement was as still as a statue. It seems like his ghostly presence still roames this place. He was even kind enough to help me get out of the Mogao Grottoes.

As I had came out of the grotto from a secret exit in the room with old documents I wanted to say thank you to Le Zun for helping me get out but as I looked behind me he was gone! He mysteriously disappeared. Was he a ghost?! I couldn't believe what my eyes saw. Was I just hallucinating or did I just find the exit? I don't know but at least I had gotten out of the Mogao Grottoes.

The desert sky was the colour of the ocean, right after a storm. Sweat was dripping off my eyelashes. I thought that in the desert, you might have a higher chance of finding something valuable, but all this journey brought was pain and regret.

Once I went far enough, I pulled out my metal detector from my bag and started my search. After an hour or so, my metal detector started beeping like crazy! I got extremely excited, I had finally found something! I pulled out my shovel and started digging.

Soon I realized the object was way too big for me to dig out alone, so I called some digger people. A few weeks went by, and I came back to the dig place and I saw that the digger people finally finished digging! A giant broken castle! I was extremely excited, so I called my friends, Brooklyn, Brayden, and Cecilia. they were heading over now, I was really looking forward to seeing what was in it. When my friends came, they were amazed by what I had discovered.

“Wow! You really discovered this!?”

“Yeah!” I replied, “I did!”

“What's inside?” said Brayden.

“I have no idea.” I Replied

“Then let's explore it!!” Shouted Brayden.

“Uh, guys,” Cecilia said nervously, I'm not sure this is sa—

“It will be fine Cecilia!” Brooklyn interrupted.

I tied a string to a rock outside.

“What's that for?” Brooklyn asked.

“In case we get lost,” I replied, we can follow the string!

“Ohhh smart!” Brooklyn replied.

Me and my friends entered the cave. It was dark, but luckily I brought a flashlight. In a few seconds, the cave opening shut behind us, making the ground shake. Then a scuttling noise emerged from the darkness of the cave. We huddled together, I was waving my flashlight all over to try and find the source of the sound.

“I knew this was a bad idea!” Whispered Cecilia. The sound became louder and louder, closer and closer, until it unexpectedly came to a halt. Then we were suddenly sprayed with lukewarm water

I shone the flashlight at all of my friends to make sure they were safe, the lukewarm water was actually blood, and Brayden’s head had been sliced clean off! All of us that were left screamed and ran from the horrid bloody scene, until we made it to another room in this nightmarish cave. What could have done this!? I asked myself. After a few seconds, we heard a sound echo through the caves, it sounded like an insect eating. Maybe whatever killed Brayden was cleaning up the remnants of his dead body. I slowly and quietly pointed my flashlight near the creature. I didn't get a clear view, but I saw that it was extremely large and hairy.

“What is that?” Cecilia asked, her eyes full of tears

“Probably the monster that did the murder” I replied

I shone the flashlight closer to the creature, but it noticed us quickly, it ran to us, letting out an ear piercing scream through its bloody jaws, we just barely escaped the monster, we soon made our way to another room, this one bigger than the other. It smelled like fresh blood.

“That was a spider!! Brooklyn whispered, A giant one too. It's a giant enemy spider!

“We are stuck in here!! What do we do?!” whispered Cecilia,

“We gotta get out of here.” I said

Brooklyn replied; “But how?!”

“We have to sneak past the spider,” I said, “then figure out how to open or find any door that leads us out of this thing.”

The Murderous Creature of the undergrowned grottoes

Island Christian Academy, Lee, Kiera – 10

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Soon I realized the object was way too big for me to dig out alone, so I called some digger people. A few weeks went by, and I came back to the dig place and I saw that the digger people finally finished digging! A giant broken castle! I was extremely excited, so I called my friends, Brooklyn, Brayden, and Cecilia. they were heading over now, I was really looking forward to seeing what was in it. When my friends came, they were amazed by what I had discovered.

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Discovery of the Mogao Grottoes

Island Christian Academy, Omoto, Yuna – 10

Marc Aruel Stein — a young, determined explorer — knew he had to be the first one to discover the Mogao Grottoes. Although many feared searching for it, he was filled with confidence. He had heard about the mystical legends; massive, golden-hued body buddhas; and the beautiful, ancient paintings on the wall with history hidden inside it. Even though many did not think of going there for thousands of years, he had made up his mind. He chose to go. He chose to go because he knew... He knew that there were many exquisite treasures of a time long forgotten longing to be uncovered...

The mellow sun rose over the horizon heating up the Gobi desert. The heat made sweat run down Stein's body. Wind blew against his face as he rode his camel along the barren desert in search of the Mogao Grottoes. Ferocious wind blew day and night causing a storm of sand. Yet Stein had a beaming smile on his face.

The cave was nowhere to be found. Everything around him were dunes and huge cliffs of sand. There was nothing. Since it was too dark to go back, he chose to stay in the desert. He covered himself in a large, warm blanket, opened his mouth wide in a gaping yawn and dozed off.

The next morning when he was wandering around the desert, which shimmered in the blazing heat, he heard some mysterious voice. "Who's there? What's up? Why are you here?" The voice got louder and louder as the mysterious creature got closer every single second.

Stein's throat was dry and tight; cold sweat poured down his body. He was almost paralyzed with fear. "Who are you? Do you know where the Mogao Caves are?" he asked cautiously— a shiver ran down his spine.

"I am Wang Yuanlu," replied the man, "The Mogao Caves... Since nobody entered it for thousands of years, it may be covered in sand. But if you keep digging, you may find it."

"That is the information I was looking for this whole entire time! Thank you so much for telling me. I hope you will have an amazing day!" Stein thanked him and Wang Yuanlu walked away. Whilst the wind, which formed a tempest of sand, blew day and night, Stein kept digging and digging. The sand was shining as if it were washed by gold. Although the wind covered what he had dug, he didn't think of giving up. He kept digging. Nothing was going to stop him now.

After a few days of digging, he finally found the entrance to the cave. His face lit up in a huge, broad grin. First, he took a time to stroll around the cave. On the walls, there were ancient paintings everywhere. Although the color of the paintings had faded, it was still magnificent. There were over a thousand hand carved buddhas. It shined in the sunlight that entered from the windows on the wall. When he entered one of the rooms, there were buddhas that were about twenty meters tall, standing tall and proud. He inspected the art and the buddhas for hours to find out the history and story each piece told. He chose to take some of the small, lightest, traditional painted buddhas, which were easy to carry, back to his home country, England, to show it to everyone.

A couple of days later when he was smoking where it seemed that no caves were at the back, the black smoke made a tiny hole in the sand. He put his eye near the hole to find out what was behind it. It took him a moment or two to realize that he found a brand new cave, which had been abandoned for thousands of years. He removed the sand away from the mysterious cave. When he got into the grotto, he worked out that it was a cave like a library. There were thousands of documents and forgotten scrolls. In addition, there were few beautiful painted buddhas, ancient manuscripts, huge, color faded silk banners, colorful embroidery and other rare textiles, which no one had ever seen. He found one document that he found that it was one of the oldest written documents in the world: the Diamond Sutra. He studied all the documents very carefully and held it gently so that they wouldn't be ruined. He took almost all of the documents, cautiously putting them inside his bag.

When it was time to say goodbye and travel back to Europe, tears welled up in his eyes. He felt like he wanted to stay in the Mogao Grottoes forever. But there was no choice. But instead, he's face was lit up in a wide smile, very exhilarated to show his great discovery of the Mogao Grottoes and to show the amazing hand-carved buddhas, scrolls and documents. He carried his bag, which was filled with treasures and looked back at the grottoes, which

showed him the most amazing thing he had ever seen. He hopped on his camel. Slowly, the camel started walking on the golden sand. Stein had left the Gobi desert.

Currently, the scroll, documents and a few small buddhas, that Stein found, are shown in the British Museum. People from everywhere in the world come to the museum to see the great discovery of Stein. However some people believe that those treasures should have remained in the Mogao Grottoes and question Stein's choice to take them. What do you think about it?

The Boy and his Wolf

Island Christian Academy, Pang, Andrew – 10

The bullet fired out of the barrel. Seven dead wolves lay on the dusty, loose ground. “Pack #13 down. I repeat. Pack #13 down.”

Pack 13 was home to eight valiant wolves—now to one. That ‘one’ lay in a cave in the Mogao Grottoes. The cave was previously filled with sounds of laughter—now filled with an eerie silence. What would he do? The fire in his legs drew him to the opening like unwavering moths to a light.

A small boy stood outside. His father had told him to stay there while he hunted for nasty wolves. Food stood in his right hand, a bone in his left. Suddenly, a tiny creature emerged from the cave. Half starved, it gracefully climbed on his lap. He fed it his food.

Love At first sight.

A booming voice approached the cavern. Father disapproved of any creature, let alone a small wolf. Quickly he hid the resting refugee in his cloak.

“What are you hiding?” Boomed Father.

“Nothing Father,” replied the boy.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah”

“Are you really sure”

“Absolutely sure”

“Well let’s get back home anyways”

As they approached the Yurt, A smile shot sideways out his small mouth The Boy giggled. It wasn't white, it was black. Father said it was because he only had black sheep back in the day. A funny misfortune.

Later that day the boy went to bed. The little creature hitched a ride in his arms. Together they watched the night sky full of flashing stars and blasting comets.

Over the next few days the father grew tense, pushing things like “give up your secret” or “stop hiding your pet”.

The pain would be unimaginable

The Boy grew up and so did the Wolf. Soon it was time for him to take up Wolf—killer. He hated that.

It was like killing more of his best friends.

The Whole village was counting on him. He couldn't step out.

What would he do?

The day he dreaded drew near.

If only The wolf hadn't attacked. That would be a very different future indeed.

Very.

Warrior

Island Christian Academy, Siu, Samuel – 10

Kai Gao: an amazing warrior, who had never lost a single battle, not even the hardest battles, as it was almost impossible to see his blood. He killed countless people; he has achieved the second-highest rank of all the warriors. The richest of all soldiers. No one has achieved being such a great warrior, for he is even richer than the king. What else could he want?

The battle had finished. They had won again. Kai Gao was walking through the battlefield looking at the piles of dead bodies when suddenly he saw a body with armour that he recognized. A body that was from his army. He looked closer. He was seeing his own body in the stinky stacks of death.

Just then the horn blew (sending a signal to the archers to draw their bows), the cavalry raged forward, men (with open mouths) were screaming as arrows whizzed toward them shiny points gleaming with death, people dropping all around him with cries. Kai showed no emotion at all, for he has had so much experience. His horse charged forward, dodging arrows and riding over people, killing them. Then he killed even more people with his sword and spear, more screams filled the rusty air. Disaster, tragedy, it needed to end soon! With that thought, he raged forward, knocking down the last of the enemy. With that, it ended. Kai had won again.

He strolled through the battlefield, looking at the dead bodies. Kai felt responsible for this. Then suddenly he felt a source of rage rush through him, *no more killing, no more. None at all. Stop.* He looked around once more. He saw his dead friend. Then he thought to himself, *No more, no more.*

He saw another corpse of his friend. *I will stop, and now.* Kai threw away his sword and spear as a symbol of peace, he took his horse and started to ride away. Faster, faster. His army raced to get him back. Faster, faster. As his once fellow friends gained on Kai. Kai threw himself off his horse, nearly killing him. So close to killing him, the army thought he was dead. The general gave the signal to ride away, and the army did.

After about two whole hours, Kai woke up. He was sore all over but he knew he had to go. They would come here to submerge him soon enough. He got up although it hurt a lot and started riding. He did not know where to ride or even where he was going! He just needs to get away from this place...

He rode all day long hoping to find land, but he could not find any. He was tearful, had no one to talk to, and worst of all, he could barely move. The world was a bad place for him, but Kai clenched his fist and rode on. He was not going to give up. He rode and rode and finally he found a light.

A light so bright he could barely see. A light so blazing that he felt pain all over his body. The light suddenly stopped shining and a magical buddha appeared. Kai screamed with amazement and jumped down. The buddha said, "Ride for 20 more days and nights there I will see you again." With no more pain he rode and rode. Twenty days and nights later, he rode and arrived at a cave. A cave? Why would a buddha want to meet at a cave? He looked around and finally recognized this place... It was not any cave. It was the Mogao Caves!

Just then a light shone. A light like the one he had seen twenty days and nights ago. An emitting light shone and the buddha came again. He told him he could stay here and make a life to live in. And so it started. The world was better for him. But still he was not the person he wanted to be. He hid from his problems, lived with the monks and painted to relax him. He tried to be better but he could not. No matter how hard he tried. He pushed himself to the limit, but even so he could not stop.

He kept trying but he just could not bring himself to stop. He needed to be assisted to stop him from killing people. That night he had a vision, a vision where the buddha had told him he needed to stop in order to stop sleepless nights. He pushed and pushed but he could not stop killing. The monks tried to help him but it did not work.

Then the Buddha talked to him again. He told him to not run away and hide from his problems but Kai ignored and kept living the same way. And so it resumed. He lived like he lived before. He hid from his problems, lived with the monks and painted to relax him. He just could not bring himself to a stop. He really needed help, and now.

Every night he had nightmares of the people he had killed before and the lifeless people from his army . But it was not only soldiers that he had seen lifeless. He has even seen his friend, who is an author, dead. Lifeless. It was so sad. Killing people and seeing them dead. Kai even wanted to stop, but he could not stop. It was like an addiction. But not in a good way. In a very nasty way. It was the worst thing you could ever get addicted to. The worst. The absolute worst. And he could not stop it. What could he do?

In the middle of a nightmare he woke up. Tossing and turning he heard the Buddha's voice “ You must go to the battle. And now. The fight is starting and you need to make peace. It is the only way you can stop.” Instantly he jumped out of bed, ran to the door, changed to his warrior clothes and started to run towards the battle scene. When he arrived the battle was just about to start. “STOP!”

The soldiers turned around, shocked to the extreme. He talked to both armies about peace and how much crying, deaths and sadness there had been in the world about death. Both armies did not fight and made up. Kai was excited to the extreme and went to live in Englandarmor as a happy man. Not a sad sleepless one.

armor

Ancient Caves

Island Christian Academy, Siu, Sonia – 10

This story begins in the middle of a roaring sandstorm covering all the lands....It was sand, heat and thirst. There was nothing left....or was there? After the storm ,our four main characters remain stumbling among the choking dry desert ,lost, unaware of what they're going to come upon next.

"I'm so thirsty!" Andy complained , "Do we have any money or water?"

"We don't have water, although we do have a couple of coins, "Valerie commented.

Our friends saw an old lady in the distance and caught a glimpse of hope. They all rushed to the elderly woman wearing a hopeful smile on their faces. "Excuse me, do you happen to know any nearby villages? "Noah questioned eagerly

"Do you need a place to stay?" the old woman offered , "You lot can stay with me for the time being."

"Actually, we do, "Valerie thanked," we'll stay with you tonight. "A smile shone on the harmless grandma's face as they followed her to their destination. They arrived at the front door of an old and pale yellow building built into the mountain.

Granny pulled the rusty lever beside her and the door slowly pulled open. "Well go on sweeties!" the lady said kindly. The four went inside, Noah felt suspicious of something, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. "Wait—" but before Noah could finish, with a sly grin granny pulled the lever once more and the door instantly shut. She isn't so harmless now is she?

There was not a hint of light to be seen. All of them couldn't believe how that lady betrayed them. The room was pitch-black .Ali's heart pounded rapidly and her hands were clammy, she had always been afraid of the dark ever since her mother died....Out of the blue, some light appeared in Noah's hands." Good thing I brought my lantern," Noah added," I only have so many torches, but this ought to give us light for a while,at least enough." Ali sighed in relief .

"How will we get out of here?" Andy murmured.

"I'm certain we'll all get out of this place and be fine if we just be careful and keep our heads up."Valerie confirmed. All of them slowly tip-toed towards Noah to get light from the lantern, they got a nice moment huddled up together. They started exploring the dusty cave and discovered inspiring cave art creeping all over the walls and ceiling. The paintings were about special events that happened to the buddhist tribe and traditions that that tribe does, painted by the buddhist people when they were in this cave.

"Woah! This wall art is wonderful!" Ali complimented

"This is truly beautiful buddhist art." Andy agreed"I wonder if any archaeologists have found this before." They continued their exploration in the cave ,keeping an eye out for an exit, when they came upon a mysterious door. Due to their overload of curiosity, they went in.

Ali took a glance around the room and gasped in amazement. The room was a library , with books and scrolls covering the walls like a blanket! The blanket of books were there to accompany the soft chairs lying on the floor !They rested there for a while and had a lot of fun, then she found a jade scroll which stood out from the others. When she grabbed the scroll, she made a horrible mistake.

The ground let out a roaring rumble as Ali and Andy let out a shrill shriek." For heaven sake calm down," Noah barked, "probably just another storm." But was it?

Every part of Ali's body and soul quivered insanely like she was jelly. The ceiling crumbled but when they tried to escape the rocks covered the entrance. Her jaw dropped....shivers went down her spine....the floor cracked open. She fell as the darkness swallowed her whole. The last thing she saw was the terrified look on her friends faces....She lost all trace of happiness from before. The girl fell hopelessly through the pitch-black void wondering if she would die. She dozed off thinking it would be less painful dying in her sleep.She had no escape....Nowhere to go...No thought to live....

The girl found herself awaking in what seemed to be an endless room of darkness. All alone, friends nowhere to be found. She could barely see a thing as she cautiously wandered through the place for sometime. The veil of darkness obscured her surroundings, but on the spur of the moment, a miracle happened.

The darkness was broken by a light glaring. As she slowly drifted towards the light she felt the warmth of a torch. A boy slightly taller than her with flaming red hair and crystal blue eyes like hers was holding the torch." Noah!". She leaped towards him and hugged him tightly. Tears flooded her eyes and they grinned ."We ought to find the others before we do anything else!". So the two set off to find the rest of their group . Little did they know that things would get much worse. They wandered through the darkness with the little light the torch provided, the tiny sun helped them find their way to another room. Inside, they found something that they truly expected the least....It was a room filled with gold and statues but what was in the centre left them dumbstruck.

Ali covered her mouth with both hands and Noah was fuming with rage. An old man stood in front of them, bald with brown skin and he was skinny to the point that you could see his ribs through his shirt. Their friends were tied up in the middle of a circle of grey dust unconscious. "Why hello there!" the man cackled "I'm Yedalina, and you came perfectly on time to watch your loved ones die!" And he lit the dust on fire and it exploded.

".....Gunpowder...."Ali called out, "I hate you!" With that ,she pushed him into the explosion and he died.

Ali froze at her own actions.
"There's no time!" Noah snapped, "I found an exit earlier ,let's save our friends before this place blows up." They stretched their hands into the fire and grabbed the first person they felt. Then something went horribly wrong.

Valerie was dead for sure. They shared a moment of silence for what had happened.

The silence was broken by Ali' s cries." Why must I be like this!" she scolded herself," If I had just—"her eyes welled up with tears .

They made it to the other side of the mountain, there was a village. There was this nice man who let them join the ride to the city. As they gazed at the horizon they thought about their own horizon. How they got in the situation. Why did they even go there? But that's a story for next time.

Mystery of the Mogao Grottoes

Island Christian Academy, Srisawat, Peerawich – 10

In the Gobi Desert, the Mogao Grottoes are a vast series of temples scattered across a steep and sheer mountain. It's a place of wisdom, a domain of thought. The artefacts there have shone a light on the ancient history of Buddhism. Now it's a landmark, unrecognised for its true beauty. An ordinary place, but it's not as ordinary as you would imagine. The events here were far too unusual to be existent. I have witnessed it.

I was at the Mogao Grottoes and the desert winds were wild and ferocious. The sandstorm blanketed everything in its path with sand. I hid in two rocks that were humongous and looked like giant limbs. I found myself inside a cavern. When I was exploring one of them, I turned around to see a shadowy silhouette. It did not seem human and the figure was giving off an unpleasant aura. The figure was in torn, ripped clothes and had a translucent body. The glow looked as pale as the moon and the tattered robes looked as if they had minds of their own, curling and waving in every direction. I edged towards the back of the room and with every step, the figure floated towards me. Its gloomy shape and ragged tendrils corralled me to the edge of the room. It was hunting me.

I must've fallen and passed out because when I woke up, I wasn't wearing my bomber jacket and jeans, but I was wearing traditional Chinese robes! I knew that something wasn't right because the cave that I was sleeping in was vivid and freshly painted. I sprang up, looking around the entire room. Everything was wild and vivid, even the ceiling was freshly-painted. I found a young boy, about my age and he looked a little bit like me. He was a young boy in sapphire and jade robes and had an old-fashioned hat, he looked no more than 12. He was sensible, unlike the monkeys in my class.

"Hey! What year is it?" I asked the boy.

"It's 366 AD and next time ask politely," Said the boy.

"Hey! What's your name?" I asked.

"It's Dai," He replied. I followed him into the deep, dark caves of the grottoes where he was grabbing some paints. While he was painting the new caves I asked him if I could paint with him. I have loved art ever since I was a child.

Of course, Dai said "Yes" so I painted one of the most beautiful paintings with him.

"So, how long have you been living here?" I asked him.

"My entire life, us monks don't get out much," He replied. We both laughed at that. We chatted all evening until he finally said something. When he sighed, I immediately knew that something was up.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

"It's just that we're going to be attacked by a kingdom in a couple of days and that we're going to have to take drastic measures," He replied with a sigh.

The smile on my face disappeared and I felt sorry for him. I told Dai I didn't have anywhere to go so he offered me a spot inside the beds. I slept late that night thinking about the chaos and destruction the fight will bring. Blood, slavery and deaths.

The next morning, I heard yelling and footsteps coming from one of the grottoes, I crept over to see the monks sealing up one of the grottoes and filling it up with their most precious documents. I was surprised to know why they were doing this. Luckily, I found Dai staring out the window and he was pointing at something. I looked out to see the rising cloud of sand and dust coming faster every minute. I still couldn't see it but when I did, Dai did too. We both yelled, and when we did, the monks ran to the buddhas and began to pray.

"What are they doing?" I asked Dai.

"They're awakening the buddhas," Dai replied. Sure enough, the buddhas began to move their fingers and bodies. They stood up and marched towards the fight.

"They're charging forward, but what are the monks doing?" I asked Dai.

"A sacred ritual that outsiders can't know about," he replied.

About ten seconds later. I could see a goldish glow appear around the grottoes. It took me about another five seconds to realise that the glow was a barrier around the grottoes. For a moment there I thought I was imagining things, but then I realised it was real. That I wasn't living in a fairy tale.

Behind me, I heard yelling and screaming. I turned around. I saw a flash of red run past. I turned back. This time I heard footsteps behind me. I turned around to see a soldier holding a sword to slice me. It was covered in blood. Dai was with me at the time and he whispered to me “Run,” so we did.. Just when it looked like it was over, there was a loud boom of a cannon. We glanced out the window and saw buddhas being shattered to pieces. We ran back to the temple and saw that the monks were still praying.

“ What are they still doing?” I asked Dai.

“ Trying to awaken the biggest of the buddhas,” He replied. There was a great rumble in one of the caves. We rushed to the cave to see what was going on. The longest buddha was beginning to awaken and it was starting to open its eyes. Just looking at it was enough to make my bones shiver. Then all the great buddhas were awake, they started to appear out of the grottoes.

When the army saw the great buddhas, they charged with immense force and power. But the general, who was a scared man, ordered the men to retreat, so they did and the buddhas went back into their dormant forms. Then I had this tingling sensation so I looked at myself. I was beginning to perish. I looked at Dai one more time. I could tell from the expression on his face that he was sad. That’s when I just remembered the story about my ancestor. It was me. my spirit must’ve got transported. I turned to dai who was still sobbing. I was perishing faster and left only my head.

“Dai, We’ll be BFFs forever, even if we’re from different timelines,” I said.

“See you in 1500 thousand years,” He replied with a smile. I fell again but this time, I was back to the present. Like nothing happened.

An Explorer's Journey

Island Christian Academy, Wong, Lillian – 10

The mellow morning sun rose over the golden sands, giving light to the Gobi desert. Mighty winds battled against him as Dave rode his exhausted camel along the barren desert searching for the Mogao Grottoes.

Eager to quench his thirst of adventure, Dave had bravely embarked on a journey to unravel the Mogao Caves' lost history and rediscover the many secrets hidden inside. However, he was not prepared for the adventure yet to come...

The caves were nowhere to be found. As he rode his camel, Dave struggled to battle the fierce sandstorms. The sun's blazing rays burned his skin whilst he blankly gazed into the distance. The sub-zero temperatures of the desert night and the cold, whistling dusty winds made sleeping almost impossible. At night, the entire desert was covered by a blanket of black fog. Dave's tent couldn't hold up against the sandstorms. It was blown away the first night. Leaving only his sleeping bag and tools behind.

After days of searching, he started to lose hope of finding the caves. Not a drop of water was left in his bottle. His skin was dry and his muscles were extremely exhausted. Nevertheless, Dave pushed himself to keep going. He still wore a mask of determination. He kept on going. Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of a shadow in the distance. "It's just an animal," he thought to himself. As he nudged his camel forwards, the shadow shifted into the shape of a man. A sharp shiver ran down his spine.

There standing was an old man. He wore dirty old rags and walked barefoot on the sand.

"Hello! What brings you here?"

Dave was paralysed. He could not hold back his fear. "Who are you?! What do you want from me?" he replied, heart pounding out of his chest; unsure of what to do next. "Do you know where the Mogao Grottoes are?"

The man stepped forwards, "The Mogao Caves you ask? Well it's right there." Then he pointed to a massive, flat mountain far in the distance and barely visible. "Most of it is covered in sand. I know where the entrance is though!" he added. "Follow me."

The old man started walking. Dave hesitated. Then hopped onto his camel and followed close behind, still keeping a close distance from the mysterious man. They got closer, He started to notice magnificent structures carved into the side of the mountain. The rocky mountain looked like it had been washed in gold. Sand piled above it glistened in the sunlight. There were a few massive worn down steps, leading up to the entrance. They carefully walked to the top of the stairs. Dave gazed at the magnificent view. The sand glistened in the sunlight and the desert stretched to meet the horizon.

"We're here!" the man exclaimed. He then pulled out an incense stick and slowly walked in.

"What's that?" Dave asked.

"It's incense to light, then worship all the buddhas," the man answered. "Before you walk in, promise to not take anything!"

"I promise," Dave replied.

"Finally, I'm here," Dave sighed in relief. He tied his camel's lead to a branch and dismounted.

Dave cautiously walked into the cave, carefully examining the paintings and buddhas. The pictures each told their own story as he studied them. The sparkling sun peered through the carved windows of the cave. He slowly moved from room to room. The statue's menacing glares gave him a mysterious feeling inside. Their vivid colors had faded yet the statue still retained their magnificence and life. Finally, he was in the Mogao Grottoes.

Then, when he entered one of the thousands of rooms, he saw a breathtaking sight. A massive buddha was standing there before him. It went from the floor to the ceiling high above him. Dave admired its hand-carved features. "This would've taken months to carve," he thought to himself. He gently glided his hand over it. It felt warm and

surprisingly smooth. After closely studying the giant buddha, he returned to the first room and he saw the old man lighting the incense he was holding.

Not long after, the smoke blew into the wall, through a crumbling hole in it. Dave peeked through. There seemed to be a hidden room. Dave's eyes lit up, he carefully chipped the wall with one of his many tools in his bag. Suddenly, the wall collapsed with a big thud. Luckily, the old man had gone to another room.

The dust faded and a room was revealed. However, it was nothing like any other. The room was filled to the brim with old books and documents. The room felt small, but it seemed to have an endless amount of papers. It had no windows or doors and was almost pitch black. Dave pulled a candle from his bag. He then lit it and slowly entered the mysterious room. Candle in hand, he examined the documents. As he was admiring the papers, the candle sparked. He took no notice.

Suddenly, the pages caught on fire one by one. The room was engulfed by smoke. He jumped up. Panic rose in his chest as he zoomed out of the room. He didn't dare look back. He thought about the promise he made with the old man. However, he shook the thought out of his mind as the fire burned and smoldered the room and the contents inside.

The flames blazed all through the room and made its way outside. Dave felt dread sweep through him like a tidal wave. The buddhas caught on fire one by one as Dave hurriedly searched for the old man. "There's a fire! Where are you!? It's not safe here! Come on!" he shouted. There was no answer. Smoke filled his lungs. He could no longer breathe but he needed to save the old man.

His heart was pounding. Then, he saw the old man lying on the ground coughing and gasping for air. He dragged himself towards the man. Dave slowly carried the man up. He ran. He ran desperately searching for the exit. Suddenly, his eyesight started to fade. He had no time, no one to help, nowhere to go. Then, everything went black.

He got up. He used his last bit of strength to get up and run. Dave frantically searched for the exit. Then, he saw a glimpse of sunlight. The exit was near. Dave pushed himself towards the sunlight. Closer, closer. The smoke faded away, he was out. He gasped for breath and immediately helped the old man up. "Thank you!" the man said to Dave. "You came back for me."

The Creature

Island Christian Academy, Yukihiro, Akari – 10

There was a cave called The Mogao Caves. when people go in it, they disappear and never show up.

It was a sunny Saturday morning and the day started. Mia and three other friends were at Mia's house.

They were all reading a book but suddenly,

"Do you know the Mogao Caves!!"

It was Mia. She was in an excited tone. Flowers were popping up in her brain.

But Oliver was in a state of a how-dare-you kind of face, slightly frowning.

James was so excited he cried "Lets go now!!!!"

"No." said Akano. "we have to get prepared!"

"Huh...ok ok ok I totally forgot about that...!"moaned James.

"Ok! Everyone, we will be meeting at the Matcha Park at five o'clock! Tell your mom and dad that we are going to a playdate! Everyone, it's five o'clock! Bye~!"exclaimed Mia(she had more flowers popping in her brain now).

5 o'clock came like a fish swimming in it's sea.

"Everyone have your food, flashlight,and a lighter? I will give you all a walkie talkie for in case you get lost in the Mogao Caves. 'kay?!"Called out Mia in the silent park.

"Okay!" exclaimed James.

"... Ok..." groaned Akano

"Oh! Oh! I brought my inflatable car and it's ok for kids!" Cried Oliver.

The four settled themselves and everyone was in the car.

"I'm gonna drive!" said Oliver.

"Let's go!!!" cried James.

"I'm so scared..." groaned Akano.

They drove a long way to the Mogao caves. Fear was rising in Akano's stomach.

They reached the Mogao caves at last.

"Everyone get ready! Ok we'll go!!!" shouted Mia.

They went in. And of course Akano in the middle(she was shivering with fear).

They walked through the arch of beautiful paintings.As they walked, they found an enormous room.

"Let's go in there!"exclaimed James.

"I think something bad's going to happen..." whispered Oliver with a great shiver.

They didn't know something bad was *going* to happen...

The room was huge. But there was a hump of what seemed to be a creature.

"What is that!?" whispered James, in the highest pitch of voice.

"Let's go back before the monster realises it sees us" said Akano in a low voice.

They backed up, trying not to make a sound. However... ***SNAP!*** Akano, the nearest to the monster, accidentally stepped on a stick.

"Well well... Hello children...I was waiting for you..."the monster said with it's low cow-like voice and, raising it's ugly enormous almost-bald-like head.

The creature had a human-like face as big as a door and the body of it was like a spider.

The creature crawled slowly and approached Akano.

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!!!!!"

The next moment, blood was dripping down the creature's mouth.

"RUN!!!" called out Mia whose decisions were way faster than normal people.

"Mmm... This is good... little human meat is the best..."whispered the creature.

"Ow!!!" Oliver tripped on a little stone and fell.

“Another one...? This kid tastes really good...So, it means...THIS KID WILL ALSO TASTE GOOD!!!”

“No...No... help... I don't wanna die... Please...”

“Oh... I love that face...”

“No—AHHHHHHHHHHHHH”

“OLIVER! NOOOO!”Screamed James.

“I'm going to go and tell the village!”said Mia.

“O—Ok,”cried James.

“I'll go back soon after I called the villagers,” said Mia.

“B—Bye”

“Bye”

Mia ran to the nearest secret passageway she found joring the fun walk she was with the other three.

She ran in.

Then she dashed to the nearest village and called for help.

Mia and the villagers came back.

There was no monster. Just the footprints towards the wall that seemed to be James.

3 years later. Mia was playing with her new friends then suddenly, “Knock, knock, no—” *★THUD★*

“What was that?!”exclaimed Mia.

She opened the front door and saw a boy with long hair and so bloody.

Mia noticed at once. Fat beads of tears leaked and landed on the floor.

“JAMES!!! You are back! You are alive! Thank god! Friends! Come and help!!! Oh, James tell me about your story later!!!”Cried Mia.

James looked exhausted, tired and had puffy eyes.

After he was bandaged up, he talked about how he escaped from the creature to Mia.

What was so surprising was that James killed the monster.

The Buddhas and the Mogao Grottoes

International Christian School, Chan, Karin – 10

It was a warm summer. The sun peeked through the corners of windows, everyone was frolicking about in the park. Well, almost everyone. Toby was stuck at home throwing a pity party for himself while doing chores, with only his mother's bickering trailing him everywhere he went.

"Go clean your room." "Wash the dishes." "That was your fault, not mine."

The only way Toby could get any peace was by hiding in the basement. He would busy himself observing precious antiques while the thick walls of the basement muffled his mother's screams.

As Toby was horsing around the cellar, he was careless of where he ran and accidentally stubbed his toe into one of the drawers, causing the few items contained inside of it fall out.

Toby winced. Even such a small misdeed was enough to make his Mom jump up and down in rage. He crouched down to the floor and began picking things up. An old letter, a compass, some pennies, and a dusty old scroll. Toby stared at the last item. It was probably left by that archeologist grandpa of his who had vanished mysteriously one day; the police never found his body. On it, he spotted the Flying Apsaras symbol, which he knew from history classes was the symbol for Mogao Grottoes. He remembered his mum telling him that grandpa would make frequent trips there to study its wall painting.

As Toby was about to bring the scripture closer to his face for further investigation, the room he was in went dark. Toby knew this wasn't a power outage: something felt off. The floor creaked with every single movement he made and the air was chillier than usual.

Suddenly, the light flickered on slowly.

"Am I hallucinating, or are there really two giant buddhas staring at me?" He thought.

Among the light, there were actually 2 buddhas, staring at him. One had huge ears and was doing the lotus pose, and had wrinkles on his forehead that just about matched the worn-out robe he was wearing. The other one looked like the buddha version of a spartan warrior. He had fiery red eyes and his face was pouty as if he was a child being told off. He had a horseshoe-styled mustache that looked like it had been slathered with hair gel.

"Looks like our dinner has just arrived," said one.

"Actually, I've just started preparing the soup. I won't make the same mistake as that time when his grandpa nearly escaped from us while we were busy." responded the other.

"Served his grandpa right for stealing the scroll from us. Fortunately, we got him back by teleporting him here after he had laid eyes on the Flying Apsaras," the Buddha with the giant ears snickered.

Toby's heart raced. So this was what happened to his grandpa – feasted upon by these sinister-looking buddhas! It rattled him that he could now smell the scent of a cauldron bubbling: his death was, too, going to be a painful one.

Toby scanned the chambers for an escape route; he knew from history books that the caves were situated in the middle of a desert; if he could only find a way out and a camel nearby, he could ride eastwards and reach Beijing. From there, he could fly back to Hong Kong via plane.

Suddenly, Toby realized he was still clutching the scroll in his hands: There was a chance he could use that as a shield. It wasn't going to save him, but it was going to buy him some time.

It wasn't the best weapon, yet people always say; "A drowning man will hold on to a piece of straw".

But Toby also had an advantage. The paper could be folded into a sword or a rock, and paper also could give paper cuts. If Toby was really lucky, he would be able to give the buddhas a quick slash on the finger to stun them.

As much as Toby wanted to attack them then and there while they were discussing on what meals they should cook with a fresh boy, he decided to wait for the perfect moment, when they least expected it. That way, they would be less aware, and Toby would have a better chance of escaping Mogao Grottoes.

He wasn't sure if buddhas were immortal or granted some kind of magical ability to be immune to pain – but he needed to stay positive, especially at this moment.

"I'm getting extremely hungry! Let's cook him now!" The warrior buddha said, while the big-eared buddha lifted him up by his armpits. Toby protested, kicking and screaming, and he quickly slashed the big-eared buddha on the face, making a thin but bloody scar that stretched down from his eyebrow to his lip.

"Ouch!" He said and put down Toby, clutching his face in pain.

This was his moment. Toby shoved the buddha down the floor, then used his left foot to stamp on him.

The big-eared buddha tried to evade Toby's feet by rolling over to the warrior buddha and grabbing onto him. The warrior buddha, far from acting as his anchor, took a stumble and fell onto him.

"Not only they are very hungry, but very clumsy as well." Toby thought to himself.

He looked at the two buddhas, sprawled out of the floor like starfish, then trampled them both.

"Take me home. I didn't steal the scroll or anything and don't deserve a grisly end." He said to it. Almost immediately, Toby was yet again engulfed in darkness, but this time for a good reason. He was glad he didn't have to hitch a ride on a camel and beg for money along the way to pay for the plane ticket, but instead being teleported back home instead.

Lost...but Found

International Christian School, Cheng, Alethea – 10

“Tell me my favourite!” I said, my tiny hands grasping my mother’s long black hair.

“Alright, alright.” Mom said, smiling. “Long, long ago, there lived a kindhearted deer. It had magnificent antlers, a long graceful neck, and a pair of liquid brown eyes. Yet, what makes it extraordinary is its nine-coloured coat. Legend has it that it is the incarnation of the Buddha Jataka. One day, it spotted a merchant lost in a desert storm. The deer quickly came to his rescue, then, the lucky man promised he would tell no one of the deer. Meanwhile, back in the kingdom, the queen dreamt about the legendary nine-coloured deer. Driven by a heart fraught with greed, she talked the king into issuing a decree that whoever captured the deer would be rewarded. The merchant gave in to his cupidity. The merchant led the army to the deer and captured it. Shaken by betrayal, the nine-coloured deer stood before the throne and told the king how it rescued the merchant. The king was moved and banished the greedy merchant. He then issued another decree: ‘Everyone must protect the deer.’ From then on, the deer became a symbol of hope for those who were lost.”

As Mom was talking, I looked out the window. The old wooden beams creaked softly as I put all my weight on it, my eyes squinted. Inky darkness fell over the earth houses in my village. The moon peeked out from a cloud, barely visible.

“Nine-coloured deer, where are you?” I whispered.

Suddenly, a flash of shimmering antlers glinted, reflecting the moonlight. I squealed in delight. Mom came over.

“What have you gotten into this time?” Mom started to sing, “Hush little baby don’t say a word...”

My weary eyes caught a glimpse of shining antlers again. My vivid three-year-old imagination led me into the nine-coloured deer dream.

Today is my eighteenth birthday.

I jumped out of bed and ran down the stairs excitedly. I found a beautifully wrapped present waiting for me on the kitchen table. There was a tag on it, saying, “Package ordered in: 2000. Delivered in: 2018.” My hands shook as I ripped it open and found. . . a ticket? The ticket read: ‘Mogao Caves: Exclusive Tour.’

Although I lived in Dunhuang province, I had never gone to the Mogao Caves. It was a hot tourist spot, and besides, our family stopped having family trips since I was three.

My eyes were lowered as I grabbed the ticket and walked out the door. The tourist bus squealed to a stop and I rushed inside. After a while, the bus skidded to a halt.

I walked out and looked up. I gasped. I saw intricate designed wooden beams, perfectly made to hold up the roofs. The “Caves of Thousand Buddhas” were stacked on top of each other so precisely that it hardly seemed human made. It looked nothing like the dusty old caves I’d imagined, laden with cobwebs.

“Miss. Do you have a ticket?” a gruff voice asked.

“Oh! It’s here!” I fished my ticket out of my pocket.

The guard inspected it closely and handed it back to me.

“Seems valid. You may go in but remember not to touch anything.” he said. “Oh, and miss, you’ve got a huge stain on your hoodie. How about you go to the toilet to clean up?”

I looked down at my hoodie. A gigantic stain was on my hoodie. ‘Strange. . .’ I thought to myself. I excused myself to the bathroom anyway. A small voice whispered in my head, saying, “If only mom was here. . .she’d help me clean it up. . .”

Small tendrils of light curled around my face. ‘Your wish is granted.’ it seemed to whisper.

“W—w—what?” I stammered.

Suddenly, a burst of blinding rainbow light hit my face. I closed my eyes and turned away. A warm nose touched my cheek.

“Don’t be afraid. I will not harm you.” a gentle voice said.

I opened my eyes and saw a shining deer. Its fur shone with nine beautiful colors that seemed to move around in its fur. Its antlers were engraved with patterns that shone with white light. Its whole body seemed to radiate an aura of gentleness and kindness.

“Don’t you remember me? I answered your wish before, back when you lived with your mother.” it smiled.

“You’re. . .the nine coloured deer! Can you bring my mother back?” my eyes widened with hope.

“I’m sorry. I have done everything I could, but your mother cannot come back.” the deer bowed its head.

“NO! It isn’t fair! Life isn’t fair!” I yelled, tears streaming down my cheeks.

“You’re right. Life isn’t fair. I feel your pain, young one. You are so young, but trapped in such darkness. But yet I find your hope. A shining beacon in the darkness.” the deer whispered gently.

My tears subsided. “What do you mean?” I asked. “I’ve never hoped since mom was gone. . .”

“Ah, but you have. You hope every day, wishing for a miracle. That is why I advised your mother to bring you here.”

“You advised?” I asked.

“Yes. You see, the Mogao Caves was once a place of marvels, of beauty. All it took was one meek little monk to spark caves of marvels. But it soon got forgotten, forsaken. Everyone wanted to be fast, and not stroll down the slow memory lane. Humans are like that. They remember, and they forget. But then, it was discovered again. Centuries of treasures and beauty stored away. You see, humans were destined to find this treasure again. We all are. Not just this, but we were destined to find that missing piece of ourselves which we stored away. It is our nature, our destiny.” the deer explained.

I nodded, new understanding flooding into me. The deer smiled and disappeared into light. I stepped out of the bathroom and saw a stunning sunset outside. And for the first time, I felt at peace.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

International Christian School, Cheng, Idison – 9

At a school called ICS, a teacher named Miss Dora was teaching a group of students about caves on Silk Road, the Mogao Grottoes in the Dunhuang, that existed half millennia years ago. One student named Ryan was interested in it so much. He decided to go and explore the Mogao Grottoes because he feels that there still has a secret place hidden in the Mogao Grottoes no one discovered yet.

Ryan used all his recess time to work on the research about the Mogao Grottoes. Actually a few students saw Ryan researching and told him that they were also interested in exploring the Mogao Grottoes. They were Jin, Ziv, Miles and Katy. Ryan was over the moon because they were kindred spirits.

So, they started to come up with a name of their group, which was “The Adventures Elf” and they decided to explore the Mogao Grottoes on the first day of the Easter holiday. Then they divided the work equally between each other. Ryan and Katy are good at using the computer so they were responsible for the research of the secret place. Ziv likes doing builder stuff so he will prepare ropes, flashlights, and other sorts of equipment. Jin is good at drawing so she will be drawing a map for exploring the Mogao Grottoes. Miles is food lover so he will prepare the snacks for everyone.

On the first day of the Easter holiday, they took an airplane to China “Dunhuang” to start their expedition. When they arrived at Dunhuang, the sky was blue and the sun shone bright. They started to look for the Mogao Grottoes. After few hours, they had found it. Right in front of them, was the famous Mogao Grottoes. Suddenly, Ryan’s heart heard a peculiar voice crying out to him. The voice told him to keep moving forward. When they walked in the caves it was petrifying as there were bats fluttering around. They started to feel afraid, especially Miles who was crying his heart out. But Ryan was courageous, he led everyone and told them “Don’t be afraid, I heard a voice telling us to proceed forward and we will arrive at the special place”. “No turning back now”! When they walked deeper and deeper, they saw teensy-weensy pinch of lights flying around. It was lighting bugs. The lighting bugs lights filled the caves full of brightness. Ryan felt spine-chilly voice telling him to pick up a stone in front of him and under the stone was a marble. He picked it up and move forward with the gang. When they moved forward, Jin and Ziv both noticed that both sides of cave were filled with breathtaking sculptures. They walked forward and spotted a baby dragon. It was red and had scales all over it’s body. It tried to breathe fire, but all it did was breathe puffs of smoke out. Katy quickly rushed to hold the baby dragon. Ziv said “Katy we should let it go, it is a wild creature we should let it roam free”. So, they released the baby dragon and it flew away. Ryan heard a voice telling him that a few meters away is the special place. So they moved on. The caves started to get brighter and brighter until they found out that it was a bunch of diamonds shimmering around. They all shouted “We arrived!”. Miles found a small diamond and wanted to bring it back home for his collection. But when he picked it up, the ground shook very hard. “Put it down” Jin cried. Then Ryan found the hole that was similar to the shape of the marble. He thought “The secret thing must be here!” He put the marble in the hole and the caves walls tore apart, inside was a golden sword on a stone. The voice told him to pick up and he did it.

Suddenly, the cave started to shake harder than before. Then, out of nowhere was a phoenix telling them to hop on its back and the phoenix flew out of the cave and dropped them off in a village. They said thank you to the phoenix. Then, Ziv said “Ryan where was the golden sword you were holding on.” Ryan replied “I don’t know, it just disappeared. The phoenix told Ryan that he was the protector of the golden sword, inside the golden sword was a demon that destroys everything in its path. The demon knew that Ryan was capable of wielding the sword, so he used a demon soldier to try and tell Ryan to pick up the sword. The phoenix also told them to keep the Mogao Grottoes secret place a secret. Then, they went back to the airport to share their experience in the Mogao Grottes journal.

They all learned that they should protect mythical creatures and let them roam where they want. They should also not take things they’re not supposed to. At the end, everyone promised that they will keep the secret place of Mogao Grottoes a secret.

The Mogao Grottoes

International Christian School, Hung, Kristobel – 11

Prologue

I looked out the window of the bus, seeing nothing but a dry desert.

Today our class was going on a field trip to the Mogao Grottoes, and I was the only one who wasn't excited. First of all, I hated long car rides. The ride from our school to the Mogao Grottoes was over 2 hours, and I was already starting to get car sick. Another thing was that I've never been interested in art. I've always preferred reading over anything else. "Get ready class!" exclaimed Mrs Chen, our homeroom teacher, "We'll arrive in 10 minutes!" Everyone Cheered. "Oh great," I thought, "This is going to be the most boring field trip ever."

Chapter 1

I stepped out of the bus along with a cluster of students holding clipboards, journals, and pens. After that, we still had to take a shuttle bus from the Mogao Caves Digital Exhibition Center to get to the actual site.

I thought on the bus: "Why did Mama have to sign me up for this? She knew that I preferred to stay at home."

"An," Mama said earlier this morning at breakfast, "This field trip will be a great opportunity for you to make some new friends! It isn't healthy to be alone all the time."

The shuttle bus stopped in front of a magnificent site. The doors opened, and one by one, we got off. I was the last one to get off, so my classmates had already gathered around our teacher.

I looked around, then slowly made my way towards them. "Time to put you all into groups!" Our teacher announced. Mrs Chen was one of those people who seemed to never be sad. A smile was always glued to her face. Bit by bit, the line got shorter. "And lastly," Mrs Chen said, "An and Daisy!" I turned around just to see Daisy looking at me with a huge grin. She wore braces, and always kept her pitch black hair in pigtails. "Ooh, I'm so Excited!" she squealed, "Let's go, partner!"

Chapter 2

Daisy was the last person I wanted to be partners with. She never stopped talking, and always annoyed me.

"So, what should we do next?" Daisy asked. I shrugged. "I suggest that we see the cave temples first! I heard that the Mogao grottoes hold the world's largest collection of buddhist art! And have you heard that the caves were actually carved by hand? You can learn so much just from reading!" She stopped talking, and looked at me for a reply. I nodded. "Okay let's go then!" She said, already starting to run towards the ancient structure.

It was a bit dark inside. I continued to follow Daisy as she skipped along, stopping now and then to look around.

"We could be here for days! Did you know that there are 735 caves in total?" she sighed happily. "You know you should also start talking An, and we really should start working on our worksheets."

"Okay." I finally responded. We both took out pencils from our backpacks and sat down outside one of the caves. For a while we were exchanging questions and answers, filling in each of the boxes carefully.

"One last question!..." Daisy continued, "And...done!"

We both stood up with our newly finished worksheets.

"Now that we're done, we can just enjoy the rest of the field trip!" she exclaimed. I nodded, and we continued to walk along the tunnel of caves.

Chapter 3

"There's just so much to learn here!" Daisy said in a dreamy voice. "It's such a pity that the field trip ends in an hour or so."

I was actually starting to relax. Daisy wasn't as annoying as I thought, and maybe we could even become friends. I guess this field trip wasn't as bad.

We stopped by a particular cave that felt different from the others. Inside were some scrolls, and it was about the size of my bedroom. "This is the Library cave!" Daisy exclaimed, "Oh I could just go on and on talking about this cave alone! Did you know that the World's earliest printed book was found here? And have I mentioned that most of the items in the Library cave can be found online? I just can't forget the fact that nearly 50,000 ancient documents were found here!"

My head was about to burst. Without thinking, I just exploded. "You're so annoying Daisy!" I yelled, "Can't you just be quiet for a minute?! I'd rather run all the way home than be partners with you!" Instantly, she ran away.

"Wait!" I tried yelling to her, but it was too late.

Chapter 4

"Daisy!" I yelled. My voice echoed through the empty tunnel of caves. This wasn't looking so good, since we had to meet back with our teacher in half an hour. I started to run. My jacket flapped against the wind. "Daisy!" I yelled, with more panic this time. Just when I was about to go and find Mrs Chen, I heard sobbing coming from one of the caves. I peeked inside and noticed Daisy sitting in the corner sniffing, and wiping her tears with her sleeve. "I'm sorry," I said as I approached her. "I know what I said really hurt you."

"It's fine." She said, wiping a tear off her cheek. "I just never knew that you thought I was annoying. I'm sorry if I bothered you." I offered her a hand, and helped her up. "Now come on," I said. "Let's meet back with the class."

Chapter 5

We met back with the class a minute later. Everyone looked exhausted, yet relieved. After our teacher did a quick head count, we headed back into the shuttle bus that would take us back to the start. I then plopped down in my seat, trying to catch my breath. "I guess you never know what could happen.." I said aloud. Then, I leaned back in my chair for a short rest.

Zhangwei and the Mysteries of the Mogao Caves

International Christian School, Yang, Renee – 10

“Come down Zhang Wei, you're late to school!” Zhang Wei's dad shouted. “Coming!” Zhang Wei replied, then he ran down the stairs of his house and got into his dad's car. Then they drove off to school. “Well well well, look who is late again”. A voice called out just as he walked into the classroom. He already knew that voice it was his teacher Ms Adam's, as usual scolding him for being late. He didn't really care at this point since he was used to it by now. “Anyways, let's start class now” Ms Adam said in a strict tone. Zhang Wei never listened to Ms Adam's lecture. All he was thinking about now was his favourite class, Science – he was thinking about the formula's the teacher taught the class the other day. “Di ling di ling” The Clock made a sound as it interrupted Zhang Wei's thought. Then all his classmates ran down the hallway like they were free. Zhang Wei didn't care though, he just plugged in his earphones and started listening to his playlist. Di ling Di ling The clock rang again, The school day ended quicker then he had expected.

When he arrived home he started his homework until he was interrupted by his dad asking him to get the mail. When checking the mail, Zhang Wei discovers a postcard addressed to his dad with a picture of an old cave. The postcard was all written in Chinese and other than his surname, Zhang Wei couldn't understand much, so he decided to ask his dad about it. When looking at the card, his dad firstly had a smile but as he read the message he started to frown. “The cave is the Mogao cave and it was actually where your mom grew up.” “And this card is actually from your uncle and he said many relics within the Mogao cave area are now at the risk of disappearing because of climate change” his dad answered. “Mogao cave is also where I first met your mom, and I fell in love with her at first sight,” his dad smiled. “And I need to go back and help the people there”, at that time Zhang Wei only knew his dad teaches archaeology in university but little did he know, he is a world renowned archaeologist studying Mogao Caves, Growing up Zhang Wei was very curious since he only knew little about his mom who passed away after he was born, knowing a little about his mom's family roots he decided to ask his dad to take him along for the trip.

In Dunhuang, although the city looks modern, it is very different from the US and most people on the street cannot speak English. Since Zhang Wei's dad was busy, he decided to go on a city tour and visit the flea market. He soon stopped at a jade shop & found an interesting dragon-shaped jade necklace. The old man that owned the shop said the dragon is auspicious in Chinese culture, so Zhang Wei decided to buy it as a souvenir. That night Zhang Wei had a dream that night with a flying Buddha coming to talk to him but when he tried to feel him, he faded out and became sand to be blown away by wind. He told his dream to his dad the next morning during breakfast and drew his visual of the flying Buddha. His dad was very surprised as the image is the same as the Buddha statue the archaeologist team is trying to salvage.

Zhang Wei asked his dad to take him to see the statue. When they arrived, Zhang Wei was astonished by its size and height; it was about 10-floor high. His dad explained that it's one of the largest statues in the Mogao Cave and there were hundreds of smaller ones but all were multi-floor high. walking around, Zhang Wei found all the Buddha statues which all looked differently and seemed to have both male and female. And as he was so occupied looking at these magnificent buddha statues, he was stumbled upon by something on the floor. When he picked it up and looked closer, he found it was a key with a dragon engraved on it. And the dragon looks similar to the one he bought in the flea market. He showed his dad the key during dinner. His dad was surprised and asked Zhang Wei to show him where he found the key. That night Zhang Wei had another dream that night and the same Buddha appeared again, this time he was smiling and nodding. But again when he tried to feel him, he faded away again.

The next day Zhang Wei's dad and his crews arrived at the place and through X-ray probing, there seemed to be an underground cave. As they were wondering whether they should drill to investigate further, they found a keyhole and decided to use the key Zhang Wei found and try. “There is a big cave underground,” the crew shouted.

Over the next 1year the team uncovered and salvaged many relics underground and this underground cave was the largest finding in history by the archaeologist team working there. Zhang Wei only stayed in Dunhuang for a month and sadly he didn't find much about his mother's roots. And he returned back to his school life in the US. One day as he was doing his usual day-dreaming, he dreamed of the same Buddha and his mother standing next to him. Both of them waved to Zhang Wei and said “Thank you”.

Mogao Grottoes

International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Cheung, Ayden – 10

Once in a land in ancient China, on a warm summer's day, a baby named Zue Yun came screaming, kicking, and wailing into being. He quickly was the joy of his mother and father's life.

At the time he was seven, he learned to walk, talk, and till the farmlands.

By the time he was ten, he was the smartest person in school.

When Zue Yun was twenty, he had to leave this home for ninety-nine days to test his strength, bravery, and his ability to cook. This all sounded easy. Then again, this was not as there were dragons and spirits roaming around.

The day when Zue Yun turned twenty rolled along as quickly as an evil spirit chasing a Whimp. He packed his bag with the most helpful items such as a jade blade with the enchantment of Damage Dealer, two dozen huge jam tarts, scrolls to read, a mini portable shrine to praise the gods, and a sleeping bag, which came with his stuffed rabbit.

At the time Zue Yun set off, the sun was just rising, so he kissed his parents goodbye and did a small Hula to entertain them. As he went toward the east, he passed jagged mountains, flowing rivers, ginormous ravines, and mysterious caves. He also saw a Billyblilly bird's nest with eight eggs, a Washchash guping salmon, an Energetic spirit leaping, and a Sepider's glowing eyes. Zue Yun was so focused on the wonderful animals that he slipped and fell off a cliff!

He was quick to react though, and went on his stomach and spread his weight, aimed for the softest bush he could find, and fell in with a CRUNCH!

He fell on an angry baby dragon! The dragon let out a tremendous ROAR, but ruined the dramatic effect by sneezing. Zue Yun ran for his life!!! He swore if he ever lived he wouldn't eat dragon stew for the rest of his life. After a quick dash here and there, a fake left, a fake right, and Zue Yun saw it: the perfect hiding spot, a cave with a lot of mini caves in it. He ran in as fast as he could (about as fast a speeding ostrich) and ducked in the cave. Luckily for him, the baby dragon was dumb, and flew right past Zue Yun without a second thought. Not like the dragon would have any more thoughts, because it smashed right into a boulder. Dragon brains were precious in his village, so by nightfall Zue Yun made a wonky clay pot with Buddha's face on it, and stored the brains inside. He ate two jam tarts and went to sleep.

By the next month or so, Zue Yun made many pots and portable cubbyholes, and stored many things in them, such as dragon hide, spirit soul, and fairy wings. He collected these items really easily thanks to his enchanted blade. Today was the fourth-fifth day, and he decided to gather goblin bones for the funsies. He could tell he entered goblin territory in the woods as the trees grew thicker and darker with more cuts and slashes, and Zue Yun could tell those marks were not tattoos.

He found his first goblin soon as he drew his blade, he could tell it wanted the jade. SHING! SLASH! STAB! Zue Yun's fist goblin down. But like cockroaches, goblins knew if one of their kind were dead, and also like cockroaches, they knew where to find them. Two more goblins came out, as well as a bloodcurdling battle cry. CHOP! Down went a goblin. HACK! There went another one. But he was quickly outnumbered and was forced to grab the bones and run away! Zue Yun backedtracked and backedtracked and backedtraked. The sun was setting and spirits were floating in the clearing where his base camp was. Zue Yun defeated the weaker spirits and dodged the stronger ones. He ducked into his base camp and ate some Billybilly bird wings topped off with Shmeell seasoning and put away the goblinw bones. That was enough for today.

On the ninety-ninth day, Zue Yun started to ride home on a tamed Fohoxed, which were like horses which hunt. When he arrived, his parents cried with tears of joy! A feast was held in his name with all his favorite foods! The

party lasted up until next morning non-stop! At last when the party feast cooled down Zue Yun was to tell the crowd about his journey. Zue Yun spoke and spoke until he felt his tongue would fall out. He drank some wine and got to the point about the caves.

“Hey, there is a place where we can store our things! There is not enough space in our titchy houses! Let me introduce you to a new area!” Soon he was leading his village on their horses, and Zue Yun was on his Fohoxed. The village people loved the caves instantly and started to file out their things and junk.

They decided that such an important place needed a name and so they took on a vote to name the caves. They wrote three names on stone tablets and asked the villagers to line up behind them. “And the winner is...” called out Zue Yun, then let out a dramatic pause, “Mogao Grottoes!!!”

Months later, a traveler from a different village came and saw Mogao Grottoes with people in it. “Yo, what’s this?” The villagers explained the background story of Mogao Grottoes and the traveler got excited by all of the cool stuff and wanted to barter with the villagers. When he got back to his village he told the villagers about it. Soon the news spread and Mogao Grottoes became popular.

Mogao Grottoes was good and awesome and it still is to this day.

Dreams Can Come True

International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Guillet, Amelia – 10

I rushed to the Mogao Grottoes desperately wanting to know where I was in my dream. I remember I was inside the Mogao Grottoes but I wasn't sure which one.

"I think this is the same Mogao Grotto because a half moon sign was marked on the edge of the Mogao Grotto rooftop just like my dream ..." I muttered to myself. "I mean though, it's probably not the same Mogao Grotto because it was just a dream, right?"

I went inside but didn't see anyone in sight. I looked at the paintings and sculptures on the wall.

"Ugh wrong one." I frustratedly said and left.

I knew I wasn't going to find the right Mogao Grotto anytime soon. I was going to walk back home when I realised I was lost.

"Wa.what?!? Which way did I go!" I cried.

It started pouring rain. I ran back inside the Mogao Grotto for shelter, I could feel the water dripping down my face. I started to scan the room, I saw paintings and sculptures on the wall. The paintings had people inside, I didn't recognize the people. I spotted a purple necklace next to me. The pendant of the necklace looked a lot like a painting I saw on the wall. I thought that it must be special and this just be a sign that I must be close to the place I saw in my dream. I picked it up and put it on, and the necklace started to glow. A gap in the floor started to open beneath me. THUD! I fell through the hole.

I looked around but it was too dark to see anything. The glow of the necklace was not strong enough. I remember having my emergency packet of matches in my pocket. I lit up a match and started to look around.

"Wait how?!?" I gasped "The painting and sculptures are the same! I swear this is the same as my dream!"

Memories from my dream started running back to me. I have remembered everything now.

I saw three doors, not knowing what they led to. One of the doors was white with blue zig zags all across the door, the second door was black with 10 neon blue paw prints randomly spread across the door and the third door was purple with 1 yellow sunflower pattern.

"Should I choose a door?" I asked myself.

I tried my luck and picked the third door. I slowly walked towards the door and started turning the handle. A flash of light burst out of the room the second I fully opened the door.

"MY EYES!" I yelled

This was way too bright for my eyes. Closing my eyes I walked out the door. I opened my eyes and saw that I was outside. I walked around a little to explore. I saw that there was another Mogao Grotto!

"Well at least it's not that bright anymore..." I muttered.

There were paintings and sculptures inside this Mogao Grotto. I heard a faint sound of footsteps. I quickly searched the room for a place to hide. I noticed a little gap in between the walls. I slipped in and moved a painting to cover me up. I tried to hear if there was any talking around me but the sound just got fainter and fainter. I slipped back out the gap that I hid in.

I saw a painting that captured my attention. I took a closer look at the painting. In the center of the painting was the Buddha and beside the Buddha was land and a pond. There were musicians and dancers around the pond.

There were monks watching the musicians and dancers.

"What a beautiful painting." I thought.

Out of nowhere I noticed that one of the monks in the painting looked exactly like me! The person in the painting was wearing the same clothes that I wore in my dream and had the same purple necklace as me! I realised that the monk in the painting was me in my past life. Suddenly all the memories from that life came back to me. My eyes filled with tears and I then realized why the pouring rain turned me back to the first Mogao Grotto and then led me to this one. If it didn't rain, I would not have come back into that Mogao Grotto. It was all meant to be. This is why I dreamt of it and knew a lot about the Mogao Grottoes. I was a monk there 1,000 years ago!

The Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth

International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Leong, Trisha – 10

The tale of the Mogao Grottoes was a very famous story indeed. Millions and millions of people across China passed on the story. It began like this,

More than one and a half millennia ago, a monk decided to dig up what he thought was a special thing that was in a cave in the oasis of the desert. The special treasure questioned the people of China, this made them pass on the tale by telling more stories about it. It has been said the treasure was a thousand diamond dragon scales, protected by a ferocious demon dragon nicknamed, Xié ‘è’. Others say that the treasure was a pile of real gold, but whoever came into the cave, never got out. But the most popular legend out of all was the Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth.

Han Xin was told by his grandfather that the Mogao Grottoes were just a plain myth. He said they were fake and all the other legends were garbage and that Han Xin was wasting his time listening to these stupid stories. Han Xin didn’t agree. His family was extremely poor, his baba was a farmer, but could only make a penny or two. Right after Han Xin’s mama died of heart disease, baba would cry for ages and ages. He never recovered from his (and the family’s) painful loss. Han Xin wanted to prove to his family (especially his mama and grandfather) how the legends weren’t fake and how the “silly” legend of the seven pearl tiger teeth were real and how the tiger teeth could make a fortune for them. That night, Han Xin packed his things for the long journey to the Mogao Grottoes located in the Forbidden Peaks. He swung his brown rucksack over his shoulder and waited until midnight. Hours passed, he could hear the faint footsteps of his family going up to sleep. The clock strikes twelve, he sprints towards the broken window and jumps. Fwump! He fell on the grass. His knees were bruised badly, he dusted them off and clumsily stumbled towards the forest beside his slum, the Hù Lì forest. The thick brambles and twigs scraped his knees painfully and his knees badly ached. He now longed for home, missing his baba and the rest of his family. Han Xin decided to sleep in the Hù Lì Forest for the night. He laid on a patch of grass, his knees continuing to sting in pain. He closed his eyes and covered himself with an extra shirt to stay warm. He started to feel numb and more numb, and he fell asleep.

Han Xin looked around in horror. His rucksack...was gone. He lifted up his extra shirt from his body and glanced around the grass patch. His rucksack was stolen by cunning and mischievous foxes! Luckily, the cave was not long from the Hù Lì forest. He would at least be able to survive one more day without food and water. Soon, Han Xin was trudging through the cold, damp snow. But in the corner of his eye, he saw an opening in the mountain near him. Shivering, he stumbled to the hole and discovered that it was a cave! Almost running, he proceeded to the cave eagerly, thinking it was just easy to get the Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth. Oh, but oh dear. He was so wrong. A floor-shaking roar echoed in the dim cave. Han Xin was terrified. Looking around, he followed the unsettling stench and grumbles to a burrow that was covered in muck. He wrinkled his nose as he half walked into the burrow. Suddenly, a pair of sinister blood-red eyes flashed before his eyes. It leaped out of its burrow. It was a horrifying creature that Han Xin had never seen before. It had the eyes of a greedy goblin. The tail of a dangerous dragon. And the body of a werewolf. It growled aggressively and Han Xin shivered with fright. Fumbling in his grazed pocket, all he could find was a pocket knife, stolen from his baba’s bedside table— wait... the pocket knife! He grabbed the pocket knife from his pocket. And stabbed the creature! It howled in pain and swung its sharp long claws at Han Xin. He successfully ducked and sliced the pocket knife again. The creature screeched an ear-deafening sound and sank its teeth into Han Xin’s arm. Quivering, Han Xin limped to a corner across the cave. Bleeding uncontrollably, he sat still tiredly on a flat stone, waiting for his life to end. He could feel the hot breath of the creature, slowly walking towards him in its dirty paws. Han Xin closed his eyes. This was definitely the end. Miraculously, Han Xin felt the creature’s hot breath slowly fade away. The creature had backed off! He could see the apologetic look in the creature’s squinty blood-red eyes. Han Xin was thinking about whether he should speak or stab the creature. But no— he couldn’t, he wouldn’t! That would be so cruel! He shakily stood up and reached for some leftover bandages in his tattered pocket. He stuck them on the wounds of the stabbing he did to the creature. Surprisingly, the creature spat at Han Xin. Before Han Xin could be angry, the spit healed him! The bleeding was gone, so were the bite marks and scratches. Actually, he felt a lot better! He thanked the creature by patting its back. It grunted softly and smiled gratefully. Han Xin, still tired from the battle, noticed the creature was lonely. It only had the The Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth to keep it

company. Han Xin looked sympathetically at the creature. Wanting to be the creature's friend, he suddenly felt something in his mind. He remembered he brought an apple for the treacherous trip. He put it in his right pocket and— and that's when he had it. He reached for the apple and gave it to the creature, smiling with kindness. The creature, stunned for a minute, hugged Han Xin and the apple. The creature handed over the seven tiger teeth and Han Xin waved goodbye. The creature waved back and slowly, but surely, made its way back to its cozy burrow. Han Xin couldn't wait to tell his family. But one thing's for sure, he was going to tell everyone how he made friends with a monster. Oh how shocked they will feel when he tells them!

The Mysterious Magao Caves

International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Lo, Kailee – 9

It was just a normal day for Beck Oliver, as he was walking to the book shop, he wanted to buy some books. He got tired, so he decided to drive his dark blue RV. He called his RV with this app called 'Car come'. Suddenly his friend Jade West showed up. She wanted to go to the book shop too!

"I need some history books." Jade said.

Everyone was staring at her, because she was a very scary and a cool girl. She stepped into his car as he stopped for her to enter. She looked pure, and she always has silver scissors with her.

"Ehh. . . . Jade thinks she owns Beck. That pure face! She is not his only friend!" one of the people staring at Jade and Beck named Andromeda said while looking at Jade and Beck.

I'll take him on a better hangout! Andromeda, thought.

The next day Andromeda took Beck out on a trip.

"So, after this we have a lot to do. First, we will go to the Mogao Caves, then. . ." Andromeda told Beck as she was slurping her meatball filled pasta at 'Pizza Planet'.

"Don't you like my cool black hair?" Andromeda asked.

"It is cool!" Beck replied.

"I hate Jade's brown hair; I mean she changes the bottom part of her hair twice this week. Today she has pink hair at the bottom." Andromeda said.

Then Jade showed up at the restaurant and said, "Hey there Andromeda and Beck!"

"Jade, you change your bottom hair colour from pink to teal." Andromeda said while looking at Jade like a baby.

"Hey Jade, I was just hanging out with Andromeda today." Beck said.

"That'll be twenty dollars." said the cashier at Pizza Planet named Jimmy. "Oh no! It's J. . . JJ. . . Jade W. . . West." He said in a scared Italian voice.

Everyone was afraid of Jade. Except for Andromeda Draco.

"Let's go!" said Andromeda.

"Can Jade come?" Beck asked.

"Sure." She grinned.

"Welcome to the Mogao cave! Here you can see a lot of things from history. Like Andy Mars, Ruby Manchester and other things too!" A person said on the speaker.

It was a dark, depressing, dusty and gloomy cave. There was a ginormous book shelf next to a painting of a Buddha.

"Hmm. . . this looks interesting!" Beck said as he pulled three books at a time.

Then he slipped and fell down a secret passageway.

Jade was talking to other people asking them where the restroom was so she could fix her makeup.

Andromeda saw Beck fell and told Jade.

"Let's go in!" Jade whispered.

"Okay!" Andromeda replied.

Jade and Andromeda sat down and had to slide down the secret passageway.

"Hey guys!" Beck said in a calm, normal voice.

"Are you okay?" Jade asked.

"Yeah!" he replied.

"Welcome all!" a strange guy said while he walked out. "I am Max Thunder Draco, and I was one of the people who created this place. I created this secret passage way and there is no way out. Even if there is you'll never figure it out! Oh by the way my last name Draco is Latin for dragon."

"How old are you?" asked Beck.

"One and a half millennia and a bit more years old." He said while touching the walls.

"What the heck!" Andromeda said with a shock.

"Wait! I know that picture on the book shelf. It is Andy Mars." Jade said. "She was the founder of this place."

"What!" Max Thunder shouted, "Andy did not find it, I did." He spoke.

"You know Andy Mars?" Jade asked.

"Andy, do you have anything to say about this?" Max Thunder asked.

"Why are you looking at Andromeda?" Beck asked.

"Wait, is Andromeda Andy Mars?" Jade asked curiously.

"Yep!" Andromeda said.

"But your name is Andromeda Jane Draco!" Beck said.

“My name Is Andromeda Mars Draco” Andromeda said.

“What about your middle name Jane?” Jade asked.

“Well, my name is two words. I am Andromeda Jane, or Andy Jane. So, my full name is Andromeda Jane Mars Draco.” Andromeda explained.

“Let us out of here Max Thunder!” Beck cried.

“Yeah!” Jade said.

“Wait! The books! That was how we got in; maybe they are the way to get out!” “Let’s try it!” Beck said.

So, Jade took a green, red, blue, and pink book and threw it at the wall. So did Beck as he took a brown, black, and yellow book and threw them too.

Then a rock climb wall appeared. Jade climbed up first Beck followed, then Max and Andy Jane.

Once they all got up back to the surface. The passage collapsed behind them. “Well, the passage died!” Andy Jane said. “I am so sorry I betrayed you and lied to other people who think ‘Andy Mars’ found the Magao caves, but it was you.” Andy Jane said sadly while looking at Max Thunder.

“Wait! Were you brothers and sisters?” Beck asked.

“Yep! A long time ago!” Max said.

“Now too!” Andy Jane said.

Magao Grottoes

International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Prete, Sara – 8

In a small city in China, there was a little school, in a poor village far away. This school was called Language of life primary school and this week the year fives were going on a field trip to visit the Mogao Grottoes.

When a boy named Jack found out that he was going on a field trip to the Mogao Grottoes he was very irritated as he felt that this was a waste of a trip. Jack was a tall boy with jet black hair that often covered his eyes, he also had jade-like eyes and freckles.

So in order to evade this trip, Jack tried his best to stay home instead of spending the day in a boring landmark. The night before the field trip the motivated student stayed up all night devising a plan to pretend he was sick at school and have the school nurse send him back home forcing him to miss the bus and the field trip. While making his master plan Jack slowly fell asleep

“BEEP BEEP BEEP”, the blaring alarm noises rang through Jack's ears as he woke up. Barely awake he glanced towards his alarm clock to check the time. Jack was shocked because the clock read 7:45 meaning he missed the school bus.

Since he missed the bus, Jack's mom Rosa drove him to school. Unfortunately, since he slept in and had to be driven by his mom, Jack couldn't pretend to be sick, meaning that he would have to suffer through this boring field trip.

Like all the other student's Jack boarded the bus. After hearing his teacher ramble and over exaggerate the wonders of the Grottoes Jack dozed off.

Jack arose to the sudden halt of the bus; they had finally arrived in JiuQuan China, home of the Mogao Grottoes. Jack and his classmates got off the bus and the huge Chinese architecture of the Grottoes shadowed Jack. He looked up amazed to see the bright red colours and beautiful swirls and curls along with the structure.

Jack walked inside the Grottoes and entered the “lobby” and Jack was surprisingly amazed from what he had seen. He was left mouth open by the jade designs, the beautiful drawings and scriptures on the walls, and finally the huge terracotta statue basking in the middle of all this beauty.

As Jack started exploring the beautiful jade “lobby” of the Grottoes Jack started to hear a voice coming from the “authorised personnel only” section. This voice was calling to him, as it took control of him to walk towards the closed area but as Jack wandered in more and more, he started to get further and further away from his group.

Jack slowly approached the steel doors, he pulled the huge steel door open and stepped inside. “SLAM” the door behind him closed shut, trapping him inside, unexpected and unaware Jack took a step forward...then another...then another. As he was walking he heard a “click” behind him. He turned around immediately to see who was behind him, but unexpectedly the floor underneath him collapsed.

Jack fell straight down into a small pool of water which cushioned his fall. After Jack's vision had cleared from the water he tried to assess where he was. Jack was taken by surprise by the detailed design of the cavern he had fallen into. He turned around only to be faced with a huge figure. Jack screamed. But after taking a second glance Jack noticed that the figure wasn't a person... But a terracotta statue much like the ones he saw in the lobby.

Jack took a step back, not taking his eyes off the terracotta figure. But unfortunately for him, he spent too much of his attention on the terracotta figure and slipped on a sheet of silk. When he fell down he took his moment of unawareness to take a look at his surroundings.

Jack had expected to see some dirt, dust and sand, seeing as these grottoes haven't been fully explored yet and were probably very dirty. Truth be told, he was right but those three things weren't what caught his eye first, it was the beautiful jade articles, the magnificent silk sheets and the breathtaking stacks and stacks of precious metals.

But while admiring the riches he had just found, and basking in his own glory, Jack realised that he ought to get back or else people would notice that he was missing. So Jack started looking for a way out, but the more he searched the less he could find, and the more he walked the more he heard "click...click...click".

In the beginning, Jack thought it was in his head but as soon as Jack sat down hopeless, with no clear signs of escape. The thought occurred to him, that this room might be booby trapped too, at that exact moment...the floor collapsed...again.

Then Jack started to fall, more and more and more. He thought he was going to be stuck in this bottomless pit forever until he saw something he didn't want to see...not in this situation at least. Jack had caught sight of the floor, and just like any normal human, he braced for impact. Only to land on the cold, hard...bus seat.

"Hey Jack, it's time to go," the teacher called, "you wouldn't wanna miss the field trip". Jack smiled "no sir I would never dream of it".

An Unexpected Visit to the Tang Palace

International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Tsang, Abi – 10

Ying lived in a small village by the Daghe River which was very close to the Mogao Grottoes. She would always go to visit her brother, who was a devoted monk there, and he would let her explore the caves and its new paintings. It never failed to impress her. Every time she visited, there were monks working on different paintings. Although she went there so often, it was still full of surprises. That is, new paint colours would be discovered from extracts of vegetables grown in different parts of the world that were traded along the Silk Road. Camels from faraway lands of the Turks would come into the city for trading with the locals, which mainly involved different types of food and of course the famous fine silk related merchandise.

One day, whilst she was exploring the Grottoes, something caught her eyes. She then instructed her brother, Xiao Yan, to come to look. Whilst she led him to the secret room, he looked at her with suspicion. They were about to enter the spiritual room which was out of bound to all lower-level monks. As they opened the thick wooden bolted door, Ying and Xiao Yan were so shocked that they almost appeared frozen...

All of a sudden, both of them were being pushed to the ground and then tied up. Ying managed to look around the room before being blindfolded. A group of children were kidnapped. There were shouting and crying coming from the victims. Several kidnappers were wearing military uniforms whilst one of them was dressed as a monk.

Xiao Yan asked Ying quietly to feel around for sharp objects. Ying felt a small sharp stone with her legs and kicked them over towards the direction of her brother's whisper. Xiao Yan managed to free himself. Whilst trying to free the other children, Ying heard footsteps coming towards the room. The kidnappers must have heard the noise that they made and charged into the room. Unarmed and feeling scared, Ying and her brother decided to fight back. Xiao Yan fought hard and managed to grab some hard objects in the poorly lit room to smash them against the kidnappers' heads. Just as they were celebrating their triumph, their happiness slowly turned to disappointment as they found all the valuables in the room were completely destroyed, namely sculptures, paintings, and jades.

"We are in much trouble," Xiao Yan turned to her sister, "The chief monk would expel me for sure."

They heard a groan from one of the tied-up victims and freed him. Unlike the other children in their dirty ragged clothes, this person was dressed in fine silk. "Are you hurt?" Ying asked him.

"Thank you so much for saving me. I'm unharmed," he replied

"Why did they kidnap you?" asked Xiao Yan.

"I'm guessing they are trying to use me to bargain with the Emperor," he said.

As confused as it gets, Ying asks the boy who is dressed in fine silk clothing in front of her "And you are?"

"I am Prince Yinong, the Emperor is my father," said the boy calmly.

Ying could not believe what she just heard so she turned to her brother and asked, "Did he just say he was the Prince?"

Her brother, who was as shocked as she was, said "That's what I heard too, I think."

While in complete disbelief Xiao Yan looked around the room and noticed all the damage that the kidnappers had made, and worried about getting expelled.

"How are we going to fix all the damage? Will you be in big trouble?" Ying asked her brother.

“Did you two not understand what I had just said?” laughed the boy in fine silk wear, “I am Prince Yinong, second son of the emperor. I will take care of all the damage and in fact, I will arrange to restore this whole Grottoes. I would also like to invite you two to come to the palace and spend a few days as my guest of honor in order to show my gratitude for saving me.”

“Wow! A few days in the palace!” Ying and Xiao Yan thought to themselves. “What should we wear, all our clothes are torn and have holes!” Prince Yinong reassured them that they would have nothing to worry about. Xiao Yan escorted all of them to see the chief monk at Mogao Grottoes. The chief monk was not that surprised to see Prince Yinong amongst the kidnapped children as he received words days earlier from the emperor that the rebellion army had kidnapped his son and was planning to use his son for bargaining chips.

After traveling back to the Palace which is heavily guarded by the Imperial Army, Prince Yinong showed Ying and Xiao Yan around the palace which was so grand and massive that after spending three whole days there, they have only explored a tenth of the area.

The food in the palace was also amazing, they had chefs that were responsible for one specific cuisine for different meals of the day. One peculiar observation was that the emperor would not touch any of the dishes until someone had tried the dishes for him, this was to prevent the emperor being poisoned. Ying whispered to her brother, “I wouldn’t mind having this job and I will even do it for free!”

Three days passed very quickly. At last, it was time to say goodbye to Prince Yinong and leave the palace.

“Before you two go I have one last surprise,” said Prince Yinong whilst he slowly pulled two gold medals from his pocket. “This is a medal of honor to show how grateful I am for saving me, and with this medal you are granted permission to enter the palace anytime you want.”

This was the most amazing gift Ying has ever received. Just like the old legend says, "with the Mogao Caves, anything can happen.”

Once Upon a Buddha

Kau Yan School (Primary), Chan, Mong Chi Molly – 10

‘Class! Calm down! If I hear another peep from you, he or she can’t go on the school trip!’ shouted Ms. Wong. The poor little lady was yelling so loudly that she looked as red as a tomato.

Carlos’s class had gone on a school trip to the Mogao Grottoes, which they have been learning in history class. The whole grade was super excited to see the art the cave contains and have been talking about it nonstop.

On the day of the trip, after riding the bus for a long time, they finally arrived at the Mogao Grottoes. Carlos and his class were fascinated. His jaw dropped when he saw the seven-storey tall cave decorated like a Chinese temple with red roofs. ‘Wow, it looks magnificent!’

The class wandered around and Carlos was making notes and was fascinated by the wall paintings and sculptures of many Buddha’s. While Carlos was busy studying a colourful wall painting of Buddhas, he noticed that one was painted with a red star painted on its forehead, so he called to his mate Owen ‘Come look!’ but while they were checking out the unusual Buddha, a kid in their class, Finn, barged in and shoved them away.

‘What are you guys looking at?’ he demanded.

He then spotted the Buddha with the red star on his forehead and asked. ‘Will something happen?’ Then, as quick as lightning, he threw his shoe at the Buddha.

And the next thing they know, they’re falling.

Carlos screamed and screamed as they fell, but it turned out that it was a short fall, and something soft happened to cushion them when they hit the floor.

‘Woah, this is really creepy,’ said Owen.

The room that they fell into was deep underground and dark. The walls are made of stone blocks and cobwebs hung everywhere. Suddenly, Carlos yelled, ‘Come here! I think I just found a door!’

Carlos and Owen used all of their might to push open the door, but they couldn’t. The door was stuck. Suddenly, Finn ran up and kicked the door open. ‘You guys are weak!’

They went inside the door and what they saw blew their mind. Inside were three statues made of pure gold and wearing accessories made with precious stones. Next, there were dusty shelves topped with stacks of papers that had turned yellow, accessories made of gold, and many other things that looked really valuable. But out of all things, a rusty old box on the corner of the shelf caught Carlos’s eye. When he opened it, he discovered that there was a piece of paper with a drawing of a map of the Mogao Grottoes. He quickly stuffed it in his pocket and ran to find the others. He found them picking up the gold accessories and trying them on. ‘We’re going to be rich!’

‘I think it would be wiser not to take them. We should leave them,’ said Carlos.

The others sighed and put them back. But now, the matter was that they could not climb back out of the hole they fell into.

‘Maybe we can see if there’s another exit,’ said Owen.

Surprisingly, as they scanned around the room, they found another door leading to a tunnel.

After walking for a long time in the pitch-black tunnel, they finally saw sunlight. And there was a rope that led back up. When they reached the top, they discovered that they were inside an empty room in the Mogao Grottoes, so they began to walk back out to find their class. When they were about to walk out of the room, Carlos heard a loud thump. It was a trap. All in a second, a giant boulder dropped out of nowhere and sealed the door.

‘Help! Help! We’re trapped!’

Even with all three of them trying, they still can't push away the boulder blocking their path. They tried calling for help but no one happened to pass by. When they're feeling like giving up, Carlos suddenly had an idea. He ordered Owen and Finn to take out the rope that they climbed up on, and tied it around the boulder.

Once it was done, he said, 'On the count of three, pull as hard as you can. One, two, three!' and the boulder began to move. It opened a little hole wide enough for them to climb out. When they reached outside, they quickly out and found their classmates.

After they talked and explained to their class, although leaving out the part where they found the secret room. Suddenly Ms. Wong yelled out in a panicked voice, 'Class! Help me find Finn! He is missing again!' The class all ran off and searched for Finn.

Carlos thought, 'What if Finn went back to the room?'

So, he and Owen went and gave the Buddha a hard kick. Down in the room., they heard Finn shouting for help, but they couldn't find him.

'Maybe there's another room somewhere,' said Carlos.

He suddenly remembered the piece of paper written with a map. But Carlos was very tired and decided to lean on a wall to rest. Suddenly, the wall spun around and trapped him in a room behind the wall.

'Carlos is that you?' said a voice.

'Finn! The whole class is very worried about you!' said Carlos.

After Owen got Carlos and Finn out, the three of them went to climb back up. They stood on top of each other and Carlos grabbed the rope from above to let the others climb up. When they are on the ground above Finn, tell the other two why he went back down.

'I just want to take one last look at the treasure room, but when I sat down, the wall gave in and I was trapped.' As they were leaving the Mogao Grottoes, they looked back at the cave, thought about the adventures they've had today, wondered when they would come here and discover more secrets.

The Adventures of Mogao Caves: Apsara

Kau Yan School (Primary), Hom, Hang Tung Audrey – 11

“We got to go in and check this out,” Grace yells to his brother Greg and runs into the small ancient-like Chinese temple. Incense is burning next to Buddha figures and a monk approaches them. “Hello. We’re new to the neighborhood and wanted to visit your temple,” Grace says to the monk.

“Welcome. I sense that you are here on a special journey,” replies the monk.

“Are you from China? In Chinese history class, we just read about the Mogao Grottoes. It’s so interesting. It began in 366 AD along the Silk Road and they called it the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas, spanning over many dynasties, including the Sui, Tang and Song. I’ve never been to Dunhuang, Gansu but they say it was the heart of trade, religion, and culture. Mogao, or ‘the high place of the desert’, continued for a thousand years with about 500 painted caves or grottoes, over 2,000 painted sculptures and over 50,000 cultural relics. It was a center of Buddhist art with influences of the East and West. It showed us so much about the beliefs, culture, arts and daily life of the Chinese people at that time. It’s a time capsule and treasure all in one,” Grace says in excitement and intrigue, sounding like her teacher.

The monk kindly answers, “Yes, I’ve traveled a far way. Indeed, Mogao carries many wonders and secrets yet to be discovered...’Om Mani Padme Hum’. Feel free to explore.”

Greg, being naughty as usual, runs off into the next room as Grace chases after him, “Wait for me!”

“This is cool! We can play hide and seek here and I bet you’ll never find me here. Tagged, you’re it!” yelled Greg as he gives Grace a shove and runs off. He barges into a room with doors of golden lotus on it.

“Got you!” as Grace jumps out and grabs Greg’s hoodie. He grabs onto the small table and a porcelain jar hits the ground, sending up a cloud of golden dust. “Look what you did now! We better let the monk know and clean this up.” They cleaned up the broken vase and headed out but could not find the monk. Outside they heard galloping horses and went out to see. “What was that?”

At the door of the temple, they looked out and were shocked. The city street was gone and they saw a big desert with an oasis in the far distance. The horse galloping sounds got louder and louder.

“Quickly follow me, now” said a lovely voice. Grace and Greg follow the lady going back inside the temple and go down a dark secret corridor and come out after a short walk.

“You’re beautiful and your outfit is like the one I saw in my Chinese history book. What is happening? Where are we? How did we get here?” asked Grace. Greg is frightened and stays close behind Grace.

“I am one of the fairies called Apsara or you can call me Feitian. You are safe as we are in the Mogao Cave and they are gone. Those were raiders from the evil lord MingTai. They are looking for the sacred vase of the 1000 Hand Buddha. I sense that you are sent here from the Heavens,” explained Feitian. “Oh no, they’ve stolen the vase! We must get it back if we are to send you back to heaven.”

Grace and Greg, still a bit in disbelief, have so many questions, “Mogao Cave! This must be a dream! Okay, we’ll help as we want to wake up and be back home before it gets too late. Who built this cave? Why does it have so many drawings and statues?”

“In 366 AD a monk named Le Zun came here at the cliffs of Mingsha Mountain and when the heavens showed him the image of a thousand Buddhas through the light of the sun, he decided to build the first grotto here as a place to cultivate himself according to the teachings of Buddha. Over a thousand years, Buddhism flourished in this area as more monks came to cultivate themselves and to preach Dharma to the merchants who passed through the Silk Road. The statues, fresco murals, and manuscripts all show Buddhist thoughts and philosophy in bright colors and details,” Feitian explains.

Grace takes a close look at the paintings in the wall and recognizes, "Feitian, I see you in so many of the pictures. You are so beautiful, graceful and you can fly and play music! I can see you being helpful, bringing pleasure through music and accompanying Buddha and so many people."

"Yes, we must go now and get the vase. I have a plan," Feitian says. They came to where the raiders were resting under a tree. Feitian plays her musical instrument to get the attention of raiders and in no time the music puts them asleep. Grace quietly approaches the raiders and finds the vase. Greg trips and wakes up the raiders and they chase after them.

Feitian springs to the sky, flying above the raiders and showers them with a lotus flower with a mysterious smell. They all fall asleep onto the ground while Grace and Greg race back to the cave. "That was close and thank—you for saving us," says Grace.

"You two have been brave. Thank—you for helping to get the vase back." Feitian plays a soft tone and Grace and Greg fall asleep.

"Om Mani Padme Hum...Wake up. Time to go home," said the monk. Grace and Greg woke up and started heading home.

"I had the strangest dream," says Greg. They arrive home tired. Grace opens her bag and finds a white vase with a lotus flower in it. She cannot stop thinking about Feitian and the bravery that she gave her to act, all the while protecting them; we must act with grace and bravery. Feitian and Mogao Caves were a true wonder.

The Greatest Treasure

Kau Yan School (Primary), Liu, Elan – 12

The grand clock of Ember Mansion was ticking nonstop, as time passed by, John Ember and his younger brother, Mark Ember were reading on the grand Mogao Grottoes, the ancient temple in the cave near an oasis where traders and travelers rest. John was ambitious and he wanted to have all the riches in the Mogao Grottoes, but going there was difficult so they asked their king, King Edward VII, to help them.

Edward thought carefully, with his hand constantly swiping his long grey beard. Suddenly, he replied, “Right.....Right. So you wish me to offer you 100 men and 11 of the Grand Generals of the Empire, for a temple? And you also want to go the long way to prevent a spiritual monster?” John replied nervously, “Your majesty, it is no ordinary temple, the roads are made out of gold and the rooms are full of gold, silver, diamonds, amethyst and much much more. And I will give you half of the riches.” Edward had a sneaky grin on his face and replied, “Great! I expect barrels and barrels of riches. Wait, no! You will go with me there, and so, you will not go away.”

On the next Tuesday, John and his little ‘crusade’ set off for the Mogao Grottoes, everyone was full of excitement and filled with glee, they wanted the treasure and will risk everything for it. John was on the giant ship that was to land on British Raj with everyone else, every of the 114 people was excited. John was excited he kept running and running around the ship to find his bookworm brother, Mark. John suddenly bumped into Mark while Mark was reading a book called “Mysteries And Prophecies of the Ancient Ruins” John shouted enthusiastically, “Oi, bookworm! What are you reading?” Mark replied in a cold tone, “Mysteries and Prophecies of the Ancient Ruins, about the Mogao Grottoes.” John replied, “Yeah, you can read more about your Foggy Rottos, we’re off for adventure! Get ready, we’re landing at British Raj!” When they arrived at the shore of the British Raj, their troops continued forward and forward, people were cheering, treasure was here! They all endured through the long roads and finally, they arrived at the humongous and glorious entrance of grand Mogao Grottoes.

They all rushed into the grand temple and John, Mark and Edward’s knights, Tomhold, Jax, Jace, Lucian, Jamie, Adam, Ben, Connor, Regulus and Harold. Harold was the champion of the knights, he always took the treasure everywhere, the golden statues, the amethyst necklaces, everything that is worth something great and he wanted it, he will get it. He was greedy and he liked riches. While they moved to the second room, there was a robot-like figure, it moved and moved, and it pointed to Connor, Connor shaked nonstop, he was very very scared. Then, the floor started to fall and Connor screamed loudly, and he fell into the deep dungeons. Suddenly, they heard a loud “SPLAT!” Then everyone there was splashed with blood. Mark screamed in terror and Mark begged them to go, “We should leave this sacred place! In my book, we must leave! Or destroy the grand blue jewel, or we will all die! There will be more Connors and then, we will ALL DIE!” Harold blew a raspberry and replied confidently, “Nah! Connor was just an accident.” And they moved on, the 13 men searched everywhere for the riches afterwards, not feeling sad for their comrade’s death.

Then, when they entered the next room, it locked off from every other room, the people trembled greatly, Harold laughed, “You are afraid? There is nothing to be afraid of! Let’s go find a way out!” But then, they were separated into smaller rooms, and suddenly, sand poured into 6 of the rooms slowly and slowly, the sound of the falling of the sand made people more scared than ever. After that, only 7 came out and the body came tumbling. John, Mark, Edward, Tomhold, Adam, Jax and Harold were surviving. Everyone except Harold wanted to leave, Jax shouted, “Let’s go!” But Harold tripped Jax and his head was pouring with blood after hitting a stair. Edward was furious, he shouted, “THIS IS A MUTINY! I FORCE YOU TO LET US GO!” Harold laughed maniacally, “Force? You force me? I have all the power and you have none.” Harold evilly tied them up, gave them goblets of water to ‘drink’ and went into the grand statue room, where the blue Crystal was.

John tried to free the others, but suddenly, when they were freed, Adam drank all the water, but it was laced with poison and “THUD!” He fell onto the ground. Edward was furious, he clenched his fists angrily, and swore revenge. They all went to the statue room to confront Harold. They walked in and saw the blue jewel and they fought with Harold. Harold beat the king in his eye, but John kicked him in the feet and he fell into a pit with spikes. And Mark threw the Crystal into the hole. And recited the poem, “Two dragon-fire and a king; travel far into the land of the dragons; a cave of the lost men with jewels and rings; hide the darkest secrets of men. In the team there was a dent;

they grew suspicious of one another; the one with six and eight in front; takes a treasure not to be taken. The king and his knights died before another; but there were four that will preserve; the four never betrayed one another; and truth is their true intent. Though there was no treasure there; though Golden Goblets, Golden Fruits; better than the other rares; friends and family is the greatest treasure, cherished in everyone's heart." John said, "Wow! Is it a prophecy? It is beautiful!"

They left the grottoes with the greatest treasure but their hand was not full, no bats were filled, for they gained a new friendship.

The Mystery of the Mogao Caves

Kau Yan School (Primary), Ng, Yuet Sum Caylie – 12

The first beam of sun hit my face, I groaned and slowly crawled to the bathroom with my blanket on. As I brushed my teeth, I thought about the strange dream that I had. In my dream, there was a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light, inside a cave. What was that? I picked up my phone and called my friend, Jackson who's a geographer. "Hey, Jackson...I just had this dream...it's a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light, inside a cave..." Jackson asked, "Oh, are you interested? I have some time, how about we go on a trip?" I answered happily, "Sure!" I then provided more details to Jackson and searched about buddhas.

We then decided to go to China, as it's one of the places with a lot of Buddha statues. Jackson and I met up at the airport and started our amazing journey! On the way to China, the plane assistants suddenly told us all to prepare to crash! I was so scared, my hands and legs were shaking. Jackson held my hands tightly, "It's going to be fine, here, wear this suit first" luckily, we fell into a raging river.

The next thing I knew, I was in a soft bed. Jackson came over and yelled, "Caylie! You're finally awake!" I spoke with a raspy voice, "Where am I?" Jackson replied with a smile, "Some villagers saved us!" A few days later, I recovered fully. The leader of the villager came over with a kind smile, "I heard you guys were trying to find out about Buddhas, right? Well, there was this tale that's from a long time ago. There was once a monk who found a cave somewhere at an oasis in the desert. Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims dug more caves and spent their time creating sacred art and literature." He then opened up a dusty old book, pointing at one of the drawings. "This is a thousand hand Buddha..."

"Jackson! I think this is it! This is exactly the same one in my dreams!" The old man smiled and continued to say, "Don't be too happy yet. We don't know where these caves lie nor if the tale is real. But...if you really want to discover more, maybe head out to the south area, where there's more probability." "Okay! Thanks a lot!" "Oh, and be aware of the weather, some mountains near us have been collapsing." "Okay! Jackson! Let's go!"

We continued our journey, as we were walking towards the nearest transport which was still far away, a sandstorm arrived. Jackson and I were blown away by the strong wind. BOOM! A few mountains collapsed...wait...what was that? I pinched Jackson, "Jackson! Look! There's a cave!" We were both shocked. What deep secrets lie in this cave? Due to my curiosity, I grabbed Jackson and ventured in.

We went inside and...wow! "Is this a city or something! This building is massive!"

I ran around, not noticing the paintings and books around. Jackson came over and held me near to him, "don't run, you might get lost, this cave is massive. Stick together." Jackson then pointed at some of the paintings, "These paintings are so old! Look at the fine paintings though...these might be from 1000 years ago!"

After looking at all the paintings and taking photos of them, we continued walking. As we walked deeper into the cave, it was pitch black. Jackson opened a flashlight and we were both amazed by what was in front of us. "Jackson! We found it! This is it! This is the Buddha!" We admired the Buddha for quite a while until something much more amazing caught our eyeballs. It was different from the painting outside. The carvings on the stone walls!

"Jackson...what are these paintings?" Jackson examined it closely, "These should be drawings about the Silk Road! Also, look at how the art improved from century to century!" After 3 hours of exploring the cave, we walked out with a bright smile on our faces.

Up to today, I still cannot forget this breathtaking and exciting journey! We reported this to the government and after scholars identified the paintings and sculptures, they were actually from a thousand years ago! They also found the oldest dated, printed book in the world! We then decided on the name of the cave "Mogao Caves". It's just crazy that the Buddha in my dream is real! How can this happen? There is no logical explanation. What other more stories are behind this cave? The mystery is folded in the centuries.

Journey to Enlightenment

Kau Yan School (Primary), Yu, Ka Hei Jayden – 11

In an aisle surrounded by white walls, Ming sat on the hospital bench and stared at his medical report. “Stage 4 pancreatic cancer... It is too late for me to be cured. I must take this remaining time of mine to do something adventurous...” Ming thought to himself. As he left the hospital, he picked up his phone and booked the air tickets to fly to Dunhuang.

A bus was on its way to the Han Great Wall, and Zhangye Danxia was its last stop. There were stops in various cities along the way; Mogao Caves was one of them. When Ming got on the shuttle bus, it was packed with most of its seats being taken and had air conditioning blowing through it completely. Although the bus was filled with passengers, the place was mainly noiseless because almost everyone on the bus was a stranger to one another. As the bus slowly moved from his hotel in Downtown Dunhuang to the grottoes, he watched the sandy scenes outside of the window as he bit on his *roujiamo* (sandwich). The grease of the lamb filling tingled on the tip of his tongue, but he wasn't really in the mood to enjoy the delicacy he was tasting. As the bus halted, Ming squirmed out of the bus and drew fresh air into his lungs. “So here I am, finally at the Mogao Caves.”

Entering the Mogao Grottoes, he was surrounded by the great art that was created a thousand years ago. Ming slowly walked into the caves one by one, with his knowledge of art history, he looked at the murals closely and appreciated the art in the caves. As though he was fulfilled by recognizing the jataka tales inscribed on the walls, Ming let out a sigh and mumbled under his breath, “Although I can finally witness these beautiful works of art, I cannot stop thinking about my medical report. All these murals seemed like insignificant symbols to me.”

As he was too concentrated on his thoughts, he lost track of his directions. When he lifted his head, he froze like one of the sculptures in the caves. Right in front of him, he saw a big buddha reclining on a big piece of stone and a monk was standing in front of the Buddha and was mumbling a prayer. After the monk finished his prayer, he noticed that Ming was standing behind him and asked him, “Young man, why do you have your brows knitted?” Ming replied to the monk, “I am having stage 4 cancer, and I'm afraid of dying.” The monk looked at him sympathetically and told him to look at the buddha sculpture in the cave with him.

“Young man, please look at this reclining buddha.”

Ming asked in confusion, “What is so special about this Buddha?”

“This reclining buddha recreates the story of the historical buddha reaching Nirvana. A few thousand years ago, the Indian prince who started Buddhism died mortally and became enlightened. In the murals, some figures are happy, envious, and sad — this shows that you can see death from different perspectives. For instance, if you miss the person who died, you will feel sad. But if you see that person as having been freed from the suffering cycle of life, like getting sick or old, you will feel happy for them.” As the monk told the story to Ming, he realized that death is not an entirely negative experience and he also wishes to be enlightened after death.

Ming stood in a bustling district where it was packed with pedestrians. He bent down and handed a homeless person a lunchbox. “Thank you sir!” said the homeless person as he smiled and started to gobble the lunchbox. Ming had mixed feelings towards it, on one hand he was happy because he could see smiles on the homeless people's faces when he helped them, but on the other hand, he felt nervous since he only had limited time left. But when he remembered the journey to Dunhuang, he felt relieved.

In an aisle surrounded by white walls, Ming sat on the hospital bench and waited for his appointment with his doctor. Even though his body had become weaker and it ached, he felt thankful for what he had and he no longer feared this white hospital room.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kingston International School, Cheung, Chloe – 9

Chloe was an eight year old student from Hong Kong. She was shy and reserved, but enjoyed reading. Until one day an unbelievable thing happened to her on the way to school. Out of nowhere, a metal arm shot out of a narrow lane that was dark and dusty. The arm grabbed Chloe before she could respond. Chloe was petrified and wanted to scream, but nothing came out! The Robot had blocked Chloe's mouth when she tried to call out for help.

The Robot said, "If I release my hand, please don't scream." Chloe hesitantly nodded and agreed. The Robot then slowly let go. Chloe was very shook-up and puzzled. She stuttered quietly and asked what was going on.

The Robot explained, "I work for Dr Cross, he is a scientist researching the Mogao Grottoes in Central China. Unfortunately some important artifacts went missing during the Christmas Holiday." Chloe was even more confused than before, because she was the one chosen to help. To find out more, she had to see Dr Cross. Chloe was anxious and said to Robot, "No, I cannot! I am not the hero that you need!" Robot answered, "But you must help. You are special and you are the only one that can survive this mission. Dr Cross can see the future and he knows that you will definitely be alright." Chloe was on the fence on what to do. On one side she was curious about what would happen, on the other side she was scared and was not prepared for the adventure. She pondered for a very long time, then she finally agreed. She knew that Dr Cross was counting on her and letting him down wasn't a choice.

Chloe was still apprehensive but luckily, Robot reassured her that nothing bad was going to happen. It was time for goodbye, she took a deep breath and stepped in.

She was greeted with a corridor filled with numbered doors. A real life dinosaur appeared without warning. In shock Chloe shouted, "How did you become a real dinosaur when a second ago you were still my little toy!?" Dini smiled and replied, "Robot turned me into a dinosaur because he thinks you need a sidekick to help you. Robot also instructed me what to do!"

They found room 378 and slowly opened the door. There was another portal in front of them, but this time it was in the ground. They had to jump through it, which landed them on Mars. Dr Cross was waiting for them.

With a welcoming smile, Dr Cross calmly introduced himself, "I have been waiting for you for a long time, I am very relieved that you have agreed to help us." Chloe and Dini found out that there was a terrible monster, Monslar had stolen the treasures from the Mogao Grottoes. They learned that the Grottoes were abandoned after the fourteenth century, but people were unaware of 50,000 documents and hundreds of paintings hidden in Cave 17. But in the early 20th century, a monk named himself the keeper of the treasures, but later he sold it to a British archeologist.

The archeologist was researching in his lab, when Monslar decided to sneak through the window and steal all the paintings and documents. When he came out, he discovered everything was missing and there was a trail of animal footprints. Luckily he was able to contact Dr Cross for help via time machine.

Dr Cross said, "We must help the archeologist retrieve the stolen things." Chloe asked who the archeologist was but didn't get a clear response. Dr Cross said, "He specifically asked me for your and Dini's help, so I need you both."

Chloe and Dini went through the time traveling portal and arrived at the Mogao Caves. Chloe looked around and saw temples and caves. She was amazed by the architecture.

Suddenly, she heard a growl and they ran to the Mogao Grottoes to hide. The monster crashed in the Mogao Grottoes with his mighty horns. Luckily Dini had a fabulous plan. Dini belted a ferocious roar and leaped towards the Monslar. Chloe was shocked to see Dini so fierce and she was left speechless. The monster and Dini started a deadly battle. Helplessly, Chloe knew she couldn't just stand and watch. She used a lasso and tangled the monster.

Unfortunately, the monster kicked Chloe and she fell unconscious to the floor. Dini saw what had happened. Filled with rage and fire in his eyes, he flew up and defeated the monster once and for all. Then he rushed over to Chloe and checked if she was ok. He gently patted her little head and luckily she started to move. Chloe slowly got up and

embraced her dinosaur. Chloe said to Dini, "Let's ask Dr Cross where the stolen artifacts are!" They went to the place where the portal was last opened and waited patiently. Dr. Cross appeared, they shouted, " Dr. Cross, we have defeated Monslar, but how do we retrieve the artifacts?" Dr Cross answered, "Legend says that a brave dinosaur and a girl will find the artifacts if they follow the glow." Confused, Chloe and Dini scanned around and saw a dim light faintly shining behind an old tree. They instantly ran towards it and found the artifacts buried underneath. They placed the artifacts back in Cave 17 and they were sent back to Mars.

Dr Cross said to Chloe, " Good job Chloe Rick Stein! You have saved the artifacts from the evil hands of Monslar." Moments later Chloe and Dini felt a tingling sensation and they were transported back to the present. They landed in a bush by the sidewalk. Dini was once again just a toy. Chloe brushed herself off and continued her journey to school. When she arrived, her history teacher announced that they were starting a new unit about the Mogao Grottoes and Marc Aurel Stein, the British archeologist. Chloe's face was in complete shock!

My Magical Trip to the Mogao Grottoes

Kingston International School, Huang, Ethan – 9

Today I went to the movie theater to watch a movie called <Adventure at Mogao Grottoes>. I was so excited because I looked forward to this movie for a long time. While I was enjoying the movie, suddenly a strange bright light flashed into my eyes. When I opened my eyes after the flash, I was in a whole new world.

“Where am I?” I looked around, only saw some strange dressed workers digging caves. I asked all of the workers where I was, but nobody had any reactions, just like they couldn’t see me and hear me. My heart was beating so fast cause I had no idea where I was. So I just walked around and hoped I could find something. “Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes!” A sound broke the peace of quiet. I looked around and found a Buddha smiling at me, with golden light shining at his back. The Buddha statue looks realistic. “Excuse me, who are you, did you just talk to me? Where am I? How could I go home?” “I am the biggest buddha here, I am 35.6 meters tall. You are now in cave 96. ” The Buddha gave me a pen, said: “Take this pen with you and enjoy your journey here, then you will find the answer.”

I walked around and saw a wall that had words on it: When was the Mogao Grottoes built? Then I realized why the Great Buddha gave me a pen, it was for writing answers! I remembered the first sentence I heard in the movie was: Mogao Grottoes was built in 366 AD. That is when the first cave started digging. It was a long time ago!

I kept walking, then I stopped at cave 126. A wall with words on it like last time: What material is Mogao Grottoes made of? I checked on a builder and saw them digging sculptures on a rock on a cliff and used some wood to build porches. Some of them painted the finished sculptures and drew pictures on the wall. So I answered: Everything has been dug on rocks, some wood and paint.

Then I moved on and saw the third challenge in cave 134: How many caves does Mogao Grottoes have? I spent a whole day counting and found out there are 750 caves there! Each cave has its own sculpture in the caves. Some of them were seriously damaged by natural disasters and some human behaviour. Some of them have been fixed, but they don’t look like the original ones anymore.

While I kept walking, I wondered: When could I go home? The fourth challenge appeared in cave 158. I was interested in this challenge: Which is the second biggest buddha here, how long is he? I saw a big Buddha sleeping there. He was closing his eyes and lying on his side. And beside him was a note: “Reclining Buddha (the second biggest buddha in the Mogao Grottoes, he was 15.8 meters long.) When I finished writing the answer, the strange bright light appeared again.

When I opened my eyes again, I found that I was sitting on my spot in the theater. “I’m back!” I shouted. (I bet you can imagine what other people’s faces look like.) I ran out of the theater and can’t wait to share my magical trip with my friends.

Would you go to the theater to watch the movie <Adventure at Mogao Grottoes>? Maybe you will have a magical trip too!

“Focus, George!”

Korean International School, Bakshi, Uma – 9

“Get up right now, George!” said Mum loudly. “We will be late for the bus,” she said. George, sitting on the couch in his pyjamas, ignored what his mum was saying and continued playing a game on his phone. George and his parents had travelled from Hong Kong to Dunhuang to see the Mogao caves during the Mid–Autumn festival break.

“George, if you are not quick enough, it will become too crowded and we will not get to see anything,” said Mum angrily. George shoved his phone into his pocket and went in to change his clothes. Once George finished changing, he plonked on the couch again to watch television. When his dad came into the room, he just looked at George. That was all it took to move George from the couch.

The bus was waiting outside. Mum held George’s hand tightly and pulled him towards the bus. He shook it off angrily. “George, are you coming or not? If you are not coming, then I have no choice but to drag you onto the bus,” she said. George ran onto the bus and his mum and dad followed. The moment George sat down he started playing a game on his phone. Dunhuang was in the Gobi Desert and had a very different climate than Hong Kong, which was a humid coastal city. Mum tried to show George how different Dunhuang was from Hong Kong, but George continued fiddling with his phone. “George, focus! How many times do I need to tell you to put away your phone when I am speaking to you? You are always distracted because of your phone. If you cannot focus, you will never be able to do well in anything!” George rolled his eyes and said, “Another sermon!” His dad gave him a stern glance and told him to put his phone away. It was a long journey from Dunhuang to the Mogao Visitor Centre, and George pulled out his phone to play games the moment his dad looked away. “I wonder how many times his hand reaches into his pocket in a day,” Dad said to Mum.

They bought tickets at the Mogao visitor centre. There they were shown two short movies about the Mogao Caves and the art in them. George found it very easy to look at screens, so he watched the movies intently. After that they travelled in a bus for twenty minutes during which Mum discussed the movies with George and Dad. “There are 735 caves and 492 out of them have Buddhist temple art that has thousands of square metres of murals and many sculptures,” said Mum. Dad was quite interested in the library cave which had more than 40,000 scrolls.

The tour guide said that he would show them eight caves out of which one would be the library cave. He took them first into the library cave. George’s parents became busy looking at the manuscripts. George got bored so he pulled out his phone and started playing his game and every time he got a point, there was a funny sound. Dad looked at him angrily. George pushed his phone into his pocket and sneaked out of the cave to finish a level in the game. He saw the entrance of another dark cave and walked inside. Turning down the volume of his phone he finished his level and jumped happily. He then walked out of the cave to join his parents when he realised that it was already dark outside. He had lost track of time while playing his game. George was terrified and couldn’t think of what to do next. He walked back inside and took his phone out of his pocket and called his mum. Mum shrieked, “George, where are you? We are looking for you!” But before George could answer, the battery died. George was so scared that he sat down and started sobbing. He sobbed so much that he fell asleep.

When he woke up, George took a second to realise where he was. “I am in the Mogao caves,” he remembered. George put his hand into his pocket to take out his phone. Then he realised that his phone had been discharged completely. He looked around at the darkness helplessly and saw a wall with a ray of moonlight shining on it. He walked up to the wall and observed some drawings. “So beautiful,” he thought. He remembered a mural that he had done with his friends on the school wall. It had taken them two weeks to finish it. “This must have taken years!” thought George. He walked back a few steps and saw that the whole cave was covered with intricate drawings and sculptures. “Amazing!” he whispered to himself.

The paintings had detailed drawings of people and animals and covered the whole cave. George thought about how much time and hard work it would have taken to create these drawings. The artist would have had to focus hard to make sure there were no mistakes.

“George, focus!” George remembered his mum’s words. “If I focus, one day I will become an artist. I must focus more intently from now on,” he thought. Just then, he heard voices outside, and someone shone a torch into the cave. “George!!” came his mum’s voice. “George, are you okay?” she asked in a scared voice. “Mum! Dad!” exclaimed George. “I am perfectly fine,” George said meekly but happily. “Mum, I was so scared!” Dad hugged George. George felt safe now.

On the way back to Dunhuang, George wouldn't stop talking about what happened in the cave and about the drawings. "I want to become a great artist, Mum," he said, "and I have realised what I need to stop doing to become one."

George's hand seldom went into his pocket again.

A Gift from Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Chong, Shun Yan – 11

“Hello?” “Helloelloelloello...” Having heard the endless echoes, I knew I was really deep inside the cave. Maybe I was way too focused on the attractive paintings on the walls, so I just went wherever there was a way through, not following my parents. It was then when I realised that the noisy sounds from strangers were gone. Dead silence came. I knew it was no use, no matter how loud I shouted and hurt my poor throat. They would not hear me if they were in such a noisy and faraway place. I tried to get out of the cave, but I kept returning back to the original cave several times. (I could recognise the same paintings and sculptures every turn) Was I going to spend the rest of my life here, where there were only gorgeous pictures on walls and statues? A miserable tear dropped onto the dusty floor.

A teensy-weensy voice whispered, “Hi, little girl, wah-wh-achoo! Ugh...what’s wrong?” I looked around, muttering, “I’m lost in this cave and I’m talking to myself. May as well spend the rest of my life here, eating my last piece of cracker.” The kind voice said, “Look at the Buddha Statue right behind you.” After that, I looked at the statue, with its mouth moving.

I stopped sobbing and thought, “Am I dreaming? Am I delirious with hunger?”

The Buddha Statue answered, “No, you’re not delirious with hunger. I’m Buddha. I wish I could help you, but I’m feeling a bit uncomfortable, the reason which I cannot figure out”.

I asked with pity, “Oh. Perhaps you’re itchy?”

Buddha replied, “I can’t feel anything, let alone itchiness.”

I guessed again. “Hmmm... do you have COVID-19?”

Buddha said, “I can’t even catch a cold. How can I possibly have COVID-19?”

So, I tried again. “Um... maybe you’re way too hungry. I have some tomato crackers here. Do you want some?”

Buddha responded, “I don’t have a stomach.”

I tried, and I tried, but nothing seemed to bother Buddha. “Is it the ‘things’ in your nose?” “I don’t have any.” “What about pimples?” “I can’t grow any.” “Maybe it’s your clothes?” “I’ve been wearing these all my life and they don’t bother me.” After several failures of guessing, I could tell it was getting late, and thought that my parents should be worried sick.

Exhausted, I sat on the floor and spoke wearily, “It’s... it’s too – too – achoo!” Thousands of specks of dust moved around the dark, dusky room. Suddenly, I stood up with a genius idea. “AHA! You’re way too dusty! Gosh, why

didn't I think of that before?" I used a tissue from my heavy backpack to wipe the statue. Every time I wiped off some dust, a golden light shimmered from Buddha. After I finally wiped off all the dust on Buddha, the statue's legs and arms opened swiftly, with its eyes opened wide, and its body flying above the pale-colour table. It shrieked, "I'M ALIVE!" After its sudden shriek, the tremendous echo remained. "ALIVE. ALIVE. ALIVE. ALIVE..."

I asked, "Um... can you do me a favour? Now that you're alive, can you show me the way out of here?" Buddha replied, "Very well. Go now." I was utterly confused. Go where? Then, I spotted thousands of statues and people inside paintings dancing gracefully, pointing the way to the exit at the same time. They were extremely great dancers indeed. Going left, then right... hurray! I was finally free! With excitement, I danced around, accidentally stepped onto a golden bracelet. It must have been Buddha's present to thank me for fixing his problem.

After I grabbed it, I saw my parents. They must have missed me. I was expecting this sentence from them: "Sonja, where have you been? We're so worried about you!" However, they said this instead: "SONJA! Wake up! Time to visit the amazing Mogao Grottoes!" I woke up, realising I was holding the same golden bracelet which appeared in my dream. Or maybe it was not really a dream...

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Ho, Jacob – 11

My name's Jack Jacobson. Today my sister, Meg and I went on a tour to the worldwide famous Mogao Grottoes.

During the exhausting long bus trip to the Mogao Grottoes, the tour guide told us some history of the Mogao Grottoes, he particularly warned us not to go to the restricted areas of the heritage site.

We then went into the Mogao Grottoes. I whispered to Meg, "Hey, want to have some fun?" Then, she grinned wickedly and nodded. We then snuck under the barrier and walked deeper into the cave. We saw a giant Buddha. Meg said, "That's creeping me out!" Its eyes were as cold as winter snow. Then something reflected light from its hand.

I climbed up the Buddha, not aware of the danger ahead of us. When I got to its hand, I saw two elegant pendants. Each one of them had a mysterious crystal on it. It kept changing its colour like a rainbow. I tossed one to Meg. She replied, "Wow." I said, "How much do you think it's worth?" she shrugged. We both wore them.

Then, suddenly a ball of light appeared—it sucked us into a black hole. Meg grabbed onto me tightly. In the blink of an eye, everything turned black.

"Are you okay, Jack?" I slowly opened my eyes, Meg let out a sigh of relief, she scolded me, "Thank God! You're alright or I'll be so lonely." "Typical Meg," I thought. Meg and I scanned the horizon. We were in a cave, I saw a statue of a wolf with a gaping mouth. There were two holes in its tongue—perfect shapes for the two pendants that Meg and I were wearing. A large explosion rattled the cave.

We coughed and coughed. In the dust, I slowly opened my eyes and peeked around.

I saw two ruby-red eyes, glittering through the dust. A humanoid creature appeared. It was a 2-meter monster that had razor sharp claws. Fur covered its body. It lunged at me, I dodged in an instant, but even with my lightning reflexes. I had three gigantic scars on my hand. I bellowed, "Meg, run!" Meg grabbed my hand, and we ran together. It was still chasing us. I could literally hear it panting breathlessly behind us—we both had something in common, we were both out of breath. Suddenly a woman's voice echoed, "Keep running!" I wondered who she was, but I trusted her.

Meg and I kept running, we saw light in front of us, as I ran out of the cave, we were surrounded by a tropical forest. I looked behind us—The creature had disappeared; it seemed like it stopped following us. I saw a woman wearing leaves—ye,s leaves. She said to me with a suspiciously dubious voice that sounded an awful lot like the woman I heard when I was running. She asked, "How did you even get in?" I had nothing to say, Meg explained. She frowned, and said, "So... you're from 2022? But it is 1 BC." Meg screamed with delight, "We time travelled!" The woman said, "No no no, this isn't good at all— you'll die if you stay for a week longer." She took us to a... camp.

The camp's people greeted us, after that, they walked away. The woman asked us, "What is your name?" We introduced who we were and she immediately stared at our pendants. She muttered the words, "How, symbol, must, oh no" and more that I couldn't interpret. She then said with a full sentence, "You got the Symbols, I mean the pendants, you must insert those back in... well a wolf statue's tongue, it's located from the cave you just came from. If you don't return them, humanity shall become extinct." Meg and I looked at each other. Probably thinking, "Ahh, it's because of you, now we have to go back from the start and deal with that beast again." But alas, we would've never survived." She saw us argue and interrupted with, "Hey don't worry! You have power with those pendants. OH NO! I can't say anymore about this... magical world, or you will go insane with madness in... your world. Ok now quick! Go back to where you came from."

We had no choice but to return back where we'd been. Meg and I found the cave once again. Without hesitation, we rushed in the cave. We ran towards the opposite direction where we had entered. We scurried through. Then back to the start. I saw the statue. Meg and I ran as fast as we could towards it, but oh well, in a story it never ends this easily.

The beast appeared again. Slashing towards us with its claws. To my surprise, I avoided every single one of its attacks. I countered one of them with my pendant, the crystal had incredible hardness as this time the beast punched with all its might. Meg suddenly kicked it from behind. It screamed in pain, we kept attacking, punch by

punch, then I switched to using the sharp edge of the pendant, which made it easier to defeat it. We punched, slashed and kicked, I never knew I was this good at fighting. I was even stronger than the video game characters. As I did a quick kick at its chest. Meg took the chance and stabbed its head with the crystal, and it slowly stopped moving. We put the pendants back in the tongue.

Meg and I woke up at the restricted area. We quickly caught up with the guide. We were grateful that we were once adventurers navigating through the Mogao Grottoes. We both agreed to keep this adventure as a secret. After all, we do not want anyone to use the pendants as a weapon to destroy humanity. We for whatever reason looked down, and saw the pendants on our neck.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Kwok, Ho Ching – 11

“Ow!” A piercing scream filled the air.

“What now, Daisy?” I answered groggily. Harsh sunlight streamed into my eyes.

“The mattress is so prickly!” My friend Daisy – a tall girl with long blond hair – called back. With a start, I realized that this wasn’t my bedroom. We were sleeping on hay bales! No wonder Daisy thought it was prickly.

“Err, Daisy?” My voice wavered.

“Yeah what?” She froze. “This isn’t your room!” Daisy yelled.

“Are we kidnapped?” I rolled my eyes.

“If we were kidnapped we would be tied up,” I fought back an urge to add ‘idiot’.

“Anyway, this isn’t my room.” I confirmed.

We were having a sleepover at my place and we had just started to sleep.

“Where are Hazel and Brook?” Daisy asked frantically.

“Meow!” Our cat Brook – a tabby she-cat – narrowed her eyes.

“Help!” We all heard a faint cry for help.

“What’s that?” Daisy inquired. “Hazel!” My eyes widened. We rushed outside and found Hazel – a petite girl with chestnut brown eyes – clinging desperately onto a pale birch tree.

“Help me!” She cried.

“Hang on there!” I shouted.

“Not like I could let go,” She grumbled. “Just get on with it.”

I grabbed a long coil of rope and a sturdy basket big enough for a person, and then tied the rope around the handle. I threw the basket over the branch and told Daisy to hold on to the rope.

“Get into the basket!” I ordered Hazel. Daisy and I released the rope bit by bit and the basket and Hazel finally reached the ground.

“Finally!” Hazel breathed. “I thought I would be up there forever! By the way, where are we?”

“Er...” Daisy and I looked at each other.

“You mean you don’t know?” Hazel demanded. All in a sudden, Brook’s fur bristled and she ran off in a easterly direction.

“BROOK!” Daisy yelled before running after the cat.

A few minutes later, Daisy returned with Brook. She was so pale I thought she’d seen a ghost.

“What happened?” I inquired.

“I have good news and bad news. The good news is that I know where and when we are. The bad news is that...” Daisy’s voice faltered. “That we are a millennia and half ago, ‘near where the Mogao Caves has just been built.” She quoted the words of a local villager.

“OMG!” Hazel shouted. “Yes! I’ve always wanted to see to beautiful artwork in there when they weren’t destroyed. And I’ve bought my phone!” She said gleefully.

“H–How?” Daisy stuttered.

“I always sleep with my phone in my pocket. In case of emergencies. You never know!” Hazel added matter-of-factly, as she charged right into the Mogao Caves.

“Wow... This place is magical! I can’t wait to see all of it!” Hazel gasped. Each cave was lit by a dim glow, and unique statues and paintings littered them all. Suddenly, the paintings climbed out from their frames and the statues stood up on their pedestals. They crowded around us and stared at us with hostile glares.

“Invaders!” They all hissed.

“I’ve always thought that these statues were powerful, but I’ve never thought them as hostile!” I screamed wildly.

“What do we do now?” Daisy yelled. Brook’s fur was standing up, and she looked like she wanted to pounce on the artwork.

“Stop.” The single commanding word echoed around the room. “These are not invaders.” A female voice filled the room.

“My Lady!” The artwork bowed.

“Who are you?” Daisy asked. A beautiful young woman with eleven heads and a thousand arms who was wearing majestic white robes and a ton of jewelry literally swept into the room.

Hazel breathed, “Are you...”

“Yes, my dear girl, I am Guanyin.” The room filled with the fragrance of lotus and flowers bloomed everywhere at her name being said.

“I teleported you here.”

“Why?” Daisy asked impatiently.

“The time has come. As for who, it’s your cat.”

Guanyin led us into a room with a glowing pearl.

“This is the Pearl of Light.”

Brook leaped onto the pearl and was enclosed in a ball of light. It rose into the air and Brook was transformed into a gorgeous girl.

“Longnu.” Guanyin said with affection. “Did you succeed?”

“Yes, my lady,”

“Where?”

“This one.” She pointed at Daisy.

“We need three.” Guanyin reminded Longnu.

“Oh, then these three.”

“Will someone just explain?” Daisy asked again.

“Put your hands on the pearl.” Guanyin commanded.

We did as we were asked and a new light emerged. A boy leaped out and the light faded.

“Shancai! You are finally reborn!” Longnu cried.

“So *that’s* why your attendants weren’t with you.” Hazel said.

Realization finally hit us –this was all part of a spell to let Shancai be reborn. They bade us goodbye and teleported us back home.

“Well, that was a lot more than weird.” I commented.

“Yeah,” Hazel agreed. “CUTE!” Daisy shrieked. “Kittens!” So, we had a new cat, kittens, and a very excited Daisy.

Secrets behind the Walls

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Leung, Wai Yan – 11

[CHAPTER 1]

There're lots of secrets hidden in Mogao Grottoes... Once you start digging — whether excavating long-populated land for a commercial project or tearing down the walls of a cave — you never know what you'll find.

There may be a ritual object there to ward off evil spirits three hundred years or a few decades ago. It may have been put there on purpose or by accident. Unless there's a note enclosed, you'll never know for sure.

Every place carries history within its walls, ceilings and floors. The very mud, rocks and stones can contain powerful secrets, talismans, some of which were placed there for people from the hereafter to find — a thread linking past and future.

[CHAPTER 2]

Two months earlier, was a summer vacation for a Korean transfer student who lived in America, named Seon Jae. She decided to go China — Mogao Grottoes with her friends who were Ashton Javernick, Theo Madres and Sylvia Madres, for twenty days in order to do some research from the team project. After booking plane tickets to Mogao Grottoes, they packed up for the trip. After arriving at the airport, they checked-in and got on the plane.

Sixteen hours later, they arrived. "What a long flight!" Ashton yawned.

"Stop being dramatic, Javernick, it's just sixteen hours." Sylvia chuckled. They started a fight afterwards.

"Unnn... Jae already started heading out, we should follow her now..." Theo called out. Aston made a face and left. After walking a while, Jae said, "Let's get on the bus now."

During the bus trip, Aston was fighting with Sylvia while Theo was chatting with Jae. "What's that on your neck? It looks precious."

"Oh! It's moonstone necklace. My mom gave it to me. She told me that this is a family heirloom from my ancestors."

[CHAPTER 3]

When they reached the Mogao Caves, Jae was the first one entered.

A member of staff approached, "Hello. Welcome to the Mogao Caves. My name is Hao Nam."

"Wait, is... is that a moonstone?" He pointed at Jae's necklace with fear.

"Yes, it is..." She was confused. "You should all come with me..."

He brought them to a room full of ancient arts. After sitting down, Hao Nam introduced a book about stones, "This is the book my master left me before he died. I read the whole book about these stones but I never saw the real ones before." He handed it to Jae.

She read out loud, "Sunstone is a type of feldspar, shimmering with golden shades, for which the stone got its name. Moonstone together with sunstone is a very powerful combination, moonstone activates and enhances energy, and sunstone awakens strength, passion and purposefulness. These stones can control the whole world when both of them meets."

[CHAPTER 4]

"What?" It gave Ashton goosebumps, all of them were shocked for sure. "The moonstone is in your hands, so you should find the sunstone to prevent villains from stealing." Hao Nam said. He took out a piece of paper and said, "Although I don't know what the whole writing means, my master told me that it's the map to find the sunstone, I think you should take this." Sylvia accepted it.

It was already night; the staff gave them rooms for sleeping. Jae couldn't sleep so she went out with her moonstone holding in her hand. Inside the room, Sylvia realized that Jae was gone and went out to find her. She saw Jae outside on the rooftop looking at the moon. "Isn't it cold outside at night? You should head back to sleep." Sylvia said.

"I can't sleep." Jae replied. She held the stone up high to the sky, a strong blue light appeared when the stone and moon came in line.

Both of them had their eyes wide open. "Sylvia, go wake the others and please take the map out."

"Ugh! What's the problem now! I'm so tired! It's already late in the..." Ashton screamed when he saw the blue light.

Jae snatched the map and tried to use the light to read the words.

“To find the sunstone, go to the highest floor of the Mogao Caves. Use the moonstone’s light to read the words, use the way you did to read this sheet of paper’s words before the sun comes out.” Jae read the words from this sheet of paper. “The rooftop!” Theo shouted.

[CHAPTER 5]

Ashton grabbed the stone while yelling, “Give it to me!” The light disappeared in a second. “How come the light doesn’t appear! C’mon!”

Jae took the stone back, and the light appeared again. She put the stone against the walls, and tons of words popped up. “The sunstone is inside the walls on the second floor. To find the stone, use the moonstone to lead you to the way where it’s hidden. To get inside there, throw the stone inside. To take it out, put the stone over there.”

All of them ran down to the second floor, and by the light of the moonstones gave them directions were formed to led them to the stone. The directions lead them to an empty room, the room with a notice of “Do not enter!”

Ashton didn’t care and broke into there, red lasers almost hit Ashton. “Phew! It almost hit my leg!” The others glared at him.

Jae threw the moonstone inside the room, then, all lasers were shut down. Jae picked up the stone and followed the directions to the stone. They saw a hole that fits the stone size like a glove. Jae put the moonstone inside the hole, and suddenly, the wall broke and a box came out. The Madres took the box out and opened it.

[CHAPTER 6]

A shimmery golden stone was inside the box. They tried to connect the stones. Until later, both of the stones floated up and gathered together, emitting a strong white light. Suddenly, it stopped floating and quickly fell onto the ground. Hao Nam rushed into the room and saw the stones when Jae was picking up both of them. He gasped, “You have found the sunstone!”

He immediately walked close to the stones. Jae said, “I think, you should take the stones and keep them here.”

All their jaws dropped, “What?”

“Well, it’s dangerous to keep them to myself, these stones should be kept here.” She handed them to Hao Nam. Hao Nam put the stones inside a glass box where other treasures and cultural relics were kept.

[CHAPTER 7]

After that day, they continued on with their research about the project. Time flew quickly. Twenty days had already ended, and they went back to America. When they were back, they didn’t tell anyone about the incident as they promised to keep it a secret forever.

However, the gang didn’t know that another challenge was waiting for them and they needed to assemble very soon...

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Liu, Siu Wun – 11

More than one and a half millennia ago, a monk decided there was something special about a cave, Mogao Grottoes, an oasis he found in the desert on the Silk Road in China.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, digging more caves and spending their time creating art and literature.

Time passed and more than 1000 years later, travellers started taking another route. The Mogao caves in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

Then, in the 1900s, local and international scholar-explorers, Tom, Susan and Mark rediscovered the caves. They gradually unlocked its breath-taking secrets. There were hundreds of caverns containing some of the world's finest paintings, sculptures and literature — including the oldest, printed book in the world.

They found a very dusty box.

Mark said excitedly, “Let’s open this musty box! We can sell this to the museum!”

However, Susan shook her head, “No! Do not touch it! We should just preserve it. We are scholar-explorers.”

But he did not follow her order. Therefore, he opened it by himself.

“Wow! This looks like an old book. This should be very expensive! We can get a lot of money!” He said.

Tom said angrily, “No! We are scholar-explorers! Like Susan said, we should preserve it! You hear me? Moreover, some said a long long time ago, a monk found a cave that had a book inside and then disappeared! Maybe we should just leave it?”

“It is just a mystery; no one knows if it is real!” Mark said assertively. He couldn’t wait for their discussion, so he opened the book himself...

“Oh no, our torch is off! Everything is black now!” Susan said. When they used another torch, a monk popped up.

“Ah!” They screamed. They were all very shocked and were shaking like a leaf.

Their leader said, “Who... Who are you?”

The monk said, “I am a monk! And who are you guys? What year am I in?”

Then, the monk started to stretch, he said to himself, “Do not be surprised! I came out just now and I have been in that book for one and a half millennia already!”

Shivers went up and down the scholar-explorer's spine, one of them murmured, “Am I dreaming? Why... Why is there a monk?” He then rubbed his eyes and found out this whole situation is real.

He screamed at the top of his lungs, “Ah! Help me! A monk! From...From a book!”

The monk continued and said, “Young people, relax. This is a magical book which I found in this cave called the Mogao Grottoes. Then, it led me to another cave and I was captured by someone who made me stuck in this book! And people said that people who found this magical book are the chosen ones!”

“We...we are scholar-explorers. Now...now we are in 2...2021. I am T...Tom, they are Susan and Ma...Mark.”

Suddenly, the book moved. "Follow it!" The monk said to the scholar-explorers. Although they were a little bit hesitant, they nodded. After a while, the magical book led them to a cave which was dark and looked like a black hole.

The scholar-explorers were shaking like a leaf and weren't sure about going into the cave.

The monk saw them shaking and said, "It is okay, follow me. But! You need to have good preparation."

Now, the scholar-explorers are even more scared. However, they plucked up their courage and followed the monk.

After a while, the monk said, "We arrived.

"The scholar-explorers were very shocked and one of them murmured, "Where...where are we?" Surprisingly, the monk heard that and said, "This is the future of the Silk Road."

"What? This? How come? Why are we in the future?" One of the scholar-explorers asked.

The monk answered, "Oh! That was a magical cave. This cave only allows this book to go in like they have a special relationship. That's why we can travel to this place. I was also surprised and excited at first but when you know the truth, it is very horrible and sad."

"Quick! Show us! How bad?"

"Follow me..." the monk said suspiciously.

After a few hours, the monk said, "Young people, this is the future of the Silk Road."

"Are you kidding me? This is just a land which is filled with grass!" Susan asked.

"Yes, I know. That's why it is horrible. In the future, the Silk Road will be gone." The monk said.

"What? Why?" Tom asked surprisingly.

"Oh, let me explain. We are in 2040 now. Here, the Silk Road is gone because of the speed of sea transportation and the possibility to carry more goods, resulting in the decline of the Silk Road. This shows that people think that the Silk Road has no use anymore. Such a sad situation. The speed of sea transportation, the possibility to carry more goods, and the relative cheapness of transportation resulted in the decline of the Silk Road." The monk said.

"Then, what should we do?" Tom asked nervously.

The monk said, "When you guys get back to the present, promote more about this problem. Even though the Silk Road may have no use, it is part of history and a culture that we should treasure. The Silk Road represents the history of the economy between different countries. This shows that the Silk Road is very important and that we should treasure it."

"Yes, I am sure we can prevent this horrible situation from happening! Right?" The scholar-explorers nodded.

"Now, let us go back to the present. However, I need to go now." The monk said.

"Thank you! We will go back!" The scholar-explorers said.

From this story, we learn that history and culture are important to treasure because culture and history brings to life a past time and place. It is also invaluable for rethinking our own historical moments.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Mei, Kai Cheung – 10

In a red brick house somewhere, three people were preparing to leave. "Come on!" said one, his name was Weasel, and he wasn't proud of it.

"I know! You think I don't want to go?" another said, she was named Lucy although people liked calling her a "smart aleck", or "superior-pig", or even "Miss-I-know-everything-you-don't". "Plus, you aren't even halfway there!" added "Miss-I-know-everything-you-don't". They did not know that they were going on an adventure for a lifetime.

"STOP THE BICKERING YOU TWO!" Yelled a voice. As you might have guessed, this voice belonged to the mother who is very, very strict, and she was not the kind who offers you lollipops every day, in fact, she does not even know what a lollipop is, I bet that is what happens to people who spends 24 hours in sticking their head into the toilet seat searching for ants and cockroaches and who knows what.

Anyways, the three were already driving to their destination.

Finally, after 3 hours of screeching and shouting, ("What IS a LILYPOP?") they pulled in front of an ancient building. "Wow! So is this Mogao Grottoes or just a piece of stone?" gasped Weasel. "It's Mogao Grottoes, dumb." replied Lucy. Secretly, their mother liked the place, but she would not show it because liking something is a sign of weakness and she did not want to show lack of power. Weasel muttered something which was barely audible, except a few words like "I don't know" which launched the "know-it-all" into a full presentation of the Mogao Grottoes, she found it really disappointing that no one was listening, but she was wrong. You are listening! Mogao Grottoes, also known as Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas is formed by 500 temples and 25 kilometer southeast of Dunhuang. It is located in the Gansu province of China. This is the basic information of the Mogao Grottoes.

These three people were in the Mogao Caves now, gasping in amazement at everything. The mother had an "important" phone call so she arranged to meet the children five hours later at the exit.

They walked around and admired the sculptures. Weasel was very happy at that moment until he thought he saw a Buddha sculpture blink. He rubbed his eyes and stared, but the sculpture stayed as still as ever. "C'mon! We will not be able to see all the stuff before the 5 hours are used up!" complained "superior pig". Weasel shrugged and walked on. And then something happened, the lights went out, the sculptures' and paintings' eyes glowed red, and the sky vomited lightning in every direction. Among this all, the combination of darkness and fog seemed to be hiding something terrible, something rotten.

"Lucy? Mom? ANYONE THERE?" Now Weasel was really freaking out. Everybody had disappeared! And now the sculptures were advancing at him, hands out and faces blank, they looked more terrible than ever. Suddenly, a white katana lunged from nowhere and the sculptures screamed, and the next thing he knew, a man was staring at him, apparently curious. The man opened his mouth to speak, but a sculpture popped out of nowhere, and with a swift move, the man kicked it out of the window, into the howling wind and flashing lightning.

"So you are also a creep-seer?" the man asked.

Dazed and surprised, Weasel asked, "A what?"

"A creep-seer, you are."

"H-how do I get out of here?"

"There is a bit of chance you can, but not a single creep-seer will be able to make it back to reality."

Weasel was half scared and half bemused. He had a lot of questions to ask, like what was this place, why did the sculptures go nuts, does it have something to do with the blinking Buddha, why did everyone disappear...

"The only way of getting out is to get struck by lightning." The man said.

Weasel did not like the idea. Still, he needed to go back to reality, to go back to his home, to live, not to die. But what is a creep-seer? "What is a creep-seer?" he asked.

As if he had been expecting Weasel to ask, the man replied automatically, "a creep-seer is someone who enters a 4-dimensional world when they are overjoyed. He or she must be in this part of the cave in order to enter this world.

Before anyone could say a word, Weasel sprinted out of the Mogao Caves, towards the outside. "BOOM!" A lightning struck near him, missed. The man understood what he was doing, and he was trying to say something. But Weasel was too determined to get struck by lightning, and nobody would stop him.

He saw a tree ahead and wanted to go there, but something in his head stopped him, and he immediately knew why, a bolt of blue lightning struck the tree and it dismantled almost in a millisecond. Weasel watched in horror as the remnants of the tree flew into the sky.

The man caught up with Weasel and still panting, he said, "See... see what happens to objects... objects struck by... by blue lightning? You need to get struck by gold lightning!"

Weasel gulped. So it was very hard after all! If only he could know where gold lightning would strike... It was no good, he would be stuck here forever. He walked back to the caves, still shocked. He walked back to where he entered this stupid world. And without thinking, he closed his eyes and willed himself to go back to reality. A few moments later, he opened his eyes and screamed. Lucy the "superior-pig" was glaring at him. "What do you think you were doing? It wasn't funny to hide from me!"

After the adventure in Mogao Grottoes, Weasel learnt an important lesson and it is to never give up even in the worst situation. As the saying goes, "Victory is always possible for the person who refuses to stop fighting."

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Wang, Chin Yu Paris – 9

It was a sunny Monday, birds were chirping, the sun was shining brightly. Oh, pardon me, I forgot to introduce myself. I am Sirap the explorer who loves to explore history and arts. So, as I was saying, I was at home drinking hot chocolate while watching my favourite television channel, The World History Channel. Just then, the news caster announced that the Mogao Grottoes would be opened to tourists after closing for 5 years! Immediately I checked my calendar to see if I would be free for the next few days, and I would! Excitedly, I called my two best friends right away who were both explorers too! And we decided to visit the Mogao Grottoes together the next day. I was over the moon and quickly packed my stuff and searched more about the Mogao Grottoes before going to bed.

The next day, I woke up at six o'clock in the morning since the first shuttle bus to the Mogao Grottoes was at seven o'clock. I met my friends at the train station and we went to the shuttle bus stop. Luckily, at the last minute we arrived. On the bus, my friends and I shared the research findings we did ourselves and got more and more obsessed with the mystery and beauty of the Mogao Grottoes.

Almost one hour later, we arrived at the Mogao Grottoes. We did not follow the tour guide as we would love to explore by ourselves. In front of us, there was a tall ancient structure. We immediately recognized that building as there were a lot of pictures of this building on the internet. One of my friend named Elly kept taking pictures because she had a travel vlog and she wanted to show everybody the pictures of the Mogao Grottoes. After taking pictures, we went inside the cave. We saw a lot of fine paintings, sculptures and literatures. Just when we were looking at one of the famous painting, I saw some footprints on the wall. I told my friends to take a look and we started to follow the footprints. Just when we arrived at the end of the footprint trail, some walls started to move and trapped us inside, most unbelievably the floor started to shake like earthquake. We were frightened and tried to push the walls but it was no use.

Suddenly, a low voice started to talk, "Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes Gate." "There is a Mogao Grottoes Gate?" I whispered to my friends. In front of us, suddenly a bronze gate appeared. None of us had heard that the Mogao Grottoes had a gate. We continued to listen to the voice. "There is a mystery key in this room, try to find it, you have one hour." Then we immediately started to search, we looked everywhere but it was too dark and too dirty. It seemed impossible to find anything at all. Time flew, when we were about to lose hope, my friend Alice's fingers touched something icy, yes, she found the key. It was stuck on between two walls and it was the same colour of the wall so it was really hard to see it easily. Elly and I hugged Alice in joy and we almost cried in happiness. Then we heard the voice again "Good job! Now you have to unlock the gate with the key and you can find out who I am. Don't be scared, I am not a villain or a bad person." Among us, I was the bravest. So, I inserted the key and you know what, we couldn't believe our eyes. It was the Golden Buddha from the History Book, he was alive and many monks were serving him. We all knelt down and the Golden Buddha told us to stand. He said, "Nice meeting you, I am the Golden Buddha. Now I will ask you a few questions, don't ask me why you need to answer, try your best and you will have the reason in the end, three of you are a team. Ready?" We all said "Ready!" at the same time and he started to ask us questions." First question is about Mathematics. Which number logically follows this series?" Then he waved his left hand, immediately on the wall in front of us, six numbers appeared, they were 4,6,9,6,14 and 6? Elly immediately answered "19". The Golden Buddha nodded, it was correct! Then he said, "Second question, History. Which U.S. president served the shortest time in office till year 2021?" I remember this question was on my exam so I said William Henry Harrison and it was correct too! I could not believe it! Then the Golden Buddha said, "Last question, Science. What is the hottest planet in the Solar System?" This time, Alice said Venus!

The Buddha smiled and said, "Congratulations! Now, let me tell you why am I stuck in this gate." We were all confused and listened to him. "Do you all know about the monk that discovered Mogao Grottoes?" We all nodded our head. 'Good, when the monk passed away, his apprentice would continue, but several years ago, there was a bad apprentice and he did not care about digging the Mogao Grottoes, instead, he wanted to steal all the valuables and make a fortune by selling them. At the same time, he played a trick to trapped me inside this gate.' We were all shocked. I asked, "I believe that's true but how can I help you to get out?" The Golden Buddha said any people who can answer these questions would break the spell. To show his appreciation, the Golden Buddha opened another door for us, which led us to the Lost City. "I know you all can be both an explorer and writer, so please tell this story to everybody." All of a sudden, he disappeared. We went through the door and saw a lot of gold and some statues

inside. There were Buddha statues, animal statues and a lot more. We called the police and they put all of the statues in the history museum to let everybody visit and know more about them.

Then, people started living there and named it LC, short for Lost City. Later, both the city and us became famous because of this story.

This adventure inspired us to continue uncovering beauty of the hidden secrets in different countries and cities. As an explorer, I travelled around so stay tuned.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Wong, Tsz Kiu – 10

More than one and half millennia ago, there was a monk who discovered a cave that was claimed to be the mysterious Mogao Grottoes. That monk decided that there was something special about the cave he discovered – Mogao Grottoes. According to the web, the monk found the cave at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China. Not long after, thousands of pilgrims arrived at the Mogao grottoes and wanted to discover more to claim it to be their land. They stayed day and night, making lots of progress everyday digging and digging more caves, making good use of their time to create sacred art and literature. Lots of arts were made over those centuries, letting people now appreciate and understand more about what people call art those days.

200 years from then, a myth appeared. An American traveler was exploring the cave, when he found a new spot with a rare picture on the wall of the cave. In the picture, there is a circle with a logo in the middle. It seems to be the word ‘M’, but other people think it is a picture of the caves. Most people think it is just scribbles from the cavemen that didn’t mean anything. After lots of thinking, three adventurers decided to go to the cave themselves to get more information about the picture as they were very firm that the so-called logo had an important meaning. When they got to the cave, they couldn’t find the picture anywhere. They were sure that they were at the right spot and everything was exactly same as it was in the photo. It brought huge curiosity to everybody as the picture was completely gone. Two of the adventurers decided to give up but the other insisted to go further in the cave to explore. He didn’t give up on finding the picture so he brought all his research and went further. After he explored further in the deepest part of the cave, the other two adventurers left him behind and returned home themselves as they thought it was too risky. Nobody knows what happened to the remaining adventurer that stayed in the cave and he vanished inside the cave. The two adventurers who already left started to become worried about him and decided to go back to find him. When they got there, they saw the whole cave destroyed and collapsed. They regretted the decision they made earlier but not long after that, they found themselves lost in the forest. They spent almost two months to make their way out of it but sadly, they both passed away not soon after they came out of the forest, and therefore none of their research was passed on and revealed to others. That completed the myth of ‘The Collapsed Logo’ that has been told until nowadays.

There were many myths made by the Mogao Grottoes and ‘The Collapsed Logo’ was only one of them. Another famous myth was called ‘Mammoth Man’. In 1812, there was a family with two children camping near the Mogao Grottoes as they thought it would be a fun experience. When they were camping, the children were messing around with the tree branches and poking each other when they heard a loud grunting noise. None of them had the courage to go near the large bush and see whether if there was somebody else or not. After that noise settled down, the family continued camping as if nothing happened. Then at night, everything was pitch black. The family went to sleep without worrying a bit about the noise they heard in the afternoon. About 2 a.m., they heard the exact same grunting noise they heard in the afternoon. All of a sudden, light flashed out from the bush and the family saw a man with a head of a mammoth behind the bush. It was so frightening for them and they left without packing anything as fast as they could. News of the ‘Mammoth Man’ was spread all around the village after the family came back from the forest. Many people didn’t believe them as obviously, as a combination of a mammoth and a man is not believable.

There are many myths of the Mogao Grottoes that are still told until now. Nobody knows what might happen next to the myths and tales but until now all stories of the Mogao Grottoes are named as myths. The two myths I shared today are only two of the many.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Yuen, Ho Chit Marcus – 10

Most of my classmates would feel History is a boring subject. Indeed, I was part of them until that day came into my life. Since then, my classmates have described me as a weirdo because I know the Chinese history tales inside-out especially the one related to the Mogao Grottoes.

Last summer, I went on a trip in China with my family. Dad told me that it would be an adventure to visit the eight caves of Mogao Grottoes as going to have lots of discoveries. He didn't lie to me as it was magnificent and large in scale that I have never seen the scenery before. I wondered how this could be built in the past without the use of technologies.

After buying the entrance tickets, we watched two films in two separate rooms which demonstrated the history and the amazing close-up graphics of the caves. We went on a tour bus to have a deeper look of the caves. There was fully packed with people who were busy taking photos with the signature caves. Definitely the warning of "Photography was prohibited" was not eye-catching enough when comparing with the caves. There was no clear signage as to where to go and there were endless stairs for going up and down. I dashed to the stairs to avoid the crowds and tried to look for something special.

In a flash, all the noise disappeared. I muttered to myself, "Were my ears blocked by the pressure changed?" I shouted, "Mum...? Dad?". I could hear my voice being echoed. When I was about to sob, I heard something tapping the ground and it was getting closer. It was a monk holding a walking stick and walked slowly towards to me. "Kid, are you lost? Let me show you the way how to get out of here.", he spoke to me friendly. I followed his way and discovered there were various paintings and sculpture. Driven by curiosity, I asked him about the paintings, and he brought me to visit the Buddhists' home. When I went to his home, I asked him where my parents were. He replied, "Your parents are not here as you have travelled to the ancient time to the year 907. When I heard it, I saw some mice took me away and brought me into caves and they introduce me some of the paintings. Most of the paintings were about the Buddhist who chopped themselves out to feed the hungry animals as they had to save animals' life first. The mouse told me the paintings were about how the city developed. Then they took me to the first built cave and said, "This cave was found by a monk. On that day he passed this mountain and saw golden light shining like a million Buddhas, so he dug this out."

After that, I followed them downstairs, the tour guide and my parents suddenly appeared. When I looked back and the mice had gone. Without hesitation, I dashed to my parents and hugged them firmly. "Where have you been? We are so worried!" they asked seriously. I replied, "I went upstairs and I lost my way." When the tour guide was about to describe the pictures and their history, I stepped forward and explained every tale to the rest of tourists. They were completely gobsmacked as I acted like an insider. After finishing the tour, Mum kept asking me why I could be so knowledgeable, and I told her that it was the secret between Buddha and me. She laughed out without further questions.

Our Chinese history is amazing as I believe that history is a tale which we all have a part to play. It is as interesting as a detective story and worth to study every clue that our ancestors left it to us to find out. That day has changed my life and passion to history.

The Mogao Grottoes' Cursed Buddha

Li Sing Tai Hang School, De Belen, Hailey Angel Enrile De – 12

And they were finally here: Mogao Grottoes. Elyse had come to write about this wondrous place which has, sadly, been forgotten. Rylie, a friend of Elyse's, accompanied her to the Mogao Grottoes and she let her come since she knew Rylie wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Another friend of theirs, nicknamed "Miki Mouse", drove them to the Dunhuang district where the Mogao Grottoes stood.

Rylie and Elyse got out of the car and waved goodbye to Miki. They stepped into one of the caves. Just thinking about what treasures they'd find made Elyse shiver in excitement, though she knew all they would find would be drawings and different kinds of vases, but she was still excited.

This cave was full of ceramic vases of different sizes and shapes—one vase was stout and teal colored; another vase was tall with a long neck, it had drawings of bulls and hoops; another one was short, blue and purple and had people wearing laurel crowns. It felt like Rylie took hundreds, if not thousands, of pictures. Elyse sketched them for references in the book *Mogao Grottoes and its Wonderful Caves* written and illustrated by the one and only Elyse. Another vase Elyse completely missed was creamy white and blue, it had gold ink writing at the foot of the vase and vicious lions and snakes drawn on it. It was magnificent and deserved to be in her book. She took a closer look at the gold writing and made out the words BEWARE THE CURSED BUDDHA STATUE. A cursed Buddha statue?

"Elyse," Rylie called out, "We should get going. We're burning daylight!"

Elyse turned to her impatient friend, "Soon we'll go. I just need to sketch this last vase." and she continued sketching.

Rylie pouted and turned away from her. She saw a tunnel that led to another cave. She walked to the adjacent cave. It was dimly lit by short and thick candles. Although she couldn't see much, she could still see a gigantic Buddha statue. Huge it was, made out of gold! Now this gigantic golden statue, was *real* treasure. She squealed. She took out her camera and pressed record.

"Look—y here, cam! It's a gigantic golden statue! Made of real gold! Real gold I tell you!" She walked closer to the Buddha statue. "Hey, Buddha statue sir, may I take a picture with you?" The statue remained quiet and still. "Silence means yes." She stopped recording and stood in front of the statue. She made a peace sign with her fingers and took a picture. *Click*. And she continued recording. "I wonder how shocked and happy Elyse would be. Her face would have an enormous smile. That would make me smile too!" She touched the statue. It felt cold. Rylie stopped touching it, and then her eyelids felt heavy. Her hands started to fade. "Huh, is it just me, or am I...disappearing? Ha, what am I...saying?" and with that last sentence, she disappeared and the camera fell with a thud.

Elyse had just finished sketching the last vase and tried to find Rylie who magically disappeared, just as she had said. Elyse searched everywhere but still couldn't find her dear friend. "Rylieeeee!" she cried out, desperate to find her. She heard a loud thud from the cave next to the cave full of vases and went to look. All she saw were paintings on the walls, a huge golden Buddha statue and Rylie's camera on the ground. It was still recording. Elyse stopped the recording and checked the gallery. It showed Rylie recording in front of the statue. Then it showed only the last statue. *"Look—y here cam! It's a gigantic golden—"* Elyse fast-forwarded it, disappointed when it ended. She swiped to the right to see a picture of Rylie posing in front of the Buddha statue, her pearly white teeth gleaming in a smile. She swiped again and another video played. *"I wonder how shocked and happy Elyse would be. Her face would have an enormous smile. That would make me smile too!"* Elyse smiled. Rylie reached out and touched the statue. She stopped touching it and then her eyelids fluttered. It was as if she was fading away. *"Huh, is it just me, or am I disappearing? Ha, what am I...saying..."* and then she disappeared. The camera fell. *Thud*. The camera fell again, from Elyse's grip this time. She was horrified. The golden Buddha statue had made Rylie

disappear! Then she looked at the walls, and saw a painting of a woman, probably 21 years old. She was holding a silver camera. A great big smile on her face. She looked oddly familiar. She looked like...

Rylie. Rylie had become a painting! This is what the vase meant! *Beware of the cursed Buddha statue*. If you touched it, it would turn you into a painting. Elyse's breathing turned heavy. Her eyes filled with bitter tears and one by one they fell in the form of teardrops. Everything turned white. The ground...the paintings...the statue...

Elyse woke up sweaty with her heart thumping like elephant stomps. She looked around. She was back at home, not in that ancient cave. Realization hit her: *it was just a dream*.

The Origin of Mogao Grottoes

Li Sing Tai Hang School, Singh, Harjas – 11

In the 1850s, lived a young boy named Mogao Grottoes. He worked hard, dusk till dawn, trying to figure out a special myth he believed in. Villagers told him to stop and start a life.

“You don’t want to end up like your father, do you?” a grandmother declared.

His mother died from starvation in Mogao’s early life. His father, a monk who died, tried to find clues of a hidden cave. Nobody knew what happened to him, what he found, or how he died. It was a Sunday morning when everyone found him gone. Forever.

At that time, people had to share beds with different people of Verakini—their village. Some of his friends searched for him, but they failed. That was when Mogao turned into an orphan. The only reason he survived until now was because of a kind barbarian and his wife—Camilla, who is Mogao’s aunt. Mogao lived in a small cottage with Camilla and Theago—Camilla’s husband. They treated Mogao like their own. Barbarians did not speak Greek, so it was hard for Theago to communicate with Mogao as Mogao spoke Greek.

You might wonder, aren’t Barbarians evil or uncivilized? But no, that was not the case. Theago was kind and helpful. Even if he didn’t have that much money, he would still help Mogao. They had been raising Mogao after the death of his father. Mogao knew that his father wouldn’t just go out to find treasure like a fool. He knew there was a reason. He also knew it was so important that his father sacrificed himself. He wanted to know more but the only thing he could do is to follow his father’s tracks.

Years passed, it was now 1895. Mogao had become a lot older. After tons of research, Mogao had found a lot more than before. He knew the exact location where his father died and what he was trying to find. He found the location when he was searching through his dad’s leftover belongings. His dad kept a notebook and in that notebook there was a sketch of that place. It was unrecognised. It looked like a cave according to his dad’s sketch. And it was located in Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China. He knew that because his father wrote that with bold red ink. It was very surprising that the red ink was clearer than the black. The sketch was very hard to see because the notebook was very old and rusty. Moreover, the pitch black ink was not clear. He did not know much about that location because nobody, except for his father has seen it.

But he could use help from a couple of friends he made from the past few years. They were all about the same age as Mogao. They were all explorers, curious about the caves. On 23rd June, 1900 the three of them went on a mission to find the cave and make Verakini proud.

“Let’s go and find the cave!” thundered Sarah—one of Mogao’s friend. They brought their bags they had packed and went going.

“I want to show you something before you go.” said Camilla.

“Okay,” replied Mogao.

Camilla took a little bottle from her closet. Inside the bottle was a bright red carpet. Use this to travel. It will save you a lot of time.

“What is this?” asked Sarah. This is a magic carpet. Everyone was very shocked except for Theago and Camilla.

“It is time to tell them,” Camilla told Theago. “I am a good witch who helps people and Theago is a powerful wizard. That is why I married him.”

All three of them were so shocked that they froze for a minute.

“So why didn’t you tell me earlier, when I was a child?” questioned Mogao.

“I didn’t want you to be alarmed. Now you should use your carpet and get going.” answered Camilla.

“Okay.” the three of them said in unison.

“But how do we control this?” asked Mogao.

“You don’t need to control the carpet, the carpet will control you,” answered Camilla.

They hopped on the carpet and the carpet started to glow and hover.

“Wow! This is so cool!” shouted Sam—the other friend of Mogao.

The carpet flew high in the sky, it was gliding really quickly. When they entered the desert after the endless jungle, the carpet fluttered like a bird without wings.

“What is happening?” shrieked Sarah.

The carpet fell on the blazing sand. After all, riding a magical carpet wasn’t a simple hobby to be picked up and laid down like a card of solitaire. It turned into a beautiful jeep.

“What is going on with this carpet?” Remembering Camilla’s words, “The carpet will control you.” said Mogao.

After two days, the place they arrived at looked like what Mogao’s father had sketched in his notebook.

“I think the cave is that side,” pointed Sam.

“I think you are right,” agreed Mogao.

They took out the tools they had packed and started searching. Sam’s job was to dig; Sarah and Mogao’s jobs were to see if something looked special or strange. After some time, Sam found a dragon shape button as he dug through the sand.

“Come over here!” he shouted in excitement.

Mogao and Sarah rushed to the scene. They all agreed to press it. Once Sam pressed the button, there was a cracking sound in the sand. Something was coming out of the sand. Hundreds of caverns aligned in the middle of the desert. All of them were unique and beautiful.

“This is spectacular!” Mogao said. So all of them went in the first cavern. What they saw shocked them forever. There were endless paintings on the walls, sculptures everywhere and many more priceless artifacts.

“What should we call our discovery?” asked Mogao.

“We should call it Mogao Grottoes,” suggested Sam.

“Yes, after all Mogao was the one who started it all.” agreed Sarah.

Journey to Dunhuang

Marymount Primary School, Choi, Ka Ching Veronica – 9

In my hands was the blurry picture of the Silk Road. Nothing much, but it had the potential to lead me into my distant memories, right to when I was facing the great caverns located in Dunhuang, facing a picturesque towering palace with an astonished expression painted across my face. Let me relate to you my prodigious adventure in the famous Mogao Caves.

Sweat was dripping down my back as I hiked up the cliff leading me to my destination—The Mogao Grottoes. Back then, I was a young explorer sent to explore the legendary Dunhuang Caves. I was exhausted after my trek along the Silk Road, so I stopped to take some photos. I continued after a while and that was when I saw it. The ancient temples stretched out before my eyes, every detail carefully carved out by monks.

Enchanted by it, I inched forward slowly, never taking my eyes off the magical temples storing the historical treasures from our past. I ambled into the empty corridor of the first stopping every once in a while to examine and take pictures of the beautiful paintings on the walls.

When I got to the antechamber, I was amazed by the treasures in it. For example, the sculpture of the great Buddha, the admirable paintings on silk and paper and so on, they were all jaw-droppingly attractive. Now is the year 1900 and these caves have been discovered not long ago, I had the chance to come here without other people interrupting my work. This antechamber was built 1534 years ago in 366AD along with the rest of the temples. Suddenly, something caught my eye, it was a mural on the gigantic wall behind me. The mural showed lots of goddesses and Buddha. Every single inch of it was breathtaking and I was highly impressed with it.

Next, I moved into the main chamber, I was not prepared for what I saw there. Dozens of large and awe-inspiring murals covered the walls, the fresh colours only slightly faded after what was about 15 centuries. I was dumbfounded, treasure after treasure, these ancient paintings, murals, and sculptures never ceased to amaze me. When I saw the statues nearby, I picked one of them up carefully with gloves as to not leave fingerprints.

Out of the blue, the devil in my mind spoke to me, "Steal it! Go ahead and steal the statue!" I asked it, "But that wouldn't be fair to the other people who come to admire the statue, would it? What's the point of stealing it anyways?" It replied that it was valuable and I could steal it for money. I kept trying to refuse but it would not stop making a racket in my head and giving me a headache, so in the end, I gave in. I looked around cautiously and tiptoed to the exit. Accidentally, I slipped and fell, I banged my head against the cold, hard floor of the temple. I saw stars before I completely blacked out. The goddess from the mural I saw just now was in front of me and lecturing me for something. She said, "You shouldn't be so egocentered and gluttonous young fellow! Do you know how many people came here before you? Quite a number, they all left the historical treasures, didn't they? But you didn't, don't you have any guilty conscience? Of all the greediness and selfishness! This is a very precious artifact and everyone around the world should be able to admire and appreciate it if they wanted to! You are stopping them from doing that! I am very disappointed in you. You need to preserve these important artifacts at once, these are irreplaceable! If everyone acted like you, then this world would be robbed of these beautiful paintings and statues! Think about it, then no one, not even you, could admire them! "

Just at that moment, I regained consciousness, embarrassed by my disgust behaviour, I put back the statue at once. As I continued walking along the priceless vases, I realized that the goddess was right. Historical pieces were made to be seen by others too, everyone has the right to look at them and admire them.

That day, I did not make my way back home without gaining anything. I had photos to remember this unforgettable journey, a load of notes, and these Caves of a Thousand Buddhas has taught me one very valuable lesson—Treasures from the past are of great importance and value, we should not take them for personal gain, because that would be preventing other people from enjoying them. We should try our best to treasure them and preserve them because everybody deserves to have a chance to admire them.

A Captivating Tale

Marymount Primary School, Choi, Tsz Hei Chloe – 11

The sunshine warmed the air, and the azure sky showed no difference from the glimmering lake. Packs of tourists led by eager-to-please tour guides could be seen everywhere, snapping photos and chattering avidly, pointing at Mogao Grottoes, which they had been aching to see for quite some time.

Cedric Smith could barely understand its appeal to his parents. What could be so fascinating about a Chinese building with shelves of boring old parchments about art and literature? Weren't all the books and homework given by the school enough? He now understood that humans' greediness could never be satisfied. He swung his leg at a rock, angry for agreeing to this dull trip.

His parents excitedly ushered him inside of the building. 'Oh great,' he thought impatiently. 'Now we're going inside the dump.' Just as he expected, there were dusty paintings and parchments filled with so many words that they seemed to blur together. Some of them were put inside some glass cases, as if they were priceless treasures instead of worthless papers.

They walked from room to room, shuffling between crowds in small, cramped spaces. He was starting to feel somewhat nauseous. He was nudged by waves of people from here to there, back and forth, until he was finally backed to a door labelled 'Staff only' and decided to wait there until his overly-exuberant parents finished their photo-snapping session.

Another wave of people entered the room, and Cedric was close to puking in the stifling room. He took a hasty glance at the door behind him, and he burned with curiosity. 'Anywhere is better than here,' he thought desperately. Cracking open the surprisingly unlocked door, he crept into the pitch-black room.

He took some time adjusting to the dark. The lights weren't on, but Cedric could make out a long corridor. He had a dim sense of foreboding, but the scene outside the room rushed to his memory, and he allowed himself to explore the mysterious place.

Cedric took off his backpack and rummaged in it, then marvelled at his findings. It was a torch, just the thing he needed in the gloom. He switched it on, and blinked a few times to make sure he wasn't hallucinating. There were gargoyles lining up against the walls neatly, and strangely enough, there were buddhist-like figures as well, mixed in with the gargoyles.

Abruptly, a rustling voice echoed through, which made Cedric jump in fright. He shone his torchlight in said direction.

What if it is a staff member? I'm dead; my parents are going to skin me alive. But— What if it isn't? What if it's— a ghost?

He paled dramatically at his own imagination. He felt his legs become jelly-like, and he simply couldn't bring himself to spread his legs and walk. His head slowly turned towards the door helplessly, just to find it was closed, his heart hammering against his ribcage rapidly.

"Hello?" he said hoarsely and anxiously, his throat dry.

"Welcome," boomed a voice overhead, "to the Tales of Mogao Grottoes."

Cedric shuddered. He hoped fervently that someone would barge in and say 'April's Fools!' but this was just his sheer imagination. However, after a few moments which he spent to console himself, he started to feel his muscles relax, and he began to feel the horror that was mounting a few seconds ago sliding away. He had a feeling that all of this was just a joke, and that he had no reason to be afraid. 'It had to be someone playing a trick on me,' he thought, 'How could a voice appear out of nowhere? It's probably just a speaker.'

Then, something changed his mind once again. A glowing book flew to him and steadied itself mid-air in front of him, as if pure magic. He gaped at it, watching it sprint open at its own record. An almighty woman's voice, different from the first, spoke as the book stopped at a page with a single word— 'History'.

"Deep into the Gansu province of China, a long forgotten majestic structure remained hidden, out of sight, up till its recent discovery. For centuries, the province has seen violent wars, the coming and going of natural disasters, and yet the evidence of the Tang Dynasty's presence stood strong with time. This is none other than the world-renowned Mogao Grottoes, which accounts the dream of a Buddhist monk by the name of Le Zun, who envisioned a thousand Buddhas in a golden light."

Cedric was appalled, and he continued staring wide-eyed at the self-narrating book. Another male voice, deep and hollow, sounded as the book flipped to the next page.

"Wherein lies beautiful myths, stories of a gruesome past echo through... loud and sorrowful. Mogao Grottoes have been pillaged in the past, by selfish and egocentric robbers but its stunning history and structure remains to be discovered..."

Cedric listened, his shock disappearing into thin air. He was deeply immersed in the appealing story and thrilling tale of Mogao Grottoes. The book spoke its history, and he seemed to have travelled back in time, to the Tang Dynasty.

After what seemed like an eternity, the book came to an end. "And there it is, strong and powerful. The Mogao Grottoes stand before bewildered eyes, despite its disastrous encounters with the world..."

Cedric blinked. The book was gone. Gone— as if it never existed, as if that never happened. He looked around in vain, trying to find any trace of it. Everything looked far too normal for his taste. Shrugging in utter confusion, he threw open the door, only to discover the security and his parents turning around in the room, desperate to find him.

"Hey, hey, I'm alright," he began, trying to sound casual. He looked around at the arts on the walls, and sudden respect welled up in his heart. Perhaps, it was the aftereffects of what just happened in that room? "Well? What are you waiting for? We have a whole building of Chinese arts to explore!"

A Magic Test

Marymount Primary School, Ip, Agnes Nga Chi – 11

“What’s the next class?” Lily asked. “Ugh, it’s history...” Tom groaned. “Come on now, it isn’t that bad!” Lily pushed Tom to his seat. The bell rang and the teacher, Miss Brown, quickly filed in.

“Welcome class, today we are going to learn about the majestic Mogao Caves. Has anyone heard of it?” Miss Brown asked the class after everyone was seated. “No one? Well, the Mogao Caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes, it forms a system of five hundred temples, twenty-five kilometres southeast of the center of Dunhuang, which is an oasis...Tom, stop drowsing! Are you listening?”

Tom jumped up. “Sorry Miss Brown, I dozed off.” “Well, you better listen now, because there is a test later on, you wouldn’t want to fail it.” Miss Brown scolded him. “As I was saying, Dunhuang is an oasis located at a series of religious and cultural interchanges on the Silk Road, in Gansu province of China. The Mogao Caves are best known to be one of the Chinese Buddhist grottoes, together with the Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, are the three famous ancient Buddhist sculptural sites of China.”

Miss Brown kept on babbling different facts about Mogao Caves until she got to the most important part. “Now, I want you to read the fifth chapter of your book, about the Mogao Caves. After that, you’ll be tested.” Miss Brown said, heading to the chair to sit while the whole class groaned in despair.

The whole class read and studied for a few minutes in silence with a sullen mood, with just the faint sound of Tom sleeping. “Ok class, the test is about to start, you will be paired up with a partner.” Miss Brown announced. “Alice with Brian, Daisy and...and lastly, Lily with Tom! Now please take your seats with your partner and we’ll be starting.” She announced cheerfully. “Hey, we’re a team.” Tom walked over to Lily. “Yeah, you better remember everything in the book.” Lily grumbled.

After everyone had taken their seats next to their partner, Miss Brown gave out bingo cards to them. “Each time you answer a question about Mogao Caves, and the answer is correct, I will say a number that is related to the answer, you get to cross out the number if it is in your bingo card, the first group to pop all the numbers wins the game and any group who gets their answers all correct will pass the test. Is everyone clear?” She clarified. “I know you did not read the chapter, so what are we going to do?” Lily slapped herself on the face with the history book while glaring at Tom. “Calm down! I might remember something, so it’ll be fine.” Tom reassured her.

“But you probably won’t—” “The test starts now.” Miss Brown cut off Lily by dingling a small bell. “Do you know this question, Mr?” Lily crossed her arms. “Um...” Tom stuttered, but he felt a sharp prick on his pocket. It was a piece of paper! He opened it and read the words written there.

“What does it say?” Lily questioned. “I don’t know—” Tom responded but was cut off by a sound of wind whirling. They suddenly disappeared, but without any of the other students and the teacher noticing anything.

“Where in the world have you taken us!” Lily yelled at Tom as they landed on their feet at a rocky surface area, slapping his face with the history book. “I don’t know! Maybe you shouldn’t have asked what the paper said!” Tom retorted. They argued for quite a moment before a cold voice appeared behind them. “Would you please excuse me, I’m trying to get through.” “Oh sorry.” Lily apologized pulling Tom to a corner. The man raised his nose up and just simply walked away. “Isn’t that...Lè Zūn? The famous Buddhist monk who in 366 AD, built the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang because he had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathing in golden light? Let’s follow him!” Lily marveled.

They tip-toed quietly, following behind Lè Zūn. He headed towards a half-built looking cave, he was alone before he was joined by another monk. “That must be the Mogao Caves! Next to him must be the monk Faliang!” Lily whispered. They watched in deep silence as the two monks talked about the cave while the workers worked hard to continuously build it.

The two learned so much about the Mogao Caves. They followed different people around everywhere. They found out things that weren't even written in the history book. For example, the Mogao Caves originally was only a place for monks to meditate. Later on, it was developed to serve the convents that were built up nearby. They learnt about the members of the family of the Northern Wei and Northern Zhou, who constructed many caves near the Mogao Caves, but the best part was seeing everything with their own eyes. Tom finally understood what history was about, it's about how to handle mistakes and be peaceful.

After a while, when they felt they had seen enough, they tried reading the words to go back, and thankfully, they did. It had just been a few minutes in reality, but to them, a long day has passed. They listened intently to Miss Brown's questions until they had got everything. By then, they were the wikipedia of the Mogao Caves.

"We did it! Miss Brown, we finished our card!" They shouted once they finished. "Great job! I have to say, I'm quite impressed with your work. You both have done exceptionally well. I'm glad to say, you have passed the test while winning the game." Miss Brown announced with a happy smile.

"Hooray! We did it!" Lily and Tom cheered. Everyone clapped for them. But the happiest thing of all, was how they understood that Mogao Caves wasn't about meditation, but the importance of learning all about the new and interesting things within it.

The Great-Elder

Marymount Primary School, Lee, Wing Ka Alison – 12

Chinese New Year was approaching, and a red mantle completely covered the city. Children practiced songs; designers sewed clothes; elderlies designed slogans. Family traditions said one must prepare something 'old but worthy'. The precious, most valuable stone, the Great-Elder, illuminates once it confirms one passed the test. The brighter the light, the more successful the test. As the most innovative child ever, I believed it was a piece of cake. Out of the blue, I found myself in a pickle. I struggled to pick the perfect present, which only occurred once in a blue moon.

My parents endeavored to satisfy me with the best and the newest since I was in their arms, although I paid zero effort and no costs. Hence, I felt withdrawn from anything ancient. It was threadbare to me. I even refuse to touch or approach geriatric objects. Such family tradition only applied to twelve-year-olds, so it was the best of both worlds before I triggered the alarm by turning twelve. I'm extending my arms to Death's welcome mat as I must bite the bullet now.

Help descended like a glorified savior. Grandpa moved, and Mom volunteered to empty his apartment. I gave a leg up because treasures were waiting for acknowledgment there. Grandpa desired ancient antiques, indeed, quite old but priceless. I'd complete my task! I thought delightedly, bits of excitement growing like saplings.

Reality crushed my high hopes. Grandpa's apartment, located in the distant rural areas, looked like an abandoned apartment. Breathing sighs of anxiety, I dug restlessly through useless appliances. Even optimistic Mom looked discouraged and woeful.

Though Mom and I were both hesitant, we reluctantly cleared the 'trash pool' in a blink of an eye. Omen brushed me when I was clearing out bookshelves, but it was so mild I merely missed it. A bird flapped out the bookshelf unexpectedly, spreading its wings but couldn't remain in the air. It landed back to the creaky floorboards, which gave its last cry before it gave out. I looked again and discovered the object lying on the floor wasn't a bird but a dusted leather-covered book. I've mistaken its leather cover as feathers; its 'wings' were nothing but yellow, aged pages. Mom was on the balcony, so I began investigating. Once I opened the book, the text began to illuminate. I opened my eyes again and found myself in a completely contrasting atmosphere.

Finding myself located on a long road, I realized I was lost. Wearing old-fashioned Chinese clothes, people hustled and bustled, as busy as a mini-city. Hawkers shouted bargains; fishers carried fish onshore; men moved goods. Even children looked after some stores from thieves and pickpockets.

Feeling a pat on my shoulder, I turned around to see a boy dressed like the others. "Hi, this is Ping. I haven't seen you around before. Lost?" I replied sincerely, "You know where we are?" "Peculiar to question this." Ping looked shocked, and his jaws dropped. "We're in the Silk Road of China!" "Right. What are those pilgrims doing?" The corner of my eye caught a crowd of pilgrims. "Well, they're heading to the Mogao Grottoes. Dunno much about that."

It's a blessing in disguise I got trapped here. I'd find the gift here ——this place looks like a millennia ago. I thought, squealing with fervor. "Great to hear. I was planning to adventure with them anyways. Let's ask to accompany them." We marched to the pilgrims, and they accepted our admission. Soon, we were striding as we walked on eggshells, flashing lanterns in the cave.

It wasn't deep like the fountains of sleep, though it was dark like the seventh ring of Dante's Inferno. Quite frightening too. Adding insult to injury, the pilgrims distributed shovels for digging. I almost refused it, but I imagined everyone exchanging disgusted glances if I rejected. Ditching me in the cave and depart. Unwillingly, I started scouring.

Sweat streamed down my forehead and raced down to my cheeks. I've never felt more exhausted. Under normal circumstances, I would've given up. But I selected to continue. Somebody gasped, I looked and found a gemstone, its glow radiant as the Sun.

A sound boomed piercingly, "You've found the channel to the Haven of the Children. Only those who fulfill our requirements shall enter. You are honest with all your dealings, forsaking treachery or deceitfulness. Your hands are

clean of violence, and your heart is free of envy and selfish ambition. Enter if you fit all these policies. Otherwise, turn and leave."

Anxiety and silence wavered, everyone enthusiastic but apprehended. I felt uneasy too. "It's impossible." I snarled vexedly. Others nodded in agreement. I gritted my teeth nervously until someone uttered something.

"I agree," Ping shouted solemnly, despite him trembling. "Anyone violates at least one of these rules from birth to growth." The gemstone silenced before it articulated again, "Alright. We have discussed this with our villagers, and they all agree. You are all admitted to entering, just because of the villagers."

The gate heaved itself up, unveiling a utopia. Birds chirped cheerily, clouds danced delightedly, and the Sun smiled sincerely. The villagers gathered, celebrating our arrival. "Welcome, guests! We'll host a feast instantly!"

Astonished, I watched how promptly they set the bonfire for a barbecue on a bench. I told them of my sudden appearance and the family tradition. A wise fortune-teller said he was awaiting opportunities to 'rescue' guests. So, he muttered a reminiscence of a poem, and I found myself back in Grandpa's apartment when I opened my eyes again, the book on my lap.

Perhaps the devil isn't as black as I painted! Old things are as precious as new things, and we shouldn't dislike them. Although they might not look as good or work as smoothly, it holds the memories of many and inspires new technology. It also enables us to know more about our culture and history. Without the past, the present would never have existed!

The Evil Genie's Prank

Marymount Primary School, Lee, Yan Tung Tiffany – 10

Thousands of years ago was a place called the Mogao Grottoes where it was as mysterious as haunted houses and as dark as the night sky, with endless tunnels leading from one place to another down the long, dusty paths. Through years of digging, numerous statues, sculptures, and arts were discovered and unearthed, such as the Genie statues which were humongous like blue whales in the deep blue sea.

One dark mysterious night, when everyone was fast asleep and sleeping soundly and peacefully, the full moon was awakened. But as one of the Genie statues was placed outside the caves, the silhouette of the full moon collapsed on it, which in the blink of an eye, came to life. It grew bigger by the minute, until it was three times its original size.

The Genie had a gigantic golden body which shimmered like gold, it could blink, talk and walk around on solid ground with stomping large feet. It even had powers to blasphemy anybody who was in its way. "Nobody could ever stop me now, I can finally take over the world!" the Genie said evilly and sneakily. Everyone woke up so suddenly from the evil Genie's stomping around in the caves. The Genie was trying to curse everyone in its path. As the Genie was starting to get bored and feeling dull, it had the most magnificent and fabulous idea it could ever think of, and that was giving each person three wishes for them to wish for anything they want, but the Genie would make their wishes the opposite of what they wanted. The Genie had a motive, and that was to play tricks on the cavemen and prank them.

The bright sun rose early in the morning, the cavemen started their digging and shovelling again. They were all chatting about what happened the other night that there were extremely tumultuous sounds all over the place. Little did they know, the Genie was planning a big plot to be set on them. All of a sudden, the Genie walked towards the cavemen gently and slowly. The Genie started to say slyly, "Sorry to interrupt your digging and chatting, but I want to say that I made all the loud noises last night and I am truly sorry. I also have one more surprise for each of you, and that is for you to get three wishes to wish for anything you want. Those wishes will appear next week and your lives will be as good as new." The cavemen were so surprised but shocked by the Genie that their mouths were wide open, and their eyes shone like stars. They thought the Genie was familiar because of what they dug up from the caves, but it was their opportunity to have what they have wanted for their lives. Everyone wished for what they wanted and the Genie promised what it said but would do it in the opposite way. Since the Genie had promised everyone that their wishes would appear the next week, it has seven days of time to plan the plot.

As the days passed, the Genie set the plot, and everything became the opposites of what the cavemen had wished and were obviously wrong for the cavemen. Everybody realised that the Genie had pranked all of them and they decided to try to find out what it was that made the Genie turning against them. They knew that the Genie was here on the night the full moon was up, so they thought that it was something about the full moon that made the Genie statue come to life. They believed that it was the full moon that caused the Genie to be nasty and that they have decided that they must keep the Genie away from the next full moon so that it does not become stronger but instead weaker.

Soon the next full moon came, the cavemen were more than ready to destroy the evil Genie. The Genie was sleeping peacefully in its cave, so the cavemen had discreetly placed a massive boulder in front of the cave's entrance to prevent it from leaving. "Ha, ha, ha! Now all the curses the Genie had put on us will vanish into thin air." said one of the cavemen delightedly. But little did they know, the Genie is so strong that it could lift the boulder with one hand.

A second plot was set up against the Genie by the cavemen. First of all, there were puddles of water in front of the cave which the Genie slipped over. The cavemen immediately poured muddy water all over it. In front of the Genie were lots of pebbles and teeny-tiny stones that the Genie tripped over again and again until it fell into the quicksand. Slowly, the Genie sank into the quicksand until it was stuck in it. With force, it tried to pull itself out of the quicksand before standing up fiercely. He roared out a loud roar and jumped and stomped around the ground, making the ground shake violently. "How dare you make me trip and sink like that! You cannot mess with me you humans!" The Genie let out another aggressive yowl and looked towards the full moon to make itself more powerful, but it was too late. The full moon had already set. The Genie cried miserably when it started shrinking and turned back into a small statue at last. Everybody cheered and clasped with excitement, and they celebrated by not digging and shovelling in the caves for one whole day.

The Quest for Happiness

Marymount Primary School, Pang, Hay Yin Hayley – 11

“Good... Not in need...” The voice echoed around the chamber. A dragon sat there, gazing at its crystal ball. The crystal ball showed the dragon every person in the world. It was how the dragon found its next mission. The crystal ball now showed a young girl with a grumpy face, despite the piles of presents around her. The girl was stomping her feet wildly. “My next mission’s going to be tough,” the dragon muttered, and flew out of the room.

“I had twenty presents last birthday. Why do I only have fifteen this year?!” yelled Jing. Jing’s name meant quiet and gentle. However, the real Jing was the exact opposite. She was always throwing a tantrum. She always counted her presents, and if they were less than twenty, she would make you regret it.

Jing, stomping as loud as she could, slammed her bedroom door in the face of her helpless parents, and began throwing anything her hands could reach around the room. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind threw her window open. The gale was so loud, Jing could hear it over her racket. Jing peeked out of her window. To her surprise... and horror, there, just below the window, was a dragon, with gold and bronze scales and a silver tail.

“Mom—” Jing started. But she was silenced immediately. “Don’t talk,” the dragon said with a stern look. Then, somehow, Jing’s voice came out of the dragon’s mouth.

“I want more presents!” the dragon shouted from the room.

“Of course, dear, your dad and I will go to the mall now,” came a panicked voice. Soon, the sound of the front door closing could be heard.

Jing’s mind was filled with questions, but she was too bewildered by everything she had just witnessed to ask them. The dragon flew in from the open window and as though it could read Jing’s mind, it said briskly, “I am the Dragon of Desires, a servant of Guanying. My name is Ming, meaning ‘bright’. I am here to fulfil three of your wishes.”

“Is there a catch?” inquired Jing, finding her voice, “Why pick me of all people?”

“There is no catch. I have picked you because it seemed that you were quite disappointed with everything,” the dragon replied impatiently and without another word, swept Jing, with its long tail, onto its back.

The duo swept into the sky in a zig-zag pattern.

“Hold tight. I have to avoid your nosy neighbours’ gazes,” the dragon said and flew higher.

The view above the clouds was breathtaking. The sky was a clear, light blue, with a little mist draping over it. From high above, Jing could see lush greenery, seas and rivers. After a while, Jing saw a rocky cliff, and carved into it was a red temple. Ming swooped down from the sky and landed before the temple. “This is the Mogao Grottoes. Follow me,” Ming instructed and entered the temple.

Jing obeyed. The inside of the temple was majestic. There were rock-cut architectures of the Buddha, murals of Guanyin, clay sculptures... The statues were life-like. It almost seemed as if the Buddha was right in front of Jing. The art of the temple took Jing’s breath away. She stood there in silence, hoping she could have the entire temple to herself.

Soon, Jing and the dragon entered a room with a colossal buddha statue, which sat cross-legged, with its hands open.

“This temple is spectacular,” muttered Jing.

“I don’t doubt it.” The dragon agreed proudly, “Anyway, time for your three wishes. You can wish for anything...” the dragon said. Then, with a glance at Jing’s face, added “except for the Mogao Grottoes to be yours,” Jing sighed.

Despite that, Jing still had thousands of wishes in mind.

“First, I wish for never-ending fortune. Second, I wish for hundreds of presents,” she said, without any hesitation. “Third, I wish for...” Jing paused. It was her last wish. What should she choose? All the options in her mind were

yelling, “Wish for me! You’ll regret it if you don’t wish for me! Wish for me!” Jing desperately wanted to see which way the cat was going to jump. Then another idea popped into her head—the talent to predict the future. Jing grumbled.

“Having some trouble?” asked Ming. Jing nodded reluctantly. “Well... Let me take you somewhere. Perhaps that may help you,” Ming said, and scooped Jing onto its back.

In no time, the dragon landed before a small cottage. Part of the wooden walls had begun to rot. Ming pushed Jing forward and told her to peek into the window.

There was a family of five in the cottage. The children’s tattered clothes were too small for their size and the parents’ clothes had a few torn patches on them. There were only some pieces of old furniture in the house and their colours were starting to chip off.

Jing frowned. How was this place going to help her know what she wanted? She looked around her. Ming had already fulfilled her first and second wish. Then she glanced back at the cottage. The family was smiling, but why? They had so little, while she, despite everything she had, wasn’t happy. Jing thought having more would give her happiness, but it didn’t. Perhaps she needed to seek happiness in another way...

Suddenly, the myriad wishes in her head vanished, all except one.

She said, “I wish everyone in the world could have everything they need.”

Ming nodded approvingly. He flicked his tail. Jing looked through the window. The furniture inside became newer. The clothes of the family turned smart and new. The family was speechless. But from their faces, Jing could tell that they were overjoyed.

Jing smiled. For the first time, she felt true happiness. After returning to her house, with the dragon’s help, she delivered the presents and fortune she had received from the dragon to everyone around the world, bringing happiness to every single person.

The Key to Success – A ballet Girl's Adventure in Dunhuang

Marymount Primary School, Wu, Hei Tung Helina – 9

Bella was an ordinary nine years old girl in Hong Kong. She lived with her dad, mum and her five years old little sister. Bella loved dancing ballet. She enjoyed the moment of dancing, and always imagined that she could fly like a flying apsara. However, Bella was timid and always got nervous to dance on the stage because she was afraid of making mistakes. Next week she would attend a ballet audition.

It was Christmas Eve. Bella and her family went to watch the ballet show – Nutcracker. In the show, Clara's uncle gave Clara a Christmas present of a wooden [nutcracker](#) carved in the shape of a little man. Seeing this scene, Bella felt joyful because she also received a Christmas present from her uncle who had just came back from Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes for vocation and bought her a flying apsara doll!

Bella and her family enjoyed the show very much and had a relaxed night. Recently she had already been preparing for a ballet audition for weeks. However, she still felt nervous and unconfident about the coming audition as she was so keen to be selected in the audition. Bella got tired and sleepy after the ballet show, so she went to bed earlier than usual. In the warm and comfortable bed, she had a magical dream.

In the dream Bella found herself in the forest of beautiful caves in Dunhuang. As if dreaming, Bella met Clara the main character of Nutcracker! Bella told Clara that she was nervous and unconfident about the audition next week. "Maybe the flying apsaras could help her with the problem. Follow me!" Clara said. Surprised, as if lighter than a feather, Clara slowly lifted from the ground and turned into a flying apsara! Oh, it's not Clara in the Nutcracker, it's the flying apsara Clara. She led Bella to the places where flying apsaras are practicing and dancing.

"Watching the flying apsaras practice their dance steps must be an unforgettable experience!" Bella thought. "What's that familiar music and performance? Oh, yes, isn't that the famous Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands?" The dancers wear a gold and yellow vest and a short skirt with a pair of leggings, and have a golden crown on the head and some sharp finger nails as decoration. They stand in two lines to form a Chinese character "人" (human) and stretch out their long and slim arms one by one, forming a spectacular Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands.

As Bella was watching the practice of Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands, Clara told Bella that the flying apsaras in this troupe were all hearing challenged. However, the timing of the dancers' moved ran like a clock. Everything, including the music was perfectly synchronized and flowed beautifully. She got stunned, watching their practice again and again and was moved by the flying apsaras's flawless performance. What the extraordinary commitment, perseverance and courage was needed to overcome unimaginable difficulties and to create such a high caliber art!

The flying apsaras didn't even had a one minute break, but continued to practice until the dance steps of Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands was perfectly on time. While Bella watched, she felt a hand on her shoulder. Looking back, Bella saw one of the flying apsaras stretching out one hand smilingly as if saying "Would you like to dance with us?". Of cause, Bella immediately agreed and danced with them. The most amazing thing was that Bella wasn't scared of dancing in front a lot of audiences and making mistakes anymore.

Rubbing her eyes, Bella was awaked from the dream, she could not find Clara the flying apsara anymore, but only the doll her uncle gave her. Bella looked at the flying apsara doll, and she saw the doll's mouth moving as if asking her "Now, did you know that confidence and grit is the key to success?".

The Heart of Mogao Grottoes

Marymount Primary School, Zhang, Yanning Jasmine – 10

So here I am, at the magnificent Mogao Grottoes. The breath-taking building stood in front of me, waiting silently for me to walk in. I breathed in slowly, as if I was trying to take in the beautiful view right in front of my eyes, but I was scared. My mother once said, “Our clan’s bravest explorers once went into the Mogao Grottoes, but none came out.” Taking a deep breath, I drew out my sword and stepped into the silent building.

Eerie echoes bounced off the walls, and every single sound made me shiver with fear. I touched my sword’s blade softly, remembering the voice of my mother. She used to tell us stories about the Mogao Grottoes, and one stood out from all the others. My mother called it ‘The Heart of Mogao Grottoes’. She told us that the 3rd Prince’s remnant belonged in the heart of Mogao Grottoes, and that his remnant’s heart was a treasure that could revive the dead. “Legend has it that after the prince’s sacrifice to the tiger mother,” she read to us, “his parents built him a white building to keep his body. Slowly, people changed the white building into what we know as Mogao Grottoes, his remnant in the painting, waiting to be found.”

I remembered the tragedy that happened when I was seven years old — my mother left me. She left me to suffer, yet she did that to save others by going into that fire. Does she care about other people, but not me? I gripped my sword’s hilt even tighter. “What are you thinking?” I asked myself. “She does care about you! Why did you come here? You came here to revive your mother!” I walked faster and faster. I bumped here and crashed there, climbed in and out of the tunnels blindly, and finally sat down for a rest. I squeezed the amethyst necklace my mother had given me to calm myself down. I groped on the floor and found an old oil lamp. I took a long match from my sack and lit it up in a fiery red flame. I held up the lantern and found myself in a huge, dark room with sculptures and paintings, rusted and faded with age. I glanced up and down in curiosity. ‘How,’ I wondered, ‘How did our ancestors do this?’

I continued to stare at the paintings that laid upon my eyes, “Remember,” I muttered, “You came here to find the Heart. Don’t be distracted!” I grabbed all of my belongings and left the breathtaking cave.

I walked quickly, and somehow, my instinct brought me to another cave. I raised up my lantern, taking in the painting that laid in front of me. My goal. I saw the tigers and royalties and the White Tower. The Heart.

“WHY ARE YOU HERE?” a mysterious voice boomed. “WHO ARE YOU?”

“What is that sound?” I shivered with fear and murmured. My heart started beating like a drum. Remembering ‘honesty is the best policy’, I replied honestly. “I’m Yolanda. I came here to find the Heart.”

“Thank you for answering honestly,” the voice said. “Now, for the Trial.” The painting suddenly became a clear image of a hungry tiger and three cubs. The tiger’s eyes told me everything. It looked so hungry and poor, making me sigh. “Trial One.” the voice said suddenly, making me jump. “Do you want to help the tiger?” The tiger’s soul was so innocent, killing its prey to survive. Taking a deep breath, I replied firmly. “Yes.”

“Answer: Yes.” the voice confirmed. “Trial Two, the Final Trial. How will you help the tiger?” I looked around the newly changed painting. I suddenly heard my mother’s voice ringing in my ears. “The 3rd Prince sacrificed himself to the tiger.” I gasped. This was what happened to the 3rd Prince in the story! I repeated my mother’s words with confidence. “I will sacrifice myself to the tiger.”

“Congratulations, you have passed.” Amazingly, the painting split in half, and an old wooden door appeared. Suddenly, it creaked open, and in front of me was a room, lit up by a dim candle. With slow, quiet steps, I stepped into the small room.

What I noticed first was a beautiful golden chest with a huge stone lock in the centre of the room. Infinite rings of words were written delicately on it. “Aren’t these the ‘scripts’ I read about in storybooks?” I gasped. I pressed onto the lock. Immediately, it started shaking, and with effort, it finally fell off. Automatically, the chest creaked open. Turquoise light shone through the widening gap, forming into—

“The Remnant!” I gasped. A half-transparent turquoise replica of the 3rd Prince appeared. “Why are you here?” He asked. “To— to find the Heart.” I stuttered. “I guessed that,” he smiled warmly. “You aren’t the only one to do so. Many come to find my heart, but they never pass the Trial. Only you did. I set up the Trial so that only someone who

has a truly kind heart can pass.” “What about the Heart?” I asked. “Oh, that’s just a rumour,” he murmured. “Once a person dies, they can’t return. I’m sorry.”

“But— ” I complained. “Listen,” he cut me off. “The rumour is false. Even if it was true, I wouldn’t revive anyone. Death might be the end of one path, but it opens up another one.” He sighed wearily. “Of course, I don’t want you to feel too disappointed. After all, you passed the Trial.”

I perked up immediately. “What is it?”

He tapped my amethyst necklace. “I advanced your gem so that you can see your mother on it.” I stared at my necklace. “Now run, I don’t want anyone to know.”

I nodded. I sprinted through the building, truly smiling for the first time since my mother’s death, feeling the warmth of my mother beside me.

Two Boys in the Grottoes

Po Leung Kok Lam Man Chan English Primary School, Lau, Chit Ting Justin –

On a sunny summer afternoon, Justin went to the Mogao Grottoes with his brother Jim.

Justin was looking at the splendid paintings when Jim called 'Justin come here!' Justin then ran over to Jim.

'What does this say?' Jim asked, pointing to some Chinese writings on the wall.

'If you are reading this, you are lost.' Justin translated. Justin and Jim both turned around, and sure enough, their parents were nowhere to be seen.

'Great!' Jim said to himself. 'There's more!' Justin said. 'It says: A dragon is coming to get you. One touch from his blue fire and you are burnt.' Justin and Jim exchanged worried looks.

'Our chances of survival are slim.' Jim said. 'Thanks for making me even more worried.' Justin sounded frustrated.

Suddenly, Justin froze.

'Uh, Jim, look!' Justin whispered nervously. Then Jim saw it too.

It was a Chinese dragon with shining red scales. It had long curved, bird-like claws which looked like they hadn't been cut a thousand millennia. It had pointy antlers and there were sharp spikes dripping with poison on its back. If anyone tried to attack it from above, he would get impaled.

'I thought Chinese dragons were supposed to be friendly.' Jim whispered. 'I guess that's a common misunderstanding.' Justin said in a weak voice.

'Uh! Oh! I am going to sneeze!' Jim said.

'Can you hold it?'

'No.'

A moment after saying this, Jim let out a big, loud sneeze. The dragon turned around and saw them.

'There you are! Puny little humans.' The dragon said, 'You two are lucky enough to be the feast for the big strong dragon.'

'I don't think you are that big for a dragon.' Jim replied.

The dragon roared angrily. It obviously did not like the comment.

'Run!' Justin shouted.

Justin and Jim both ran, but the dragon followed. They were fairly quick. The dragon, on the other hand, could not move fast because of its big body. It also had trouble squeezing through narrow gaps because its antlers got in the way.

Finally, Justin and Jim reached a dead end.

'The dragon will be here soon. Let's hide!' Jim said. The two of them hid behind a stalagmite.

'What do we do now?' Justin asked. 'I guess we just wait for our doom and pray to the gods.'

They had just finished praying when the dragon came.

‘Come out, humans. There is no hiding from me.’ The dragon said. After a few minutes of searching, the dragon finally found them.

‘There you are!’ The dragon swooped, exposing its sharp talons. Justin and Jim sidestepped. The dragon’s talons were stuck in the rocks.

The two children both noticed that a cave painting was glowing. It depicted people hunting. Jim touched the painting, and his hand went straight through it!

‘It’s a portal! Let go through it before the dragon frees himself.’ Hope ignited in Jim’s heart. He stepped through the portal and Justin followed.

They arrived in an edgeless grassland. Around them was complete chaos. Arrows were flying everywhere. Deer were stampeding while people on horses were chasing after. Justin and Jim were in the middle of a hunt.

One of the hustling hunters saw them and asked, ‘What are you little kids doing here?’ ‘A dragon is looking for us.’ Justin answered. The hunter jaw dropped. ‘Are you serious?’ The other hunter said in disbelief. ‘Yes, we come from a different world. There is not much time to explain. May you help us?’ Jim answered quickly.

‘Give us one reason why we should believe you and help you.’ The hunters said, raising his eyebrows.

‘You...You could sell the dragon scales for a thousand yuan!’ Suddenly, an idea come up in Justin’s mind.

The hunters paused. Then one of them said, ‘Fine! I will help you.’ The other hunters nodded their heads too.

Justin told the hunters to prepare to shoot at the same spot that they appeared on. A few minutes later, there was a flash of light and the dragon appeared.

‘Where are yo-----’ Before it finished the sentence, the dragon turned into a porcupine with arrow quills. It dropped to the ground and lay dead.

Suddenly, out of the sky a person appeared. He was sitting crossed legged on a floating lotus seat. There were small bumps on his black hair, and he wore a small golden crown on his head. His expression gave people a calm and peaceful feeling. When Justin and Jim saw him, their racing hearts finally settled. It was the Buddha.

‘Justin and Jim.’ The Buddha said with a peaceful smile. ‘You have defeated an evil Chinese dragon who betrayed its kind. So, I will grant you a wish.’

Justin and Jim stopped to think for a moment. Then they said, ‘We wish to go back to our parents.’

Buddha smiled and said, ‘Take one of the dragon scales and you will be able to go back home.’ Justin picked up a scale and in a blink of the eye, they stood at the cave entrance. Justin looked at his hand and he saw the dragon scale, he then put it inside his backpack.

‘Mom! Dad!’ Justin and Jim shouted when they ran to their parents. ‘Jim! Justin! We thought we had lost you two! Where have you been?’ Their parents said in a relieving tone.

‘It’s a long story!’ Jim smiled mysteriously.

At night, the two little heroes fell asleep quickly. The scale glowed under the moonlight...

The Unforgettable Adventure in Cave 254

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Kwok, Long Ching Chloe – 9

“The Mogao Caves are famous for their mural paintings and Buddhist statues. The precious paintings could be found on the walls and the roofs of the caves.” The tour guide told the tourists. Katie was visiting the famous Mogao Caves with her friend, Daisy. However, Daisy thought it rather boring to listen to the tour guide. Therefore, she decided to convince Katie to slip away and investigate the caves instead.

“Come on Katie, it’s really dull staying here. Let’s go exploring ourselves!” Daisy suggested cunningly. Katie had reservations but nodded with agreement. “I remember the paintings on the south wall of Cave 254 are very terrifying. I love spooky things! How about finding some fun there?” Daisy asked in a curious voice.

“What are they...they about?” Katie stammered as she shivered with fear. She had started to take a bite of one of the hot, juicy hamburgers she’d been keeping for a snack for her and Daisy, but the fear made her wrap it up once more and place it back in her pocket.

“They’re about Prince Sattva and his brothers. Prince Sattva wanted to help a famished tigress that had wandered into the enclosure of the forest. He was so selfless that he killed himself with a sharpened bamboo stick and sacrificed his body. Finally, the tigress crunched Prince Sattva up,” Daisy explained enthusiastically. “Come on, Katie, don’t be a scaredy-cat. Let’s go to Cave 254!” Daisy yelled.

Left with little choice, Katie followed Daisy to Cave 254 timidly.

By the time they reached Cave 254, Daisy turned on her torch. “Look! It’s marvelous here!” she shouted merrily. Her eyes sparkled with delight. There were numerous paintings everywhere.

“ROAR!”

Suddenly, Katie heard a strange sound. She felt panic-stricken. “Daisy! Daisy! Did...did you hear a roaring...roaring sound?” Katie stuttered in a stunned voice.

“No way! Stop telling jokes, Katie! I’m too busy exploring here!” Daisy replied edgily.

“I really want to know where the roaring sound came from, but it won’t put me in danger, will it?” Katie muttered to herself. She then discovered a painting with a tigress and three princes. She walked towards the painting and touched it, both anxiously and curiously at the same time.

All of a sudden, something horrible happened. Her hand vanished! However, there was no time for Katie to rationalise. She turned smaller and smaller and her whole body disappeared in the darkness.

“Why is it so bright here? Where am I?” Katie asked in a puzzled voice. She grimaced in agony because she had hit her head. Katie started to tremble with fear. “No, it is my time to be a hero, not a scaredy-cat,” She suddenly thought. Therefore, Katie decided to explore on her own.

Suddenly, Katie caught a glimpse of movement ahead. She spotted two suspicious figures behind the trees.

“I’m wondering why Sattva asked us to leave first! Maybe he is finding a way to help the tigress.” One of the figures said in a loud voice.

At that moment, realization dawned on Katie. She was inside the painting! Those figures were Prince Sattva’s brothers! “Hey!” Katie chased the prince’s brothers and cried, “Your brother, Prince Sattva is in trouble!”

“Who are you? Anyway, what are you talking about?” The prince’s brothers asked Katie in a rude way.

“Prince Sattva is really in deep trouble!” Katie yelled with all her might.

“This stupid girl is crazy. Look at her silly costume. Let’s go.” One of the princes whispered to his brother.

Katie’s heart sank. “I am a coward. I can’t save Prince Sattva even though I know what will happen to him.” She muttered miserably to herself.

“Ahh, I’ll use the bamboo stick!” A loud voice nearby pierced through the air.

“It must be Prince Sattva! I have to regain my composure if I want to save him! Even though his brothers didn’t trust me, it doesn’t mean I can’t believe in myself!”

Katie grinned and ran towards Prince Sattva. “STOP!” She bellowed and sprang into action. Katie immediately snatched Prince Sattva’s bamboo stick.

“What are you doing? The tigress needs me! She must gobble me down! Don’t you dare stop me?” Prince Sattva hollered with rage.

“Calm down, your highness. You don’t need to sacrifice yourself so that the tigress can eat meat. You have other choices instead,” Katie replied calmly.

“Ok, ok. So, what other choices do I have? Where can I get meat?” Prince Sattva questioned impatiently.

“From me, of course,” Katie answered as she took out the food in her pocket and threw the piece of meat out of her hamburger.

“Roar!” A generous roaring sound suddenly came from the tigress as it enjoyed the gift. The tigress swiftly became more energetic. Then, it walked near Katie and looked as if it wanted more. Katie smiled from ear to ear as she took meat from the second hamburger.

“Wow! You’re amazing!” Prince Sattva exclaimed. He now appreciated Katie so much.

“Thanks!” Katie said and beamed with pride.

“Your act is one of great friendship and compassion!” Prince Sattva said as he held Katie’s hand. He took something out of his pocket. It was a Golden Coin! “It’s for you as thanks for saving my life,” The prince complimented gratefully.

“It’s my honor,” Katie said in a gleeful voice.

“By the way, what is your name? Why are you here? To be frank, you...you look so odd in your outfit.” Prince Sattva asked bewilderedly. By the time Katie wanted to respond, something dreadful happened. Katie closed her eyes as she lost her consciousness once more.

“Katie! Katie! Wake up!” A familiar sound rang. Katie woke up and found herself lying under the painting of Prince Sattva. She wiped her eyes and saw Daisy, who was staring at her worriedly. “Are you ok? Why are you in a sweet slumber here?” Daisy asked.

“I’m ok, Daisy. I’m just a little bit sleepy.” Katie said, feeling a little sad initially, before great pride warmed her spirit.

“Katie, look! There is something weird about the painting. The painting I expected should be a tigress crunching Prince Sattva, but it’s now a tigress munching a piece of meat instead.” exclaimed Daisy. “It looks like the meat of my hamburger!” Daisy said puzzled as she took her hamburger out of Katie’s bag, “Whoa! Where is my meat?”

Katie grinned and touched the Golden coin in her pocket. “I’m not sure,” she told a little white lie, wanting to keep her adventure in the paintings to herself.

“It’s my secret. I hope I can meet Prince Sattva again,” Katie thought joyfully.

Secrets of the Mogao Caves

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lau, Sum Yau Audrey – 9

Once upon a time in the Sui dynasty, the people were building caves. The people put a lot of effort into the drawings, which were painted on the wall. They also made a monster out of water, so when anyone disturbs the caves, the monster will scare them away. The Mogao Caves took a long time to build, from the Sui dynasty all the way to the Tang dynasty. After that, everyone just forgot about the caves.

One thousand years later, some kids and their family were taking a stroll in Dunhuang, China. Suddenly, one of the kids saw the cave, he exclaimed, “Look, there is a special cave!” The other kids and the adults came to look at the caves. They wanted to call it the Mogao caves, so they made a sign saying, “This is the Mogao Caves.” The family looked inside the caves, and they found a lot of drawings and some statues. The family was very excited and wanted to tell everyone about it.

Suddenly, there was a gigantic monster, it was made from water, and it had teeth as sharp as knives. Everyone shouted, “Help! Help! There is a gigantic monster!” The monster shot out a lot of ice and tried to freeze the kids. There was no one to save them, and things were getting tough, when a kid yelled, “Come on everybody! Wear your roller skates! We will escape faster that way!” They hid in a corner and put on their roller skates, they rolled and rolled for a long time, finally they escaped. The monster was exhausted, and it never left the cave. The monster took the memory of this out of the parents and the kids. The family could not tell the other people about the caves since they had no memory about this, so no one knew about them.

It was the year 2019 when me and my family were on a vacation in China. The shuttle bus took us to Dunhuang. I thought Dunhuang was stunning because of all the plants and trees. At the same time, I heard a loud noise coming from behind me. I walked all the way to the direction of the sound, and I saw a cave! I said, “Look, there is a cave!” I saw a sign saying, “This is the Mogao Caves.” Suddenly, a monster appeared. I was terrified since it was as big as a building. The monster shouted, “No one will interrupt this cave!” The monster attacked all the tourists, and it even threw the shuttle bus into the sky. I ran behind a tree and stayed there. The monster said, “I am the powerful monster in this cave, no one can stop me from protecting this cave.”

One of the tourists told the monster, “We are not here to disturb you, we are here to look at this place.” The monster was outraged, it turned big and small. It was at this moment when a thousand light bulbs switched on in my brother’s brain. He drank all the water in his water bottle and exclaimed, “Look monster, there is some treasure in this bottle!” The monster was very interested and looked at the bottle, but he could not see what was inside since the monster was so gigantic. So, the monster turned smaller and smaller until it could go through the tiny hole of the water bottle. My brother closed the cap of the water bottle, and the monster was trapped inside.

Everyone was very happy except for the monster. I gave the bottle to some scientists and my brother got a new water bottle. I told everyone about the mysterious monster, and the next day lots of people went to investigate in these caves. They found lots of old paintings on the walls of the cave; they painted the pictures again because the old ones were wearing off. My brother became very famous because he defeated the monster. Nowadays, anyone could come to the Mogao Caves...unless there was a second monster!

The Legendary Monk of Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lee, Cheuk Wah Kyra – 10

Once upon a time, there was a monk called Liu Shi-tang who studied Shaolin martial arts in a mysterious temple in Mogao Grottoes. The temple was owned by and the home of a deceased Shaolin master, who coaches Liu, looks after and does chores for the temple as a ghost. Each morning, Liu would wake up at dawn and run to the temple, warmly greet his coach drinking tea, and train until afternoon. Everything was smooth for years, until one day...

The whole tale started on a winter morning. Liu did his morning routine as usual, excited because his coach had promised to teach him a new style, but when he reached the temple, ready to greet his master, he was shocked. The kung-fu ghost had disappeared! He wasn't in his kitchen-tearoom, not in his library, not in the garden, not on the balcony, not in the training room! He was nowhere to be seen, it seemed as if he had vanished in a puff of smoke. Liu was devastated. How would he learn kung-fu now? How would he search for the martial arts master?

Liu set off on the find, asking the few villagers he met along the way. All of them gave the same answer: No. Nobody saw the ghost, and he did not leave any tracks or clues. It was up to Liu himself to solve the mystery. He climbed a nearby mountain, set camp up there, and peeked and poked between the bushes, down the streams and rivers, and climbed through tunnels for 3 straight days. Everywhere he searched, what he got was just sand, rocks, small plants and insects. When he thought he sensed his master, he realized it was just his imagination. At last he found nothing, except from 2 diamond-jade gemstones, a rusty metal golden bangle, and a brown sun badge with strange characters carved into it. "Probably these will help me," Liu thought as he stuffed them into a leather bag.

He spent a whole day descending the mountain, so stayed the night in an old villager's cottage. The kind-hearted man provided a papyrus with ancient characters that maybe were clues. The next day, Liu thanked and bid the old man goodbye. As he set off on a new adventure, he read the papyrus. Once he set his eyes on it, he immediately recognized the characters! Liu recalled that his coach used these "mysterious" characters to explain kung-fu movements of the body to him! The monk mentally translated the characters. It was a riddle:

Under the heavy body of the hill,

Wonderfully, this place keeps a strong will.

Listen as the cave's pool water crash,

Try to splash through in a flash.

Walk straight into darkness with only a flashlight,

And you'll find your target, waiting in the "night".

As Liu read the first and third line, he got a hint of where he should go. He had to go to a cave under a huge hill, and his first guess was a deep cave near the temple. It was under a hill due east of the temple and Liu had never gone there before.

Soon, he arrived at the opening of the cave. Liu shivered out of fright, since it looked like a huge lion's mouth, ready to munch on anything that wandered inside. Liu took a deep breath, and stepped in. "Alright. I've completed the first 2 lines already. *Listen as the cave's pool water crashes, trying to splash through in a flash.* I should run through here." He dashed quickly through the water pool, then dried his shoes while planning ahead, "*Walk straight into darkness.* OK...? *With only a flashlight.* I've got one! *And you'll find your target, waiting in the night.* My target is Master. He must be here." Liu put on his shoes and switched on the flashlight. He already sensed warmth and safety. He knew the kung-fu coach must be near!

Suddenly, Liu slammed into a wall and got bruised. However, that led him to discover the fact that he had to complete puzzles to enter a chamber where the Shaolin coach was waiting. A bucket and an old, ripped-up paper barely showed a rhyme:

Ice—cold water, bottom of oil,

Light a fire, glittering stones boil.

Use the tool for opening a chest,

You'll officially start your quest.

Diamonds, jade charms,

On a sacred wall of alarms.

Enter a portal

Witness transformations of mortal and immortal.

You should remember summer,

Where goldens welcome a newcomer.

“Water is denser than oil; it should be at the bottom. And I should light it with *glittering* stones?” Liu used the bucket to carry some water with oil on top. That moment, in the corner of his eye, he saw bioluminescent pebbles! He picked them up and lit them with the water–oil mixture. Soon, the formula melted into a golden key. The wall slid away and there was another wall covered in buttons except for 2 holes. “The riddle mentions diamonds and jades. Maybe they’re the ones I found on the mountain,” Liu thought as he fixed the gemstones into the holes. Instantly, he fell into a portal and passed out while he changed magically. Returning consciousness, he found himself back in the cave with an orange door in front of him. The orange door had 2 holes, 1 in a sun’s shape, and the other a ring. “Hm... summer. Goldens. The ring is the bangle! The other is for the sun then.” Finally, there was a keyhole on the handle. “That must be the golden key’s. Insert!” The door opened, but he saw nothing. He panicked. “What?! All that for nothing?” Just then, a familiar voice replied, “I was trapped! I’m here. I’m glad you found me, Liu. You have a reward.”

The monk led Master back to the temple and learnt a new style, as promised. The coach revealed that the reward was... Liu was immortal! Liu was overjoyed and swore to help people in need forever.

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Leung, Hayden – 10

“Chirp! Chirp!” The crickets were crooning. The night’s aroma pervaded the air. In a cryptic cave in Dunhuang, two courageous explorers, Wong and Chao, were exploring this amazing ancient grotto. They were in the Mogao Caves. The caves were prodigious. There were thousands of humongous Buddhist statues and gorgeous murals inside. The cave exhibition was about to close for the day. But the adventurers just kept on exploring. Suddenly, all the lights flickered off. The whole cave was pitch black. Wong suddenly realized, “This exhibition closes at 6pm and it is already the time to close! How can we get out of this cave with no light?” They used their torches to shine their way out, however they got lost and wandered into the Library Cave.

Inside this cave, there were countless ancient manuscripts, silk banners and paintings. There were fine silk embroideries, and other rare textiles. Chao saw a grubby manuscript, which was hidden in the corner and shimmering mysteriously. She perambulated cautiously to the manuscript. Out of curiosity, she opened it and read it out anxiously. After she finished reading the manuscript, something eccentric immediately happened... All the Buddha statues and murals started to move. They were levitating in the air! Panic surged through Wong and Chao. Their heart lurched. Their stomach clenched. The largest one among the crowds of Buddhas flew out. His left arm was broken. He explained in a soothing yet powerful voice, “We need your help...”

Wong and Chao sweated with fear. They were startled by the fact that the Buddha could move and talk. The Buddha continued, “We came alive because you read the Revitalization Manuscript.” He pointed to Chao, “However, we need to tell you that our Protection Manuscript 236 was stolen. It was originally in the hand of the biggest Buddha in Cave 96. That was the most powerful manuscript. It prevents this place to be destroyed by disastrous earthquakes and other cataclysmic disasters. That is why we could survive for thousands of years. We need your help to find this marvellous manuscript. It must be stolen by the tourists. We can’t leave the Library Cave because this is our home.” Wong stammered, “Okay... We will try our best to find this important manuscript. But... can you tell us where the entrance is? We are lost in this grotto.”

After the buddhas directed the explorers out of the caves. A security guard spotted them. He had a robust figure. Wong caught a glimpse of his name tag. He was called Tao. Tao boomed, “What are you guys doing here? The exhibition is already closed!” Chao uttered, “Manuscript 236 is stolen. We need to find it back.” The guard glanced around and his brows furrowed. He immediately bellowed, “No! There is no such thing as a stolen manuscript! Just go away now or else I will arrest you for trespassing this cave! You are making things up! Don’t waste my time! I need to get back to my security work.” Wong and Chao went home and waited for the next night to come to investigate again.

The next night, two security guards were at the entrance of the Mogao Grottoes, Tao and another guard called Lu. When Lu and Tao were not paying attention, Wong and Chao skulked into the caves surreptitiously. They were as stealthy as ninjas. Once they got inside, they forthwith went to Cave 96 to scrutinize around the largest Buddha and search for clues. For one hour, all they could find was dust and mud only. Suddenly, Wong shouted, “I found a glass shard!” An idea struck Chao, “Let’s go to find the glass pieces that match with this shard!” They went to different rooms to investigate. After examining a few caves, they went to the security guard office. They described a pair of broken glasses on Lu’s table! They thought the criminal must be Lu, however they figured out the glass shard did not match. All of a sudden, they heard some footsteps coming towards their direction. They hid in a large cupboard at once. Unexpectedly, they saw something shimmering inside the cupboard and it was sparkling with rainbow colours. It was the Protection Manuscript 236! They were astonished! In the meantime, Wong and Chao saw Tao stepping into the office through the slits of the cupboard. Tao was holding a broken torch. It seemed that the broken part also matched the glass shard.

Without a second thought, Chao opened the cupboard door and hollered, “You stole Manuscript 236!” Tao dashed away in a flash. Wong and Chao instantly chased after him. Tao darted into the Library Cave. Therefore, Wong intentionally called out, “Buddhas, he stole the protection manuscript!” The Buddhas became alive and flew out straight away. Tao saw the Buddhas turning alive and he fainted right away. When he woke up, he was already in the police car and on the way to the police office.

After the police and Tao left the Library Cave, only Wong and Chao stayed there. The Buddhas came to life again and they beamed ear to ear, “Wong and Chao, thank you so much for finding the most important manuscript.

You saved the magnificent Mogao Grottoes. We all feel relieved now.” In a blink of an eye, the Buddhas turned back into statues. Wong and Chao smiled contentedly. The two courageous explorers continued their journey in the Dunhuang area, hoping to uncover more adventures in the future...

The New Tale of Diamond Sutra

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Luo, Xin Yue Jane – 10

It was a cloudless sunny day, Kate and Max were preparing to go to the British Museum in downtown. After traveling for several hours, they finally arrived at their destination. Max and Kate were both very excited because it was their first time visiting the British Museum. The museum was full of numerous ancient art pieces, old rusty fossils, old airplanes, ancient jewelry and many more. Kate's eyes sparkled and she jumped in glee. They went to every corner of the museum. In the corner of her eye, she saw an ancient odd-looking book. She and her brother Max were curious so they went to take a closer look. The book had many ancient symbols on it, there were many patterns and there was a picture of a buddha on it. This book was very different from the others Kate thought. It was so fascinating that it took away Kate's breath.

It was time for them to go home. On the way home all Kate and Max could think about was the ancient book they saw earlier. While Kate and Max were eating lunch, an idea suddenly popped into Max's mind. He told Kate that they should go to the library to do some research about the ancient book. After lunch, they rode their bikes to the public library. They discovered that the book was originally found from a cave in Dunhuang, China. The book was called the Diamond Sutra. Suddenly Kate felt a breath on her shoulder and a shiver ran down her spine. A monk with a golden yellow robe appeared behind them. He asked the kids if they were interested in the Diamond Sutra. "Yes, we are very curious about the Diamond Sutra!" said Kate. "Here, this is a book that you will find answers to your question," said the monk. "Take good care of this book." Then in a blink of an eye, the old monk disappeared in thin air. Kate and Max were shocked, and they thought the monk had magic powers. They stared at the book and realized it was dated 1907.

Afterwards, they went back home and read through the ancient book that the monk gave them. Many hours of reading went by, and they fell asleep exhaustedly. The book suddenly flipped open, a bright beam shot out. It woke up Kate and Max and they walked carefully and slowly toward the book. As they were about to touch the book, it floated in the midair and a deep voice said, "Hello children, I need your help to catch a thief. His name is Marc Aurel Stein. He stole a very important book called Diamond Sutra. To catch the thief, you need to go back in time, to year 1907." Kate thought about it for a long time and she finally agreed to help and so did Max.

The next day, Kate and Max packed their bags and got ready for the adventure ahead of them. When it was twelve o'clock sharp midnight, the book shot a beam of golden light at Max and Kate. It took them to the year 1907 and arrived at Dunhuang, China. Suddenly a deep voice appeared, "Take this map. It will lead you to your destination. Follow the footprints." Suddenly a map came out of nowhere, and footprints appeared on the ground. Kate and Max followed the footprints, and it led them to a wooden cave. There was a monk guarding the cave. The monk said, "If you want to enter, you'll have to answer three riddles." "Sure, I love riddles." Kate said with confidence. The monk declared "First riddle, what can you break, even if you never pick it up or touch it?" "Hmm, I can never break... a promise!" "Correct!" said the monk. "Next riddle, what goes up but never comes down?" "That is easy! Age! You get older, but never get younger." "Correct again, but the last riddle is going to be hard. You see a boat filled with people, yet there isn't a single person on board. How is that possible?" the monk asked. "Hmm, this is harder than the others. There isn't a...single person on board. Is it because everyone on the boat is married?" "Correct again! You got all the riddles right. Now you may enter the cave," the monk said.

The cave was very dark, and luckily the footprints could glow in the dark. It led them to a doorway, and inside was an old library with many books and painting of all sorts. Suddenly a man sprinted through the door. "That's the thief! Catch him, Max!" Kate yelled. Quickly, Max ran toward the man and tackled the thief to the ground. But Max was too weak and the thief quickly escaped from Max's grasp. Kate chased after and threw her backpack like a boomerang. Bang! The backpack hit right on the man's head. He let out a loud scream in pain and went unconscious. Kate quickly picked up the Diamond Sutra and returned the book into the bookshelf where it belonged. Just then, a halo portal appeared.

The portal transported Max and Kate back to their bedroom. "How did we come back home?" Max asked. "I have no idea." Kate gasped. A familiar deep voice appeared, "Well done, my children! You have stopped the thief from stealing Diamond Sutra!" "We did it!" yelled Max! "Shhh, don't wake up Mom and Dad," whispered Kate.

The next day, Kate and Max begged their parents to bring them to the British museum. Thankfully, the parents agreed. When they got there, they rushed to the room where they first saw the ancient book, but there was no sign of it. “Where did it go?” Kate said. “I think we changed history! The book is in the cave library in Dunhuang!” Max exclaimed.

The Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wang, Zoi Sum Serena – 10

Zhang Tai scooped up water and splashed it on the clay. Zhang Tai, a monk of the Mogao Grottoes, was part of the duty to create art and statues for the Buddha. Every day, he returned to the Caves to create more and more shrines as a place of worship. Gently, he plastered clumps of clay onto the reed-padded frames. A skilled sculptor, every movement felt all-natural to him, precisely smoothing and cutting the clay with quick cuts of his hand. This was his life. Every day, every moment. If Zhang Tai wasn't resting, he'd be continuing or starting statues. His life was a never-ending loop of modelling, and he enjoyed it. If anything were to happen that would prevent him from the wonders of constructing, he would not know how his life could continue.

He felt his fingers run through the clay, finding dry lumps and crumpling them. Zhang Tai dabbed his finger into the clay, scooping up as much as he could. He loved the feeling of clay. The simplicity of such material, yet creating great statues. His hand felt blessed as he put clay on the padded base of the statue. With ease, he smoothed the clay. He brushed his hands along the statue's clay clothing, creating small creases in the cloth, putting depth into the body. All the glorious visions he had for this one, all the ways it could shine in the eyes of others, though he knew no one would see its greatness.

Nobody seemed to understand Zhang Tai, and he didn't understand how they didn't. The other statues may look good, but he felt no soul in them. The others may have great designs for their statues, but Zhang Tai didn't feel connected with them. It did not feel as if the statue had life, had soul, had existence. A monk should feel in sync with the Buddha, but Zhang Tai did not see the way others saw the Buddha. He believed a Buddha should give hope and a feeling of gratitude, not of how many garments or gems they had. He believed the soul of the Buddha should be more important than the looks it had.

Zhang Tai did not like the face he sculpted. He decided to gently pull off the clay and try again. The face felt too...unreal. He supposed he'd try a different face this time, a face with a gentler smile, one with radiance to it. Scooping up clay and plastering it on, he worked his hands with small movements, making eyes for the statue. While his hands built the face in front of him, he started thinking of his other statues. They faced scorn, and dislike, but that thought simply passed him by. He did not care for the opinions of others, only the way the Buddha truly was.

Zhang Tai remembered his greatest pride, his most beautiful statue of all. The face bore a beautiful shine, and it looked like the Buddha himself. More statues surrounded the Buddha, an artistic wonder to Zhang Tai's eyes. He knew it would go down in greatness. In his brain, all of his successful sculptures shone a yellow light, nature gently curling around it, a strong but gentle radiating glow on the palm of the Buddha. Zhang Tai's thoughts continued to wander as his hands moved on to the highlights and the creases of the face. He thought of new sculptures, perhaps a throne to the wondrous Buddha, and a draping over the hand. It would be a statue worth working on, and he'd continue planning the statue in his head if his hands had not already finished the current face. He shook off his thoughts. The face before him bore quite a lovely smile, and so he moved on from the face, down to the neck.

The statue planned in his head remained. He had almost everything worked out, but he could not figure out the face. A few weeks had passed, and the figure he had been working on was finished from head to toe. It was pretty, and he felt life in its core, so he decided to move on. A sudden pang hit his head. Another headache, perhaps the 3rd or 4th this week. He found it hard to sleep with the bright vision of the planned statue still lingering. This time, though, Zhang Tai fell asleep quickly. In his dream, the statue he had been planning was being built. Then he moved to the face. He could not remember the face. What was it? Panic flooded him. If the face couldn't be made, he'd have to scrap the whole statue. A light dimly lit up the blank face. Zhang Tai saw...

...Faces. Beautiful ones, cycling through the lighted area. Zhang Tai saw a radiating face. It slowed its pace and landed on the blank area above the neck of the statue. Zhang Tai felt as if he saw the Buddha himself. Creating clay out of his bare hands, he worked even quicker than he'd ever seen. He finished at an astounding speed. As it suddenly glowed bright white, Zhang Tai woke from the dream. The face was now placed in his plan, etched in like a scratch to a stone. His eyes burned bright white, and he had no other urge to sleep. Another headache hit him as he

set off early, earlier than the morning birds who chirp, earlier than the sunrise that signed the day. He shook off his thoughts and ran to the next building site, the starlit vision of the Buddha himself, more realistic than ever could have been made by man, running in his head, pacing through his mind.

One Thousand Golden Statues

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wong, Chloe – 10

The wind beat against the strong walls of the cave. The rain dropped heavily without mercy. Lightning flashed, illuminating the sole figure standing alone at the entrance. It was a person. A person with long, tattered robes and a once-beautiful, scarred face. “I cannot wait any longer,” the woman muttered to herself. “My daughter must complete her destiny alone.” Thunder boomed overhead, threatening to rip the sky itself apart. The woman collapsed, unmoving, on the ground, as a forceful voice bellowed its anger to the entire universe.

Jin stared aimlessly at the falling sun. So beautiful on the horizon. It glimmered with the beauty of a million gems, a million cups of warmth, a million grams of gold. “Your name means gold,” her mother used to sit next to her and say, “But not only on the outside its beauty would show. Glow from the inside, Jin. Always remember that.” But now everything has changed, since the horrifying accident that took her mother’s life. She looked far, far out to sea, and saw a great cave, big enough to swallow mountains and all her troubles away. What was it? She stared at it every single passing day. Gradually she found out what she could see – the Mogao Grottoes.

One silent night, Jin crept out of the house. It’s not like her father cared anyway, so what was the point? She asked herself. She ran out with a backpack of supplies and ran for so long her legs didn’t know where she was going anymore. And finally, she stopped in front of a modern cottage house. It was her best friend Claudia’s house. She was not native to China, with her large, shiny brown eyes, skin as white as snow, and braided, brunette hair. She came out of the house grumbling in her pajamas before Jin even pressed the doorbell. “Your running is louder than a truck. Be thankful I woke up instead of my parents.” Jin groaned and grabbed her hand. “Comb your messy hair. We’re going.” Saying that she took off into a run across the moor, dragging a stumbling Claudia. “Where to? Wait. You always say...” A look of realization flashed across her face. “Jin, are you serious? The Mogao Grottoes?” Jin nodded her head with determination. Claudia would never desert her even if they went to hell and back. “And we’re going to take Yang with us,” she added. Soon they found an apartment near the center of the city. Yang reacted the same as Claudia had and determinedly joined them. “I would do anything for you, especially when you need it,” was his reply to them. They all understood Jin and knew what to do.

Dawn was breaking when they finally hailed a taxi. The sky turned different shades of colors, giving a little hope to the three teenagers in the packed cab. Jin smiled at the large cave that glimmered next to the rising sun. She was to complete a prophecy that no one had ever succeeded in, with the help and care of her two best friends. Her mind floated back to the year she first came across an ancient prophecy book. She would never forget the five simple sentences.

“The girl with the golden heart

Shall come forth and depart

With her friends, and save

The treasure to uncover in the cave

The girl with the golden name”

“Hey, Jin?” Yang snapped his fingers. “Lighten up! It’s not the end of the world...” He smiled brightly. Jin allowed herself a small smile. At least if she had to be on a supposedly impossible quest, at least her friends were with her. “So we are supposed to do an impossible quest with no start. What should we do? Stand inside the cave all day?” Jin groaned. They hesitantly squirmed into the cave. Its breathtaking beauty slapped the trio off their feet. Standing inside the cave were approximately 400 large stone Buddha statues. But Jin looked at her feet. “There used to be 1000, all destroyed now,” she said silently.

After half a day of searching for any clue, Claudia suddenly screamed. “Jin! Yang! I found something!” Jin squinted. There was a tiny, tiny black dot on the ground. She realized it was a button. Claudia smiled and bent down to press it. “Claudia! No!” Jin tried to warn her, but the damage was done. A swirling vortex sucked the air out of the trio’s lungs– and themselves, too.

Jin landed hard on the ground. She tried to stand but suppressed a scream. Yang landed lightly on his feet and rushed over. "Broken ribs," he stated to Jin. She groaned. But all this time Claudia had been silent. Jin looked over and saw her mouth was agape, staring with shock at something. Something enormous. Yang and Jin looked over. It was a giant Buddha statue. It moved. It twitched. It smiled evilly. "So, little trespassers, what are your last words?" it boomed.

The next few minutes were chaos. The statue lunged at Jin when Claudia ran between its legs and stabbed it in between with a chunk of jagged rock. It howled in agony as the three of them raced at it. But wait, Jin thought. What use are three inexperienced teenagers against a 40 feet tall magical statue? Yang shouted out loud, "Claudia! Jin! The trapdoor behind it!" Jin understood. She dragged herself, ignoring the sharp pain, under its legs once more and pushed the door open. She ran as she had never run before to her friends, and together they raced to the room. Claudia slammed herself onto the gates and they closed with a creak, leaving the giant to pound angrily at the metal doors. All three of them panted and heaved, Jin wincing at her ribs.

In front of them stood a thousand gold statues.

The Thwarted Plan

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wong, Kei Yu Kate – 10

“This is so boring! Can we leave?” Leon moaned. “Can you just be quiet for a moment, Leon? I’m trying to examine this beautiful mural!” His sister, Emma snapped back. Leon was at the Mogao Grottoes in China with his family. Emma and Leon’s friends, Mandy and Justin, were also with them. They had gone to China in order to have a peaceful and relaxing, or in Leon’s words, BORING vacation. Leon hated history. “History is just a whole load of useless rubbish we need to learn about! What’s the point of all this?” He often complained. Then the others would say, “We learn about history in order to understand about the modern-day world, please stop complaining Leon!” Now, back to what is happening in the story.

They were standing in front of a Buddhist mural in one of the caves in the Mogao Grottoes. Leon was moaning on and on about how boring it was while the others were checking out the detailed mural on the cave wall. That was when Leon noticed something that wasn’t quite right. They were supposed to be following the tour guide, yet there was a person creeping away from the group. Leon prodded on Emma’s arm. “What?” She asked. “Look guys, somebody is acting suspicious,” The four friends wheeled around. Sure enough, they saw a man creeping off silently. “That is suspicious. The tour guide told everybody to stick with the group at the beginning of the tour! He should know that it is easy to get lost,” Mandy whispered. “Should we follow him? We could be like spies,” Justin suggested. “Are you crazy Justin? We’ll get lost!” Emma whispered. “Sis, I have a bad feeling about that man. I think that Justin is right. We should go after him,” Leon said. “I think that we should go too. If you aren’t going, then we are,” Mandy said. “Fine, but I’m only going because I don’t want to be left alone here,” Emma sighed. Silently, they slipped away from the group and towards the man.

Silently, they followed the man. They went through a lot of winding corridors, until the man reached a wall. He knocked on the wall three times with his left hand. The wall became a door, which opened for the man. “Well, how did it go, Jim?” A voice floated through the open door. The man spoke, “All we have to do is to put the gunpowder in cave 275, and we’re set to light those powder kegs.” The man inside the room chuckled. The four friends looked at each other, stunned. These people were trying to blow up the Mogao Grottoes! Very soon, they were going to light the gunpowder and blow everything up! Then Justin did something that was very stupid. He ran right through the doorway and yelled, “Stop this! Don’t blow up the Mogao Grottoes!” He yelled at the men. The men reacted instinctively. There was crash. The others, horrified, crept closer to have a look. It appeared that the men had knocked Justin out. “I have a feeling that there’s somebody outside who’s with this little kid,” One of the men grunted. He dashed out of the door and saw the others crouching there. Then he gave a roar of fury and launched himself at them. They all screamed and ran. The two men chased them down the winding corridor. They turned left, then right. The kids went through a doorway to the left. That was when something happened. The doorway melted away and became a wall, they were stunned. It was as if the Mogao Grottoes were helping them. They all collapsed on the floor, panting for breath. When they all got their breath back, Mandy said, “I think that we should leave a message for Justin. When he comes around, he can call for help.” That was when a phone suddenly appeared on the floor. The Mogao Grottoes were really helping them! They scribbled a note to Justin and dropped it onto the floor. It read:

If you get this note, then the Mogao Grottoes are helping you. Take the phone on the floor and call the police. We are being chased by the men. Help!

From your friends

After that, they ran out of the room as fast as they could, just in case the men were on their tail. The sprinted along winding corridors and up some stairs. They had no idea in which direction they were going, all they cared about was getting away from the men. After running for what felt like eternity, they stopped to catch their breath. That was when they spotted two pairs of feet standing in front of them. Somehow, they had run straight into the men. For a split second, they looked up at the evil smirks spreading on their faces. Then they sprinted off in the opposite direction. Suddenly, they found their path blocked by a hooded figure. They were trapped.

Meanwhile...

Justin had found the note. He snatched the phone and dialed 999. Five minutes later the police arrived. Everybody started searching for the others and the men. They searched through caves. At last, when they opened a door...

They found Mandy, Leon and Emma tied up and gagged shoved against a wall, and the two men standing over them, sneering. The police pointed their guns at the men and they held their hands up, afraid. Justin ran over to his friends and untied them. Mandy asked, “Have you seen a hooded figure? That’s the boss of the men! He blocked us when we were trying to run! When he heard footsteps coming towards this room, he panicked and disappeared. Oh, and he left this note.” They looked at it:

You may have defeated me this time, but there will a next time kids!

The Master

They turned pale and whispered, “The Master?” That was when they realized that their new adventure had only just begun.

A Trip to the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chan, Hayden – 11

Kelsie and Ryan were very excited because they were going to Mogao Grottoes tomorrow. They had been preparing for a whole month for this trip to these legendary caves. Kelsie and Ryan really liked reading. When reading wasn't enough, they would usually go on field trips to learn more about things that they were interested in. They had been fascinated by the Mogao Grottoes and were longing to go there. Unfortunately, the entrance fee was incredibly expensive. Last month, they read in a magazine that the Mogao Grottoes had an ideal discount, so they bought two tickets for themselves and planned for the whole month to visit there. This trip will surely be unforgettable for them.

The next day, Kelsie and Ryan woke up early and ran to the grottoes fast as there was a quota of going into the Grottoes. At nine o'clock sharp, everybody rushed in like a stampede of buffaloes. Thanks to the large amount of information beforehand, the siblings were totally captivated by what they saw. As they were watching these magnificent buildings, Ryan felt a strong pull towards one of the grottoes from his heart. "I really want to go there. Something is pulling me." He told Kelsie. Kelsie saw a pair of eyes staring cautiously at her and her brother among the crowd. "It's just my imagination," thought Kelsie.

The siblings went to their destination – "Cave 275." Kelsie said as she read the visitors' guide, "At the west side of the Grottoes, it is one of the oldest caves found and was built more than 1500 years ago. The main and the largest statue was called Maitreya. It was 3.4 metres tall." She looked at the statue. There was a glowing sign on its hand. "Look!" shouted Kelsie. Ryan saw it too, "It's glowing!" Ryan saw a thin, long leg, sticking out behind the enormous statue. "Who are you? Show yourself!" He shouted, shuddering. "It's only me." a man walked slowly out of the shade behind the statue. He continued, "Good Morning, chosen ones! I'm Walter, the Guardian of Mogao." "Chosen for what?" Kelsie spat out impulsively. Walter answered, "Of course, to get into the scroll room of Mogao."

"Why? How?" Kelsie asked. Walter replied, "For 2000 years, the Buddhists have ruled China peacefully, building some mythical platforms and temples. Have you ever wondered why Mogao could stand for so long that it was hardly broken? Because there was magic in it. The Mogao contains scrolls about history. Very rarely, someone will be chosen to read the scrolls and be informed of the history of China. The chosen ones can visit and take a look if they pass through the Room."

When Kelsie and Ryan were puzzling, the legs of the statue rose up, and there was a dark, dusty hole in the rock where the statue was sitting on. "Wow!" Ryan gulped. They carefully climbed into the hole.

After traveling through the narrow tunnel, the siblings dropped into a chamber. Inside, it was like an escaping room. There were sculptures of mighty dragons, silver warrior crafts, and lots of decorations in the room. At the end of the room, there was a camouflaged door. Kelsie tried to open it, but it was locked. "Looks like we need to solve this question to open the door." She said, thinking. In the middle of the room, there was a rectangular, golden table, with twelve figures of animals, who were in positions of dashing, running towards the same side. At the end of the table, there was a flag and a line. "Looks like this is the finishing line." Ryan cried, slapping his legs, "I knew it! We need to line the models in the correct order to make that stupid door open!" "Yes! These were the twelve animals of the year! My teacher told me all about them. Mouse is the first and Pig is the last." Kelsie replied, stretching her hands quickly to reorder them. "Nice job, sis. Good for you that you concentrated in class." Ryan patted Kelsie's shoulders. Suddenly, a loud voice rumbled, and the ground shook. "Beat you, door!" Kelsie laughed proudly, dashing through the opened door to another room.

The siblings entered the scroll room, which was smaller than they thought. The room was very hollow. It only had an old, sacred wardrobe, with many kinds of scrolls. There was a piece of paper, which said "Wise to read one. Foolish to read two. The greedy ones will be expelled into darkness forever..." "It's spooky. Let's take a look at a scroll." Kelsie randomly picked up a scroll and read it. Ryan stuck his head in and tried to take a look of what was in the book. "Let me see." he hissed. After scanning the content, Ryan was completely overjoyed that he slapped Kelsie on her back, "It's the accurate history of 3000 years ago! Are you kidding me?"

Two hours passed, and they finally finished reading. Kelsie was delighted, but... "What a story! Wait! How can we get out of here?" She just realized that the door was now slammed shut. Ryan answered, "Check if there's any

button. It might be the button for the way out.” “Here!” Kelsie pressed the button. The place that Ryan and Kelsie stepped on rose up immediately and whoosh! They were back in cave 275.

“Had a nice trip?” Walter boomed out. “It is surely a nice trip.” The siblings agreed, sharing their experience with the guardian. Afterall, the siblings had just woken up from a ‘dream walk’. They promised to publish their incredible story and announce this wonderful legend to the world.

The Mystery of the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chan, Ronnie – 11

It was a windy typhoon day during the middle of the dry humid summer, Tyson and Elizabeth were at their own different houses.

“I wish we could go out and have fun, not staying in our own rusty, boring house.” Elizabeth whined on the phone.

“I hope so. The typhoon is just insane. It's been here for the whole week already! We can only stay at our stupid little room phoning each other. I wish we could meet each other face to face.” Tyson complained also.

Next day, they were told that the typhoon had finally gone. They both immediately met up at the small little park where they spent their sweet and lovely time together for years. They both cuddled each other as soon as they met. After decades, they finally separated. The little couple was making plans for the coming vacation.

“How about going on a vacation in China?” Elizabeth suggested, “maybe to the Mogao Grottoes?”

Tyson looked up in the sky, thought for a moment, and replied, “Sure! Why not?”

Suddenly a strong magnetic force pulled the couple towards a blue swirling wormhole. The two tried to pull them from the blue magnetic force. However, it was as hard as calling the sun to rise from the west and making the moon show up in the morning. They were pulled into the blue bright portal. They grabbed each other's hands, yelling for help. They knew it was useless. The light of hope started to melt down. They closed their eyes and waited for their fate.

After swirling and reversing inside the wormhole, they realized that they were on a hard land. They slowly opened their eyes, trying to find out where they were. What they saw was a whole crowd of tourists walking around. The tourists were all taking out their phones, taking selfies or portraits. “At least we are not in the ancient time or something like the BACK TO THE FUTURE...” Tyson EXCLAIMED.

“Yeah, at least...” Elizabeth agreed.

Tyson took out his phone and searched for his location. Surprisingly, he found out that he was in the Southeast of the Dunhuang oasis, where the Mogao Grottoes was located. He told his girlfriend excitedly, “Oh my gosh! We are having excellent luck! The portal brought us to the Mogao Grottoes! We're having a free vacation!”

The couple was delighted. They immediately charged to the marvelous cave that had stood there for 1685 years. The historical place that kept the evidence of evolution in Buddhist art. They skipped happily to the extraordinary cave. Before they started to have a look at the marvelous cave, they found a mysterious map on the floor. They had no idea what it was, but they still held on to it.

They slowly walked up the long staircase that connected to different caves. They first went to the painting cave. It was amazing. The picture showed the evolution of Buddhism. They were astonished. Suddenly a bunch of light shot out from their map. They didn't know what was happening, so they took the map out. To their surprise, the blank map somehow became a piece of English script. They read the script word by word. It said, “The paintings on the wall had recorded the full journey of how Xuanzang went to India to bring Buddhism to China. Every harsh moment and pain were told in this mural.”

The couple was astounded by the mural in front of them. They walked from place to place and together, then they were in cave 302, the best evidence of Chinese history. Once again, the map shone brightly. The words on it had changed to something else. This time it said, “This is cave 302. It was built in the Sui Dynasty. It contains one of the oldest and most vivid scenes of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, depicting a camel pulling a cart, which was the typical trade of that period.”

The two exclaimed how valuable the Mogao Grottoes was. They held an important historical evidence during the development of China.

The night was coming fast. They only had little precious time left to go over this historical cave. They went to the library cave, the place where millions of historical strips and literature pieces were kept. Again, the words in the magical map had changed. A detailed description of the treasure in this spectacular cave was shown in the map. “This is the Library Cave. It was first discovered in 1990. This little cave contains tens of thousands of historical Chinese scripts. All experts acclaim that this cave is the greatest discovery of oriental ancient culture. Not only that, it is an invaluable reference for the study of ancient China and Central Asia.”

The two had a good look at the scripts displayed on the brownish wooden rack. After that, night fell. They were thinking how they could get back to their houses.

A familiar magnetic pull appeared again. It was the blue swirling portal! They both hopped happily to the blue lightning portal. This time, they had no fear at all. They were relaxed. After some swirling and rotating, they arrived back at their village. The magical map was still in their grasp, but there were no longer any signs of words. They both knew that this historical China trip would be the most extraordinary trip that they had ever had.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chan, Yan Tung Yannie – 9

Our story starts here, thousands of years ago, when the ancient Silk Road was still in use. There was a dim-witted and always curious seller by the name of Yukami walking along the path of the Silk Road. At the end of the road, near a poxy little village, there stood a large cavern, awaiting unaware people to fall in. As Yukami, holding his goods, clambered down the rocky and sandy road, his eyes met something strange. A cavern? Although he was near his destination, he was very, very curious and decided to climb down with his goods. Then, as he was carefully clambering down, his slippery hands gave way and he fell. "Argh!" he cried out as he dropped. To this day, he has never been seen.

Meanwhile, in our later part of the story, six children from the year 2022 were playing with the Ouija Board, the world's #1 most haunted game, which was said to be "controlled by a spirit of each board." Their names were Racle, Mirac, Sophia, Andy, Hugo, and Serena. Well, of course, they had to give it a try! I'll say it worked since they got sucked inside the board instead. They screamed and screamed as they held each other's hands! And, with a mighty crash, they landed in the same cavern where Yukami was huddled in greasy, dirty blankets. "Wh—who are you?" Sophia stuttered, afraid.

This man looked like he hadn't eaten for centuries!

Yukami whimpered sadly, "You're trapped in the cavern I've explored more than a millennia ago..." He told them quickly to find a way out or they would have the same fate as him. So, frightened, the children combed the cavern for an exit (except for Hugo, because he decided if the man could stay here for thousands of years, he would live forever) and couldn't find one. They had no choice but to split out, so the children got separated from Yukami. Unsurprisingly, after who-knows-when, Yukami got lost! They decided to go around to search for him because who knows what might have happened? Soon, each person found themselves stuck in a cave with a task assigned for them. But all they had to do was simply to avoid it. After they had reunited, the protector of the cavern had shown up out of the blue and punished them for entering the cavern without permission. He wanted to start a battle. So, he struck the first blow. It was terrible! With yelling and disagreeing from everyone, it was chaos. "Hey! What's this?" A struggling Sophia heard Racle yell. She was holding a pale diamond. It shone in the light of the crystals like the moon! Immediately, Sophia got up and started searching. Soon, Andy joined in, trying hard to break free of the curse first. Serena, the child with the biggest brains, watched them as she thought and fought at the same time. Andy soon found a ball of fire that followed him around like a dragon stick to food. Therefore, he called it Flame of the Dragon. Meanwhile, Sophia had gone to a dustier area of the cavern and started to dig. She dug some. And dug some more. Soon she saw a glint of gold in the sand and tenderly scooped up the soft golden sand. It smelt like honey. Sophia loved it!

Just then, Serena called out, "Guys! We can use those to defeat the protector! We need four though... I'll go find the last one since Hugo, Yukami, and Mirac are a bit tired..." After that, she sped off.

She soon came back with an old rubber wheel and a ghastly sparkling grey rock that emitted a smoky spirit that would help you.

"Seriously, Serena? A rubber car wheel?" Andy rolled his eyes.

Serena replied defiantly, "No! I was talking to a weird smoky spirit. He said he was trapped inside this rock and knew everything here. He brought me the tire and told me how to combine the elements and how he never got the chance to get himself out with those," she paused, "put the sand and the diamond in the center of the wheel. Andy, get a stick and prod the fire so you get it inside. After I put the rock, Sophia shall say the magic words." She whispered to Sophia while pointing at the old rubber wheel.

Sophia nodded and slowly announced, "Of earth, fire, rock and sparkle, summon a power that would help us leave.....Now!"

The old rubber tyre seemed to understand, and started to glow and vibrate. Suddenly, a beam of light shot through the cavern ceiling from the tyre. The elements were gone. Mirac, Hugo, Yukami, and the protector were shocked!

Racle exclaimed, "A pogo stick? What do we do with this!?"

Hugo then grabbed the pogo stick, bounced twice, and suddenly leapt from his pogo stick on the protector's head! As the protector was old and frail, he burst apart and shattered immediately, leaving behind a thunderous roar and a large beam of light. The power released from him was so strong, it sent the shocked children and Yukami flying back to their home in America. They were free!

"We're safe!" Yukami yelled out in joy. Although he was tired and hungry, he had not aged a single bit. Mirac had a wonderful idea. "Hey, why don't you live with us?" She said happily. He nodded with tears in his eyes. Soon, the children and Yukami simply burned the Ouija board that brought them to the spooky cavern in their barbecue pit. Little did they know, it began to evolve again.....

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chau, Kong Tsun Andy – 9

Thousands and thousands of years in the future, there are some explorers who want to experience the lives from the past. They stole the time machine from the lab and charged it with a high EMP(electromagnetic pulse) contained power cell. After the procedure, they went to the time portal.

When they jumped off the time machine, Kaya processed the chance of getting out, 0.00000000000001%.

Everyone thought for a while, Henry said, “We should team up!” The others agreed.

What Kaya actually was calculating, was the chance we got out without breaking the laws of time and space. Kaya found out the core was missing in the tower long ago.

They set up a plan to steal the core; Ken first used invisibility to get rid of the guards in front of the gate. Then Henry teleported us in. Yannie stole the core and they got out of here.

They peeked at the gate of the tower. There were guards standing straight in front of the gate, probably guarding the gate. Ken gave Yannie invisibility, and Yannie defeated the guards. When they opened the mask, they saw a body that was biologically without a head. Even if they were from the future, they still had never seen that before. With some scary vibes going on in their heart, they still stepped through the gate...

They kept going up, still no sign of the core, the stairs felt like it was endless.

Kaya asked, “If we can't go up, can we go down?”

They went downwards. Without a blink of an eye, they were already in the basement. For safety measures, they let Yannie take it. Yannie took it with ease. Suddenly, a bunch of running sounds and there came the guards. They held hands and disappeared in front of their eyes. This is Henry’s ability: to teleport anything but not through time and space. They made it back. Yannie put the core and recharged it. A shine of light came through the portal. It was the light which “told” them to go back. They went in the portal before the guards couldn’t even realise they already “left”.

They came back. Their mom, Jess, asked her four children, “Did you all finish borrowing the books for your project?”

They replied, “Yes...of course!”

They saw mom with an angry face. They knew two things: first, they bet mom knew everything. Second, they were going to detention!

After the one-week-detention, they realised history is not what it seems. They were just lucky to flip a tiny part of the leaf without dying. Never challenge history!

The Mogao Caves

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Cheung, Sheung Kiu Mirac – 9

A long long time ago, there was a huge mystery in the Mogao Caves. A dark and spooky cave with a secret chamber.

Sophie and Julie were friends. Sophie was not very smart but she was very caring. She liked to help people. She was keen at ending arguments because of her great warm heart. Almost everybody wanted to be her friend. Julie had good grades; she always wanted to be the smartest. She often started an argument, but still, her bestie Sophie liked her a lot.

One day, Sophie and Julie had a sleepover. They saw a very old box in Sophie's bedroom and they opened it. Magically, they got sucked into the box.

They had teleported to Mogao Caves. They were in Western Thousand Buddha Caves. There were thousands of Buddhist arts. There was a myth saying that there were thousands of Buddhas behind the painting. Then, unawares, the walls collapsed. They quickly ran for shelter. Unfortunately, the pictures were all broken.

Surprisingly, there were buddhas who helped them out. They came out from the creation. The legend is true! The buddhas managed the way out and they sent them home by a flying book from the library caves. The Mogao Cave would be fixed very soon.

The two girls reached home safely, thanks to the Buddha's and the flying book. They promised that they would keep it a secret. They would not tell anymore even their friends!

The Mogao Caves

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Cheung, Sum Kiu Racle – 9

A long long time ago, there were two princesses who were twins living in a house on their own. The Mogao Caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, Dunhuang, the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China.

The twins were called Crystiana and Anna. Crystiana was very smart and clever and she is also a fast thinker and a problem solver. She was attractive and popular at college. Sometimes she had evil thoughts. She loved winter. Anna was not good at academic; she didn't always get good grades. However, she loved and cared for everyone. She was also lovely and loved summer.

One day, Anna and Crystiana each found a mysterious box on the floor. When they touched the box, they teleported to the Mogao Caves. Suddenly, a gigantic stone fell from nowhere and blocked the entrance. Soon, they found out that one of the stones represented ice and the other represented fire.

Unexpectedly, a monster moved the big stone and came into the cave and said to Crystiana and Anna, "You two need to give me the two stones, or else I will kill you."

They were so frightened, so they gave him the two stones even though they didn't want to. The monster used powerful magic to open the two stones. In each stone, there was a gemstone, yes, but it was extremely glamorous.

At last, the monster finally let them out of the cave and teleported them back to their own home.

Tales from the Mogao

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chu, Long Yin – 10

A hundred years ago, there was a family who lived in an old wooden hut near the Mogao Caves. They lived a peaceful life with food and clothes, it was all they needed. But they never knew what was inside the Mogao Caves, and never went in.

One day, the family's lovely, kind daughter Morginni asked his parents, "Mom, dad, what is inside Mogao Caves? I want to know, may be there will be treasure inside!"

Once hearing the word "treasure", Morginni's brother Gabeleth's eyes light up with glee,

"Did you say treasure? Let's go now!"

They left the house and a cold breeze blew past them. They stared at the humongous entrance of the Mogao Cave, mouth opened — wide, and they stepped inside...

They looked around in surprise, the cave walls were filled with colourful paintings of animals, peoples and ancient civilisations. They wandered through the maze—like passageways and not long later, they were lost,

"Where are we?" cried Gabeleth.

They began to panic and Morginni started to sob helplessly. Alistar looked around and saw a strange sign on a wall,

"Hey! Look at this!"

They rushed towards the strange sign, which resembles strange arrows with numbers on it

.

"Left, right, left, left, right, what does it mean?"

Morginni exclaimed with glee,

"I get it, it must be the order of directions we need to go to get out of this labyrinth!"

They memorised the order and got out of the maze in no time. They then entered a large empty room,

"Wait, that's all, nothing, easy!", shouted Gabeleth.

"Careful, son. It could be a booby trap." replied his mother Silestar,

but Gabeleth had already rushed in. All of a sudden, a giant stalactite fell from the rocky ceiling and crashed in front of Gabeleth, he screamed like a baby and rushed back to his mother. They inched forward carefully step by step, so that they would not shake the room. Soon, they made it to the other side,

"Whew," sighed Silestar, "That was close!"

They then entered a small room with a table in front of them and statues of animals around them. There was a monkey, cat, dog and rabbit. There were even pieces of rocks that looked like bananas, fish, meat and carrots.

"This puzzle is easy, we just need to match the animals with the food they eat!"

shouted the Alastar. They immediately got to work, and soon a doorway to the treasure room appeared. They walked in and discovered an old painting. It was the painting of their family tree. They were really excited to have found this unique painting, and will treasure it forever.

Tales From the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Ho, Sui Chit – 10

A long long time ago, two travellers Luke and Dave who were twins and both looked tired, were walking along the Silk Road in a desert, hoping to find a place to stay and rest because they haven't stopped walking for days, and still are finding a bed to lie on. The weather was above 40 degrees celsius, which was super hot and there was not even a drip of water in the desert, so they were having a hard trip...

Later, after a long walk, they found something green and blue in the desert, it included trees and a giant pool of water. It was an oasis in the desert. Finally, they had found a place to recharge. They lied on the water and swam around. Luke and Dave, two had a wonderful time until they found something, it was a cave just beside the oasis. Luke and Dave moved into the cave. Luke said "we can finally relax"

After they moved into the cave, Luke lied down and said

"Now we can relax in this cave and the oasis is just beside us so we can get water any moment!"

Dave nodded his head. Suddenly, they heard a strange noise, there was someone else in the cave! Dave said,

"He..hello?"

Then came a voice,

"I am Jake, I have been living here for years." He was very short, with a moustache above his mouth, a wise old man. His voice was very low. "Hi!" Luke said,

"Why did you just come out?" Jake replied,

"I am going to find food, stay here and wait." And Jake walked out of the cave and went off to find food.

After a few days of waiting, Jake never seemed to come back, Luke and Dave got worried.

"Where is Jake? I am starving with just water to drink," said Dave.

The trees were starting to die, and there was not much water left, and the twins were very tired. Then Dave marched out of the cave and started to find Jake. Not long after he walked away, he came back with a familiar body, it's Jake! He must have died of hunger and dehydration!

After Jake's death, Luke and Dave found out that Jake actually died of falling off a cliff accidentally! Luke and Dave were heartbroken, so to remember him, they carved many statues and literature.

Years passed, people who arrived at the Mogao Caves remembered the lasting culture and continued it, until now, the Mogao caves were discovered by modern humans.

Mogao Cave

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Kiang, Cheuk Yau – 10

In China, there are millions of caves. Although the best and the most mysterious one is the Mogao Cave. It was built a long time ago and was filled with gigantic and beautiful sculptures. Although no one really knows the reason how the cave was built without modern technology and why the talented person ever built it. But today, clear your brains, because I am going to tell you the story behind it...

1000 years ago in a bone dry desert, the boiling hot sun rays were shining on the sand, making it look like glitter. It all seemed to be very silent when some shuffling sounds echoed through the desert. A man was walking through. His bare feet sinking in the burning sand, beads of sweat rolling down his face, he was Roy the explorer, he came to explore the dry and empty desert, hoping to let his precious son and wife know more about it. He stopped in mid way, bent down and scooped a handful of sand as he muttered to himself with a pleasant smile, "They would like it." He was about to continue his journey when he noticed that he couldn't move his legs, his body was slowly sinking down in the sand, his hands wobbling as he almost did a backflip when his body toppled to the back. Just then he realized he just stepped right into a quicksand! He tried his best having his balance as he frantically flapped his arms like a bird, shouting for help. It was like all hope was lost, now his waist was touching the sand, and soon after a minute, all you could hear was some muffled voice in the sand and a desperate, waving hand stinking up.

Suddenly, a transparent cloud slowly whirled around in the air. The cloud pieced itself together into a body shape, then the head, and the nose and eyes. Then, it floated down next to Roy, with one wave with its fluffy transparent hand, a magical force pulled Roy out of the quicksand. Roy's clothes were now a bit ragged, with bits of holes in random spots, he flinched in pain and let out a tiny squeak, he managed to get a glimpse of the cloudy savior but it disappeared in a flash. Roy fell to the soft, slightly sizzling ground, he rubbed his back as he stared longingly at the fluffy white clouds floating in the sky, still very amazed and confused about what happened. He paced back and forth around the sand, brushing his feet, thinking aloud, "Who is that clouded figure, how did something so soft pull me up so easily? Is it a person or what? Am I in a dream?" Millions of questions flooded into his brain as he questioned himself over and over again.

Soon, it was sunset. The sky was ablaze with the fire of the setting sun. The weather was getting colder and colder, Roy stopped questioning himself and started looking around for shelter. His teeth chattering like a horse, clamping his hands around his arms, shivering. His eyes darted around and to his relief, found a cave. Roy bolted to the cave in delight. The cave was rocky and colossal, some rocks crumbling down from the ceiling. But Roy didn't mind, because he got shelter after all.

He gathered up some wood, rocks and strings to make a bonfire when he realized the food he brought were all dried up. He rummaged through his backpack, but the best he could find was a dried up fish which turned to a disgusting shade of brown. Roy moaned and threw the fish behind him with huge disappointment. Just then, something popped up in his brain. "The cloudy savior! I was so confused I forgot to thank it!" Roy said, slapping his forehead. He looked around him, some wood, stone and string..... It would be perfect for making an axe! Plus he got a whole large cave to himself. Roy twirled around in excitement as he yelled, "Idea! I will make a museum with this cave and axe!" Roy knew who to sculpt since he was little, a great interest of him, really.

Roy picked up the string and started tying the wood and the largest piece of stone he could find together. Soon enough, Roy started chopping, concentrating hard on what the cloudy god looked like. Since he can't really remember what it looked like, he started sculpting what he believes. He built the god sitting on an elegant throne, with tiny servants dancing around it. Roy didn't know he was going too far. Soon enough, the whole cave was built and filled with tall and large sculptures. Roy was pretty proud of himself. Lucky him found the most amazing thing anyone has ever seen too, a lake full of water and berries! Roy used the berries as paint and made the cave look enchanting. Although a few more days later after he finished sculpting his thanks, he was running out of water and berries! He looked back at the beautiful cave and gave a small smirk, he had secretly hidden a treasure in it. A very valuable one. He got it from his backpack. He never leaves a journey without it to keep him in company. But he knew that someone who worships the god and his art needs it more than him. It's pretty simple. To be the "someone", it's pretty simple. You just need to discover more about the cave! Soon, you'll know...

The Most Recently Discovered Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Lam, Sung Chit – 10

In 1988, a family with different talents was traveling to near countries in a desert, and they discovered a deep, dark cave. They went inside because they were very tired. The family consists of Galahad (father), Martha (mother), Astaroth (eldest sibling, brother), Morrigan (sister), and Artemis (youngest sibling, sister). After they went into the cave, there was a giant rumble and suddenly, a giant rock blocked the exit. “Oh no!” said Galahad, “we can’t go back out!”

Martha said, “Well, the only thing we can do now is to explore and see what’s inside. Maybe we can even find another exit!”

Eventually, they all agreed.

Into the cave, they came across a maze made of plants. They went into the maze and turned left, then right, then in the middle, then left and hit a dead end. Morrigan cried, “What do we do now?” Artemis said, “We can backtrack and try again!” Soon, they backtracked and tried again. And, they saw the exit of the maze!

Next was a room full of humongous bricks. One of them read “push here for a test (and pick up the capes, one for each)” so they picked up the capes and pushed the button. Suddenly, the floor gave away and they were falling through the air. Morrigan shouted, “AAHH! I HATE THIS! Wait, Morrigan, calm down, and think of an idea. I know! We can use our capes as parachutes!” They did that and landed safely on the bottom. “Phew! What a blow!” Said Morrigan, “all that made me want to do a number one.” She said, as they continued on their journey.

Lastly, they came stumbling across a small dog with a sign that says “to exit, please tame the dog”. Astaroth was the best at fighting, so he went to fight the dog to tame it. He kicked, punched, and did some advanced moves. But the dog seemed to be made out of steel, because nothing worked on it. After an hour of fighting, Morrigan said, squirming, “I... I... really have to go. Can you hurry up?” Astaroth replied “I am trying my best!” All of a sudden, he realised that he only needed to pet the dog to tame it. So he petted the dog, and the dog wagged his tail and panted. “I guess you found yourself a dog,” said Martha to Astaroth. “Thanks, mom, you’re the best!” Said Astaroth.

Suddenly, a part of the brick wall opened, and they saw a passageway with dim light. They ran excitedly. Then, after a long walk, they finally found the exit.

After they exited, they found an oasis with fresh water and fruit. They all took enough food for the rest of the journey, and Morrigan was about to go when suddenly, a black thing sucked them in.

A few seconds later, they were teleported into another cave that was blocked (probably the end of the cave). The only thing that was shining was Galahad and Martha’s phones. The lights they turned on from their phones were dim (so Morrigan hid in the corner to pull up her dress but when Astaroth turned on his flashlight, they could look a lot better. The room was full of riddles, and the one in front of them read, “what thing can be really hard,

But allows you to pass, no matter what?

What thing is sideways,

But you can understand from the start?”

All of them looked confused. They asked, “What do you think, Morrigan?” Morrigan, being the brightest lightbulb in the family, read it again, shivering from holding her number one, said “A riddle!” Then, the riddle disappeared. Galahad said, “good job, Morrigan! It probably means that you have answered correctly!” Morrigan broke into a big smile.

Then, after all the riddles, the wall separated into two halves and there was a sign. It showed “who can be the best gymnast?” Challenge. “I’m going to win!” Said Martha, since she is the most flexible. “First challenge: the 180 degrees leg stretch.” Morrigan said, “I quit! I can’t hold my urine like that!” As Martha easily did it. Artemis succeeded too, and so did Astaroth, but roughly.

“Next round: handstand” read the banner. Martha did it as a professional, but Astaroth and Artemis failed. “Yes! I won! What do I get?” She asked. The banner now read: “You get a mansion in the destination you are heading to

and all the drinks in the world including water.” Then, the wall acted like an automatic door again, and finally, they saw a male restroom and there was a sign with the female restroom, as well as the exit pointing to a narrow corridor. And there, they saw... Mogao Grottoes! Morrigan said, “Finally! I almost leaked!” But when she tried to go, there was a bright light surrounding them and they were teleported in front of a mansion.

A few years went by and their journey was a memorable past. The day they turned the cave to the scholars helped them earn a lot of money. All was well.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Lam, Yat Yi – 10

It is 29th November, 1907. There was a curious researcher called David. David was as short as a monkey, so it was easy for him to get inside narrow gaps and small doors. David had brown hair, and had rather pale skin. David loved researching and exploring hidden places in China. Right now, he was going to travel to Mogao Caves and look for ancient things for his ancient China cultural research.

David stepped inside the first cave he saw. Inside the cave, it was dusty and dry. He touched the walls, which were smooth, and it was carved. David looked for ancient writings, sculptures, books, anything that would help with his research on Mogao Caves. As he walked deeper and deeper into the cave, he still didn't find anything. "Hmmm," He thought, "I should be seeing some art now." He still couldn't find anything, but David decided not to give up, and walked deeper into the cave.

David looked around for some clues. He looked at the walls and the floor to look for anything that would lead him to the ancient scrolls and sculptures. He searched around, and eventually found some markings on the floor. He tried to figure out what it meant, but it made no sense to him. "What does any of these markings mean?" He said to himself. David couldn't figure it out, so he tried looking for other clues, but he couldn't find any more.

David started to wander around as there were no clues to help him. He thought, "Maybe if I walk around, I might find something!" So he started to walk around the enormous cave.

As he walked, he suddenly came to two paths, one leading to the right, and one to the left. "Which one should I choose?" He wondered. He decided that he would head to the right path. After a few minutes, he came back to the two paths. "Hey, that's strange! I was just here! It's like I'm walking in circles!" So this time, David went to the left path. He had been walking around for 10 minutes, and he had no idea where he was. "I think I'm lost," David said.

David got desperate. He needed to get out of the caves, even if it meant he wouldn't get anything for his research. David was running around in the caves in panic trying to find the exit. As he was going around the caves, he stumbled across a big square with lots of tiles on it. Each of the tiles had animals like tigers, sharks, alligators, and mice on them. Not caring about the tiles, David stepped on one of the tiles with a tiger on it. As soon as he set foot on the tile, an arrow shot out of the wall and almost hit him. "AH!" he shouted. "That was close," he thought, his heart beating, "why was there an arrow shooting out of there anyway?" He looked at the tiles carefully. He saw a rock on the ground, so he picked it up and put it on a shark tile. The shark tile fell down, along with some other tiles around it, revealing a lava pool underneath. The other tiles returned to the surface, except for the shark tile, which was burning in the lava. "Hmmm. Tigers, sharks, alligators, and mice. What do they all have in common?" He asked himself. "Of course! They are all dangerous except the mice!" He said aloud. He threw a rock on the mouse tile, and nothing happened. "Yes!" He thought he jumped on all the mouse tiles and safely got across. At the other side was what he was looking for.

The scrolls, the sculptures, the books, the writings, the art! Everything he was looking for! David was overjoyed! "HOORAY! I found what I needed!" He wrote down everything in his notebook, and took some pictures. "Wait, I'm still lost." He wasn't so happy anymore. But then his happiness returned after he found the back exit! He rushed out and called his assistant to fly a helicopter to get back to his lab.

At last, David's research was complete, and it was a success! David even shared his research with people around the world, and he became one of the most famous explorers. David found out a lot of hidden secrets and places and China, and he was determined to find it all.

The Great Escape in the Mogao Grotto

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Lau, Katie – 11

“Freeze! You can’t escape from this prison!” A prison guard shouted. The person who escaped from the prison was a man called Miles. He was innocent, but everyone in the village thought that he stole the precious painting, the soul of their village (they claimed) since he was the last person to go into the room and after that, their painting was gone. He was sent to the prison in the village and had no other choice but to escape from that horrifying place.

He escaped from the prison successfully, but he didn’t lose the guards. The guards were following him like his shadow. He didn’t have a chance to sit down and relax. Miles almost ran out of breath after this long running “competition”. He stopped and had a break, but he forgot that the guards were still after him. They were about to get Miles. Miles saw a cave right in front of him. He quietly sneaked into the cave. “Phew, they almost found me!” Miles thought he was very lucky, but he didn’t know that he was even luckier to be in this cave— the Mogao Grotto, which was admired worldwide.

It didn’t take too long for the guards to find out that he was in the cave. They caught the sight of him once again. Miles ran towards a door without noticing what was behind that door. He just knew that he had to run. When he ran into the doorway, he found that there was a picture of a goddess on the wall next to him. She was wearing a beautiful red dress. She sat on a glorious golden throne, praying.

Miles stopped his legs in front of this cave painting. Miles loved art since he was small, and he had studied art for a long time. He loved this picture. He felt like he was inside this picture when he was enjoying it. But time flew swiftly. The guards were catching up again. He had no choice but to run forward while his eyes were sticking to the paintings of gods and goddesses he saw.

“I hate this stupid Mogao Grotto. It’s like a maze. I wonder when we will catch him and report to the boss!” One of the grumpy guards said. Miles then realized he was in the famous Mogao Grotto that he had always wanted to visit.

Miles found a little corner where he could hide from the guards. He sneaked in. “Let’s just break these walls so we can get him easily,” a guard suggested. The guards started to work. A painting of a dancing goddess was broken by the ignorant guards, not knowing that they were sabotaging a priceless painting. Miles stood aside, watching them damaging these precious paintings. He should do something to stop it but he couldn’t. He would get caught if he stood out and stopped them. Miles watched the guards quietly, feeling helpless. Finally, he couldn’t stand it anymore. He stepped out of the corner and started running once again. He stopped in front of a wall. To normal people, it might just be an ordinary wall, but Miles felt that there was something fishy with it. He pressed onto the wall. The wall automatically opened. What he saw amazed him.

Behind the wall was a room with loads of cave paintings! He stopped right in front of a painting with a woman holding a bow—like Jade. Then, he walked to another painting that contained a queen wearing a golden dress with a lot of servants. He smiled with satisfaction while looking at these wonderful paintings. A painting caught his eyes. There were words on the wall, “The special words will appear, only if you feel the fear. Read the words aloud, everyone sees you will bow.” Miles went on looking for the special words. His focus was on the painting. He thought for a moment. Suddenly, he realized that the paintings here all had names. He gathered the first letter in all the paintings. They came out like “un deseo será concedido”. Miles read the words aloud.

As soon as he finished reading, a woman appeared, “I can grant you a wish since you freed me, young man! What do you want?” the woman asked. Miles said he would like the Mogao Grotto to be back to normal since the guards had damaged it. “Young man, I like that you are not greedy. Of course, I can grant your wish, but let me add something to it.”

The Mogao Grotto became normal again. Right after that, a bright light appeared behind Miles. In seconds, Miles disappeared.

Since then, no one has ever seen Miles and the guards again.

A Tale of Luoyang Cave Dwelling

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Man, Hoi Lam – 10

Hi, I'm a ten years old girl living with Longmen in a cave called Luoyang Cave Dwelling. It's currently the 18th century. I enjoy living here a lot! The environment here— greenish trees, the soft tan colored sand, the homes...

Even the Longmen were so good-natured! Living here is just the BEST.

One normal morning, I was walking around the caves again. I have just finished some paintings for the Longmen. They were thanking me and inspecting my masterpiece. When I asked what I could help them with next, they said I could pick some vegetables from the Longmen farm. I agreed and went to the farm. I walked around the place but I found out... That I didn't know where the farm was! I was really perplexed and I continued looking around— Then, "POOF!"

I fell into a hole in a cave! "OW! THAT HURTS!" I looked at my bruised knees. I didn't even know where I was! I sat up rubbing my head and looked around. "Where is this place?" My voice echoed in the cave. This place seemed like it's underground... Now I can't even see light. I was petrified that I couldn't even find my way back again! But I have to try, as much as I could! I found a stick from the floor and scratched it on the stone wall. I made a torch. While holding the torch with my trembling hands, I walked around, exploring the cave. As I walked around, I accidentally bumped into one of the cave's walls. Then I looked at it, there was a cave carving! I looked closer at the dusty wall, and I understood more perspicuously. The carving was about the Longmen starting to build in this cave! They looked so peaceful and untroubled! "Hmm, this is kind of interesting", I said. But when I turned around to head away, I spotted a number of bats right in front of me. "AHHHH HELP!" I screamed at the top of my lungs as I fought through the cloud of bats. As I was dashing out of the cave, I caught a glimpse of some marbles on the floor. I didn't know what I needed them for, but I took them and put them in my pocket.

Finally, I was out of the cave, but there I had another problem. Gosh, there were criminal-looking people next to me! They were holding knives in front of me and commanded, "Give us all your money, or die!" I wasn't listening to them. I was still stunned by the environment. The tall grass, flowering meadows... I was quickly disturbed though. The criminals ordered again, "GIVE US ALL YOUR VALUABLES!"

I replied, "Sheesh! Give me a second first, you impatient culprits!" I looked through my pockets. All I have was those marbles I picked up from the cave! Suddenly, I had an idea. I immediately took out the marbles, threw them on the ground and started to run away. "Hey! Come back, you little child!" They chased after me with their irritated looks but slipped on the marbles. They criminals were more foolish than I thought! The marbles only lasted for a while though. It wasn't much for me to worry about, as I have another plan!

The plan was just so clever! While I looked around when I came out of the cave, I found a route back to my home. I ran back and shouted to the Longmen, "Hey, someone get some tree branches and give them to me!" After I snatched the branches from the Longmen, I went to the hole I fell into before and covered it with the branches. I stood next to the covered hole and waved to the criminals, "Hey, I'm over here! Come and—" I didn't even have to finish before they ran into the hole. Again, I heard that sound, "POOF!" Yep, they fell in again. While hearing their arguing sounds, I was laughing my heart out. Hope they have fun with the bats! The Longmen just stood in shock, stunned with what I did.

This day taught me to be careful with every one of my actions. If I did, things would work out even better for me. After this day, I was still laughing at those foolish criminals. The Longmen still haven't understood why this was so hilarious.

Twins' Silk Road Quest

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Sheng, Tsz Yau Sophia – 9

Once upon a time, there were twins living with their parents. Their names were Alice and Lucas. The twins were at school. Mrs Smith was talking about the Mogao Caves in China. Mrs Smith announced, “Students! Your homework today will be about Mogao Caves. I want everybody to write a report about Mogao Caves, and hand it in next Friday.”

“Not again!,” Lucas howled.

Mrs Smith regarded him coldly, “Yes, again. If you don’t like it, you might as well have 5 reports!”

As if she was saying, “Yes stupid, IF you don’t like it, I would rather give you 10 more reports.” Then without saying anything, she left the classroom.

As the twins walked home from school, Lucas complained, “We had a report like, 3 days ago, now another stupid report with another stupid topic and now off to the stupid library.”

“Come on Lucas! Reports are fun! You can learn a lot,” Alice proclaimed.

Lucas scoffed, “Oh yeah! They ARE so fun!”

Alice rolled her eyes at him while snickering, “Stop your sarcasm.”

Lucas thought out loud, “Today is Monday, the report is due on Friday, right? So I’ll probably do it... on Thursday.”

Alice cried out in disbelief, “That’s way too late, in fact I’m gonna do it today. Now follow me, we’re going to the library.”

“Ughh,” Lucas protested.

When they got in the library, Alice waved at the librarian, Mrs Johnson. She asked Alice peculiarly, “Who is this? I don’t think I’ve seen him.” As she said this, she pointed at Lucas.

“Oh that’s, uh my brother, Lucas.”

“Nice to meet you, Lucas.”

Alice inquired, “Are there any books about the Mogao Caves?”

“I don’t know, because today many kids rushed here to do their project, well they’re on the fourth row on shelf 3,” Mrs Johnson informed.

“Thank you, Mrs Johnson,” Alice’s voice trailed off as she went off in search of the book.

“Aha! There it is!” Alice exclaimed. Alice opened the book, and Lucas poked his head in just as his sister fell into the book.

Alice and Lucas got teleported into China, Silk Road, Dunhuang, Mogao Caves.

“WOAH! WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE WE!!!” screamed Lucas.

“Well ...” Alice looked around, “I think we’re at Mogao Caves, China, Dunhuang.”

“OK, time to go,” Lucas noted firmly as he dragged his sister away.

Suddenly, he stopped. “I don’t know where I’m going! This is frustrating!” Lucas yelled.

“So let’s stay for a while,” Alice grinned. Then she ran out of sight. Lucas found her in front of a big cave.

Alice declared, “Mogao Caves!” Then she ran inside.

Lucas panted in exasperation, “Is she crazy? Where did all that maniac energy even come from?” He searched in the cave for a long time, eventually, he found Alice. Alice was staring open mouthed at some paintings, Lucas immediately ran to her.

Lucas yelled, “What on earth were you thinking! I nearly lost you!”

“I want one....,” Alice murmured.

“What?,” Lucas demanded.

"I WANT TO TAKE A PAINTING HOME!!!!!" Alice screamed.

Once she touched the painting, the whole ground shook.

Alice groaned, "Oh no!"

Lucas echoed her, "Oh no!"

Standing right in front of them, was a ferocious looking dragon, staring daggers at them.

"Don't just stand there, RUN!"

Alice didn't move.

"OH COME ON!" Lucas bellowed.

Alice finally started moving. "I need to take back this painting!"

"Okay but unless you wanna die here extra crispy, you better hurry!" Lucas hollered over his shoulder.

Alice stopped again.

"What now?" Lucas asked in an annoyed voice.

Alice lowered her head, "This is ancient history, I can't take it."

"Oh, you finally realize that, now thanks to you we are on our way to the dead."

"Stop yelling at me, Lucas, maybe if I just put back the painting, the dragon won't chase us."

So she quickly placed the painting in a corner of the room. Nevertheless, the dragon kept chasing them.

"Well I don't know you but I'm leaving," Lucas informed.

Alice caught her breath, "Wait for me!"

After dodging and diving, the twins finally escaped the cave.

"Whooo, that was close," Lucas wiped his brow. "Now, how do we get home again?"

"Well, we came from our library from the book so let's try going to the Chinese library," Alice suggested.

They went to the library and got a few raised eyebrows. The library somehow teleported the twins back to their home.

Alice celebrated, "YAY! Now I've got so much information about Mogao Caves!"

"Oh goody," Lucas muttered under his breath.

Alice checked her watch, "Hey, what time is it? What! It's already Thursday! I have to finish my report!"

She dashed back home leaving Lucas alone.

"Hey! Wait for me!" Lucas yelled as he dashed after his sister.

Tales from the Mogao

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Tseung, Kung Wing – 10

One day in 1922, Dad, mom and I wanted to go to the Mogao Grottoes to explore inside and find treasures.

We arrived at the west side of China. The west side of China is cool, and it was filled with sand. We were very surprised when we saw that scene.

After we walked for a while, we were tired. We were sitting near a river with clear water. Then, a person walked by here. He was very ugly because his giant eyes could fall down at any time. He also had sharp teeth, smelly breath. He walked like a zombie towards us.

“Hi, would you like to make friends with me?” He said.

We always liked making friends with crazy people, so we also made friends together. We and the secret person walked into the small, long cave. We found the treasure (some ancient Chinese scrolls) at a corner in the cave, and we gave the treasure to the secret person to keep it for us. When we were walking in the shopping mall, the secret person took the treasure with him and jumped off the building.

For a moment, we still hadn’t found out that the secret person had disappeared. After we walked for a while, we turned back and looked, then we found that the secret person had disappeared! We went to the river, and we swam in the river so that we could see if the secret person was hiding in the river. Even though we swam in the river for one night, we still hadn’t found the secret person, so we decided to go to another place to find the secret person.

“Dad, when could we find the secret person?” I asked.

“I don’t know, but we will probably find him sometime!” Dad answered.

We were too tired to find him, so we went back to the building again to find him on every floor. Even though we kept finding him, we still couldn’t find him, so we found the security guard.

Mom asked the security guard, “Where is the secret person?”

“Who is the secret person?” The security guard asked.

“He walked like a zombie, had giant eyes that could fall down at any time, sharp teeth, smelly breath. He looked very ugly,” Mom answered her urgently.

“I know that person. We had been friends together for years. Although we don’t often see each other, we send letters to each other every day. I also had his WeChat. I could ask him now.” The security guard told us.

“He sent me a message that he is in a house. Good Luck!” The security guard answered us.

We rushed to a house and knocked on the door. The husband and the wife came out.

“What’s up?” The husband asked.

“I wanted to find a secret person,” Dad answered.

“He is under the bed right now, you can go in and see him,” The wife answered.

We walked onto the muddy floor. The bedroom is very neat and tidy, because the wife always cleans the bedroom. There is a vase filled with flowers. The flowers smelled very good. Besides that, there is also a wooden cupboard and a big and beautiful bed. We went under the bed, and walked slowly under the bed. Finally, we all saw the secret person, and he gave us back the ancient Chinese scrolls.

“Sorry,” The secret person said, “I will never steal things from you again.”

“Not from us, it is from everyone! You can never steal other people’s things!” My dad answered.

“Okay, no problem,” The secret person muttered.

Finally, we saved the treasure. We went home with the treasure, and we were all satisfied.

The Legend of The Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Charmaine – 11

It was almost the long-awaited summer vacation. The assessments ended 3 weeks ago and the year-end party is going to begin next month. As Aniya was discussing with her parents where she would go, her phone started buzzing.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Aniya! It’s Cindy. I was looking through some holiday destination pamphlets, and I came across this particular pamphlet for the Silk Road. It isn’t a guided tour but I already have a hotel in mind. It’s near the Mogao Grottoes. Legend says there is a secret room with valuable treasures within, but only the so-called ‘chosen ones’ can enter. It seems very intriguing so I will go there with my family. As I searched it up on google maps, I saw that the flight time was quite long, though. So, we could go there in mid-July. I was wondering if you wanted to go with me?” “Oh, that sounds interesting. After all, we will learn about China in P5. My mom said I could choose where we will go this summer too! Let’s go there!” Aniya said enthusiastically.

When the day came, the two families decided to meet up at the airport. They packed their bags excitedly and set off. Since it was already 10pm when they arrived, they moved into the hotel Cindy mentioned – Jiuquan Hotel, and the families settled in for the night.

The next morning, Aniya and Cindy’s family woke up early. Aniya and Cindy brought their lunches, water, two maps, two flashlights, and some snacks. They rode on a camel and secretly followed a group of hooded tour guides. After a few minutes they noticed the tour guides stopped at a temple which seemed to be engraved into the mountain. After they looked it up on their phones, they realized this was a renowned national park called the Mogao Grottoes. They decided to go in and take some pictures. However, when they walked into the cave, they were disappointed to find out that photo-taking was not allowed.

Once they went in, they were astonished by the scenery. There were colourful murals carved on the walls. It was nothing like what they expected. As they continued exploring, Aniya seemed to be hypnotized by the murals, and she ignored all of them and walked away all by herself. When she finally came back to her senses, she realized her mistake and tried to look for the group. But alas, she found nothing! She crept deeper into the Mogadishu Grottoes fearfully, getting more anxious each step. Little did she know someone was discreetly watching from afar...

“Mom? Dad? Cindy? Where are you all?” Aniya shouted in despair when she found something shining as bright as a thousand suns. The voice echoed across the halls like it was some sort of horror movie. As she crept closer, that light vanished into thin air. Suddenly, in the corner of her eye, she noticed the hooded tour guides around the corner. ‘Maybe they could assist me! After all, they are tour guides, right?’ Aniya sanguinely thought to herself.

She chased after the tour guides, but then they faded away like ashes after a raging fire broke out. She was all alone, again. As she ambled down the gloomy pathway, tears started filling her eye sockets.

“Where are you? Weren’t we supposed to go together? Say something! Shine a light! Anything!” she whimpered desperately.

Soon, she saw a statue that looked like the Big Buddha back in Hong Kong. It reminded her of all the pleasant and remarkable memories she had with her friends and family. Her tears slid down her rosy cheeks as she hoped for a miracle to happen when she saw a strange stone in front of her. Out of nowhere, the stone began gleaming luminously, and a pathway was soon revealed. She gathered herself together, and dashed across the concrete floor and up the stone stairs. She then saw a large human-size statue with two other statues stacked upon each other beside her. Abruptly, she saw the hooded tour guides appear again right in front of her.

“Come with us, Aniya,” they said sternly.

Aniya was full of doubts, but decided not to question it after all she had been through and followed them. They led her to a dark room with a dim light under a tarp. When they unveiled the tarp, the light source lit up the entire room! It was a room with statues of knights surrounding a Buddha. The two light sources glowed brightly as it revealed the surroundings within 100-meter radius.

“Woah... what is this place?” Aniya asked.

“This, this is the secret of life,” one of the tour guides said seriously, “This first one, is Dharma, and this other one, is Sangha. Dharma means the teaching of Buddha, and Sangha means the community of Buddhists. These are the treasures and secrets of the universe.” the tour guides said in unison.

Aniya saw the light getting brighter and brighter every second. She was dazed by the lights. Her head started to spin and soon she passed out...

“Aniya? Are you okay? Wake up!” Cindy’s voice echoed through Aniya’s head.

“H-huh? W-what happened?” Aniya stuttered while rubbing her eyes.

“Oh good, you’re awake! We were so worried about you! You fainted while you were admiring the murals! Come on! Do you need to go back to the hotel? Take a rest. Eat some food? Tell me!” Aniya’s mom asked Anita, concerned.

“Mom! I’m fine! It’s just that I couldn’t sleep well last night, I feel better now. I promise!” Aniya said, trying to calm everyone down.

“Okay, if you say so. Let’s continue now, please try and follow the group.” Aniya’s dad reminded.

Aniya felt relieved, ‘Phew, it was just a dream... I wonder if that...room is real?’ Aniya thought deeply, as she was following Cindy’s family and her parents.

The Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Helen – 11

Yes! I had finally convinced my two best friends, Alice and Isabelle, to go to the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang with me! Believe me, convincing them was not easy at all.

As soon as we arrived at the ticket office, Isabelle went to collect the tickets while Alice and I had a look on the map. Isabelle came rushing back, mixed emotions showing on her bright face. She didn't even wait for our questions when she exclaimed, "The ticket selling guy gave me this key without noticing! Let's see what it opens when we explore the Mogao Grottoes!" The key was a calming, dreamy shade of blue mixed with light purple, in a swirl marble pattern, which was an unusual colour for a key. I took the key from Isabelle. It felt cool against my hands, and I could feel carvings on the head of the key, but when I looked closely, I couldn't find any carvings against the metal. I felt weirdly confident and delighted when I held the key. The feeling was so mesmerising that I couldn't imagine how I even survived without that feeling of joy. Alice and Isabelle argued with each other about who should keep the key safe, and I was gleeful when they decided that I should keep it.

We went to the Ci Shi Tower first. That's the tower right in front of the entrance. Alice exclaimed at the structure of the building. She said, "This is the signature tower of the Mogao Grottoes! I've done some research and I found a lot of information about it!" She babbled on about how the structure was unique, and the colour of the building was beautiful. I had to try very hard to keep my mouth shut from shouting out that this was just a normal building. Isabelle rolled her eyes at me, and I mouthed, "Don't ruin this for her! She thinks it's so wonderful."

After Alice finally finished "appreciating" the tower, we were relieved to be able to set the foot to the inside. I decided to focus on exploring the magnificent grottoes instead of just looking for a place for the key to fit. "I also did some research on this, and I heard that the murals inside the caves are very impressive. They cover a lot of Chinese elements and a few of the murals also show Indian elements in terms of the painting techniques." I said proudly. Then, seeing the expression on their faces, I mumbled, "Of course, it may be very boring." I personally enjoyed art, but from all the boring art projects we did at school, I could understand why they hated art as everyone else did. If it's not from the pleasure of being good at it, I would have hated the school's art as they did. Suddenly, to my surprise, Isabelle said slowly, "I guess it may be interesting. Yeah, I'm in." Isabelle saw the doubt in Alice, and said to her, "Aww, come on! It might be interesting." Alice gave a small sigh and followed us reluctantly.

We explored the murals, and they were quite fun actually. We found a small hole on one of the walls, and it shaped like a keyhole, too. I tried to push the key in, but it didn't fit. We found several small holes like the first, but all of them didn't fit the key. In one of the holes, the pastel key managed to get in half of the hole, we gave a small intake of breath, but no matter how hard we tried, the key just wouldn't go in anyone. After 9 times of failure, Alice said, "This is too much of a disappointment. We should just give up." Isabelle cried, "No! We can't give up! This key must lead to something, right?"

After another 7 times of coming to nothing, we walked slowly to the exit. I said sadly, "We've already explored everything in the Mogao Grottoes. Where else could the key lead to?" When we were nearly at the exit, we saw an old man selling souvenirs. A box with red and orange swirly marble patterns caught my eye. I whispered to Alice and Isabelle, "Do you guys think that the key may fit this box? I mean, it doesn't have a key with the box as a set, and they both have swirly patterns, too!" I asked the old man, "Is it possible to try out this key in your box?" He replied with an "Of course" and a smile. I took a deep breath and pushed the key inside. With a click sound, I knew I had succeeded.

I paid the old man, and bought the box. Inside was a small model of the Mogao caves, and it was completely made of wood, very rare, colourful wood! Every detail of the model was such a fabulous combination of colours and patterns. Luckily, my two friends weren't the jealous type, or else they would be arguing about who should keep the box! I told them that I would put it to good use, "I'll create an artwork and make a video of it. I promise I'll keep the beautiful memories of this trip and our friendship in the future!"

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Jannie – 10

Long long time ago, clever Amelia and her rich parents who were retired officials decided to go to Mogao Grottoes to explore since they knew that it was well known. They were walking and glancing around and found Mogao Grottoes very interesting. They loved Mogao Grottoes and immediately planned to go there again next time. Again?

When they were at Mogao Grottoes, they went into every fascinating cave which was different sized. They saw and looked at the things inside it. "These are so old styled stuff! Appealing!" Amelia exclaimed. They came to another cave and looked around like what they did when they went in the caves before, but this time was so different, the cave was so big and they weren't able to see the end of it. Then they walked and walked and got lost.

After getting lost, they were not in the enormous cave anymore but saw another cave with a poor man dressed in damaged clothes inside. They tried to ask the poor man, "Excuse me mister, do you know where to leave?" but the door suddenly closed by itself so they kept thinking of the solution.

After meeting the poor man, they discovered that it was the treasure house since they heard that there was a treasure house in Mogao Grottoes that the door is able to close by itself. Amelia and her parents thought the treasure house was so genius that could help them magically leave, the poor man was so kind hearted because he quickly found a treasure bit for them but unexpectedly, it did not work as it was expected.

After that, they saw a box and opened it they saw a golden coloured key. The poor man gave them a hint that it was the key for the door and Amelia and her parents guessed it. They immediately opened the weird door then saw a map right in front of the door. They picked it up and took some treasure from the treasure house and put it into their backpacks. They also invited the poor nice man to live together with Amelia and her parents. They met the emperor and gave him the treasure so the emperor treated them ten thousand dollars as a reward.

Lastly, Amelia and her parents gave the man food, clothes and half of the money the emperor gave them. The man was not poor after and they all lived happily ever after.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Lok Ching Serena – 9

Hundreds and hundreds of years ago, there was a deserted cave on top of a cliff, the people in the town just saw it as a lonely place which had nothing interesting. But a monk named Yuezun had a vision of a thousand radiant Buddhas on the cliff face, and he decided that there was something special about the Mogao Caves, that inspired him to begin excavating the caves.

A year later, Yuezun was still thinking about his designs.

Yuezun thought to himself, "I'll never be able to finish this, I'm hopeless. Why did I even want to do this anyways!"

He angrily walked around finding a place to stay since he left his home to live in the cave. He passed by a China palace while looking for a place to stay. He curiously looked inside and found a monk, the monk was called Faliang. He asked Faliang if he wanted to join him, and Faliang agreed! They went back to the cave and talked about his vision, but after that Faliang knew that it would be impossible to finish it so he decided to look for more people to help.

After many months of looking (almost a year), they finally found a person that was willing to help, her name was Yannie, she lived in Japan (yes, they traveled to many countries just to find her.) Yannie was a great asset to the team, and she helped Yuezun with the designs and the structure of the build. While Faliang was helping him build it, everything was going well until they ran out of materials.

Yannie said, "There's no more materials for me and Faliang to build, but you shall not worry because I will travel to get all the stuff we need."

When she was looking for her last material, Yannie went to France to get materials, but she did not know the Anglo-French wars were there; therefore, she got badly injured.

A week had passed and Yannie still has not returned. Faliang and Yuezun started to get worried. They both decided to check on Yannie to see if she was okay. When they found Yannie, she was lying on the ground unconscious, they were panicked when suddenly a soldier appeared behind them and offered some help. They took Yannie to the nearest hospital and let her heal for a week.

After Yannie had healed, they went to another country to get the last material. They got it after three days and travelled back to China. They finished building the Mogao Grotto cave after 2 months. Yuezun thanked Faliang and Yannie for their help and sent them back home.

Endless Caves

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Yan, Hei Hugo – 9

Have you ever been to the Mogao Caves? No? Then let me tell you a story about it.

One day, in the far, far, future, there was a group of four children, eager to go on any adventure. Once, they had gotten into a secret base belonging to the military. Their parents were not very pleased. Well, their parents were top scientists that were working on a time machine. They had a prototype in their house that was very buggy. The kids thought that the prototype was a real time machine. They decided to ride their time machine to the 1900s to impress some people with the super advanced technology from the future. Without permission, they climbed onto the machine and they headed off into the past. As usual, the prototype malfunctioned, and they were whisked off to the ancient Mogao Caves, in the medieval times.

Let's get to know the kids. One of the kids was called Daniel. He was often the leader of the group. He was very brave and fearless, although he was not very bright. Cammy was an explorer that liked to take risks; however, she was very clumsy. Ben was the brightest of the four. He was a bit shy sometimes. Tiffany was quick witted and energetic. She sometimes would run off all by herself, leaving the others behind.

Year : 1900

Place: Mogao Caves, Cave 36, Dunhuang, China

"W—where are we?", Ben asked, stumbling out of the rubble.

"Umm...Is it the Mogao caves?" Tiffany asked.

It was dark and spooky inside the caves, and it was like a maze so no one could get out. They were trapped inside the cave, with only a month's rations left. The time machine was broken, so they had to build one from scratch.

The boulder led them to a huge room. There was a skylight at the top. They used whatever they could find, books, rocks, and paper. They climbed to the top. Daniel sighed and pulled out the ball from his pocket. The ball emitted a faint glow. It started to shine.

They were being transported to the future! They were safe at last, running into their parents' arms.

The Adventure in the Mogao Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Zhang, Rachel – 11

It was a summer holiday. My friend, Tia and I were sitting on a train to Dunhuang. How my friend managed to entice me to see the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang for the holidays, I did not know, but according to Tia, Dunhuang's caves were one of the most amazing places in the world.

When we arrived in Dunhuang, all I saw was sands, sands and sands. I was about to point out that this place didn't look as amazing as it was described, my best friend exclaimed, "Wow! This place is SO beautiful! Just look at the sand! They're not too light. They're not too dark. They are the most beautiful shade of yellow. And look! Don't the sand piles look like waves?" I nodded my head, not wanting to burst Tia's bubble, "So why don't we explore the Mogao Grottoes?"

We walked along the road to find a closed cave. Tia sighed, "Pity. This was one of the most wonderful caves here in Dunhuang." I nodded, pretending to know what she was talking about. Just then, my best friend's face lit up. "Rachel!" she cried out loud, "Let's just sneak in there!" "Are you sure, Tia? I mean, it's closed after all," I replied. However, my friend seemed to be obsessed with the idea of going into the closed cave as she later on pulled me in there with her.

Nothing odd happened at first. However, when Tia just started to enjoy herself, looking happily at the beautiful pictures on the wall, she suddenly tripped over something. "Ah!" cried Tia. Then came a flash of lighting. Tia and I were surrounded by the mist. It was extremely thick, even if I placed my hands in front of my eyes, I wouldn't been able to see them. "Tia!" I cried in the mist. "I'm here!" a voice echoed across the room. I made my way towards her voice. "I hope the mist will clear soon, Tia," I whispered to her. However, after a long time, the mist did not disappear. Tia and I were trying desperately to clear the fog by fanning our hands, but still, the mist thinned very slowly. When it disappeared, the paintings on the walls were gone. Around Tia and me were the ghost versions of the pictures on the wall.

"Hello girls," said one of the ghosts, "Thank you for freeing us from the pictures." Tia and I were too stunned to speak. When I finally found my voice again, I said, "Are you good guys or bad guys?" The ghosts gave out a snort of laughter. "This is no story, children!" cried another ghost, "How famous are we now?"

"Very famous I guess?" I muttered, "but I don't get it how all of you are as impressive as Tia described." That earned me a kick from Tia. "Oh, no! Don't say that!" she cried desperately, "I thought I convinced you that the Mogao Grottoes are amazing!" A ghost shook its head, "We, the flying apsaras, may not be amazing, but our friends are!" With that it pulled Tia and me out of the cave to explore the others.

Tia and the flying apsaras pulled me into the 257 cave. There were paintings of very colorful deer. "Every picture has its own story, and these paintings represent the stories of the nine-colored deer," explained Tia. "Very good indeed!" smiled an apsara, "and here is the story of it..."

"Once upon a time, there was a greedy merchant. He was lost in a storm and was losing hope. Suddenly he saw a radiant deer, gleaming with color. The nine-colored deer helped the merchant get out of danger in exchange for not telling others its place. However, when the king announced that whoever could tell him where the nine-colored deer was, the merchant gave in to his greed and led the way to where the deer was. When the deer was caught, she asked the king how they found her. The king told the deer that the merchant led the way. Feeling betrayed, the nine-colored deer told the king the whole story. Horrified by the fact that there was such a despicable person in his country, the king banished the merchant from his country and made sure that no one would ever harm the nine-colored deer again."

"So, the story teaches us that people who break vows and promises wouldn't have a good ending," concluded Tia. I nodded, deep in thought. "So, what do you think about the Mogao Grottoes now?" asked an apsara slyly. I snapped out of my daze, "It's amazing, but I'm still not impressed." The flying apsaras signed, "Looks like I have more work to do..."

In spite of my denial, I was actually deeply impressed by the Mogao Grottoes. As I watched the stunning sunset, across the Dunhuang Desert, I thought, the traditional Chinese culture was definitely magnificent.

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Po On Commercial Association Wan Ho Kan Primary School, Cho Hei, Kwong Cho – 10

Mogao grottoes, a tunnel to the lost world, holds breath taking secrets and stories of religious, commercial, and cultural exchange of the ancient Silk Road.

It all started when a Buddhist monk named Le Zun was crossing the Gobi Desert on his journey to the Western Paradise. He found a special spring which allowed him to quench his thirst. There he saw the image of Maitreya Buddha in the sky, with a thousand beaming Buddhas emerging and fairies playing heavenly music. He was greatly impressed and decided to stay and make the first cave with his painting and sculpturing skill. Years later, more Buddhist monks came and carved more caves with detailed paintings and amazing sculptures, which made it quickly a pilgrimage site for not only monks, but also for traders and artists.

It has a significant cultural heritage as it includes different types of art such as architectures, murals and sculptures. These masterpieces dates back to a period of over a thousand years, from the 5th to the 14th century. The art style of the murals and sculpture is very unique as it combines both foreign cultures with traditional Chinese art. One of the examples is the art of flying fairies. Most Chinese traditional art involves people in full traditional Chinese clothing. However, the paintings also show clothing from other cultures like Tibetans, Indians and even Turks. It shows great cultural diversity of the Mogao Caves. Moreover, the sculptures of Buddhas are mind blowing as they are massive, often accompanied with devas, heavenly kings and other mythical creatures. It certainly shows fascinating details with incredible historic value. This also has great impact on literature. The best known manuscripts of the Mogao Caves are the Dunhuang manuscripts. It is one of the greatest treasure troves of ancient documents found. Surprisingly, not all of them are Buddhist scripts and it also contains a large amount of administrative documents, including a lot of Confucian and Taoist manuscripts that were previously unknown or thought lost, which greatly contribute to the Chinese literature. They also offer insights of both religious and secular matters of ancient China which give us a glimpse into the lives of people back then.

Having witnessed the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties, The Mogao grottoes bares the history of Buddhism and also shows the cultures, art, religions and civilizations in ancient China. It carries not only historic values, but also shows the interaction among China and other cultures in Asia.

Flying

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Chu, Tsz Ho – 11

It was at the dawn of early spring, You ring the morning Bell, waking me up, I have not seen your face in the chaos, you have disappeared in the mist, Perhaps, in the middle of summer noon, you shine everywhere, burn me, glorious light stabbing my gaze, you have disappeared in a sparkle of color. Perhaps, in the late autumn dusk, you unload the sunset, send me to sleep, hazy I have not seen your appearance, you have disappeared in the twilight. Perhaps, it was in the dead of a winter night when you carried in the wind and snow and froze me. Though my eyelids were not closed in the numbness, you disappeared into the darkness. You appeared shuddered suddenly disappeared when I was happy, leaving me delighted. You sometimes fly away, but I care, and you are sometimes close at hand. But I forgot, you Came from the Dunhuang Murals, you rebound PIPA flying into the nine days.

Dream back to The Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Qi, Jiang Rui – 10

I dream that I went back to the past, and I was in Mogao Grottoes with people.

I saw them digging Mogao Grottoes, and I joined their team. I wanted to paint something with an auspicious meaning, celebrating my motherland, family, and myself in a meaningful way.

I also want to carve some Buddha statues and then worship them piously to pray for my family, free from disease and disaster. In this way, I painted many murals and carved many Buddha statues. The whole cave can be regarded as a treasure house. I think my cave is genuinely an “auspicious treasure house.”

Open the World of Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Song, Zi Yi – 12

Today is the first day of the National Day holiday. My parents and I will visit the famous scenic spot of the Mogao Grottoes in China.

My father booked the tickets the night before we left. After we packed up, we went shopping in the supermarket. After 3 p.m., we set out from Shenzhen to Dunhuang City, Gansu Province. This journey is too slow and long! It took about thirty-three hours to reach the destination. It was already more than ten o'clock in the evening. My family and I stayed in the hotel we had made an appointment in advance. To not wait a long time, we got up at seven in the morning and took a bus to Mogao Grottoes after breakfast. I am thrilled and looking forward to it! Let's start a wonderful trip to Mogao Grottoes! You must have heard legends about the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, such as King's corpse cutting meat to save pigeons, the prince Sarina sacrificing his life to feed tigers, 500 robbers becoming Buddhas, and Zhang Qian's mission to the western regions. Before going out, my father and I talked about many famous Dunhuang murals, such as flying fairies, nine colored deer, buildings of the Tang Dynasty, flying Buddha statues and landscape paintings, and various graphics and patterns. The colorful murals in the photos surprised me, but I knew how spectacular it was when I really came to the Dunhuang murals. The retro colors, the soft lines, the ever-changing characters, and the vast pavilions. In addition to a large area of murals. I also saw some Buddha stone carvings. After observation, I found that many Buddha statues' eyes are closed or half-open. Why? I asked my father about this, my father told me that the Buddha closed his eyes because people closed their eyes when they settled, so when building the Buddha, they closed their eyes. How interesting!

When I visited the Mogao Grottoes, I thought of a poem, "thousands of Mogao Grottoes are lined with singing sand, and the cliffs are covered with colorful clouds. Outside the Cuimeng Pavilion Road of Populus, the ninth floors are connected with sunlight", to praise the Mogao Grottoes.

Children Who Left Stories of New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Wu, Yancheng – 10

People in the book :

Ben—Teacher in the team, he likes writing very much!

Peter—Children tourist group's captain always brings a notebook everywhere.

Emma—The youngest child in the team, but she is the cleverest.

Sam—Peter's younger brother is the richest boy on the team.

Chapter 1 Begin Travel

On a warm day, Peter was at home with his mom. "Mom," he said, "I'm bored!" His mom thought a moment and said, "Do you want to travel with your friend?" Peter jumped, "Yes, I do! Hooray!" "So tomorrow, you need to ask some of your friends to get them to an agreement, OK?" Peter smiled, "OK!"

The next day, Peter woke up very early to ask his friends. At last, the names on the paper were "Emma," "Sam," and "Peter." The adult's name was "Ben." He reported to his mom, and his mom said, "Excellent! You can go tomorrow!"

(In video call)

Ben: Is everybody here? Let's make a roll call. Peter?

Peter: Here!

Ben: Emma?

Emma: Here!

Ben: Sam?

Sam: H-E-R-E, here!

Ben: Hahaha, everybody is here. Let's begin our meeting now. We will start our trip tomorrow, at 9:00 a.m.

Emma: Where should we meet?

Ben: Mmmmm, you need to take your luggage with you and wait at your house's door. I will catch a taxi to take us to the airport. OK?

Sam, Peter, and Emma: OK! Bye!

Chapter 2 Begin Travel

(On the taxi)

"Where are we going?" asked Sam, "Where is it?" "We are going to the Mogao Grottoes!" Ben said, "It is 25km southeast of Dunhuang City, Gansu Province." Emma said, "I know something about Mogao Grottoes: Mogao Grottoes, commonly known as the Thousand Buddha Cave, is in Dunhuang at the west end of the Hexi corridor. There are 735 caves, 45,000 square meters of murals, and 2,415 clay-colored sculptures." "Wow, Emma, you are very clever!" said Peter. "We are ready to get on the airplane, come on!" said Ben, "Let's get off the taxi now."

Three hours later, they were at Gansu airport. "Wow! I can't believe I arrived in Gansu Province, where the mysterious Mogao Grottoes are, so soon!" said Ben, "Let's catch a taxi to the Mogao Grottoes!"

Ten minutes later, they were at the Mogao Grottoes. "Let's get in!" they said. "Wow, it's amazing," said Sam, as he touched the wall painting. There was a big hole on the wall, and the wall ate Sam! "OH! My god! Sam!" They tried to help Sam, but they were eaten by the wall too. Wow, they flew to a strange place with many old buildings! Emma

said, "This is ancient China." What an exciting thing! They saw so many flying Apsaras in the sky, and the buildings looked the same as the Mogao Grottoes.

They said "Hello" to the flying Apsaras, but they had no response. It seems they can't listen to their voice. They fly and dance peacefully and beautifully. There are even some flying Apsaras playing Chinese musical instruments.

Suddenly, Peter jumped and then he couldn't stand on the ground. He was flying! They followed him, and everyone was flying, too!

Chapter 3 Real Travel

Ben looked at his watch, and it was time to close, and suddenly they were back to the outside of the Mogao Grottoes. They found this was just a video of the grottoes, and they could begin to watch the real Buddha Statue now. After they saw the Flying Apsaras, they could understand the beauty of the wall painting very well now.

What an excellent art record! Ancient China had many exceptional artists.

Emma told everybody, "This is the most famous painting in the world. The ancient people used the natural material to color the wall painting." And the Buddha Statue looked real. When you look at their eyes, they say something to let people have inner peace.

Chapter 4 Get a Map

After 3 hours, they were tired, and they looked around and found a small room, and there were four chairs, and they were so tired that they all fell asleep. In the dream, they saw the old buildings and flying Apsaras again. What another exciting thing! But this time, the flying Apsaras could talk with them. They told them that ancient China was very good at painting and they just recorded a small part in the Mogao, and for more good paintings you can look for in China, that means there are some places have that more painting, but now we don't know where they are! And they gave them a map to look for them.

They woke up, and they found a map in everybody's hand!

Chapter 5 Back Home

Peter told everybody that it was time to go back home, and he suggested looking for the paintings on the map again when they were back home. Everyone said this was a good idea! They looked at their map and found only one part on everyone's map, so they should add up and work together. After this, they caught a taxi to the airport and returned home. Everyone still thought about the plane's magic dream, the flying Apsaras, and the old buildings they saw in the plan.

Another Me in the Mogao Grottoes

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Zhu, Sze Kei – 12

Emily: An ordinary pupil, she is the protagonist, that is, me.

Selina: This is my sister. She is an ordinary college student.

Dad: He is the person who organized the trip.

Another Emily: She is severe and seems to be behind the plot.

Chapter 1

It's sunny today. Dad said to us, "look, how nice the weather is today!" My sister and I replied perfunctorily, "The weather is perfect." Dad leaned forward and said, "You stay at home every day. It's time to take you out to play." I looked up at him. Dad smiled and said, "Let's travel to Mogao Grottoes!"

Chapter 2

The weather in Dunhuang is so hot that my hair is sweaty. My sister complained, "Dad, when do we have to line up to get in?" Dad replied, "Soon, don't worry." I looked at the entrance, and there seemed to be a force attracting me, which made the cold wrap my whole body.

Chapter 3

The initially clear sky began to turn black, and we also entered the mogao grottoes. I saw a lot of Buddhas. They are very exquisite. I also saw the murals on the wall. They are the same as the characteristics of Buddhas statues. Their artistry is superb. Suddenly, the world I saw became dark. I only heard a girl's evil laughter. I turned around and saw a girl wearing the same clothes coming towards me. Like two peas, I saw her facial features were the same as mine! I trembled and asked, "Who are you?" The girl smiled and replied, "I'm you, the other you." "What do you want?" I asked. "What do I want to do?" She stared at me. "I want to replace you." I opened my mouth wide and looked at her in horror. "You are a cowardly waste!" She yelled at me. "I have ambition. I can win, I can win, I can achieve, I can do many things you can't do! Why do you control my body?" There was an evil smile on her face. She said, "now, I'm going to take back what belongs to me."

Chapter 4

The scene around me began to become dear. Is creamed. My father and sister were bleeding and lying on the ground in pain. The Buddhas statues around are also stained with bright blood. Dad stared at me with bloodshot eyes and shouted, "You're a murderer!" dad didn't care about hope. He vented his hatred to me with his eyes. At this time, I noticed that I had a knife in my hand. Suddenly, my trembling hands became out of control and slowly stabbed me in my stomach. My pupils suddenly shrunk, and pain filled my whole body.

Chapter 5

"Emily! Emily!" cried, my father. I opened my eyes and saw my father and sister sitting next to me. "God, you scared me." I looked around and found that the Buddhas around me were no longer covered with blood but seemed to have come back to life and looked at me kindly. I thought to myself: they saved me. But then I heard a gentle laugh that made my blood run cold.

Anaisa

Renaissance College, Stone, Esme – 10

Dear Alzin Bruschel,

We regret to inform you that your friend, Brother Bodhin, though you may have known him as “Canjel Aconis”, had been missing for a week until Brother Caldane found him in the Mogao Caves. He was alerted by a flash of bright light omitted from a part of the caves that we had not searched.

Brother Bodhin’s body seemed to have transformed into a statue. We knew it was the real Brother Bodhin because the statue was dressed in his robes and the satchel contained his tiny ink bottle and two of the letters that I have enclosed within. The other was found in his hand. The ring mentioned in the letters was nowhere to be seen.

Brother Bodhin was found surrounded by other statues of monks that had gone missing some years ago. They were all found in positions of agony on the floor.

Perhaps he was misguided in his way of thinking about how to reach nirvana. Brother Bodhin followed the path of the others who became statues, and now nirvana remains forever unreachable.

Buddha bless you,

Brother Banzan
Mogao Caves Monastery

Tales From the Mogao Grottoes

Renaissance College, Wong, Kityu – 9

Friday 21 March, 1899

It was a cheerful day at Meijo School of Fairies and Anna, an air fairy, just finished her history class. She had never liked history before, particularly human history. But today her history teacher, Mr. Heb, talked all about the Mogao Caves. She was fascinated by the paintings and sculptures inside the caves that Mr. Heb explained to the class. However, the books in the classroom never told them where exactly the caves were. The book was written when the caves were built, so everybody knew where they were and as a result, they didn't need to write the location. They only wrote about how wonderful they were and Anna wanted with all her heart to be the first one to find them. As she was an air fairy, she could fly there. Plus, she was also the best in every single class except for History. She definitely could find it! She was just heading to the cafeteria for lunch when Atona, her best friend, showed up: "Hi, Anna! Where are you going?"

"To lunch! You wanna sit with me?" Anna replied.

"Sure!" Atona was also an air fairy, but unlike Anna, she wasn't the best in the class. However, Atona was sportier, better at flying, and could also swim better than Anna. Those two were the best possible pair!

"Hey Atona?"

"Yeah?"

"Have you ever thought of being the first one to find the Mogao Caves?"

"If I knew where they were, it would be a piece of cake. But I don't have the knowledge to find out."

"What if I found out and we went together?"

Atona thought about it for a while and then said: "Sure, but we are not allowed to skip class! Plus, we only have the weekends off, and I am guessing that 2 days is not enough!"

Anna replied easily "I thought about it already. We can go during the Easter holidays. I have three whole weeks to research, then we can use one week to travel."

"Ok!" Atona smiled and the two friends went off to lunch.

It was nighttime and Anna was lying on her bed in her dorm. All she could think about was the Mogao Caves. Anna knew one of her ancestors must have been a painter or something in the caves, because she once read a book taken from her house's store room about working in the beautiful caves. She remembered it was signed: Mara, but had no idea who that was. She was thinking about going home on Saturday and asking her mom about this. But for today, she was really tired after flying, so she fell asleep easily.

Saturday 22 March, 1899

"MOM! I am HOME," Anna shouted. Anna heard her mom coming down the stairs. "Hi sweetheart! Go and eat some of the lozenges I just made! Honey flavoured, your favourite!"

"Thanks, mom, but I wanna ask something."

Anna's mom stopped where she was and asked with suspicion, "Yes?"

Hesitantly, Anna said, "Do you know who Mara is?"

“Oh! Surprised you should ask. She was your grandma’s grandmother's mother. A bit confusing, but basically she was your very old ancestor. She was also a painter in the Mogao Caves! Being a painter in the caves had very high pay, and they left amazing artwork behind. Only one out of 100 people could have that job, so she was probably the most famous ever in our family.”

Anna smiled: “Does she know where the Caves are?”

Her mom thought deeply and then said, “She did write where it was at the very front of her book about the caves. The book is... ummm” Anna’s mom pulled out something from a box and then said: “Here.”

Anna grabbed the book and looked. “WHAT! It’s in Dun Huang, Gan Su? But that is only a 1 hour flight! Me and Atona can get there in no time!”

Anna rushed through the clouds and flew right back to Meijo School. She found Atona looking for things to bring, and Anna rushed to tell her, “Let’s go!”

“Go where?” Atona asked, confused.

“Dun Huang! Mogao Caves! Just go, bring your water and let’s leave!” Atona quickly filled up her water bottle and she flew up in the air. “Lead the way then Anna!”

They flew, and before they knew it, they reached Dun Huang. “Ok, Atona, here we are. Listen closely!” Like cats and bats and owls and foul creatures like wolves, fairies had excellent hearing, especially Atona. They listened through the sand for the hollow sound of empty caves, especially those nearby the many oases of the desert. They made it through almost the whole desert, when suddenly, Atona shouted, “Listen! A hollow sound!”

They dug and dug and they tried to find the caves, and when all hope seemed lost, Anna remembered something. “Hey Atona, take your water and pour it on the sand.” Atona did what she was asked and slowly, the stone caves began to appear from the sand. They were so excited and they continued breaking the sand up around the clear stone figures. After hard work and one hand after another, they finally finished one small cave. The joy of finally finding a cave gave them a burst of determination to find more. Even if they were fascinated by the paintings and sculptures, they knew they needed to keep being archeologists. Hours passed and they finally finished the whole thing. They were too tired to fly back, so they used a magic wind to carry them all the way home.

Everyone kept asking them questions about the caves, but the sculptures and artwork were too precious to be told. Thanks to Anna and Atona, the Mogao Caves were once again open to the world to discover and marvel over.

The Treasures of the Mogao Grottoes

Renaissance College, Wong, Ella – 10

Treasure. The thought ploughed through Richard's mind as he wandered through the museum. He was looking for the new exhibit about the Mogao Grottoes. Treasure. Yes, he told himself, he'd get to treasure soon. The museum had announced that it had unearthed priceless treasures in the Mogao Caves, and Richard loved treasure. What could it be? He wondered. Gleaming gold coins, or shiny round jewels? Costly bolts of silk, or animal skins?

He quickly glanced around. The lights were all off, the world pitch black, illuminated only by the frail beam of his torchlight. His footsteps echoed eerily on the marble floor tiles. Richard loved treasure, yes, and he'd go to extraordinary lengths to get it. The new exhibit wasn't due to open to the public until tomorrow. Richard simply couldn't wait that long. Excitement sent chills snaking down his spine, and tension buzzed in the air. Richard was greedy, he couldn't deny it. And he wanted the museum's treasure, even though he knew it was wrong. Richard was a thief with a liking for money—and whatever he could sell for some.

Heart pounding, he pushed open the polished oak doors that led to the new exhibit. A bright yellow banner strung above the doorway proudly proclaimed, *Mogao Grottoes Exhibit. Discover the wonders of the past!*

The room was large and circular, and the walls—gleaming with mosaic tiles arranged into pictures of monks shrouded in their vibrant, amber-orange robes, as if they were wrapped in molten sunlight, meditating with peaceful smiles on their faces—were lined with shelves. Richard shone his torchlight onto the shelves. Half of them carried small stone statues and bright painted icons, all of a smiling Buddha. On the other half, hundreds of scrolls rested on the shelves, each one emblazoned with words in flowing black ink. There were poems and stories and quotes of wisdom, but Richard didn't care about that. He shook his head in disgust and his gaze fell on the glass box in the middle of the room.

The glass box's bottom was embedded with white lights that would shine dazzlingly when the museum opened, throwing its treasure into a beam of brilliant light. Richard swallowed. His breathing quickened; his heart went so fast and so hard he was certain it was going to burst out of his chest. He wondered that it didn't give him away; surely someone must have heard it?

Slowly, he shone his torch into the glass box... For a moment he didn't dare breathe. He looked, and looked again. His eyes stared disbelievingly, and confusion furrowed his brow. Was this a joke? Inside the glass box lay a wrinkled piece of paper, yellowed by age, the edges charred and black. It looked like a decaying tooth. Richard wanted to splutter in shock, but he clenched his teeth. The slightest sound and he'd give himself away. Words danced across the seemingly worthless paper, written in ink as black as night.

Richard leaned forwards. This isn't treasure! His mind screamed, but his heart told him to read it. His gaze roving over the yellowed paper, he began to read the coal-coloured words.

Be grateful for what you have.

That was it?

Richard's mind churned, trying to explain how this useless piece of paper was treasure. Slowly, it dawned on him that what the paper said actually made...sense. Lots of sense.

He thought about what he had. He had a family who loved him and who had no idea what he was doing now. Guilt twisted his heart into knots. He had enough money to live for a month, and after that he could easily find a decent job. He remembered quitting two years ago, convinced his salary wasn't enough, and turning to a life of crime. More guilt; it stole his breath, made his stomach churn, clogged up his throat. He had so much compared to people who had so little; some people had no home and no money and no food or water to drink, and here he was—he had all that and still he wanted more.

How could he have been so greedy, so selfish? More importantly, what was he doing at this time, taking the treasure before others could enjoy it? Everyone had a right to learn from this paper and its benevolent wisdom.

In that moment, Richard made a silent vow to himself. He wouldn't do this again. He couldn't. All his life he'd been chasing after money and jewels and things he could sell, but what good had his money ever done him? It hadn't

given him any happiness at all. Instead, the more riches he accumulated, the bigger the yawning hole in him stretched: the chasm that hungered for even more money, and yet grew bigger and greedier with each coin that fell into it.

Everything was crystal clear now. Silently, he thanked the infinite wisdom and the incredible insight the paper held—its true treasure, he realised—and slipped away to walk home.

Moonlight washed his steps in beams whiter than milk and the stars winked down at him from above. As he looked at them, Richard felt a sense of wonder that he'd never felt before. He'd always taken the sky for granted, but maybe he shouldn't. He was lucky to have been born a human, on Earth. Richard thought for a while, bouncing with happiness. He already had all the treasures in the world. His family loved him more than anything, he was perfectly healthy, and now he understood what he had, every inch of him was filled to the brim with joy and gratitude.

The future might rob him of all of that, but right now, in this moment, Richard knew only how to be thankful.

And he understood that what he had was priceless; more expensive than any amount of gold.

In Search of Immorality that Led to a Death

S.K.H. St. Peter's Primary School, Cheung, Gabriel Ka Ho – 11

In 366 AD, a monk was travelling along the Silk Road. Suddenly, he saw a vivid vision flashing in such detail and elaborate visuals. He could no longer fall asleep and was lured into a cave and started painting, engraving and carving all the mysteries that had come to him.

Waking up in an empty bed, Philip decided to sign up for a long holiday to the Silk Road. He had to get away from all the familiarity, after the divorce.

He always thought it was just a cave, but he didn't know it encompassed a collection of 492 caves. On the third day of the trip, he was at the famous Mogao Caves. He and other tourists were being introduced to their guides of the day, three monks from a nearby temple.

"Isn't Monk Peace's turn today?" one of the monks asked the taller monk.

"He didn't show up," the taller one explained.

"That's strange, as he's never missed his shift," the shorter one responded.

As the tour began, many tourists stopped by the third cave for a break, but not Philip. He wanted to take in all the information to stop his mind wandering back to his bitter-sweet memory of his marriage.

When they got to the tenth cave, it was just Philip and the taller monk. The cave was dim but tranquil, with many paintings of Buddhas on the wall. There was a single splash of red paint on the ground. Philip approached for a better look and smelled blood! Laying there was a monk with his eyes wide open. "Look! Is that a body?" the monk screamed.

"Let me look." Philip, on the other hand, was as cool as a cucumber. Philip was thrilled that now he had a crime to solve.

Philip kneeled next to the corpse, observing the bruises on the neck without touching them. He knew better than to contaminate the crime scene. After an initial examination, Philip called for reinforcement. One of the police officers was Paul, who was twice as tall as his partner, Bill, who, on the other hand, was pretty short. Later, they found a wedding band inside the victim's pocket and a pair of broken glasses next to the body. However, none of them found any fingerprints or footprints.

"The suspect was so meticulous; he had cleared up the crime scene," Paul concluded.

Philip summarised, "We have four leads. First, considering these glasses are made of gold, we can deduce the suspect is rich. Second, the suspect suffers from myopia, considering the curves of the lenses. Third, none of these monks is responsible, as they can't get married. Finally, the suspect is either married or engaged."

"The monks have confirmed the identity of the body as Monk Peace," added the shorter officer.

"I know where the suspect might have bought this pair of glasses. These golden glasses are special items at Delta Optical," Phillip recalled.

"How can you be so sure that the murderer got it at Delta?" Paul inquired.

"Delta Optical specialises in manufacturing this type of eyewear," explained Philip.

“Sweet, let’s head to Delta Optical now,” Paul said in excitement. On the horsecar, Philip examined the wedding band closely and found it was from De Beers Jewellery, and the initials ‘M.T.’ were engraved on the inside of the ring.

“Interesting. M.T. Enterprise is the one financing the renewal of the Mogao Caves,” said the taller officer.

“Perhaps, we should visit the M.T. headquarters,” suggested Philip.

Arriving at Delta Optical, the officers began interviewing the shop attendant. “Please provide us a list of customers that have made an appointment for next week,” they asked.

“Why do you need it?” The shop attendant was curious.

“We think the suspect may come to this optical store next week to get a new pair of glasses,” the officers explained. And without much surprise, they found a Martin Torres booked an appointment for a new pair of glasses, same model, same configuration.

“Shall we head to the temple and see if we can find any connection between Monk Peace and our suspect Mr M?” Philip advised.

Later, they learnt that Monk Peace was an expert on the Immortal Buddha in particular. Yet, he had never revealed which of the thousand Buddhas was the Immortal Buddha for fear of theft. Just that an idea came to Philip.

On the next day, the announcement of “The Debut of the Immortal Buddha” went viral on major social media platforms. “A private tour of the Immortal Buddha will be given to the highest bidder,” the abbot announced.

In the morning of the private tour, Philip, the two officers and the abbot were waiting at the entrance of the Mogao Caves. Coming out of the private helicopter was none other than Martin Torres, the multibillionaire. Seeing the police officers, M.T. looked mortified but quickly regained his composure. “I’d not answer any question without the presence of my lawyer,” he requested.

When they arrived at the police station, Mr Torres told Philip and the officers that one day he overheard two monks at a bar talking about the Buddha of Immortality at the Mogao Caves. He was intrigued because he wanted to know the secret of living forever. He then approached Monk Peace alone and offered him a hundred thousand gold coins. Monk Peace, however, rejected the offer. The argument got heated, and he accidentally pushed Monk Peace against the stone wall, and that, he died.

After killing Monk Peace, Torres panicked. He had never killed a person before. So, learning from all the crime movies he had watched, he wiped off all his fingerprints with his tie and took off.

“Thanks for your honesty,” said the taller officer.

Philip silently left. His quest for love may have ended in divorce, and Torres's pursuit of immortality caused a death and a sentence. Philip was glad he could start over and genuinely prayed for Torres's soul to be redeemed.

An Adventure to the Mogao Grottoes

S.K.H. St. Peter's Primary School, Li, Chak Ping Ramsey – 10

It was a moonlit night with a clear sky. As usual, I quickly fell into a sweet dream after saying good night to Mum.

I was flying freely and finally landed in an exotic place with foreign vibes. I found myself in an oasis city, enveloped by oceans of drifting sand. Just when I felt totally confused, I saw people in queer outfits walking towards me. I couldn't help but wonder where I was.

Then, I saw a monk. "Master, may I know where I am?" I asked. "Young benefactor, you must be foreign, aren't you? This is Dunhuang's Mingsha Mountain, a place where traders must pass. It's also called the Silk Road," the monk replied calmly. "What? This should be the Qin Dynasty. How come I've gone back in time?" I muttered anxiously, thinking about what I should do. Although I learned about Dunhuang in history books, being alone in this ancient desert was unimaginable and disturbing!

Just as I was baffled and flooded with anxiety, the monk comforted me, "My name is Le Zun, please don't panic. Look at the golden lining upon Mingsha Mountain. It must be the Buddha's appearance. The Bodhisattva shall bring you to wherever you wish to go, Amitabha!" After hearing his kind words, I felt more secure, but still I didn't know when I could return home.

That evening, Master Le Zun invited me to join him. I didn't know where to go, so I agreed. I told Master, "My name is Alvin. I live in the southern city of Hong Kong, and I come from 2022." I took a glance at Master, then I continued, "2022 is more than 2000 years from here. There are many skyscrapers and cars in Hong Kong..." To my surprise, Master didn't doubt what I told him; instead, he seemed to be fascinated, as if he had been to a place called Hong Kong before.

Suddenly, we heard roosters crowing – it was already dawn. The hostess of the family we were staying with prepared a piping hot breakfast for us. It reminded me of the delicious bacon omelette Mum always makes for me. I felt like crying and teared up.....

"Don't be sad, my young benefactor." Master Le Zun said. "I shall take you to Mingsha Mountain to chant sutras. The Bodhisattva will surely help when He hears your heartfelt words. Amitabha! Good indeed! Good indeed!"

Although not feeling entirely confident, I followed Master Le Zun to Mingsha Mountain. I could see mountains surrounded by clouds and thousands of golden rays, and I faintly saw an apsara with a light body and beautiful look. She had long ribbons flying with her freely in the sky, and the Flower of Luck in her hand drifted away with the wind. Then, one of its petals fell gently on my palm. Its fragrance gave me courage and strength. I felt that the God of Luck suddenly came to me. My heart trembled slightly, and some voices and words in Sanskrit quietly reached my ears. My intuition told me that these Sanskrit voices were revelations given by the Gods – a sacred mission given to me.

From then on, I temporarily let go of my family attachment and wholeheartedly helped Master Le Zun to beg alms. We also wrote copies of the Bodhisattva's wise words and distributed them to local families and business travellers, hoping to get everyone's help to dig the Buddhist caves.

After the news spread, many people donated money and helped us create the grottoes. First, artisans worked together to paint exquisite murals and make human figure frames with sturdy wooden branches. Then, we wrapped the frames in reeds, covered them with mud and painted colours on them. This was how we made the coloured sculptures before their paint dried, and we carefully put them into the grottoes.

Looking at what we had built, we all had a huge smile on our faces. However, when winter arrived, the weather became so unstable that it snowed for three days and nights straight. Many artisans were trapped in the grottoes and were frozen to death. When their families saw their frozen bodies, they wailed in grief. I also felt aggrieved and

deeply saddened. However, the dead artisans' open eyes expressed calmness and tranquillity, as if they were consoling their beloved ones, "Don't worry. We are just going to Heaven a few steps ahead."

Over time, we put grief aside and resumed our work. The artisans worked continuously, and days and years flew by. We went through a dozen long dynasties – Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties and so on. Every day I watched the sun rising from the east and setting to the west, while witnessing the completion of the largest cultural and historical treasure house.

"Wake up, Alvin. Going to be late for school!" I suddenly heard Mum's voice. I opened my tired eyes, and I could still vaguely see the coloured sculptures and murals on my ceiling. The dream was just too real to forget...

It was finally Christmas holiday. I surfed the Internet about the history of Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes, feeling genuinely interested like never before. For the first time, I carefully read the historical documents of the Mogao Grottoes. "Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes, the Thousand Buddha Grottoes, is located at the eastern foot of the Mingsha Mountain, 25 kilometres to the southeast of Dunhuang City in Gansu Province, China. It is a mecca of architecture, sculpture and painting altogether." I enjoyed the texts while reminiscing the unforgettable moments from the dream. Now it seemed even more intriguing and perplexing!

Afterwards, I asked Mum, "May we visit Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes when the pandemic is over?" Mum looked at me doubtfully but quickly agreed, "Of course! I hope that one day I could visit the sacred city of Buddhism too." "Let's go then!" I proclaimed firmly, just like a well-studied archaeologist whose eyes were filled with anticipation to learn about ancient civilisations.

Exploring the Ancient Temple

School of the Nations, Jiang, Karen – 10

Right after the school bell rang, Lily went to the library to meet with her partner for a project. She wanted to start the presentation right away! It was a group project assigned to her, although she was pretty smart, she didn't know what to write! So, she stared at her history book instead. There is an entire presentation about the Mogao Grottoes to fill out! Beside her sat her partner, Noah, who was puzzled. Noah is a boy that likes to draw. Nothing in the history book made sense to him, he looked up the location on the internet.

A few minutes later, Lily took a deep breath and finally said "Why don't we explore the Mogao Grottoes first?" Noah nodded in agreement.

The next day, Lily woke up extra early, she was very excited for the trip, Lily grabbed her phone "Hello? Is this Noah?" But there was no reply. *He must still be in bed*, thought Lily, *He's always late, he's even late for school! But I didn't think he would be late for this too, I should have predicted this!* Lily shook her head, she quickly packed her stuff up, and headed towards Noah's apartment. She knocked on the door. The door creaked as Noah slowly opened it.

"Why this early?" Noah asks with a yawn, "It's only 6:30!"

"I don't care, we are going right now!" Lily said. *It's not even that early!* She added in her mind.

Noah rubbed his eyes sleepily, "But I haven't eaten breakfast y—" He wanted to protest, but Lily interrupted him, she was ready for this! "No excuses! Take this sandwich as your breakfast." she said as she reached into her bag.

Lily stuffed an egg sandwich into Noah's mouth, grabbed Noah's hand and dragged him out. *Here we come, Mogao Grottoes!* She thought excitedly.

Walking to the Mogao Grottoes wasn't easy, in fact it was pretty far, only after a few minutes, Noah started to complain.

"It's been hours!" cried Noah,

"Be patient," said Lily.

"But I don't like walking, my foot hurts!" Noah complained.

Lily ignored him, and opened a map she bought yesterday. It was a map of the Mogao Grottoes.

"Wow..." Noah muttered under his breath, "How prepared are you?!"

A few minutes later, Noah was still complaining, Lily was so annoyed that she even started scolding him. Noah bent down after being scolded by Lily "I beg you!" He said, "Please let us take the bus!"

Lily sighed as she reached into her pocket. There was nothing, not even a single coin. Noah also realized he only had one coin, as he left the rest of his pocket money at home. One coin wasn't enough to pay for one person's bus ride! "I guess we have to walk all the way now. It's good exercise!" Lily shrugged as they walked down the street.

A few hours later, Noah and Lily finally reached their destination.

"The Mogao Grottoes..." Noah looked up, and exclaimed, "It's so tall! Taller than I expected!" Noah grabbed his sketchbook and sketched a couple pictures.

Lily stared at him "You've never seen it before?! Not even in photos?!" *That's weird, I thought he had seen them before*, Lily told herself.

"Why so surprised? I thought you knew!" Noah replied without even looking at her.

Lily just continued staring at him, "No, I never knew that. But, seriously, you haven't seen it before?" Lily frowned.

Noah just took a deep breath and walked in the Mogao Grottoes, "Come on, get over it!" he replied.

Lily raced after Noah, "Hey! Wait for me."

“Woah” gasps Noah, “So many Buddhas, I wonder who made these!”

Lily was curious so she stepped forward. She looked up, she felt a bit awkward. She had never seen this many Buddhas before! Lily looked beside her and realized that Noah had gone to the next room. Lily headed towards the next room, to catch up with Noah. The room was decorated with Buddhas, on the wall, and even on the ceiling.

“More Buddhas!” Lily said, looking surprised, so squeezed Noah’s hand, “Who has time to design all of these rooms?!”

Noah sneered, “I thought you saw it all in the pictures.”

Lily shook her head and didn’t even look at him, instead she stared at the walls, “So many details...” Lily admired the walls for a few more minutes, before walking into the next room, then another, and then another, until they had been through all of the rooms. It was all the same, decorated with Buddha pictures and some even had statues. Noah quickly sketched down what he saw, and Lily, she carefully examined the sculptures and art. “Wow!” Noah and Lily stared at each other “No wonder why our teacher wanted us to make a presentation of this ancient building,” Noah said. Lily nodded in agreement “The art and sculptures were amazing! All the textures, details... Just look at them!” Lily pointed at a nearby sculpture of Buddha.

After a bit more of examining and sketching, they decided to head back towards home by taking the same path. Lily noticed a little library nearby, and the two of them headed towards the library, hoping to get more information about the Mogao Grottoes. Luckily, for them, there were tons of books about the Mogao Grottoes in the library. They took their time reading and finding out more information about the Mogao Grottoes, “Look at this!” Noah showed Lily, it was an old book with tea colored pages, and the cover said ‘History of the Mogao Grottoes.’ Lily found a dusty old book with facts about the Mogao Grottoes.

Noah groaned “I can’t remember all of them!” Lily put her hand in her bag and took out two notebooks and two pencils, “Be glad that I came in prepared, unlike you!” Lily replied. Noah muttered something about being dragged, but Lily didn’t hear it, instead she focused on reading and taking notes. Hours and hours passed, by the time Lily and Noah finished their notes, the sun was setting.

Then Noah put the book back to its proper place and said, “I think I got enough information for our presentation. I think we’ve done enough exploring for today. Come on, let’s go work on our presentation, unless you want to get a low score?”

Noah took Lily’s hand and both of their notebooks and dragged her back home.

Lily grabbed her computer and began typing everything that was on their notes. Noah, thanks to his sketchbook, which he used to sketch a bunch of pictures, easily added the illustrations to the presentation. After a few days of hard work, the presentation was nearly done.

At the end of the week, Lily added some final touches to the presentation before submitting it.

“Good luck to the both of us!” Noah gives Lily a high five.

“I hope the visit was worthwhile.” Lily said.

“Oh, it definitely was.”

The Curse of the Mogao Grottoes

Shanghai Singapore International School, Chaudhury, Tanisha – 11

On a quiet evening Ann, an eight-year-old girl, was in the dining room eating dinner with her family. She is a happy and dauntless little girl. Still safe and living a normal life, little did she know that she was not going to live very long. Rumors about a curse regarding the Mogao Grottoes that had been released in the ancient times (古时候) was spreading rapidly. It also had been rumored that on one unlucky day, the whole Human Race would be wiped out.

“爸爸你前去莫高窟么?” Ann asked her dad, but Ann’s dad didn’t respond.

The next day ,Ann’s mother started acting strange. It felt like she had been affected by the curse.

Even though Ann and her father were suspicious, they did not let their suspicions go far. How could Ann’s mom have the curse?

Or could she?

One midnight, appalling news regarding Ann’s cousin's disappearance came to her family and it came in a horrifying manner.

“小安你的表妹不见了!” exclaimed, Ann’s mother.

Tears flowed heavily down Ann's eyes. Her cousin was so close to her.

The Mogao Grottoes caves are located in Dun hang, China. One night, Kang Kang was listening to the news with his parents about these mysterious caves. The news quoted, "The legend of the Mogao Grottoes is unfortunately true." One of the text scrolls a monk had written proved it. He had stated that thousands of bodies lying sacrificed in these caves have been found. The text scroll was ancient and frightening.

‘Today I found a little boy's body lying near the place where I held my prayers. I am a priest of this cave and have never seen anything like this before. It is mysterious and scary. The boy’s body was covered in blood, and when I turned around, my altar offerings were also covered in blood. When I looked down, I saw a trail of mysterious papyrus lying on the ground. I picked them up and followed them, at the end it brought me to a giant Buddha statue that I had never seen before. I knelt before him, I felt like it was radiating a power so strong I could feel it in the air. As I looked at him, I suddenly felt like I was about to die a peaceful and wonderful death as an offering to Buddha.’

That was the monk’s last word.

Many qualified researchers went and searched for the monk but found nothing.

Kang Kang was amazed, and he wanted to find these caves. At night when his parents were asleep, he ventured out, as he lived close to the caves of Dunhang. He rowed to the front of the cave. There he could see a hidden entrance and went inside. There were bodies in front of the giant statue. It was eyesore to the cave and made the

place creepier. But something didn't feel right, and nothing could have gotten more gruesome than what was going to happen to Kang Kang.

“我在哪儿？” whispered Kang Kang, he turned around and saw the statue radiating a glow.

The next second there was blood all over his body.

He knew death was near. His parents had once told him death is just a next great adventure and there is nothing to fear about it. The thing that you should fear is life, life is the most horrible yet fascinating thing, you never knew what was going to happen.

Before his final breath, his body fell motionless on the ground and he looked around peacefully.

The statue's eyes were the blank. Its face was not scarred with the single bit of emotion instead it was blank and expressionless. It had the same gravely look of respect in its eyes and though it was immobile, it felt like it was moving around the room. There was a sudden movement and in an instant the sound of a body falling hit the ground. Kang Kang lay immobile under the cave. Blood was gushing out of him on the altar and there was a pool of blood underneath.

“妈妈您去哪儿了？” screamed Ann at seven in the morning.

That dull day, Ann's mother's disappearance was reported to the police and the police did their hardest to find her, yet there was no luck. When the news came out to the public it was obvious—everyone was being lured to the Mogao Grottoes.

That day while Ann and her dad were watching the news, it was reported that everywhere people were disappearing.

The next day ,Ann and her father disappeared.

The aftereffects of the curse were seriously escalating, and there was nothing anyone can do about it. They had to go in the cave and retrieve the bodies of their dead loved ones.

Was it the end of humanity? Would the million-year-old curse kill everyone? Did people expect the statue would give up on his revenge of what was committed millions of years ago?

The Little Monk in Mogao Cave 220

Shanghai Singapore International School, Hsueh, Weiyo – 11

It was in 1994 when the three men found a mysterious cave located at the eastern foot of Mingsha Mountain. It was on the west bank of Daquan River, facing the Sanwei Mountain in the east, 25 km away from Dunhuang. A perfect location for making cave temples, it is now called the Mogao Grottoes. Paul Pelliot had wanted to explore the Mogao Grottoes in his life, and the first cave he unlocked was named 220.

Horse hooves trotted across the desert, leaving prints on the sand of the rocky barren. Three men that had leather bags on their backs marched towards the caves. Small rocks landed on the boy's head whilst he held the basket of herbs in his hand. Scars ripped open on his feet from walking on the rough rocks. Blisters formed by scrubbing the bare floor with damp cloth. His hands felt weak as he pulled the rope for the well. He didn't mind. He had just become an apprentice and was ready to learn from his master. The little monk didn't have a name; he was an orphan taken in sanctuary by the monks. His only purpose in life: to help his master.

Color danced in the little monk's eyes as the master drew on the wall, creating a picture of two celestials flying on the sky. It was like a living being, the art. The little monk loved it, especially when his master told him to mix the paint. To create the paint, he had to collect herbs from the nearby hills or mountains. Plants were very hard to find in the desert. Although the little monk had to travel very far to receive one type of flower or root, he still loved it.

That night, under the sickly light of the oil lamp, the little monk saw his master painting on the wall. It was a goddess in the position of flying. After sleeping, the little monk woke up on the floor to see a lively piece of art in front of him.

Turquoise dresses floated along with the movements of the two apsaras. Many other deities stood on the bottom of the massive wall, bodies curved, as if in awe of the goddesses flying. Another goddess had risen to her feet, shape as lifelike as a real human. The little monk opened his eyes wide with curiosity at the painting. He wished it were real.

One day, the little monk's master asked him to collect a special herb. "It helps the painting stay longer on the walls rather than rotting under the wind and dust," his master mentioned to him. The mission became important. It was going to be a long road due to the plant living in special environments, so the little monk would have to climb to the top of Mingsha Mountain in order to receive the herb.

The first few days were calm and steady when the little monk went up the base of the mountain, but the weather got worse. Sand poured into his eyes whenever he tried to open them just a tiny crack. Nothing could be seen in view, but the little monk didn't give up. A flaming hope had ignited in him. He wished to look at the painting on the wall when his master finished the final layer coated on.

The little monk's energy was dwindling and he felt like collapsing when he saw the herb he was meant to retrieve in the sandstorm. The herb's strong roots held it firmly to the ground. He wasted half his energy pulling the plant from the ground.

It had been a few days since the little monk had found a place to rest and sleep. He was extremely tired and stiff. He knew for a second, he was going to perish in the foolish pursuit of finding his way back to the caves in the middle of a sandstorm. The little monk pushed that thought away from his mind and continued for more flowers. Three days had passed, and a cave appeared in front of the little monk. He felt overjoyed. He could almost see the painting shared amongst the other monks coming to the Mogao Grottoes and the smile of the goddess.....

A light shone, filling the small cave with color, blinding the little monk momentarily. The goddesses came alive! Music floated along the painting's streets, sunlight danced into the little monk's fingers and the turquoise-dressed goddess reached out a hand, as if pulling him to heaven.

The Battle at Dunhuang

Shanghai Singapore International School, Lee, Christopher – 11

All this suffering of my people...my country...all because of oil. These last words from the men on the battlefield...their bodies are never coming home. They didn't even have a proper burial. It is time we took a stand. It is time to speak up. It is time for an assault. We are taking vengeance to our unfortunate brothers who were slaughtered... Let's annihilate the giant blocking our path to greatness.

"Hey you, what's your name?" It's the commando. I hated that guy. But it was fear. I replied, "It is Din-Shank, sir," in the best voice I could. It was hard, especially since I was trembling in fear at the same time.

"Din-Shank, huh. I've got a position for you."

I gasped. In my mind I was hoping for a squadron leader. But the words that came out of him were "messenger."

Han-Song, my best buddy, snickered. Everyone knew the messenger was the worst. You had to watch your brothers die in your arms and record them down.

"I've been watching you during the artillery. You seem to be a good chatter."

I have no idea what he was up to.

"Well, I think you seem to be a good at chatting and writing down the following events while your fellow brothers die."

"No sir, that would not be a pleasure."

"Too bad someone has to do it." Han-Song laughs once again.

"Messenger, eh? Ha, messengers... so cruel... some people even say worse than being in the midst of war... just standing there... watching people you have been with getting massacred." I remain speechless as the others laugh.

The next morning, we started a jog, a jog like no other. It seemed forever, but we stopped when we heard something. We crept up a hill and see Chinese troops.

"What the heck are Chinese troops doing in Mongolia?" We check the map. We didn't have any idea where we were. But it turns out, we're in China, in the city of Dunhuang. We had to retreat immediately.

It was too late. Chinese troops chased after us as we ran. We ran into a nearby cave. Because it was so dark, we couldn't see a thing. Suddenly, it felt weird. We lit up a flashlight, and there was something that really stood out. Pillars on both sides had drawings of little figures on them, as in the middle, stood a giant statue standing around 20-30 feet tall. I gazed up at the monument as we stare in amazement.

When one of the men were about to move, the commando stopped him. He said that if he moved, all of us would be speaking Chinese. We heard footsteps everywhere, as if the mini figures on the wall moved.

Suddenly, the footsteps got nearer and nearer. Han-Song pulled a grenade and rolled it toward the entrance.

"No!" the commando exclaimed. We grabbed our M16s and opened fire in any direction possible, ruining much of the perfect wall. It seemed like the opposing side were doing the same.

Instantaneously, I heard a cry, "Arrg, help!" It was my best buddy Han-Song. He was struggling between the pillars of life and death. I hurried over to help him, but it was too late. He was shot in the arm and the leg. When I got there, his last words were, "One last thing, I want those men on the other sides to join me."

I cried in despair. Since I knew we weren't going back to Ulaan Baatar anymore, there as no point of living. I pulled the pin of a grenade and sprinted for the cave entrance.

5

Suddenly, a million childhood memories started to come back to me. Mama and Papa buying me ice cream...it all revolved around my family, like something was up. It was like a million butterflies flying around me, but I couldn't catch a single one of them.

4

This is it. Now or never.

3

★Gunshots★ "Gettem!" yelled a Chinese soldier. "He's going to destroy the Mogao Caves!"

2

"Shut up, you little nauseous twit"

1

"For my country."

The Battle at Dunhang

Shanghai Singapore International School, Li, Wei Han – 9

In the year AD 750 during the Song Dynasty, deep in northwest China there was a city called Dunhuang, which has a beautiful oasis to the south of the city with a famous lake called the Crescent Lake. The lake normally has a depth of seven and half meters, but one day, it suddenly dried up, and the local population only had about two weeks of water left. The chief monk Sanzang of the monastery near the Mogao caves ordered a relay of fire signals to be sent back to the capital city of Chang'an. At the time, the emperor Xuanzong learned of this news and immediately sent his top agent named Phoenix to investigate and help the people. Agent Phoenix quickly prepared his equipment, food supply, and five crew members and hopped onto an imperial airship able to travel anywhere in the middle kingdom within five days. He sat in the cockpit and set off towards Dunhuang. On the way, one crew member curiously asked, "Why is this place called Mogao caves?" Phoenix replied, "Mogao means peerless, and you will know why when you see it for yourself."

Within three days, Phoenix and his crew landed on a sandy cliff near the monastery. The crew member excitedly remarked, "Wow! The Mogao caves really is peerless! It is so tall and long, and it has so many beautiful artworks and sculptures from the past!" They were greeted by Sanzang, who told them that the sacred Dunhuang Star Chart had mysteriously gone missing. Phoenix told Sanzang to take them to the location of the Star Chart, which was in Cave 17. Cave 17 has a secret chamber which stored the most sacred scrolls. Phoenix went inside to check for any clues left by the thief. He looked at the floor and found footprints leading to the other side of the room. As the trail finally met the rocky walls, the footsteps also appeared on the walls. Phoenix thought, "I'm pretty sure that he climbed over the walls and onto the roof....and escaped!" Phoenix and the crew went outside of the cave and onto the desert, he noticed that the footsteps continued on so far into the horizon until he cannot see it anymore. Sanzang told Phoenix that he believes that the missing Star Chart is affecting the water in Crescent Lake, so the Star Chart must be found before the towns people start to dehydrate!

Phoenix and his crew boarded the airship. A crew member said to the monks, "Don't worry, my friends! We are going to get the Star Chart back in no time!" They flew for half a day in the southwest direction into the Gobi desert and arrived at a strange, hidden city that was not marked on the map. Phoenix explored the city and went from door to door to ask if anyone has seen the Star Chart. At last, they found an old man who gave them clues. The old man said, "I saw a tiny man holding a scroll with a Star seal walking towards that house over there last night." Phoenix and his crew ran towards the house and found there was a tiny man studying the Star Chart on a table in the middle of the room. Phoenix asked the thief "Hey you! Why did you steal this sacred scroll from the Mogao caves?" The man calmly introduced himself, "My name is Wang Ping. I am poor, and I do not have food to eat. One day, a mysterious man from the West promised to feed me if I can steal this Star Chart for him. He chose me because of my size. Only I can fit through cracks in the walls to reach the secret chamber in Cave 17." Then, Phoenix's crew member said "Give it back! We need it for the townspeople to survive!" Phoenix explained that the moment the Star Chart went missing, all the wells and water in Crescent Lake dried up; it is a curse of the Mogao caves if the Star Chart is not returned to where it belongs.

Before Phoenix finished explaining, Wang Ping snatched the Star Chart and tried to escape. He jumped out the window onto a narrow road. He kicked the side of a wall along the road and the whole wall came crumbling down. Phoenix and one of his crew got over the rubble, but three of the crew members were badly injured. Wang Ping kept running, saw the parked airship, and ran inside it. Phoenix was right on his tail, and there was no escape for Wang Ping. Phoenix and the crew member barged in and locked the door tight. Phoenix snatched the sacred scroll from Wang Ping's hand and tied him up. Phoenix said, "I'm sorry Wang, but you did not listen, so we have to tie you up."

Phoenix and his crew flew back to the Mogao caves. They heard everyone cheering as they landed. Wang apologized to the townspeople, "I am so sorry for stealing your precious Star Chart and causing so much trouble." Sanzang was very forgiving and said, "It is ok, but make sure not to steal anything again, ok?" Wang nodded. Sanzang decided to invite Wang to live in the monastery with them so he can have food and learn to be a good person. As Phoenix placed the map back into the secret chamber of Cave 17, Crescent Lake magically filled up on its own. Now that he has done his job, Phoenix and crew returned home to report the success to the emperor.

Crescent Lake and the townspeople remained happy and well-hydrated for over a thousand years until one day when Wang's descendant, abbot Wang Yuanlu, crossed paths with a gentleman named Sir Aurel Stein at the Mogao caves in the early 1900s, and once more, the Star Chart was removed from its resting place. But that is a story for another time.

The Mogao Malice

Shanghai Singapore International School, Sinha, Niharika – 11

“The Mogao Grottoes, finally we have arrived!” Malena exclaims, looking at the huge front temple. It was Chinese style with seven balconies poking out of the smooth rocky hill. The first floor was the only one with doors. As they went through, the sight amazed Malena. All along the walls there were carvings and paintings. There were probably thousands of statues carved out of the walls. There were many temples on the ground. The place was so big you could get lost in seconds.

“It has been years, since I last came here,” Jason said, looking out to a beautiful sculpture on the wall.

“Can’t believe you went to this beautiful place without me,” Malena whined, looking all around.

“You weren’t born yet!” Jason argued.

“Hello!” A strange-looking man appeared from behind one of the many beautiful temples. He was tall, with freckles dusting the bridge of his nose dotting all the way to his cheeks. Messy, dark hair lingered right above his black mysterious eyes. He was wearing a hunter uniform. He had a long stream of bandages carefully wrapped around his hand.

“My name is Feng. You can call me Will, and I will be your tour guide for today,” he motioned for them to follow.

They followed him, chattering happily. As they visited lots of temples, it started to get dark. When they were about to finish off, Maybelle couldn’t help but be drawn to a particular room.

“What about that one?” Maybelle pointed at a dark room.

“I don’t think we should,” Will stuttered.

“Why not?” Malena asked.

“Well—yo—you see th—that room is haunted.”

“How?”

“Mmm—hmm,” Jason pushed him aside and opened the door.

“No, don’t go in there!” he shouted as they entered.

“Woah, it sure is dark in here” Jason stated, lighting a match.

“Hey, I see something. Over there in the corner!” Malena yelled, pacing towards it.

It was a glass cover that had been broken through the middle. Shattered pieces of glass were inside. Blood peeked through some of the glass shards. A torn piece of silk purple cloth dangled from one of the edges on the cover. Whatever was inside it was gone, and all that was left was empty clues. Fear rushed over them. The siblings raced out of the room.

“Quick, call the police” Malena screamed pointing at the room.

“Wh—what?” Will was trembling.

With a shaky hand, he pulled out his phone and typed in the number. Soon the police arrived.

“I am officer Shu. You will have to stay in this area until this case is solved” Officer Shu said

“We can’t stay here long as our college starts soon.” Malena said

“She’s right. Please let us help with the investigation, it will speed things up.” Maybelle pleaded

“Fine, but I don’t know how a bunch of kids will help.” the officer grumbled. The next day morning they set off to check the site.

"It seems to be someone has smashed the glass." Jason told.

"And the culprit cannot be from outside since security would have stopped them." Maybelle said.

"Why don't we ask the security who was here the night before?" Malena said. They all walked towards security.

"Hello Mr....." Maybelle trailed off.

"Wang Lei" the guard replied.

"Mr. Wang Lei, may I ask you some questions?"

"Fire away." Wang Lei answered.

"Do you happen to know who was on guard the night before yesterday?" Maybelle asked.

"That would be me"

"Do you remember who was here on that night?"

"Let me see, the manager was here having a late-night check. Bolin was here on guard with me, and Will and another tour guide were helping the manager checking the artifacts in this area. Oh, and before I forget, I heard glass breaking. When I came back the manager told me it was nothing to worry about."

"Thanks." The three walked away.

"I'm telling you Maybelle. It's Will." complained Malena.

"Just look at the signs, the glass has blood on it and will has an injured hand. Plus, he was the one telling us not to go in." Jason backed her up.

"I know, but I still don't think it's him" Maybelle answered walking away. The next day morning Maybelle woke up early to question all the people. She started with the manager of the area.

"Where were you the night of the theft."

"I was doing my regular late-night check. I decided to bring Will and Antony along for a look around since they were new. Bolin was sleeping, as usual, but Wang Lei was on duty outside that temple. We went towards my office, they waited outside as I went to grab my keys. When I got there, I heard a crash I came outside and saw Bolin outside my office surrounded by broken glass. He had only broken a vase. I went back and saw Wang Lei worrying. I told him that there was nothing to worry about."

She went from the manager to Bolin, he said that he was sleeping the whole time until Jones woke him up to tell him to get some water. When he went in the office, he was so tired he accidentally knocked down the vase.

Then she interrogated both Will and Antony they said they were waiting outside the office like they were told few hundred meters away from the temple. They had also heard a crash from inside right after they saw Bolin walk in, they were worried so they went in to see Bolin had knocked down a vase.

Later that day Maybelle had called everyone to tell them that she had solved the case.

"Everyone listen up the culprit is none other than.... Wang Lei!"

"What? Impossible!" The manager screamed.

"Listen first, Wang Lei was the only one there at the temple when all of you were at the manager's office. Wang Lei heard a crash, but it happened at the manager's office hundred meters away. How could he hear that? Unless he was trying to frame someone else. He noticed Will had a bandage, so he used that to his advantage and broke the glass when no one was there. The only reason Will was telling us not to go in there was because he did not learn about that temple so he would not know what to talk about in there. Instead of telling us and making him look like a newbie he told us a lie to cover up." Maybelle finished, panting.

The Mogao Caves' Thrilling Secret

Shanghai Singapore International School, Somireddy, Sahasra – 9

"I woke up looking as tired as a zombie and checked my calendar. To my surprise today was the day me and my friend, Katy, were going to the Mogao Grottoes to explore the caves!" I dashed to the bathroom and brushed my teeth with joy and headed downstairs and started packing for my adventurous trip.

Soon I was standing in front of Katy's front yard. Then, I saw Katy with her suitcase. We took an Uber and in about three hours we reached the entrance. We got off the Uber and saw the massive gate. I touched the cold metallic bars and opened the gate, everything there was an amazing sight. People exploring caves, Mogao Grottoes themed comics, history of the Mogao Grottoes and many other amazing sights. We went to our hotel to the fifth floor and sat down to relax.

The television was as huge as an elephant, bathrooms, bedrooms, kitchens all seemed very tidy and clean. "What a luxury hotel! The next day at seven o'clock, I went to the bathroom, brushed my teeth, took a shower, and wore my clothes. I jumped up and down the stairs and saw Katy ordering food for us. We scarfed our food with creamy melted cheese on top and gave a loud burp.

Later, we strolled down the Mogao Caves exploring them one by one. Our next goal was to explore the Buddha Temple to inspect the ancient times of what the Mogao Grottoes history was like. I walked with Katy looking for a tall Cave with moss growing on it. We looked for about five minutes until we saw a tall, mossy cave. It smelled stinky and I could hear loud banging sounds inside there. It was very strange.

We slowly took a step or two and there was a loud thud behind my back. I turned around to see what happened and then I saw that the heavy door was closed. By this point, Katy was almost ready to faint.

I looked ahead in front of the pathway. No light, complete darkness. Now Katy and I were shivering. With nothing else to do I stepped forward hoping there was a way out of this mess. I also discovered that every step you take a lantern lights up. We finally came to the end of the pathway and to my surprise there was a tall monument of Lord Buddha with other statues surrounding it. To me, all those statues look incredibly old, smelly, disgusting, and moldy.

We stared at the statues for an extended period. Then, I heard the most thrilling, unbelievable, shocking news ever! The monument said in a raspy voice, "Hey kids stop staring at me like useless pigs." You, that little redheads need to get me a bucket of water or you are going to be cursed."

We were so shocked in amazement that the statue could speak. I whispered to Katy to not follow any of its commands, and she agreed with me. "NOW!" said the monument. Katy wanted to escape so she thought of an escape plan and whispered in my ear to ask the monument if we could go to the bathroom so that this crazy situation would end.

I disagreed to her plan and said, "Katy this is nearly the worst idea ever. "What if we get caught and can't escape?" But Katy was not listening. In fact, she said, "May we please go to the bathroom, it's important?" The Buddha eyed us suspiciously at first and then he told us to come back in a minute. Then, Katy just grabbed my hand and ran to the entrance. "Wow!" Katy is a cheetah!

By the second we saw sunlight we leaped in the air and pranced with joy. We searched for hungry tigers looking for their prey. Luckily, I spotted our hotel and we entered it and packed our suitcases.

We were headed home!

The Tale of the Last Man

Shanghai Singapore International School, Srivastava, Aanandi Jambholkar – 11

According to the legend, the Mogao Grottoes were created in 366 AD by Le Zun, a Buddhist monk. It was said that Le Zun had a vision of a thousand Buddhas, leading to the creation of the Mogao Grottoes. As told by the most ancient storytellers, and most rumours that I heard, Le Zun created those caves to hide his treasures. People speak of gold, diamond, rubies, emeralds and various other precious jewels and riches that no one has ever seen before. But my job, as a storyteller, is not to describe these fabled treasures, but to retell the tale of the last man.

When Le Zun first decided that the caves were safe enough to store his treasures, he told two other men. The two people he trusted the most. Although he trusted them both, he had confidence in one of them, and that man would take care of the treasures, and find them after he died.

Now, that very man, said to be called Jing Li, was setting off to find his friend Le Zun's treasures, as Le Zun had died a few weeks ago. Jing Li reached the caves quicker than expected, as Le Zun had given him a map all those years ago. As he looked inside the caves, he hastily lit his lamp, and started carefully treading inside. But then, a voice said inside him, "There will be traps. Do not put your feet on any squares, and hurry up." He had been remembering exactly what Le Zun's instructions were. Taking out his ruler from his knapsack, he measured the tiles laid on the floor in front of him; they were rectangles. He sighed with relief.

Guided by his lamp, Jing Li walked on the dark, musty path inside the cave. There were cobwebs at almost every corner, and it was obvious no one had visited those caves for a very long time. Squinting into the distance, he saw a slab on the wall. Walking hurriedly towards it, Jing Li saw some illegible words. After removing all the moss on the slab, he held his lamp in front of the slab. It said:

"Which Buddha can listen to your tale? Tell it your story."

—Le Zun

Jing Li was puzzled. There were countless Buddhas, and what did his friend mean by 'listen'? He sat down on the floor. But before thinking any longer, his eyes began to droop, and his body was aching. Clearly, he needed rest. Laying down his warm rug, Jing Li resolved to sleep on it and decide what to do the next day.

The next morning, sunlight danced through the cracks in the wall, and Jing Li woke up. He had dreamed about an old Chinese tale he had heard from his grandmother. It was about how a king wanted a new minister, and had spread word around for those who wanted to attempt the test he would set for them. One day, a young man came to the king. "Ah, young man. Tell me, which doll can listen to your tale?" asked the king. There were three dolls in front of him, each identical to the other. The young man asked for a piece of straw. In the first one, he poked the straw through its ears, and it came out through its mouth. That meant this doll could not keep a secret. The second one, the straw went through one ear and came out the other. Still, not. The third one, the straw was stuck inside, it never came out. "Sire, it is the third doll." He was the new minister.

Also, Jing Li remembered that his friend, Le Zun, had told him to carry the biography he had written before he died. Jing Li quickly opened his knapsack and flipped the pages in the book to see if he could find what he wanted. He found it. On pages 50 – 54 was the tale of the three dolls. Jing Li at once knew what he had to do. He counted the Buddhas. "1, 2, 3, 4, ...49, 50," he counted out loud. He didn't have a piece of straw, but he did have a toothpick for picking his teeth. Taking it out, he poked it through its ear. It came out the other ear. He tried the 51st one, and the straw came out the mouth. He tried the 52nd one, and it stuck. He poked a little more to make sure, and a roll of paper shot out the other ear. He opened the paper. It was empty, but a small key fell out.

Keeping the key in his pocket of his robe, Jing Li walked for miles ahead, looking for some kind of door or chest. After walking for at least an hour, he found a door. Exhausted, he fitted the key into the door. *Click!* He pushed open the door with a creak. There was a passage of stairs going down. His lamp always in front of him, he slowly but steadily walked down. *Slam!* The door shut behind him. He jumped and almost lost his balance. After reaching the

bottom of the stairs, his lamp run out. He jumped across, as there might be traps in the dark. But there was something quite different.

His eyes almost fell out. Le Zun's treasures were not jewels, but it was a diamond mine. There was light gleaming on diamonds the size of eggs, the blue light reflected everywhere creating a rather overwhelming effect. Jing Li hurried back towards the stairs. But, earlier he had jumped over the tile right after the stairs. But this time he didn't. The tile was a square. Putting his feet on it, an icicle made of rock fell from the top and crushed him to death. Jing Li failed, and Le Zun's treasure has yet to be found.

"If I fail, I try again, and again, and again."

– Nick Vujicic

Mystery

Shrewsbury International School, Chan, Man Cheuk – 10

More than one millennium ago, there was a curious boy called Bob. He went to an ancient cave in a desert. Inside the ancient cave, there were thousands and thousands of magnificent pictures, glorious statues and some timeworn scrolls. As soon as he took his first step to found out more, he heard something from the ground. “Oh, no!” he muttered before it exploded. “Help!” he shouted and was gone. He woke with a start. “Oh, my!” he sighed. “There must be a treasured cave there,” he said to himself.

Immediately, he fell out of his cozy bed. Then, he paddled the aged raft and reached the dusty caves.

Up the stairs he climbed, reaching his destination – Mogao caves.

“Wow! What a marvelous roof!” he whispered to himself. He looked up and saw a gigantic picture of Buddha. He focused at the ceiling. Suddenly, he was shifted to the pictures! At first, he didn’t know where he was. Confusedly, he asked an age-old man. “Where am I? What sort of place is this?” “Oh!” old man stopped in his tracks. “This is a place of Mystery!”

At the same moment when Bob disappeared, a goldfish which acted like a human saw it! “If the boy can disappear into the picture, then I can do it too!” Suddenly, it got a brilliant plan. So, it stared at the magnificent, multicolored ceiling. Nothing happened. Soon, it laid there furiously! “Instead of staring, I am gonna charge!” it thought. Immediately, it pounded rapidly, away from its corridor. Then, it leaped as high as a glider could glide! And...smashed!

“YAAA!!” screamed Bob as a giant, silvery goldfish crashed into the scene. “Woo! Cool! A big goldfish!” Suddenly, something beeped and a red, incandescent light blinked next to his foot. He looked down, but before he could see it, he vanished from the picture! Quickly, he stared around. Everything seemed distinct. Walls were brighter and statues looked brand-new too. Tons of people flooded into the cave. But their clothes were different, they looked like robes. Bob asked a young boy, “Is it 2021? Are those clothes ...” “No, silly. It’s Tang Dynasty!” interrupted the boy. “WHAAT?!!?” screamed Bob, saliva flying everywhere. He gasped with a sigh.

While Bob was rushing, two jetpacks bumped along with his foot irritatingly. They picked them up and wore them. Bob accidentally pressed a vast, red button. In a short time, jets of gas blasted from their jetpacks, lifting them high above the floor. “YAAAA...” they went, crashing into a cloud.

Bob pointed to an indigo star while the goldfish spotted an UFO as it zoomed away. However, they were closed to a BLACK HOLE! “NOOO...” they both cried as they zipped through it. Weirdly, they found themselves transported to the future, 1,000 years after Tang Dynasty. “...OOO!!!” they continued, plummeting towards Earth.

As they landed safely near Mogao caves, they discovered that all people were complaining. One exclaimed, “The spirits chased my child!” The others were blabbering about how creepy the cave was when a shadow loomed over them. “AAAH! The God spirits! Run!” someone screamed, speeding away with the others. Meanwhile, some children destroyed mural arts secretly. They smeared paint on the drawings bit by bit. They farted as putrid as a skunk’s fart while they were worshipping too. Soon, all the humans went away.

Years passed, only four men were left behind. One spoke, “Who will be the guard?” No one said a word, except Bob replied, “Me.” The last party waved goodbye and settled home.

At 1900, Bob was still guarding the cave with his humongous, chummy goldfish. Out of nowhere, a cheerful man from England appeared and Bob showed him everything awesome. On the other day, Bob stumbled around trying to control his headache but fell on the ground, dead as a door nail. The goldfish instantly cried it’s head off. After crying for few days, the cute goldfish finally settled down and built a grave for Bob. At the same time, a thief who forgot to be evil, stopped by to burn an incense stick.

The thief scrutinized the caves. “Ooh! What an awe-inspiring looking cave!” he thought. “Oh, I’ll kill and everything mine!” went his brain. He wondered for a moment, then he said, “Do you want a cookie? It’s delicious!” “No, I’m too old for cookies.” Replied the goldfish. The thief was heated. His first plan failed. At once, a fabulous trap struck his evil, mad mind. He leaded the goldfish to numerous, devastating mousetraps. Cautiously, he stepped between all the mousetraps to the other side. However, goldfish managed to reach the other side by its snow shovel!

The thief was getting more enraged. Now, he was as exasperated as a cheetah being trained how to dance. All of a sudden, he shouted, "I'm done with you! I'm gonna kill!" He took out his extremely hard, electrical chainsaw and an immensely sharp sword, chasing the cute goldfish with his maximum speed. Goldfish flung its tail, just in time to let the thief bumped into a rock. "YEEOUUUCH!!" hollered the thief in pain. Goldfish raced into a cave labelled 'Computer Room'. The thief was so furious that he stomped in frustration. A helicopter lowered a cloning machine onto the ground.

Back at the cave, goldfish hacked the cloning machine. After deleting few useful codes from the machine, hacking was done. Outside the cave, thief typed 'ARMY' but no thousands of himself appeared. Instead, an army of mosquitoes came out. "NOOOO!!" screamed the thief as dozens of immense mosquitoes poked his butt. "YEEOOOOUCH!!!" cried the painful thief as an immeasurable mosquito pined his head. He stumbled around, trying to control his headache, although he couldn't. He fell on the ground, knocked out cold.

"Phew!" Goldfish sighed in relief.

"Zzzz...Zzzz...Zzzz..." I went as I slept on my bed. I woke up after few hours, realizing that it was a dream. I yawned and set to work, writing this story in your hands.

The Grotto Spirits

Shrewsbury International School, Fernor, Annabel – 9

I guess you could say that it all started when I became an orphan. Or when living in that silly orphanage got just that bit too much to handle. So I ran away. Well, more like floated. Floated away, far away, in a boat, ending up in China. I was only five when I wound up on the streets, near the Mogao Grottoes, living as a British street urchin in a Chinese world. But, bit by bit, I taught myself the language, and, bit by bit, China felt more like a home. And so, I started to explore.

It's not my fault I'm so curious. I just am. And the Grottoes, they just... stole me, I guess. At seven years old, I started creeping inside, marvelling at the statues inside. I would find the best painting, or statue, and imagine that I was the first one to have discovered it, thinking up an explorer name, like, 'Daisy the Discoverer,' and pretending to have won a medal. It became a daily routine. Every night for five years I visited the cave until I made the discovery to end all discoveries. And this time, I really was the first.

When I was twelve, I found a new route through the Grottoes. It led to a statue bigger than anything I've ever seen, and trust me, I'd seen everything. On the floor, there were many stone tiles, each with a zodiac animal on it. And, in the statue's lap, was a large jade box, with a dragon carved into the top. I let out a breath I didn't realise I'd been holding, walked across the room, and made what was probably the biggest mistake of my life. I opened the box.

They all flew out at once. The rat, monkey, sheep, tiger, rabbit, horse, ox, pig, snake, rooster, dog and dragon. Each one was like a ghost, blue and almost see through. Occasionally, one would change colour, shrink or grow in size, and the room was filled with the sound of shrieking and roaring forcing me to hide behind the rocks around the room. I covered my ears. I tried to think, but the deafening noise muffled the sound of thought in my head. Stay calm, I told myself, stay calm and you'll be ok. But I doubted that. And then I had a brilliant idea.

If the spirits could shrink, then could I trick them into shrinking so small, I could trap them in my hands? I decided it would be worth a try. I stuck my fingers into my mouth and whistled, stepping out from behind the stone I shouted at the spirits, "If you want to be the greatest, then you prove to me you have the power to shrink." One by one, the spirits shrank – but not enough to fit them into my hands. "You call that shrinking?", I asked, and slowly but surely the spirits shrank further until they were the size of a pea. "Let me inspect you", I said, "I can't quite see you from here." They floated forwards. Quick as a flash, I caught them, clenching my hands around them.

They wriggled a bit, then stopped. Back into the box they went, the lid firmly locked. I crept back out of the room, and blocked it off with a few rocks, just to make sure the spirits weren't let out again – then I ran away. After that, I was quite done with exploring, thank you very much. And, as far as I know, the spirits were never found again.

Traveller Tito and the Mysterious Mogao Cave

Shrewsbury International School, Kim, Tito – 9

On a Sunday morning, Tito, the famous traveler, walked through the desert to go to the MOGAO cave. Tito thought that he would find the MOGAO cave in a couple hours. However, he was wrong. It took days and days for him to find the MOGAO cave. The water he brought was getting empty and he thought he would not have enough water and die. After suffering for 100 days, Tito finally found the extremely GIAGANTIC cave. He did not care if the cave was the MOGAO cave or not. He ran and tried to find water. After drinking 100 liter of water Tito felt alive.

Now he looked around the cave, he saw the enormous statues, and the paintings inside the cave. He was 100% sure that it is the MOGAO cave. Nobody knows when the MOGAO cave was built and Tito wants to study about the beauty of the MOGAO cave. He enjoyed being alone in darkness. He liked the silence of the cave and the size of the cave. Not only that, he fell in love with the colorful paintings and the enormous statues.

After sleeping inside the cave, Tito started a brand-new day to travel inside the cave. While going inside the cave Tito was worried about getting lost. So Tito marked the cave with a red crayon to remember the way of the cave. When going inside MAGAO cave, Tito felt weird. He saw a mysterious fire marks inside the cave. Tito was worried of a monster living inside the MAGAO cave, but also he was sure that it is impossible to have a monster inside the MAGAO cave. After looking carefully of the fire mark he laughed out loud. He found out that the fire marks were actually the red marker which Tito drew in order to prevent from getting lost inside the cave.

Walking inside the cave, Tito saw a small spider. He first thought the spider was cute. But after he picked up the spider, he got bitten and the spider got bigger. Tito laughed and became crazy. Suddenly, Tito's finger got itchy and slowly felt pain. Tito vomited and became dizzy. He fell down to the ground and fainted. After hours of time passed, Tito woke up, but he felt different than usual. When he saw his hand, he was shocked. His hand actually looked like a spider hand. He could not believe it. He fainted again.

After waking up, he saw a person in front of him. He asked for help, but the person did not answer but started to laugh. The person said that he is the spider Tito picked up. He said that the person who gets bitten by a spider changes to a spider while the spider becomes human. Tito was angry, and he tried to bite the person but the person ran away. Tito had no hope but to live as a spider inside the MOGAO cave.

After 100 years later, a new traveler came to the MOGAO cave. And the traveler met Tito, the spider. Tito thought it will be his last chance to become human again. He bite the traveler and ran away. Tito felt happy. After 100 years he became human again and ran away from the MOGAO cave. The world has changed a lot, and Tito did not know what to do.

The Adventures of Monk Zhao

Shrewsbury International School, Lai, Ashton – 10

It was a tranquil morning in the town of Kai Chang, Monk Zhao was preparing to embark on a dangerous journey to save his beloved monastery, his home of thirty years from destruction. His mission was to retrieve the lost treasures hidden in the Mogao caves to save it. Legends told of a mysterious golden box filled with priceless jewels and gold coins guarded by a evil red-eyed Buddha. He felt anxious “will I be brave enough to complete the mission?” He thought fearfully. He rapidly packed his sack with all the things he would need, including water and fresh bread. As the sun blazed down relentlessly, Zhao examined his map meticulously before setting off on his journey. The entire village waved and cheered as he left, he felt nervous but excited. Two hours later, he had reached the edge of the desert “there’s no turning back now” he thought as he took his first step onto the hot sand, the journey had begun!

The journey through the desert, along the Silk Road was dangerous and risky. Along the way, he spotted something in the distance. As he got closer, it seemed as though it was getting further and further away, he was so confused that he ran as fast as a cheetah, tripped and fell into a sand trap. All of a sudden, he heard thundering sounds coming from above him, he glanced quickly over the top of the trap and saw three wicked bandits on camels heading straight towards him. When they reached him, they looked inside and saw Monk Zhao curled up in a ball, they all pointed at him and burst out laughing “look at this hopeless guy!” They joked. The main bandit jumped in and grabbed him, he threw him onto his camel and shouted “you’re coming with us!” He frowned menacingly as they headed off through the desert. Monk Zhao was panicked and petrified, he had no idea where they were taking him, would he make it out alive? Moments later, he opened his eyes and saw something in the distance, he heard loud screeching and flies buzzing around his head. He shook his head quickly to scare them away and as they got closer he realised where he was, he had reached the Mogao Caves! He felt overjoyed to be there but confused about what the bandits had planned. As the camel drew closer, he looked up and saw the magnificent red temple, glistening in the sunlight, he was awestruck at the many caves that had been carved into the rocks. As he admired them, suddenly the camel halted and dropped him fiercely to the ground. The bandits surrounded him intimidatingly, the main bandit walked towards to him with a piercing stare “my name is Chan, we found your secret map, We want the treasure, defeat the red-eyed Buddha and give it to us!” He bellowed. Monk Zhao was horrified by their demands, but he had no choice but to obey. He nodded to the bandits, picked himself up and stumbled towards the cave entrance to begin his search.

As he trudged to the entrance he saw a giant pair of doors towering above him, he pulled them open and looked inside, he felt like he had traveled back in time, the architecture was like something from another dimension, he looked around the room and saw, five giant Buddhas on each wall painted magnificent colours, there were beautiful, gold patterns covering the ceiling, he felt awestruck. As he wandered around the room, he noticed a small key hidden on one of the Buddhas legs, he was surprised and picked it up, it was shimmering like a jewel and had the letter “S” carved into it. He wondered what it was for and began to search for a door it could open. It didn’t take long for him to spot the tiny wooded door on his left, “bingo!” He thought as he slid the key into the lock and twisted it sharply, it burst open immediately. As he entered he heard weird echoes, creaking and screeching coming from all angles. He wandered around in confusion, then crouched down and saw a cluster of holes in the wall. He was way too big to crawl through the tiny holes so he used his finger to poke inside, he felt around until suddenly something bit him! He shrieked and pulled his hand back. He ran to the other side of the room and leant against the cold, hard wall, suddenly, it began to move, it slid outwards to reveal a secret passage. Although it was frightening, he decided to follow it. He felt his way through the secret passage, until he reached a dead end, he was panicked “what do I do now?” He thought to himself, he was unaware that he was actually standing on quicksand, he gasped as his body quickly began to sink, he tried to shake free but it was no use. He took a deep breath as his head sank and rather than sinking, he landed onto a solid floor. He had landed in the cave of the Red-eyed Buddha, in the darkness he saw red eyes poking out from the cave walls, with a puff of smoke, the red-eyed Buddha himself appeared, he hissed “get out of my cave!” Zhao nervously replied “after I get the treasure!” Zhao picked up a stone and threw it at him, the red-eyed Buddha disintegrated before his eyes then disappeared into thin-air. Relieved, he scanned the cave for the treasure until a shimmering object caught his eye, he moved closer to investigate, he had found it! He was overjoyed but knew he had to be careful. He snuck out the cave behind the back of the bandits and carried it all the way back home where he was greeted by the entire village, they were elated. Monk Zhao became a legend in Kai Chang and everyone knew of his adventures in the Mogao Caves.

The Monk's Final Wish

Shrewsbury International School, Lee, Matilda – 10

“What do I do?!” Fewer and fewer people were visiting the cave. The Head of the Mogao Grottoes was panicked that his creation was going to be forgotten soon. He sighed and gently put his hand on the beige, leather cover of an antique book.” There is now only one thing to do.” he said firmly. He wrote a quick message in the book and stepped outside. “I hope somebody worthy finds you...” And with a final wave of his hand, the mysterious monk disappeared...

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A millennium later, Qing and her family were visiting a lake beside their village. It was a lovely place with no fishes, but blooming, beautiful lilies. They all went carefully down a cliff and to the lake. The family had a relaxing time soaking up the sun and splashing in the transparent, soothing water. The sky was getting dark so they decided to leave. Just as Qing was about to get out of the water, she felt a rumble beneath her feet. It was like a miniscule earthquake. “Mama, Papa something’s not right...” she frowned. “I think– “ But just as about when she was going to finish her sentence, the ground beneath her erupted and she was sent flying up into the air! “Qing!!!” her parents screeched. As Qing was suspended in mid-air, her eyes glazed over and suddenly everything went pitch black.

“W—where am I?” Qing was waking up with her wet, sandy hair in her face, dazed and confused. As she looked around at her surroundings, she saw lush, tropical trees; a large temple anchored into the golden sand; and some statues of elegant people. Slowly, she stood up and started walking to the temple. She had a feeling that it was calling her to come inside it. As she got closer, she noticed all the little details carved onto the walls. There were pictures of books, treasure chests and wise monks. When she got inside, there was a fork in the temple. One of the signs on the doorways said ‘Money’ and the other said ‘Books’. Qing thought hard and decided to go with books. Even though her family could be millionaires, she decided to go with her gut feeling. She just felt that it was right. When she entered the tunnel, she gasped. She was awestruck by what she saw in that room.

The room was adorned in zigzags of gold and it was ginormous. There were scrolls of Chinese stories, art of ancient emperors and a thick, worn book with yellowed pages. In wonder, Qing carefully flipped to the first page and noticed that there was faded writing on it. It was almost illegible but she could just make out the writing. Here’s what it said, “Dear Reader, congratulations. You are the first person who chose books instead of money. My island knows if a greedy person came visiting. A long time ago, many people used to walk through these halls. But after a period of time, visitors started to forget about this place. I was so sad, I closed it down, putting many artifacts into one of the two rooms. In money, I put a booby trap and, in this room, I put lots of treasure for a worthy person such as you. Hopefully, my cave will once be discovered again. I wish you the best of luck and there is a map of how to get back to the village. Sincerely, the Head Monk of Mogao Grottoes.”

★

Twenty years later, Qing was gazing proudly at her museum and all that she had achieved. Quickly, many people had gathered in to catch a glimpse of her artifacts. She felt so delighted that she had made her own museum. Mostly, she hoped that she had pleased the monk who she appreciated. “If you’re watching from above, I just want to let you know that your dream has come true,” She smiled.

The Mogao Caves

Shrewsbury International School, Wang, Olivia – 9

Long, long ago, there lived a monk called Wang Yuan Lu. One day he was walking in the desert and found himself faced with ancient caves. Around the caves were millions, billions, or even trillions of different buddhas. The caves were called the Mogao Caves. The caves were almost falling down. Wang Yuan Lu said to himself, “it’s the last chance to save the caves”. This is the story of Wang Yuan Lu and his adventures to the East to save the Mogao Caves.

“Crash!” waves splashed higher and higher almost reaching the Sun. The only one on the ship was Wang Yuan Lu who was talking to himself, “Why did I ever go on this journey, I am crazy for risking my life!”. Wang Yuan Lu shook his head in despair. “Boom!” The noise threw him out of bed and up to see if land was near. Seeing the black sky was not a good sign, it was about to rain. Wang Yuan Lu quickly took his scrolls under the deck. He stayed under the deck for a week by passing the time he taught himself to read the scrolls. After a week of sailing, Wang Yuan Lu finally saw land. Without thinking Wang Yuan Lu got out a paddler and paddled himself to land. When his paddler reached land, he jumped out of his paddler and kissed the ground with sheer delight. He had made it; Tokyo was bustling in front of him.

He asked people that lived in Tokyo to give him directions to the man’s house. Wang Yuan Lu finally found a person that knew where the man lived. The person also agreed to take Wang Yuan Lu to the man’s house. When they arrived at the man’s house the person who took him there said goodbye and wished him luck.

“Screech!” The sliding peephole opened. “Hello? Who’s there?” said a furious man, “Be quick or go away.” So, Wang Yuan Lu quickly spoke.

“Excuse me, my name is Wang Yuan Lu, and my friend gave me your address. I am the man who sent you a letter about a month ago. Do you remember me? And would you like to buy some scrolls?”

“Oh yes, I’ve been expecting you for a long time, how much are those scrolls?”

“\$20 for a set, but \$30 for 2 sets.”

“What! That expensive, I would rather give you \$1 for you to go away.”

“But I can’t sell it for too cheap, they were used a long, long time ago, around 1000 years ago, they are also very delicate.”

“Well.....then fine, \$10 for a set so I can study them.”

“Oh, thank you very much sir.”

As Wang Yuan Lu headed back to his ship, he felt really happy that he had sold his first set of scrolls.

And so, Wang Yuan Lu continued on his journey across the world...



Fiction

Group 2

Sophie & the Long Lost Secret of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Arrowsmith, Lucia – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Bai, Ethan – 10

Chapter 1. The Raid

366 AD

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

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

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

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

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

And then, his vision went black.

Chapter 2. Fortune

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

"Where is this?" He croaked aloud

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

Yue raised his head.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3. The Sacred Place

Three Days Later

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

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

The mountain.

It was glowing !

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

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

He was going to make grottoes out of this mountain.

Chapter 4. The First Grottoes

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

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

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

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

The Secret of the Library Cave

Singapore International School, Chen, Jasmine – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discovery of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Chu, Nicole – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“But...but why?” Wang stammered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Start of a New Journey

Singapore International School, Han, Zi Wei Elaine – 11

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

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

Father had never smiled ever since then.

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

“Father,”

“What is it, Son?”

“Can I come?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I am afraid of...the journey ahead.”

“Or are you just afraid of death?”

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

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

“But what about Li?” I blurted.

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

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

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

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

I didn’t know.

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

"Are we halfway to India yet?"

"Not yet."

"Are we almost halfway there?"

"Definitely."

"Are you afraid?"

"Yes. Are you?"

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

The Elemental Scroll of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Ho, Ella – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hunter hesitated and said, “The Elemental Scroll.”

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

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

Heldras and Hunter nodded.

‘What has 4 legs in the morning,

2 legs in the afternoon,

And 3 legs at night?’

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

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

“Thank you.” Hunter bowed.

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

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

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

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

Has a mouth but never talks,

Has a head but never weeps,

Has a bed but never sleeps?’

Hunter frowned, “River?”

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

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

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

“Where is it?” Hunter asked.

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

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

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

Both dragons obtained the magic power of water!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Mogao Caves

Singapore International School, Ho, Kurtis – 11

The Mogao Caves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What are YOU doing here?” Elijah responded.

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

“Why not?” Liam replied, sarcastically.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Hui, Ching Ho Des – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Jiang, Letian – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Together

Singapore International School, Law, Hilda – 11

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Silence.

There was only the sound of vigorous air around him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My father saved me? He was there?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saving the Mogao Caves

Singapore International School, Lee, Chun Wei Kyra – 10

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



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

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

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

“What do you want?” Silver demanded.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

“Good idea!” Silver agreed.



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

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

“Did you hear that?”

“It was Kate, wasn’t it?”

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

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

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

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

“Why me?” Silver asked.

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

“But how do I get it?” Silver asked.

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

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

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

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

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

In the second pedestal were 4 empty holes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Leong, Ryu – 11

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

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

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

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

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Li, Hongfei – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Lin, Amanda – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Lo Ka Wai Jaymee – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who’s there?”

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

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

“Agent Taylor, and your name is?”

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

The Guardian

Singapore International School, Lye, Yuxin – 10

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

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

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

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

Hong Kong, 1984

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thirty thousand feet above ground.

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

“A hunch.”

Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was a moment of silence as I pondered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yue breathed his last breath.

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

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

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

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

Journey to the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Ooi, Shi Qi – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Shen, Zhi Yu Olive – 10

“Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick tock”

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

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

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

“Why?” asked Alisa, eyeing Rose suspiciously.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Awesome! That is magnificent!" She exclaimed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mystery at the Xi Jin Tombs

Singapore International School, Shi, Sophia – 11

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

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

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

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

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

THUNK

I fell feet–first down a hole.

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

“Aaaaaarrrrrrhhhhhhhh...you can see me?”

“Aaaaaarrrrhhhh...yes”

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

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

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

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

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

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

I kept quiet.

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

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

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

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

We both turned to look at the remarkably unremarkable wall.

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

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

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

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

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

I opened my phone.

“Hey, I’m Siri! How can I help?”

“Siri, can you read this?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Sit, Chee Wei – 11

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Morgan's Final Piece

Singapore International School, Soon, Sonya – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Tsang, Jordan – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Singapore International School, Wang, Elaine – 11

“Could you please spare me money?”

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

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

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

“Where did you get that?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Hello?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Wang, Julian – 10

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

Biggest mistake of my life.

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

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

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

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

Something was happening right in front of my eyes.

Something indescribable and intense.

It was magical.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But it was.

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Singapore International School, Wu, Xin Ru Audrey – 10

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

So forward it is.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Fine! Are you alright!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Why World War 2?”

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

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

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

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

“Isn't that Japanese?”

“Dragons are linked to both Japan and China.”

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

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

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

Shangdi merely raised an eyebrow.

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

“No one said I needed to train!”

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

“Is there wifi?”

“Of course.We’re not savages.”

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

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

“Well,The evening night sky is beautiful.”

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

And so the training began.

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

“Awake for lessons,Shangdi?”

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

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

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

Singapore International School, Yan, Joanna – 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An Adventure to Maogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Chen, Zhixuan – 10

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

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

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

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

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

An Unforgettable Experience

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

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

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

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

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

The Adventure of Coco and Yoyo

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

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

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

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

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

Incredible Adventure to Mogao Caves

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Fong, Yuen – 10

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

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

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

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

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

Magic Friendship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, Nina and Anna are best friends.

The Treasure in Mogao Caves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Lost Wisdom in the Mogao Caves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Golden Buddha Statue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An Unforgettable Experience in Mogao

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

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

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

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

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

The Journey of the Monk

SKH Chu Oi Primary School, Leung, Kathryn – 9

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

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

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

Discovery of Mogao Caves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Life of the Yinlna

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An Adventurous Experience

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

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

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

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

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

Mogao Caves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An Amazing Journey

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A 'Tail' of Two One Seven

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'What happened?' I asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Tales of The Time-travelling Scholar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aperta and the Mogao Grottoes

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

Chapter 1: the portrait

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chase then went to the kitchen to have a drink of water. He must have been really exhausted from reading and researching because he leant on the painting and fell asleep. Just then, he heard a clicking sound and the drawing fell. He immediately woke up and looked at the portrait carefully. There was an old journal hidden behind the canvas. Chase took another look at the figure and quickly recognized the man as Aperta’s grandfather. He took the journal and gave it to Aperta who was in shock.

“HOW DID I NEVER SEE THAT?”

Chapter 2: the journal

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

It read:

Dear Aperta,

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

“MAGIC?”

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

“MONSTER?”

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

Love,
Mogao Parsley.

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

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

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

Chapter 3: the Mogao Grottoes

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4: the Sphinx and the Riddle

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

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

He was too shocked to talk.

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

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

"I believe a circle has no starting point."

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

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

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

Chapter 5: the treasure

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

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

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

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

Chapter 6: back home

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

Tales of the Mogao Cave

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Unknown Cave in Dunhuang

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Secrets of the Mogao Caves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was English.

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

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

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

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

They were logged into a website.

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

A scholar sarcastically said, 'Of course, why didn't we see it? Of course some random monkeys from like 1000 years ago knew English and made a website. Yeah, that's something you'd realise everyday.'

After looking at the website, they were sure that their prediction was certainly correct, as it explained the same things they had thought.

The scholars thought they had enough excitement today. They decided they wanted to share this with everyone.

They sent everything to professional writers and asked them to write a book about the amazing discovery of what they had just discovered.

One year later, the writers published the book. Once it was published, everyone bought the books as quickly as they could, afraid of it being sold out.

The scholars were so proud to have the honour to discover this that they threw a party to celebrate the next day. But the party didn't last long, as they needed to go back to study what other fascinating history lies hidden in the Mogao Cave.

Adventure at the Magoa Grottoes

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

The Mogao Grottoes is a junction of caves found in Dunhuang district. Many caves lie under the soil awaiting their inevitable discovery. Our job as scientists are to take notes of discoveries and report back to our boss.

One such cave has been found by us. Inside was a lot of carvings of an ancient language, simple weapons and even ancient art! We were surprised, as most caves have been dug up. As we explored the cave, we found many skeletons, ancient clothing and a lot of materials! We then found a room with a campfire, a 'strange' one too! It acted like a sort of mirror but it reflected our ancestors and their camp, it was like a portal to the ancient world! As we were just about to extinguish it, a voice called "stop! If you extinguish that fire, the human race will end!" We looked back in shock, seeing an old monk whose clothes had holes in them, "What are you talking about? It's just a campfire!" I replied as my voice trembled. The old monk told us "That fire is lit to honour our ancestors! If you extinguish that fire, our ancestors' history and everything they did will be removed, and since we are their descendants, we will be removed from history too! Every race has one whether they know it or not. "He then told us the fire's meaning and the 'strange power' it has. He then showed us the underground base of the native monks, but when we headed to the camp, we saw a large horde of creatures led by the "Demon King". He said we should take the axes and bows and defend the camp at all costs.

As the monster horde approached, we spotted various mythological creatures, such as dragons, minotaur's, griffins, werewolves and pegasus! The old monk tasked us to find and extinguish the "fire of creatures", so we advanced to extinguish said fire. After slaying wave after wave of creatures, we reached the last dragon. Once it was dead, I looked back, seeing that only a few monks were injured in the battle and no injury was fatal, giving us all courage to finally defeat the Demon King. We then set off and we reached the fire, but it was guarded by the Demon King! Of course they would guard it! He started attacking us and it threw punches here and there! In a moment of desperation, I threw the axe at its eye, and when he let loose his grip on me, I ran for the fire. The Demon King swiftly attempted to punch me, but I extinguished the fire just in time, and the Demon King's fist stopped right in front of my eyes, then the Demon King along with all other mythological creatures vanished into thin air! When we went back to the camp, the old monk had some bad news for us. "You actually went into a portal into our world when you first entered the cave, and you left yours. Since this is a one-way rift you entered, you can only go back, meaning when you leave, you will never see us again. Farewell. "We exchanged some little souvenirs and soon left their world.

We returned to the lab with all the art and other things, all of us smiled and looked back at the base one last time. Our boss was very proud of our discovery and promoted some of us to a different lab. Everything we found was sent to the 'The National Museum of China'. We bid farewell to each other and parted ways.

But, it's not over yet. I tried to find footage of this happening to send it to the news station nearby, but I realised the Demon King smashed my helmet with the sport camera still on it! Luckily, I could salvage all the footage. But, since we had to go into a different world, the camera couldn't get enough data to keep up and had a corrupted video and audio. When I went to show my boss, he told me to go to the news station, just like I was going to do anyways. The news station unfortunately rejected me, so I decided to write my own book with everything inside! I'm glad the book did well! There's one thing for sure, and that's to never judge a book by its cover, who knows what awaits the other side!

The Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

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

Today, professor Loepi taught me something fascinating, The Tales of the Mogao Grottoes! It was about a monk who found a mysterious cave and his adventures to explore inside. Others had tried to go into it but couldn't find anything interesting. It looked very exciting and made me want to go there too.

After school, the first thing to do was my homework. I had not been putting effort into it since my obsession with the Mogao Grottoes started. After finishing my homework, I decided to go to the Mogao Grottoes during my holiday. It's gonna be thrilling!

Grandma suddenly came into my room, and she wanted to tell me something. "I will not stop you, but make sure you don't risk your life. Here's a map found in your great-great-great grandfather's room. Take good care of this." I felt shocked that my great-great-great grandfather had gone to the Mogao Grottoes before but he went too far and was cursed by the patron saints. I am still curious about the tales, but I don't wanna end up like him.

My grandma called me after packing, she gave me a magical necklace and said only the ones wearing this can access the cave. I thanked her and decided not to tell my mum about this. I told her I was only going to summer camp.

The day has come, I ate breakfast quickly and ran to the door. Grandma was there waiting. She said if you see the Crystal Parrot, begin to climb. We hugged each other and said goodbye. I felt sorry that I wanted to go there but to have her worried about me... but I will succeed. That's how I started my crazy adventure to the Mogao Grottoes!

At the station, I first bought some snacks from the kiosk. Then the train arrived. When I purchased the train tickets, I found that it was very expensive. I used most of my savings to buy the ticket. Luckily, grandma had given me some money.

Finally, I got into the train. It was beautifully decorated and was not full. I read about the cave and prepared for my journey. Of course, I took a rest so I'm in good condition to have any challenges ahead. Nevertheless, it was a 5 hours train journey to the Mogao Grottoes. When I woke up, I was very hungry and decided to have some food in the canteen. However, there were not many food choices from the menu but the food was tasty. I started to prepare for off-boarding.

Finally, I'm here. THIS IS TOO FAR OUT OF MY IMAGINATION! It's dirty, dank and creepy! But I can't regret it, I need to solve the mystery.

First, I need to go to Yogan forest and pass through it. The necklace said the Yogan is a kind of bird with crystals. I was amazed by its talking powers. I passed through obstacles and made it. That's it! I suddenly remembered, the Yogan means the Crystal Parrot! And it also means start to climb! I climbed up a tree as fast as I could and waited. In 20 seconds a bunch of lions were passing the forest! It really helped!

I didn't stop but continued my adventure. According to the map given by my grandmother, I should come across "NAUGHTY MONKEYS." However, I didn't even see any monkeys ahead. Suddenly, I remembered they wouldn't come out if I didn't "SHOUT."

I tried to shout "OOH OOH AH AH!?" Then, tens of monkeys from the woods were rushing towards us. I had no choice but to run. In a sudden, the monkeys stopped. Luckily, I got into a cave and entered it. Two patron saints were standing in front of me and I politely asked if I could go in. One of them said "YOU MAY ENTER". I carefully stepped in.

I found a big, locked door in front of me. There was a hole on the door and likely it should be the way to open it. However, where was the key? I started to get frustrated but the necklace talked to me again, "the stones." Oh, there were lots of stones on the ground and the key should be one of them. I checked carefully and found there were

symbols on each one. Some of the symbols were trees, some of them were animals. I recalled that I met lions and monkeys before. These should be the answers. I checked again on the rocks and finally found one with a lion and monkey on it. These must be the keys. I put this stone into the hole of the door immediately and the door opened slowly. There was a big time capsule in front of me. It has my great-great-grandfather's name marked on it. I opened the capsule at once and my great-great-grandfather woke up. I told him I was here to bring him home. But the necklace told me when I exit, you must be careful. I carried him out quickly and ran as fast as I could back to the Yogan forest. I wondered if the patron saints could survive, so I brought them out. To thank me, they gave me a ticket back to Caple Town. I thanked them and got on the last train of the day.

I brought my great-great-great grandfather to the nearest hospital and called my family. I was so happy to have him back. It was a wonderful and unbelievable event. I did a "Mission impossible" and was a hero to my family. What an adventure!

Mysteries of the Mogao Caves

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

Legends say that many centuries ago, when Tang Sanzhang and Sun Wukong went on their journey to the West, they also discovered the Great Scroll of Cures that contained the secrets to heal all diseases in the world, as well as the medicine to reverse aging. Cho's father was an archaeologist. He believed in this legend and has been studying all the evidence of the scroll, but nobody believed him except for Cho. One day, Cho's father decided to go to the Mogao Grottoes to find the scroll and prove everyone wrong. But he has not come back for a very long time.

Cho decided to go find her father. By the time she reached the cave, it was already twilight. Just as she was about to enter the yawning chasm, he felt someone grab her shoulder. She jumped, holding out her spear. But it was just a young, village boy.

He raised his hands in surrender and said, "Woah, calm down. I'm just asking to help."

Cho looked at the boy suspiciously and asked, "Who are you? Why do you want to help me?"

"I'm Yang, I live in the village down this hill. I've been in the Grottoes so I wanted to see what's going on" the boy replied.

Cho eyed him and agreed. They stepped into the cave, looking for clues. The walls were covered in paintings of Buddhas, there were symbols and geometric patterns carved on the ceiling. After a while, Cho found a scrap of cloth and walked over to pick it up. Suddenly, she felt the tile beneath her move, the ground rumbled and the floor dropped down into a pit. All of a sudden, they hit the floor with a loud thud. Cho looked around. This cavern wasn't very different to the ones from above.

Cho called to Yang, "Do you know where we are? Is there a way out?" but Yang was just as clueless as she was.

"I don't know, I've never been here," Yang shrugged.

"Well, let's see if there's an exit," Cho offered.

They ran around the cavern trying to find an exit. However, they soon realized there was no way out. Suddenly, Cho noticed a carving among the paintings. There were no other carvings. She pressed on it and like a miracle, part of the wall closed into the ground, showing a long hallway. There were statues of Buddhas along the walls. Cho got excited and rushed forward, but crashed to a stop as an arrow shot from a Buddha's mouth.

Yang grabbed her hand and yelled, "On the count of three we run. One, two, three!"

They sprinted across, with the arrows following behind, missing them by a few inches.

The next cavern was lined with faceless statues. Behind the statues were paintings of gods gathered around a Buddha. There were muscular gods wearing long flowing capes, gods with silky long cloths draped over their shoulders and all kinds of mythical creatures. Cho caught a glimpse of something moving in the back of the cavern. She widened her eyes in terror for all the statues had come alive and were charging towards them. Out of nowhere, a statue lunged at Yang, suffocating him. Suddenly, before Cho even processed what she would do, she swung her spear around, breaking most of the statues. Then she grabbed Yang by his arm and ran towards the door.

This cavern was a hundred feet high, with paintings of Buddhas everywhere they looked. There were scrolls scattered all across the floor. Cho gasped, this was the library her father told her about. She noticed her father laying in the middle of the room.

She rushed over and cried desperately, "Oh please, don't be dead!"

Her father opened his eyes and said, “Thank the gods! You're here!”

Then he pulled her into a hug. He explained that the statues were guarding the Great Scroll of Cures.

Yang asked, “How are we going to get out?” I tried opening this stone door but it won't budge.”

Cho took the scroll from her father and placed it onto the ground. Magically, the doors opened.

Seeing this, Cho's father said with uncertainty “Well, it's been a great experience, and since this is the only way out, I should just leave the scrolls here for another person to find.”

So finally, they left the cave, leaving the scroll back in the Mogao Caves where it belonged.

The Mogao Grottoes Code

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Lam, Choi Sum – 10

One gorgeous afternoon, I went to Grandfather's place. He was strolling around his room leisurely. After I settled down, he beckoned me over.

"Mike, do you know that when I was young, I suffered from a disease similar to the COVID we have now? At that time, more than half of the villagers were desperately sick. Some had a severe headache, some recorded high fever, some kept coughing and sneezing. The scariest thing was that it was highly contagious threatening to our health," he said while feeling out of sorts.

He continued, "However, something weird was going on. A few months later, a monk was passing by and he could not bear any more. Out of his great empathy, he left some incredibly precious Chinese medicine and urged us to take them as soon as possible."

"Take it or not take it, that's the question," I murmured.

Grandfather's eyes were dancing, "Yes, we took the medicine bravely and surprisingly, we all recovered speedy."

"I was wondering if the Chinese medicine would be an effective treatment to the COVID," he changed into a joyful tone and painted the town red.

Noticing me nodding my head, he took an old picture out of his drawer and continued enthusiastically, "The monk once gave me this picture and said that we could find the ingredients of that medicine in the cave. Make use of it when necessary. Meanwhile, he was worried the precious medicine would be abused by somebody, so he embedded the secret code," he pointed at it with his fingers. It was a faded picture of a monk standing in front of some murals.

"Sadly, I forgot where the cave was."

"Grandfather, when there's will, there's a way. Let me have a try and find it out for you. The cave and the code." I was in seventh heaven and squealed in delight.

Just then, I spotted my best friend, James, walking in the threshold. I was waving my hand, and a few seconds later, he was beside me. I decided to tell him what Grandfather just said and showed him the picture.

"Oh! What a coincidence! My uncle was a senior researcher at the Dunhuang Academy. He inspired me a lot about the characteristics of Dunhuang, for example the monks, murals and sculptures. By the murals, I believed the cave might be in Dunhuang. Let me check and confirm with my uncle tonight!"

"Thanks, James," I replied.

The next day, James was full of joys of spring yelled to me, "Yes, Mike, my uncle said that it was one of the Dunhuang caves from his previous experience. He even recognized that it was the Mogao Grotto No. 61!"

I could not wait but dashed to report it to Grandfather. He was over the moon. We went the extra mile and started reading more information about Dunhuang.

But there was a dilemma. How could I physically visit Dunhuang during the pandemic? If I could not go there, I could not resolve the secret code. Struggling. It troubled me for a very long period of time. This time, James supplied a wonderful suggestion. He remembered that we visited an exhibition about Dunhuang several years ago. And there was a virtual reality section. By using a VR application, we could simulate a three-dimensional environment and virtually visiting the Mogao Grottoes.

He suggested, "Why didn't we make use of VR again?" I thought this idea was marvellous and put it into action.

Taking glimpses of the VR, I felt like personally visiting Dunhuang. As it was an oasis located at a religious and cultural crossroad on the Silk Road, there were wall paintings, silk paintings, woodblock paintings, sculptures and finest examples of Buddhist art spanning a period of 1000 years ago. In general, figures of donors appeared at the bottom. Buddhas of many sizes, shapes and types could be found in the middle. Last but not least, flying apsaras were

depicted in the ceiling of above the buddhas. The Mogao Grottoes were decorated so neatly with numerous colours, as if they were so real. Extremely impressive!

When I was staring at the flying apsaras, I found out that on one hand, some were flower-sprinkling, flower-presenting; on the other hand, some were dancing and playing music. But why was each of them holding a bouquet of flowers and pointing to the next apsara? Looking cautiously again, I recognised there was a line of tiny words on the flowers. Following carefully the fingers of the apsaras, I managed to dig out the wordings. However, they were meaningless to me. Or they were secret coding?!

It read “toor daowogidni”.

“Did I somehow find something wrong in the middle?” I asked James, who was also wearing the VR application. After a couple more times and efforts, we still got the same wordings.

Scratching my head, I tried to check the buddhas and figures of donator, but there was still no ordinary outcome. I had a heavy heart and was low in spirits.

Just as I was about to give up, I recalled my motto, when there’s a will, there’s a way. Something flashed in my mind – REVERSE!

Immediately, I reversed the wordings.

Yes, “Indigowoad Root”! After looking up in the Internet, James and I learnt that it was a kind of Chinese medicine curing people with bacteria and virus. Happy as Larry, I invited Grandfather over and reported to him our great exploration.

Grandfather suggested us sending the information to Scientist Tu Youyou, who was the winner of the Nobel Prize in Medicine, and her research team of the Medical School for further experiments.

“It was important to keep and review our heritage of Mogao Grottoes,” said Grandfather. “They were treasure to our wellbeing.” James and I smiled. We were very joyful to know that we could help the world with such an extraordinary way!

The Last Paradise

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Mak, Audrey See Kan – 11

Over the centuries since the monk found the Mogao Cave at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China, thousands of people came, creating sculptures, drawing, and literature. Little did they know, by building and drawing all these murals and sculptures, they had actually captured the souls of Buddha, flying Apsaras, and other characters from the legends in the walls of the caves. When the caves were forgotten, there trapped the souls of the millions of gods, goddesses, and the legendary creatures as well.

“I’m so bored! How long do we have to wait for somebody to come?” raged one of the flying Apsaras, Tian.

“Tian, we cannot rage so easily. We must be patient and wait ‘til the kind-hearted and faithful remember us and come to us,” said Gautama, raising his hands with his eyes closed. “I feel that someone is getting near now. Everyone, stay in your own paintings, murals, or sculptures.”

All the creatures returned to their ‘homes’, some of them crawled, while others flew. The Gautama Buddha was the Buddha human beings praised and was well respected even in the community of the legendary fairies and gods. He was known for his patience and deep thinking in the community and was so powerful that the other creatures crowned him as their lord.

“Dig, my men! Dig!” shouted a voice outside the cave. “The treasure is just steps away!”

This sent uneasiness across the cave. The silence and calmness that the fairies and gods just managed to reign was immediately broken. “Gautama, my Lord, I do not mean to interfere with your plans, but don’t you think that this is getting out of hand? I mean, who knows what they’ll do to us next!” protested Tian.

“Let’s have hope, Tian. Now, if we don’t stop arguing, the people outside will hear us,” said Gautama, smiling.

The digging continued. Every dig made by the people outside was a threat to the creatures inside the cave. They became more and more impatient. They looked at Gautama for help, but to their surprise, Gautama did not move an inch. He stayed where he was and continued smiling pleasantly.

“One last dig, my men!” the leader shouted. “On the count of three...”

“I don’t have hope in these people!” mumbled Tian.

“Two...”

“One, dig!”

A huge wave of a mixture of sand and mustered smell gushed out from the cave. Followed by the wave was a flock of a few Apsaras, led by Tian. The men outside the cave coughed hard and closed their eyes which were filled with sand and dirt. The workers waited for the sand and dirt to precipitate and slowly stepped into the cave. The murals, walls, books, and sculptures were so beautiful, that the sight cleansed their eyes. Their eyes filled with tears of happiness and joy as they triumphed across the room.

“This is absolutely amazing!” screamed one of the workers.

“In all my life, I have never seen anything like this paradise!” said another quietly.

“This is not just normal treasures! It is treasures that can bring us wealth for life! We should let people come in and look at all these wonderful creations. We can earn lots of money from people all around the world!” suggested the leader.

“All right, boys, let’s take a lunch break for now, before we plan for our great fortune ahead!” demanded the leader of the gang. The other diggers joined in joyous cheers and rushed out of the cave.

The grotto returned to complete silence, a long silence before anyone could react and speak again. The remaining creatures gradually woke up from their shocking state and all turned to look at Gautama who was lying on a bench in one of his paintings. “They don’t seem friendly, do they?” one of them muttered.

Gautama nodded and flew out of the painting. He created a transparent wall at the cave entrance that blocked anyone from outside from viewing and hearing them. All the other creatures flew out from their paintings and sculptures and gathered in the grotto hall.

“Well, their plan would drive a lot of tourists to our place, and not pilgrims. These people will leave destructive marks on the paintings and sculptures, instead of creating new ones to praise and worship us. This will draw more attention to the world that will just try to find values in stealing the artwork here. These are not the kind-hearted and faithful people we have been waiting for. After all these years, we end up in the hands of the bad and greedy,” said Gautama.

After a pause, Gautama continued, “we need a plan, anyone?”

“We could bewitch them. I mean... maybe one of us is able to do it.”

“We could kill them.”

Gautama raised a hand, and everyone stopped discussing.

“Yes, they are bad people, but we are gods. We should not hurt human beings no matter how bad they are. Maybe it is time to leave the grotto now. Maybe we should go and find a new hide-away. I am sure there must be one last paradise somewhere in this world. Any disagreements?” Gautama suggested.

All the creatures looked at each other. They did not dare to object. They knew they had nothing to counter-propose either. They followed Gautama and left the cave one by one. Although they were forced to live in this rusty cave for years, they still enjoyed the time spent together here. With one last farewell, they left.

Years later, the Mogao Caves were opened to the public. However, little did these visitors know, the paintings, sculptures, and murals that lie peacefully in the caves were the homes of the spirits of these mythical creatures. Little did they know, the amazing paintings, sculptures, and murals that they are seeing now are actually empty-spirited.

Where have all the Apsaras gone then? Well, in a paradise hidden far, far away.

Dune after endless dune, mountain after endless mountain...

The vastness of the Gobi Desert was immeasurable, even infinite. Ancient secrets were buried beneath the thick layer of powdery yellow sand, waiting to be uncovered...

It was undeniably an odd sight.

In the middle of the Gobi Desert, near the city of Dunhuang, Gansu Province, an old monk, clad in ragged, worn robes clung onto the back of a flea-bitten, scraggly donkey, who groaned with every step. The monk squinted up at the blazing sun that hung in the sky, mercilessly bathing him in its heat. He was sweating profusely, with enormous pearls rolling down his forehead. His donkey stopped in the middle of the path. Its limbs quivered slightly, before it collapsed to the ground in a heap of skin and bones, unconscious. The monk sighed, and, hoisting the animal's limb body onto his shoulders, continued his lengthy journey.

After trotting along for hours, he stopped. Could his eyes be deceiving him? At the foot of a mountain was a small oasis, more beautiful than any he had ever seen before. He immediately thanked Buddha before rushing towards it, scooping up some of the clear, blue water. The sweet liquid trickled down his throat, and he felt more rejuvenated than ever. He fed some to his donkey, who regained its strength soon after.

Suddenly, the mountain glowed, ablaze with flames. The old monk fell back, startled. Thousands of fiery figures appeared on the mountain's peaks, each in a different position. Some had their hands to their chests, some were touching the earth, some were praying. But all had the same calm, serene expressions on their faces. They were one—the Gautama Buddha. As the sun set, the visions slowly vanished, leaving the monk and his donkey alone in the desert. The monk was stunned. He started rummaging through his satchel, and his hand emerged, holding a small dagger. To honour Gautama Buddha, he carved a shrine into the base of the mountain.

This monk was Lezun. Unbeknownst to him, he had just created the very first of the Mogao Grottoes.

After Lezun had created the very first grotto in 366AD, he was joined by another monk named Faliang, who helped him develop the site. What Lezun originally planned to be a simple place of meditation for hermits had developed into a gathering place for monks from all over China. Monasteries and temples quickly sprang up around the mountains, and by the early 400s AD, a Buddhist community had formed at the foot of the mountain, with seven grottoes in total.

News of this meeting place for monks soon reached the ears of the Wei royals, who commissioned the construction of twenty more caves, with the preceding Zhou, Sui and Tang Dynasties following suit. The grottoes became officially known as Mogao, which meant “none higher” or “peerless”. The caverns certainly lived up to their name, as the construction of the Mogao Grottoes had reached its height in the Tang Dynasty. Many rich patrons donated large sums to the monks, hoping to achieve enlightenment by helping build the temples. With their financial support, the number of caves quickly rose to over a thousand. Unlike the older, more simple shrines, the grottoes constructed in the Tang Dynasty were elaborately decorated with 2,000 sculptures and 45,000 square meters of murals of gods (including the notorious the Monkey King) and monks, and with a more sophisticated architectural design as well. Through visual representation, they were meant to educate illiterates about Buddhist beliefs and stories, including the famous “Five Hundred Bandits” story depicted in Cave 258. The grottoes were no longer exclusive for monks, but a religious centre for the public, as well as the home of 1,400 monks and nuns and countless artists.

Although the Mogao Grottoes were flourishing, Turkish lords had seized land around the western part of the Silk Road, which sealed off Mogao from the rest of the world. As less people came, Dunhuang slowly became depopulated. The site went into decline, and by the Ming Dynasty, the Mogao Grottoes were sadly abandoned.

Lost to the mists of time, the Mogao Grottoes sat, untouched, unknown, for nearly 500 years. However, this would not be its permanent fate: a re-ignited interest in the Silk Road during the late 19th century led to Western explorers discovering an ancient stele that was erected in 1348 to commemorate the sponsors of a temple in Mogao.

A Taoist abbot named Wong Yuanlu had discovered some Mogao temples at the turn of the century and became a self-appointed guardian for them, attempting to raise funds to repair some statues. In 1900, he accidentally stumbled across an old cave, (what would be later known as the Library Grotto,) and discovered an enormous collection of manuscripts, ranging from about history and mathematics to folk songs. However, Yuanlu was ordered to close the caverns under the orders of the governor of Gansu, who was concerned about the cost of transporting the artifacts.

Luckily, Yuanlu's discoveries caught the eye of Hungarian archaeologist Marc Stein, who bargained with the abbot, asking for the manuscripts in exchange for a donation to repair the statues. Wong agreed to this deal, causing foreign explorers to go on expeditions to Mogao for its precious documents. The rest of the ancient texts were sent to Beijing for scholars to study.

Conservation efforts made by the government helped restore the grottoes to its former majesty. The International Dunhuang Project helped do research on the Dunhuang manuscripts and uncover many secrets of ancient China. Nowadays, the Mogao Caves are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as a popular tourist destination. A milestone in art, literature and religion, the Mogao Grottoes have affected the course of history, and will continue to, for evermore.

The Mogao Grottoes,

Peerless, and acclaimed world-wide.

Buddharupas nine xun* high,

Statues tall, they kiss the sky,

Holy days, joyous and blithe.

— Zhao Puchu

*Nine xun is equal to about 3.34 m

My Fairy Tale in Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Au-Yeung, Hau Ying Audrey – 10

Long ago, there was a magical cave in Mogao, China. Explorers discovered that there was something strange in the cave and they were scared about it. So I decided to find out what is in the Mogao Caves.

One day after swimming, I booked a private jet and flew to Mogao. When I got there, I looked in the cave. There was a lot of skeleton bones on the floor and it was... hair-raising! I then realised this should be the lost mystery place I was looking for. Suddenly there was a landslide nearby, and I immediately ran as fast as I could to a safe place! I jumped into a dark hole to escape from the landslide. While I was resting and sitting on a rock, an ant climbed on my feet, then onto my body and shoulder. "Hello, thanks for saving my life! I managed to cling onto your shoe luckily while you were running for your life just now! By the way, what are you doing here?" I froze and wondered, how can that ant talk? I whispered, "Um... I am here to explore!" The ant crawled onto the floor and said, "Oh! An explorer! Come on in and I'll show you around this place!" It led me into a room filled with grey dusty pictures and statues. The pictures were covered in spider webs, and they were all about the daily life of the ant family and the fairy family. The statues showed that the fairies enjoyed a picnic and they looked pleased.

The ant told me that the statues were built by fairies. All the statues were enormous, even bigger than trees. The ant said, "There is a fairy family living in the basement, want to check it out?" I exclaimed, "Of course, I'd love to!" We went to the basement, then I discovered there were little bottles filled with fairies inside them! These bottles were square-shaped and rainbow-coloured. I opened one of the bottles and asked the fairy, "Why are you in a bottle?" "I don't know!", said the fairy. "I'll get you out of here!" I kicked the bottle and freed the fairy, then asked, "Who captured you?" "A few years ago, a witch captured my family and friends from our home, The Fairyland! She wanted us to be her slaves, but we refused. That's why she punished us and put us in the bottle." Wow, a witch captured the fairies. That is unbelievable! That witch is so mean. How could she do something so evil to these lovely fairies? I was determined to save the fairies. I unlocked all the bottles, and all the fairies were so elated to be free! We got to know each other and became friends. We also agreed to go explore this cave together.

The fairies, the ant and myself went back to the cave entrance. We started digging into some sand on the floor to see whether there was hidden treasure down there. Then, the ant saw something next to the skeleton in a shiny golden colour! We all paid attention and looked carefully. It was... a treasure chest! We took it out and opened it. The chest was full of gold coins! We agreed to share them. I planned to donate all the gold coins to people in need. The fairies decided to use them to rebuild the Fairyland and the ant chose to use the coins to buy food for itself.

After that, the sun was setting and the weather was getting frigid. "It's time to go home, goodbye!", I yelled. "We need to go back to The Fairyland too. We miss our family and friends as we've been stuck in this cave for a long time!", said the fairy. The ant walked back into the cave and waved to us. "I will miss you all!" I hopped onto my private jet and flew home.

That night, I had an amazing sleep and dreamed about the fairies and the ant. I had a fantastic adventure in the magical Mogao Caves! When I looked back at this adventure, there were always something unexpected waiting there for us. I would like to go back next time with my family and friends, and introduce my parents to the ant that I met. I'm also going to write a letter to tell the explorers that the Mogao Caves is nothing to be fearful of. Instead, it is a place that is full of excitement!

The Magical Adventure About Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chan, Hui Yin Constance – 9

I was riding my unicorn Nico in the sunny blue sky, suddenly, a strong gust of wind blew us off balance and I fainted. After sometime, I felt something on my face. I woke up and found out Nico was licking my face. I slowly climbed to my feet, looked up and found out I'm in a desert. I saw a temple-shaped structure in a distance. I felt weird and thought someone had played a trick on me! I didn't know where I was but the surrounding looked familiar. I remembered reading a book about Mogao Caves! "Is this the famous Mogao Caves?" I asked myself. "You were going to discover Mogao Caves with me today!" said Nico. Suddenly I wasn't scared anymore. A tour guide was here, it was strange too, that a unicorn knows how to talk! "I think I remember who REDISCOVERED Mogao Caves! The first Western expedition to reach Dunhuang arrived in 1879. More than twenty years later, a Hungarian-born Marc Aurel Stein, a British archaeologist and explorer, learnt of the importance of the caves. Stein reached Dunhuang in 1907. He heard rumours of the walled-in cave and its content!" I exclaimed happily waiting for Nico to praise me.

"Your description is accurate! Do you know where we are now?" "No, I only know we're in Mogao Caves!" I said shyly, "Then let me tell you exactly where we are." Nico said. "You are at Dunhuang, an oasis located at a religious and cultural crossroad on the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China. The caves are also known as the Dunhuang Caves! However, this term was also used as a collective term to include other Buddhas Cave sites in Western Thousand Buddha's Caves, Eastern Thousand Buddha's Caves, Yulin Caves and Five Temple Caves". Nico explained confidently.

"Nico, you are so smart! Can we be partners so I can learn more?" I asked. "Ok! But I'm getting a bit hungry, can you give me some of your carrots?" "Certainly!" I said.

"I still want to know when Mogao Caves was built." I said. "Mogao Caves are famous for their statues and wall paintings, spanning 1000 years of Buddhist art starting from 366 AD and represent the great achievement of Buddhist art from 4th to the 14th century. Cave 302 of the Sui Dynasty contains one of the oldest and most vivid scenes of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road." I am astonished that Nico was so knowledgeable, was it an expert in history and archaeology? Or it was a genius who knows everything? Regardless, I'm embarrass that I'm less knowledgeable than a unicorn. "Please tell me more so I can be a famous explorer when I grow up." I said.

"Mogao Caves are also known as Buddha's Cave. It is 28 kilometers south of Dunhuang. There are 750 caves altogether on 5 levels, the biggest cave is 130 feet high!" said Nico. "Wow there are a lot of caves. I don't think I can visit them all in one day!" I said. "But some caves are very small and can accommodate few people at a time." Nico said "OHHH how poor the homes must have been really small for them!" I said in a fake poor voice. "YEAH, I agree also. Of the most 800 caves chiseled into the cliff face, 492 are decorated with exquisite murals that cover nearly half a million square feet, some 40 times the expanse of the Sistine Chapel. The cave interiors are also adorned with more than 200 sculptures." Nico said. "Weren't they scared living in the caves?" I asked.

"I still have 3 more questions! First, who constructed Mogao Caves? Second, what did the library caves write about? And what is hidden in there?" "These are very good questions Constance! The Mogao Caves are fifteen miles away from Dunhuang's bustling market. It is home to one of the most breathtaking collections of Buddhist paintings and statues in the world. As legend has it, a Buddhist monk name Le Zun was making the long journey to the Western Paradise, he had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light at the site in 366AD, inspiring him to build a cave here. Regarding your second question, the library contains treasure troves of writings which was collected between the 9th and 10th centuries CE by Tang and Song Dynasty Buddhist monks who carved the cave and then filled them with ancient manuscripts on topics ranging from religion and philosophy, history and mathematics! Regarding your last question about what is hidden in Mogao Caves, I suppose it's history. The library cave, Dunhuang manuscripts, art, murals, architecture, sculptures, paintings on silk paper, printed images, textiles and many priceless artifacts." "Thanks Nico for the answer. You are equally useful as Safari." I said. "I am really pleased and I hope I can remember all these fantastic facts when I visit Mogao Caves with my parents next time." I said happily! "I think your family will be so glad to know that!" said Nico.

I suddenly heard someone screamed "Constance, wake up!" I opened my eyes and found out that it was just a dream! I told my mom what I dreamed, and she told me our bus is arriving at Mogao Caves in 15 minutes and

we need to get ready to see some invaluable historical artifacts. I was so glad to know all the facts about Mogao Caves so I could be the tour guide for my parents! I felt so energized and excited.

We finally arrived to the magnificent Mogao Caves! I ran into the first cave and told my parents all about it! My family tried counting how many caves there were but they lost count! At last, I told them how many caves there are and they find out that it was impossible to count without me telling them, but at last they were all still very proud that I knew so much about Mogao Caves! They praised me!

The Dream Quest of Buddhas

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chang, Long Tin Andy – 11

“The Silk Road was used to allow exchange of spice, silk...”

I had endeavored to squeeze facts about the Silk Road into my brain for my Social & Cultural Study examination revision for the 101th time but it was so boring that I kept dozing over, again and again. I had no idea about why even has to be bothered to memorize these “useless” information from decades, if not, ages ago.

“Spice, silk...”

My head dropped again for the 99th time when all of a sudden, my vision got blurred. I rubbed my eyes and when I opened them again, I found myself inside a small cave and I saw a stream of light coming from inside it. I was puzzled but curious, so I decided to start following it.

The more I explored, the more I found this cave special. It was neither dark nor spooky as in my imagination of what a cave would be. I heard small crackling of the dead leaves under my feet and I felt the dryness and chill of the air. The many beautiful paintings all over the cave wall took my breath away. They were not stickmen type of painting, but rather colourful, detailed and elaborate – simply stunning! I was feasting my eyes on the paintings thinking to steal some ideas for my next VA assignment when I suddenly realized that most paintings had one focus in common – Buddha.

I was still following the light, which was coming through a small window right at the top of the entrance of the cave when suddenly I came face to face with a humongous figure of Buddha facing it. The light shone on the face of the Buddha sculpture as if it was a spot-light on stage. I was amazed by the so very clever design of the lighting on Buddha and just stood there staring when I noticed about some luminous lichen that gave the walls an eerie glow. Oh My God! The lichen had slowly turned the cave wall into a screen.

As if to answer my questions on what cave was it and why was it there, a movie began to play. I saw a Buddhist monk who had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light in his dream which inspired him to build a cave here in order to build karmic merit. He was later joined by a second monk and the third, the fourth and so on, all sharing the same excitement to carving different Buddhas by hand to perform their acts of veneration. The site gradually grew. Buddhist monks, local officials, and wealthy families all raced to build different caves and made different paintings and sculptures of Buddhas. They did not just build them, but also worshipped them with their hearts. Word of mouth about the caves spread like fire and people from far and near flooded to pay visits.

One particular cave caught my attention. In there sat a monk on the ground barefoot, facing a Buddha and chanting. He was trying to bury a gilded Buddha charm inside the Buddha he was making. The charm, seemingly made from real gold, sparkled and looked valuable. The Buddha was also very special and instead of standing or sitting, he was lying down in a peaceful manner.

Then, the images on the wall began to fade away and the lichen stopped glowing.

I found myself waking up in my bed with a lot of questions on my mind about my dream and so I googled about Buddhas and caves. My jaw dropped when I saw images about Mogao Grottoes – the caves looked exactly like the ones I saw in my dream!

The Mogao Grottoes, now on UNESCO's world cultural heritage list, were carved into the face of a sandstone cliff at Dunhuang on the edge of the Gobi Desert. I read with interest the amazing figures about it: the caves were carved starting 1,700 years ago from the 4th to the 14th century; the decorated caves' walls and ceilings totaled close to 500,000 square feet; there were 2,000 sculptures and the largest sculpture was over 100 feet tall! In surfing the various websites, I even saw a picture of a lying Buddha in one webpage about Mogao Grottoes which looked very similar to the one in my dream.

The more I learnt about Mogao Grottoes, the more I was interested in knowing more. Besides knowing its history, I also learnt that the site had been swamped by tourists in recent years. The resulting high levels of carbon dioxide and humidity posed great challenges in conserving the caves.

I suddenly had a brainwave on why I had to study Social & Cultural Study – so as to understand the history of mankind, the history of my kind. I also found an urge to master science so that I could make good use of technologies to help conserving Mogao Grottoes better.

I decided that one day, I will go and see for the Buddhas in Mogao Grottoes myself and I hope that I will unveil a secret that there is really a gold charm inside the lying Buddha as shown in my dream. If I study hard enough, I will invent a machine to take out the gold charm, or other hidden treasures, without hurting the Buddha!

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chiang, Ching Alexander – 10

The desert climate was still cold in the early morning when my family and I arrived at the world famous Mogao Caves for sightseeing. I always want to be here because I like history a lot. Also, I want to learn how the ancient monks built this wonderful place thousands of years ago. It is a legend and I truly admire it.

When I first saw the tour guide, I suddenly got an uncomfortable feeling. The tour guide had a huge scar across his face and he didn't look like the image on the website where we hired him.

"Hello, I am your tour guide and my name is Daniel, you can call me Big Dan. I hope you will have a great time," he said with a deep and mysterious voice.

"You are very welcome to come and find me at the hotel but stay out of my room." He also always looked behind us like he thought someone was stalking us. I ignored that and continued our sightseeing because the wall paintings there were too beautiful and the magnificent Buddhist art was stunning.

The next day, our tour guide was limping. I started to feel nervous.

"The first caves were dug out in the stone age by the cavemen," said Big Dan.

"And the "Library Cave" was found last year."

I stared at Big Dan and thought all of his information was impossible and ridiculous. The information was different from the books about the Mogao Caves I borrowed. He even took us to a dead end accidentally when we asked him to take us to the ancient library.

On the third day, Big Dan was missing. My mom was determined. "Nothing can ruin our family vacation! Let's explore the caves ourselves," said my mom.

While my mom was looking at a painting, my brother and I saw something in the corner of a dark room. Suddenly a stinky stench caught my nostrils as I approached, and I found a rotten body lying there. I was terrified and told my parents and they called the ranger there and told him what happened.

After that, my mom got nervous. "Maybe we should go to the ancient library." She thought books could calm her down. When we were at the library, my brother saw a painting on the wall of something like a "PLACE" with a curse that makes anybody start rotting and stop them from leaving if they steal from the "PLACE". I was terrified of that picture but I didn't know where the "PLACE" was in the painting.

That night, my brother and I read all the books about curses shown from paintings and books about solving mysteries on our ebook account. We found out that the "PLACE" was the Mogao Caves... Suddenly, I figured out that the rotten body and the tour guide could be "black archeologists"!

"Black archaeologists steal and smuggle precious historical cultural relics in the black market." I told my brother.

But luckily the curse could be broken by something holy and pure goodness. My brother bought a Buddhist token from a souvenir shop yesterday because he thinks it is a lucky charm. We thought we should give it a shot. The next morning, we went back to the ancient library and put the token on the painting. The painting suddenly changed into a happy place with a lot of monks filled with enlightenment. "I hope the caves will be safe now. After all, preservation is important." I said to my brother.

On the last day, we went to the Gobi Desert. We climbed to the top of a big sand dune and slid down the dune with sleighs. It was scary but fun! After a few rounds, we saw some cute camels and paid the riders to ride on the cute camels. While we were playing, we suddenly felt windy and dusty.

The riders told us to run to nearby shelters. "Run! A sand storm is coming!" We jumped off the camels. We quickly ran into our car but my dad was too panicked.

"I dropped the car keys. I lost them." Dad almost cried.

"Look at the camels! Dad!" said my mom. We saw the camels flee to a nearby tent and we followed them immediately.

The run was about ten minutes but it felt like ten hours to me because it was really hard to run in the sand. My face started to feel pain from the dust. When we finally ran into the tent, we fell onto the carpet floor in exhaustion. After a second, the tent suddenly flew away because of the strong wind. When we thought we were going to die, the sand storm ended and everyone was unharmed except our car which was blown away and crashed into a dune.

I will never forget this trip because of the beautiful paintings and the frightful but exciting journey of this spiritual place. When I grow up, I want to be an adventurer and come back to explore Dunhuang again.

Adventures in Ally's Cave

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chu, Yan Kiu Carina – 9

Boom! Boom! A young and pretty scientist named Ally invented the time machine and traveled randomly back to Dunhuang, Gansu Province in China. When Ally got out of her time machine, there was smoke coming out. Her head was spinning and her hair was as curly as if she had got an electric shock. She looked at her magical, silver watch and said, "Let me see which year it is now!" She switched on her magical watch and her watch said, "Master Ally, you are now in 366, which was one---thousand---six---hundred---and---fifty---five years ago!"

The time machine was damaged and took time to repair. Ally looked around and discovered a lot of caves on the hill inside a golden mountain near a desert. She met a storyteller called Max. Max was a tall young teenager but he had a grey moustache. He told Ally that the place was called Mogao Caves. Max introduced Monk Le to Ally. Monk Le was the first monk to dig caves and make scriptures on the hillside. Monk Le also told other monks that the place was sacred. It had attracted a lot of people to come and make more Buddhist scriptures and sacred arts.

Max, Ally, and Monk Le became friends and they shared a lot of drawing techniques. For example, Ally taught Monk Le how to mix the colour pigments, spread the colour pigments, and make beautiful paintings on the walls. Monk Le told Ally the origin of Buddhism and showed a lot of Buddhist scriptures to her. Max and Ally played hide and seek in the caves and studied a lot of exciting stories inside the caves.

Max, Ally, and Monk Le went on a marvellous adventure together in the desert. That day the sand storm was extremely strong and they could hardly see anything. Then they saw a fire dragon coming out from the sand dune, blasting a lot of hot fireballs at them. It was so hot that they felt as if they were going to melt. They tried to hide near one of the caves. Ally spotted a warrior sword inside the cave and showed it to Max and Monk Le. Max carefully examined the sword and delightfully said, "Look, Ally, do you know what is this? This sword is an ancient magical weapon lost for centuries. You see, the sword has seven colourful gemstones. There is a myth that when you press the button on its blade, it will shoot strong rainbow beams from the gemstones and kill the fire dragon." They took the sword and left the cave. They pressed the button together and smashed the sword with the rainbow beam on the dragon. They defeated the dragon finally! To commemorate their adventure, they named the cave "Ally Cave" and carved the name at the cave entrance.

Ally said to Max and Monk Le, "It is about time for me to return to the future". Monk Le sighed, "Oh no, why do you leave so early?" Max pulled Ally's shirt and said, "I will miss you very much!" Monk Le then asked, "Can I share our story with others and carve it on the walls?" Ally replied, "Of course, I will tell your story to my parents too!" Monk Le and Max bid farewell to Ally and said, "Goodbye, Ally! I hope we can meet again in the future." Next, Max helped Ally to find the spare parts to repair the time machine.

Finally, Ally returned to the present. She told her parents her amazing story with Monk Le and Max but her parents did not believe her. She begged them to go to Gansu Province and look at the stone carvings. In Summer, they went to Dunhuang and visited Mogao Caves. They finally found the "Ally Cave" and they felt incredible! They saw the carvings about their adventures of defeating the fire dragon by the warrior sword. They also found some notes left by Monk Le on the wall saying, "Ally, see you in heaven!"

New Tales of the Magao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Fung, Yan Amber – 9

Sapphire lived in a village nereby the Mogao Caves in China. She loved reading books. One night, she read a book about the legendary Buddha Cave, and soon after that, she fell asleep, she heard a thunderous sound and woke up.

She was in a place where there were thousands of buddhas and soon after, she fell asleep. She was in a place where there were thousands of buddhas surrounding her! How breathtaking the splendid buddhas looked. Around her were loads of magnificent paintings with wondrous colors. It looked like a pyramid that she read about a long time ago! She explored around the gigantic cave and even saw a gorgeous buddha sleeping exactly like how Sapphire does. She stepped backwards, trying to see the entire cave clearly and how colorful it looked, as if this was the place where she used to see a book that looked ideal to her. This miraculous cave looked like it was waiting for Sapphire to see how amazing it is. All of the sudden, Sapphire saw the first clue that this Buddha cave was used by civilizations of ancient China during the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties and is important evidence of the evolution Buddhist art in the Northwest Region of China.

It was obvious by just looking at the red, green and gold clothing on a large buddha surrounded by other handsome and beautiful buddhas. After a while, Sapphire found the buddha in her book she read today. She could right away recognize the buddha's face because she had looked at the picture of the buddha for quite a long time and tried to memorize it. She admired the fantastic look of a part of the cave filled with the charming sights of the buddhas. She heard the door slam, and a shiver ran down her spine. She was an intelligent girl, so she knew that this was just a slam. She nodded her head to tell the buddhas that it was nothing but the wind.

While she walked around, she found the biggest buddha among all other humongous buddhas. This buddha looked like the most well-known one in her village. "Sapphire! I'm waiting for you to wake up!" her mother reminded. Sapphire woke up and was still thinking of the magnificent Buddha Cave, so today in computer class, she typed in "Buddha Cave" and the Magao cave came out. It looked exactly the same as the one in her dream! What a miracle.

The Kingdom of Monks

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, King, Sophie – 11

One grey wind-swept afternoon, a seven year old girl Lilliana or Lilly, was resting on a couch, reading a library book about monks and Mogao Grottoes. It had only been a week since her family moved from their mansion into this plain old country house after her dad got fired from his job.

The house was extremely eerie, with an attic for storage, creaking floorboards, and spiderwebs hanging from the ceiling! Before moving in, the owner had warned them to never, ever open the door next to the guest bathroom. Ever since, Lilly had been secretly wondering what was behind the door. Lilly was alone (her parents were out job hunting while her brothers, Liam and Lucas, aged ten and twelve, were busy preparing lunch), she took the opportunity to investigate. As she nervously approached the door, she paused and took a deep breath before slowly opening it.

To her horror, a giant blue vortex appeared in front of her and she instantly fell inside. “Help!!!” She screamed at the top of her lungs. Liam and Lucas heard her ear-splitting scream, and rushed over to see. They tried to pull her to safety, but only ended up falling into the vortex too!

Down they went, swirling faster and faster. “Thump!” They landed on a large patch of grass. Two odd looking creatures, like old fashioned fairies that were dressed stylishly, suddenly flew past. Lucas waved at them, trying to catch their attention, asked in his sweetest voice, “Um...excuse me.....we come from a far away land; we were brought here by mistake, so...um...we were wondering if you can help us get back home?” Shocked, they asked suspiciously, “What makes you think we would help you when we hardly even know you?” Liam stepped forward awkwardly, then replied, “Please, kind fairies, we can explain. It all started when..” After listening carefully and lots of discussion with each other, they sighed heavily and said, “We would love to help, but unfortunately we don’t know how to send you home. We do know a way though. Here is a map that can guide you to the King of monks.” “Thank you!” they said gratefully before heading off.

After what felt long, they finally reached the maze of manuscripts. It was already night time, which made it extremely hard to see. “Ouch!” Ben yelped in pain. He had accidentally tripped over a torch and a mini mirror! Liam picked up the torch and turned it on. “This must be left accidentally by an adventurer who once ventured into the maze! I wonder if he managed to find his way out?” He shuddered at the thought. “Well, at least we can use this torch to find our way out!” Lilly said as she opened the gate to the maze.

After a while, they stopped at a curb which separated into hundreds of paths. “Which way should we go now?” Lucas asked exasperatedly as he searched for clues with his torch. “Aha!” he cried triumphantly. He found a gilded board with words written in an unknown language: “bUo! TUo gniHgUAl”.

Lilly looked sideways at the board. All of a sudden, Lilly’s face lit up, “That’s English! I bet if we read the board using the mirror, we would ‘crack’ the case!” Lucas took the mirror from Liam and directed it towards the board.

“Laughing...out...loud?” he read.

“But how will this help us know which way to go?” Lucas asked curiously. They racked their brains, hoping to find an answer, when Lucas exclaimed, “That’s it! LOL is short for Laughing Out Loud right? LOL turned upside down is 707! That’s the path to the exit!” At the word 707, gilded arrows appeared on the ground, showing their way out! “We did it!” The threesome exclaimed joyfully after they had exited. Exhausted, they decided to take a rest before travelling to their next destination.

The next morning, they reached the Forest of Buddhas. In they went, when suddenly Lilly spotted a massive row of Buddha statues blocking the path. Even though Lilly was quite sure that they weren’t alive, she still asked quietly, “Excuse me, Mr Buddha, but would it be possible if you move over slightly so we can walk past for just a second?” Not expecting anything to happen, one of the largest Buddhas grabbed her aggressively by the arm and threw her into a hole. “No one can enter this forest without permission!” The Buddhas let out a thunderous bellow in unison.

“What do we do now?” Lucas asked his brother. Liam stared sternly at the Buddhas.“ LAUGHING OUT LOUD!” he yelled.

As if by magic, the Buddhas roared in unity. They had opened up a passageway for them! The two darted towards Lilly, then shook her awake. The threesome scampered out of the forest as fast as they could.

As soon as they had escaped, they noticed a plain desert, with nothing like a cave. They strode around when Lucas accidentally stepped on an invisible button!

All of a sudden, a grotto appeared, and the King of Monks throne of the cave. “How may I help, strangers?” the King of Monks asked solemnly. Lilly explained everything from start to finish as the King listened intensely. “I see. I understand your difficulties and I would be glad to help.” the King replied. To their complete surprise, the King held out a dazzling crystal ball and whispered a spell.

Suddenly, a crystal blue vortex opened in front of them, sucking them in! Before disappearing completely, they quickly thanked the King and waved a final goodbye.

“Poof!” Lilliana was sitting back in her armchair with her library book . She noticed a mysterious note on the table alongside the book. It was the same unknown language in the Maze of Manuscripts! She sprinted to the bathroom and studied the note through the mirror. “Thank you for visiting our land,” it read. The afternoon sun shone brightly on her. It was a wonderful day.

Exploring the Hidden Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, King, Stephie – 11

“Follow me, Boomer!” I said as I was walking to the Mogao Grottoes, with my dog, Boomer trailing behind at a slow pace. For many years, I have been studying the history of the mystical Mogao Grottoes as I am interested in the ancient artwork of the monks. There were many rumours about the Grottoes, and I was sceptical about whether the caves actually existed. Finally, I got the courage to venture into them...

As I arrived at the Grottoes, I suddenly came to a halt. The Grottoes were like a classical Chinese temple, and they looked stunning! I cautiously stepped into the cave and was taken aback by the magnificent artwork and sculptures. The walls of the cave were covered with ornate drawings of fantasised creatures, such as flying apsaras, celestial beings and more, all of which were filled to the brim with a burst of colours. Manuscripts of literature were neatly displayed on wooden tables, and the exquisite sculptures of monks in tunics lined the rustic walls. Beautiful murals were neatly carved into the walls, which gave the room a majestic air.

Meanwhile, Boomer wandered around the Grottoes, sniffing at the manuscripts inquisitively. He had always been fond of art, and found the fragrance of old paper unusual. He was in awe of everything around him, and couldn't help bouncing about enthusiastically, which caused him to bump into things. “Oh, Boomer, isn't this place just amazing?!” I cried out. But, Boomer wasn't listening. Whilst happily strolling around the Grottoes, he had found a wall covered with drawings of dogs, and was rather exhilarated by it. He was eagerly wagging his tail at the wall, just a little too vigorously...

“Click!” The wall suddenly slid aside, revealing a secret passageway. I immediately rushed over to Boomer, and exclaimed with delight, “You clever boy, Boomer! You've found a passageway that perhaps no one has ever found before. Let's explore!” I tentatively stepped in, and found an alleyway of stairs. The wall shut behind us with a thud. Excitement trembled through me as Boomer and I walked further and further down into the cave's hidden compartment. My heart began pounding slightly, and I could feel my legs trembling. “How will we get out?” I thought.

After what seemed like a million years, we entered a spacious room where every inch of space was filled with more art pieces and sculptures of the monks. As I turned to my left, I noticed some odd looking objects that had a furry section on one end and a round tip on the other end. They filled up the jars on the shelves. There were also many platters of see-through containers, with different coloured circles inside of them. I was curious to know what those queer objects were, but had to acknowledge that there was no reasonable possibility of finding out. We were bewildered by the glorious discoveries that we had found in this secret compartment.

“Help.....help.....” Suddenly, we heard a faint sound coming from a corner of the room. We followed the sound and found an old trunk that looked rather decayed. It still had specks of gold on it, and looked like it could have been a treasure chest that had once belonged to the monks. Without hesitation, I opened the box and discovered a large, grey rock, painted with a pair of eyes, a nose and a mouth.

“How did that rock make that sound?” I mumbled to myself.

“Because, I am a magical rock and I would like to thank you sincerely for freeing me,” the rock said earnestly, in a deep but kind voice.

I jumped back, alarmed. “You...you know how to talk?” I asked, startled.

“Yes, of course. I was made by a very young monk, thousands and thousands of years ago. He was the one who painted my face, and I was his companion until he grew up. He has kept me in this trunk for a long time, so I have been stuck here and could not escape. But, oh, how fortunate am I, that you are here, and that you have freed me from my box,” the rock said jovially.

I was astonished, and had many questions to ask him. “Since you have been here ever since the first monks lived here, do you know what this place is?”

“Ah, this is the Magical Cave. It was built by the monks to protect their possessions and is filled with their peculiar inventions. This whole area is stored with many different objects that people don’t use nowadays. Now that I’m free from my prison, let me show you!”

Using his magical powers, he lifted one of the odd looking objects from a jar. “This is a paint brush. The monks made it so that they could use it to paint their artwork and sculptures,” he explained, as he simultaneously lifted the colourful platter that was laying on the shelves. “This is a paint set. It contains different colours in little circular compartments. The monks used this to add dimension and colour to their art pieces to make them look more attractive.”

“Amazing!” I then blurted out, “The monks were quite creative inventors, especially as they were one of the first group of inventors to ever exist in the world. I know this, as I have learnt that from research as a scholar–explorer!”

“Quite so.” The rock agreed warmly. “Would you like to take these inventions back to your world? I am sure your people would enjoy using them.”

“Thank you, Mr Rock!” I cheerfully thanked him. “Is there any way I can repay you for these splendid utilities?”

“Would you please promise me to keep this magical cave a secret?” The rock asked in a low voice. “No one should ever know about this hidden compartment, as it is filled with many precious items.”

“Of course! Your secret is safe with me.” I said.

“Thank you. Now, let me help you get back to your hometown. I hope you will visit me again soon!” The rock said gleefully, and with an instant wave, I found myself still holding the paintbrush and paint set in my hands, back in my warm, cosy flat.

The Time Machine

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lai, Cheuk Hei Curtis – 9

“Yes, Arian! We made time travel possible!” I shouted. Arian was in the garage fixing his dad’s car. I showed him the time machine project that we had been working on for so long and it was done! “It looks like a two-seated B-29 in the 1950s,” he said.

The next day, we fuelled up the tank and hopped into the cockpit of the time machine to test if it could travel back in time. We checked that everything worked fine and then took off excitedly. The plane soared through the sky like an eagle gliding smoothly in the wind. We had set the date to 1912 to see the Titanic. During the time travel, we were flying over important events; our clothes would turn into different types of clothing, representing different time periods in history. We didn’t notice that we had flown over the Titanic, as we were busy navigating. When we noticed the dashboard, we were already in 1678. We realized that there was no way to go back. We decided to take turns to take a nap. When Arian woke me up, we had already landed in a desert where we saw some camels passing by. We came out of the cockpit and walked around the area. A while later, we stumbled across a five-storey temple, and part of it was built inside an enormous cave. The statues gave me the willies – they looked so real!

In one of the caves, we discovered a gold-coloured wooden sword. Next to it, there was a slot that the sword could fit in. We inquisitively pushed the sword in to see what would happen. Immediately, we heard a click and then a door slid open. Inside the room, we found piles of gold laying on the ground. We gasped, as it was our first time seeing so much gold! It was unbelievable!

While we were exploring another cave, we unearthed bundles of scrolls and a large number of paper books. It was a precious library! The vast paintings on the walls and ceilings were magnificent – they must have taken a long time to finish. We cautiously climbed over the scrolls, picked a few up and rolled them open – we found a historical legend. Arian read, “One day, Le Zun, a Buddhist monk, was travelling to the Western Paradise. The weather was as hot as a frying pan. When he went through the Gobi Desert, he had finished all his water. Luckily, he found a small lake two kilometres away from this cave. He scooped up the water and drank it. The water was sweet like honey! Afterwards, he sat down and relaxed. He was admiring the sunset when something hit his eyes. He raised his head and saw the mountain glowing. At the same time, he saw a golden Maitreya Buddha floating in the sky, as well as a thousand beaming buddhas hovering in the sky, surrounded by flying fairies playing heavenly songs. From then on, he decided to stay there to reconstruct his vision through painting and sculpting in this cave.” I continued reading the story, “Years later, Fa Liang, another Buddhist monk, had the same vision. He dug another cave and filled it with paintings and sculptures, like Le Zun.” We realised that through time travel, we visited the renowned Mogao Grottoes on the Silk Road in China.

After this thrilling adventure of exploring the Magao Caves, we both agreed that it was time to go home. We carefully put the scrolls of manuscripts back on their original shelves in the Library Cave. It took us a while to find our time travel machine in the desert. When we found it, we got on it and tested the machine meticulously to make sure that it could still function as expected. We carefully typed “2022” into the dashboard this time, as we did not want a repeat of what happened earlier. Soon, we soared into the sky like a rocket and travelled back home safely. We went to school the next day and shared this adventure with our teachers and classmates. They were all stunned to learn what we had experienced in this adventure!

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lee, Cheuk Yin Koen – 10

“The Magao Grottoes is really a fantastic place, Mom! I have been longing to visit the Magao Grottoes for years. It was built on a cliff of the Mingsha Mountain formed by river erosion in the west. As for its name, it was called Mogao Grottoes, and Mo means desert and also no in Chinese, the Mogao Grottoes refers to the caves in a high place of the desert. So as a whole, it means there is no higher and better cave than the peerless ones.” I kept talking about the Magao Grottoes, hopefully, I could persuade my mom to take me there. Finally, we ended up going to the Magao Grottoes Exhibition held at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum last summer.

We walked around the exhibition and took beautiful pictures. We took a small break and had a healthy but delicious meal before we decided to continue our excursion. We followed the tour guide to a classroom. He taught us that most of the poor caves were terribly damaged due to a lot of human-caused destruction not just from natural weathering. With four hundred and ninety-two caves, only four hundred and two survived. I looked around at all the 3D animations of the ancient architecture, sculptures and murals, which vividly represented the Buddhists with plenty of colours. I felt a bit dizzy in a very crowded place after getting separated from my mom and was left feeling helpless.

I opened my eyes and in the darkness of the animated desert, I vaguely saw a little light flashing in the dust. The light got closer and closer, and finally, I saw a creepy creature moving towards me. It was a camel! A camel told me that fewer and fewer camels were left in the desert. “Many people use me to transport different goods from China to France, Germany and other European countries. I am exhausted from carrying parcels every day on the Silk Road of China. Some of my friends have even died from being overworked and lack of nourishment and water.” The camel wanted me to save him. When I tried to ask how I could do that, he disappeared in a flash.

All of a sudden, the ground started shaking, and the story started to unfold. I was being guided to the caves where ancient paintings came to life! A cactus in the painting suddenly started to move and then it spoke! It told me the extremely hot weather dried them out and some of his friends had even died. He knew the high temperature was caused by the polluted air caused by all the carbon emissions from cars and air-conditioners. The cactus told me that he was the only plant on earth. Without green plants, all the living organisms would die and it was scary to know that the end of the world was approaching.

The cactus had not even finished its conversation when a lovely deer and a black sheep jumped out from behind a 35-meter tall Buddha sculpture. They were skinny and looked like sticks! All the black sheep's wool had been torn from its skin. They had had nothing to eat for three days and were extremely hungry. Surprisingly, the Buddha sculpture rose up to the sky, and a lovely deer jumped into a big hole and guided me to a place beneath the Buddha sculpture which unlocked breath-taking secrets. I saw a nine-storey temple embedded into the cliff. Surprisingly, all the doors closed and I was trapped inside with a big Buddha. The Buddha was so huge that the floor had even cracked open. I was extremely terrified and wanted to escape, but the Buddha had me trapped. He told me that I should stop wasting paper every day because it is killing a lot of trees and soon the forest would be gone. People also do not care about animals enough. He said that it was good to be a vegetarian because not eating meat is not only good for your health but it saves animals too. The Buddha asked me to promise that I would plant more trees to protect the environment before I would be allowed to leave.

The lights suddenly flashed. I opened my eyes and saw my mom watching a dance performance from Chengdu. The journey had been so adventurous and unforgettable. Most importantly, it sparked in me a desire to treasure our cultural heritage and protect all the natural resources in the world. My mom then asked me if I had any ideas on how to preserve the heritage site as many parts of the caves had been damaged by humans.

I hope I can be a scientist in the future and use science and technology to protect cultural relics. I would like to figure out things such as how water affects the caves, and what kinds of changes in the environment can cause the murals to disintegrate. To preserve the Dunhuang Magao Grottoes, technology can be used to create high-definition images so that everyone can have breath-taking virtual tours with minimum disruptions caused to the fragile caves. Heritage

sites reflect a nation's development and wisdom from the past. All people are responsible for ensuring that relics are well-protected. The animals and plants are suffering too and it is up to us to protect them and the environment. I promised Buddha I would try my best to do it. I hope even after 1000 years, the images, colours and all the information in Magao Grottoes can be protected and people can still appreciate their splendour. Most importantly, I hope my mom can take me to the real Mogao Grottes in Dunhuang, China one of these days.

The Adventure Ceila Would Never Forget

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lee, Heidi – 11

Once upon a time, a 16 year old girl named Celia lived in Forever Town that was near the ancient cave. Celia was a very pretty orphan indeed. She had long curly brown hair, eyes like the starry blue sky and perfectly smooth skin. She always wore a white moon clip that shone under the moonlight. Although she was beautiful, she was not as shy and timid as she seemed. In fact, she was the only fearless girl in the town.

The town people followed a certain rule that contained warnings about adventuring outside the town. The elders simply said, "It's beyond dangerous to go outside the town." People had never understood why it was so menacing to go outside, but they assumed that it was because of wild animals lurking around. But there was another rumor – about caves that were hidden somewhere not far in the mountains. You see, this village was once a buzzing city along the Old Silk Road, but no one traveled along it anymore. Over time, the city dwindled into a small town and now, no one ventured out mythical ancient caves.

But did Celia care? No, most certainly not. She had never cared about rules, especially the ones that made no sense. "How could it be dangerous when no one had ever explored it?", she thought to herself.

Finally one fine day, she decided to set off to find the hidden caves of wonder. Despite the town's warnings, Celia set off into the mountains to seek a great adventure. It took her 17 days to travel from the town to the cave, in blistering, burning daylight sun and facing snowy blizzard storms at night with winds that blasted her face

Soon, she arrived at the entrance of the cave. What she saw dazzled her. On one side of the cave was the rocky opening, filled with small gemstones embedded in the rock face. When she stepped inside, a giant Buddha statue stared at her. Art paintings were around the walls, making the room seem more colourful. Celia swore she heard whispers in the air, repeating, "Finally you have come to meet me...". She shuddered but she didn't freeze for long. She tied her hair, and continued to march deeper into the dark opening.

Celia found herself in an ancient library that was filled with tons of books. She looked around, trying to find a book that interested her, when she encountered a strange something floating above the bookshelves. It was pearly white, as if it was snow – a figure that materialized into a short black haired, about 18 year old girl in a gown with a white hairband. She was a ghost!

The ghost soon realised there was a human behind her observing her every move. "Who are you? No – what are you?", Celia finally asked.

"M – me? Are you talking to me?" the ghost stuttered.

The ghost seemed more frightened of Celia than Celia was of her.

"Yeah you. What's your name?", Celia asked.

"Alisa... yours?"

"Celia. Hey, how about we sit down – if you can – and introduce ourselves?"

They talked for a long time and soon they felt comfortable with each other. Celia complained about how silly her town was for fearing the unknown caves. Alisa felt the same, thinking it was a shame that the descendants had long forgotten the journey their ancestors had made and the treasures they had created there.

After three weeks of staying in the cave, Celia knew Alisa's backstory a bit more.

It all began when Alisa was once exploring Mogao Caves just like Celia. But a few days later, Alisa found a mysterious button which was tempting to press. After some discussion with herself, she decided to press it. At first

nothing happened but soon enough, the ground began to crumble and Alisa fell into the pit of darkness. After she woke up, she looked at herself just to find a small, transparent hand that's similar to hers before in front of her.

On Celia's last day, Alisa said something Celia couldn't forget.

"Tell your townspeople that, no matter what, adventuring is the most important thing in our lives. Without it, our beautiful grotto would not exist and our art would be lost."

The townspeople learned from Celia that adventuring was not such a bad thing because, after all, without adventuring, the Mogao Caves would never have come to be and the townspeople's ancestors would never have settled in their beautiful mountainside town.

Faliang the Monk

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Li, Olivia Erica – 9

Once upon a time, there was a monk called Faliang. He was very hard working and always finished his tasks ahead of his fellow monks. He was awarded with one week's holiday.

It was a summer night, Faliang fell asleep when he sat under a tree enjoying the sound of the wind and an owl hooting. In the dream, Faliang saw a mustached man dressed in a white robe coming towards him.

“My dear friend, I am Jesus. God has sent me to tell you that you have been chosen to create some sculptures of the ancient Chinese god, the Buddha. You shall create them in a remote place in Dunhuang, where there are more than one hundred caves, spacious enough for you to create as many sculptures as you wish. Now, I need to report to my Father, so goodbye. I shall see you when you are building the sculptures.”

When Faliang woke up, he thought for a while. The dream real so that Faliang believed that was God's special mission assigned to him and decided to follow it and make the dream become true. This would also give him something to do during the holiday week.

It was boiling hot when Faliang set off to find the remote place in Dunhuang. After a few hours, he found a place near an oasis. Faliang also saw there was a long and tall line of caves with rectangular entrances, a few meters from the oasis. In the distance, Faliang saw a mustached man approaching him. When the man got closer, Faliang realized that it was Jesus!

Jesus said, “My dear Faliang, I will help you build the sculptures.”

Faliang gathered some building materials and started building the sculptures. With some help and assistance from Jesus, Faliang finished his masterpiece without too many difficulties.

Suddenly, Faliang and Jesus felt an earthquake coming towards them. Faliang begged Jesus to do something to stop the earthquake so that their work would not be ruined. Unfortunately, Jesus told Faliang that there wasn't anything he could do, because the earthquake was sent by God. Instead, Jesus told Faliang that he should hold on tight to him.

The earthquake was so violent that it seemed the whole world was going to end. Faliang could hear the wild wind blowing but did not dare open his eyes. It seemed like a decade until Faliang heard Jesus say: “It is now over; you can let go of my sleeves now.”

Faliang could not believe what he saw, the caves were all buried in a thick blanket of mud, rocks, and trees. All their hard work was destroyed. “What should we do, Jesus?” Faliang moaned. Jesus said, “Go, call the other monks, and tell them that you need their help, and that it is I, that have sent you.” Faliang ran back to the temple with his shaking legs.

Faliang did not let Jesus wait for too long before he returned with a group of monks. They helped Jesus and Faliang to dig out the cave. They discovered that a whole bunch of the caves and sculptures had broken, collapsed, or cracked.

Faliang noticed that there were not enough sculptures to fulfil God's request. So, he, Jesus and the others gathered some more supplies and started rebuilding the collapsed sculptures. Soon, they finished rebuilding the cracked sculptures and replaced them with new ones. The monks and Jesus added more sculptures than needed and decorated the walls and ceilings with Chinese paintings, ancient legends, and myths of Buddhas. They even added an extra cave, whom Faliang called The Library Cave because the monks stored ancient scrolls, scripts, prophecies, and important information in that cave.

Faliang named the caves “Mogao Caves”. It was amazing work so Faliang thought it would not be fair to hide the caves from the world. He asked Jesus how to make Mogao Caves famous. Jesus suggested that Faliang travel around the world and spread the word so more and more people get to know about Mogao Caves.

Faliang listened to Jesus and delivered the message to the people. Not long after, Faliang succeeded, and the Mogao Caves were famous ever since, so was Faliang.

Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Liu, Caleb – 11

As warm gentle rays stroke my eyelids, I open my eyes almost instantaneously. I stretch out my arms and rise from my simple bed in a grotto cave to the cool morning sun. I reach for my broom and duster, as I have been a faithful yet inconspicuous servant of the Mogao Grottoes for over twenty years.

The Grottoes are a captivating sight, I mean, just to look at the sheer size of the caves is breathtaking! The great sand dunes of Mingsha and Sanwei Mountain are magnificent. The desert climate is either burning hot or freezing cold though it is almost always dry, thus preserving the priceless mural paintings on the cave walls. Endless chambers contain countless Buddha statues. As I sweep, I learn from the fascinating murals. Every picture tells a story: the Nine-Colored Deer which saved the drowning man; the Five Hundred Robbers redeemed to become Five Hundred Buddhists; and Prince Magasattva sacrificing himself to save the seven tiger cubs from their hungry mother, just to name a few.

All these years I have worked faithfully, watching visitors come and go. Monks come to meditate and learn from the Great Books, merchants with camel troops stop by the City of Dunhuang for food and rest, and many travellers come to pray at the Grottoes for protection on their adventurous yet perilous journey on the Silk Road. Royals visit the murals painted by famous artisans in honour of the gods.

I have all but almost forgotten I am a royal myself ... well only almost ... because sometimes I still wonder about my King Father's people of the Kingdom of Youhium since I left twenty years ago. Youhiumians are the most peace-loving people that have ever existed.

Just then, as I was sweeping the dry stone floors, an unexpected visitor galloped in. It was Centaur, my father's faithful messenger.

"My dear, Prince Aaron! I always knew in my heart that you are still alive, though everyone else had given up hope after you vanished so long ago," he said. "You must fight your vile uncle Kieran for the people of Youhium, and... and," he exclaimed as he tried to catch his breath, "to avenge your poor father the Great King William."

"What do you mean? What has happened to my dear father?" I demanded.

"Your uncle tricked you and sent you here on purpose. Do you remember what happened on your eighth birthday?"

Of course I did. How could I forget.

I was born the Great Prince Aaron Bainbridge the 7th of the Youhium Empire. It might sound grand, but I can assure you, you wouldn't want to be me. It is rather stressful to be perfectly behaved at all times, and even worse, if you happen to be the only heir to the Crown, there are always relatives who try to harm or even kill you. That was what happened on my eighth birthday. My father, the King, had put on a big celebration for me and everyone in the capital was invited. My father was known for his generosity and his patience, and his peoples always loved him.

Everyone was thrilled to celebrate, except for my uncle Kieran. Apart from my parents, he was the closest person to me. I remember once passing by his study, and he was taken aback. Seeing no one else was around, he beckoned me to enter. "Here, my dear, Aaron. Your father told me there are people trying to harm you. Drink this potion and you will become immortal. You shall then be teleported to the Mogao Grottoes for your own safety, and you must stay there until I tell you it is safe to come back."

Centaur shook his head in disbelief. "Kieran told your father you ran away, and your poor father soon died after that from grief. Kieran seized the crown, but his evilness could never make him a true Youhiumic monarch. The whole Kingdom suffered. Here is your father's Sword of Fury, it is now yours. Use this deadly weapon to slay powerful and vicious people, such as your uncle." He looked at me in the eye. "Only a true prince can use it. Kieran will be here soon, and the biggest war in Youhiumic history shall begin."

"A troop of soldiers is ready for you at Sanwei mountain," continued Centaur. "Slay Kieran, you true King of Youhium! Win this good fight!" He then immediately disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Clutching a broom in one hand and the Sword in the other, I was too shocked to say anything. The evil Kieran would surely notice Centaur had disappeared with the Sword, and he knew exactly where to find me. Suddenly, I heard Kieran's voice booming and echoing in the Grottoes.

"You didn't expect me, Aaron, did you?" he snarled cunningly.

"How could you betray my father? He was your brother!" I retorted in tears.

With a loud cry, I leapt into the air with the Sword. A flying horse came up underneath me and carried me to the dunes of Sanwei mountain.

I marched my troops up Mingsha Mountain, with Kieran's troops closely on our tails. We were turning round a sand dune when our hidden troops ambushed them, wiping them out. Kieran was irate and retreated to the banks of the Daquan River, where I lunged at him with the Sword of Fury. He leapt at me but missed, and I immediately sprung back to make my next move. He was losing energy fast, and I finished him with one final blow. My men roared with cheer. "Long live King Aaron!" The sufferings of Youhium had finally come to an end.

I gave one last look at the beautiful Mogao Grottoes before I returned to Youhium triumphantly as King Aaron. Every evening since, I have knelt at my father's grave, as I can feel his presence teaching me how to become a good king. The Golden Era of Youhium is about to begin.

The Adventures of the Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lun, Chi Kwong Max – 10

The monk who found the Mogao Caves was, of course, dead. But before he died, he left a precious treasure behind in the Caves. That was just a legend, and Ben, well, he didn't believe it at all! Ben was a boy who was only ten years old. He was always desperate for thrilling adventures, but never finds them. Until one day, he went exploring in the desert on the silk road in China. He found an enormous cave which was the Mogao Caves! His heart skipped a beat. He thought, if the Mogao Caves exists, there must be treasure!

The cave was an amazing sight. The construction was a magnificent throne with a Buddha Statue sitting on it, with his eyes closed peacefully. All of a sudden, he heard an ominous growl. A monster appeared in the dark shadows, cackling menacingly. It shot out like a bullet behind the throne! It looked like an enormous fuzzy ball with frightening streaks of red and yellow stripes on it. Ben ran as fast as he could, with the monster tailing him at such a close distance that you would think it had a leash and was being pulled by Ben. Ben picked up speed, then made a sudden turn. He thought the monster would crash right into the wall, but it turned as swiftly as him. Thinking like a calculator, Ben thought of another idea. He found a scorpion on the ground, picked it up, and flung it at the monster. As soon as the two jet-black pincers grabbed the brightly colored fur of the monster, the scorpion sank its poisonous tail into it. The monster was defeated!

Ben peeked excitedly into where the monster first appeared, the gap between the Buddha and the throne. At last, there it was! It wasn't a legend after all! Ben took the shiny box of treasure home, full of pride. All he wanted was another adventure just like this one.

New Tales of the Magao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Mak, Wing Hei Renee – 10

During the summer holiday of 2021, there was a family who went on a trip to the Mogao Caves. The daughter, Shannon, was the one who most excited for the trip. Shannon's mother told her about the history of the Mogao Caves and Silk Road before. Her mother wished to bring Shannon to visit one of her friends who worked there for many years. Shannon expected it to be a great adventure.

On the way to the cave, Shannon yelled, "Mogao Caves! Mogao Caves!" Everybody knew she was excited. When her mom took her to the entrance, she quickly ran past everything into the caves. She soon saw a place she loved. There were many seats made out of stones. She sat on a seat and looked around while her parents examined a Buddha statue as still as a log. After a while, Shannon got bored and went to another cave nearby, 'Library Cave', alone. Shannon was amazed when she saw the cave was full of silk sheets, bundles of scrolls and numerous damaged figurines of Buddhas. She took out a silk sheet and started to read it. Suddenly, she saw a flash of lights surrounding the Buddhas in the cave which made her feel dizzy. She was scared and fell to the ground.

Plop! Shannon shivered and sat on the ground, her eyes were closed tight. "Hi! What are you doing here? You must be tired. Do you need water? The well is over there." A girl's soft voice broke the silence. Shannon relaxed and opened her eyes a bit. "What? Well!" Shannon said. "You must be thirsty," the girl smiled at her. Shannon stood and ran outside immediately. She saw a big well and all the things there were different and old fashioned. Shannon was shocked. She went back to the girl in the cave. The girl looked very pretty with dark marble eyes and a black pony tail. Shannon was curious about what she just saw and asked, "Um, I know this is a silly question, but which year is it?" "Never mind, people here always forget it. It is 1987," the girl answered politely.

"What? Impossible! 1987!" she shouted. Then, Shannon said "I came here with my parents. I must go and find them!" The girl took Shannon out and put her on a camel. It was the first time she ever rode a camel, but she was calm as nothing could bother her from wondering why she was in 1987. The camel stopped outside a plain blue tent. The girl led Shannon went inside the tent. Shannon started to explain, "Actually, um, I'm a person from 2021, I travelled here with my parents. But, unbelievably it's become 1987." The girl was stunned after hearing what Shannon said. The girl's parents came and when they saw Shannon, they asked, "What's happening?" Shannon put her finger to her lips. The girl understood at once and told her parents, "Well, Shannon's my friend now. She got lost in Mogao Caves, so I brought her home." Her parents invited Shannon to sleep in their tent.

That night, they ate some steamed stuffed buns and meat for supper. Shannon was tired and quickly fell asleep. The next morning, the girl's parents left so Shannon and the girl went back to the Mogao Caves to find her parents and also any hints to return to 2021. Instead of the Library Cave, the girl brought Shannon to another cave, "Thousand Buddhas Cave". The cave was full of small seated Buddha figures. Buddha paintings were also found on the walls and ceiling. The girl tried to help Shannon by praying to the Buddha. She believed that the Buddha would help people in need. Suddenly, shimmering lights sparkled on all the Buddhas surrounding them. Shannon was not afraid because she had this experience the day before. However, the girl closed her eyes tight just as Shannon did.

Plop! They landed on hard ground. "Ow, it hurts!" the girl shouted. "Time traveled again," Shannon wondered. "Don't tell anyone about it." A monk came to them and asked, "What are you girls doing here?" They saw a tree and replied, "We fell from there," the girl winked at Shannon. "So, do you need help?" the monk asked. Shannon thought twice before answering. "No need, we know the way to go, but thank you anyway." They went back to the Thousand Buddhas Cave and discovered that the Buddha's figures and paintings were well decorated and less damaged. This time, they saw glimpses of light shining on the hand of the golden Buddha figure. Without any fear or thinking too much, Shannon went to touch the Buddha's hand to ask for help. They time-traveled back to 1987 at the same cave.

Shannon seemed to understand the way to travel back to 2021. She cried to the girl, "I guess I should leave now." "Yeah, I guess so. Your parents will miss you. You'll be missed. I'm Alison, tell me your name before you

leave,” the girl said. “My name is Shannon and I’ll miss you too.” They hugged each other tightly. “Goodbye!” With the last shout, Shannon disappeared in the cave after touching the Golden Buddha’s hand.

“Ouch, it really hurts.” Shannon shouted just as Alison did. “Hey, are you Shannon?” Shannon felt that lady’s face was familiar to her except some wrinkles on her forehead. “Oh! You are Alison! You look older!” Shannon was surprised. Shannon’s mother finally found her in the Thousand Buddha Cave. When she saw Shannon talking to Alison, she asked, “Shannon, you know Auntie Alison already? She was my friend when I studied in university.” “I knew her when she was a little girl with a pony tail.” Shannon and Alison giggled. “What a mysterious trip in Mogao Caves!” Shannon thought.

The Spine-Chilling Cave Traps

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Pang, Hei Man – 9

Like all days, Ariana was meant to be practicing her fantastic flute after dinner. She expected that the flute books would be staying in her flute bag unless her nosy brothers purposely took them as drawing books. When she was about to take out her books, she found out that they were missing! She searched the whole house carefully in order not to miss out any minor details. She even searched under the toilet cabinet, the medicine drawer...

Ariana finally found her books under the dusty shoe rack. Peering around, she found a pocket-sized necklace nearby. She put on the necklace and she realized seconds later that she was spinning in a funnel of indigo and rust.

Ariana landed firmly on the ground. She looked at her clothing and knew that she wasn't wearing her pyjamas. She was wearing a thin dress in light magenta with matching socks and also a pair of aquamarine trainers. She also spun around and looked around curiously as if this new place fascinated her. Rubbing her eyes, she saw a pitch-black cave. Beside the cave, she saw a few Chinese characters carved into the rough rock. Ariana thought: Yes, I can translate these characters. Aunt Melissa has taught me Chinese. She scrutinized the characters for a few minutes and it directly translated to 'Mogao Grottoes, Gansu Province'.

She felt some footsteps behind her, so she turned around her to see what it was. She hoped with all her heart that it wasn't poisonous scorpions or slithering snakes. Tensely, she turned around and saw that it was a girl. The girl was tall and willowy. She had such breathtaking beauty that the surrounding area became strangely airless as she pushed some sleek auburn hair down her back. She told Ariana that her name was Katelyn.

Katelyn told Ariana that she was on an important mission to explore the Mogao Caves. After a long discussion, Ariana agreed to accompany Katelyn to explore the caves but Katelyn said that nine years old is too young to explore caves. Although, Katelyn admitted that she was only seventeen. Together, they bravely entered the Mogao Caves.

They were a few meters into the cave when Ariana noticed a book with old-fashioned writing on the cover. Ariana flipped open the pages as gentle as if she was holding a newborn baby. Looking around, found instructions written for visiting the cave. It read: Enter stranger, but don't be afraid. You will learn to explore, but first you play. Katelyn was a few feet deeper into the cave when she whispered, "Come, Ariana. There is the Library Cave with some beautiful murals I am sure that you would approve of." They set foot into the Library Cave when Katelyn stepped on a booby trap! Ariana was a few centimeters from falling into the damp, marshy mud floor littered with dead worms and scorpions. All Ariana could see of Katelyn was her sea blue eyes, frozen with terror and fear. What Katelyn did not realize was there was one slithering scorpion that was still alive and stung her on the ankle. Katelyn let out one last high, shrill cry then she died in agonizing pain.

It was at this moment that Ariana realized that she was alone in this cave. All alone, without Katelyn or any person except herself. Ariana was determined to complete Katelyn's mission, but she was doing the mission in Katelyn's place. Ariana went to the edge of the cave, carefully examining every step. She picked up some of the scrolls and started to read them. She found out that these colossal scrolls were not books; instead they were sacred art and literature. She read about a young girl travelling back in time, bravely rescuing her ancestors. Perhaps her favorite was a story about constellations, forming a pattern with imagination and hope. She mumbled to herself, 'I have no time for these stories, I must find a way to help Katelyn finish her mission'.

Remembering the story Ariana read about constellations and never giving up hope, she walked deeper into the cave. Sweating, she continued to walk as a booby trap was activated! She fell into at least 3 meters of muddy water with biting salmon. As if 300 Great White Sharks were chasing after her, she persevered and quickly swam towards the shore. Soaked, she was about to give up when she saw a small Lapis Lazuli crystal pendant with a note written in Chinese characters. She remembered her Aunt Melissa had taught her Chinese, the note translated to: Well done! You are now a member of the Mogao Caves Explorers! Use this necklace to return home. It will become an ordinary necklace after using the magic.

At last, Ariana returned home. She missed Katelyn and was desperate to see her one last time. One rainy day with an ominous sky with her roof encased in ice, she unconsciously followed her heart that led her to an old cemetery nearby and found a grave with Katelyn's name on it. On the white marble, she saw a message on it. Carved in detail with a silver pen, it read: an evil demon called Death took away a beautiful rose from the gardens. Somewhere, Ariana could hear Katelyn's soft, gentle echo of her laughing about the murals at the Library Cave...

Tales from Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Saito, Yuli – 10

The sun was beaming on the western China deserts and Ted the traveler was heading towards the Mogao caves, determined to find the most ancient, printed book in the word in the Mogao library. This aforementioned book had been there for hundreds of years and Ted had read somewhere in the past, a monk named Wang had found extraordinary treasures in the Mogao caves.

Legend had it, that Wang took some historical documents and painted scrolls from the caves and traded them with an explorer named Stein and earned good money.

All Ted cared about was money, so despite having to battle through cliffs after cliffs, he didn't give up. He sweated so profusely that he could have filled his water bottle to the brim, but he still used his remaining strength to drag his legs to the Mogao caves.

As he trudged along, he saw a tall building that was so ginormous, that it was distinguished from far away. Ted was incredibly relieved to see the tower, that he sped up his pace eagerly to find treasure that could make him a fortune. The tower got bigger and bigger as he moved closer to the Mogao caves.

Finally, he was at the steps of the caves! He took a deep breath and pushed the cave entrance doors open. His jaw dropped as he discerned the gigantic Buddha statues. There was an unfathomable number of sculptures. Some were inexplicably large and towering, while some were as tiny as a hamster. As Ted tip toed towards the Mogao library, he felt like the statues were staring at him with their cold blank eyes, foreseeing that Ted was about to steal one of the most ancient treasures of the world. Every step he took the creepier the atmosphere felt, it made his hair stand on end.

At last, he found the Mogao library, and it was completely different than what he had expected. There were no shelves, but books stacked messily all around the giant room. There were lots of pictures on the walls, and a picture on the wall was of a huge monstrous tiger attacking human beings while protecting a shabby and tattered book. Ted assumed that the book was the treasure that he had come all the way for. He stared at it longingly and tapping the book as if it would mysteriously appear on his palms. After pressing for ten times, the picture magically turned into a button, and his hand sunk into the rocks!

BOOM! A giant tiger, resembling the picture on the wall dropped from the ceiling, and it was furious for being woken from his nap. It roared loudly and Ted felt as if his ears were about to explode. The tiger was a thousand times more enormous and scarier than its picture. It had fangs sharper than a knife and longer than a meter, its fur was matted with fiery red hair and little spikes poking out at various places of its body. One of the spikes had a book poked through it, and Ted recognized it as the most bygone book for ever written!

Ted hesitated, wondering if he should lunge for the book or save his neck, it was one way or another! The tiger was ready to pounce on him, so doing the most sensitive thing ever, he ducked, crawled into a tiny hole, and used a rock to cover the entrance. Even though the tiger attempted to catch Ted by swiping continuously as small cracks, its paw couldn't reach him, so it stopped.

Ted could finally breathe a sigh of relief. The monstrous tiger was gone. After calming himself down, he finally decided to come out. But once he got out, he wished he hadn't. Along with the tiger, about ten thousand mice and cockroaches charged towards Ted, and the force of so many gross creatures knocked the wind out of him.

Dumbfounded, he leapt to his feet, brushing off cockroaches, and dashed out like a mouse in a cat chase. An ear-splitting roar came from the library and the spiky tiger chased Ted along with the mice and cockroaches. The pack followed him relentlessly, all around the Mogao cave. They arrived at where the tall Buddha statues where Ted was out of strength and breath. He found the largest statue, leaped onto its lap, and climbed as high as he could with his remaining strength. The tiger spotted him and jumped continuously. On the final jump, the tiger was abruptly frozen mid-air!

Ted swiveled around and saw the Buddha staring right back at him! He screamed and jumped with fright.

"Hello Ted." Ted was speechless, it could talk!!!!

The statue continued “I see that you have not achieved your goal of robbing the most precious book in the world. You have had the misfortune to meet the Heeda that protected the treasure for the past thousand years” The Buddha pointed at the tiger. “Despite that you have highly disappointed the ancient gods, we have the power to forgive. So, this time, I shall let you go, but if I ever catch you steal ever again, you won’t live to see another day.”

Ted nodded vigorously and said a feeble thank you as he was lowered down from the statue. His legs felt like led, but he staggered out of the cave.

From that day on, Ted never attempted thievery ever again.

The Adventure of the Mogao Caves

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Shea, Jady Xi Min – 11

“We are going to take you to a legendary place today,” said dad. “We are going to the Mogao caves in Dunhuang, located in Gansu province.” Little did I realise that this was the beginning of an incredible journey.... The moment we went in, we first saw the fantastic clay sculptures of Buddha and the different heavenly deities. We tried to talk to them, but they seemed to be silent and still. As we wandered through the caves, I noticed some eye-catching pictures, so we went on to visit the caves with ancient wall paintings. I was surprised that these murals reflected scenes from different cultures in the past, western, Asian, and more specifically, Chinese. “This must be because people from everywhere visited and created their works here.” How amazing, I thought to myself. Then, I came upon a cave, and something caught my attention.

It was a picture of a trader carrying goods on a camel that fascinated me. I was so mesmerised by the scene in the desert that I tried to look closer to explore the details of the journey. Suddenly, there was a flash of light and a mystical power dragged me closer to the mural...

“Swish!” I had fallen on the ground in an unknown place! I found myself in a vast desert. I looked around and there was a trader in a strange costume and a camel beside me. His colourful turban and long pointed boots resembled a costume from a historical play.

“What are you doing?” he said. I stood there, utterly perplexed. He yelled, “Fast, we have to get these goods to the destination tonight!”

I finally understood as I looked at my own clothing, it was that of the Tang Dynasty! I had turned into one of the travelling tradesmen in the picture! “Wait, I don’t belong here!! How can I go back to the modern world?” I cried. “There is no time to talk, we have to hurry,” said the bewildered tradesman. “My name is Ali from Persia. I only know that our emperor sent us to carry these goods to sell in Dunhuang.” OH! It was suddenly dawning on me that I might have time-travelled!

I had no choice but to join the caravan expedition. After walking for a long time, we came through a narrow mountain pass. I saw what appeared to be crouching shadows nearby. The whole thing seemed strange and kind of fishy, so I immediately reported to Ali in a hushed tone, “I think someone is following us and is lurking behind the rocky slopes.” I cautiously pointed in the direction of the slopes.

“Oh no! It's the bandits! Help! Help!” Ali shouted. Everyone panicked as the bandits appeared from the hill slopes and approached us, brandishing their crescent-shaped weapons. We were terrified as cold sweat rolled down our spines. Our hearts sank and I had the feeling that we couldn't escape this calamity!

All of a sudden, we saw something gliding down from the mountain. A monk appeared before our eyes, he looked concerned and told us to stand back and stay calm. Then he looked at the bandits solemnly and started to chant. The chant grew louder and louder and finally filled the entire valley with a strong force. At first, we thought he was just an ordinary monk, and his method was unreliable, but later, this method seemed to work after all! The bandits appeared to be frightened. They scattered and escaped back to the distant hills. Ali and I sighed with relief.

After thanking him profusely, we sent the monk on his way. Ali and I simultaneously cheered, “After a fierce struggle among the bandits, we finally overcame them! But” Ali continued, “I think we should take turns to be on the alert.”

We continued hurrying to complete our mission. “Fast, we won’t be able to sell the items if we don’t hurry!” Ali grumbled. In a flash of inspiration, I came up with a fantastic idea, “Why don’t we just trade our goods?” I exclaimed. “Yeah! That’s a very clever idea!” Ali accepted my suggestion.

We headed towards an inn at the nearest trading post. There, Ali and I took all of our goods out. As a Chinese person, I took out my silk, tea leaves, and chinaware. Ali, on the other hand as a Persian tradesman from Central Asia, took out his grapes, saffron and dried pomegranate seeds.” We excitedly bargained and exchanged our goods.

Meanwhile, an Indian merchant came close. “Can I join your trade too?” he said.

“Sure! What do you have?” I replied. As he was taking some of his literature scrolls out, I was shocked! His scrolls were the most important historic literature from the Tang dynasty. I recognized them as those I saw among the displays in the museum that I had visited! “These were the Buddhist scriptures that monk Xuan Zang got during his journey to the West,” he explained. After our friendly trading, I got some exotic fruits and a set of ancient religious scrolls.

As we were walking back peacefully in the desert, a strong desert storm suddenly appeared. I was utterly scared and had no idea what to do. “Crouch down, cover your face and lay beside your camel!” Ali shouted. Ooosh! A tornado was coming towards us! In a second, all of our belongings were blown away by it. I tried to grab them but found myself drawn into the powerful tornado...

In a flash, an indescribable creature which looked like an emerald dragon appeared, “You have completed your mission, you can go back to your world now.”

“But how?” I wondered. As soon as I thought about it, I could feel my body ascending into mid-air and a secret magnetic power pulling me back to reality!

“Oh boy, you are finally back!” said my mum. I was still confused, and the guard looked shocked. Fortunately, I still had a sacred scroll in my pocket! When I showed my parents the ancient scroll, they both seemed delighted that they had gotten more cultural treasures from the ancient world. But more importantly, I had the most meaningful experience of a lifetime – travelling through time and space, building international friendships at the crossroads of eastern and western cultures, and expanding my historical horizons on the Silk Road.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tang, Pui Yiu Sophie – 10

In the little village of Mogao, something astounding was about to happen. Three young courageous adventurers Aila, Lila and Kwan lived in that tiny village, always ready for thrilling journeys. Unfortunately, in the tiny compound, the most exciting place was a petite cave which they knew inside out. There was nothing to do in the village, and they had always wanted to leave the village to go explore the world. Kwan was reading a new book “Places You Must Explore”, as he flipped the page, he found the jackpot.

There was an article about the Mogao Caves which were rediscovered recently. No one had dared to go in and this was the perfect opportunity to become a famous explorer! Kwan dashed to Aila and Lila to share the exceptional news.

“Oh my gosh! This is going to be phenomenal!” exclaimed Aila.

“But how are we going to sneak out without our parents noticing?” “Don’t worry Aila, I already have a plan.” beamed Kwan.

When the clock struck midnight, Kwan, Aila and Lila were wide awake, they tiptoed silently out the house, careful not to make even a teensy-weensy sound. They gathered at the gate where they could leave the village. They climbed over the gate with ease and began their journey. They hiked along the steep, rocky hills and the curvy, narrow roads. It was a never-ending journey. They were exhausted but they had come too far to give up now. At last, after their fatigued voyage, they finally reached their destination.

“Are you sure this is the place Kwan?” It looks like an ordinary cave; it doesn’t seem like a hazardous place.” blurted Lila.

“This is the place, I am sure.” exclaimed Kwan confidently.

Kwan, Aila and Lila fearlessly strode into the cave. Inside, they found bewitchingly drawn pictures by the ancient people. They walked further and found three different paths. “Which way are we going to go? I think I am going to take the left path.” Lila said. “Aila, you should go to the middle and Kwan can go the right.” “Then that’s settled, good luck!” beamed Aila and Kwan.

On Lila’s path were the most beguiling sculptures and paintings. On the other hand, Aila was in extreme danger. When she stepped on the path, rocks began to collapse and the entrance was blocked. The walls gradually closed in on her. If she didn’t escape soon enough, her life would end. Kwan’s path led to the treasure. When Kwan reached the treasure, he saw a sign, “If you pass the treasure, it will be yours. If you choose to leave, the treasure will be gone”. Just when Kwan was about to get the treasure, he heard the petrified scream of Aila. Without a second thought, he chose Aila over the treasure.

With determination, Lila and Kwan discovered that the only way to save Aila was to break a code. Working as a team, they broke the code and Aila was saved. “What great friends I have!” grinned Aila.

The friends were ready to leave the cave when a voice from behind them cheered, “Congratulations! You have found the real treasure hidden in the cave, friendship! Little boy, your action displayed how much you care about your friend and that’s what friendship’s all about!”

“Now, allow me to reward you with the most precious thing in this cave. This is a pill that will make immortal. The King of Qin Dynasty has spent his whole life searching for this pill, and now it’s going to yours. Have a great day!” and the voice vanished.

Aila, Lila and Kwan were speechless. “Who’s going to eat the pill?” asked Lila. “Let’s not get into a fight, how about we destroy the pill instead, there is no point to live forever without good friends around you, right?” Aila and Kwan agreed. They destroyed the pill and it was forever gone.

When they headed back to the village, it was late in the morning and the news travelled quick in the tiny village. The friends got a warm welcome from the villagers and their parents were extremely proud of them. After hearing their heroic adventure to the cave, the village decided to rename the Mogao Caves as “Friendship Caves.” Aila, Lila and Kwan were ecstatic to know that and couldn’t wait to head on their new exhilarating experiences with each other.

Now, the village can go to the caves to have fun and relax. It became a very significant place for travelers all around the world to explore and find out more about the ancient times. This is all thanks to Aila, Lila and Kwan.

A Historical Encounter on the Silk Road

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tao, Jayden – 11

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A Story in a Story in a Story

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ting, Paige – 11

“Grandma, can you tell us another story?” asks Meg, jumping up from under her blanket.

“Only if you go to bed straight after,” I say to my grandchildren. “Or else your parents will get angry when they come home. And do stop jumping around like that. You’ll hit the ceiling, which is why Will should have taken the top bunk.”

Will also climbs out of his covers and switches his bedside lamp back on as he sits up. I take a seat in the cozy armchair next to the window, the spot where I’ve told them many fairy tales. Meg climbs down the ladder and takes a seat next to Will. And so I begin...

Once there was a girl called Hui who lived in a small town in Gansu. For as long as she could remember, she would follow her older brothers to school. She was too small to be noticed, so she never got caught. Sometimes her brothers teased her when they rode together in the donkey wagon, jabbing at her small body hidden in the hay bale, “Why don’t you just stay home and learn cooking and cleaning like a normal girl?” But mostly they felt curious that a girl would be interested in school.

One day, Hui took her normal spot in the big tree next to the window of the schoolroom, soaking up everything her brothers were learning in the room where girls were not allowed to be. Perched on the tree, she looked out into the horizon beyond the schoolhouse, and saw something in the hazy desert that she’d never seen before. A temple? Why was it merged into a cliff? Hui scampered down onto the gravelly path and suddenly her bare feet felt the hot, golden sand. When she reached the temple, she felt willed to go inside. She found strange statues and questionable paintings, and what seemed like hundreds of Buddhas.

The marble floors were cold against her dirty feet, and a spooky wind rushed through the cavern. The walls were so dusty that everything in the room seemed a little greyer. But Hui was curious so she continued into the cave. As she walked deeper and deeper into dimness, she laid eyes on a magnificent book. She flipped it open and started to read the words printed among many illustrations of brave warriors that curiously looked like women.

“Here is our history book. Once we were ruled by strong empresses who ruled the land and they welcomed all types of people.”

What? A place ruled by women? Hui was certain that her brothers never learned this in school. She knew that she had to get home soon, or her parents would wonder what happened to her, so she quickly read some more.

“Our city fought and won many battles against invaders. However, we fear that men may eventually take over, and if they do, our empire’s history will be erased.”

“Grandma?” Will interrupts, “I think I hear someone knocking at our door.”

I fling open the curtain next to me and see two women standing on the porch, but they are dressed like ancient soldiers. “Well, that must be your parents and they forgot the house key. Go to bed now and I’ll open the door for them,” I lie.

I go outside and quietly close the front door behind me. “We have come from Gansu to find you because you were the one who first found our history book,” one of the soldiers announces.

“The imperial army has won your battle. You asked us to report back to you, and now you shall come with us to be our chieftain,” the other one explains.

At first I'm confused, but then I remember that, before leaving for university 45 years ago, I slipped a note into the secret shrine. It said:

Dear whoever finds this:

I am Hui and I am leaving for university today. I found this cave when I was a child. I've picked a fight with some friends about women's rights, they said I can't study and they were wrong. I need someone to continue fighting for women's rights. Please report back when we win.

~Hui

I quickly go inside the house, scribble something on a notepad, rip out the piece of paper, fold it up and hand it to the soldiers.

"Please give this to your empress," I say, holding out the note, which said:

Dear Empress:

I am Hui and I'm now living peacefully in Canada. I have a son, a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. I'm sorry but I don't want to come back and become one of your chieftains. I'm proud of what you've accomplished and I support women's rights, but I'm too old. Hope you understand.

Best regards, Hui

I watch as the soldiers nod like they understand, and they disappear into the night.

I go back upstairs and tuck the kids in once more. "It wasn't your parents. Anyway, go to bed, and for real this time," I say as I pull the blanket over Will. Meg looks down from the top bunk and says goodnight to us.

"But Grandma?" Will begins. "Is this story real?"

I smile and look away. "Well..."

The Mystery of Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tsoi, Ethan Lai Shun – 11

“Chrip ! Chrip ! Chrip !”, I heard a beautiful sound whispering and calling to me while reading my research materials in the library. I followed the twittering sound and, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a strange glowing and sparkling light that shimmered on the top shelf of the book case. When I walked close to investigate, I discovered that it was a very large book covered with thick dust, so I whipped off the dust with my bare hands. It read, “The Mystery of Mogao Grottoes”. The title glowed and the pages magically turned to a spread page with a massive painting of cave 257 “The Nine-colored Deer”.

There was a faint sound coming from it, which was the same chirping sounds that led me to the book. All of a sudden, a flashing light shone at me, so bright that I shut my eyes firmly. When I opened my eyes, I found that I was high up in a clear blue sky. I was so scared that I was going to fall so I screamed, struggled and flapped my arms. To my surprise, I did not fall at all and I turned into a yellow bird, so I spread my wings and flew into the forest. While I was still tracing the tweeting sound, I saw a little bird badly hurt below the bushes.

“Help! Help! Can somebody help, please?” I yelled desperately. Suddenly, a radiant deer appeared in front of me. She looked so glamorous and glittering with nine different colours gleaming from her coat and a pair of grand white antlers as bright as snow. Just at a glance, she licked and wondrously saved the little bird from danger.

In the meantime, we heard someone crying loudly from the river, “Save me! Save me! Please..., please...” the drowning man yelped in despair. The nine-colored deer leaped into the rapid water immediately to rescue the drowning man on her back. The man was so grateful that he was alive so he knelt down, nodded his head towards the spiritual deer and claimed “Thank you so much for saving my life, you’re such a powerful deer. Please allow me to serve you for the rest of my life.”

“Thanks, but no thanks. Please promise not to disclose my habitat to anyone.” The nine-colored deer said in a gentle voice. The man replied quickly, “I swear to the Gods on heaven and earth that I will not reveal your habitat to anybody or else I will have sores all over my body.” The man left the forest and went back home safely.

At the same time, the queen dreamed of the nine-colored deer that night. When she woke up, she couldn’t forget the beauty of such a creature. She was so determined to get a unique deer skin to make her new coat. Her obsession and greed made her very ill. The vain queen said, “My dear king, please let me have the nine-coloured deer skin to make my new cloak or I will die.” The king loved his queen so much that he offered a great reward to anyone who could find the deer.

The man who had nearly drowned became greedy as he wanted to get the reward so he broke his promise and led the king to hunt the nine-coloured deer with a team of soldiers. When I heard this news in the palace, I was terrified and thought to myself, “Oh! No, I must tell my friend to run away as soon as possible.” I flew as fast as I could and begged my friend “Please hide or run away because the king’s soldiers and the man from the river are coming to kill you.” Unfortunately, the nine-coloured deer was sleeping under a tree while I finished my words, she was already surrounded by all the king’s soldiers!

Under the command of the king, the soldiers shot arrows at the nine-coloured deer and amazingly all of the arrows turned into dust and disappeared! The soldiers were shocked and the nine-coloured deer asked the king softly “Your Majesty, who brought you here?” the king replied “Him” while pointing at the man from the river. “Oh ! This was the man that I saved the other day when he was drowning at the river! He swore that he would never ever disclose my place to anyone, but he betrayed me and brought you here to kill me!” said the nine-coloured deer in a solemn voice.

The king felt extremely sorry for the unfaithfulness of that man, so he banished him. He also instructed his soldiers to step back and set the nine-coloured deer free. The king was moved by the deer’s good-heartedness and kind behaviour and he proclaimed that all people in his kingdom should protect the deer from now on.

In the end, the man from the river got sores throughout his body due to his despicable behaviour. While he was running away, he accidentally sank into a river and passed away. Meanwhile, the queen’s greed drove her mad because she couldn’t get what she wanted.

The little bird and I were glad that our dear friend, the nine-colored deer, was safe and free. We chirped and sang to celebrate such a happy ending. While we were enjoying this peaceful moment, my stomach started to churn as I felt hungry and I heard a sound whispering near my ears, “Ethan, please wake up! It’s time for dinner.” I reluctantly woke up from the piles of books in the library and I realized that I just had a great adventure in my dream. I could not even possibly believe that I just had a dream because it was so real. I had learnt that we should never expect a reward when helping others, more importantly, we should not return kindness with ingratitude. I decided to borrow “The Mystery of Mogao Grottoes” and darted home with my mother for dinner.

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tsoi, Wai Ching – 9

New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

Thousands of years ago, a monk who believed in Buddhas found a spacious and immense cave at an oasis, which is in a desert on the Silk Road of China. When he entered, he immediately felt Buddhas' whispers. He knew that the cave was special and therefore the perfect place to pray.

As time passed, the monk spread the news of The Mogao Cave. Hearing that the cave was a chosen place by the Buddhas, pilgrims travelled from afar to visit the cave. After visiting the cave, they wanted to live there and soon they decided the caves were not just for praying, but also a place to preform stories and paintings. Then, they started digging more caves for a place to live, and spend their time creating sacred art and literature. They loved the place so much that they named the cave "The Mogao Cave."

Three centuries later, new buildings were built so the religious and miraculous story of The Mogao Caves grew less popular every day. The travellers took other paths to other fabulous landmarks instead. At last, the story of The Mogao Caves were forgotten, as if they were sucked into a deep sinkhole.

Due to the occasion, many people didn't know much of the past, nor the reasons to believe in Buddhas. Fortunately, in the 19th century, a group of international and local scholar-explorers found the cave. It was almost crumbling, which was dangerous, but the leader insisted that they should explore the cave as deep as they could.

Inside the cave, there were spectacular, carefully shaped sculptures and colorful paintings all over the place. They were on the walls and some were even on the ceiling! The group continued until they saw a room with similar pictures in an orderly pattern. The leader stepped forward and examined the story behind the pictures. As if he read the team's mind, he started to express the wonderful story.

"A long time ago," the leader said. "There was a young hunter who liked to kill innocent animals. The Buddhas tried to save him because of the goodness of their heart. They would like to help the hunter to go to the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. They summoned a monk to guide the young hunter into a righteous path of life. The monk agreed and set off a journey to find the young hunter. She told him, 'There is a pig den which is not far from here. Follow me!' Instead of bringing the hunter to the pig den, she led him into this very cave."

"The hunter was furious when he found out there wasn't any juicy pork for him to feast on." The leader continued. "He yelled at the monk and refused to go inside. Somehow, the monk persuaded him to take a step inside. When he went in, his emotions weren't hysterical anymore. He felt calm and relaxed. The monk taught him to believe in Buddhas and respect the lives of every living creature. When the hunter passed away, he was blessed."

The entire group closed their eyes and smiled. They wanted to explore some more stories and art, but it was getting late and it was time to leave. They reported to their coach about their new discovery of The Mogao Cave and the lesson of respecting every living creature. In return, you can enjoy your afterlife in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Now in 2022, you could explore Mogao Caves yourself in China. Have fun exploring!

The Bird and Mo–Gao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wang, Maggie – 9

A few thousand years ago, a family of birds lived in the Northwest horizon of China. Their dad was shot by human hunters when the baby bird was just a month old. The Mum cared a lot about the baby. A few months later, it was time for the baby to learn how to fly. He suddenly remembered his dad always telling him” When you learn, you have to listen carefully”

When he was learning to fly, his mother told him” When you jump out of the nest, flap your wings and you will fly very easily!” He was listening very carefully to the instructions and soon, he could already fly. He soared into the sky. It flew and flew and went flying into the desert! The bird was amazed by what he saw. He saw an upside–down nest–like thing. It was so big that even the whole tree they lived in could fit inside. He thought: Is a giant bird living inside? So, he decided to explore. He flew inside and was so shocked that he could barely breathe! He saw all kinds of old Chinese paintings drawn by a kind of living thing called a human! He flew back to his nest, where his mother was waiting for him. He told his mum everything he had seen. His mother sighed and said” There is no such thing as a human painting. It must be the sun playing a trick on your eyes. Or maybe you fell while flying and dreamed all about it.” The bird doubted his mother. Could his mother be right after all?

A few years later, the bird grew bigger and bigger. It was time to have his own family. He said goodbye to his old mother one last time and flew off. He flew and flew, and finally found a family of his own.

One day, his son came back and said:” Mother! Father! You’ll never believe this: I saw a hole filled with human paintings, they were incredible!” His mother said, ”You are telling lies again!” His father just smiled.

Adventures of Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wang, Yuxing – 11

Hey, guys! I am Bunny Mak! As you should know, I am a horrible bandit, I rob people, and I also have a bandit gang! My best friend, Herrick and I like adventure very much, so we keep looking for the ancient treasure land.

It was a sunny afternoon, and I was watching a video about world heritage sites. They mentioned a place I had never heard of before. I searched for this weird place on Google. It said that Mogao Grottoes was in a desert in China. It was founded 1600 years ago, and it was filled with sacred art and scrolls. It also had statues made of gold and precious gems. After I watched the video, I immediately called my gang and made a plan.

We first talked about how we would get there, then I said, "Let's use the teleport lift so we can land right where we want to!" Everybody agreed. Then we packed food, water, lock pickers and hammers. We also took big bags, so that we could carry lots of statues. After that, Herrick, my best friend and accomplice, asked, "What if the police find us?" I replied, "That's why we need to be sneaky!" We wrapped up our preparations, and off we went.

We teleported one by one to Mogao Grottoes. It was a beautiful but strange place. There were towers and a few green trees in an otherwise empty desert. The sun was blazing hot. Our sweat could form a river. We silently sneaked inside and entered cave 937. It was so damp, but luckily there were no people. We were filling our bags, and we didn't even have to sneak around! We used our hammers to chop up gold statues and put what we could in the bags. We dug deeper, and you wouldn't believe what we found there! Gems and hitherto unseen ingots. We dug even deeper. Our greed knew no bounds. Finally, we came upon a big chest. We all tried to open it, but no matter what we did, we just couldn't open it. In the end, we used the lock picker and ta-da! The chest was open, and it was filled with sacred scrolls! We were so excited!

Gold and money make you greedy, and greed makes you do dumb things. We dug deeper and deeper, and suddenly the tunnel we dug collapsed, and we all fell on cave 21. There were crowds of tourists taking photos. Not only were they shocked by our sudden appearance, but we were scared stiff. What an embarrassing moment! We quickly teleported back home before anyone could call the police on us.

When we finally arrived at a safe place, we decided to spend our moolah on snacks and toys. But when we looked in our bags, they were empty! Everything had probably fallen out. This mission was a complete failure! Isn't greed the vilest thing?

Well, what a bummer and the past can't be undone! We don't want to go back and get busted by the police! Don't let greed get the better of you, or you will fail at everything. Even though you can't change the past, you can always change yourself.

Lilo's Wonderful Adventure

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ye, Yangxiao Atticus – 11

Lilo got separated from his classmates on a trip to the infamous historical Mogao Caves. While his classmates left the cave, Lilo decided to take a last look when he tried to follow them he got lost in the cave's maze. He was scared but he remembered someone told him that panic drowns thought, so he calmed himself to think of a solution. It was almost dusk; he knew he must rush. As he walked past darkened rooms, he took out his torch. He was about to turn it on when he heard something in the hallway. Clackity, clack, clack! He froze, the sound grew louder and closer. Lilo turned and said, "Who's there? Show yourself!" No response. "Show yourself!" He tried to stand tall, but his tummy was churning.

Slowly a SKELETON emerged! Lilo suppressed a scream. The skeleton opened his jaw and said, "You sssshall not passsssss." "Why?" asked Lilo. The skeleton smirked and as it was about to say something, a sound behind it shouted, "DITTO! Return!" a Poke ball appeared out of nowhere and the skeleton jumped into the red and white Poke ball not before changing into a whole lot of pink goo and disappearing into the Poke ball. Lilo stared at the red and white Poke ball and was about to pick it up when he tripped on something.

The next thing he knew; he was staring into a monk's eyes! "Ahhh" he screamed.

The monk looked at him curiously, "Where do you come from young man?" Lilo ignored his question and noticed he was in a room with a... bed?

"Where am I?" Lilo asked.

The monk smilingly said, "You are in the meditation chamber of Mogao Caves."

"What time is it?" Lilo enquired.

"It is 8:30 am on 31st of January 1321. We found you unconscious in the middle of the desert so we rescued you," the monk kindly replied.

"Can I see the outside world?" asked Lilo curiously.

He wanted to see what Mogao Caves looked like in the past.

"Alright, come with me," the monk said and they left. What Lilo saw amazed him! Hundreds, maybe thousands of monks, dressed in yellow, holding pickaxes were busily mining the gray rocks. However, some were building or getting wood, and some were making Buddhha sculptures. This must be the entrance of Mogao Caves when it was being constructed ! He thought. He didn't want them to know he was from 2022. So he kept exploring Mogao caves with the monk.

"Wow! It's so cool. I want to explore more!" Lilo said.

"Nah, you better go back. I'm sure your family is worried about you!" the monk replied.

"Well... I guess staying here for a few days won't do any harm, will it" Lilo asked.

"Up to you," the monk replied.

The next day, another monk taught Lilo to make sculptures. Here are the steps. Step 1: take a large piece of wood or stone and draw your sculpture on it Step 2: use a pickaxe or axe to cut or mine out the exact look of sculpture. Step 3: mine or chop off the spare part Step 4: chisel out the face and body of your sculpture Step 5: paint your sculpture and let it dry for a day. Then, you have a complete sculpture!

On day 7, the monk who had rescued Lilo asked him "Where is your home?"

Lilo sighed "I'm from the future."

“I actually knew you were from the future, because the day before you came, I dreamt of you, and when I woke up, I found this dusty map,” said the monk pulling a dusty map from his yellow robes. “The next time you will close your eyes and open it again, you will be back to where you got hit on the head by a cobblestone.”

“Thank you so much” said Lilo. “I hope we can be friends forever.”

“We will be friends forever because I’m going to be in your heart forever. Good luck, Lilo and I wish we will meet again in the future,” the monk said with a sad smile.

A tear rolled down Lilo’s face. “Goodbye” And with that, Lilo closed his eyes.

When he opened his eyes and looked ahead; he was back in the dark scary hallway. The first thing he realized was that the rocks and cracks had disappeared.

Next, he realized that he still had the map from the kind monk; he looked at the rusty map and studied it very closely. The map was pretty simple; it only took him a few minutes to figure out where he was. He stood up and put on his back pack and started walking backwards, soon, he saw the dim sunlight again, his heart is pounding with excitement, his legs started moving faster and faster, and all he thought about was that this crazy adventure soon is going to end soon. Not long, he saw the cave’s entrance. His classmates were waiting for him. “Where have you been Lilo?” Asked Atticus annoyed, “We’ve been waiting for you forever!” “Well, let’s just say that I’ve on a little adventure. “Lilo replied with a deep sigh of relieve. “We better go, it’s getting dark.” And with that, they stepped out into the dim sun’s rays.

As they walked, Lilo looked back at Mogao Caves for the very last time, and by the corner of his eye, he thought he saw a figure, dressed in yellow, holding a shiny blue pickaxe, and waving at him! Lilo waved back to the mysterious figure and shouted “I PROMISE I WILL NEVER EVER FORGET YOU!” “The figure nodded at him and disappeared with a blind flash of white light. “Who are you shouting to Lilo?” asked Atticus confused to his core. “No one.” Said Lilo shrugging his shoulders. “You are so weird Lilo.” Said Atticus. “Agreed” said Andy. And with that, they slowly walked towards the beautiful magnificent setting sun.

New Tales of the Magao Grottoes

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yeung, Tin Yan Selina – 9

My family and I lived in a distant place in Dunhuang, near the Mogao Grottoes.

Every single day at home was nothing but boredom. My family suffered from poverty and me and my sister, Mei Lin, never got an opportunity for education.

Mei was eleven and was rather ambitious. She shines like the sun's rays. However, she can get on thin ice when she's too adventurous.

My sister always pleaded to delve into the Mogao Grottoes. But there was a decree in Lin family which forbid every one of us from going there for centuries.

If Mei groused about the decree, Granny would snap, "Child! That abysmal place is no playground for children! The hollows are sacred and you shan't go there! Understand?" What she declared disappointed Mei, but it didn't cause any difference to me as I didn't have any particular interest in it anyway.

One day, Granny was sick with scarlet fever, so our parents went to fetch a doctor. We were left alone.

Mei was as excited as a puppy with a bone. "This is the perfect time to sneak to the Mogao Grottoes!"

"Remember what Granny said," I mumbled grimly.

"Since you're thirteen, you have the liberty to go anywhere you want," Mei grimaced. "You don't want to miss the Library Cave, do you?"

"Fair enough," I said.

Mei and I strolled down the path as we approached the gate of the Mogao Grottoes. I tried to open the rusty gate, but it was locked.

"It's locked... but I know there's a side entrance," I said. I led Mei into the grounds outside the grottoes, and I caught a glimpse of a young adolescent boy darting into one of the caverns.

"Did you see that?" yelled Mei. "The boy's heading towards the caves! That's the secret entrance!"

"Hush, he'll see us!" I mumbled.

We tracked the boy and we entered one of the grottoes. There were humanlike stone statues and artworks of Buddhist art.

The boy gazed pensively into my eyes. His hair and eyes were as dark as midnight and his skin was pale like ivory. "You two are from the Lin family, aren't you?" his voice was deep and insightful.

"Who are you?" questioned Mei.

"I'm Fung Lin," he said. "I'm part of your family too. Perhaps a first cousin once removed? As much as I know, you mustn't be here."

"Then why are you here?" I asked bashfully.

"You might want to sit down for this," said Fung. We sat on the wooden bench and listened prudently. "A millennia ago, an old man, Wei Lin, owned the Mogao Grottoes. One day, Wei and his family got into a huge argument and Wei got so livid that he cursed and forbid anyone from the Lin family to enter the grottoes. If anyone in the family risked coming here, they would either turn into a stone figure here or be locked up. I must forewarn you, he's still wandering here, being immortal and enjoying his eternal life—"

Our conversation was interrupted by a rumbling growl. "Hurry! That's the growl of Wei Lin! Head towards the Library Cave next room!" cried Fung.

We dashed into the Library Cave. There was a mass of manuscripts ahead of me, in innumerable quantities. They filled so much of the room that I scarcely had space to stand.

Suddenly, I overheard a vicious voice from behind. "Oh yes, I've never seen any visitors since young Fung."

Mei shrieked. "You're Wei Lin?"

"Yes, child, I'm Wei," he smirked. "You are trespassing. And, I shall turn you into a stone!"

"Stone?" Mei asked doubtfully.

At that moment, Wei glared at Mei with malicious black eyes, and she turned into a statue. Still and unmoving.

"You can choose to surrender or turn into a stone figurine like your sister," Wei said to me.

I cried. "Fine! I surrender!"

"Young lady, you're a prisoner now." chuckled Wei.

"Just don't do something ignorant, I'll protect you," Fung murmured into my ear. Wei blocked all the exits of the Library Cave, so Fung and I couldn't escape.

I didn't have much to do inside the Library Cave, just examining the gorgeous manuscripts and figures. When I saw the stone statue of Mei, I began to sob wistfully, "It's too late. We can't do anything."

"Don't be a pessimist! We're about to break the curse!" bellowed Fung.

There was an opal bracelet in his hand. It was a colour of pure white, turquoise and amber. "Where did you get it?" I queried.

"I stole it from Wei," he replied. "It was the origin of the curse. It can do anything you want so that we can escape! To break the curse, we need to burn the opal bracelet."

Fung placed the opal bracelet on the cave wall, and in a miracle, the cave wall opened, and we dashed out of the grottoes and hurried to the remote mountainside. He managed to make a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood several times.

"Do you really want to do this?" I squirmed at the fierce force of fire.

"Yes, as long as we can save Mei," he said confidently. Fung threw the opal bracelet into the flames.

We darted back to the Library Cave at a frantic pace. Mei was there!

"I'm so grateful you saved me!" Mei cried and hugged me.

"I'm so glad you're alive!" I sobbed.

Mei, Fung and I walked into the next room and Wei gave us a last snigger and turned into a deadly stone statue.

"Farewell," Fung sighed. "I mustn't stay here."

"Goodbye!" we said.

When we went home, we told everything to Granny and she was highly delighted to see us and gratified that we had broken the curse.

The Mogao Grottoes taught us not to give up being adventurous and ambitious, even when things are tough, you will always succeed if you try hard enough.

A Vacation to the Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Capelli, Marco – 11

"Kyle. We're about to get off the plane" said his mum. Waiting to get off, a breeze arrived leaving a speck of paint on Kyle's shoe. As they found their guide, it was 5pm. "I'm Mike this is Florence, our children Jess and Kyle" said Mike. "I'm Dylan your guide". After the ride to the hotel, the family went to have dinner, then the family went to hotel...

The next day, they quickly got ready to leave for the Mogao Grottoes. As they headed there, black clouds formed. A breeze flew past, leaving a speck of green paint on Kyle's shoe. They got out of the car and ran to the ticket entrance. "Hello!" said Dylan. "All visits are canceled, sir" responded the woman. "great!" said Mike. "Is there a Grottoes museum?" asked Florence. "Yes!" responded Dylan happily.

Kyle hated museums. His idea "the Internet".

As Dylan blabbed facts Kyle looked around; there were no pictures when they were building the grottos. "I've got a question" said Kyle. "I was wondering... where's the toilet?" he asked. "That way" responded Dylan. When they finally got to the car, Dylan exclaimed "lunchtime". "I'll order you the Dunhuang traditional". After lunch, the family went back to the hotel. But something caught Kyle's eye; another green speck landed on his shoe.

The next day, they headed for the grottos. The driver handed them a note: 'sorry I cannot come today; but they have guides there.' "I don't think the grottoes are real. There're no pictures of when they were made" said Kyle.

When they arrived, Kyle had a stomachache so he stayed in the car. The driver started going slowly forward; Kyle didn't realise until they turned a corner. Kyle tried to go stop him, but he got thrown back. The driver gave him a wicked grin and Kyle lost consciousness.

"Where am I?", questioned Kyle laying in a bed looking around. "You are in the past, the truth is the grottoes were built thousands of years ago by one monk" said a deep voice. "Where is this place?" asked Kyle "this is the past I just told you". "Are you a kidnapper?" said Kyle scared. "No, I am not a kidnapper. Just call me Bob. I'm just trying to show you the truth" said Bob. "I believe you!" for the first time Bob turned around, his eyes were skinny, his face was dark. "Come to the balcony," ordered Bob. As he stepped up onto the balcony. "The legend is the first grotto was chiseled out in 366AD by a monk called Yue Zun. Yue Zun saw the top of a mountain glinting with golden light, as if there were thousands of Buddhas. "We are when it all began, when Yue Zun saw the golden light, look over there". As Kyle turned his head he saw a young monk standing at the foot of a mountain glaring up at what seemed in his eyes a big golden glimmer which he quickly climbed up to and started chiselling that glimmer of beautiful shining light out and making the first ever known grotto. "That's how it began?" asked Kyle amazed; Bob replied with a nod. "I'm ready to go home, with the truth" said Kyle convinced. As Bob looked back into the horizon, Kyle heard a set of footsteps creeping up the stairs, by the time he has turned around... a mischievous and evil looking man was looming over him. Before Kyle could make a sound, the man shoved him into a bag and slowly bobbed down the stairs. Kyle was standing in the middle of three men...

Kyle didn't know who or what was approaching him; one of them said, "WAIT! He's not a dummy!" "What?!" exclaimed another, "Doesn't he know what happened to the last one?" one said.

"Well? Should we let him go?" he had barely finished before getting slapped on the back of his head, "NO, fishbrain, we won't let him go" responded another "I'm not fishbrain, you're fishbrain" "NO I'm not, you are pigbrain!" As Kyle watched the two men argue like four year olds, he suddenly noticed there was a third man looking at him. The third man shouted, "BOYS!". "I don't think we introduced ourselves very well. I'm DoubleR," he said taking his mask off and revealing an ugly face. "These are Biggy and Smalles"; one was short and fat and the other was tall and thin. "I'm Biggy!" said the short one. "I'm Smalles!" said the tall one, leaving Kyle confused. "Follow Biggy and Smalles" ordered DoubleR. As they arrived... "he's here" said Biggy "Activate the defences," said doubleR with a killer voice. The first crystal was fired. The second and then, the third. "Is that all you got?" taunted Bob. Crystals were being shot from all around "STOP!" pleaded Kyle "It's personal," responded doubleR with a grin. More crystals were being shot and Bob he was everywhere up, down, left, right. Bob put his hands together and a barrier formed around him coming smaller till he was on both knees and then something flashed

in his mind. “DoubleR are you too scared to fight me like a man!” screamed Bob. “Stop the fire” said doubleR. “Are you too weak like when I brought... HER!” screamed Bob. “Enough!” snapped DoubleR charging towards the entrance of the cave and barging out right before lunging himself at Bob who reacted quickly only to be taken down “How dare you talk about HER”. As doubleR got back to his feet and started beating up Bob. He picked him up and flung Bob across the area before following and landing close “When she came, she was healthy with two kids, but when she left she didn’t” said Bob desperately. “Her only love was her babies and she gave them to you, and you showed her the Hades Crystal!”

“That’s how you repaid her? By showing her the Hades Crystal!!!” screamed Bob telling him the truth.

“Ahhhh, memory power!!!” screamed DoubleR.

“She gave you the loves of HER life and you killed her, YOU KILLED HER, RORY!”.

A blue flame appeared in front of Rory “MARY? It’s really you?” asked Rory crying. “Yes it is, Rory. Please stop this madness; I hate looking down upon this, change” pleaded Mary. “I will, I promise!” said a suffering Rory. As the flame disappeared into ashes, Rory’s body flopped onto the floor motionless. Kyle stood up and raced out of the cave; he realised what had happened before he arrived. As they made their way back onto the mountain, the monk had finished chiselling the first grotto. “Time to go home,” said Bob, patting some dust. “We had quite a remarkable journey,” replied Kyle. With that, Bob brought him back to the moment he had left – in the car. Kyle climbed out of the van, still a little shocked and raced towards his family, who were just entering the grottoes. The first grotto visited was the most famous. The grotto showed the monk, the mountain and the light. As everyone cleared out to see the next grotto, Kyle stayed behind, staring at the glimmer of light. Suddenly, it turned to Bob’s face. He smiled back and hurried after his family to enjoy the rest of the trip.

As he sat in his seat, he put his hand in his pocket – he had a crystal! “A holiday to remember,” he told himself.

Mogao Grottoes Legend City

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Chen, Lucas – 9

“Time’s up! Class is nearly over. Jack, stop it! You are being a bit annoying and disrupting the class.”

“Sorry, Mr. Hublen.”

Mr. Hublen is a very serious man with a mantra of safety first. Jack was an absolute nightmare for him because Jack could never concentrate or stay in his seat, so he had to try everything to prevent disaster caused by Jack’s actions.

RING! RING! RING! The bell rings and everyone is reminded that tomorrow is the beginning of a one-week school trip week

“Please get all your things and food; we are visiting the Mogao Grottoes in Gansu, China.” Mr. Hublen said cheerfully. Everyone was excited about getting a change of pace and scenery from the boredom of daily life and school.

The next day!

It has been a long time since getting on the train and the students are getting bored. Jack wishes he was playing with his friends, but they are in another carriage. Their group finally arrives at the hotel which is quite nice. After organizing their stuff, Mr. Hublen puts Jack and Tom in a room.

At midnight!

Jack suddenly wakes up after a strange dream just after midnight. He dreamt that he discovered a cave near their hotel and after looking out the window, there it was!

“I’ve got an idea! I can explore the cave so I’m going to pack my things.

After getting ready, Jack climbs the window and adventures into the cave.

In the cave

Jack spots a book floating in midair on top by magic from 366AD, so Jack grabs it. Right at that moment everything disappears because of a sudden flash. When he opens his eyes, he realizes he has been transported to some old town.

“Oh, this is like in the Mogao Grottoes Museum painting that shows a town that looks just like this!”

Suddenly the book starts glittering and it opens.

“Hello, I’m the Mogao Grottoes book. You will pass through here and you must find a Buddhist monk called Le Zun to complete an epic quest!”

They meet!

It’s a very hard quest and Jack faints from hunger and exhaustion. When he opens his eyes, he is in a real bed.

“Oh my gosh where am I?” Jack questions himself. “I’m...”

“Hello, are you ok?” said the girl.

“Who are you!?” screams Jack.

“Oh me? I forgot to introduce myself. I’m Lucy and you’re in my home. We took you home to rest after finding you on a street corner last night.”

“Thank you so much for your help. I’m Jack from England and I came from 2021.”

Top secret!

“Hey Lucy, can I tell you a secret? This magic book lets me travel and see the map. It says that a scholarly and holy man called Le Zun will pass through here. Everyone here speaks Chinese but luckily, she is the only one in town that speaks English because of her job as the town translator.

Start to go!

The adventuring pair are now ready to go on their journey to find Le Zun. Jack is sweating a lot and they walk for miles over a mountain where they see the vague outline of a man.

A bright golden sunray pierces through the sky and a thousand things that seemed to resemble Buddha appeared before him. Jack realizes that the Buddha and the men must be Le Zun.

Two minutes later

“Le Zun told me that he is going to build the temple right over there.” said Lucy.

While Le Zun and the men build the temple, they continue asking questions and help with the construction. They build at an incredible speed due to their blessed speed and strength from Buddha, but the construction is still incomplete.

One hour later!

“Because the book shows here at the bottom of this page. It says we must complete the quest with Le Zun and when the time is up, the book will start glowing and we must leave. We must...”

The book begins furiously flicking through the pages and turns to another page and the next. They disappear...

The book speaks!

They open the book and on the next page, they're told that they have to stop a certain evil man mentioned on the final pages. The evil, bald man is called Stein and must be stopped at all costs because he was sent there to break the proper timeline. The pair remember a bald man with some troublemakers lazing around the temple construction site who must be there to do evil.

TIME TO STOP HIM!

Jack notices Stein's English accent and he deduces that he must be from London, England as well. Lucy has a great idea because of her local knowledge of the town and connections with the police force as her father is the police commissioner. They communicate with Le Zun and the police to ensure there is enough evidence for his arrest. Jack pretends to be in on the evil plan and Stein is unaware that Lucy is bilingual and is translating for some undercover police. Lucy makes a signal after gathering enough evidence and the police in hiding come out armed with weapons to arrest Stein and his henchmen. The prophecy of the magic book is finally fulfilled and the evil forces have been defeated by Jack and Lucy.

The end!

The book started to shine brightly and showed a key that instructed Jack to return to present day. When he opened his eyes, everything is blurry and in a daze.

“Jack! Where were you? We were so worried about you! Don't you remember my mantra of safety first?” asks a crying Mr. Hublen.

Tom suddenly joins in with relief and excitement.

“Hey Jack, do you know what? History almost changed, come take a look at the different history books.”

Jack just gave a fleeting smile and just before dozing back off after being exhausted on his adventure, he whispers out.

“Always safety first, Mr. Hublen.”

The Mystery of the Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Doo, Ayden – 10

It was a cold, cloudy night; the full moon could not be seen. Mark and Cathy stared into space, as they couldn't even see their own hands. Chilly, black waves of darkness came from all directions, and dread swept through them like a tidal wave. Time flew by, and in the blink of an eye, a rim of pale pink had formed on the eastern horizon. The first rays of morning sunlight were an alarm call for the desert. As the first sounds of the dawn chorus echoed across the land, the eerie, damp gloom of the night was replaced by the soft light of day.

Not very far away, there were some caves. Not any ordinary caves, but enchanted and bewitched caves. The moment that the two set foot inside the grotto, the first thing that met their sight was a vast statue. This figure was completely made out of stone, sitting cross-legged as though meditating. With closed eyes, a dot on his forehead, the Buddha sat on a substantial lotus flower. The large giant seemed to wake up as Mark and Cathy crept by.

As they wandered aimlessly through the passageways, they soon found themselves in a room full of ancient scrolls. They could not resist not stepping forward and opening one of the scrolls to see what interesting writing and pictures it contained. But at that moment, an odd creaking sound was heard. The sound was coming from below them, as if there was an earthquake and the stone that they were standing on was splitting apart. But that was the truth and seconds later, they had fallen deep down. Down and down they went. Down and down and down and down...

when they finally reached the ground, it was pitch black. Nothing could be seen. When their eyes adjusted to the darkness, they could tell that the two of them were inside an underground chamber.

Fortunately, Mark had brought along a torch and some sandwiches. As they snacked on the sandwiches, Mark couldn't help noticing a stack of old crates piled up in one corner. There was something bizarre about these crates. Something that couldn't, be explained.

When they finished eating, the first thing Mark did was to go over to the crates and try to figure out how to open them, while Cathy looked for a secret exit. But all they found was an old scroll that had fallen into the chamber with them.

On the scroll it read:

"Elephant Notify Trapped Room Ancestor,

Nearly Central Egotistical Bear Ensure,

Halves Initials None Doomed Craters,

Read Atmosphere Teleport Everything Should,"

They read it over and over again until Mark found a hidden clue. The word "*initials*" meant the first letter of every word. So, Cathy, word-by-word, noted down the first letter of all the words. The code made "*ENTRANCE BEHIND CRATES*".

This made perfect sense now. The crates... the scroll...

After Mark and Cathy moved the burdensome crates out of the way, they were so tired that they could barely walk, but they kept on moving, dragging three feet behind them, their shoulders stooped and head slumped on their chest. This revealed an immense, colossal door, large enough to fit a giant.

Outside, the wind blew and caressed on their cheeks. Oh, how good it felt to be in nature again

The Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, He, Wesley – 10

The sandstorm was blowing hard over the Gobi Desert. I got separated from my parents on their way to the Mogao Caves. As the sun was setting, I crouched in the sand, gazing up at the sky. In the darkness of the Gobi Desert, I vaguely saw a dim light flickering in the distance. The light got closer and closer and to my astonishment, I saw an ambassador walking towards me. I gaped at his silk clothes and ruby rings. I followed the ambassador without a word, not considering if this was a good choice or not.

After what seemed like an eternity of walking, the ambassador stopped in front of the gloomy entrance. As I peeked inside, I was amused by the intricate and detailed paintings on the cave walls and begged to be let inside. As I crept into the caves, the ambassador explained: “These Mogao caves are known as the ‘Thousand Buddha Caves’ and were created in 366 C.E.

It was damp and gloomy in the cave. Raising my head, I saw an image of multiple glorious golden Buddhas floating in the sky. A thousand beaming Buddhas emerged, surrounded by flying fairies playing heavenly music. I was dumbfounded and intrigued by the glamorous painting and was immediately sucked inside. I was in a lecture hall bigger than ten classrooms and saw hundreds of monks listening to Buddha. I noticed a boy trying to sneak out of class and hurriedly ran to prevent him from doing so.

“Why are you ditching class?” I asked the boy.

“I am tired of the stupid lectures! I want to go out and play!” cried the monk.

Suddenly, everything was a blur and when I opened my eyes, I saw that we had unknowingly teleported to one of my favorite spaces, the Da Vici Centre: a hub of mechanical engineering and creative design for budding inventors in my school. The monk had come too. He was amused by the 3D printing machines and tools. He understood the importance of learning and vanished into thin air...

The Secret Buddha

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Hung, Wei-You Wesley – 9

Liam looked around the room. There were large glass canisters filled with cotton balls and bandages. It was a typical doctor's office and while Liam waited, his stomach was turning into a million knots. He was waiting for his cancer report. His hands felt wet and clammy. He always got this way when he knew something bad was coming.

"Liam, as you know, this is a very rare form of cancer," Dr. Collymore said. Liam knew this wasn't good. "The cancer has already spread to your liver and your kidneys. At this point, surgery and chemotherapy are not options. The cancer is very aggressive. I'm sorry," Dr. Collymore said with sadness in his voice. Liam was still, but his mind was racing. "According to this, our best guess is that you only have one year to live."

He had cancer and the panic he felt was splashed all over his face.

The doctor continued, "I'll give you some advice on how you can be more comfortable before you die."

★ ★ ★

It felt like an eternity in that doctor's office. After he finished talking, Liam dashed home.

"Mom, I, uh, I need to talk to you and dad about something," Liam said, choking up. They already knew that he had cancer, but didn't realize how aggressive it was. He was only eighteen years old. His parents were extremely devastated by the atrocious news. They hugged each other as a way to share the grief.

"Son, life is precious. You've truly taught us that this year. Now, I want you to do something for yourself. Live your life. Do whatever you want in the time you have left. We'll support you no matter what you choose. We love you," and with that, his father collapsed in tears.

"I love you, too," Liam said with gratitude.

Liam returned to his room to look up different treatments for his cancer, but every road he went down ended in disappointment. Eventually, he started reading about alternative treatments that were considered more taboo than modern medicine. He came upon an article about immortality.

"Is this real?" Liam read on in disbelief. He read about the Legend of the Secret Buddha. According to myth, there was a Secret Buddha statue that granted eternal life. If one touched the statue's hands and wished out loud three times, they would be given immortality. The Secret Buddha was said to be hidden in the famous Mogao Grottoes. Right then and there, Liam knew what he wanted to do with what time he had left. He wanted to find the Secret Buddha and live forever.

He told his parents of the legend. At first his parents were skeptical. They weren't so sure of the validity of the legend. But when they saw how much he believed in it, they gave him their blessing on one condition: that they join him.

★ ★ ★

Liam and his parents boarded a plane the next week. On the way, they travelled from cities with lofty skyscrapers to dusty roads in the desert. They finally arrived at their destination: the Mogao Grottoes.

"This place is huge!" Liam's mom was in awe of the magnificent caves. Each chamber seemed to hold new treasures of a time long ago. They spent the afternoon exploring the caves.

That night, Liam had a vivid dream of the Secret Buddha. The Secret Buddha already knew what Liam wanted and was showing Liam something in his hands. Liam looked at the Buddha's hands and saw that he was holding a star in his right hand. Behind the Buddha, he noticed two robust horses.

Suddenly, Liam woke up.

"I think I know what I'm looking for," Liam said to his parents as they were walking through the sandy caves.

!

"How do you know which one is the special one?" Liam's father asked.

"The one we're looking for has a star in his right hand and two horses beside it. That's what I saw in my dreams and I know that it was a sign!" Liam said excitedly.

Even though there were more than 100,000 Buddhas, Liam wasn't giving up so easily. Liam could feel the history of the place. He was surrounded by the knowing stares of each statue, yet the one he wanted was being elusive.

"Can you see if there is a painting with horses on it?" Liam looked around the spacious chamber, trying to spot the horses from his dream.

"Take a look at this one, Liam," Liam's mother was staring at a large canvas with hundreds of animals on it.

"I remember seeing only two horses and no other animals," said Liam.

"How about this one? This painting only has two horses," his father said, standing in front of a beautiful image of two majestic horses. They looked rather realistic, as if they were about to charge forward.

"This looks like the one!" Liam said. He looked right at the two horses and then noticed they were next to the most beautiful statue of Buddha they had seen yet. The Buddha looked down at Liam with kind eyes. Then Liam looked at its hands and saw the star.

"I can't believe we actually found the Secret Buddha! I really hope this works. I love you guys," said Liam as he stepped towards the Buddha. Liam touched the statue's hand and said, "I wish for eternal life," three times.

Suddenly, Liam's feet felt glued to the floor like cement. His feet actually turned into stone and continued up his body. His parents watched in horror as their son slowly turned into a statue. But not a statue of Liam. He turned into another statue of Buddha! He was immortalized and his parents couldn't believe it.

Liam's parents started looking around the room. They noticed that Liam was not the only statue. It was full of other people's wishes for immortality. The room was full of Buddha statues, standing forever.

The Magic of Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Kummer, Hermine – 11

Deep, deep in the blazing— hot desert, which carried on as far as the eye could see, an abundant amount of tourists and people from a variety of numerous countries ,are having a layover to examine the wonder and deep magic hidden in the Mogao grottoes ,which were the most historical and furthermore , the most beautiful places that anyone would want to glimpse at .

Daily, innumerable amounts of tourists traveled all the way from their far away countries, to the far way, in the west end of Gansu Province, southeast of the centre of Dunhuang , just to see the famous grottoes. Although, a short number of months later, the flight all the way to Dunhuang, was canceled. People couldn't visit the magical Mogao grottoes anymore, and stopped visiting them. After six months later ,the grottoes were forgotten about , and as the powerful wind blew ,like tumbleweeds in the wind ,large amounts of dry sand crowded all entrances ,and pathways to the Mogao grottoes ,leaving no entrance for anyone to see them ever again.

Another month passed , and the Mogao Grottoes grew dark and ancient , changing themselves in numerous ways. The intricate and colorful patterns of Chinese paintings and drawings of emperors and many places ,could no longer be seen ,as the colors dried out ,and then there was nothing to see. After that ,alluring palaces and ancient buildings ,which were parts of the Mogao grottoes ,were buried under a blanket as hard as rock! When spring ,summer ,autumn and winter passed by ,new spirits of these no longer flagrant astonishing grottoes ,were awakened by the cold drip of water ,coming down from the ceiling ,which made loud echoing noises ,travel through the Mogao grottoes ,forming an almost see through body of the spirits, which had been paintings on the walls ever since the drawings didn't dry out. Some of them ,were either fat or thin, sometimes pig-headed, or cold— hearted too ,but some were kind and generous ,while others were grumpy but nice. "How are we supposed to get out of here ?" one of the worried spirits began, whose name was Tacky. "Well isn't it obvious to you that we will never get out of here ,since these dumb-minded people ,who have recently forgotten us ,will never get us out of here ,as if we are a garbage thrown away in the greasy trash can!" replied one of the rather cold hearted spirits named icy. "Well ,he does have a point, began tarry. And why would they just cancel all of those stupid flights here ,just to see us ,if they love us ,which they don't?" he questioned. "Stop being so rude you guys ,they will find us ,it's just because they are a bit clumsy ,and because , like tarry said, all the flights to Dunhuang were canceled and so because they were canceled for way too long ,they forgot ,but they will discover us soon or later ,no matter what ,but they love these grottoes ,which do include us." Hearty replied ,who was always friendly and generous ,and as said, he was also a kind-hearted spirit, as most of them say ,he was the nicest of all.

While all these spirits, gathered around ,all worried and feared that they wouldn't be discovered anymore ,they didn't notice ,people searching for places unknown ,who were trying to discover the historical ancient but beautiful grottoes again ,were searching and passing by with spades to search the grounds ,but as the spirits were quiet and couldn't scream for help ,because a human might panic immediately when seeing a living spirit ,besides they did not notice anything and just went on to search somewhere else.

When night grew dark ,the spirits finally declared to figure out a plan to make the humans find them again ,but for this they had to be as quiet as a mouse. A few days later ,they discovered footprints on the rocky surface outside through one little hole (which could possibly only fit a small sandwich). They looked closely, "See! I told you they wouldn't stop to try find us!" Hearty realised , getting a little bit angry at the other spirits. "Well sorry Hearty ,but we need to get going and not answer your stupid questions ,we need to pay attention!!!" Icy began. "Uhhhhh!" Hearty groaned ,getting tired of what everybody is doing. Like a thief in the night, the spirits crept silently through the grottoes, trying to find a bigger way to escape into the moonlight and air outside.

Unfortunately, there was nowhere else to escape, other than the tiny hole that could fit a small sandwich, in which probably nobody could fit through. Later ,they all fell asleep and the sun rose , making sparkles of light filter through

the grottoes' only gap."Help!Help!"all of the spirits screamed , as they heard people outside still checking the area to find and discover them."Yaaaaay!"they cried ,finally being discovered.To their surprise ,they had already dug up another part of the grottoes ,so the spirits , including the rest of the grottoes, could only be next.Once the humans heard this scream ,they immediately started digging through the underground to discover the final part of the Mogao Grottoes. And of course, as Hearty announced earlier, people will never forget them ever again!

A Tunnel To The Lost World

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Low, Avelyn – 10

As I trudged laboriously into the lustreless, crepuscular caves, a colossal pair of peculiar gates made out of pure Stygian revealed itself out of the gloominess. An ebony, menacing shadow was cast over me. I knew I wasn't supposed to go in, but curiosity got better off me. With all the might I can gather, I thrust open the pair of gates. Suddenly, millions of golden illuminations poured into the tenebrous caves. The dazzling gleam blinded my eyes temporarily, causing yellow spots to dance in my eyes. But before I knew it, I started tumbling into a dingy pit that I was pretty sure had no end.

I. I Go from Person to Pancake *RIIIIIIING!*

All of a sudden, I bolted upright from my lumpy mattress with beads of sweat rolling down from my forehead, drenching my clammy t-shirt with moisture.

THUD!

A head-on collision with the floor. Just my luck. With my body spread widely out like a bulky, gargantuan pancake, I tried to stir from this awkward position. Sneers and taunts attacked me viciously from behind. Agonisingly, I tried to settle myself on my uneven mattress before some of my fellow scholars decided it was 'amusing' to try to torment me. The fourth empty cup of herbal tea drained to the dregs lay on my nightstand, my droopy eyelids suggesting the prerequisite of a fifth cup. But before I can make that invigorating cup of herbal tea, my thoughts were suddenly was laced back to my dreams. I had a million questions. Were the gates real? What was the dream trying to tell me? Why did I suddenly fall?

“Yuanlu. YUANLU!”

My intent thoughts came abruptly to a stop.

“What do you want?” I retorted, irritated that Chun Li had intervened.

“You’ve got to hurry up. The breakfast bell had started.”

Breakfast. My stomach growled ferociously at the thought of breakfast. I hastily got dressed and went briskly down to the Mogao cavern’s dining hall.

II. I Receive a Boiling Gift from the Sun

CLINK! CLINK! CLINK!

As the sweltering sun embraced me in a convulsive, titanic clutch (which reminded me strongly of my bulbous Aunt fu’s hug), I tried excavating at a useless piece of grime, which I knew it was futile to keep on attempting. I don’t have a clue why my administrator thought Mogao grottoes to be a idiosyncratic archaeological site, where there were about thousands of other caverns waiting patiently for its concealed secrets to be unraveled and discovered. After all, plenty of pilgrims had traveled years before us to unearth the grottoes’ mystery, yet the cavern was unyielding to spill it out. So why bother?

CRACK!

What was that? Frantically, my head spun around, in search for any movement or activity made by the grotto. Suddenly, another several cracks popped out of nowhere. Panic began to rise in my chest. Although the weather was scorching hot, my body was shivering. Freezing hands were doing the Eensy Weensy spider down my spine. And before I knew it, I was plummeting headfirst into a fathomless abyss.

III. I Enter the Past from the Future

Where am I? I scrutiny my sombre surroundings: a dingy, minuscule chamber, with mountainous piles of boulders in every nook and cranny. All at once, my body turned motionless. Just in the dim light of a broken piece of glass, I could just make out the feeble silhouette of something circular. Something with a tinge of coppery. Something of incalculable value. Circling around me was hundreds and hundreds rolls of manuscript from the year the Qing Dynasty was crowned emperor. My mouth went agape. Just when I thought Mogao caves was nothing but a huge pile of rocks, I found this tiny cavern crammed with pieces of historic parchment that could earn me a million yuan! But this happiness could not last long. All of a sudden, realisation dawned on me: I couldn't get out.

IV. I Nearly Met Mr. Death

Climbing the walls? To steep. Calling for help? Voice too soft. All I could do was to pray that I had the luck of a devil and someone would approach to free me from my prison. Slumping down beside a pile of scrolls, I brought my knees to my chest and buried my head in there. First, this was a fantastic cavern full of surprises. Now, it was my prison, with no way to escape. *What did I get myself into?* Suddenly exasperated at myself, I slammed my fist into the dirt wall.

BEEP!

Out of nowhere, a ligneous door automatically gave away its hiding spot. Smoothly, it slid open to reveal a set of stairs made out of earth. Without hesitation, I bolted up the stairs into nature. The sun was starting to subside down the horizon.

"Yuanlu! We've been looking for you everywhere!" Lulling blurted out.

"You look ravenous! Do you want to grab some food?" Chun Li asked me anxiously. But all I could do was to nod, then collapse into a tangled heap on the dirt. Someday, I would be known as Wang Yuanlu, who discovered the Mogao cave's library chamber.

Riley's Story

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Ortego Lafuente, Irene – 10

Riley was a passionate girl with a whole world of imagination and dreams ahead of her. It all started on one usual day when she was locked up in her room writing away, as she thought that was the only way of expressing her feelings and emotions. She had always pictured herself being a fantasy book writer for little kids. Unfortunately, her mother had never been a fan of her stories and had always thought that her daughter was destined to be a mathematician.

One day, when she was as bored as she had ever been, Riley decided she was going to write a story, but not any story, a story about adventure and history. She knew it would be impossible to go anywhere without her mother's consent, but she was desperate, and had an endless list of places she wanted to go to and write stories about. On the other side of her room, was a large, elevated window that gave sight to her garden. An idea came to her. It was genius. It was perfect. It was thought to be done. As determined as she had ever been, she packed her things, and prepared herself for what she had been waiting her whole life. An adventure. She knew where she was going, she had been waiting to go there her whole life, the Mogao Caves. Her plan was to tell her mother she was going to study science in her room (she said science because she knew that would make her extra happy) and then sneak out of the house through the window in her room, which was perfect because it led straight to the garden. She thought to herself, let the journey begin!

Her first mission was to fool her mother into thinking she was doing her homework. And that was an easy task, as all mother ever wanted was for Riley to do her homework and study. First task, done. The next part was when things started to get interesting, she had to sneak out through her window without being caught by anyone. She cautiously opened the window feeling the autumn breeze on her cheeks. She climbed out and ran towards the gate and hoorayyyy!!! She was out. All of her emotions had summed up and she was about to turn back and stay home, but she thought to herself, I need to do this if I want to become a famous author. And here's where her adventure actually begins...

She was off to the Mogao Caves. Her head was filled with things she could write and what she would see. Once she had finally made it to the caves, she couldn't believe her eyes! They were sky reaching and built in such an intriguing shape. So many stories went through her head, horror stories, fantasy stories, all sorts! When she went inside, she was amazed to see the walls covered in Buddhist art, it was beautiful. It was the perfect chance to write the perfect story. This was her moment! As well as the Buddhist art, she saw tonnes of information describing it: evidence of the evolution of Buddhist art in the northwest region of China. That made the Mogao Caves of unmatched historical value! In a room stood 5 Buddhist statues, the one in the middle of the room seemed like the most important. It was sitting cross legged with its eyes closed. In her notebook she wrote, 'The walls were covered with information, Lily...'. Everything was so colourful, the ceilings had such intricate designs on them and were covered in all sorts of shapes and forms.

After hours and hours of looking around, reading and writing, she decided it was time to go back home thinking it was enough for one day. She had never left a place with such a happy feeling inside her. It had been such a pleasant and perfect visit. Pages and pages were filled in her notebook of 'Lily's adventure at the Mogao Caves'. It was the same walk back home she had taken on her way to the caves, but this time it was starting to get a little bit chilly and she realized she had forgotten to bring a jumper. Relieved, she saw the gate that led to her garden. She sneaked in through the window once again and back into her room. She felt amazing! What an experience she thought. Unpacking all of her things, she realized the book her last story had been written on was open. That wasn't like that when she left! Who read it?

Did Riley's mother read her story?
Did she find out she left?
Had she been spying her all along?

The Mogao Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Tai, Liszt – 9

It was dark.

Thunder boomed right next to the house. There were no electric lights in the whole city except one house whose attic's light was blazing.

Very lonely, I was thinking hard about a math question. There was so much homework that I needed to do and work on for hours. On a normal day, I would hear my mother stomping around at eleven o'clock, agonizing over her unfinished writing. But today was different. Wind was howling at the windows, it was horrifying.

Without making a noise, I crept under my bed. The attic door flew open, and out came two men, but it was not exactly two men, it was one man with two heads.

"Where is he!" screamed one of the heads.

I sprang up from under the bed and jumped out of the window to the river. Without turning back, I had dived into the river, and it seemed to wake up my senses. I knew exactly what to do now, I waited and tackled him causing the man causing him to stumble back. After a moment of fighting the man staggered backwards into the darkness.

I wanted to celebrate my victory, but I know they will take revenge, my mother was being captured. I knew it. It was the monster that had just come to capture me.

I chose to go diving in the lake that had before woken my senses, but to my surprise I was caught in a forceful whirlpool causing me to faint.

As I lulled unconsciousness, I dreamt that I was on a beautiful island with an immense feeling of joy. I was invisible, and I could not make any sound. A monster called an Assendo, was talking to a man, Luke. I knew him even though I had never seen this man before.

When I woke up, I suddenly felt calm, A centaur and a boy called Jason were crowded around me. I was sucking something like chocolate pudding.

Like everywhere else, I needed to be careful of what I did, but I didn't have that feeling now. I felt as if I had never been into a real home before. My father never cared about me, but in this place, strangers were welcoming me, teachers were helping us all if we their sons or daughters. Soon I discovered that we were all in danger, and this camp should help us to escape it.

In this camp you learn how to fight this enemy of ours. I am the best at punching and kicking, and usually I won beside the river, as the river could help me. Soon, we ought to leave the camp except for some children who were in real danger, so they continue to live in the camp.

Now I was prepared for the battle to save my mother for, without my mother my life would be doomed. Fortunately, I had made lots of friends in summer, Jason, Clair, Clarisse, and James had all come too, and Jason my best friend.

Today was the day that we would fight the monsters that captured my mother.

In my attic we started a serious discussion about how to invade the Mogao Grottoes. We discovered that each person had a talent: Jason was the best at magic, Clair was best at being quiet, Clarisse could fight like a lion and James could appear and disappear here and there. Jason was very wise with the skills of an architect.

Everybody made suggestions, unfortunately none of them could work, as Grottoes was in the desert.

"So now we have decided that Clair and James will sneak up either side of the tunnel, when they successfully reach the middle, they will raise a white flag to tell us they succeeded. While Jason, and Clarisse and I will appear after. It's a 90 percent chance that we will get my mother back." I concluded after we had finished the discussion. Now we would start working on and exciting the plan.

We were in the back of the Mogao Grottoes now, I squeezed Jason's hand "Don't be afraid,"

It was dark and damp, even a single drop of water alarmed us. Working very hard Jason opened the door that led to the other end of the cave.

The Grottoes were full of Chinese artefacts showing evidence of different types of gods in every country. It was enormous, there was so many doors leading everywhere, corridors with dusty floors, you could catch sand in your nose easily.

We waited impatiently for the sign, after a few minutes, no sign came.

"They are in danger," predicted Jason as he crept towards a big rock that led to one of the other doors.

Now, not only was my mother was imprisoned, James and Clair had been taken too. Crawling as quiet as mice, crossing every room and inspecting thoroughly, we didn't make any progress, but soon we found a trap door in the first room of the Grottoes.

"This is too easy, wait!" Jason yelled as Clarisse charged towards the door, soon she fell on the ground, a wire that was nearly invisible had tripped her, Assendo appeared everywhere, two headed men behind them, I knew I couldn't fight this many alone.

The second thing I knew is that I was charging and sawing, killing huge number of monsters, but there were too many. The last thing I knew was that I was chained on the floor along with my friends, I realized I couldn't get on out of this.

We thought it was hopeless, these chains were full of magic. When you struggled the chain would tighten, all we could do now was wait for death.

Suddenly, a flap of wings gave us hope, our camp was here to help us. The Assendos were very confused as arrows and spears knocked them down to their knees. Fire balls exploded everywhere, and our teacher, Mason, broke all of our chains and now we were free. We flew happily in the air back towards the camp for winter solstice. Since we were separated from my mother's cabin, we would come back for my mother another time, our camp don't have the magic to break it.

Gore in the Grottoes

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Temucin, Selin – 9

A vast mountainous landscape supported the elegant architecture of the Mogao Grottoes. Maya and Nicolas were on a school trip to explore the beautiful, ancient culture of the caves and the history of its creation. Since they were both bored, the two of them became very close, very fast. The first two days were full of tiring activities such as hiking, mountain climbing and much more. It was only the start of the trip and they both quickly felt exhausted by all of the challenges. All they wanted was silence and to be alone but there was no possible way to get that, unless...

At night, when Maya was snuggling in her bed, a cold breeze flew through her window, so she woke up with a startle. As an hour passed, she could not fall back to sleep, so she decided to wake up Nicolas to go on an adventure in the caves. At first he was confused and attempted to hit her with his pillow, but when he realized it was Maya he started laughing hysterically.

"How on earth did you get in my room?" he asked starting to blush.

"This place is a dump, I used your spare key," she whispered quietly in his ear. "Hurry, let's go have some fun of our own."

They snuck out Nicolas' room trying to be as quiet as possible so the teachers wouldn't catch them leaving. Although they were both nervous, but excited for their freedom. After a while, Maya and Nicolas found a comfortable spot in the cave and started getting very tired so they thought of walking and trying to play some games for fun. After running through the spirally cave, they stopped at a long, wonky bridge to take a break, when Nicolas started walking towards her.

"Wow, this is so different to what we have in Spain..." he marveled, starting to get very close.

Maya stepped back, worriedly. "Maybe we should start heading back, I'm pretty sure they're going to wake up soon."

He grabbed her hand and she pulled back before anything wrong happened. "Oh come on Maya, it's just us. I'm not going to do anything." Again, he reached out, but as he took a step forward, he stumbled on a rock and plummeted head-first over the railing...to his death. Splash! He fell, deep down at the bottom of the ocean, not able to be saved. She could feel tears dropping down her face, it was all her fault.

Maya dashed desperately back into her room, her hands starting to tremble. As the time flew past, she was drowning in her tears, and she felt closer to him. But nothing would bring him back.

The next day, everyone gathered so the teachers could complete a headcount before they started to explore the Grottoes building. As they reached Nicolas' name, the room went silent. Nicolas wasn't there. But that wasn't the worst part.

Half the class was missing.

Encounter

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Wang, Estelle – 8

In a summer holiday, a girl named Rinka went to Dunhuang's Mogao grottoes strolling around the cave. She was amazed by the gorgeous architectures and wall paintings. The cave was very colorful and with lots of fairies like the flying apsaras on the wall. Suddenly, one of the flying apsaras blinked. The wall started to shake, and dust fell.

Rinka rubbed her eyes, it was unbelievable! She was so frightened she tried to scream but she can't give a cry. She tried to run away, but her legs were stuck just like a stone statue. At this time, the flying apsara started to talk: "Hello, Rinka, how are you? I'm Estelle."

"I'm fine, thank you!" Said Rinka in fears.

"Don't be scared!" Said Estelle, the flying apsara. "Long time no see!"

"Wh. wh... What? Are you kidding me?" Rinka cried in a fear and surprise.

"I'm not kidding! When you were 1 year old, you came here once. And you were so cute!" Estelle recalled.

"Really? Are you sure? Is that really true?" Rinka cheered proudly.

"Of course! Your sparkling eyes impressed me a lot! I would like to take you to my world today. Would you come with me?" Estelle invited Rinka happily.

Rinka was so curious about everything that happened in front of her. She wanted to explore more. So, she nodded. Suddenly, a light of flash beamed. Estelle took Rinka back to 2000 years ago. They arrived at the fairy world. It was very massive, spectacular, and beautiful. There was a tremendous, vivid, and twinkling tower. That was Estelle's home. Estelle blinked at Rinka and turned her into a Flying Apsaras. Rinka was happy with her new dressing. But suddenly, the ground trembled violently. The dreadful monster popped and appeared in midtown. He opened his scarlet mouth and roared coarsely. It was like an enormous eye of typhoon, sucking in every fairy except Rinka and Estelle. The fairy world became a mess and in ruins. Rinka and Estelle had to save the captured fairies. They made great efforts to save every fairy from the cage except the eldest one, who was trapped in the bedroom of the monster. Rinka proposed a great plan to rescue the eldest fairies. Half of the fairies went to save the eldest fairy. The other half of the fairies drew away the monster. Estelle turned into a blue butterfly to distract the attention from the monster. The monster followed her and eventually dropped into a massive hold with magic. The hold became a huge web which trapped him tightly. The monster yelled angrily and struggled to remove the web, but it didn't work. He consumed all his efforts and died. All the fairies cheered up because their magic defeated the monster and saved the eldest fairy.

"It was time to go home!" Rinke sighed.

Estelle gave an amulet to Rinka and said, "If you want to see us in the future, just hold this and then you can talk to me!" As soon as she finished, Rinka went back to her life.

Fantasy

The British International School Shanghai, Puxi Campus, Xue, Rex – 9

‘What is that?’ said Franklin. A creeping sound broke the dead silence in the darkness. Hairs on his back shot up into the air. Cold sweat of nervousness dropped down from his ruby red cheek.

He stood still. Staring at the endless corridor of gloominess.

Drops of water felled on the stone curved floor. He was only accompanied by silence. Franklin fished out the rust old torch. A light shined in the dark. He walked through the corridor of master pieces. Franklin walked and walked, drawing to drawings. He stopped, and stared. What is it? Statues, three mighty handmade statues curved by mud. The smell of burned wood filled his nostrils. Suddenly, a flash of light appeared, it’s the statues”what are you doing here!” said the female statue in a Chinese accent. Franklin nearly yelled out loud, he ran and fell. Landing on his butt. He stared at the statue that had just been turned alive, amazed. It had a gauze on its head. Face as white as Snow White (of course the Snow White in your bed story) and a piece of grass in its shiny hand.

What? I was just a visitor, not a thief or a crazy bank robber! Thought Franklin, I wish it could say something like: oops, I spot the wrong person! Or: Ah, Visitor! Sorry!

“Don’t be afraid, little hero.” murmured the statue (she’s not actually talking because it hadn’t even moved her stone curved mouth.) She floated around the chamber, disgusting damp smell drifted around and made Franklin feel sick, like kind of a seasick, but as the smell disappeared the sickness disappeared as well.

“Who are you?” asked Franklin questioningly, as the sound of water drops echoes in the vast a wonderful “mansion”.

“I am Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva,” answered the statue (dear readers, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is not a made up word!) What? A something Safari? thought Franklin.

“But where are you.....” said Franklin. Suddenly, it has vanished in the dark. This statue that had only talked to Franklin no more than eight words in the conversation had disappeared. Franklin continued walking in the dark. Suddenly he spotted something glowing in the dark chamber, his torch had run out of battery. Franklin sped up and wish it would be a nice and full charged torch. But no. It’s a Chinese ancient long knife, not the kind of knife we used in our dinner. A long knife with deadly sharp blade made from iron.

“Whaaaaaa! a mysterious sound echoed in the chamber. What is that? Sounds like a baby crying alone. Franklin followed the noise in small footsteps. Always looking around in the room. OOF! Franklin was pressed on the floor by a monster. It had a human face with terrible beards (maybe it hasn’t look after it,) a body of a male striped tiger with thirteen tail (what terrible Monster!) It was a Chinese enlightened beast from the book Legends of Mountains And Rivers. Franklin’s face was paled. He kicked the monster; the monster roared a loud roar. Franklin reached for the sword on the floor. The horrible monster pushed it sharp claws on Franklin, he dodged, and he jumped. Franklin strikes the monster with the sword; he missed the target. And he slashed again, the blade of the sword strikes the monster in the eye. It roared painfully, Franklin slashed again, the enlightened beast was finally beaten by this hero. The beast vaporized into ashes. Franklin looked at his arm, it was scratched, and his leg was bit. He walked out the chamber, into the corridors and out of the cave: Mangoes cave. The cave in the burning desert, and in the station of the great Silk Road. it was already dark outside, cool air blowed on Franklin’s body. He stepped on his bicycle and gone back home.

Franklin opened the door and crept in his room he ran and jumped and fell on his bed. Home, sweet home thought Franklin. He fell asleep at once. Even though it was just fantasy.....

“Wake up! Franklin, It’s school today!

The Magical Tour in Dunhuang

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Bonn – 9

Dunhuang is a very valuable and attractive cultural site in the Jiangsu province of China. There exists more than 700 caves holding more than a thousand pieces of Buddhist frescoes, which is actually the largest collection in the world. These frescoes were created between the 4th and the 14th century, showing how people lived in ancient time. From these wall paintings, we can see peoples' luxurious fashion that resembles modern day clothing, like Persian clothes and beautiful handbags. We can probably tell a bit about how our ancestors lived. One impressive piece of work that really fascinates people is the Fresco of Angels that look like girls but are actually boys!

The largest caves is the Mogao. They hold the most frescoes in Dunhuang, and needless to say, attracts a large number of tourists everyday. Visitors are interested in learning about the Buddhist culture.

A few years ago, two families of great friends came to Dunhuang for vacation. They are the Chans and the Zhangs who had a passion for Chinese culture and religions. They unpacked as soon as they arrived at the hotel and dashed out to the site in excitement. Then the moms and dads said, "We are going to have a competition to see who can find the most unusual pieces of frescoes." Cowin and Syleen, the Chan and Zhang kids, immediately jumped up and rushed to find the unique paintings.

They quickly ran in and out of many caves and discovered that some illustrated peoples' daily lives and others were the drawings of gods. The children were fascinated when they saw Fresco of Angels. It was already late at night and they could not stay out too late. So, they returned to the hotel and slept. They slept and snored till 3am.

Suddenly, a bright flash woke the children up. They saw a beautiful angel which was the one in the painting that they came across in the last cave they visited. The children were stunned by what appeared in front of them. The Angel started to talk to them in a mysterious voice, "I would love to bring you two to ancient China!" In just a flash, the children were teleported back to year 705 during the Tang Dynasty. Cowin and Syleen landed in a foreign city. They looked around and saw houses made out of wood and people wearing jewellery and strange clothes covered in patterns. The crowd were playing with weird toys too. Everything was so strange! At one point, they saw two boys waving goodbye to their father. Cowin and Syleen went over to see what was going on and the two boys told them in a sad voice that their merchant father was heading to the Silk Road to sell his goods. They further explained that the Silk Road was a very dangerous route full of pirates and burglars. They were afraid that their father wouldn't come back. Cowin asked what the two brothers would do meanwhile. The brothers said they would continue to paint the family caves. They also invited Cowin and Syleen to join their fresco painting.

At the merchant's cave, Cowin and Syleen started their art works. Secretly, they added to drawings modern day items like handbags, facemasks and a baby stroller. The Dunhuang kids were surprised at what the two kids drew but they loved the unusual objects and joined in to do the paintings.

After everyone was done, suddenly, the Angel appeared again and said, "I will bring the four of you to the Empress's Chamber!" Again, in a bright flash, they were teleported to the palace of the only female emperor in Chinese history, Empress Wu Zitian.

At a glance, the children saw a woman dressed in fine clothes and looked strong, powerful and serious. That was the Empress! Cowin and Syleen were a bit scared and tried to hide themselves behind the merchant brothers. The two merchant brothers laughed and said, "Why do you two look so scared?"

The Empress was actually a very kind person. While Cowin and Syleen were still shivering, the Empress offered them comfort, "Hello Children", in a strong but kind voice, "Welcome to my chamber." The children were very surprised, "Your majesty, aren't you going to send us back home?" The Empress answered, "Of course, but not now. You two should come join my party!" While the two children didn't know how to react appropriately to that, the Angel appeared again and sent all four kids back to the cave again!

The merchant kids were so kind that they taught Cowin and Syleen to craft Buddhist art. However, as much as Cowin and Syleen tried their best to follow the cave kids' instructions, they still didn't do so well and ended up drawing a man angel! They also drew a harp, but the shape and design didn't turn out to be what they expected. Their very pleasant experience meeting the Empress and the merchant kids had Cowin and Syleen thought Dunhuang was a magnificent place.

After all the hard work, the kids would love to take a rest. All of a sudden, the Angel appeared again. In a flash, Cowin and Syleen were sent back to their hotel where they met with their parents. After a night's rest, the dads and

moms brought the kids to the Mogao once more. The last cave they entered was the one where they had done the strange paintings with modern day items. The two kids suggested to their parents that this painting was the most unique work in the caves.

Mogao Grottoes

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chen, Ho Lung Adwin – 11

It was a dry and hot afternoon, as Johnathan Ruben Michaels trudged through the barren dunes, on a course set directly to the Mogao Grottoes. Every step he took caused pain to shoot up his aching legs, but he knew that it was going to be worth it. After all, it wasn't called a gateway to the past for no reason. As he continued to make his way across the sunbaked desert, he finally spotted a patch of green in the distance, with a dark-colored smudge nearby. *That must be the cave* John thought. Within a few hours, all of his studying to become a scholar would finally come to fruition. If he uncovered something special, he would have an opportunity to finally pay for his mom's sickness treatment.

After walking for another hour, his weariness got the better of him, and his legs crumpled. John panted heavily, as he fumbled for his water. He drank a few gulps before shoving it into his backpack, not caring about keeping it tidy. He was less than a kilometer away from the oasis, and he was so ready to slouch down in a tent, away from the sun and not feeling its baking wrath for a few minutes. He heaved himself onto his feet once more and made his way to the oasis, for the final time.

Once he got there, he groped around his backpack until his hands latched onto a piece of smooth, water-resistant cloth. He pulled it out and set it on his lap. He then reached into the backpack and pulled out a series of bendable metal poles, folded them out to their full length and set them on the sand. He then unfurled the cloth and pushed the metal poles through the loops on top of the cloth, making his tent. John dropped his backpack on the bottom of the tent, grabbed his flashlight, chisel, and handgun and left the tent.

An hour later, a Jeep with desert-travel modifications, came next to the cave. “So, you’re finally here, Alfred.” John chuckled, “I was beginning to think you weren’t turning up.”

Alfred jumped out of the Jeep. “Let’s just say my alarm decided not to work.”

“Well, now you’re here, grab your gear and let’s get started.” John replied, with a slightly annoyed tone.

Once Alfred had gathered his gear, the pair descended into the cave. Today the cave was empty, with most of the usual archeologists and scholars away. As they moved further into the cave, ignoring the already discovered mosaics and paintings, Alfred suddenly exclaimed, “GOD, IT’S A SPIDER! AAAAH! HELP!” In Alfred’s panic, he stumbled and crashed into a wall. However, instead of making a thud that a typical solid wall would make, the sound was a hollow “Thump” which echoed for 3 seconds. Alfred, forgetting the spider, felt a smile creep up his face. The once confused John exchanged grins with him, and they got their chisels out, banging and scraping on the rock wall until the stone gave away, revealing a hidden room. Once the hole was big enough for them to crawl through, they clambered into the secret room, not knowing what awaited them.

Sticky with sweat, the two wiggled their way into the chamber, and pulled out their flashlights. On the wall were a set of engravings, written, “ᐅᐃᐃ ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ ᐃᐃ ᐃᐃ ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ, ᐃᐃ ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ”. John realized he had forgotten to bring a camera, so the two left the chamber and sprinted back to grab a camera.

When they got back, the runes seemed to be emanating a faint purple light deep, deep, inside. John and Alfred exchanged suspicious glances, but decided to shrug it off. They took a picture of the runes, and Alfred noticed that there was another set of runes next to that. He shone the torch on it, and captured an image. The second engraving read, “THM NMBRF ZHFN RIEM, FTM BRIO DM WOP+WFNI QP HNMFTIT”. Once the pair was satisfied that there were no more secrets in the chamber, they made their way back to the tent, in hopes of deciphering the mysterious runes.

As they left the cave, they pocketed the pictures and clambered out of the tight fit of rocks. Suddenly, a black puma the size of a lorry pounced at them from behind the cave. John dove the ground, but the beast's claws grazed his hair. Had he not dived, it would have turned him into confetti. The puma spun around to face them once more. However, as the sun peeked over the horizon, the puma gave one large roar and disintegrated.

By the time they finally got back to the tent, they were too tired to exit the tent and explore, so they stayed in entire day, looking at all known runes and ciphers that could have been translated to this. With no luck up to midday, they were weary and discouraged, wondering why they even decided to do this in the first place. As John got ready for another exploration, he crashed into the desk, to which the cipher files all crashed down. John cursed under his breath, as he bent over to pick them up. Anglo-Saxon, Latin, those were files useless for this investigation. He was nearing the bottom of the pile when he found something peculiar. An old file that seemed to have only been opened once, probably by the author. As he compared the cipher to the runes, he realized that they were a perfect match. Excited to finally have a lead, the pair eagerly deciphered it, to which the two engravings combined read, *“The inevitable cannot be stopped, only delayed. The Umbra shall rise and bring the downfall of humanity.”*

It confounded them, with the mention of this “Umbra” entity. Who was it? Why would it obliterate humanity? They had too many unanswered questions, but at the moment it seemed they couldn’t do anything about it. Or so they thought.

The Legend of Mogao

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chen, Yao Hayden – 11

“Finally.” I breathed into the crumbling, stone wall.

I carefully prised the scroll from its resting place and lifted it up, inhaling the scent of a hundred years’ worth of wisdom. Finally. I had been on the lookout for this particular scroll for 5 long years. My name is Jonah Parker. I am a researcher working with C.R.I.S.I.S., an organization dedicated to stopping the climate crisis ravaging the earth, no matter the cost. I sighed. Looking back, 2020 was paradise. Even though we had the coronavirus to worry about, the Earth still stood proud. That all went south when in 2040, the world began to fall apart. Because the leaders of this world were too invested in economics, they failed to notice the planet earth, the very planet they swore to protect, slowly crumbling under their influence. Volcanoes erupted, the ocean boiled, the Arctic melted. The earth turned into a barren wasteland, with all living creatures forced to depend on each other to survive.

Just two months after these disasters occurred, some of the most brilliant minds remaining on earth formed C.R.I.S.I.S., an organization to help prevent any further natural disaster caused by the climate crisis. That’s why I’m here today, in Dunhuang, China, having relocated the ancient Mogao caves. Experts had found evidence of an ancient scroll inside the caves, containing what the ancient monks referred to as “*The scroll to save the earth*”, roughly translated from Chinese. Experts believe that this scroll contained the diary of the legendary monk, To Lao, who saved the earth from a climate crisis like the one faced today. The scroll would surely give insight as to how To Lao solved the climate enigma so many years ago.

I looked around at the ornate carvings on the walls, slowly fading into nothingness. All around me, the paint on the religious statues were peeling. From Buddhas to Monks, they all sat there staring back at me with eyes thousands of years old. Rows of books and scrolls lined the walls, all identical to the scroll I had in my hand now. Everything seemed so...soulless, so cold.

“Parker. Two minutes until extraction.” My earpiece rang. I tenderly grasped the scroll in my hand. Who knew that simply stepping foot in this ancient cave would make me feel so much? “Clang.” I had accidentally dropped the scroll.

Before I could bend down to retrieve it, it suddenly burst into a ball of flames and the words boomed. “*The solution to your problem is for all of you to look inside your hearts, and find it in each other to forgive, live, and laugh, to slowly rebuild your lives.*” The scroll then disappeared into the cool desert night. I lay in shock, not because the scroll suddenly spontaneously combusted, but because I finally understood its purpose. I smiled to myself. Even thousands of years old, the wisdom of the monks still stand. We have to work together, rise up from the depression that consumed us, and finally understand the beauty and nature of life. “Parker. Five seconds.” I stood there, grinning, for finally I understand, the secret to saving the earth has been inside us all along.

I stepped outside the crumbling cave, into the cool, windy desert night, feeling the swirling sands beneath my feet. Empty-handed, I waved at the gargantuan chopper slowly descending onto the desert, making the sand swirl even harder. As I watched the chopper’s blades slowly rotate, I thought: “Shouldn’t I be mad, that I’ve come all this way just to have my treasure at the end of the rainbow vanish?” A little voice in my head answered me in the most truthful and honest tone: “No.” This was all worth it.

As I climbed onto the chopper, I could not resist watching the pilot’s face droop as he noticed my empty hands. “What is the meaning of this stunt, Parker?” He spat, his face turning a violent shade of red. I took a deep breath and explained everything to him, watching his mustache twitch in sync with the story I told through my headphones, otherwise drowned out by the roaring sounds of the chopper’s flight.

I’m recording this down about a year after the incident in question and am pleased to report the earth is somewhat recovering. The people of earth, regardless of race or identity all united after my discovery, and slowly, the earth recovered. Trees are flourishing; flowers are blooming. The river began to flow again. Completely abolished is

anything that could be harmful to the environment – electric cars, burning coal, fossil fuels. The people of earth now live as one with nature, slowly evolving a utopia they called New Earth.

All it took was a little... push in the right direction for humans to rise and evolve, to live in harmony without war or contest, all thanks to a little wisdom from the caves of Mogao. As for Mogao, the caves have become a popular tourist attraction, as after all, humans would not exist without the scroll of To Lao, recovered from those very caves. All the sculptures and paintings have been expertly renovated and preserved, and now the caves of Mogao have earned their place as one of the most important landmarks in modern history.

I feel all this couldn't have been possible without the forgiveness, dedication, and resilience of the human spirit itself. All we needed to do was to look inside ourselves and embrace our positive traits, and work with one another to evolve each other into an age of peace – all thanks to the caves of Mogao.

“But the most beautiful things in life are not things, they’re people and places, memories and pictures. They’re feelings and moments, smiles and laughter.”– Anonymous

Mogao Caves and the Importance of Friendship

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Hui, Kaylee – 10

Mogao Caves and the Importance of Friendship

Many people like to visit the Dunhuang province in China for many reasons. But not many people know there is a mysterious cave situated fifteen miles away from the busy cities. According to the legend, a Buddhist monk named Le Zun stopped by this cave to have a rest. While he was having a sip of water, he saw a vision of a Golden Buddha floating in the sky. Then he saw a thousand more Buddhas floating with heavenly fairies. The monk was so amazed that he decided to paint the vision he saw on the cave's walls. Many years later, people from all over the world came and added to the beautiful paintings in the caves.

Devon and Maryam were friends and decided to venture into the caves and discover all their secrets. Devon is a 30-year-old man who has brown hair, black eyes, and is as tall as a baby giraffe. Maryam is a 27-year-old woman who has blonde hair and loves to study ancient arts. Here is how they discovered the caves.

One day, Devon and Maryam wanted to explore the city of Dunhuang. They wanted to find some hidden treasure that they heard about. On the way, they felt tired and wanted to sit down to rest, so they dug a hole and found some shade.

What they saw inside the caves was unbelievable. There were bumpy stone walls and claw marks made by animals long ago. Inside the cracks between the claw marks, spongy mushrooms were growing in it. If you lean closer to the wall, you could hear the wind whistling outside and trees rustling. But what was most striking about this cave was that there were hundreds and hundreds of beautiful paintings on the walls. If you look in the middle, you could see a huge Buddha sitting there, legs crossed, arms folded. Next to it, a dozen smaller Buddhas are sitting down in various positions. When Devon and Maryam looked further, they saw more paintings: a Buddha was playing the lute, some were playing a pipe and a flute, a person was dancing in the middle. All of the paintings were covered by dazzling red, blue, green, and brown. It was almost as if the past was coming to life! Maryam and Devon were addicted to these majestic paintings; they followed the paintings and did not realize they were going a bit too deep into the caves.

A little later, they reached the 387th cave. Maryam looked around and asked, "Where are we?" Devon then turned around to Maryam then turned back at the paintings.

"Hey, Devon! We have way more important things to worry about, please stop getting distracted!" Maryam snapped.

Devon rolled his eyes and said "Oh, come on! Didn't you notice the clues on the paintings?"

Maryam's face softened, "What clues?"

Devon pointed at the Buddha towards their left and there were arrows on the floor leading them out. Maryam studied the Buddha one last time, then followed Devon out of cave #387. As time passed, they finally reached the 100th cave. But this cave's riddle was not so easy. It looked different from the first time they passed this cave. There was some "old" language inscribed on the walls that people used to communicate long ago. The writings looked like small pictures and patterns. Some looked like ocean waves, some looked like bunnies and some looked like a teapot. Luckily, Devon knew how to read it, so he read it out loud for Maryam. It said:

"Go through this maze till the first cave's lies, if you fail, the exit dies."

Maryam was shocked at what she was hearing. She thought: What do you mean "the exit dies?" I hope it doesn't mean if we fail, we stay here forever! I have a family! I have friends out there! What should I do?

"Hey, you okay Maryam?" Devon asked. Maryam jumped, then nodded. Devon stepped on a button, then a box appeared in front of them. It said: Left, up, down, right, down, right, left, up. Maryam and Devon were confused, to remember this clue, Maryam took out her notebook and wrote it down. Devon stood there, thinking of what this clue was about.

“I think it means that we have to follow the words, so first we go left, then we go up, and so on,” Devon said to Maryam.

“No, I think we have to find a pattern in this clue!” Maryam protested.

“What do you mean by a pattern? This clue is easy! Just go left, up, down, right, and so on!” Devon grumbled.

“I said there is a pattern! Stop being so stubborn!” Maryam screamed.

“You’re just wasting my time. You and your stupid ideas can slither under a rock and stop bugging me!” Devon snarled.

Devon grabbed Maryam’s notebook, stuck his nose in the air, and then ran off. “HEY! Give my notebook back!” Maryam shouted after him.

Devon turned back, stuck his tongue, and kept running. Maryam chased after him. Devon thought: Yes, my plan is working, she’s following me. He glanced at the notebook, it said to go right, so he went right.

Soon, Devon made it to the end of the maze. He threw his hands up high and he heard Maryam approaching. Devon expected to hear a scream.

But there was only silence.

“I’m sorry Devon. You were right. I shouldn’t have said you were stubborn. Thanks for getting us out.”

Devon thought that she did nothing wrong, but to not hurt her feelings, he kept silent. After apologizing, Maryam changed the topic, she said “I smell the air from outside! We are nearly there!”

Devon smiled at her “You’re right, I smell it too.”

Hand in hand, they walked to the exit, smiling because they could finally see the light of the sun, hear the rustles of the trees and feel the warm hug of their family.

For a Better World

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Lee, Sze Pui Valarie – 11

500 years ago, a war broke out. There was lots of fighting, shouting, and violence, and a man called Ching couldn't stand it anymore. Ching's family was forced to be in war, helping their country, China. Ching was a peaceful person, and the war was the last thing he wanted. When the war ended, Ching was in a dilemma. On one hand, he loved his family and would love to ascertain his family's safety. On the other hand, he was afraid to go near to where the war once was due to a high probability another war might break out as soon as he arrived.

Once he arrived, his heart started pounding quickly. The land was filled with dead bodies, so many that Ching had to be extra careful about where he was stepping. On every single dead body, there was blood, fresh and creepy. Looking at the bones on the ground, Ching was wondering if his family was killed in the war. Walking around and asking the survivors, Ching had confirmed the death of his family. He sat down and started weeping. Ching felt bad but also wondered whether there was anything he could do to stop any war from happening in the future.

He first talked to a few of his friends, they all agreed on the fact that this aggressive behavior was something they needed to be stopped, but none of them was able to figure out a solution. As such, they decided to ask the wise old man for advice since he usually had the best answers to all sorts of questions.

After the "knock-knock" sound, someone replied almost instantly. "Hello, welcome! Ah, a few young men. How can I help you?" asked a wise friendly old man holding a cane. They told him the whole story and their discussion, and finally, the old man told them in a whisper, "If you go to the Gobi Desert and walk to the end, you will find what you want, your dream, and what you've been hoping for." The friends of Ching eyed him suspiciously; only Ching showed faith in the old man's words. He decided to embark on this journey all on his own. It was certainly an adventure, but the potential results made it worthwhile for him to give it a try.

"I've walked non-stop for 5 days and 4 nights, am I there yet? Or was the wise old man lying?" Ching questioned, clearly exhausted. He lost all his hope, out of water, food... It felt like he was about to die, all the energy drained from him. As his vision started to blur, his legs started to wobble, he fell to the ground and blacked out.

Once he had woken up, Ching told himself that he couldn't give up; he would succeed and achieve his goal. He kept walking along the path. After a short while, Ching smiled as his persistence paid off. He saw the cloudless blue sky and a faint outline of the cliff. At first, he didn't believe his eyes, but after he blinked a few times, the cliff was getting closer, and he knew he was not dreaming. The view he saw was breathtaking, Ching couldn't take his eyes off it. When he stood on the edge of the cliff, he felt like a king that ruled everything he wanted. When Ching saw the river below the cliff, he gulped from the thirst-quenching water from the stream and sat down on the hot silky sand.

"This is such a quiet and peaceful place, just as I wanted!" he mumbled, sitting there, staring at the jewel-blue stream in front of him. The stream was glinting brightly, like the Crown Jewels of the desert. "Spending time doing things you enjoy is important," Ching thought. Just when Ching was enjoying the scenery, a huge sandstorm broke out, followed by an earthquake. Ching could feel the power of nature and how amazing that was. Not knowing when or how it happened, he collapsed on the ground due to his exhaustiveness.

When he woke up, the sun was already high up. Ching decided to explore and investigate the reason that had brought him here. When he walked around the area, he saw weird structures, like caves. Carefully creeping into caves to get inspiration, he read stories off the walls. It made him wonder if these wall drawings were passed down by their ancestors, and if they were, there had to be meanings or messages to be conveyed. There were lots of stories that inspired Ching, but there was one that Ching would never forget. It taught people that fighting with violence and force was not the correct way to get what you want, and he agreed, as he hated wars more than anything. The story was about 500 thieves who bullied women and small children and stole from poor people. When the king knew about this, he was furious and decided to ask his soldiers to stab all 500 of them blind. It was a huge punishment and

all the bad guys felt severe pain in their eyes. A buddha then appeared and decided to give them a second chance. He asked the 500 thieves to repent and promised not to hurt or harm anyone. They kept their promises, changed their mindset and beliefs and they eventually became the 500 buddhas.

It had been a year since Ching arrived at the Mogao Grottoes, the peaceful place Ching loved. The old man did not lie; there were thousands of hidden treasures. During this experience, Ching learned much. He learned not to give up and believe in himself to be capable of anything. He learned to respect others. Indeed, it was what the old man had hoped for – that more people from new generations would understand these morals and kind gestures, for a better world.

One Last Monk

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Leung, Adelaide – 8

Beep! Beep! Beep! An annoying alarm woke Dixie up. “Ugh, I want to sleep more,” said Dixie. Today the summer holidays started, and unfortunately, Dixie had summer homework. She had to write an essay about Mogao Grottoes. Dixie thought for hours and hours on how she should write it, but she had a serious case of writer’s block.

Dixie said, “If only I could go back in time and explore the Mogao Grottoes.”

Suddenly a bright light filled the room, then Dixie and Yuki floated up and went into a bright tunnel. Dixie and Yuki landed somewhere.

Dixie asked, “Yuki, can you track where we are?”

Yuki said, “According to Google Maps, we are right in front of Mogao Grottoes.”

“This is perfect! I can write my essay here!” Dixie exclaimed, “What a coincidence! It’s like someone heard my wish.” Dixie and Yuki looked around and saw a lot of ancient Buddhist art and Buddha statues. She pulled out a notebook and jotted down everything that she saw.

After a while of wandering around, Dixie saw a wooden door and told Yuki, “Let’s go in! I’m interested in what’s in there.”

Inside was an exhibition. A sign on the wall read: Mogao Grottoes is also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Dixie smiled, thinking that they were called these names because there were a lot of Buddha statues.

Then they saw another door and went in too.

Suddenly she bumped into someone. “W–W–WHO ARE YOU?” Dixie screamed. She knew it wasn’t Yuki because he was right behind her. She could also hear him trembling.

Then someone said, “Master — is that you?” Dixie slowly backed away. The lights suddenly flickered on. She saw a Buddhist monk. The Buddhist monk sounded as scared as Dixie. He stammered, “Who—who are you, and what are you doing here? No one stays here anymore.” Dixie whimpered, “How are you still alive?”

The monk sighed and sat down, head in his arms. He told her about the resurrection stone that his master found, and how curiosity got the better of him and he touched it. Now he will be alive forever unless the stone is destroyed. He also mentioned that he locked himself in this room forever as a punishment.

Dixie was fascinated by the story. She asked him what his name was, wanting to know more about him. The monk said, “My name is Anurak.”

Dixie smiled and replied, “My name is Dixie.”

Anurak told Dixie that when his master found out he had touched the stone, he was very mad. This made Anurak extremely ashamed. Now he wanted to die and apologize to his master. So he asked Dixie if she could help him destroy it.

“How am I supposed to destroy it when I don’t know where it is?” Dixie asked.

Anurak said, “I know where it is but it will be a far journey.”

Dixie grinned, “Don’t worry. It will be much faster if we have Yuki. He can activate seats and fly super—fast.”

“Hop in!” Yuki smiled as he transformed. Yuki followed directions from Anurak. When they finally arrived, Dixie asked Anurak, “Um.... what is this place?”

Anurak replied, “Do you know the mountain called Jiuhua Shan? This is Jiuhua Shan mountain.” Dixie smiled at the name. “Oh, I do know that mountain. I went there for a field trip. I didn’t know it existed back then.” Yuki asked, “If you don’t mind me asking, but where is the stone?” Anurak replied, “I hid the stone in a cave. We might have to walk up a bit.” After a while of walking up, Dixie was tired because she wasn’t much of an outdoor person. She asked if they could just ride Yuki. But Yuki said he was too tired to fly, so she just had to walk up. After what felt like an hour to Dixie, they arrived at the cave and there Dixie saw the resurrection stone. She quickly took out her notepad and scribbled down a lot of words. She asked Anurak, “Are you sure about this?” Anurak replied with a nod. Dixie said, “Ok if you say so.” She grabbed her pencil. (She would use that because it was sharp, and she destroyed a lot of stuff with it.) But before she could destroy the stone, Anurak said, “Thank you for helping me with everything, Dixie and you too Yuki.” He gave a smile to Yuki. Then Dixie destroyed the stone and the pieces flew everywhere. Anurak was gone. Dixie felt a bit sad. She thought he was very friendly. But she brightened up a little while later.

Then Dixie suddenly thought of how they were going to go back home. She asked Yuki, “Do you know how we’re going to go back home?” Yuki panicked, “I can’t believe we forgot about going home! This adventure was so intense that we forgot about going home! Maybe we can find some sort of portal to go back home.” Dixie told Yuki, “That kind of stuff only happens in movies.” She leaned on a wall. Then suddenly the wall slid open and there was a portal! Dixie called for Yuki. Yuki turned around and saw the portal too. He asked Dixie, “Do you think this is a portal leading home?” Dixie answered, “There’s only one way to find out.” And she jumped in the portal. Yuki jumped in too. Surprisingly they ended up back in Dixie’s room. Dixie saw Yuki. She asked him, “Did all that stuff happen or was it just a dream?” Yuki told Dixie, “It happened all right, now on the bright side, you know exactly what to write for your essay!”

Suddenly the door flew open. It was Dixie’s mom. She said, “Thank goodness you two are ok! I’ve been looking for you two all day long!” Dixie and Yuki exchanged mischievous smiles. They knew they would have to keep this all a secret.

Grottoes

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Li-Black, Ming Chu Kayla – 11

Prologue:

It was scorching hot in the desert of Gansu. One might even call the feeling “roasted brains”. As far as she knew, everyone who had ventured to these grottoes either disappeared or had gone mad.

“Relax, Pearl. Won’t this be the mysterious and mystical death you imagined?” She tried to shake off the visions of certain death. It was hard in a place so deprived of life and joy. She tried to focus on her grandmother’s words. She was among the only few who had made it back alive without going mad. “Have faith, and don’t lose what shines brightest in the darkest hour.” Just then, she spotted a shape in the distance. Through the heat she could just make out a shape. Was that a cave? Was that water she could hear? She stumbled, and landed face-first in the sand. Would it be so bad just to lie here and await death? “Get yourself together. Where is your survival instinct?” she thought. It was hard to get up, but she managed. Slowly but surely, she trudged toward the shape, hoping to reach it before sundown. It was at this time that her followers had deceased. Some had disappeared mysteriously throughout the course of the night.

Right before sundown, she reached the yawning mouth of the cave entrance. By then she had confirmed that the water was real. She stumbled in, the last trace anyone had seen of her was her large, vividly neon yellow backpack swallowed up by the darkness. This would be her death sentence.

It had been 20 years; Or had it been longer? Pearl La Cue sighed, the ghostly sound echoing across the barren walls. She had come to this desolate place desperate for fame, for money, for riches, but all she had gotten was death. There was nothing in this place, nothing at all. Yet this had somehow killed her. One moment, she was reading an ancient scroll with shining eyes in the dim light. The next she was gone, sucked up into the desolate place. She knew how to get out of here, she really did. But somehow, a force kept her from accessing that knowledge, buried deep in the depths of her brain. All she remembered was the name of the scroll. “*She Who Wields This Cave*” was a tale she’d never forget. It had taught her how to survive this barren world, shy of life and joy. People from all over had come to this infamous destination, all of them trying to absorb the information they had read, like plants reaching for the sun. The force allowed her to keep few memories. The rest, she assumed, were to stop her triggering the “forbidden scroll” as she called it. She had photographic memory, yet that wouldn’t work in the blasted place. She knew what would happen to her. She had seen it, heard it, even felt it.

“Hello?”

“Is anybody there? Is there a way to survive this place? Anybody?”

There was another voice.

Pearl got excited. Is this what emotions feel like? She replied, “Come down... take the scroll.”

“Okay! Is it worth millions of dollars? I wanna get rich!”

“Hmmm.... A greedy girl. No surprise. I need to have a word with you. Come down please.”

She made her voice sound gentle, calm and longing.

A face appeared. “OMIGOSH! YOU ARE SOOOOOOOO CUTE! I bet that you could earn me millions by midday! EEEEEEEE! Now gimme the scroll. NOW.”

“Come closer. Yes, that’s it. Now stay very still.” Pearl chided.

“COME ON, LADY! GIMME THE SCROLL!” She whined.

Pearl would not mind taking her. She grabbed the scroll and jumped into her body, holding the scroll. Wow, was it this easy just to escape.

“HEY! Are you just going to leave me here? TAKE ME WITH YOU!”

“What’s your name?”

“What?”

“What’s your name?”

“It’s Ruby.”

“Well, sorry to inform you that you are now officially a spirit. Trapped here forever. Ta Ta!”

“WAI—”

“Snarf! Umph Sck Sck.”

Pearl shuddered. Ugh, she had heard that noise way too many times before. It was the mark of the devouring of the serpent. “Hmmm, she did say she had a rich daddy... Maybe I’ll go toss him down there and be his heir. I might do that to my future children, ensuring that I can stay alive.” She thought.

SNAP! The scroll rolled shut. Vanilla grew as pale as the plant she was named after. Drake spoke, but even his voice was barely a whisper. “M—m—mu—mummy will feed us?”

“Ohhhh Vanilla! Ohhhh Wylieeeee! Mama’s taking you on a little trip to the desert!” The sound of her heels clicking up the stairs was unmistakable.

Together, Vanilla and Wylie jumped out of the window to find two plane tickets to California—and to their father. Hopefully, there will be shelter from this madwoman.

“Father will fix this.”

Epilogue:

“The children are gone! Oh noo —Snarf! Umph, Sck Sck.”

Those sounds will forever rest in her brain.

Adventure of a Rare Panda

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Liu, Ethan – 10

First constructed in 366AD, The Mogao Grottoes are a collection of 500 temples located in Dunhuang, China. These grottoes were cut into a side of the cliff above the Dachuan River. They host the finest examples of Buddhist art from the 4th to the 14th century. The numerous artworks offer vivid murals, sculptures, and other art forms portraying medieval lives in western China. Conservation of this UNESCO World Heritage site is imperative as tourism and climate change threaten its preservation.

Fudge stared out of the window and saw The Great Wall of China below him. Ah, he thought. Finally, a vacation!

He was looking forward to seeing his family in New York and eating his grandma's homemade fudge. He could almost smell the sweet scent now; it tickled his nose and wrapped around him like a warm hug.

Fudge smiled at the thought and sank into his seat, or seats to be precise, and almost knocked his neighbor off hers. His apology was met with a sneer, something Fudge was used to. Being a rare, giant panda with burgundy and white fur wasn't always easy, even if you were a judge.

'Judge Fudge'; his parents always thought it had a nice ring to it, but everyone still called him Fudge.

It would be a while before they brought lunch around, so he decided to have a nap. Fudge had just closed his eyes when 'BAM'.....

Fudge woke up in an endless desert. The air seemed thick with sand and his eyes were stinging. Fudge coughed into his arm and noticed his fur had turned black and white. Petrified and disoriented, he muttered, "Where am I?"

A stranger's voice came from behind him, "You're in the Gobi Desert". Fudge turned around to see a man who looked like a traveler. Behind him, there was a cluster of sand houses with stone roofs and cacti outside.

"Where are you from?" the traveler asked curiously.

"I was on a plane...next thing I knew, I was here." Fudge said weakly.

"What's a plane?" The traveler asked.

"Pardon?"

"I said what in the Buddha is a plane?", the traveler chuckled. "Never mind. Let's find you a cave to rest. You might have bumped your head!"

The traveler took Fudge to the Mogao Grottoes and shared its history: "These caves have been built by monks over the past six centuries, as a place of sanctuary, to meditate and worship Buddha. This location was chosen when a monk had a vision of golden Buddha lights and believed this spot was sacred. There are already 300 caves and more are coming."

"Six centuries back? Aren't these caves over 1,600 years old?" Fudge asked, confused: "I'm sure that's what my grandma told me."

"It's year 999," said the traveler, puzzled.

Fudge's jaw dropped, "Pardon? I'm from 2022!"

"Oh my!" The traveler replied, astounded. "You must have banged your head. Look me up if you need anything. I'm just a day's hike away. Keep this torch and this map, you'll need them," said the traveler.

Fudge stared up at the huge maze of caves before him. "Er...the map has a hole in it," he asked the traveler, who had disappeared into the hazy air.

A huge bronze statue of a panda welcomed Fudge by the first cave's entrance. The statue glowed in the blazing sun and cast a long, familiar shadow on the golden sand. Behind the entrance was a smaller statue of an albino panda, who was making dim sum. Fudge reached out to eat the delicious-looking food and almost chipped a tooth. "Not a good idea..." he murmured.

Fudge then entered the Panda Cave. A monk was painting a beautiful mural of an embarrassment of pandas collaborating to build caves. The monk smiled at Fudge. "Why were these paintings made?" Fudge asked. "For the love of our religion and mankind," the monk explained. "We wish to share our experiences with future generations." "This is amazing!" exclaimed Fudge. "Such beautiful color combinations of mint, burgundy, and chocolate. By the way, it's pitch-dark here, how do you get the light in?" "We use candles and mirrors to reflect the light into these caves," the monk replied.

Fudge must have hiked miles before he reached the Library Cave, which showcased stacks of books, including art books, literature books, and fudge's favorite, culinary books. These bookshelves resembled lines of massive 1950's computers.

Exhausted, Fudge found a place to rest. Night had already set in. He gazed up and saw a medley of stars glittering in the sky. "That must be the Milky Way!" Fudge exclaimed. He looked out to see a tiger mother and her cubs sleeping soundly under the moonlit blanket; he listened to crickets chirping and the wind whispering gently through the shrubs.

When Fudge awoke, he found himself in the Jade tower. The map showed the tower housed a hidden jewel that offered inner peace. When Fudge stood up, the ground collapsed under his weight. He discovered the jewel along with a scroll in a room plated with gold. Fudge picked the scroll up and blew the dust off it and saw the family crest marked on the back! He had seen that many times at grandma's house. He read the scroll and learned his ancestors sponsored the building of the Mogao Grottoes!

Returning the scroll to a lectern in the center of the room, he found the missing piece to his map. The new treasure guide led him to a secret chamber!

Air whooshed around him; golden smoke filled the room. Fudge was so anxious that he squeezed his torch. A portal appeared before him. Frightened, he retreated and tipped over a palette of burgundy paint. He was then absorbed by the portal and got teleported back to his flight to New York! He tried to dust off the sand from his fur, which had turned burgundy and white! Suddenly, he heard the same deafening sound! Here we go again, Fudge thought.

The Treasure of the Mogao Grottoes

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Shu, Yu Xi – 10

The Banquet
1855, Palace of Versailles

Napoleon III invited Queen Victoria to a lavish banquet in Versailles.^{i ii} During the feast, Napoleon gave a subtle signal to the queen. Seeing the signal, the queen quietly followed the emperor, who led her into a chamber deep inside the palace.

“Your majesty,” Napoleon said, “I’ve heard that a British soldier in your war against China had a special discovery in West China.ⁱⁱⁱ The locals call it the Mogao Grottoes. The soldier found an inscription in one of the caves saying it hides valuable treasures!”

“Oh goody! I also heard. But I also heard that the treasures are locked up by a code sequence, but there is also a curse on it.” She replied.

Napoleon said: “Why not we send our armies to get the treasures? I will declare a war against China, claiming the Chinese had been cruel to the French, but our real reason is for the treasures.”

Just then, lights in the palace suddenly went out. Napoleon III and the queen startled, both quietly thinking, “Is this the treasures’ curse?”

Foreign armies are coming!
1856, Gansu

Huaming was thirsty. He was a ten year old living in a remote village near Mogao Grottoes.

He climbed up a tree in the village to pick some fruits. Then he heard something. He pushed some branches out of his way, and curiously looked on. To his surprise, he saw a huge moving path of blue, red, and gold in the valley below. He looked closer, and realised they were people riding on horses and holding strange things that he had never seen.

“Strangers are invading!” Huaming shouted.

The villagers went to look. An old man said with a worried look, “I remember those people. They are foreign armies!”

Huaming told his friends, “Those soldiers look suspicious. We should go at night to see what they do here.”

Night slowly fell, like a person throwing a massive blanket from above.

The camp of the European army was bright with torches. Huaming and his friends followed the light, and crept down the valley. They hid behind a boulder near the commander’s tent, and peeped through the gap of the tent.

They could see that two people were talking happily over a picture. Huaming immediately recognised it as a picture of the Cave of Lord Dongyang – the prettiest one among the Mogao Grottoes^{iv} where he and his friends played hide-and-seek. The stories of the cave Huaming and his friends heard so many times from old villagers came to him – its treasures and the curse. Huaming knew instinctively the foreign soldiers were after the treasure.

He told his friends in a whisper, and they silently left.

The next morning, a small band of French and British soldiers arrived at Lord Dongyang’s Cave, along with an English master code breaker who had worked with Chinese codes before. They started searching for codes which were sets of oriental symbols.

One by one, the codes were solved. There was only one last sequence left to unlock the treasure! By now, it was night time.

“I’m tired! I want to call it a day!” yawned one soldier. Others echoed him.

“Okay, let’s have an early start tomorrow then. I can’t wait to get my hands on the treasures! And then all of us will be rich!” The code breaker said excitedly.

Saving the Treasures
1856, Gansu

Meanwhile, Huaming and his friends went to find help. They traveled to the nearby monastery, where they became good friends with the monk Boyi. Realising the significance of the information, Boyi decided to go with them immediately to the cave. They waited to get in until the foreign soldiers left. Boyi’s monastery had the scrolls with the keys for the symbols and the meanings for all but the last code sequences. Following the scrolls, they swiftly got to the last code sequence which read as:

Pray in front of the Buddha where the angels fly,

Then go ask the owner,

And he will show you the way.

Not sure what this meant, Huaming stood before the statue of the Buddha sitting in the middle of the far wall, and looked up the graceful Chinese angels (*fēitiān*) flying above the Buddha. Then he remembered the story an old villager told the children that the Lord Dongyang – the patron of the cave – commissioned the flying angels to protect the Buddha. The Lord himself was said to be the first person leading a procession on the east wall to worship the Buddha.

Huaming’s eyes quickly settled on Lord Dongyang’s image. Excitedly, he noticed that Lord Dongyang’s hand pointed to a place in the far wall. With his heart pounding hard, Huaming went to that spot. As he touched it, a trapdoor opened, revealing the treasures.

Knowing the job was not done, he held back his excitement and told his friends, “Let’s take the treasures and leave before they find out!”

They seemed to be too late. The foreign soldiers arrived, with the code breaker.

“You think you are clever, Huh?” the code breaker said. He went up to snatch the treasures. “Thank you! We are now rich!” He roared with laughter as he took them.

The Chinese armies arrived just in time, and shot the foreign soldiers in the cave.

Just at that moment, thunder sounded and lightning cracked. “It is a curse!” The soldiers down in the camp shouted. They hastily retreated to the harbour where their ships were moored, and set sails to France.

“Thank you for saving the treasure. The foreigners almost got it! I will take this to the emperor. I bet he’ll give you a big reward!” A local soldier said.

“Thanks, but I don’t need any reward.” Huaming said.

“Are you sure?” The soldier asked.

“Yes.” said Huaming, and he knew he was right.

The Spirit of the Silk Road

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Tan, Edward – 12

Crunch...

Crunch...

Crunch...

The sand crunching under Yang's boot sounded his predicament. He was separated from his caravan during the sandstorm. Worse still, he lost his cargo in the tempest. All he had was his sand-ridden clothes and an empty water-skin. In the dying light of the day, Yang saw a faint flicker in the distance. Hoping to find shelter, Yang made his way there.

When Yang got close to the source of the light, he was surprised to find it emanating from inside a cave. As a boy, Yang had heard tales about demons that would eat travelers whole. Summoning up his courage, Yang took a step into the unknown. Inside, he realized he was not alone. He could hear faint chanting at the end of the narrow passageway that eventually opened-up into a large chamber.

There he saw a shaved-head man in yellow robes painting celestial beings on a wall. Curious, Yang asked him what he was doing. The man replied he was documenting the wisdom of the different peoples in Dunhuang. He went on to explain the significance of Dunhuang as a gathering place for people from faraway lands. Though it is true that trade brings people here, they also bring their ways – how they see the world and how they live. If not for the Silk Road, would the teachings of Buddha have found its way to the Middle Kingdom? Would we have the indigo from the subcontinent to paint on this wall? Or would we have the cumin spices from Persia that the locals delight on their mutton skewers?

When the man finished his explanation, he invited Yang to rest by the hearth. Tired and weary, Yang soon felt the relief of sleep wash over him.

Chatter...

Chatter...

Chatter...

When Yang woke up, he felt groggy. Looking up, he noticed the yellow-robed man was gone. Furthermore, the whole cave was covered in a thick layer of dust. Yang found this odd since he had only been there for one night. What's more, the mural the yellow-robed man was painting was completed. On the ceiling and every wall were sutras and celestial beings brushed in indigo, ochre, and gold leaf. How could that be, he thought?

Suddenly, Yang heard voices. Fearing the worst, Yang prepared to flee. Cautiously, he peeked outside the entrance and was greeted by the sight of a bustling bazaar. Yang was puzzled, for the bazaar hadn't been there before. Bewildered by the sight, Yang made his way to the nearest merchant to ask if the bazaar had always been here. In reply, the merchant told Yang it had been here since before the rule of Kublai Khan. To Yang, that made no sense. But soon, Yang was able to piece together the astounding information he was given. Somehow, he had slept for over a hundred emperor's reign.

Yang pinched himself, hoping that it was a dream. But it wasn't. Happily, he saw the yellow-robed man at a teahouse. Wanting answers, Yang asked him what was happening. In reply, the man said that what he saw was what he painted on the walls of the grottoes – people from faraway lands bringing their ways. "You smelled their spices and heard their unfamiliar tongues. You see, some things never change", he continued. "Here on the Silk Road, the intermix of cultures will always bring us closer together."

After his explanation, the man offered Yang a cup of tea. When Yang finished drinking it, he suddenly felt light-headed and blacked out.

Clang...

Clang...

Clang...

Yang woke up inside a cave and heard the clanging of iron. It sounded like a battle outside. Fearing the worst, Yang again prepared to flee. However, the racket faded. In the calm, Yang peeked outside. To his surprise he saw many horseless carriages, oxen-less plows ripping the ground, and gigantic claws digging the earth. Puzzled by his surroundings, Yang went searching for the yellow-robed man for answers. But since he was nowhere to be found, Yang asked a nearby man what was happening. The man said they were working on a road that will connect Dunhuang to the far west. Perplexed by what he meant by the far West, Yang asked him if he meant Rome. The man said yes, and then continued by saying the road will go much further than Italy. In fact, it will go all the way to the ocean he called the Atlantic. With this initiative, trade will bring every country closer together.

Yang thought the man was joking, for a project this colossal would take many lifetimes to complete. Sensing Yang's doubt, the man brought him to the main construction site. When Yang saw it, he was amazed by its scale. Hundreds of men shoveling dirt, hammering nails, and heaving iron beams. Astonished, Yang ran down towards the working men to have a closer look. Suddenly, Yang heard someone yell 'Duck!'. The world went black.

Chant...

Chant...

Chant...

Yang woke up again. He was inside the cavern once again. To Yang's surprise the yellow-robed man was also there meditating. It must have been a dream, Yang murmured.

Hearing this, the yellow-robed man snapped to attention and said that it was no dream. What Yang saw, the man explained, was what had always been, what it is, and what it will always be. Sensing that Yang was confused by his explanation, he continued by saying that human connections are eternal, which are the fruits of the Silk Road. The riches and wisdom of all the world's kingdoms travel along it, taking root along the way. After all, it is why the Mogao Grottoes exist – being the benefactor of many thankful traders leaving their mark on the walls of these caves.

The spirit of the Silk Road will endure beyond the rise and fall of dynasties. The future might be unrecognizable, but we can take comfort that our need to connect with one another will always be the same.

Ling Hoong's Adventure

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wan, Kay Li – 10

and Hoong's Adventure

"Class B7, I don't want any of you to get lost," warned Ms. C. The class walked around the museum, admiring the historic artwork displayed on the walls. "Where is the cool artwork we saw in the book?" whispered Ling. "Maybe it's in the next room, or in there," Hoong pointed to the green door. "Hoong, the sign clearly says 'staff only'," Ling said, crossing her arms. "Don't be such a party pooper." Hoong dragged her towards the door. "It's time to go," hollered Ms. C heading for the next room. Hoong put his grubby fingers on the door. It swung open.

The room was dimly lit, inches of thick grimey dust covered the floor, like a blanket, as if no one had been in it for ages. Hoong darted towards a wall. "That's the artwork we've been looking for," exclaimed Hoong. She extended her arm, "Ling you can't touch anything," warned Hoong panicking. Ling ignored Hoong, tracing the artwork with her stubby fingers. Click, suddenly the lights went off.

The room was pitch black. Frightened, Ling grabbed Hoong's arm. Click, the lights came back on. The large painting that had been standing in front of them only moments before had been replaced by ancient hand paintings which covered the walls around them.

Hoong turned around to see Ling's mouth wide open. "Ling, this is..." started Hoong "The grotto," Ling said, shocked. Out of nowhere, the appetizing smell of garlic, ginger, and ancient spices surrounded them. "Ling," exclaimed Hoong, his stomach shouting, "let's go look for food." Not before long, Ling and Hoong were walking around the village just outside the grottoes. Unfamiliar scents wafted around and everyone wore beautiful silk han fu. "What is that?" asked Ling, scrunching up her nose, "Something delicious," Hoong said, rubbing his stomach. Ling and Hoong decided on a small stall in the corner. "We're hungry," Ling said to the stall owner, looking at the food. "Ah, my dear, why don't you try donkey meat and noodles, a famous dish here." "Yes please," Hoong said immediately, holding out a few pennies. The man looked at them frowning, "What is this? You can't buy food with that," the man scolded. Suddenly a man appeared. "I can help," he said slowly, grinning. Ling and Hoong studied the man. He had greasy hair, small cunning eyes, and wore a long black han fu. Hoong looked up at the man with adoring eyes, "Thank you, kind sir!". Ling, on the other hand, slowly retreated, taking big steps backward. The mysterious man immediately shot her a sharp stare. Ling knew there was something unsettling about this man. The man opened his hand to reveal a few rusty copper coins with holes in the center and thrust them at the stall owner. Moments later, piping hot bowls were delivered to the table. "My name is Shu," the man said slyly as Ling and Hoong slurped down their fragrant noodles. For the rest of the day, Shu insisted on showing them around. Before long, they had ended up where they had started, inside the grottoes. Shu pulled them into a dark passage and whispered, "I'm looking for my lost artwork, you two are going to help me find it." "Oh no thank you," said Ling boldly. "This isn't a request," the man sneered back. While dragging the two of them deeper into the cave he began to describe the painting he was looking for. "There are lots of Buddhas on it, the colors are mint green and tomato red, with a silvery outline to finish. It's magnificent, and it's mine," Shu exclaimed, his eyes wide with greed.

Ling and Hoong pretended to search for the painting. When Shu was out of earshot, Ling whispered to Hoong, "The painting Shu is after is the painting we saw at the museum. It's the painting that brought us here!" At this, Hoong's eyes widened, "You're right! So does that mean..." "He isn't the one who drew the painting. He must be trying to steal it!" At that moment, Shu caught up, kicking up dust as he walked. "Hello Children," snarled Shu, "Did you find it yet?" he asked, glaring at them. "N-no..not yet." stuttered both Ling and Hoong. Shu furiously kicked the wall. He dragged them by their collars and marched even deeper into the grottoes, eventually reaching the room Ling and Hoong had first arrived in. He shoved both of them into a room as dark as night and slammed the door behind them. "How are we ever going to get out of here and ensure Shu doesn't steal the painting?" Wailed Ling. "We need to find it first," Hoong suggested. Ling picked up the oil lamp and began wiping thick dust off the walls. Beautiful hand-painted artwork started to show beneath the dust. Silvery waves and cherry red lines along with mint color paint strokes are shown. "This is it," gasped Hoong. "Thanks," grinned Shu. He had appeared out of thin air and marched towards them. His hands shot out to touch the painting on the wall. "NOOO!" hollered Ling and Hoong, rushing to protect the painting. Just as Shu made a grab for the precious artwork, Ling and Hoong suddenly fell onto the floor. "Ow!" Said Ling, "Did Shu get the painting?" asked Hoong "No..it's right here with me," said

Ling confused “Wait..wait isn't this the storeroom? This painting really is a time machine,” Hoong gasped, he noticed a crack of light under the door. “Oh my gosh! Ling, we’ve gotta get out of here before something crazy happens again!” They hung the painting and crept out of the storeroom. “Ling! Hoong! You two are in trouble, where have you been?” Ms. C said worriedly. “We haven't been anywhere at all! Just lost...” Said Hoong grinning at Ling. “In the Mogao Grottoes saving a precious painting from being stolen,” added Ling in a whisper. With that, the two burst into a fit of laughter.

Mogao Mystery

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Ryan – 11

As I took a step forward through the red-pillared passage, underneath an ornately glazed-tiled palace roof, light from outside was suddenly replaced by a shadow, engulfing me in darkness.

Venturing deeper into the narrow corridor, I groped my way through the obliterating blackness, with my hands outstretched in front of me. Inching forward, I had no idea how far, how deep this passage would go, when suddenly...

WHOOSH! I felt my feet give out under me as if a rug was pulled, and my spine crunched against a hard, stone surface, sliding down deeper and deeper as if into oblivion. Hurtling downward through a winding spiral, all my organs froze as I plummeted at tremendous speed into the depths of the unknown void.

After what felt like an eternity, I finally landed on a sandy floor, with a huge puff of dust. Before I could even get to my feet, I was unwelcomely greeted by a thousand gold eyes locking onto me: the horrifying, withered and filthy Buddha sculptures.

My eyes were struck by a blinding light, until I found myself kneeling on a red carpet in a pearly palace, with a thousand eyes locked onto me, again. The man who sent me on this impossible mission was seated on a golden throne in front of me. The murmur of old monks surrounded me, with faint whispers hovering in the air: "impossible quest", "booby traps".

The Great One bellowed, "It is said that you are the best detective and collector." He added, "You must retrieve the immortality potion for me, and I shall reward you with endless treasures, gold and platinum. If you fail, your body shall be cut into a thousand pieces."

"...A thousand pieces". The phrase whirled dizzily through my mind as I wiped the dust from my eyes and found myself back in the subterranean room of 1000 Buddhas. I felt a wave of relief when I felt the pack of matches reserved for emergency situations like this. Striking one, I now saw there were dried blood stains and cobwebbed skeletons lining the floor. Holding my hands over my mouth, I resisted the urge to scream.

Collecting myself, I gingerly managed to step around the skeletal figures on the floor. I felt a warmth coming from the left and decided to edge towards it. Moving through the corridor, the air felt thick, as I took in marvelous pictures on the ceilings and walls: gargantuan gods, fantastic birds, fearsome humans, all arranged in a labyrinth of intricate patterns.

"Hello?" I asked the decayed Buddha statues. My unanswered interrogation echoed through the cavern, crumbling into an echo repeating itself until it faded into the darkness and the distance overhead.

There was only a small window revealing the bright moon outside. Underneath, four lines of words were engraved into the wall.

Before my bed, there's a pool of light.

I wonder if it's frost on the ground.

The last two lines were faded. I realized this wasn't any ordinary writing. This was the poem Quiet Night Thought by Li Bai! I had memorized this since I was young. Slowly pulling the last two lines from my memories, I was seized by amazement!

I find the moon bright,

Then I lower my head in homesickness.

As I gazed at the moon, thinking about the last line, I lowered my head and torch. I used my hands to push away the dust and moss; I had found a secret lever! I used all my strength to push it. A doorway creaked open, revealing another room.

A magnificent purple glow radiated magic in the other room, and it was coming from liquid inside a glass bottle. I had found the legendary immortality potion, and it rested on the palm of a golden Buddha. I knew it could not be so simple, and any sudden movements could trigger traps. Scouring the depths of my mind, I chanced upon a brilliant plan. I held my hands out as I estimated the weight. Then, I took out my bag of sand and quickly replaced the potion with my sandbag. It worked!

As the gleaming, purple and boiling potion shone in my hands, I felt really strong. I could feel a voice emerging from deep within; a dark side of myself pushed me: "Drink the potion! Conquer the world! Betray the Great One!" The voice was deeply overwhelming.

Falling to my knees, I closed my eyes, and tried with all my might to push the devilish thoughts away. For a second, I thought I was saved, and nothing happened. But just then, the pressure plate jolted down and disappeared below. I turned around as the gold Buddha Statue behind glowed, slightly lighting the cave with a dim golden shine.

"I see. You have managed to get through all the traps and the puzzle. That was quite unexpected, but since you have come, I must tell you one thing. Be careful with that potion. There are only two endings." The Buddha statue paused.

"Tell me, what are they?" I demanded.

Silence. A new voice reverberated in my skull as if reading the Buddha's thoughts: "There are those that wield the power for good, and those that will destroy the world, a life unfair to all."

I paused for a moment and fell silent. I believed that the Great One would never torture innocent people, but great power brings great evil. Deep inside, I was greatly attracted to the enormous reward, but I also had a feeling that this potion could bring endless destruction...

It had to be destroyed. I held the bottle up and smashed it on the ground. The purple liquid disintegrated almost immediately after it made contact with the ground, emitting a haze of smoke. I looked back at the Buddha, but the light in its eyes had already faded.

And that was the story of the immortality potion and the Mogao Grottoes.

The Lost Painting

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Zhang, Shiyin – 10

Long long ago, pilgrims and monks started to arrive and live in an oasis that was found in the desert on the Silk Road in China. The pilgrims and monks created art and literature in the oasis. The monks and pilgrims changed the oasis into a beautiful place. Before it was just plain, lots of weeds grew, they were so tall that when you try to go in, the weeds are up to your shoulders! After the monks and pilgrims came, they built hundreds and thousands of statues mainly of Buddha, that is also a reason that The Mogao Cave are also known as the Thousand Buddha Caves.

But as time passed, The Mogao Cave was forgotten. The travelers and people there started going to other places all around. Less and less people stayed at the oasis. Soon, everybody left. Until explorers rediscovered the cave in the 1900s.

This is the story of how the explorer Dave in The Mogao Caves discovered one of the Buddha paintings. Dave is one of the explorers that discovered The Mogao Cave. As he got in the cave with the other explorers, he found some pebbles and rocks and some reddish gray spheres that he can't recognize in front of a stone wall covered in layers and layers of dust.

Dave believed that in the stone walls there must be something. At first Dave thought it might be a vase or an old object until he looked down, and on the floor, he realized the reddish gray spheres were put into a certain order. The ones closer to the stone wall were bigger, the ones more further away were smaller. Dave followed the spheres and it was heading to a small hole that is just enough to go through at the other side of the room. So Dave decided instead of discovering the stone wall, he chose to follow the spheres.

Dave followed the spheres, he got through the hole, the moment he got through, it felt like another world. The ground was filled with grass, the trees were healthy, they were all leafy, flowers bloomed, fruits grew on plants, birds are chirping, the whole place is full of vitality.

As Dave walked forward, he found people living here. Then, as he got in, he found himself in front of Buddha. As Buddha saw Dave, she smiled softly, Buddha started speaking: "I knew the one of you explorers are careful enough to discover this place. I am Buddha. I am here to help you learn more about here." Buddha paused. "But you will have to do something first, and during that time, you will learn more. Before I explain what you need to do, you need to take this." Buddha handed Dave a piece of paper. "This is the map", Buddha continues, "all you need to do is find this painting", Buddha points to the top left corner of the map. "This painting is missing, and some of the villagers got clues. But I am too old to collect their clues, so that is what your going to do. The villagers will not just tell you the clues, they will tell you through something. Soon, you will know some of the most amazing secrets of here, The Mogao Caves."

Dave took the map and left without saying anything. As he look down to the map Buddha has handed him, a riverbank was glowing on the map. Just that moment, Dave knew it! He need to go to the riverbank right now. He headed straight over. There was a old fisherman sitting not far away. Dave walked up to the fisherman and asked politely: "Hi! I am Dave. Buddha has asked me to find her lost painting. Do you have any clues? This riverbank was glowing on the map she gave me."

"Oh yes, I do! You are a smart young man. If Buddha sent you here then I should tell you all I know. What I know is that the painting is at the north. Buddha lost it there and the painting is pocket-sized. To get the next clue, go to that side." The fisherman pointed to his right. "You will see a tree house, the women there would tell you more." Dave immediately rushed to the tree house and saw the women. Dave asked: "I am Dave. Buddha sent me here to find her lost painting, do you have clues?" "Of course I do! And here it is, the painting is on the field that has purple-leaf trees. The painting is behind the seventh tree counting from the river to the other side." Dave thanked her and ran there.

Dave got close, the first row of trees are blue, the second row.....they are purple! Dave then started counting from the riverside. Dave located the seventh tree and got there quickly.

There it is! Dave found it, and started admiring it. Suddenly, Dave realized why Buddha asked him to find it. It is the painting all explorers want to find! On the back it wrote: Dear explorer, this painting is yours now, go share it with the other explorers, but do not tell them where you found it, they will not understand, also this place has disappeared. Buddha.

Just that moment, Dave opened his eyes and he is still in the dusty Mogao Cave, but on his hand he still has the painting.

When he shared it with the other explorers the others were so surprised!

Falling Through The Times

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Hania – 10

The Mogao Grottoes, a tall, big and impressive cave. Thousands of caves all into one mountain, still hundreds of caves to be found. Murals, Buddhas, Manuscripts and more, opening a lost world of secrets and breathtaking views. It's a tunnel of the past and is already full of historical findings, but are there still secrets to find, and new treasures to discover?

"Bye!" Ruby shouted to her mom as she bounded onto the study bus and zoomed away.

Ruby, a 14 year old studious teenager, had joined a study tour from school to visit the Mogao Grottoes. She was a historical fan and had woken up extremely excited to pack her things. She was also very excited to be exploring the caves with her best friend, Rebecca.

"What do you think it will look like?" Ruby and Rebecca chatted animatedly and were so excited that they didn't notice the bus had stopped until gasps rose around them.

Ruby looked up and her jaw dropped. She was astonished at the grotto's beauty. How could such a majestic place be in the middle of the desert? The entrance was tall and large and had 5 and more layers. It was beautiful and impressive in its own unique way. Ruby was so entranced by the appearance of the Mogao Grottoes, it was when Rebecca tapped her on the shoulder that she broke out of her trance and scurried off the bus.

Ms Cassie, the tour guide, led the group to different caves. They went to cave 17, the cave of wonders, where they all crowded around the "Diamond Sutra", the oldest printed book in all the world. They also visited the giant reclining buddha, with its calm and peaceful expression and 14.4 metre long body. Another cave was cave 51, where they admired the beautiful Bodhisattva with her gentle face. But after visiting all these caves, Ruby and Rebecca finally gave up. They were actually dying to see cave 61, also known as Manjusri hall, where the largest and most gorgeous paintings were. So when Ms Cassie turned her back, they wandered off and started searching for cave 61.

"Where do you think it is?" Rebecca asked, scanning a map she had gotten from the entrance.

"I'm not sure... Here it is!" Ruby bounded into an enormous room with a ceiling that went far over their heads. Strangely, the room was empty except for them. Large paintings were displayed around the room and Rebecca and Ruby were too astonished to speak.

"This is amazing!" exclaimed Ruby, jumping up and down with excitement. Rebecca couldn't help but agree. Just as they were snapping pictures of the paintings, disaster struck. Rebecca's foot caught on a rock and fell backwards. She fell onto a painting that swung sideways, revealing a black tunnel! Caught by surprise, Rebecca fell back into the dark tunnel and the painting moved back into its original spot.

"Rebecca!" Ruby shouted, anxiously pushing back the painting.

"I'm alright." Rebecca smiled.

"What is this?" Curiously, Rebecca and Ruby walked into the tunnel, the painting sliding shut behind them. "Is this part of the exhibit?"

"I'm not sure..." Rebecca mumbled. She hated confined spaces like these.

The two friends walked deeper into the tunnel. Rocks were surrounding them and only small slivers of light shone in from the gaps of the rocks. While Rebecca was looking cautiously around, Ruby glimpsed a spark of light at the end.

"Look over there!" Ruby exclaimed, galloping over to the light. A rock was covering the gap and Ruby heaved it away. She could have never expected what she found next.

Ruby was in a secret room! The room was filled with ancient stuff, all from secret movable levers to make them go up and down to different needs. There were many chairs and tables as well as bookshelves and ancient scrolls. There was a hole on the wall that just emerged and dried plants were scattered around the room. Light from the hole

was reflecting on a broken piece of glass, shining it on the plants! A stream of water trickled in from another hole and the friends guessed, from the higher parts of the mountain. Curious and fascinated, Ruby examined the ancient things.

“Rebecca! Come see!” Ruby yelled. Rebecca came running and like Ruby, gaped in shock.

“Maybe this secret room was used for resting. The monks that once lived here must’ve used this place to rest after work!” suggested Rebecca.

“Yeah, you’re right! Maybe the glass shard was used to cook the plants here! Who knew monks from the past would be so eco-friendly!” Ruby exclaimed.

The two friends continued inspecting their historical findings for a bit while longer before Rebecca broke the silence.

“I really think we should get going now. Ms Cassie might be worried about us and I don’t feel really secure here.”

“You’re right,” Taking one last glimpse of the secret room, Ruby nodded and pushed the rock back in place.

Excited and amazed, Rebecca and Ruby ran back through the secret tunnel to the painting. They pushed open the painting silently and slipped out. They were now back in Manjusri hall.

“I think we accidentally found a secret room!” gasped Ruby, shaking with anticipation at the experience they went through.

“I can’t believe it!” Rebecca shook her head in disbelief. “Do you think we ought to tell everyone about it?”

Ruby thought about it but then shook her head.

“I think the monks would have preferred for this to remain a secret, don’t you think?” Shocked at Ruby’s thoughtfulness, Rebecca smiled and nodded.

The Mogao Grottoes, a tall, big and impressive cave. Thousands of caves all into one mountain, still hundreds of caves to be found. Murals, Buddhas, Manuscripts and more, opening a lost world of secrets and breathtaking views. Standing in front of the Mogao Grottoes, Ruby and Rebecca smiled at the secret room they found out, revealing another world of lost secrets once more.

Secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Ian – 10

Last summer, Roy went to visit the Mogao Grottoes which were the highlights of his summer holidays. “Wow” Roy said to himself with amazement. “Look at these paintings on the wall!” There were a lot of things here and lots to find out! I was blown away by how detailed the paintings were and how long it took to draw them. And Roy thought to himself “How did they get here?”

Long time ago, an evil spirit heard about the Mogao Grottoes where people lived happily and harmoniously in one of the most idyllic places in China. He was very jealous, he held up a fist and said “You are having fun now?!” The evil spirit went over there and with a wave of his hands, he put everyone inside the cave's walls and they were stuck there forever.

As the days went by, the Mogao Grottoes became one of the most popular places in China and the world. Tourists from all over the world go there to see the paintings on the walls. Explorers, writers and travelers are all interested in the history and the background of these paintings and their story.

People who visit the Mogao Grottoes admire and look at the paintings on the caves walls depicting the way of life of people from different sectors of the society. They noticed every face, every expression, body postures and costumes of the people that are unique showing great details of how they went about in their daily lives in the past.

While Roy was looking closely and intensely at a painting of a young boy on the wall, he thought he saw for a moment the young boy was smiling at him. But when he looked again after blinking his eyes, the smile was gone. So he didn't give it a second thought and went back to his parents to continue exploring the endless caves of paintings.

That night, in his bed back in the hotel, he couldn't help feeling that there was a connection between him and the young boy in the painting as if the boy was trying to reach out to him.

The very next day, he persuaded his parents to take him back to the grottes for another visit. Roy went back to the wall paintings of the boy gazing at it and trying to establish a kind of telepathic communication with him. Suddenly, Roy could hear the boy's voice in his ears. He was talking to him, the young boy explained to Roy how he and the people of Mongao Grottes were being locked inside the wall by an evil spirit all those years ago.

Their souls were being trapped and they could not move on to the other world. They would be eternally grateful if Roy could help find a certain monk in a monastery nearby to perform a ritual to set their souls free.

Roy related the boy's plea to his parents who felt very sorry for the trapped souls and agreed to help. They arrived at the monastery and invited the monk to the grottes to perform the ritual. The souls inside the wall were set free and came flying out, and on their way to eternal peace in another world. They were all very grateful to Roy and his parents. Roy was glad that he was able to help them. It was an unforgettable experience for Roy who unlocked the secrets of the Mogao Grottoes.

The Storybook Adventure

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chen, Emily – 9

The magical book glowed. Sze Mo opened it. Hand in hand with her sister, she leaped into the book, thus arriving in the vast desert. The magical adventure began.

It was a dark evening. Outside, a sand storm raged: howling wind hit the ground and blew dust. A horde of travelers trapped in a dark cave huddled around a small fire, except the two extraordinary lasses: Sze Mo and Sze Gao, who were identical twins. They stood near the crack where a glimpse of the sand storm outside could be seen, and was deep in thought. Earlier, the travelers blocked the aperture with a big rock.

Han Ying wore a muddy grayish-white shenyi, with gray silk shoes. His intensely icy blue eyes were all attractive, though his expression showed rage. Hu Ying wore a muddy beige shenyi, with brown silk shoes. His eyes were as icy blue as his brother, though his expression showed rage.

The twins wore identical clothes, both white hanfus with green decorations. They both had aqua green silk hung around their neck, shoulders, and arms. Because a big rock was blocking the harsh wind, the wind wasn't quite strong there, so their hanfus and silk only fluttered gently. There was a gleaming golden band with a small bronze square around her wrist as an exquisite ornament. They were perfectly stunning!

Suddenly, the sandstorm stopped. 'Listen, everyone!' shouted Han Ying. 'The sandstorm calmed down. Get ready to go!' But just as quickly as it stopped, the sandstorm started again, more fiercely than before. Hu Ying laughed. Sze Gao turned towards the traders and Sze Mo did too.

'The dust in the atmosphere settled down, and the sky became clear. If we hide under a handy shelter we create, we can evacuate to a safer shelter'. Sze Gao said. Everyone believed her, except Hu Ying.

Han Ying told the traders. 'We should try it. After all, it may be our only hope.' He then asked the twins: 'How do we start?' Sze Mo was startled, then replied. 'We need to build a handy shelter, then everyone can duck under it. Sze Gao shall guide you.'

'Oh, come on. That would never work' interrupted Hu Ying.

Sze Mo rolled her eyes at Hu Ying. 'Oh, wait here.' She approached Hu Ying, asked everyone to move away from him. She turned her back to him. Sze Gao knew it. 'Don't, Mo!' she cried. But it was too late.

Sze Mo turned around, waved her mighty hand, and fairy dust sprinkled on Hu Ying's shenyi. As the sparkles vanished, fairy rope entangled him.

'What did you do?' Han Ying asked. They fight often but if someone upsets his brother he feels upset too. He loves his brother deeply. A sly smile spread across her lips was Sze Mo's reply.

Han Ying felt his brother's pain, and looking at him tied up, he suffered too. He felt anxious about how they could transport him in that situation. Cleverly, he asked Sze Mo that he will guard his brother, but Sze Mo rejected it.

10 minutes later, everyone had ducked under the two shelters. A 'cart' was made for Hu Ying, who was very reculent to get in it. 'Follow me!' Sze Gao, who was hidden in a fairy umbrella, shouted. Sze Mo was also hidden under one, but she was with Hu Ying.

Sze Gao led everyone into a cave, saying the shelter was only three hundred meters away, but they had to cross sand dunes and other hard-to-walk places, so they had to eat and rest for a while.

While Han Ying argued that the traders are experienced 'sand hikers' and did not need rest, Sze Mo firmly stated that if they did not rest, they will not continue to the shelter.

Reluctantly, Han Ying told the traders to stay in a cave to rest, which gave the twins some time to build a town using magic.

'Can we go now?' asked Han Ying. Hu Ying agreed. 'Alright. We can go,' Sze Gao answered.

They trudged on, towards the town that never existed.
At last, the town came into view.

Sze Mo took Hu Ying to a cozy, middle-sized bedroom. She asked softly: 'If I unite you, will you stop annoying us?' A timid nod was enough for Sze Mo to trust him. Immediately, she waved her hand, and the rope vanished like a bubble being popped.

Sze Mo returned to the main hall, the twins led all the traders in their own designated rooms.

Days flew by so fast; and at first, everything went smoothly, but then the traders began to complain about the coldness, the lack of food/water, and more. Sze Mo and Sze Gao were helpless; they didn't know how to help them.

So they decided to use some magic.

But just as they were about to release their magic, a goddess appeared, and warned them: 'Go ahead. Use your magic. But you may be stuck in this era forever.' Then, she disappeared.

The twins glanced at each other. 'We will take this chance. After all, it may be our only chance to save these kind travelers, ' they agreed in unison.

The next day, the twins stood along the seashore under the blazing sun. Soon, they were saying goodbye to the present.

They recognised this place: the Mogao Grottoes. Then, a light appeared. They knew it was the way to return home. Their journey was over.

They gracefully flew into the sky, following the light. Some witnessed it. That's why there are pictures of fairies flying in some of the caves.

At night, the twins took one last look at the desert below, with all their friends tucked safely into bed in the Mogao Grottoes. 'Adieu...' Sze Gao whispered. And with a smile, Sze Mo leaped them out of the book, and closed it.

Way back in the story world, the sky was suffused with a rosy light. And Han Ying was amazed by it.

Han Ying realized that it was the memories that counted, and that the twins had a huge part of their lives.

The traders remembered the twins as their savours.

They had named the caves the Mogao Grottoes, to honor the twins.

The painted fairies and other important people on the walls of the caves represented the young twins which had saved their lives.

And this is the story of the Mogao Grottoes.

The Gift Of The Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chen, Miranda – 10

“Sweetie, how about a relaxing week off at the beach for your holiday?” Mum asked.

“Nah,” I replied, disgusted. I don’t like the beach as I hate swimming. I always struggle to swim for a long distance.

“Then...What about somewhere in the desert? Like... The Mogao Grottoes in western China?”

“Desert visit in the summer?! That’s even worse! But wait...” I suddenly recall the book I was reading just now named “Journey to the West” about Monk Tang’s exotic travelling experiences. Actually, it might be a good idea to visit western China.

We arrived in Dunhuang City, previously one of the most important crossroads on the Silk Road. It is on the edge of the Gobi Desert and contains over 2,000 years of history. It is famous for the Mogao Grottoes, a series of caves filled with Buddhist statues and murals.

We trekked all the way into the desert to see the Mogao Grottoes. After an hour burning in the sunlight, I felt bored and exhausted. My mum wanted me to enjoy the heritage but all the Budda statues and ancient murals looked exactly the same to me.

“I’ll stay here and wait for you,” I grumbled to my parents.

“Are you sure? The Mogao Grottoes are heritages,” Dad tried to make me continue.

“Yes.” I took out “Journey to the West” and sat on a bench in front of murals. Holidays are for relaxation so I prefer reading in the shelter.

It was as hot as a cooking pot. Everything looked distorted, flowing in the heated air. Soon, I fell asleep.

Then a boy tapped me awake, “Hey, would you like to join the scouts and guard the Mogao Grottoes for a few hours?”

Before I even had the chance to decide, the boy continued, “ There will be a wonderful gift afterwards.”

“What gift is it?”

“You’ll never regret it.” He spoke in a cryptic voice.

I was still hesitating but the boy took my silence as acceptance. He told me that my task is to make sure the mural behind me was intact till he came back. He would bring me the gift upon his return. Then he walked away, disappearing mysteriously in the flowing air.

“This is gonna be easy!” I thought. I looked back, and the mural behind me was actually about Monk Tang’s journey to the west. He was to cross the desert under the flaming mountains.

Suddenly, a bright golden light flashed, and I couldn’t help closing my eyes. Then the light was gone. So was the mural behind me!

Unbelievable! I started to panic, feeling butterflies in my stomach. I rushed to the CCTV frantically and checked. For god’s sake, I saw the mural appear on the other end of the Mogao Grottoes!

I sped all the way towards the other end. After running and searching frantically for an hour, I found the missing mural rock lying in a dark cave. The rock was around half a meter long and wide. I held it firmly in my arms and tried to lift it up.

Jesus! It was as heavy as an ox! No matter how hard I try, it didn't move an inch!

Gasping badly for breath, I groaned, "Come on! Holidays are supposed to be relaxing! Forget about this!"

Just as I was about to give up, something in the mural rock became alive.

Was it an illusion? I rubbed my eyes and looked closely. No, something wasn't right! Something... or someone... was staring at me! I recognized the face from the paintings. It was Monk Tang! I was almost shocked to death! Monk Tang said to me in a deep voice, "You can only make it if you persist." Then the paintings on the murals became alive too! It showed Monk Tang and his apprentices crossing the desert. They were running out of food and water, nearly dying but extremely determined.

"So... is Monk Tang telling me that if I persist, I can achieve anything?" Again I held the stone firmly, heaved it up with all of my strength. It worked! Inch by inch and as slow as a snail, I was able to move forward.

"How am I supposed to reach the original place with this snail speed?!" I mumbled exhaustedly.

The deep voice came alive again and again. "YOU CAN ONLY MAKE IT IF YOU PERSIST! ..."

I dared not to put the rock down. I was afraid that if I stopped, Monk Tang would immediately come out of the painting and punish me. The only way out is to move the rock back as fast as I can. I didn't want Monk Tang to come alive again. It would creep me out.

The rock became heavier and heavier. My arms and legs were numb, my head was dizzy, my eyes were dim and my mouth was dry. My whole body was dripping with sweat. Yet, I continued...

I felt someone wipe my sweat. It was Mum. There was no rock in my arms at all! It was a dream! I could have been happy but I was rather disappointed as I wished to complete the task and receive the gift.

The day when I was back home, I had to continue my swimming lessons.

"Can I quit swimming?" I groaned.

"Come on, sweetie, you know you are gifted." Mum said.

Suddenly, I saw the flowing water was making up Monk Tang's face. The waves sounded like, "You can make it only if you persist!"

It didn't creep me out as I knew Monk Tang was right. I was determined to focus and keep paddling. Unbelievably, I could swim a whole lap just like others!

"Woohoo! Good job! I told you! You're gifted." Mum cheered.

Oh, I'm gifted! It is the gift the boy promised! For the first time in my life, I believed that I could do anything only if I persist.

Henry, The Creator of The Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chui, Hing Man – 11

More than a millennia ago, there was a story about a nine-colored lion. It was about a nine-colored lion by the dusty dunes, in the Mogao Grottoes. Its fur has nine different colors, hence the nine-colored lion. This lion seems magical, but it would eat human flesh whenever it saw some. Its nose was once shot by a hunter, but its eyesight could see far distances.

One stormy day, a man accidentally fell into a deep river, as deep as the ocean, maybe deeper. The man was thrashing and kicking, and he was about to drown. The lion jumped into the river with the man and carried him back to the dry land. The lion thought: “I haven’t eaten for days!” When the man pleaded, the lion just laughed and spat in the man’s face. The man was now very scared and also angry. “I’m not letting you run away!” the lion roared. Then the lion spat in the man’s face again.

The man roared too. The lion had insulted him. He punched the lion right in the guts. POW! Then there was a loud BANG and the man fell onto the floor, paralyzed. The lion roared: “Fight, you nauseating filthy beast!” The lion pulled his magical fur. It dropped immediately. He then turned it into a wand. The man gasped. He had a wand! “NO! What the—” But the lion didn’t let him finish the rude word. “Wand, kill the man!” the lion yelled, the wand pointing at the man’s chest. A serpent rose from the wand and was about to bite the man. FLING! The man caught the serpent and threw it into the river. HUH?! The lion thought. The man tried to dodge the lion’s deadly blasts and looked over. Wait, what was it? What was that magnificent view? Yes, that’s right—it is the Mogao Grottoes! “What are you looking at, you filthy veined muck?” the lion roared again. “Wait, is that the Mogao Grottoes?!” the lion exclaimed in disbelief. “What Gro—what?” the man asked. “AGH!” the lion yelled. His precious fur had vanished. Powerless, the lion darted away. “YOU WILL PAY!” the lion hollered in the distance.

Is that some Grottoe thingy? Where did it come from? The man bombarded himself with many questions. I ought to investigate, the man said to himself.

The man got up and left the mysterious land. If this was the exit, where was the entrance? He was excited to find out the secret of the Mogao Grottoes. But day after day, he still had no sign of the name, not even people had heard of it. “What’s the use?” he sighed to himself. The man began to lose hope. What was the purpose if you couldn’t find what you wanted for weeks? He was just about to turn back again when suddenly, he saw a vast cave.

It was empty. “This could not possibly be the Mogao Grottoes?!” And yes, reader, the smart man figured out the name. He entered the dark, vast cave, still slumping, but having a teeny-tiny bit of hope. He progressed further, but still no sign of anything. He was just about to go, dejected when suddenly, he was spun and he spun until there was nothing in his sight.

“AND WHO’S THIS?” a ghost’s voice boomed into the place. “I’m nobody.” said the man. “IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SECRET OF THE MOGAO GROTTOS, YOU MUST IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE.” the voice boomed. “How do you know what I wanted to look for?” The ghost ignored him. “IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE, now!” “I’m-----fine. I’m..uh...Henry.” “Henry WHO?” “Just Henry.” The man lied. “VERY WELL. OPEN THIS CHEST WITHOUT A KEY. IF YOU SUCCEED, I SHALL TELL YOU THE SECRET OF THE MOGAO GROTTOS.” Suddenly, a wooden chest was slammed in front of the man. The man tugged and tugged. This was insane. After real effort, the man unlocked it, panting. Inside, there was a voice, soft but audible:

“The Mogao Grottoes, in Dunhuang, Gansu, is the most important Buddhist attraction in China, and it is renowned for its famous grottoes or small caves. It has lots of grottoes, but when you visit it there are no cameras allowed. But there are seven hundred grottoes you can go to. Each carries a unique story. But the other grottoes are not for tourists. On the train to Dunhuang, you will pass the Gansu wind farm, which is-----you guessed it! The largest in the world. The sand dunes are also a key part of Gansu. It is very popular, but there are only a few people on the top, maybe none. However, there are loads of people on the bottom. Crescent Moon Lake is the most important tourist attraction. It is the national spring. The Crescent Lake is also known as the Crescent Spring, Crescent Moon Spring, or Yueya Spring. It is considered a natural wonder of the Gobi Desert. Just as its name

implies, the lake appears like a crescent moon and with its crystal clear water, resembling a turquoise or pearl inlaid in the vast desert.”

“Not long ago, a monk thought there was something special about a cave he found in the Silk Road in China. He thought: “This cave looks interesting. I want to dig a grotto in this cave.” He was very young, but after he dug the grotto, he had entered the final five years of his life.”

“More and more people came, and more and more stories were told. It was rediscovered in the 19th century, after it was deserted in the 13th century.”

Do you wonder what happened to Henry? Henry is now known as one of the most important creators of the Mogao Grottoes.

Golden Hour

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Hung, Tsz Ching Sabrina – 11

It's the golden hour, the sun had the color of egg yolk, a beautiful sight yet I'm here alone...sitting by myself. the time has hit 7 and I ran back home trying to down all the negativity from my mind and the tears threatening to come pouring down from my eyes,

“Wen qing! Your back!” I heard mom's faint voice from afar.

“Yes, Mom I'm home...” I said with a sigh while I looked at the place I **called** home, I went inside hoping that everything that happened to me was just a nightmare nope there it was upon me... The newest grave was freshly dug down... Xian Zi... I miss her light golden fur with her hot breath that might have smelt funny but I would love to smell again...sometimes when I close my eyes I can still see her falling down from that very edge we use to watch the sunset together

“A-qing? A-QING” Mother started screaming then she got quiet for a while

“I know it's hard I get it but you're 17 and you have to let go of Xian Z-” I cut her off immediately,

“No MOM you don't get Xian Zi was my everything and now without her, I don't think ANYTHING will be the same not the place I called home or Whatever! I JUST WISH I WAS IN ANOTHER UNIVERSE-” in a blink everything became dark, just my mom's faint shoutings, then I passed out.

I feel the sun glazing onto me while I slowly open my eyes, my eyelids almost giving up on me in the middle, my toes lightly stepping on the soft yet burning sand. How did I get here? I looked around and I saw a temple? I see something ...a boy?

“HEY” I shouted with all my might, my throat stinging just as it could get worse I fell

“Miss? MISS?” I hear just as I fell on my knees, he handed me a water bottle

“U-um thanks? my name is Wen qing w-what ab-about you?” I mangle to stammer out

“My name is Lan Yuan, you can call me a-yuan” he replies

“A-yuan? I know this sounds weird but I don't think I belong here. What year is it?”

“It's the year 809?”

“Well I'm from 2019 and I need to get back...I made this stupid wish and-” I was cut off when he suddenly put a finger on my lip

“Ok shh I get it, I've also been wanting to try to get to a cave in the Mogao Grottoes to make a wish, it's a legend that there is a god in there that grants everyone one wish...” A-yuan said while he was beaming bright I couldn't just say no, could I?

“Ok well, let's get going!” I faked a smile trying to keep this positive atmosphere, I saw him taking some things out and handing them to me, A robe?

“Put it on, it'll fit you,” A-yuan said with a slight smile with a hint of sadness?

With curiosity hitting me I asked him,

“Why are you so sad? This robe looks spectacular!” I beamed, trying to lighten the mood a bit.

“It used to be my mom’s...she passed away after I turned 18, I carry it around as good luck.” I saw him staring at the robe with a bittersweet smile and tears forming

“Well let’s go find the god we don’t have much time left,” I said quickly while he stared at me

“What?” I asked

“Y—you need to change” I heard him stutter out “Right”

~After changing~

“A—Yuan let’s go!” I said grabbing his hand while we walked closer to the temple I found something it was... IT WAS A BUTTON?!

“A—Yuan press this button it might be an opening to the—” before I finished my sentence he pressed the button and we plunged down,

“AHHHHHHHHHHH” we both screamed while I subconsciously hugged something then we plopped onto the ground.

“A—A—Qing can you let go?” I looked up at him...Oh no—

“ah S—sorry,” I stammered out while I blushed furiously no—no! I can’t be falling for a stranger!

“A—qing I think we need to rest here let me start a fire and we can rest for a while,” he said staring into my eyes with his sparkling hazel eyes, ah~ how dreamy— A—QING snap out of it

“A—Yuan, I think we can make the wish tomorrow let’s just rest a bit.” After a while, I passed out while I felt A—yuan’s hand wrap around me.

~The next morning~

I woke up, naturally, I looked up but when I did I saw a statue of a goddess with a woman standing next to it,

“Um, miss, may I ask who you are?” I bowed to her with respect

“I am Chen qing... The goddess of wish and I felt a negative feeling so I came.” The goddess said, just then I saw A—yuan awake and I explained everything to him, he told me to make a wish

“Dear Goddess I wish to go back to the universe I came from which is Earth 2019 AD”

“And you boy?” she raised an eyebrow.

“Well I would like to follow A—qing ” I heard A—yuan say, I cocked my head to the side

“Well your wish is granted,” then yet again everything turned black.

“A—YUAN NO YOU WILL REGRET IT!” I screamed,

“Don’t worry A—qing I won’t, okay ?” he gave me a reassuring smile, then we both passed out...

I woke up back on a familiar mountain and I saw A—yuan waking up but the first thing he said is

“Be careful of what you wish because there might be a consequence as you see what happened, you got transferred to another universe” he said while we both chuckled.

“I could say the same for you, you idiot.” We laughed harder and watched the sunset together while he had his arm around me and gave me a peck on the cheek.

A Magical Journey Through The Mogao Caves

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Jin, Louie – 9

“The rain’s coming, we have to go.” said the woman as she walked towards the boy. She glanced at the cloudy sky.

“But ma, the girl won’t wake up! Plus if this girl is dangerous, the rain isn’t the worst.” said the young boy sitting on the sand.

“Ughhh... My head...” I moaned, I started to wake up “wh—what?! What...” I opened my eyes with a startle.

Straightaway, the boy pointed his spear at me with a shaking hand. I took a step back.

“Oh god...” I gasped in amaze as I looked around. The skies were painted with nothing but a dense blanket of low, grey clouds. But what most amazed me was what the people were wearing. The clothing was like the ones I saw in my Chinese history book. The men even had braided hair!

“H—hi? Where am I? Who are you?” I muttered, sitting up. “Who am I at this point?” I said faintly.

“Oh, phew, you’re not one of them...” The boy sighed in relief “Since you aren’t, we have to go, rain’s coming. Wanna tag along?” the boy asked while putting down the spear.

“Uhh, I’m afraid not. Where are my parents? I need to go ho—” I started my sentence, but stopped short. “God, the last thing I remember is me, my parents and my lizard travelling in Mogao Grottoes. Then, I... I ended up here, somehow...” I thought anxiously with my hands on my head. I tried hard to remember everything, but couldn’t. I must’ve hit my head hard somehow.

“I guess I’ll have to go with you...” I said with hesitation.

“Great! We’ll go to the mogao caves for shelter.” said the boy, who stood up with a genuine smile. “Well, let’s go!”

Then, we set off for the Mogao caves.

After we went into the Mogao caves, I realised I was the only one wearing T-shirts and jeans. The others were all wearing ancient Chinese clothes. Was this some kind of cosplay?

“No way” I thought with doubt I was wrong.

“Hey, what are you thinking of?” asked the boy.

“Uhh, nothing, but can you tell me what dynasty is it?” I asked awkwardly.

“It’s the Qing dynasty, everybody knows that...” He said slowly, backing away for a bit too.

“Hehe, um, I’m a bit hungry, do you have food?” I asked, changing the subject.

“Uh, maybe, I’ll check.” he responded. He stood up and went to a sack. After a while, he came back. “We’re out of food...” he grumbled quietly as he sat down. “I’ll ask the grown-ups to go out for food.” He went to a bunch of adults gathering around. He whispered something into his mother’s ear. Then, the mother told all the adults, and they went out.

“Can you show me around? I really wanna find my family. ” I asked quietly, standing up.

“Yea sure let’s go!” He said.

So we followed the path on the right, deeper into the mogao caves...

“Well, until now, I didn’t even tell you my name! My name’s Noah!” said the boy.

“Tell me more about yourself Noah. Why did you leave your city?” I asked.

“My village was invaded by robbers, we were forced to leave. Our people lived here for years. I also have a special book with me that my father gave me before he died.” Noah said sadly.

“Oh sorry to hear that.” I said.

Suddenly, my foot bumped into something sharp. I looked down, it was my pet lizard!

“Oh god, finally, someone from my family at last!” I blabbered, I couldn’t help it. I picked up Lemon and put her on my shirt. I just couldn’t take my eyes off her. Noah looked around and realised something crazy.

“Umm, sorry to interrupt, we’re actually lost.” Noah said, avoiding my eyes.

My smile ended with a frown. “Oh, well we can only go on.” So we kept walking forwards, hoping it would lead to an exit. But we were wrong. We hit a dead end with a cave painting in front of us.

“Seriously?!” I was a bit panicked.

“Calm down, we can make it out. I’ve been here before.” Noah said calmly. “What a beautiful painting! Pity the other half was stolen.”

“Honestly, I’m from like 200 years after...” I said sitting down “Cannot believe I’m time travelling! Cause in my time, all of the Mogao caves were destroyed.”

“Your time? What do you mean? Are you from the future?!” Noah said with wide eyes.

“I think so.” I said looking around. Lemon climbed on the cave painting. The cave painting suddenly turned like a door. There was a gem inside the room behind the painting.

“That is a black opal! That’s so rare!” I exclaimed. I took a step forward and examined the stone. There was a claw carved on it. I took Lemon and put her claw on it. Suddenly, there was a flash of white and we were back at the cave entrance. But this time, when we looked at the path we took, it was GONE!

We looked at each other’s confused faces. “You know I’m from the future right? I visited this part of the Mogao caves. It’s next to Mingsha mountain. When I came here for vacation, I never saw the parts we just explored. By putting Lemon’s claw on the black opal, I think it just triggered the magical power in the opal!” I said shaking him

“Oh my god! I remember in my dad’s book, there was a secret door or something, and to unlock it you need a dragon’s footprint!” Noah said excitedly.

“That’s great!!!!” I said, jumping up and down.

“But in the book, it said the magical power in the gem will twist time and save Mogao Grottoes” Noah said with a frown “I can’t remember the rest...”

Suddenly, my body started fading along with Lemon.

“You’re fading! I guess the magical power makes you time travel again. So we have to say goodbye...” Noah said disappointedly.

“It’s so nice knowing you and take care!” I said before fully fading away.

I sat up. I was reading a book outside the cave. But in the modern times. Was that just a dream? I felt something hard in my pocket. I reached in and took the thing out. It was the black opal. So perhaps the legend was true, the Mingsha mountain was magical. I felt there was something pulling me towards the caves. So I went into the cave and found a book inside. On the book cover, it said: “MOGAO LEGENDS – Owned by Noah liu With thanks to a girl who saved the Mogao Grottoes”.

I knew it was Noah’s book and I knew it was about the secret door and time travelling. I could imagine him standing right there when I faded, smiling for a bit. I will treasure this book as a souvenir of this unbelievable experience.

The Odd One Out

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lau, Chelsea – 10

Cerise Lancaster was not a normal girl or, she didn't act like one, when other girls tried out for: Cheerleading, ballet, and gymnastics, Cerise would walk towards the soccer field—where she tried out for the soccer team. Cerise wanted to make a worldwide discovery when she grew up, she wanted to be known worldwide for her discovery.

As Cerise ran towards the soccer field, two girls walked up to her, Cerise rolled her eyes.

Here we go again. Cerise thought *it's the same every single day.*

“Hey, Lancaster! Why not be a girl for once, and try out for the cheerleading team?” Pamela Houdini shouted.

“Yeah, why do you always walk towards the soccer field instead of the ballet studio? I mean, are you actually a girl?” Violet Bizarre asked, rolling her eyes. Cerise didn't mind, she turned her head away from the two girls, and stared at the fake green grass on the field. she was used to it, it happened every single day, she didn't mind.

A few years later, Cerise graduated from High School and entered College. There, Cerise found her passion, Mysteries and Legends. When her mother found out, she wasn't pleased at all.

“Cerise dear, why aren't you like other girls? You should be taking cooking classes or maybe even a dance class, not some silly old Mystery or Legends class!” Her mother would say.

“But mom, Mysteries and Legends are my passion!” Cerise would answer.

One day, her professor announced that they would be going to the mysterious Mogao caves to do some research. Professor Liane said, in a low voice “The Mogao Caves were created long ago when a Monk decided there was something special about a cave he found at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China. Over the years, Pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, they dug more and more caves, and they spent their time creating sacred art and literature.” Cerise was astonished by the tale and decided to do some extra research on the Mogao Caves to be prepared for the trip. On the discovery day of the trip, Cerise ran into a cave and was immediately astonished by the amazing art and literature surrounding her from head to foot.

“I never knew humans could create such wonderful artwork...” Cerise breathed, sighing in amazement.

“I know right? I never thought it would be done this well!” Jo Miller. While everyone was busy admiring the wonderful work of the pilgrims, out of the corner of Cerise's eye, she spied a rectangular object half buried in the dirt.

“Hey, guys! I found something...” Cerise called, as she struggled to pull it free.

“Cerise! It looks like a piece of writing... Perhaps a book?” Professor Liane exclaimed, running down and grabbed the dusty item from the damp, wet floor.

“Umm.. Professor? I think we should leave it here. We should preserve and respect these ancient caves and their relics.” Cerise declared.

“It is your decision Ms. Lancaster, and I respect it.” Professor Liane said, nodding curtly. The others nodded in agreement.

Suddenly, Jo Miller piped up, “I found something too! It's right over here!” The others followed her to what seemed like a bedroom in a cave and saw a beautiful sculpture.

“ I don’t understand, what does it even look like?” Jack Louis questioned. As Eliam Brown took pictures of the cold cave.

“ I think we should leave now, let’s send these photographs to the newspaper office, I’m sure our discoveries will be sent out worldwide soon!” Professor Liane commanded, smiling.

Months later, the discoveries of this group were spread all across the world. Cerise couldn't be happier.

One day, as Cerise was skipping down the neighbourhood, basking in the joy of her newfound discovery, she happened to run into a few old frenemies.

“ Hey! Cerise, is that you?” Violet Bizzare asked as she squinted.

“ Violet? Uh yeah, that's me! What are *you* doing here?” Cerise questioned.

“Just came here to buy some groceries, see you around, if you do come around” Violet said, edging closer and closer laughing menacingly.

This time, however, Cerise stared defiantly at her old nemesis. '*You're never ever discouraging me again*', she thought as her mind began to wander down her memory lane. Cerise remembered the upsetting times Violet Bizzare and Pamela Houdini had teased her and laughed at her for trying ‘non–girly things’.

Staring at Violet dead in the eyes , Cerise said "I've grown tired of your teasing and bullying. I do not need to endure your taunts and threats any further, because I have found my passion and that's where I'm heading for the rest of my life, and not listening to your annoying voice talk." And with that, Cerise strolled right past her wide–eyed tormentor without a second thought.

Years later, Cerise’s discovery was made famous, she was known at every corner of the world and she even inspired younger generations to follow their heart and pursue their passion.

After the news came around, many people flocked to the Mogao Caves, discovering brand–new treasures every single day. The soon filled up the cover page of countless news articles, making the Magao caves one of the most mysterious and creative places to visit in the entire world.

One of them even stated, “ I was inspired by Cerise Lancaster's adventurous spirit. Entering the caves was like travelling through a time machine! A truly breathtaking experience!”

Now working as an Archeological Professor, Cerise has never felt more at home. As she continues to inspire younger generations with her passion for the historical wonders of the world.

And that, children, is a story of a young girl named Cerise Lancaster, who decided she would strive to follow her dreams and ignore the whispers that brought discouragement. Instead, she did what she desired and loved: Uncovering a worldwide discovery going towards where her heart desired.

"Find your heart and you'll find your home."

Once upon a time...

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Leung, Hin Ching – 10

“Once upon a time, there lived a monk far away in the middle of nowhere, who no one had seen for the last 10 thousand years. He had a book that could solve any problems. From broke to rich, from ugly to beautiful. Legends say that the only way to find the secret book in Mogao Grottoes...”

“Just one step closer...” I placed one aching foot on the desert floor and pulled myself up. I couldn’t face the sun’s harsh glare. Beads of sweat rolled down my eyelashes, blurring the path ahead. I rubbed my eyes, and it shimmered with delight. I saw it. Mogao Grottoes. A cave with extraordinary features, filled with breathtaking tales, a birthplace of magic. I stood up, tall and proud. I had arrived.

Footsteps echoed through the Mogao Caves. Patterns of goddesses, birds, and ancient people filled the cave with many ancient colors I’ve never seen before but that wasn’t all. Thousands of statues flooded through the cave. I gently touched the golden statue I liked the best and smiled. But something that really caught the corner of my eye was this big brown book with ripped pages and written in Chinese, it looked *spellbinding*. I wanted to know what the book meant so much, I was so desperate, I flipped through the pages touching the letters and closed my eyes... I sighed. Of course it didn’t work. But I was wrong.

The book started to glow until it was impossible to see. *What had I done!* I thought in a panic. Suddenly, I felt like I was spinning. I tried to open my eyes again. Nothingness. I was spinning faster, and I was getting dizzy. I was afraid.

A few seconds later, I fell back onto the ground. I opened my eyes, expecting to see the glowing monk, thinking it was just my imagination. But I wasn’t looking at the sculpture anymore.

“B... But...” I stuttered, not knowing what to say.

I gasped when the monk held out a big treasure chest filled with gold. His seat was a pattern of goddesses. Behind him was a gigantic peacock’s feather, twice the size of a normal person. Beside him were six servants on each side.

“Greetings, traveller,” he said in an old voice. “This treasure chest is from the cave I found,” he said. “If you find the way to my cave again, you get all the silk and gold in it.” My eyes grew wide.

“However,” the monk continued, “This will not be as easy as you think.”

I smiled confidently. This was going to be an easy win.

“Very well,” said the monk, as if he was reading my mind. “May I send you good luck on your journey?”

Suddenly, I felt like I was spinning again. But this time, I felt strong. I was going to be rich.

I ended up in the same desert. I started looking for it. It was night by the time I found the oasis. I spotted a hole, and it was glowing as bright as the monk sculpture. It must be it!

Suddenly, a dragon zoomed past me. I sighed. I’m not sure if I could beat a water dragon.

“If you can defeat me, then everything within the cave is yours,” he said.

“I bet I’m stronger than you!” I said, “Look, I can squeeze a stone until it drips!”

“You are strong,” grunted the dragon. He didn’t know I was squeezing a lump of cheese.

“If you win this round, you win the cave,” he said.

He got two balls. “I can throw my ball over the mountain,” He said, and he to prove his point, he threw it across the mountain

I looked nervously at my heavy ball... an idea popped into my head! “I can throw mine over the sea,” I lied. I threw in quickly and pointed up at the moon. Ha! The dragon thought the moon was my ball.

“Impossible, How did you do that?” the foolish dragon roared, “I don’t care anyway, take the cave!”

I couldn’t believe my ears. I fooled the dragons easily! My heart was beating so fast. This was too good to be true! I

took all the treasure from the cave. I was too happy to feel the weight on my shoulders.

“Very well, look what we have here,” the monk said as I went deeper inside the cave. “You’ve got your treasure.”

I proudly got presented with bags of treasure. The bags were surely heavy, but somehow, I couldn’t feel the weight on my shoulders.

When I got back on land, I heard a terrible screech “Help!”

I looked around, confused. Suddenly, I saw a monkey drowning. It was a deep oasis. I wandered around in panic. I found a rope and a very long branch and tied them together.

“Hold on to this!” I cried to the monkey. He quickly grabbed the branch and pulled. *Please don’t let it break!* I prayed. Luckily, the branch was steady. Fortunately, the monkey was saved.

“Thank you!” said the monkey cheerfully, “I owe you one!”

“No problem,” I replied.

“You’re rich,” he said.

“I didn’t think you’d notice that.” I looked at the bag of gold behind my shoulder.

“I’m not talking about that,” he said, looking at the bag of gold. “Anyway, I gotta go. Thanks again!” His voice echoed in the distance. There are not someth

I frowned. I was rich, but he wasn’t talking about the treasure I had!

As I was about to leave, I realized what the monkey was talking about. I had been rich in my *heart*.

I went back to the oasis and put the treasure down. I looked in front of me and I saw the monk, smiling. “You’re still rich,” his voice echoed.

Suddenly, I was spinning and landed back where I started from. I didn’t have gold with me, but I didn’t regret it.

Long, Long Ago in the Cave

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Leung, Hin Lung – 10

I walked towards the cave standing before me. It was getting bigger and bigger. I took a deep breath as I reached the start of the tunnel. It was great, dark, narrow, and ancient. Who would have gone in there? Who would want to travel a million kilometres to reach this desert? I sat and watched as the first drop of rain kissed my cheeks.

“There! Here is the tunnel; I’ll be the first person there!” And I took a deep breath. Even though I was feeling butterflies in my stomach, I wanted to continue to explore because I was here as an explorer. I took out my notebook, entered the cave and started my journey.

It was not dark all the way along. After a bit of walking, a shaft of brilliant sunlight shone through the top of the cave. But this was too bright for my liking. As I walked in, I found the interior was very particular. Books were left sitting, yelling, shouting for people to read them, though people ignored them. It also contained loads of photographs. A monk in the temple. A picture of the whole cave. All black and white. All centuries old. A tall, narrow diamond shape formed the cave. It was almost impossible to pass through the cave.

I closed my eyes for a second, and I felt all the darkness creeping me out again. When I reopened my eyes, I saw a bunch of patterns on a wall. Looking at the wall, I wondered, what could it mean? What could I possibly do if I was here travelling, doing stuff, finding? But I turned around and realized it was a trap.

The patterns moved.

But then I saw those patterns forming words; it turned out to be a riddle.

A voice echoed in my ears. “Answer the riddle unless you want to stay. If you get the correct answer, you will no longer be led astray.”

The patterns on the wall formed the riddle:

I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have nobody, but I come alive with the wind. What am I?

“The answer is an echo!”

“Correct. You may proceed.” All of the excitement washed over me. I felt a huge sense of achievement, thinking about getting famous and earning a lot of money, by being the FIRST person to discover this cave. I thought of myself going on television, everyone looking at me while the interviewer asked me questions about the cave. I decided to explore further and continued my journey into the cave.

I found Chinese books lying around the edges of the floor. I walked closer. What are they? I took up one book and flipped the pages. It was very long, like the books I read in English. Even though I didn’t know what it was about, I knew it was a history book, and despite not understanding it, it still seemed interesting. Suddenly, a whirling spiral appeared in front of me, and the moment I looked up, the same voice returned. It let me know what happened in the cave and who last walked into the cave. I stepped on the spiral and I was spinning off the ground and when I dropped down, I ended up in a different place.

It was the edge of the oasis, where I first started, but a big monk was sitting beside the oasis, and I observed what was happening. After some time, I understood that this was the past, like what the voice said in the cave.

“There we go! Finally, water, water, water.”

The monk's grumbling voice echoed into the loneliness of the night in the dark desert. This was the oasis on the Silk Road through China. The monk looked into the cave and gasped. He said in his deep voice, "Wow."

The monk goes into the cave, and wonders aloud, "What is this?"

I realized this is the place just outside the cave! I wanted to smash my notebook down and cross my arms because I wasn't the first one to discover this. The excitement washed off me and I felt a sense of anger rise in my body. I wasn't the first one here... no more becoming famous. No more going on television. No more earning money. Ugh! It was so unfair!

I followed the monk in, trailing behind him into the darkness of the cave where I had just gone. I wanted to ask the voice who had brought me in how I had entered this memory, and what this was for? All the surroundings were the same. Both of us heard the same sound, but the riddle was different. He asked the voice about getting his things back, travelling back in time, wanting his temple back because he got angry and broke it himself. But the voice said NOTHING could be done, and that he couldn't change what had already happened.

As the voice said this, I understood that I should think about the present and the future more, because we cannot change what we have done.

Like the same feeling as the start, I zoomed back into the cave and I was back to reality. The voice said, "So you see, that vision was not to tell you what had happened, but it was telling you that you can do nothing about the past."

I gasped; this was a life lesson all along. I realized that I should change myself.

The next day. I went to the same place again with my friends. They were very excited and told their friends, and their friends told their friends until the Mogao Grottoes became a famous tourist attraction. But nobody knew that it all started from the monk, who first discovered this cave, and it has been untouched for more than a millennium.

The Hidden Buddha

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Li, Felicia – 9

In the midst of the Gobi Desert, there was a man called Haoyue who was exploring the Dunhuang Mogao Caves for his presentation in college. He explored the caves one by one. But after a long time, he wanted to give up because he couldn't find any interesting cave paintings. When he finally arrived at what felt like the hundredth cave, he wondered if he should have done this topic for his presentation at all!

"I'll just have to tell Mr. Johnson I can't find anything interesting here..." Haoyue said to himself as he walked into the cave.

He couldn't focus much either because so far, he couldn't even get any information out of all those cave paintings! Inside the cave, he still saw many sculptures and random tri-colored paintings. Just as Haoyue was about to leave, he saw a small lizard stuck under a rock. He felt bad for the lizard as it looked like it was trapped under that rock and couldn't move. Therefore, he tried to lift the rock up, but it was unexpectedly heavy.

He kicked the rock, but that only made his foot hurt. Then, out of the corner of his eyes, he saw a spear leaning against the wall. Inspired by the knowledge he had learnt in physics class, he instantly ran over to the spear and grabbed it. He knew that he had to stick the spear head under the rock and take another stone as support and leverage in order for his plan to work. He pressed and pushed on the spear to move the rock inch by inch, finally he freed the lizard!

Suddenly, a ray of light blinded Haoyue, and a Buddha appeared in front of him. Haoyue had to pinch himself several times to make sure he wasn't dreaming. After a few seconds, the Buddha broke the silence.

"Hello young man," said the Buddha, "thank you for freeing me after all these years of being trapped under this rock as a lizard! All that was caused by the evil sorcerer from old times..."

"Wow! So you're saying that an evil sorcerer turned you into a lizard, then trapped you under a rock?" Haoyue asked. He was very curious.

"Yes, that's right, but the rock was cursed to be heavy, so good job on using the spear to help! I have been stuck here for two hundred years already, and I'd probably still be stuck if it weren't for you!" The Buddha told Haoyue, sounding very relieved that someone came to free him at last.

"Two hundred years! That's a long time, my grandpa's grandpa wasn't even born back then!" Haoyue exclaimed, drinking in every single word the Buddha was saying.

"Yes, but thank you for freeing me. I bless you with great success in your studies and I hope you keep on being a kind man!"

"Thank you, by the way, do you mind if you share some stories with me about the Mogao Caves? My task is to collect information about Buddhas and the Mogao cave paintings!"

"Of course! I'd be glad to!" The Buddha replied, chuckling.

As the Buddha told the stories about the Mogao Cave paintings, Haoyue took very detailed notes; he was fascinated by the stories he heard from the Buddha. There were some about animal hunting, and some about old mighty emperors. All dating back to more than a century ago. They chatted for a long time, and after a few hours, the Buddha said, "It was great talking to you, young man. But I'm afraid it is getting late, and you should get back before it gets dark. Good luck on your presentation and farewell."

"Thank you! Oh and one last thing, do you mind if I take a photo of us together?" asked Haoyue.

“What’s a photo?” The Buddha asked.

“Umm... well maybe you can think about it as modern day magic! We use it to store people's memories! Just like the paintings here that record the history. And I would like to keep my memory with you and remember it forever.” Haoyue explained.

“Sure! Let’s do the photo thing then!”

After taking the photo, the Buddha waved his hand, and another ray of light shone warmly around Haoyue and in an instant, he was back in his hotel room. To make sure it wasn’t a dream, he flipped open his notepad. And there it was, the notes he had taken back in the cave along with the photo of the Buddha and himself!

“I’m glad that it wasn’t just a dream. I was looking for the history of the Buddhas, but I actually met the Buddha himself!” Haoyue thought happily to himself. It was certainly a very interesting experience and he was very grateful for the Buddha’s help.

One week later, it was Haoyue's big day. It was his turn to present. Thanks to the help of his notes, Haoyue made a wonderful presentation! He also shared his experience and adventures with his teacher and classmates as they were very interested to hear his discoveries. In the end, Mr. Johnson gave him an A+ and even put his presentation slides on the school website!

Haoyue was thrilled at this honor and of course, he never forgot the Buddha that had helped him to accomplish all this. So on every Buddha’s Birthday, Haoyue always goes back to the same cave he rescued the Buddha from to pay his respects.

Travis And The Awakening Of Herobrine

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Qin, Winston – 10

The year 2134

My weird nightmare started like this. (Well, maybe that was just a dream, not a nightmare.)

I was dreaming of a big red monster with only one eye, sitting in a dark cave, and reading the scroll of immortality. Totally weird enough. There were also a lot of weapons like swords, knives, arrows, spears, lances, and almost every kind of weapon you know in ancient times. (I guess you will go “Duh!”)

Suddenly there was a trapdoor opened. (I never noticed that trapdoor.) Another red monster with one eye climbed up from the trapdoor. (Which is hidden) Then a third, then a fourth. Then I realized that this was an army of big red monsters.

Then they lunged at me and then....

My dream shifted into something else.

My dark, red eyes were opening, and I sat up from my bed in Manhattan. I am Travis, and I live in the year 2134. At that time there was only Manhattan in the US, no other states. So the capital is Manhattan and it is just a small island. I looked at my clock. Five minutes! I had to go to professor Herobrine’s ancient history lesson. (Don’t ask why) We were going to the Mogao Grottoes in Gansu, China. Now it was only five minutes left to get to the airport. I rushed to the front porch, turned on my hoverboard, (Remember, past beings, this is the future!), and hovered to the airport in two minutes.

Everyone was waiting there. Professor Herobrine said, “Everyone please go and boards the plane! We are already full of people!” Then we hopped on and took off.

Everyone on the plane was chatting about the Mogao Caves in Gansu. Even I was excited. This was going to be perhaps the best trip ever! (Totally not, we will get to that later.) There might be ancient scrolls. (With bizarre poems) There were a lot of ancient things there. Each painting stands for a small story. I thought about a big rich, but rude emperor sitting on his luxurious golden throne. (Waste of money)

Meanwhile, the flight attendant passed out lunches for the passengers.

I think that it is western food like I used to eat, but...(Yeah, it’s Gansu Food.)

A Few Moments Later

It was time for us to parachute off the airplane. (I wonder how people used planes in the past.)

As soon as we reached land, we booked a hotel. It’s a one million trillion zillion gazillion octillion decillion star hotel.

When we got to our rooms, this was like a new home for us. A living room, bedrooms, bathrooms, and so much more.

Me and George (One of my friends) had to share a room. (Argh) George staggered into his bed. (Cus he is tired) and started to doze off.

Suddenly Professor Herobrine boomed, “It is time to go!” Everyone started stumbling along with the steps to the lobby, following him. He led us to a bus stop. We boarded a bus and the bus took off.

We finally got to the Mogao Caves. It was huge! Holes lined the yellow mountain (or dune, I'm not sure). We looked at sculptures and paintings. And also, Professor Herobrine said that these sculptures were once alive before. Huh, I didn't believe that. And that's when the most amazing thing in the whole entire world in a million dillion zillion trillion billion hundred years happened. (That's when it started to go straight down)

One of the sculptures came alive. It was a statue of a warrior. It swung its sword and ran out. Another statue came alive and the statue was a monster (Well, at least it LOOKED like a monster.) Then those two started dueling with their swords. All the valuable things (Or stuff) in the Mogao Caves had come alive.

I took some random sword (That still looked quite new) from the cabinet and slashed at the evil monster statues that tried to kick my gut. George grabbed another random spear (Which also looked quite new) and struck an evil spirit statue. (Great move) We hopped to the rooftop. Professor Herobrine smiled. His eyes turned glowing red, then white. He flew to the tower, and I realized his true identity. (I heard that this Herobrine guy appears in a video game in the past called Minecraft – I wonder what it would be like?)

Next, stone towers rose, circling us. We hopped from tower to tower dodging his attacks. (I have kung fu class, you know.) The stone towers can move diagonally, trying to smash us in the back of our butt. We managed to dodge some of his attacks, but in the end, we got tired of it. "HA! YOU WILL NEVER RISE! YOU DON'T KNOW WHO I REALLY AM! I AM HEROBRINE, DA EVIL SOURCE OF DEPRESSION AND SADNESS!" YOU WILL NEVER SUCCEED." Herobrine said. The stone towers faded.

I grabbed my sword. George raised his spear. Those two weapons are gleaming with blue light. Next, the towers rose again. (I knew it, plus, Herobrine's eyes are still shining white) (I guess he is becoming a bit like Entity 303) We squinted in all directions, dodging the mighty smash on top of the Mogao Caves. If we continue like that, the Mogao Caves will be crushed. All of the valuable stuff from history will be gone. So George and I loaded up our last of our parachutes and flew off the caves. Herobrine lunged at us.

Herobrine started to get annoyed. A big radioactive wave shot out like a ring from his body. Of course, we dodged it. EVERYONE dodged it. Herobrine was so angry he released all his power and then...

Bang! I woke up at the airport. Ahhhhh! I missed the flight! That was all a dream? The guy next to me, who is reading the book MN0087, said, "You slept for forty hours." What??

Uh Oh...

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sutherland, Sophie – 11

“Well, that will be the end of the story!” Mum said, “But I want you to tell me another story! Please!” I groaned, my mother looked at me with her sweet and charming smile, and whispered, “I’m sorry, but the mogao caves will have to wait till tomorrow.” Ughhhhh! One story wouldn’t hurt!” “Lila, the world is filled with amazing and fascinating things, and one of them is patience, so wait till tomorrow, and you will get your wish.” As she got off my bed I rolled my eyes, I just don’t understand why she couldn’t tell me another story. I turned my back to my mother as she walked out of my room and bid me goodnight. I waited until she was in her bedroom. As I heard the door lock, I slowly crept over to my desk, ready to grasp my mothers book. I had to see what other stories would spark my imagination, Creek! Creek! I winced my eyes as the floor slowly quieted down, the world seemed to be disappearing, but suddenly, I heard my mum’s footsteps coming towards my room, like a giant stomping across the forest, ready to attack. I knew i was supposed to be on my bed sleeping, so I grabbed my mothers book and bounced onto the bed just in time for my mum to think i was sleeping soundly, dreaming of the mogao caves and its beauty, it was truly easy to feign sleep, i just had to close my eyes and pretend to go to sleep, but it was quite hard to stay awake.

My arms suddenly felt weird and numb, like a thousand ants were crawling around me. The book was still right next to me, but I was too tired to open it, too tired to move. I closed my eyes and let the world drift away....

I felt like I was falling into a well, but when I opened my eyes, the atmosphere seemed different. I realized that I was still holding my mothers book. I heard footsteps, I hid behind the door, then i heard someone say “I swear I heard someone here, thought it was a thief coming.” My heart was pounding now, i had no idea where i was, or maybe the question is when am i? As I looked out the window I saw people sitting on the sand drinking from goblets, holding gold coins.

I ran up to someone walking my way, looked at what they were wearing and realized what had occurred, I HAD TIME TRAVELLED BACK TO WHEN THE MOGAO CAVES WERE BUILT! My eyes looked like they were going to pop out, my jaw was about to hit the floor. The monk looked at me strangely and walked away whispering “*What is going on today?*” I opened the book to see where I was, remembering that my mother had told me she had a map inside the book. But which page? When I opened the book, I had expected pages and pages of stories, but instead I had found pages and pages of wordings and pictures of strange beings, but the pages never stopped! All the pictures and notings all seemed familiar, as I flipped through the pages I saw that it created a flipbook with a letter on each page spelling out: PRINCESS PINGYANG. My mind was confused and blown away at the same time, why did my mother have a spelling of princess pingyang? Was she Princess Pingyang? But how was she still alive? It happened so long ago! As I looked around I spotted my Mother! I knew my chances were bad but perhaps I could work this out.

But before I get distracted, I had to go find my mothers doppelganger, so I sprinted across the road and ran up to her, “Princess Pingyang, I’m your daughter, I’m from the future, i have no idea how you are still alive but, all i know is that you have to get me out of here and back to where i belong.” “I *am* Princess Pingyang, how on earth do you know, and I am supposed to be your mother! And you’re from the future! That’s just complete nonsense!” My face was filled with disappointment, but I opened her book and flipped through the book looking for the word time. When I found it, my face was lit with joy, I skimmed through but nothing helped, I was standing there like someone who had been rejected badly. I knew that I had to continue, so I pushed it in my mothers face and she snatched it from my hand looking utterly disappointed, “Where did you get this? And even if you were my daughter I would not have taught her to steal from people!” “Please! Please! I know that I don’t seem like your daughter but you’re the only one that can help!” Her face of anger and confusion slowly faded away and made a gesture to me to follow her.

This was my only chance, she pointed towards the entrance of the mogao caves and I followed her inside, when I first stepped inside, the paintings and statues were extraordinary, I had this feeling when I stepped in, I felt like a new person, i felt like i was reborn, a flashback of my mother telling me about the magic in the caves came flooding back,

but i was starting to get old. But now I understood what the magic was, my mother was talking about how the paintings and sculptures were like magic. I knew why people adored the mogao caves, but most importantly, if my mother was the princess and could see the mogao caves and do extraordinary things with it, I would have those too! If me and my mother worked together to bring me back home, it would work. When we finally reached the last cave, my legs were like jello, but I had been distracted by the beauty of the mogao caves, I didn't really care! My mother gestured at me to go and stand in the middle of the room, and then tapped my forehead gently and felt the world drift away....

As I fell asleep I slowly rolled over and realized I was back in my bedroom, and it was already morning! I heard my mother calling for me, so I packed my bags and rushed onto the bus. Even though I barely got any sleep, I was wide awake from what I had seen! I could only think about the mogao caves! When I came back home, I decided to tell the story this time, but halfway through the story my mum looked pretty surprised about what was coming out of my mouth, but everything worked out perfectly fine.

Value

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sze, Yuen Hei Kristen – 11

My feet sank under the sand, well beneath what I could see, with every step that I took. Every second, my journey got harder. I had run out of water a long time ago, and my lips were cracking and bleeding. Dehydration made the world spin. My brain screamed at me to stop, to give up, to pass into a blissful, endless sleep. I refused. I was nearly there, the treasures in the Mogao Grottoes so close I could practically feel their presence, calling me, inviting me in. Just a few more steps.

I fell against a wall, legs buckling from exhaustion. My eyes closed and I took a few deep breaths. My map had been blown away, and I wasn't sure if this was the correct spot. If it was, then lucky me. If it wasn't, I'd just have to continue the next day, assuming I survived until then. Curling into a comfortable position, I ignored the small pebbles falling onto me and the grainy sand grinding against my skin. Sleep didn't come easily, but when it did I was incredibly thankful.

I dreamt about being in the rain, which was a nice change from the harsh heat of the desert, until the small droplets of water started to hurt, striking me hard. My eyes flew open and I snapped back to reality. Pebbles were falling everywhere, dislodging from the fragile wall, and they were rapidly getting larger in size.

I ran away from the wall, but something caught my eye. I saw something glint near a nearby rock. It was risky, I knew, but I couldn't resist checking it out. The treasures promised in the Mogao Grottoes was temptation sweet as honey, and I couldn't stop myself from sprinting back to them.

Just as I thought, there was a hole in the wall that the fallen stones had covered. It was so small that my underfed body could just fit through. As soon as I had wriggled through, I gasped. The cavern was massive, and sitting in front of me was a Buddha statue with years worth of dirt and grime covering the surface in layers. I didn't understand. The legend of the Mogao Grottoes told of treasures beyond compare. When I made the journey out here to the desert, I was expecting diamonds, rubies, gold, jewelry, all of that and more! Was I in the wrong place?

I ran my hand along the cavern wall and some dirt came off, allowing me to see beneath the earthy layer. Pictures and scriptures covered most of where I touched. The wall paintings had probably been there for very long and were preserved quite well, but I didn't see why they were important. Some pictures depicted various versions of Buddha, dressed in elegant outfits from ancient times, hands held together sitting on clouds. As I moved further into the cavern, I realized the wall paintings were neverending and extended towards the inner chambers. I didn't know why but a sense of calm and tranquility was building up within my heart as I moved closer to the inner chamber. My thirst for treasure was somehow dampened.

One would think that it would be completely dark within the cave, but there was natural light filtering in through from somewhere above illuminating the dark space. For a minute, I thought it might have been the halo of the Buddhas around me, guiding me. I reached the inner chamber, closing my eyes as I entered, certain that this was where the treasure was. All the suffering I had been through would be worth it. I opened my eyes slowly, ready to be dazzled with shining treasures. But what I saw was not treasure.

Laying in an untidy pile were well-preserved scrolls lightly scented with the typical ceremonial incense among other religious instruments. I passed a big statue of a sleeping Buddha and unconsciously sat next to it. I was surprised, not by the fact that there was no treasure, but that I wasn't disappointed. Yesterday, I would have considered the sleeping Buddha a useless piece of rock, but looking at it more closely, I felt unexpectedly calm and an indescribable feeling of fulfillment filled my heart. To me right now, this statue was a masterpiece. Over time, the statue had clearly aged, but at this moment, I felt the craftsmen's sincerity and couldn't deny my admiration. I had an urge to join the statue, to just lay on the ground next to it.

As I laid down, I pondered why I came here in the first place. Blinded by greed, I lived a life of decadence. I was hungry and thirsty, and my greed would be the cause of my demise, stuck in this cave for eternity.

Something caught my eye. One of the Sleeping Buddha's fingers was missing: it must have broken off over the years. I saw it lying near me. It was pointing towards the wall within the inner cave. I instinctively got up and headed towards that area.

There was a small opening in the wall and the stones were loose. Removing the rocks, I entered another corridor. It wasn't long until I reached an exit. In front of me outside of the cave was an oasis, with crystal clear water and lush vegetation. The evening light of the sun shone down onto the lake, only to reflect back at me, the surface of the water glittering.

Thank you, Buddha, I thought, You've taught me that the art pieces and scrolls can teach me a lot about history, and the importance of history and culture. I've realized that the knowledge we can gain from those, from the Mogao Grottoes and its library on the walls, was the real treasure here.

My eyes fluttered open and I pushed myself up. My arms had been laying on a textbook, flipped open to a page in the middle.

Value

noun. the importance, worth, or usefulness of something.

A True Treasure, A True Adventure

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Tan, Liya – 11

Lucy is a smart schoolgirl that lives in China. She is a total teacher's pet but has lots of friends. Seth, on the other hand, is a pure math genius but is the worst at every other subject. To both of the children, weekends were the best days of the week because it gave you extra time to study or play. This week, they were each reading a history book that they found in the local library. Suddenly, as they were reading it, a bright, sparkly light swallowed them up, then spat them out in the middle of a dark, dank cave. The history book sat in front of them.

The book started furiously flipping through its pages. When it stopped, there were words writing itself onto the page. *You are in the Mogao Grottoes, the 420th cell. You will be transported to the first cell shortly after to begin your journey.* Suddenly, the book started to flip through its pages again.

Finally, the book calmed and lightly flipped one more page for Lucy to see. It was a tiny footnote. *There is a treasure yet to be found in the Mogao Grottoes. The original creators of the Mogao Caves hid it, waiting for one worthy of inheriting the Mogao Caves. Pass the tests of discovery, bravery, and adventure, and you will find the treasure. Somewhere.*

Then, words started forming, tinier and tinier under the footnote. *Look to the end of ends, look in between, look at the front and the start, but only one will help you discover.*

"Oh!" Lucy gasped. This must be the way to the discovery test..."

"Or it could already be the discovery test!" Seth finished with a smile.

Once again, a sparkly light swallowed them up and spat them out in another cave. "This must be the first cell," Lucy said.

"Yep, it is! "Come on, I think I already know the answer to the riddle, and it's not here. Follow me!"

As Seth animatedly raced through the tunnels, barely dodging the artworks, Lucy gasped and panted as she hurried along behind him. "Where are you... going? How are you not tired?!"

"You see, the riddle says that we have to look at the front, the back, and in between. We've already looked at the back; we came in at the 420th cell but there was nothing there, then we got transported to the first cell, and there was nothing there as well. So all we have to do now is find the in between, otherwise the middle. And 420 divided by 2 is 210! So we're heading to the 210th cell."

"Since when were you a math genius and a riddle genius?" Lucy snickered.

Surprisingly, Seth knew this place better than Lucy did. "I thought this was your first time here?" Lucy asked.

"Oh, I have more connections with this place than you think..." He replied with a sly smile. Suddenly, he turned red as a tomato. "I shouldn't have said that—" He muttered to himself. "My secret almost saw the light of day..."

"Secret? What secret?"

Seth shook his head. "It's nothing. Oh look, we're here!"

Indeed, they were standing right in front of the 210th cell. But unlike the other ordinary cells, instead of art, there was a singular, metal door with no handle and no hinges. Suddenly, the floor started rumbling. *You have completed the discovery test. Now it is time for the test of bravery.* A voice said. Cracks appeared through the ground that had so faithfully held them steadily under its grasp. Before Seth or Lucy could even move, the ground gave away, and they fell into darkness.

They woke to the sound of footsteps. Eyes fluttering open, a stone ceiling stretched over them. Seth sat up first. Then Lucy. A shadow stood over them. They both gawked at the person for different reasons. He had gigantic buttocks, a pear shaped body and a Budha shaped head.

"Oh my goodness! Grandfather, is that you?!" Seth gasped.

“Yes, it’s me, but only my spirit. And I’m afraid your secret that you hid for so long is now uncovered.” The stranger made a swift gesture at Lucy.

Lucy goggled at Seth. “Your secret’s that you have a grandfather?”

He sighed. “It’s much deeper than that. You see... My grandfather’s the monk that started the Mogao Grottoes. That’s why I know this place so well— it’s like some of his knowledge was passed to me. Even when it was my first time here, I knew every single path and exit.”

“But none of that matters now. My time here’s limited,” The monk said sharply. “You have just passed all three tests. Therefore—”

“But—” Seth interrupted, “We only finished the discovery test! What about bravery and adventure?”

Lucy was having this thought too. Pondering it over, something in her brain clicked. “I think I got it! Was the bravery test not running away from the tests and the adventure basically our entire trip through the caves?”

The monk beamed at her. “Yes, that’s right. But that is not important either. I have come to reveal the treasure, so—”

“Woah, stop right there,” Seth interrupted. “If you’re going to give us the treasure, then where’s the treasure chest?”

“If you keep interrupting me, we’ll get nowhere and you won’t even get the treasure! So shut up, will you? Anyway, the treasure is not related to riches. Money can’t buy you happiness. Love can, friends can, and so much more! You don’t need money to get happiness. So that’s why the treasure I will give you is a lesson. Always do what you want to do. Be happy. And just trust the fact that you can be happy. This journey has surely taught you that. Now...”

The monk waved his hands around in a pattern, and a familiar book glowed with the same sparkly light Lucy had seen the first time she travelled into the book. Now Lucy knew it was time to do that again, and go home.

“Goodbye...” Lucy whispered.

Seth and his grandfather both smiled back at her, great, loving smiles that filled her heart up with love. Now she understood the true meaning of the monk’s lesson. *It is a great treasure.* As the light slowly swallowed her up, Lucy responded with a matching smile towards Seth and the monk. And the last thing she saw was a family that she had just accepted herself into— and the family that had just accepted themselves into hers. True happiness comes with love, after all.

Secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Tsao, Joshua – 9

“The Mogao Grottoes have been rediscovered!” newsboys hollered at men hurrying to work. When Thomas heard this, he called a cab excitedly as he thought: Mogao Grottoes! I cannot believe I am going there! Let’s just hope that Atlas doesn’t show up again to steal the treasures... Soon the cab came, and he told the cabbie to drive him home at the speed of light for double pay.

At home, he grabbed a sword, a cloak, and the book his father had about the Mogao Grottoes. Childhood memories of his father telling him about Mogao Grottoes flooded his mind. Thomas remembered his father used to tell him that there was a great library within Mogao Grottoes, and that it stored many paintings, scrolls and sculptures which would be priceless and teach us wisdom of their times. His father used to spend all his free time reading and researching the lost Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, and always hoped to visit it one day.

Thomas hopped on his coach, patted the horses. He cried “Mogao Grottoes, here we come!” It was already late at night when Thomas arrived at the boundaryless desert, it must be the Gobi desert in front of him, he believed. Thomas decided to rest for the night as it was getting too dark to continue. Though Thomas felt nervous in this deadly quiet desert, he felt excited as he was one step closer in fulfilling his father’s dream.

Without much sleep, Thomas woke up early to continue his journey. Not far ahead he saw many pillar-like structures so he quickly looked it up in his book, and lo! It was a stupa! A sign read: Meditation. This must be where monks did their spiritual meditation, assumed Thomas. He hopped off the coach and studied at the stupa closely which was covered in runes. Thomas rode forwards through the desert until he saw a hint of a river near a cliff. Carved into the cliff was a temple-like structure. He rode until the structure near the river was in full sight. “Is that the Mogao Grottoes?” Thomas shouted.

“I must be seeing things.” muttered Thomas.

He rubbed his eyes several times and saw that it had a temple-like design. Each of the floors got smaller and smaller. This indeed was the Mogao Grottoes just like how it was described in the books. The Mogao Grottoes towered over his coach as he rode forwards. Thomas pushed open the door lightly and the door creaked on its thousand-year-old hinges. He cautiously stepped into the musty caves and saw a little cave under a trapdoor that was poorly hidden. He tiptoed in and saw a shirt of glittering chainmail, a cloak, and a longsword in a gleaming scabbard with gems embedded on its scabbard and hilt. The hilt was jet black with a ring of silver which separated half of the hilt with the other half. That was the fabled Lightbringer, thought Thomas. Legend has it that it was lost when its previous owner fell in battle. He put on the shirt of the mail, cast off his old cloak and sword, put on the new cloak, and hung Lightbringer on his glittering belt.

Thomas climbed up a ladder and found himself in a room. In the room were racks and racks of countless manuscripts, paintings, sculptures that were encased in countless layers of dust. They had a musty smell to it, as if it had not been cleaned for eternity. On the walls, he grabbed a burnt out torch and lit it. As he tiptoed around the room, he tripped over something. He looked down. A skeleton stared at him with empty sockets. This must be the Library room, Thomas thought. He continued to wave his torch around. Suddenly, Thomas noticed a stone tablet sticking out of the wall completely covered in dust. He brushed away the dust with his hand and on it was written, “Be kind to others, be kind to yourself.” This must be the secret that my father told me about! Thomas took the tablet and left.

When Thomas was about to leave the Library Room, he was shocked to see a familiar silhouette standing there. It was Atlas! My nemesis, thought Thomas. Atlas bore a sword in a black sheath with pieces of amethyst embedded on the sheath and pommel. “Darkbringer.” gasped Thomas. “Give me that tablet or die! I WANT THAT TREASURE!!!” cried Atlas. “You’ll have to pry it from my cold dead hands!” cried Thomas. Thomas drew Lightbringer and Atlas did the same. Atlas leaped at Thomas, and Thomas parried. Thomas slashed wildly at Atlas but Atlas deflected and knocked Lightbringer out of his hand. As Atlas strode quickly towards him with Darkbringer

in his hand, Thomas rolled away, snatched up Lightbringer, and parried the attack. The blow knocked Atlas's sword out of his hand, and Atlas drew a long knife. Atlas stabbed Thomas, and the blade scored a hit on his left shoulder. Thomas cried in pain, but managed to raise Lightbringer. And with a swift, but sure stroke, clove off Atlas's head, and all went black...

When he woke up, he was lying on the floor of the Library Room. He looked around and saw a notched knife and Darkbringer. It was the knife Atlas wielded. Thomas snatched the knife and peered at it. "How did Atlas get this dangerous artifact?" muttered Thomas. He couldn't feel his left arm. He rushed out with the tablet heeding nothing, for he had to get home. He ran out of the Mogao Grottoes and leaped on his coach. He whipped his horse and they rode home.

The next day, Thomas went to the museum and donated the tablet to the museum. A few weeks later, he got a letter inviting him to lead the expedition to the Yellow Mountains. Thomas snatched his newfound Lightbringer, mailshirt, and cloak. He then sprang onto his steed and rode off into his next adventure...

Legend of Mogao Grottoes

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Wang, Ellie – 10

In a peaceful village in Dunhuang, lived a kind 12 year old girl named Mei. She was as pretty as a flower, she loved reading fairytales.

One night, Mei was sitting on her bed and reading a book named The Legends Of Mogao Grottoes, when she thought she noticed one of the rabbits move. Then suddenly the tree swayed, the pages were alive! Mei started rapidly flipping through the rusty yellow pages of this old fairytale. To her surprise, all the pages were alive, words were falling down the pages like tiny parachutes, the pictures were like videos, playing in front of her eyes. “No! This is a dream.” she told herself again and again trying to steady her thoughts at the same time. Just then, Mei looked around her surroundings “W–what?” she mumbled confusingly as she looked around. The world was turning hazy, blurry, then. . . it went black. Everything was quiet. A bird flew by the window, then away into the grey night sky.

An hour later, Mei opened her eyes. A bald man was standing before her, she sat up as quickly as she could. Everything but her surroundings were the same. She was still in her pink PJs, her gold clip and her book in her hands, but giant trees were surrounding her, sand on her hair, in her mouth.

“Bleh!” Mei half coughed, spitting out the sand. She quickly stood up and stared at the man “ Excuse me, who are you?” said the man suspiciously. Mei was confused and scared, she stared at the man and the man stared at her. “ Oh my god! What is happening to me?” Mei thought as she blinked blankly at the man. Wait a second, this man looked familiar.

Mei thought, she thought and thought, then her eyes met the cover of the fairytale she was holding in her hands. She knew. She knew what had happened to her, who the man was and where this place is. She knew it all.

She was in her book. The man standing in front of her was one of the monks that built the famous buddhist artwork. The actual Mogao Grottoes!

“Excuse me?” came a voice. Mei steadied her thoughts and started explaining why or how she was here. Half an hour past, an hour past Mei finally finished explaining – how she got whisked away to this place. Even though Mei herself didn’t really understand how the magical book had somehow transported her here. Now she definitely wanted to know all about the Mogao Grottoes.

Days passed as Mei became good friends with this buddhist. During these days, Mei inspired the buddhist to build the Mogao Grottoes, they worked together, designed the building, told each other jokes. . . “This structure should have 500 temples!” “It shall be the most beautiful extraordinary structure ever made by monks!” They happily discussed their brilliant ideas. As days passed, the buddhist and his friends kept working on this magnificent structure.

But as time went by, Mei started missing her family and friends, she was homesick! She started getting worried, she wondered if she could ever see her family and friends, Mei was determined to find a way out of this.

In the following days, Mei tried to find ways to get back to her village. She would spend days flipping through the book, staring at the foggy sky. The monks noticed Mei becoming depressed day by day, they tried to encourage her but they knew something was wrong. As days turned into weeks, Mei grew skinnier and skinnier, she refused to eat, usually she’d spend her time sitting under a tree.

Just sitting there and staring blankly at the layers of sand swirling in front of her. Mei had lost hope of going back home, meeting her friends and family again, all she knew was that she was going to be trapped in this dynasty for her life. The monks tried to be helpful by giving her some personal space, but they knew nothing could give hope to Mei.

Until one day the monks finally had enough of this depression, they marched up to Mei and dragged her into the tent the monks shared, they forced her to eat and drink, they tried to tell jokes but nothing made Mei smile, Mei was too broken to do that, her family and friends meant everything to her and nothing can make her smile if she couldn't see them anymore.

The monks were stumped, they wanted to help Mei but didn't know how. That night when one of the monks was just getting ready for bed "ping!" Something fell down beside him. The monk turned around, then he just stared. The object was tiny, but it was absolutely magnificent. The smooth side of the round sphere, the golden light it let out blinded.

"Oh my gods!" the monk exclaimed, the monk suddenly noticed a note beside the object, on it was the most perfect handwriting one could do. On the paper wrote: "As shiny as the sun, as precious as gold, for the sweet girl as pretty as a flower."

The monk knew this was god's work, god wanted this object to be delivered to Mei. He quickly jogged to Mei's privy chamber, Mei was there weeping silently, when Mei noticed the monk was there, she quickly steadied herself. "Oh my dearest Mei, I believe this is for you!" The monk slowly held out his shaking hand to Mei.

"Oh why is it magnificent, why don't you keep it?" Mei asked.

"Mei sweetheart, god purposely delivered this to you and you only you shall take it. Mei gave in and took the tiny sphere from the monk's hand, suddenly golden light slowly sprinkled down on her body, Mei noticed the book of the Mogao Grottoes flying up from the light, the golden light wrapped the book like a cocoon. After a few moments of complete silence, the cocoon burst as specks of gold covered Mei. There in front of her was another unfamiliar book, the title of the book was "A complete guide to the village of Dunhuang!" Mei was overwhelmed with tears, she thought about all the fairytales she read, thought of all the memories with her family and monks. She held out her shaking finger and pointed at the book "I wish to go there!" Mei stammered half croaking out the sentence.

The next moment, Mei was back in the village, on her bed. She sat up and stared, pinching herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming "I'm back!" Mei said to herself in fluent Chinese. She bounced with joy. Mei suddenly realised how tired she was so she curled up on her bed and slept like a baby. P

Beyond the Mysteries of Ancient Heritages

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Wong, Leah – 11

The top of the cave shines like the starry night sky, as this fellow traveller stares, as he knows that his life is coming to an end. This traveller had explored and found numerous secrets upon his search, but no one knows. He had kept it a secret for his whole life, and never told a soul. But of course, he would not want these secrets to go to waste, because he had spent his whole life searching. He knew these secrets couldn't fall into the wrong hands, this extraordinary information could make a whole difference to the world, he could succeed, gain money and afford countless things. And so he decided to hide the secrets in a letter. He grabbed a bowl and what looked like a berry out of his pocket and squeezed the juice out of the berry and into the bowl. Then he finally begins to write on a thin piece of wood with his finger. – year 350

1,467 years later...

I opened my diary, which is a collection of thin parchment, and was about to write the date. Then I asked myself "What's the date again?" I recovered my memory and realised that the date was the year 1817, March 18. I turned to Noah to see how he's doing. But as always, he acted like a couch potato and was slouching on a sheepskin chair, and I was sitting on the weak wooden chair. My back is sore, but it was all I got. Then I told Noah "Hey bro, we are visiting the Mogao Grottoes today!" But there was no big reaction. It seemed like Noah won't do any packing, so I'll have to do the work. I had no choice so I rushed to the living room and borrowed one of mom's big cloth and placed the following items on it: A gas lamp, a med-kit and extra and warmer clothes made by mom. I was panting by the end of preparing my stuff and my brother's stuff, and I was exhausted and ended up collapsing onto the floor. A few minutes later, we left the house to go to the Mogao Grottoes.

We all entered the Mogao Grottoes, holding our gas lamps. I examined the Buddha art painted on the walls, wondering how people were able to do these extraordinary things. Some I liked were the 2 giant sculptures that represent Maitreya Buddha. They were ginormous in person! I took out my dairy and started sketching out the stunning sculpture. Next we found the monk's room. It was an undecorated plain cave room and all the walls were concrete grey coloured. We moved on to even more art, and all of them were unique in their own way.

Then, the cave started to rumble. Rocks crumbled and fell to the ground like threatening rain, about to hit me and my family. Noah tackled me and moved me away from the fall. Dust flew everywhere, I couldn't see anything. Noah and I were coughing. I asked "Is everyone alright?". The only response I hear is from Noah. There were no signs of mom and dad. When me and Noah finally opened our eyes, we discovered that we've been separated from mom and dad by a wall of rocks. I turned to Noah and took a glance at his leg. Blood trickled down his right leg, slowly touching the ground. I cried "Are you okay? Can you walk?" Noah panted "I'm alright, just give me a lift please." Before I could do anything I grabbed the med-kit and immediately wrapped a small cloth around the wound. "Thanks, sis" he said. "You're welcome!" I replied.

We turned around the corner of the route, and heard a slither... I turned back but there was nothing there. I continued on the path and the sound of the slithering was louder. I turned back again. And a shadow appeared. Whatever it was, it came closer to me and Noah. I got a glimpse of it and I swore it was orange. And in a book, orange reptiles and insects are usually poisonous. "RUN!" I shouted. We both ran like a cheetah. I was curious to know what it was so I turned back again. But the creature was not only ONE, but there were FOUR. I ran while looking back, and the figure of the creature was a long straw-like shape. It was a snake.

When we finally got rid of the snake, we found ourselves in a room full of paintings on the wall. We stared at the paintings in awe, hoping for a miracle to happen, but nothing changed. We were stuck in a room, with no parents and nowhere to go. We moved from every side to corner, checking every single painting. Then Noah suddenly asked, "What's this stuff?". He pointed to a small golden handle at the very corner of the room. I pulled the handle carefully, resulting in a drawer. Inside the drawer was a note. The note was in an envelope and it was begging me to open it. It read:

Dear Traveller,

You are about to uncover the secrets of this cave...

From long ago, I have found this riddle. But it has never been solved. I hope you find good use of it.

On the day the moon turns bloody red,
Can see those who they love and are dead.
Just say the names of those you want to meet,
And they will all appear for you to greet!

From: _____

I looked around, but there was only me and Noah. Who would write a letter about a riddle? It made me confused. But Noah exclaimed, "Wow! What a surprise. Can we actually meet those who are dead?!" Although I was a little disappointed, I realised that the time I spent with Noah was important, not the prize.

10 years later...

The top of the cave shines like the starry night sky, as we stare upon it. We grabbed a bowl of ink, and finally wrote the answer to the riddle: Sometime in November, there will be the Blood moon. On that day, if you say out all of the names of the people you would like to meet, they will appear in the room where we found the letter. But there's something, something we never checked yet... I grabbed the note and opened it. My eyes flicked to the end of the note. It showed:

From: Cheung Li Fu

"Wait... Isn't this one of our ancestors from the family tree we made?!" I blurted out.

A Young Man, Meng Gao

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Xu, Julia – 11

"Don't let me ever see you again!" Shouted Meng Gao's boss. Meng Gao sat on the edge of the company, he could feel water in his eyes. He looked at the ground and it felt like there was no light in life. Suddenly Meng Gao saw a shadow of two people, it was his wife and daughter. "Daddy where have you been?" Meng Gao's daughter asked. Meng Gao held back his tears and hugged his daughter. At that point, he promised that he will take care and prop up this home.

Meng Gao woke up and left home in the morning, his dedication to find a job. He went to a bakery store and tried out for a baker job and he got hired. However, two days later, the bakery store was shut down, because there were no customers. Meng Gao came home full of disappointments, he laid down on his bed and closed his eyes, he thought of all the jobs and tried thinking of one that he is suitable with. The next day, he woke up before the sun was awake and didn't give up on looking for a job, he continued to look for a new job. He went on to the street and suddenly he saw a board full of posters and a sign up form that said that Mogaoku needs workers to construct the Mogaoku. This could be a great opportunity for me, Meng Gao told himself, without hesitation, Meng Gao signed his name onto the list.

A week later, it was time for Meng Gao to say goodbye to his family. Meng Gao's daughter was only three years old, she wasn't familiar with emotions and didn't know what to say. Meng Gao's wife bite her teeth while having the last hug with her husband.

The construction started for Meng Gao. He put bricks on top of the bricks and stack it over and over again. Sweat felt like rain, his hair was wet and his hands were full of dirt. Meng Gao's hand shook and his legs were too tired to carry the weight of the brick. The sun went down and the moon peaked ur of the clouds. It was rest time, it was already 10pm, everybody was in there accommodation, only Meng Gao wasn't in his accommodation. Meng Gao was looking at the moon, he thought of his family. In the dark clouds, Meng Gao could see all the memories that he spent with his family.

Three years later... "Auchhhh!" Meng Gao exclaimed. Blood dripped from Meng Gao's arm, his arm was covered in dirt and blood. Meng Gao's friend, Rong Qi rushed to check out what happened, before Rong Qi could arrive there, Meng Gao fell on the ground and passed away.

Meng Gao was sent to the village doctor's home, Meng Gao was laid on a bed and the doctor claims that this injury needs a bandage, he may never use this arm again! Meng Gao still had a positive attitude, however, nobody knows that Meng Gao always saved the tears till nighttime.

Days went by, Meng Gao had to go back to work, he wrote a letter to his family and sent money to them, he also told them to not worry about him. Meng Gao went back to work, Meng Gao's clothes always got fully wet, his face was always covered in sweat. Just to do the work requirement, Meng Gao had to lift a heavy brick with only one hand, others did it with two hands, so he had to do double the amount of it! Good thing is that Meng Gao strived so hard that he didn't take up double the time and he only took three hours more! However Meng Gao still had to work from seven in the morning till one in the midnight, while others got three more hours of rest.

Soon , Meng Gao finally finished his 4 long years of work. He remembered how he had to do so many repetitive actions and how he didn't have any time to stop during the day. Meng Gao was ready to go back home and see his family, however he was worried if his daughter wouldn't recognize him.

Meng Gao stepped towards his home, nothing changed. "Mom, somebody's at the front door." Meng Gao's daughter said. Meng Gao's wife could smell the familiar sent, she could see the familiar face, she could also see the familiar hairstyle, however the hair is much longer than she thought it would be. Meng Gao's wife could see his broken arm, her eyes tried to hold the tears back but she failed. She knew it was him, it has been a long three years.

Meng Gao came to hug her daughter, but his daughter rushed to the inside of the house and rejected his hug. Meng Gao's arms dropped, Meng Gao's wife tried to tell her that he is her father, but his daughter didn't have a father for such a long time, she was insecure of everything.

One years later, Meng Gao found a job as a doctor and finally reconnected with his daughter. During the years, Meng Gao always had been there for her daughter, he always had time with her and attended all the activities with her. Meng Gao spent a lot of the time with her family and he also donated his savings to the charity.

Throughout this experience, Meng Gao learnt to bear with loss and learned that everything can have a good side and a bad side. Just like this experience for Meng Gao, the good side of the experience is that he participated in the construction of the Mogaoku and finished, and he also earned a lot of money for living, but the bad side of this is that he lost a lot of time with his family. Meng Gao wishes that for the rest of his life, he can be with his family and share happiness together!

The Miracle at the Mogao Grottoes

W F Joseph Lee Primary School, Leung, Hoi Yu – 11

Harry leaned his head against the window of the tour bus. His class were on a field trip to Gansu, China for 3 days.

The class soon arrived and got off the bus.

“Mr. Johnson, I can’t wait to look at the buddha statues!” Amelia exclaimed.

“That’s the spirit!” he responded. Harry rolled his eyes and Nico snorted.

“Did I just hear someone snort?” Amelia asked loudly. The entire class, who were all chatting previously, fell silent.

“Amelia, I think it was Nico,” Hailee stammered.

“Do you think it’s funny, Nico? I suggest you stop wasting time on laughing at people and pay attention for once,” Amelia snapped. Some kids laughed quietly.

Harry quietly wished that time would freeze so he could rest.

Just after that, everything froze and began to glitch except for Nico, Amelia and Hailee. He looked up and gasped. There was a giant looming over the children.

They all screamed.

“Who are you and what do you want?” Amelia demanded.

“I’m Wong,” he answered, “And I want to teach you kids a lesson.”

“Lesson? Are you sure, Mr. Wong? I mean, me and Hailee have done research on the Mogao Grottoes before the trip,” Amelia explained.

“I’m pretty sure you did, but it’s not about knowledge, it’s about friendship. Anyway, you four would make a really good group, you know?” Wong said calmly.

“Us? A group?” Nico laughed.

Wong smirked, “Well. I froze time, if you want to unfreeze it, you’ll need to solve two tasks together. I’ll send you to your destination now.”

They all got sucked in a tornado and found themselves in a dark room.

They all screamed again.

Then, they heard a giggle.

“You kids are really funny when you’re panicking,” Wong joked.

Wong snapped, “Your task here is to find a way to get out of here, after you do, I’ll see you all in the next destination.” And by that, he disappeared.

“I think I can solve this and get us out of here,” Nico stated.

Amelia looked at Nico doubtfully, “Are you sure you can handle this?”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Nico replied and started patting stuff.

“What are you doing?” Hailee asked.

“I’m looking for a handle of some sort.”

Harry imitated his friend and also started to touch stuff and stumbled upon a lever and he pulled it with all his might.

“Guys, is it just me or has everyone wet themselves?” Nico asked nervously as he looked at the floor.

Water was filling up the room very quickly.

“Oops,” Harry mumbled.

“Oops? What did you do, Harry!” Amelia yelled.

“I just pulled a lever,” he mumbled.

“Without even talking to us?” Amelia screamed.

The water now reached their waists and they would soon need to paddle.

“We’ve been looking around; we haven’t looked on the ground!” she yelled.

Harry dived under and saw a door on the floor.

“Hailee’s right, there’s a door on the floor,” Harry said.

Harry dived down again and pulled it, only to lose strength.

“I think it’s locked!” he panted.

Nico groaned and swam after Harry and started searching for a key.

“I found something!” Nico screamed as he emerged from the water.

Nico and Harry dived under and tried to unlock the vent and shot back up.

“I don’t want to say this, but we don’t have enough strength to open it,” Harry grumbled.

Hailee volunteered to help.

She was surprisingly very strong and they finally lifted the vent.

Then, they felt their bodies going in a downwards spiral.

“Hi, kids!” Wong greeted.

“Mr. Wong? I believe these challenges are extremely dangerous, is there a manager I can speak to?” Amelia asked.

“I’m the manager,”

They were in a park. Around them, were gold, diamonds and different valuable things.

“You are surrounded by everything that any person would want. Choose something that the Buddhas would appreciate. Good luck,” Wong said.

With that, he disappeared into thin air.

“Well, I guess we can work together then,” Amelia said.

Nico and Amelia went to inspect a horse made out of solid gold.

“It’s beautiful here, isn’t it?” she sighed.

“I suppose,” Nico responded.

Hailee and Harry soon approached them.

The four of them brainstormed a lot, thinking about different animals, materials and jewels the Buddhas would value.

All of a sudden, Wong reappeared in the room.

“Children, you need to hurry up! The garden will self-destruct in five minutes,” he warned.

“What happens then?” Nico asked.

Wong sighed, “You die.”

Wong gave them an encouraging smile and disappeared.

“I didn’t know we could actually die here!” Nico wailed.

Harry looked at his watch and gulped. 60 seconds left.

He glanced at his watch while it ticked.

“That’s it!” Amelia suddenly yelled.

“What?”

“I know the gift we need to give to the Buddhas! It’s something Phoenix related!”

Harry remembered the Phoenix statue.

“I saw it!” he exclaimed.

Nico looked the right side of the garden. It was fading into ashes.

“Hurry!” Hailee cried.

Harry went to the stone table and grabbed it.

There was a strong wind, it seemed to be preventing him from reaching the Buddha statue.

Harry heard a scream; Amelia was fading away and soon vanished.

He began to run.

Within seconds, he was the only one left in the garden.

He placed it gently on the Buddhas palm and felt his arm being tickled.

Harry looked at his hands and saw nothing. They had vanished.

He thought of his friends and let a tear drop on his cheek.

They had tried their best.

Harry opened his eyes and looked around his surroundings.

He was back at the end of the class line with Nico standing next to him, looking as equally confused.

The boys went to Hailee and Amelia.

They all embraced and even cried tears of joy.

The four best friends looked into each other’s eyes and smiled.

Amelia smiled to herself, the phoenix symbolizes peace, which the kids finally have.

Wong has succeeded.

Adventure at the Mogao Grottoes

W F Joseph Lee Primary School, Maksian, Kalysta Anoush – 11

Heather has always been really curious about things around her, she was extremely curious about the tall building near her house. She never got a chance to ask her parents about it since they were always out of town for business. Every time her parents were away they would have a babysitter to come look after her. Heather has always thought the idea of having a babysitter ridiculous. Besides, she was 15 – she definitely had enough responsibility to take care of herself.

She had always found the building really fascinating, she believed the objects inside would come to life. Nobody believed her and thought she was just out of her mind, but that didn't stop her from believing it, so one night she decided to sneak out of the house right after dinner when her babysitter was sleeping on the couch. She followed some tourists just to make sure she was going the right way. Once she arrived she was astounded at how tall it was – it didn't look this tall from her house. Even though she had looked forward to going in these caves for a long time, she still felt really nervous. Do they really come to life? Will they do anything bad if they come to life? Guess she'll have to figure that out by herself. She definitely didn't expect the Buddhas to be that big, some of them had patterns carved into them. After exploring the cave for a while, she heard some people walking in saying the cave will be closed but Heather didn't want to leave so soon so she quickly hid behind a door, Heather had no idea what this door would lead to.

Behind the door was a couple of Buddhas, nothing too scary or unexpected. Abruptly she heard a bell rang, she heard mysterious sounds coming from the Buddha behind her. She couldn't believe her eyes – she was right! They did come to life! She definitely didn't think this through, she started to regret coming here. The Buddhas were whispering to each other, Heather couldn't understand what they were trying to say, she then said hello to them, and they stared at her up and down. They looked really confused. One Buddha came up to her and told her that they weren't able to escape for a long period of time, they figured the only way to escape was if each Buddha had their elements. Heather then examined the cave and found a mysterious box, it had a keyhole. She then saw a little compartment on the ceiling, luckily she could reach to it by standing on an old looking chest. She opened it and saw a key, bingo. She opened it and saw a map, perfect that must be how she could find the elements. She quickly introduced herself to the Buddhas and explained how she got there, apparently she was the only person that could see that door. Heather could not believe all this. Heather had another problem to worry about, how could she go back home when the cave was closed? The Buddhas handed her a piece of cloth and told her to hold on to it until she got far away from the cave, and so she did. She walked out the door and passed the guards, the guards didn't even notice her! In fact, no one seemed to notice her when she walked past them, she thought the cloth was magical.

She held on tight to the cloth and ran into the house, Louis? Louis is Heathers best friend that lived next door, his jaw dropped when he saw her appear out of thin air, he thought she was a witch. She quickly explained everything to him, he believed her. She was out of breath after all that, Louis wanted to go to the cave with her the next day, Heather wasn't sure if that was possible, could he see the door? Guess they'll have to figure that out tomorrow.

The next morning Heather and Louis were woken up by the smell of pancakes, they quickly ran out to the kitchen to eat. Right after that Heather told her babysitter she was going to the library for a few hours. She rushed to her room to get her cloth and headed out the door.

Louis found a book about the Mogao Grottoes in less than ten minutes! They sat down and started reading it. Heather noticed something odd, there was a piece of cloth inside the book, she lifted it up and placed it next to the one the Buddhas gave her. It was like a puzzle, they fit together! But it seemed like there was three missing pieces to it, could they be the elements? Five pieces of cloths and five Buddhas, it must be right. They rushed to borrow the book and went back home to do more research.

Finally it was dinner time, Louis and Heather finished their food as fast as they could and told Heather's babysitter they had to go to Louis' house for a school project. They definitely weren't going for a school project, instead they ran to the tall building just a few minutes before midnight. They still had seven minutes to sneak into the cave. Heather handed the other piece of cloth to Louis and he turned invisible! She then held onto the cloth she received earlier and they both attempted to go through the door, it worked! They examined the room to find more cloths to complete the "puzzle", it wasn't long until the bell rang and they all came to life. Heather asked one of the Buddhas if

they had any more of these cloths, they did! They handed the cloths to Louis and Heather, they both thought, this all happened pretty suddenly, they decided to pick a girl that didn't know anything about the Mogao Grottoes to help them escape? What if all this was a trap?

Heather was about to put the cloths into her pocket when one of the Buddhas picked the cloths to fit them all together and each piece of cloth had a shiny element and they all fit into the Buddha's chest. They started to rise up in the air when the paintings carved into the wall came to life and a bolt of light shot at each of them and they all shattered into tiny pieces of glass. Is that the end of this adventure? Louis pointed out that he heard running water, he was right, the room started to fill up with water! Heather checked to see where the water came from, it was the compartment on the ceiling! Louis lifted her up since the water had already covered the old chest she stood on last time. She picked up a really heavy piece of brick and it fit perfectly, she then closed the door of the compartment. Although the water stopped filling up the cave, the water was still there and the cloths were ruined. How would they go back home without anyone noticing? Louis dragged Heather out the door and through the guards, the guards saw them but they both decided to hide behind a tall bush, surprisingly the guards never found them. They both ran back to Heather's house, and Louis showed how they could sneak into Heather's room by climbing a window, that's how Louis went into Heather's house! Once they got in, Heather's babysitter was standing right in front of them, except it wasn't her, it was Heather's mom! Heather couldn't believe her eyes, her mom asked them what they had been up to, and Louis was about to tell a stupid story but Heather decided to tell the truth. Heather didn't expect her mom to believe her, but she did. She then held up a piece of painting, it looked like the cave they were in! Did she casually have that in her pocket? Her mom said that she experienced similar things but she was the one who trapped the Buddhas into that cave. No wonder why she kept telling Heather not to go in. Her mom, Louis and Heather then reached in for a group hug. Heather's life is definitely full of surprises. She couldn't wait for her next adventure.

The Mystery of the Thousand Buddha Statues

W F Joseph Lee Primary School, Wong, Hiu Ching Bella – 11

The sun was high above the sky, spreading its heat around, as if threatening to burn the world to ashes. The whole world seemed to be collapsing under its fiery gaze. Water was scarce – not even a drip of it was found on the desert.

The traveler struggled to keep his eyes open. After walking on the desert for three days without rest, every step seemed to drain him of the little energy that was left. That was the least of his worries, though, as he had drained all the remaining droplets in his water bottle in one big gulp a few days ago.

The traveler wished he hadn't had done that. His thirst was unbearable and his throat was burning. Looking up, his vision blurring, the traveler yearned to spot sight of any source of water nearby, yet all he could see was the endless sand oasis. His knees buckled and gave way – the traveler fell face down onto the sand. At the corner of his eye, he saw someone who was wearing a robe. Feeling his last bit of consciousness slipping away, the traveler opened his mouth to cry for help.

"Help...me," The traveler mouthed weakly as his vision cut to black.

A few hours later, the traveler blinked his eyes open. He was lying in the sand – no, on a bed. He sat up and a kind face swam into view.

"Oh, are you awake?" a caring voice said. The traveler blinked. The man by his bed was wearing a robe. His head, however, was bald.

"Who are you?" the traveler croaked hoarsely. Then he realized that he might sound rude. "Where am I?"

"You are in our temple," the man smiled, not at all offended. He watched as the traveler help himself to the carrot soup that was just brought in by the fellow monks. "My fellow Buddhists carried you in. You were out cold for hours."

"Xie xie," said the traveler, his voice stronger after drinking the soup. "May I ask what temple is this?"

The man smiled again.

"You are in one of the most famous temples in China," he said with amusement. "The oasis city of Dun Huang, as known as the Mogao Caves."

Monks can never have much fun.

That's what Yanfei learnt from her stay at the temples.

"Where had that little girl gone?" Her mentor could be heard bellowing while Yanfei ran around exploring the Mogao Grottoes Caves.

And today, Yanfei was yet again in a place where she wasn't allowed to be in.

"Hi mother!" Yanfei cried, catching sight of her mother in the painting cave. The cave walls and ceilings were sure to take people's breaths away. It was covered by paintings devoted to the Buddha, such as people worshipping, meditating or even just talking nicely to one another. They were hand painted and shown with any color under the sun. There was no sign of any discord in the paintings. Yanfei's mother saw her and sighed.

"Dear, you should be meditating with your mentor," said Yanfei's mother, pursing her lips. Yanfei groaned.

"I did, and it was boring," she said.

Just as Yanfei's mother opened her mouth to lecture her daughter, a distant scream could be heard!

"OH MY DEAR BUDDHA!" it cried, panicked. "One of the sacred Buddha statues is gone!"

Yanfei hurried into the Thousand Buddha Caves, her heart fluttering with excitement. It was a common belief that anyone who came here would be blessed with visions. A guard was weeping by one of the statues while the priest comforted him as everyone in the temple came to look. Yanfei stared curiously.

“Yesterday there were 289 statues, but now there’s only 288!” the guard exclaimed. The priest glanced around suspiciously.

“No one can go in or out in this cave until I say so!” He bellowed, and the doors were locked. Yanfei breathed heavily in the semi-darkness.

“Pssst!” Yanfei recognized the voice as her friend, XieWuju. “Let’s investigate. It’s looking suspicious to me.” Yanfei nodded and beckoned him behind a statue. She nearly slipped on a puddle on the floor. XieWuju looked surprised.

“Why is there water on the floor?” he wondered, bending down to check. “Wait a minute...that’s oil!”

“It must have been left by the thief! How did they get that?”

The friends returned to the others. Yanfei stared at the guard who had fell to his knees and cried, “MY DEAR BUDDHA FORGIVE ME FOR MY SIN!” and felt a bit guilty about her lack of devotion. The priest shook his head miserably. “I feel so ashamed. We’ve clearly neglected our duty upon your holy bodies of art— As the priest, the blame lies with me alone.” And he too sank down and bowed.

The friends exchanged glances.

“The sooner we catch the thief, the better.”

“Did you see anybody near the crime scene?”

“Yes, XiaoMin and DaWen was there.” The guard sniffed.

“DaWen works in the kitchens!” Yanfei recalled. XieWuju ran to the kitchens. “Did you see DaWen here in the morning?” The chef shook his head. “I know for a fact that he was out on the Silk Road. He promised to give some cows to me. Hmmm cows.”

So, DaWen wouldn’t have enough time to get back and steal the statues.

“Then that leaves ...XiaoMin.”

“RELEASE ME STUPID!” XiaoMin demanded as he was held by the guards. The priest stared coldly at him. “Did you steal the Buddha statue?”

“I did.” XiaoMin hissed. “It’s destroyed now. Look at your faces! As if the sky has fallen down.” The priest gasped unbelievably.

“Your confidence will be ruined and the temple will fall!”

Yanfei stepped up. “No! Although the statue’s gone, our loyalty will stay. It’s not the statue who connects us— We will not collapse!”

A beat. Then everyone in the temple started clapping. Peace was restored.

“It might have been better,” said Yanfei’s mentor, “If you have showed an ounce of devotion to Buddha.”

Catch That Cave Robber!

Wellington College Shanghai, Bi, Lyndsey – 9

It all started when I first met this young courageous girl, Shayne. It happened when I was completely in awe of the spectacular Mogao cave, the ancient Dunhuang people built. I accidentally bumped into Shayne, and she said, “I’ve finally found you Ellie.” Oh, my name is Ellie, by the way.

I was filled with curiosity and my mind was swirling with question marks and confusion, but I tried to remain calm. In the rays of sunshine, Shayne held my hand and said, “come on, I’ll show you.”

I was so shocked and frozen to the spot when I saw what Shayne was trying to show me. Two graverobbers was peeling of the murals of long ago! “Why would anybody do that, hurting all the wonderful memories, stories and secrets from the past? This is our only chance to understand the past of Dunhuang and share our knowledge with the world but they were just taking it away, unbelievable!”

“That’s why I brought you here, the secret map had chosen you and me to complete the mission.” Shayne took out an ancient map and said. We have to solve this problem before sunrise, or these murals will all vanish!”

“But what should we do?” I asked. “We can tell they’re really skilled graverobbers. They’re using sharp knives to peel, what if they attack us?”

“They have knives, but we have the ancient map and our knowledge,” Shayne said, “The ancient map will guide us with instructions, you may read the first one.” I read, “Solve this problem and you’ll have the first ingredient in a potion, which will surely stop your enemies and made the murals back to normal.” “The plant you need to find is a beautiful flower. There are loads of kinds, but the one you seek, has not yet been seen. It’s gorgeous white and has lots of petals. It’s now on an imaginary field, which is in your sight. Follow your imagination, and go where it leads you. Then dig in deep and the flower will find you!”

“Hmmm... I think it’s some kind of a daisy,” I said. “Me too!” Shayne exclaimed.

Meanwhile in the dark shadows, the two graverobbers with beady eyes were whispering to each other, “We’ll steal the famous Maitreya Buddha statue with some kind of a smooth face that’s round and feminine,” “Ha! Big jokey? Who cares what it looks like, as long as we’ll go famous and rich!” the other graverobber explained, “Actually, the look of the statue makes it famous because myths say that the statue’s face was sculpted in Wu Zetian’s likeness, who was the first and the only female emperor in China!”

“Come on let’s find the daisy before they break the statue!” “We shall follow our imagination... It’s leading me to the west, so what are we hesitating for?” I walked ahead and Shayne followed me to the west of desert. The sun was boiling above me, it felt like walking through a volcano! Finally, my intuition told me to halt, and we started to dig, we dug so deep, I was certain the ocean is right beneath us, but it seemed not! So, we dug on and on, until I saw the blended wet sand and soil. Water started to leak and the petals appeared, then the leaves, the stem and whoosh! The whole plant appeared and was pulled out by Shayne. We put it into a bottle we found on our way.

“OK Shayne, let’s read the second instruction.” “The potion juice, is certainly important, you’ll find it, in the petals of the magic daisy. Squish it and squash it until you’ve got a third of your bottle daisy juice. Then add in the petals, shake it to a greenish slime. Smear the slime onto the old murals, and link your pinkies to chant, the friendship key!” “Well, it looks like more works need to be done, let’s get going!”

We squashed the leaves and shook the bottle, we crept in the cave and luckily, the two graverobbers were snoring on the floor because of the back-breaking work which was of no use. We quickly smeared the slime on, linked our pinkies and chanted the words. Suddenly, rainbows shoot out of the slime with red, orange, yellow, green, turquoise, blue and purple lights. The lights twirled and swirled until finally healed the murals.

“The murals are marvelous and the statue is spectacular!” We exclaimed.

Shayne called the police, who arrived moments later and took the two graverobbers away.

“Yes, we did it!” I highfived with Shayne.

The Sparkle of Magic

Wellington College Shanghai, Cai, Ayden – 9

CHAPTER 1

The Mogao Caves

Once upon a time, the Mogao caves was a place where people pray to buddhas as sculptures lies on the sandy ground, but now it's just a tourist's destination where people now look at the ruins of it...

Still, some magic sparkles upon the cold, gloomy caves, until something will happen to it...

As it was the first day of holiday, as me and Alex had our last class which the topic was the Mogao caves, we sat down on the sofa.

Our homework this holiday was to go on a trip to the Mogao caves and write a story about the trip and now we're just about to go. We've packed our bags so we're ready!

Chapter 2

The Mysterious Earthquake

The wind blowed to the right as the sand on the dessert stayed calm and hot as the white clouds caught the bright, glowing rays of the sun.

We were at the Mogao caves and was very excited about going into the caves, we went in cave No.1, darkness flowed around as if black paint was sticking permanently everywhere.

"Hey, I think something fishy is going around here." I said in a low voice, "do you feel it?"

"I think I feel it" answered Alex quietly, glancing around. Something sparkled in mid-air, it flowed over me and gently touched one of the buddha sculptures. Just at that point, I felt the one and tinniest little fragment of movement and everything happened too quickly for me to describe. Everyone started shouting, "EARTHQUAKE!" And everyone was trying to run out of the cave as the ground started shaking and we were trapped in the cave. My head suddenly hit the ground and finally I went into a deep, deep, sleep... All that I knew was that I saw one thing just when I had woken up, a Buddha sculpture moving towards me. Was I dreaming? I rubbed my eyes and looked again. It was still moving towards me. Believe it or not, the Buddha came to life! He can move and he can talk.

"Hello, what's your name?" he asked.

"...I am Ayden." I said with a small voice.

"I am Buddha Wu; I was sent here by Buddha Ru-Lai (roo-ly) to give you an important mission."

"What is it?" I asked, full of curiosity.

"Well, look around, what do you think is wrong here?" said Buddha Wu.

What I thought of first was my friend Alex. "My friend is gone!" And sure enough, Alex was nowhere to be found.

"Yes," he said, "I'm sending you on a mission to find your friend Alex."

Chapter 3

The Journey to Find Alex

“If you want to find him then you need to find a shard right in the middle of the inner core of the earth. I’m afraid the shard is guarded by Buddha Ka, the Buddha of evilness and is in the volcano of Ka so you better go in the volcano when Buddha Ka is gone. I’ll help you by giving you a costume, so you won’t be burned to ashes. Oh, and you get a special digging machine for digging your way to the inner core, every minute you dig counts for 1000 km. Good luck! You can start digging right here,” the Buddha finally moved back in place.

I put on the costume, took the machine, and started digging. It was full of darkness and dust and no one else seemed around. I felt scared but I didn’t have time to worry. I needed to find my friend.

When I started from the crust, I saw the sparkle of magic, the same kind of sparkle that flew around before the earthquake happened. I grabbed it and put it into my pocket and wondered what I could use it for. Then I continued digging.

I dugged at full speed with the magical machine while the heat around me grew hotter and hotter at the atmosphere around my body. My body felt it as hot red fire flickered around me until I heard CRACK! The tip of the blade of the machine broke and fell into the ruby red flames, my eyes reflected the colour.

“OH NO, NO, NO!!!” I howled, “I cannot dig anymore, and I am stuck in the middle of nowhere! What can I do now, help me Buddha!”

Just then, I found a very special poker card and it had some dust on it, so I rubbed it. Just when I rubbed it, fire came out from it and then slowly the fire stopped. I knew what to do now.

chapter 4

Let Me Stop This

I need to burn the sparkle of magic into ashes so the earthquake wouldn’t happen, the Buddha wouldn’t come alive, I didn’t need to dig and mostly, Alex wouldn’t be gone. I knew that if Buddha Wu couldn’t come alive, my costume would be gone so I could be burned and get hurt. But I know, sometimes when people show big love, it could also mean releasing sacrifices. That’s when I rubbed the poker card and put the sparkle of magic inside the fire. Slowly, my costume disappeared from head to toe. The heat rose at least from 50 degrees to 1000 degrees. I got the feeling that slowly I was disappearing into ashes. And finally, I was gone...gone...gone...

chapter 5

A Happy Ending

When I opened my eyes, I was at the hospital. I was alive! I was alive! And guess who was right beside me? Alex!

“Are you okay?” he said to me, looking worried.

“I’m okay!” I said happily and I gave him a big hug. “We are back together, and we are alive.” Alex looked at me with puzzled eyes, I knew why as he knew nothing about what could’ve happened.

So, I wrote my story: Once the Mogao caves was a place where people pray to Buddhas as sculptures lies on the sandy ground...

The Journey South

Wellington College, Shanghai, Hu, Annie – 11

“Quit pacing around the room!” Hailstorm complained.

Icicle stopped, but she still couldn’t stop herself from feeling excited. A bird cawed outside, as if understanding her excitement. A sudden thought hit her.

“Hailstorm, we forgot to pray to Buddha!” Icicle yelled in horror. They scrambled to the prayer room and prayed to Buddha for an exciting journey. At least that was what Icicle prayed for. Hailstorm probably prayed for a safe journey.

DING DONG! DING DONG!

The clock struck ten. Looking into each other’s eyes, they muttered, “Uh oh.”

They dashed back to Icicle’s bedroom, grabbed their bags, and rushed downstairs for the ceremony, getting there just in time for the announcement. Icicle’s father, who was king of Snow World, wore a cloak of fresh snow.

“Aha!” Icicle’s father called, spotting them. “Here comes our fellow adventurers! Let us welcome Icicle Winter and Hailstorm Autumn onto stage!”

The crowd cheered. Taking a shuddering breath, Icicle stepped onto the stage to face the people. Her people. Suddenly, she noticed that Hailstorm had not followed her and looked back to see Hailstorm standing there, frozen with fear.

“Come on,” Icicle encouraged her.

Hailstorm walked stiffly up the stage and stood there, as silent as a cat.

After an hour or so, the ceremony finished and Hailstorm and Icicle were about to start their journey. south. The crowd were still telling them to be careful when Icicle’s father appeared and pulled Icicle away from the crowd and Hailstorm. He whispered in her ear and she returned to the crowd, her face grave. They flew into the wild woods after many more goodbyes and kept flying and eating snacks. Icicle reached inside the snack bag and—

ROAR!

She dropped the piece of dried fruit she was about to put in her mouth.

“What was that?” Hailstorm whispered.

“Dunno,” Icicle whispered back.

“Bet it’s something big,” Hailstorm said.

Another roar was heard that made them both shudder.

A day later, they were still traveling and could hear roars every few minutes. A few times, Icicle almost fell out of the sky. It was making them nervous, but they couldn’t avoid it. There was nothing to do but block their ears.

Icicle yawned. It was already ten days since they left Snow World. Beside her, Hailstorm yawned too. Suddenly, a black hole in the middle of two trees caught her eye.

“Hey! Let’s go and check out that cave,” she beckoned to Hailstorm.

She called up every single wisp of magic in her, in case there was danger inside. Cautiously, they stepped inside. It was hot and dry inside. They walked further into the cave. And there it was. A dragon. A dragon the size of ten African elephants. A dragon with wings like spears. A dragon with teeth like daggers. A dragon with a breath of fire. Icicle concentrated her magic on the dragon and blasted it towards it. But—no, those were teeth sinking into her shoulder. The dragon was faster than her. The whole world blacked out.

Her eyes fluttered open. They surveyed their surroundings. She was in a cave, and she was lying on a massive piece of rock. She sat up. And saw the most outrageous sight in her *entire life*. Hailstorm was *chatting with the dragon*.

“HAILSTORM!WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” She screamed.

“Icicle! Listen! This is Seacess. He’s a friend. Friend, not enemy. Ok?”

“Explain.” Icicle crossed her arms.

So Hailstorm started explaining everything. From how Seacess recognized Icicle as a descendant of Snowfall, who had saved her life once, and realized her mistake, to explaining to Seacess about their journey to receive education from perfectionists of magic at the Mogao Grottoes, the sacred place of magic. Even though Icicle knew how to use her magic, she couldn’t control it very well. Hailstorm told her that Seacess had offered to take them there, because it would be quicker.

“Right, let’s go then!” Icicle swung her leg onto Seacess’s back and seated herself at the front. She helped Hailstorm on too.

At the Grottoes, their teachers merely congratulated them on reaching the Grottoes so early and put them in separate bedrooms, which was what Icicle had wished for. Icicle lay on her bed, staring at the large, bright, moonlit ceiling. She closed her eyes, then opened them again, shining. It was time.

Grandma's Tales – The Mogao Grottoes

Wellington College Shanghai, Kothapali, Shanvi – 9

Dolphin! Dolphin! Dollpphinnnn! Shouted Marigold. Gran said “it’s time for dinner “ Every summer, our family had our dinner in the moonlit patio. I could already smell dumplings and noodles out in the patio. When I got there, Marigold and Star were already slurping and chomping down noodles. “There’s nothing left for me!” I started having a tantrum. A gentle voice spoke, “ Dolphin, here’s your dinner dear.” It was grandma! So I ran to gran and gave her a big cuddle and chomped down my food, gloriously. Just then, I, Star and marigold all clamoured at gran to tell us a story. Gran smiled and began narrating her childhood memories of Dunhuang. Our gran questioned us, “Have you heard about “The Mogao Grottoes”? If not you’ve been stuck in a grotto all your life!” It was summer time I was and we had a school trip to the Mogao Grottoes which is located in the Gobi desert, Dunhuang district, Gansu province. We had all packed our bags and tucked ourselves to our seats and now the bus is all set to go. I and my friends started chatting about the Grottoes. When I looked outside, all I saw was a vast place filled with sand dunes. There was no sight of vegetation at all! Then, I rocked myself to sleep and I slept like a log. It was morning we reached Mogao Grottoes. When we got off the bus we could only see caves and monks all around. Our teacher managed to book a guide and we set off. The guide said “Let’s dig deeper into history. The Central Asian people acted like a middle men to hook the west to east by the means of trade. At the start of the rule of Emperor Wu Di, he was curious about what was happening after Central Asia. As a result two or three spies were sent to Central Asia and beyond to find out what was happening. As they ventured into the markets of Central Asia, they found out that the Central Asians were trading Chinese silk and getting more valuable items in return from white men. The emperor Wu Di found out there were other mighty civilizations than them. Han Wu Di was the first emperor who facilitated the route and established a new age of trade for the east and west. The Romans in the west went gaga for silk, lacquer ware, porcelain, jade and the Chinese admired horses, gold, silver and glass beads. Han Wu Di established a new route for the trade which now is called The Silk Road.”

After listening to the guide I was flabbergasted! Even though I was born and brought up in Dunhuang, I had never known the history of the trade route and how it had played a key role for the setting up of the Mogao grottoes. Many cultures and traditions were spread throughout China. Buddhism was spread all over China. The monks started preaching Buddhist principles. During the Han dynasty period the emperor funded the monks to paint the murals. The Mogao grottoes have a history of a whopping 1000 years– 4AD to 1400AD. Then we visited Statues, Paintings, Murals and sculptures. The monks were nomadic who built the grottoes. Well, we know that monks built the grottoes but... Who started it? Le Zun did. He had a vision of a thousand Buddha’s bathed in a golden light. This inspired him and some other monks to construct the grottoes. We then reached the first cave ever built in 366AD. Meanwhile, we were interrupted by our mom, who said it was time for bed. We were reluctant to leave our gran so we cuddled her and trudged to our beds.

I stepped outside into a bustling place filled with people. Their camels were carrying loads bulging with emeralds and rubies which sparkled in the sun light and the glass beads jingled at every step. I decided to walk further. Then, I noticed the murals which resembled all of the Tibetan kings who were great followers of Buddhism. Suddenly, my eyes drew towards a magnificent sculpture of Bodhisattva Manjushree and Shakyamuni Buddha. I heard a voice calling out ‘Dolphin’ I looked back and saw my gran! I immediately sprang into her waiting arms. Then I blurted out ‘How are you here?’ She replied ‘Sshh.It’s a secret.’ I’m going to take you to the LIBRARY CAVE. The cave filled with Buddhist scripts, Buddha sculptures, paintings and sculptures, Buddhist sutras, scrolls, documents in ancient languages including Tibetan, Sanskrit and Uygur, and even more than 50,000 manuscripts! Some say that in the diamond sutra there is a special mantra which can make us immortal! As we reached the LIBRARY CAVE I was looking at the murals display natural scenery, buildings, mountain and flying Apsaras. I and Gran walked towards the other grottoes happened to find Indian king, the chakravartian ruler Ashoka. Ashoka was a follower of Buddhism and harnessed Buddhism in his dynasty. We could feel the history as we walked through each cave. The oldest one we visited had an original painting from the 5th century Sui dynasty. I and gran entered into a grotto and I tripped over a stone and bumped into a sculpture and my knee was bleeding and I started sobbing. I felt I was being jerked and I opened my eyes and saw 8 googly eyes staring at me. I cowered and screamed I pulled the quilt down and saw Mary, Star, Gran and mom. They were ever so astonished then Gran asked me why was I sobbing so loud? I replied ‘call the doctor, my knee is bleeding!’ Gran inspected my knees and couldn’t find any blood. I leapt out of bed and started checking my knees. What! Gran don’t you know I tripped onto a sculpture in the grottoes. ‘Grottoes?’ my

Gran asked. 'Dolphin we are at home!' Then only it hit my head that I was dreaming about the Mogao Grottoes! Then mom left us as she has lots of chores to be done for the day. Star asked me to narrate my dream. So did Mary and Gran. So I told them of my visit to the Mogao Grottoes and how I met Gran and how we explored the Library caves. 'LIBRARY CAVE' Gran exclaimed 'But that is a famous grotto recently found in the modern times.' Marigold and Star said what an amazing dreams you had Dolphin.

'Mary, Star and Dolphin come here dears.' said Gran. The tale of the Mogao grottoes teaches us how Dunhuang was a hub for commerce and for Buddhist practices. Mural paintings of different dynasties show the different painting styles and reflect the political, economic and cultural conditions of Ancient China. Mogao Grottoes is the culture integration of Buddhism and Chinese traditional culture.

The Revenge of the Gods

Wellington College, Shanghai, Li, Dalen – 11

“Come on, quick! The show is about to start!” We all flew to the sofa in the living room when the deafening, dramatic music that introduced the start of National Geographic started to blare out of the speakers. My name is Jack, I’m 19 years old, and I’m now in London, England. I’m now in a gargantuan mansion as huge as four whole African elephants, just after filming my own wildlife survival TV show, like my father’s friend Bear Grylls. I am utterly exhausted, and nothing would mean more than a relaxing afternoon slumped on the sofa watching National Geographic. I have a Hitler-like mustache right above my upper lip, and a round face. To be honest, my whole body is round, but not like how other people say. I mean, no human has the body of a hippo and the head of an ant, do we? Another thing other people call me is a tiger. They think I am afraid of nothing, absolutely fearless. This is because that I could go into record breaking haunted houses without even breaking a sweat, and I would love to say that they are right, but that would be a lie. I have one titanic fear. Spiders. Such a simple fear, so simple fear that nobody would even suspect that I had it, but I do. Anyway, the music was playing, and our hearts were drumming out of our chests in hope of a good episode. My whole family was addicted to National Geographic. No, not just addicted. We needed it. It was like food to us, giving us energy and feeling, giving us life and thought. Oops. All that talking made me miss half the episode. The strange thing was, my mom, my dad and my brother’s eyes were not blinking, not even once. Before I even knew it, everyone started packing like there was no tomorrow. “What is happening?” I asked my brother, “Is there an air raid or something?”

“You won’t believe it!” He screamed back, “We are going to the Mogao Grottoes!” At first my mind was blank, but suddenly I remembered a geography class where I had learnt about it. The teacher even showed us a photo. The grottoes were beautiful, with lush green moss dotted randomly across the gorgeous carvings of various gods on the walls of each and every one of the caves.

In a blink of an eye, we were already wandering around the majestic grottoes, staring at the elegant bhuddas towering over us and the elaborate, ancient, astounding wall carvings littered across the crumbling cave walls. The actual scene was much more pretty than the photos, with more color and liveliness and basically more everything. Also, the grottoes had a special aura that could not be sensed in the photos. Eventually, we stopped at a gargantuan stone gate. There were four workers on each side of it, and one of them, and one of them was holding a sign which said: the sky God’s room. VIP only. “It’s our lucky day.” Whispered my mom. “We got VIP tickets.” We casually strode into the room, flashing our tickets at the bystanding guards who pulled the door open for us like we were members of the royal family. As the door slammed shut behind us, my eyes slowly took in the scene around us. People were staring intensely at the sky god, which also seemed to be the most important god, and it was covered with a thick layer of translucent white fog. It had eight arms, each holding various objects essential for survival, and also covered by uncountable carvings and a variety of fluorescent colors. “Sky god,” my brother snorted, “It’s just some kind of fake.” Strangely, as soon as he finished the statue’s eyes changed color. First to green, then to blue, then to orange, then to red. Red. The color of blood. The color of fury. “Run, quick!” I screamed, pushing against the immense stone doors with all my might.

“This must be some prank!” hissed another man. A growl was already audible, and my heart was drumming with fear while the others buried themselves in the vast variety of carvings. Slowly but steadily, the growl increased into a roar, and the ground started shaking like we in the world’s most powerful washing machine. Just as the other visitors were starting to get worried, a mysterious voice boomed: “You shall be punished.” Everybody immediately started shrieking in terror and pounded on the immense stone door, but it just would not even budge. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the roof of the cave opening, revealing multiple tons of dirt and rubble. The last thing I heard was the sound of rock hitting rock...

“Are you awake?” That was the first sound I heard when I finally woke up.

“Come on, the alarm clock hasn’t gone off yet.” I grumbled. I sat up, stretched, and looked around. Oops. I wasn’t at home. I was trapped in one of the most important caves in the Mogao grottoes. I was in the middle of a gigantic

crowd, with a short man trying to count us, but failing because we kept on moving around. The man had chocolate brown eyes, bizarre hair and a triangular shaped nose. Everyone were in small groups, sharing food and resources among themselves.” So we’re trapped.”I thought, while trying to somehow find a secret escape route by staring at the cave walls, but failing. Funnily, another huge rumble was building up.” Not again,”I thought “I survived it once already, and with my luck I won’t survive twice. I listened more carefully, and found out that the noise was from outside!

Suddenly, a gargantuan crane lifted the top of the cave. Whoops and cries of joy echoed across the vast cave, and teardrops formed in my eyes in thought of home.

The Magical Journey

Wellington College Shanghai, Lu, Hedy – 9

Long, long, ago, there was a group of sellers that sold colored glass. They traveled all along the silk road, but one day a big sandstorm separated them. Hua Shizhao was one of the people that got separated. Even though, she couldn't see clearly because of the sand, she heard a strange bell sound. She went closer to the sound to hear it because she thought it might be another travel group, but actually it was robbers. She didn't know what to do, she thought maybe she should stay and hide, but she realized she needed to go to the bathroom. She thought it would be best to start going to the Mogao caves, because it was the next stop on the trip, and she thought that her traveling group would be waiting for her there.

She ran as fast as she could, and finally she reached a long, dusty road. At the end of this road, there was a huge shape that looked like a cave.

Hua Shizhao decided it would be best to hide there. Once she entered the cave, she saw a carving of Buddha. She thought that Buddha could save her, so she hid behind his chair. However, once she had finished climbing up there, she realized that there was a hidden door. She tried to open the door, but she couldn't. On the door, there was a painting of the *thousand hand goddess*, on one of the palm's there wasn't an eye, there was a small Buddha. Hua Shizhao pressed that hand hard on the door, and it opened.

In the cave, she sees statues of Buddha, and many different types of colored glass. She is shocked! She wants to stay here forever, but she can't. She can only stay here for the night.

The next day, she wakes up, and goes on the long dusty road again. She finds her travel group, and they continue their journey along the silk road.

Adventures in Magao

Wellington College Shanghai, Tan, Jessie – 9

In the Gleason of the sixteen Kingdoms, there was a young writer who wrote a book...

Centuries later, a girl was reading the book in her garden. She felt her mind swirling. Her surroundings faded away. She could hear nothing but wind rushing past her ears. After a blinding flash of light, she woke with a jolt and found she was lying on soft sand in a totally different world. So different she had never ever known, no beautiful garden with colorful flowers and no birds singing in tall trees. She stood up wobbling. What she saw was nothing but enormous sand dunes. The furious wind slashed sand against her skin painfully. The strong sunlight blinded her eyes. After a while, she found there was a tall cave with a blurred figure standing not far away.

By the time she reached the cave, she was almost worn out. However, when she entered the cave, she was astonished to find that there were so many fantastic paintings on the wall. With the variety of patterns and colors, each painting seemed as natural as though it were living, telling some ancient stories. The little girl couldn't help stretching out her hands. All of a sudden, she was sucked into the painting before her own eyes.

She landed on a soft grassland. Thirst and hunger gnawed and weariness weighted her limbs. Suddenly, she noticed a deer dashing out of the bush. Its right leg was throbbing. In the distance, a hunter riding a horse raced over.

The little girl ran in front of the deer and shouted in a stern voice: "You should not hurt this deer!"

The hunter started to speak but the girl kept on saying, "The deer is actually a human."

"She's right", said the deer suddenly.

The small girl looked as surprised as the hunter. "I created a story to save this deer so how can it speak?"

"I was a prince and played tricks on my father. He banned me from his kingdom and turned me into a deer." The deer continued in a sad tone, "I need to help someone to compensate, otherwise, I can't turn back into human form."

"You can help me!" squeaked the girl, "I was sent here by the unknown."

"I think I can help you. But first, I must defeat the Dark King. Will you help?" asked the deer hopefully.

The deer bounded through dense vines and finally reached a tree with a hollow on its trunk. "What am I supposed to do?" asked the girl. "Fit your hands inside the hollow shape." ordered the deer. A riddle suddenly appeared on the tree trunk.

"Things to help you to defeat: the Sun's heat, books, kindness from a hook, magic, but not tragic."

"I know how to get books and get kindness. But getting magic is difficult if you don't want a single bit of tragic. Also, how do I collect the Sun's heat?", said the deer sadly.

"I'm sure we'll know what to do by the time we get to the library." The little girl said calmly.

When they got to the library, they chose two books. The first one is called <<how to trap heat>>, the second one is << how to get pure magic>>. "We need two bottles to trap heat and kindness," said the girl, looking around eagerly. The deer used his tail to brush two of his spots on his body. Magically, two bottles appeared in front of them. "My spots contained different kinds of things." The deer whispered with a mysterious smile. "Now let's find kindness from a hook."

"Great!" said the deer softly, "The magic mist helps you get magic while the tragic mist helps you get tragic. The bad thing is that these two kinds of mist were mixed together by the dark wizard—Mardred five years ago."

"I think I know how to make magic!" shouted the girl. Then she ran off leaving the speechless deer behind.

Within a second, she came back, with a feather and some cotton. Without a word, she pulled out a needle from her pocket, then brushed the feather against the needle. The needle went sparkly while the feather turned dull.

She sewed the needle in and out of the cotton as if there's an invisible thread behind. Suddenly, the needle turned dull and the cotton turned sparkly. Then she put the cotton into the bottle with kindness and closed the lid. "Finally, I get some pure magic!" whispered the girl excitedly.

“Let’s mix all the things together!” said the deer.

The things inside formed into a golden unicorn horn. The girl picked up the horn and she immediately turned into a unicorn. She then gave the horn to the deer and it put it into one of its spots. He turned into a unicorn too.

The girl who turned into a unicorn got a shiny gold mane while the deer got a sparky silver one. “Great! Let’s call ourselves Sparkly and Shiney!” shouted the deer happily.

Suddenly, something rushed past them. Shiney’s blood turned to ice. “It’s a Rury! They are murdered women. They want to drink unicorn’s blood to turn them into humans!” screamed Sparkly. She raced off without another word. Shiney dashed off after her. However, she couldn’t catch up with Sparkly. A narrow path appeared ahead. She followed it cautiously. “Where is Sparkly?” she wondered. Without warning, something rushed over. It was Sparkly, gasping and covered with mud. “I thought you were dead!” said Shiney with a sigh of relief.

“Let’s go and defeat the Dark King.” Said Sparkly, shaking her mane to get off the mud. “Let’s be his top advisors, Admos Wood and Kailer Smith when they’re on holiday. The dark king hates unicorns. We can take him to the Unicorn Party Land and then push him into the center of the unicorns’ circle.....

“ Ah! Admos and Kailer! You come back a few days earlier than expected!” the Dark King said softly but dangerously.

“Yes. Your majesty! We found out a way to kill all the unicorns!” said Admos.

The Dark King followed them to the circle of unicorns. They led him into the center of the circle.

“All the unicorns are under control. Your majesty.” A bright flash of light came out of those unicorns’ horns and stabbed into the Dark King. With a scream, the Dark King was burnt into a cinder.

After that, Sparkly became a handsome young man and Shiney turned back into the little girl.

The young man took out the golden horn from his pocket. “Hold it in your palms, turn three circles.”

The little girl took the horn from the young man and found she was in the garden again. Everything seemed like a dream. When she looked up, a sparkly bird was just flying over...

The Lost

Wellington College Shanghai, Thoma, Atia – 9

It's a long time since this pen touches this paper, but today was a crazy day...

Chapter 1

The bad beginning

We were looking at the depths of the Mogao Caves when she spotted the “amulet of the lost” behind the majestic statue of one of heavenly kings. Taking it off the holder she held it in her hands in a blink of an eye the amulet was gone...

Chapter 2

NO!!!!!!

“Where did it go” she said anxiously “nowhere” said a voice. Laughing it came out the Mogao Stealer Ha ha ha you're right. “What” “NO”

Chapter 3

The horrible horizon

“I'm going to start World War III” “No you're not” “What are you doing here?” “Stopping you” “Never” “I have armies and bombs” “He'll destroy the caves if he's fires the bombs we need to get out of this

Cave” “You're not going out” “He still has the amulet” “The amulet has magic that can help the good to destroy the evil” A flash of light the amulet sprung up into that air and

Chapter 4

Back to normal

..... and all of a sudden the Mogao Stealer died the army disappear “what about the amulet” she said as it float back to its original place.

Now writing in my diary about this crazy day I thought.....

Skylar's Magao

Wellington College Shanghai, Wong, Bella – 9

On Christmas holiday, Skylar's parents decided to go somewhere warm. Skylar's dad gave a suggestion, why don't we go to "Bella's island". Skylar asked, "What made you think of Bella's island? What does it look like?" Skylar's dad replied, " well it's actually a mountain, so maybe we should go there." "Ok, we will, 'said Skylar's mother excitedly. They started getting in the car, then they drove to Bella's Island. While Skylar's dad was driving, peaceful music was being played. Skylar and her mom even sang a song. Finally, they arrived.

The first thing they did was mountain climbing. They climbed really high. Skylar saw something really odd. She saw a door then asked herself "why is there a door?" She thought but she still didn't understand. She asked her parents but both of her parents said nothing also confused, they had a wired face. Skylar's dad being the adventurous type decided to have a look. He told Skylar and his wife "I'll be back, just wait right here." Then, he went in, Skylar and her mother waited and waited but Skylar's dad still didn't come out. Skylar's mum was worried so she also decided to go in. Skylar waited for an hour but both of her parents didn't come out. Skylar made a decision, she was going in and she did, she went in....

It was very dark inside. Then she suddenly stepped on something. She remembered she had her phone in her pocket, she took her phone out of her pocket then turned the flashlight on. She saw walls with carvings on them, it was beautiful. The thing she was stepping on was becoming watery. She used her phone to face what she was stepping on, she was stepping on water. Actually, it wasn't quite the water she thought, it was red muddy water. She kept on walking, and she saw a head with no eyes, only a big mouth. She got scared looking at this unknown thing. Luckily, it didn't have eyes so it couldn't see, but Skylar must be really quiet because the head has ears, she looked at the side of this place, she felt a tap on her shoulder, it was her parents. Skylar wanted to shout out, "You're here! You found me!" Just as she was going to do that, her mother put her right finger on her lips, Skylar knew what it means, it means "be quite". The three of them tiptoed away from the head, Skylar accidentally stepped on a rock and tripped, it was terrible. She made a loud BANG! sound when she tripped. The head also heard it and turned around. The head didn't like people in its cave, so it started chasing after the family. Skylar's dad shouted "RUN" at the top of his voice. The family saw some light white running and knew it was the door they came through. They went out of the door and closed it quickly.

They ran down the mountain and drove back home. None of them talked as they have never been so scared before but they all knew without talking they were never going back to Bella's Island ever again.

Song

Wellington College Shanghai, Yang, Yanis – 9

I am Song, a pine tree. How old am I? Let me think, time elapses like a flash of light. I am almost 2000 years old now.

I have been living in the Gobi Desert since I was a baby. The fierce sandy wind blew and was about to take me away with it. There were only my family and other tree families living there. The entire world was quiet and I like to look up at the starry sky.

I grew up as a teenager and one day I saw some humans. They moved here by horses and carriages. They even built houses. We call them people. People settled down adjacent to the desert and life was not easy for them.

Some years passed, one day a monk appeared, climbed up on a mountain and meditated there for some days. He left and followed by some men days after. They began to dig a cave and worked days and nights there. I stopped looking up the sky. I was eager to know what they were up to.

One night I was sleeping, someone was patting my arm and said, "Follow me." I looked around and no one was found. I was flabbergasted to see my feet moving to the mountain. Some magic power pushed me to the cave. The magnificent murals and sculptures crashed into my eyes. That was incredible.

Every night, I could walk and see the caves, more and more caves were built. I was obsessed with the beauty of the artifacts. They gave it a nice name, Mogao. People went to pray for a better life.

Thousands years later, one day some vicious and greedy men came, attempting to steal the treasure in the caves. I was overwhelmed by anxiety. Before I realized, I said, "Stop it!" The gang looked up and widened their eyes, never in their lives would they expect to see a tree talking. They yelled in fear and fled immediately.

That night the same hand touched my arm and said "Thank you buddy." I have never seen him in my life. Years and years have passed, I am old and weak now, however Mogao still flourishes and attracts people around the world to explore the glory.

Entering the Unknown

Wellington College Shanghai, Yuzuhu, Yuzuhu – 9

The awakening sky shifted to amber, then red, and the sun rose in a glorious explosion of pink and gold. Rustling on the treetops, the flock of birds welcomed the new day. Amelia gazed out through her cottage window as the warm air gently brushed her skin, like an artist painting a canvas. Slowly and soundlessly, she stepped out of her cottage, instantly being washed by the divine, fragrant aroma of the elaborate garden. Cherry blossom trees form an arch of pink leaves that created beautiful canopy above her. Amelia was enveloped in the vivid and sparkling treasures of Spring.

Amelia lay on the ground painted with white daisies and red poppies. ‘What a restful day!’ thought Amelia, immersing herself to the tranquility in such a haven. Suddenly a glittering blanket of butterflies hovering over a field of bluebells fascinated her. The butterflies had glistening, shimmering wings, and their bodies shone like a jewel in the sunlight. A gorgeous golden butterfly rose and fluttered away without noticing Amelia following it. She chased the butterfly and didn’t realise where she was going until she stumbled into a damp, dimly lit tunnel and was followed by a creaking reverberation.

The deeper she went into the tunnel, the darker it became until she completely lost the sight of the butterfly. It was too late.... As the tunnel closed in on Amelia, her unease grew tremendously, and she lost track of where the exit was. She wanted to wail but could not shake off the sensation that she was being followed and hence dared to make no sound, not at all.

Amelia faltered, froze to the spot, with only her heart heavily thudding in her chest. She was in a sheer panic. The next thing she knew, she felt anxiety infecting her body, yet she was forced by herself to gingerly edge forward into the unfathomable.

It was a seemingly never-ending tunnel, and took for ever for Amelia, but eventually, the tunnel became less gloomy and inky. Amelia knew she was approaching the exit, she hurried forward, dashing for the shadowy glow in the far distance. Quivering and shaking, she with all her might ran as fast as a tiger chasing its prey. Amelia could feel her legs burning and hear her chest heaving and gasping for breath, but she didn’t dare to halt until she came to the end of the tunnel with more mysteries to be unfurled.

Abruptly, Amelia stalled, gazed around, and watched streaks of sunshine sneaked through the gaps of the stones, projecting sparking shards that shimmered onto the ground. Wind shrieked through the hollows and gaps of the walls like a banshee haunting a graveyard. Amelia felt enchanted as she found herself encircled by mystical and majestic statues. Dithering and uncertain, she swept away the dust and debris of one statue, one by one, and exposed herself to unprecedented decaying artefacts and models. Some of them were so vivid, they shone like diamonds in the beamed light, while others looked so ancient, yet colourful, as if they were telling Amelia a tale of long, long time ago. Amelia couldn’t believe her eyes. Her fears were vanquished and swept away by immense curiosity, and her face was lit up by layers of paintings on the silk paper, rare collections of manuscripts, and tons of magical artifacts, that she can’t even comprehend what they were. Only time could tell.

History and mystery intrigued; Amelia knew with joy that she discovered an unknown world that was so magnificent. A path was laid down in front of her to explore the secret civilization.

Adventures at Mogao Caves

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Cheung, Tsz Hei – 10

Last week, Ben and I went to the fascinating Mogao Caves. We needed to prepare a lot of things before we went there. We brought hats, beverages, lots and lots of water, a camera, etc. There was so many things that we needed to pack two suitcases and two backpacks full of important stuff. At sunrise, we were ready to leave, and we got on a bus. The bus drove around the whole day and finally, we arrived at sunset at the splendid and wonderful Mogao Caves. When we got off the bus, it was cloudy but absolutely hot because we were in a desert in August.

In the evening, we checked in a hotel. There was an ancient China setting with low tables, big drawings of legends, and special Chinese water dispensers. At night, we ate a rich meal and enjoyed a show. We had a wonderful night at the hotel. We got a lot of rest because we needed all the extra energy to explore the famous Mogao Caves.

Early in the morning on the next day, we met our tour guides, Max and Sam. We got ready and went to the entrance of the Mogao Caves. Finally, we went into the Mogao Caves that were known as the second cave of wonders.

When we went into the Mogao Caves, it felt like a whole new world. There were as many paintings, artifacts, ancient tools, and sculptures as the eye can see. One painting told a tale about another land of happiness and prosperity, and that painting held the secret for entering that land. Another painting described the story about a person called Manjusri who met Vimalakirti once upon a time. I thought that the story was just made up of Buddhist theories. I did not really understand it but maybe archaeologists have another point of view. Another place in the Mogao Caves was a favourite for art lovers and history lovers – the Library Cave. In the Library Cave, there were a lot of paintings and scrolls that told fascinating tales or stories. It was also a place where pilgrims could read literature. Another fine, cultural painting was about someone named Bodhisattva leading a beautiful lady donor towards the Pure Land, where everything was pure in heart and everyone was very kind.

While we were looking at the wonderful arts of the Mogao Caves, we were separated from the tour guides. It turned out that the Mogao Caves were a gigantic place. We had no internet connection or phones, and we did not bring any maps. Fortunately, we could see the whole place from the top of a tower. On the tower, we saw the entrance. However, when we headed there, we found out that we needed to go through an almost infinite maze. When we walked through the maze, it looked like every time we saw light, it was a dead end. One time, there was even a pit of wooden spikes. When we successfully crossed it, it was a dead end, so we needed to cross it again. After what felt like a lifetime of searching, we finally found the exit, but we were still a mile away. While we were finding the exit, we came to a thin wall. 'Maybe we can smash this wall and go into the desert, then it'll be much easier to get to the entrance or maybe even find our hotel,' said Ben in Chinese. However, I replied, 'We shouldn't destroy public property.' When we argued and argued, suddenly, we heard the voice of Max. Luckily, the conscientious guide found us.

A few moments later, I heard someone coming and I thought they were the cats from the story that I saw in the Library Cave. The Mogao Caves were actually made by three-eyed cats which came to the Earth a long time ago. They weighed 300 pounds each. They had amazing tech like teleportation devices or planet-killing guns. They used their hair and a special type of coffee bean to create concrete, art, paint, and legendary artifacts. After they made enough things, they created the Mogao Caves and they died after that. About six centuries later, a monk found the Mogao Caves and finished what the cats had started. He used a tree trunk in the oasis to make wood and charcoal. He also ground the grit, gravel and rocks to make sand and forged weapons from stones and metals. When the monk renewed the place, he found a lot of paintings and tech made by the cats. After I cleared my head, I said, 'The three-eyed cats are still alive and are coming, run for your precious lives! Ah!' A few seconds later, everyone was running towards the maze, although the entrance had a fire on it.

Then I heard someone say that what on earth I was doing. I thought Ben said that, but it actually came from the direction of the three-eyed cats. When I took a closer look at them, I found out that they were tourists. I walked closer to them and asked, 'Where's the Mogao Caves' exit?' I waited quietly. A few seconds later, one of them replied

in a British accent, 'The exit's there.' Then he pointed at a tunnel with a sign saying 'Exit'. A few moments later, we got out and immediately got back to our hotels. Max was back to his RV to take wonderful and relaxing showers and a fine nap.

The Mogao Caves were a magical place where there were different kinds of art. Some caves were made for living, while others had art for hobbies like painting or art appreciation. However, most caves had art that unfolded stories or historical moments or both. Although I did not think the Mogao Caves were magical, I still wanted to visit such places again. Next time, I would not forget my maps again!.

The Secrets of the Mogao Grottoes

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Ng, Lok Yiu – 10

It was 2050 and two sisters, Sophia and Christina, were building a time machine for a science project. Christina was talking about the Silk Road. She had been learning about it at school. They both thought it was very interesting.

Just then, Christina's mum called. 'Girls, have you packed your things? It's time to go.' Christina looked at Sophia. 'Oh, we still haven't finished,' Sophia replied. 'Let's pack our things quickly. We can check it later.' They packed their things and went back to checking the time machine. As they stepped inside the time machine, Christina tripped and fell onto the control panel. Suddenly, the door slammed shut and everything went dark. Soon afterwards, the lights came back on and the door swung open. The year on the display said, '1896 AD.'

The girls stepped out. 'Where are we?' Sophia asked. Christina looked around, shocked. She saw some caves and a sign that said, 'DUNHUANG.' 'This must be the Mogao Grottoes on the Silk Road,' said Christina. 'That means ... the time machine really works!' said Sophia. 'This is so exciting! Let's go into the caves,' said Christina.

They went into a cave. It was so dusty with rocks everywhere and there were pictures on the walls. 'Wow! Look at this Buddha statue! I've never seen such a huge Buddha before!' Sophia said. The gigantic Buddha was lying down. It was as big as four buses. 'They call this place the 'Thousand Buddha Cave'. It's made up of 500 temples. Let's keep going,' said Christina. They went deeper into the caves and saw another enormous Buddha, but this Buddha had its hands together and it was sitting up. The girls were amazed.

After a while, the girls went back to the time machine and saw that it was glowing with sparks flying. Sophia said, 'That's strange. It shouldn't be like that.' The two girls stepped back into the time machine to find out what was going on.

Once again, the doors closed and everything went dark. When the lights came back on, they saw the year on the display read, '0004 AD.' The door swung open and they walked out. They saw some men dress in rags, dragging heavy stones and smashing rocks with giant hammers. 'What are you doing?' asked Sophia. One of them said that they were building temples. Christina asked another workman, 'Who are you building them for?' The workman replied, 'We are building them for the Tang Empress Wu. Everyone who lives here must build them or they will be punished.' Suddenly, a soldier shouted, 'Hey you, get back to work!' The frightened workman hurried away. Then the soldier looked at the girls and said, 'What are you waiting for? Back to work! If I see you chatting again, you'll be sorry you were born.' Christina and Sophia were scared, so they did what he said.

The girls worked very hard for hours. Later, two soldiers grabbed them and led them to a palace. The soldiers took them to the throne room. The Empress' son, the Prince, was waiting for them. The girls felt scared. 'Welcome to my palace,' said the Prince. 'I want you to feel comfortable while you stay here with us.' Then he looked at a soldier and ordered, 'Take them to the jail.' He looked at the girls and said, 'By tomorrow morning I will know if you are good or bad. If I am happy, I will make one of you my wife.' The Prince added, 'If I am not, you will stay in my jail forever.' The soldier took the girls to a cold, dark room with no windows.

The girls chatted inside the jail. 'This is a nightmare. I hope we wake up soon,' said Sophia. 'Being his wife is scary enough, but being here forever is even worse,' cried Christina. 'I just want to go home,' said Sophia.

The next day, Christina and Sophia were taken to the Prince again. He looked at them and pointed to a picture on the wall. 'In the picture there is a rich person and a poor person. Which is better?' he asked. The girls thought for a moment before they answered at the same time. 'Neither,' they said.

The Prince said, '...very good, you passed. Now who shall be my wife?' Christina started to cry. She told the Prince everything that had happened and about the time machine. 'We are so sorry,' she said. 'Please let us go,' cried Sophia. The Prince felt sorry for them and decided to let them go.

The Prince's best scientists helped the girls to make their time machine work again. The girls thanked everybody and said goodbye, then stepped back into the machine. Once again it went dark but this time when the lights came back on, the girls were back in Sophia's room. Just then, they heard an angry voice, 'GIRLS, I'VE BEEN CALLING YOU FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES. WE'RE GONNA BE LATE!' Mum stomped into the girls' bedroom, her face reddened with anger. Christina and Sophia had never felt happier to see their mum so angry. They ran and hugged their mum. 'We love you, Mum,' they said embracing her tightly. 'Yes, ok, I love you too,' said Mum. 'Dad is waiting in the car downstairs, so let's go.'

The girls grabbed their things and ran to the car. When they got in, their dad said, 'I was just looking at holidays for next year. I thought we could visit the Mogao Grottoes in China. I heard you girls talking about it all the time.' The girls looked at each other and smiled, 'Um, no thanks,' said Sophia. 'We just want to stay home with you and Mum this year,' added Christina. Dad looked at Mum, confused. 'I don't know,' said Mum, 'But they have been acting a bit strangely.'

A Trip to the Mogao Grottoes

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Pang, Hong Ching Clara – 11

Last year, six of my classmates and I were the lucky winners of a history painting competition co-organized by the History Club and the Art Club. Earlier this month, we went on a trip to explore the Silk Road in China. After a few exhausting days of travelling, we finally reached our destination – the Mogao Grottoes. The Mogao Grottoes are caves in the desert found more than one and a half millennia ago. However, about a thousand years later, the caves were forgotten.

Upon reaching the caves, we were mesmerised by the sheer size of them. There were hundreds of caverns. In the caverns, we found some of the finest paintings, sculptures and literature in the world. The first cavern we went to was filled with paintings. There were more than two thousand paintings in the cave. Despite being well-preserved, the paintings were dull yet somehow colourful at the same time. Most of the pictures had faded. This made them messy and confusing to understand. However, my friend, George, and I were particularly fascinated by the paintings. We kept gazing at the murals because we felt like there was a hidden message behind them. During the trip, we got so busy analysing them that we missed our teacher's call when moving to the next cavern.

We followed the message from the paintings which led us to another cavern. In that cavern, we did not see any paintings. We found plenty of old boxes instead. "Let's open some of these boxes. Who knows, we may find something cool," George said jokingly. Upon opening some of them, we found some dusty scattered photos and poorly written notes. In the second box, we found some small bones. We could not seem to figure out where they came from. Before giving up, we tried one last box. To our surprise, within that box we found there a few maps, some gold coins and a diary written by a pirate many years ago. I wondered, "Why had nobody found these before us?"

Upon examining the diary, we realised that the maps would lead us to some treasure along the Silk Road. While we were wondering if we should go find the treasure, we heard our teacher calling our names. George and I started to panic and quickly grabbed some gold coins, the maps and the diary before our teacher found us. When we left the cavern, we looked back and realised that the cavern was gone! We wondered if we were the chosen ones to find the maps and diary. Will it really lead us to some treasure?

After we went back to school, I reflected on what had happened. I learnt that we should not forget about national treasures like the Mogao Grottoes, as there is a lot of history associated with them and there may be a lot of interesting things within them. George and I are looking forward to planning another adventure to look for the treasures when we are older.

A Tale of the Mogao Grottoes

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), She, Pak Yin – 10

In a place of China, a news reporter suddenly remembered something that his grandpa said. “There was this place called the Mogao Caves. It is very secret since everybody forgot it. Maybe if you go there and report it, it will be great news!”. He wanted to check it out, so he grabbed his camera and went into the caves.

There were only a few coins on the ground, but they were quite new. The year on the coins was 1900. “How is this possible? This cave has not been found for a thousand years!” He looked around very carefully but slipped on a rock. When he thought he went to the wrong caves, he saw that the walls were not similar to the rocks. He took a rock and threw it against the weird wall, nothing happened. He There were only stairs to what seemed like a secret basement. He wanted to go in. Just as he went in, his camera went out of battery. “This is a bit like the Bermuda Triangle!” he thought. As he slowly went down the stairs, he was looking at the cave ceiling the whole time. As a result, he carelessly stepped on a booby trap. Poisonous gas was released. It made him unconscious. Someone dragged him away. When he woke up, he was in the basement, locked up in a cell. There were a lot of treasures such as diamonds and emeralds, with no ways to get out. His only plan is to wait for help.

A little boy that lived near that cave heard someone scream, so he went in. He saw footprints and fingerprints full of sand. He was still new to investigating, so he did not know where to start. One hour later, he felt bored so he wanted to go back home.

When he walked out of the cave, he slipped on a rock and fell down. He accidentally broke the weird wall and it opened stairs to the basement. He walked down and saw a terrible sight! The man was still alive but he was starving. He was so skinny that he was only bones!

A thief hid in a corner and said, “Hello, you’re very brave but I’m afraid I’ll have to take you out.” The boy did not know what to do. He ran quickly into the thief and made him fall. He was very surprised at what he did. Then, he saved the man. He took the thief’s keys and unlocked the man. He asked him to report to the police to arrest the thief. “Thank you. Thank you so much!” said the man.

The news reporter got a promotion and the boy told his family the story. They all lived happily ever after.

The Great Monk Who Built the Mogao Grottoes – Lezun

Ying Wa Primary School, Chan, Wun Tung – 11

He was riding on his camel's back and stopped after eight hours controlling it all the way from Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province. Then he took out a loaf of bread and his porcelain water bottle from his leather bag and had a short break to cool down a little.

"How on Earth can I survive in this long journey?" he said, miserably. It was the year 366, and he was shivering despite the thick wide-sleeve clothes he was wearing. The dusty air made him really uncomfortable, and he was surrounded by the dry desert in every direction. He was an earnest Buddhist, and a few days ago he had decided to be a monk. Monks needed to go to the White Horse Temple in Henan and complete a written test with a writing brush, in which he didn't have much confidence.

Now he was in Dunhuang, still a long way to go, but he thought he wouldn't make it through. He was completely exhausted, so he slept on the soft sand after finishing his bread, thinking of whether he would continue in his journey or just give up and be as normal as everybody else in his village. When he woke up, he saw something really peculiar. It was the great head of Buddha, whose long ears made his earlobes extend out of his head.

"Why... why are you here, Great Buddha?" he asked, in great surprise.

"Lezun, I know that you want to become a monk, don't you? If you really want to be one, you must build a cave here," said Buddha, in a deep voice.

"Why do I need to do so? It is very cold here and I want to leave this environment as fast as I can," said Lezun.

"The monks in the temple will need you to tell them what I told you to do," said Buddha, "and you need to bring evidence that you have completed the task." Lezun still wanted to ask Buddha another question but he saw many fairies afterwards. Lezun was curious about what he saw but they disappeared one second later.

All of a sudden, he found a shovel beside him, and he thought that must be what Buddha gave him. Then he transported the sand to somewhere else with the shovel's help and did his very best to make the largest and stables cave he could, which was one of the Mogao Grottoes. He felt very comfortable inside so he lived there with his camel and rode on it when he was bored. On the next day, he saw a paintbrush and some paint beside him, and being a good artist himself, he painted the fairies on the wall, which he had seen the day before. In the painting, they had beautiful pink lips, delicate little noses and hair with two braids on either side of their cute and round face.

After a few days, as he thought the food was scarcely enough for him, he decided to leave and arrive at the temple as quickly as possible. When he was packing his belongings, he took a closer look at his painting, appreciating how beautiful it was, but when his nose touched it, he was absorbed into its world! "Argh!" he screamed, and the next second he found that the fairies were all staring at him with curiosity. They looked just like girls, but each of them was only the width of an adult's palm.

"Run! Please don't go!" they yelled together. "We are seeking you for help!"

"We have lost our wings," a little fairy told him with a sweet voice. "A few days ago we had wings, but they were somehow gone suddenly. Without wings, we don't have magic powers. We wanted to explore this place but it turned out to be dangerous. Look! A volcano eruption has occurred, and that's why we are running! How can we go back home, which is on the other side of the mountain?"

"Uh... once I saw people setting off sky lanterns at the Lantern Festival, and maybe we can make something similar!" said Lezun. Now they were safe, for the lava was out of reach from them, so they stopped and the fairies accepted his suggestion. The land there was completely different from the desert. There were plenty of trees with birds chirping, and green grass could be found everywhere. The sky was blue and clear, with no clouds stopping the sun from shining onto the ground, so Lezun took off his jacket and wiped his sweat off using a handkerchief.

With the help of the fairies, Lezun successfully made a sky lantern with a basket so that all of the fairies could sit inside. He chopped wood from a tree and made a fire from it, and one of the fairies gave him a present in return.

After checking the wind direction, Lezun waved them goodbye while the lantern was flying in the sky, until it disappeared out of sight.

Then, he felt himself whirling in the air, and a bright light appeared in front of him. Everything was now back to normal! It was still daytime, and he noticed that he forgot to paint wings for the fairies, so he painted them back.

He was now no longer afraid that he would not be able to arrive at the temple, because he now believed that everything was possible with faith! Therefore, he rode on his camel and continued on his journey hopefully.

After three months, Lezun finally reached the temple. The monks asked him for evidence that he finished the task, and he suddenly remembered the present from the fairies. He opened the box and found that there was a pair of shiny wings! “Lezun, congratulations that you pass the test! You are now a real monk!” said an old monk in the temple. He was proud of himself because he completed all of the difficult missions with his strong faith, determination and self-belief.

From A Writing Assignment to the Mogao Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Cheung, Chun Wang Isaac – 11

I sat tiredly on my bedroom, which was filled with piles of battered, crumpled paper balls. The sky was dark, with grumpy clouds soaring over the gray, lifeless sky. I had been sitting there for hours. Beside my depressed body was a sheet of paper, proposing the words “HKYWA writing”. Frustrated about not knowing what to write. I scrunched and threw the worksheet away, leaving it landing on the floor in a heap. The worksheet shook dramatically, summoning a vortex which sucked me in, my sound fading.

Upon opening my eyes from the blinding light, I found myself in a rather unpleasant place. It was completely deserted, with little cracks running through the hot, dry land. Enormous sand dunes rose from the ground, acting as roadblocks, further stopping any would-be survivor around, leaving only sand and dead bushes for the barren wasteland. I was about to recall what happened, when a group of men came by on camels. There was no time to think.

“Where are you heading?” I inquired the group of men.

“We’re going to the Mogao Grottoes to do research,” said one of them. “Would you like to join us? We could use some extra people.....”

When I nodded, the kind-hearted men welcomed me on their camels warmly. They wore brown hats and boots, with cloaks like a cowboy’s.

The road to the Mogao Grottoes was very dull. Although we could see camels, lizards gradually, it was always either animals or dead bushes or other animals again. The most interesting was a particular camel I spotted just then, which had something on his back. Wait—that’s not something, that’s someone—rob.....robbers!

The robbers had ugly, cruel looks. They had tall, chubby bodies which were covered in rough, leather clothing. They all had cold eyes and round noses, with a dropping mouth with gold teeth underneath. On some of them were deep scars representing victory, and all of them had a symbol on their clothing. Quick as a flash, a robber took out his rifle and fired a shot, narrowly missing one of our men. Then, a “tink” sound rang, and the robbers’ lethal weapon had disappeared. Other robbers pulled out their guns, and the same event happened also to the unsuspecting criminals. Without their weaponry, the robber panicked and ran for life, until they were out of our sight, into the blank desert.

Just then, a man in our gang surprisingly pulled out all of the robber’s guns. We were astonished.

“Just needed to give them the old-fashioned grapple-hook,” said the man, “name’s Paul Pelliot. I’m off to find the treasure of the Mogao Grottoes. Used the grappling hook to ‘confiscate’ their guns. Oh, and can you find the treasure with me? If you find it, I’ll give you something special.

It was agreed to rest through the night. After eating some corn bread for breakfast, we continued our road to the Mogao Grottoes.

After some close encounters with robbers (again), we had finally arrived at the Mogao Grottoes. From far away you could already see the gigantic silhouette, but when close-up, it was truly a sight to behold. The magnificent architect had tall, stone walls surrounding it, and staircases and rooms stretched out both sides of the wall. Where the walls met were a towering eight-story building, and it was decorated by curved rooftops and elegant, patterned walls.

There was no time to waste. We split into two teams: one for the renovation works, which started to refresh the paintings on the walls immediately; and the other, which consisted of Paul and me, went into the interior to explore.

The men were just done refreshing a coat of painting when we heard an air-splitting cry. Paul! We ran to him anxiously. Fortunately, he was only mildly injured. On the other hand, he seemed to be sitting on some sparkling items—manuscripts!

Looking carefully at the first manuscript, a fellow historian found that it dated back to the year 868—that's older than the oldest printed book! The other script seemed different. It was ... a treasure map!

Following the instructions, we first had to find the painting where the sun at noon shines on, for some reason. After a tedious while, I saw a blur ray of light slowly trailing across the wall, and stopped at the exact frame of an ancient piece of painting. We gazed thoughtfully at the artifact, which wrote "to find the next clue, enter the first room." — that means the treasure map room!

When we backtracked back into the treasure map room, however, things changed drastically. The former environment of all its glory had disappeared. Surrounded by mist was a blank room. Unwary of the dangers ahead, we stepped into the room carelessly. A low rumble followed by a mild earthquake, and thick, stone barriers covered the room, effortlessly trapping us inside. The place had turned into an arena.

Out of nowhere came the artifacts, alive. Smoke billowed out of their bodies. They chanted, "Drop that manuscript, or we shall eliminate you from existence," Extremely frightened, I trembled and dropped the manuscript. Suddenly, the symbol in the script started glowing, and the artifacts returned back to their position as if nothing happened.

The large, drastic change to the room seemed to have revealed a secret chamber. Inside was, about 300 artifacts, waiting to be discovered! These must be the legendary treasure Paul talked about! As a reward for finding the treasure, Paul winked and gave the treasure map to me. Suddenly, the map turned into the writing assignment and the vortex appeared, echoing the words "writing idea found".

I was sitting in my bedroom for hours. However, I picked up my pen and started to write. Well, you're reading it now!

The Second Shower of Golden Rays

Ying Wa Primary School, Choy, Tung Lam – 11

“Wake up! Wake up!” shouted Wanhe, a Buddhist priest. It was the Tang Dynasty, and Wanhe was shouting for the monks in the Mogao Grottoes to wake up. That day was no ordinary day, for the Monks had learnt about the fall of the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan to the Islamic conquerors from Kashgar. That day was the day when the monks would seal the library cave, then escape, to avoid any destructions to the Buddhist establishments in the grottoes. The cave temples were named Mogao for it was built in the tallest peak of the desert, and the monks knew that this fact endangered them, since the temples would be easy to spot. They had to act fast.

The monk’s first destination was the library cave, for they wanted to seal it. The reason for them to do so was because it contained over 50,000 manuscripts, scrolls, and booklets filled with sacred Buddhist information. If the people of Kashgar found them, the books would be burnt. Led by Wanhe, the monks sealed the cave entrance with tons of dirt until it blended in with the walls. Their next goal was to escape.

On their way out, they passed the Sleeping Buddha Cave. It contained sculptures of thousands of Buddhas, and the monks stopped to pay their respects. As the leader, Wanhe led the monks in to a prayer. While the monks were chanting, Wanhe thought he saw the 16 metres long Buddha’s eyes open slowly, and a ray of gold shot out, then vanished. He didn’t mention this to the others, because he thought he was mistaken. After that the monks prayed to the Gauntama Buddha, who is regarded as founder of Buddhism. Then Wanhe once again saw a streak of gold light come from the sculpture’s eyes. What he didn’t know was that the rays meant an arrival of some sort of spirit, and he would soon find out.

Maybe you’re wondering: Why did the conquerors of Kashgar want the monks dead? The answer is simple: They were Christians. But there were no Christians in China! Yes, but these people come from the west of China, outside its boundaries. And since the grottoes are near the Silk Road, which was used by the people of the West to leave and enter China, that meant the Christians would soon arrive. And also the cave was built in Sanwei Mountain, the highest point of the desert, so the Christians soon spotted the mountain. Then Siwilltong, the leader of the troops from Kashgar, shouted out, “Fellow brothers! I have spotted the demon’s nest! Let us march on!” His words roused a chorus of cheers from the army. As for the monks, they heard the stampede above the caves and made a run for it. That was the end, they thought. Or was it?

Very soon, the party of Kashgar arrived in front of the grottoes in Dunhuang. Then Siwilltong announced, “Troops! Thy entrances of Hell lie before us! By the power of the Lord, we must enter!” Then again a chorus of cheers arose from the army. And on the other side, the monks stopped running, and Wanhe said gravely, “By the power of the Jade Emperor, let us march on and meet our enemies.” So both sides continued on.

When the two groups met, the leaders approached each other. A solemn conversation started. “Here is the leader of thy demon!” shouted Siwilltong. “Open up to the Lord, and thou shall be forgiven.” “Never.” replied Wanhe, calmly. “You shall not pass.” “Then by the power of our true lord,” boomed Siwilltong. “You shall die!” But still the monks stood, not even flinching. “If you want to pass,” said Wanhe, “then you must step over our corpses, looked by the devas above.” He gestured to the Thangka on the ceiling of the entrance, about the size of 792 square centimetres. “Very well.” growled Siwilltong. “Then we shall fight.”

Now you must know the monks had a huge disadvantage: They had no protection. Their fight was based on nothing but their belief. And on the split second when the Christian priest’s blade reached the Buddhist priest’s chest, a miracle happened. All the Buddhas, be it sculpture, be it painting, their eyes glowed a shade of gold. A ray of gold struck Siwilltong’s blade, saving Wanhe. Then the paintings above shot out thousands of rays. It was as if history was repeating itself. Wanhe sure felt that way because he knew legend has it that Yuenzun, creator of the grottoes, saw a shower of golden rays, so inspired, he started building the caves.

This was the second time it happened.

The second shower of golden rays.

In the confusion, the golden rays merged into a golden ball. It then said, “Christian Siwilltong, is this what you seek. Is this hatred, this war, this fear, this confusion what you seek? Isn’t it peace that your God yearns?” “Who are

you?” demanded Swilltong. “I am you. I am also Wanhe. I am everything. And I am here to warn you, that what you are doing is wrong. I am no Lord, nor Buddha, but if you dedicate your belief to something, and try to achieve its purpose, then the something exists. Just like Wanhe, he dedicated himself to Buddhism, and now he is fiercely protecting this place, because he believes that Buddhas exist. So if any of you dare harm another believer, he shall pay the ultimate price. “With that, the swirling mass vanished.

“I don’t know what sorcery this is, but I’m not falling for it.” Shouted Siwilltong, keeping his cool. “Brothers, charge!” But with these words, no cheers came, because Siwilltong slowly turned to ashes. With that, the people of Kashgar had a breakdown. Words like “heaven help us!” and “I want my mommy” were spoken. The monks were safe, without having any men to die.

A mysterious voice sounded out in the distant, “Believe your belief...”

The Mogao Labyrinth

Ying Wa Primary School, Kwok, Ho Lam – 11

For years, the Mogao Grottoes have fascinated mankind, ancient scrolls containing knowledge about Buddhism, paintings and sculptures, immortalising the Buddha. But recently, archaeologists have discovered a new cave, and they plan to send in two of their finest explorers to retrieve some valuable information.

“Do you remember what we’re looking for?” asked Martin to his fellow archaeologist Bruce.

“Of course I remember, we’re looking for more pieces of the Gandharan scrolls right? The oldest and most famous Buddhist scroll ever?” answered Bruce confidently.

Martin and Bruce have been best friends since first grade, and they have both decided to go down the path of exploration and discovery, it’s an understatement to say these two know each other well. Even though they are best friends, they don’t have a lot in common. At least on the outside. Martin has blue eyes and dark hair, he was quite tall and usually had a serious tone. He doesn’t make too many jokes but that isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Bruce has hazel eyes and blond hair, he’s a little shorter than Martin and he’s a lot more relaxed.

Martin looked up from his map, “Right on. So... You ready to go inside? Hold out your torch.”

The two carefully marched up to the entrance of the cave and ventured inside. There were lines of books and the walls were covered in paintings, a large clay statue sat at the end of the room, holding up one hand. The two explorers instantly recognised that this was the meditation mudra, which symbolises wisdom, this was often done during meditation.

“The Gandharan scrolls have a birch coloured cover so if you see anything similar to it, just let me know.” Martin said while scanning the room.

“Hey Martin,” Bruce suddenly said, “Can you come over here for a quick second?”

Martin walks over to Bruce and his eyes locked onto the thing Bruce found, it was a lever.

“I don’t think we should pull this, even though this was from ancient times it could be a trap.” Martin said with a shaky voice.

One thing you should know about Martin is that he is a very calm person, he doesn’t get nervous easily, so his voice getting unstable must mean he is *really* nervous and concerned about this lever and what it can do.

“It’s probably just a lever to open a door. That might be where the scrolls are hidden! We should go for it.” Bruce said, a little bit too relaxed for Martin’s liking.

Bruce was always the one that was more carefree, he always thought of the best-case scenario, which explains why he wasn’t even slightly concerned about the lever in this cave.

“No, we really shouldn’t –”

It was too late, Bruce had pulled the lever, different clicks and ticks began immediately and a cracking sound began, the floor was pulled underneath them and they fell down into a ravine.

“Ugh... Where... What is this place?” Martin said while getting to his feet, “Bruce... Bruce? Where are you?”

Bruce was right next to his feet, unconscious.

“Bruce no! Wake up, wake up! You can’t leave me now, I need your help! What do I do, what do I do... Oh!”

There was a pool of water a couple of metres away from them, Martin put his hand into it, and lucky for him, it was cold. It should be able to wake up Bruce. Martin cupped his hands and poured a little bit of water of Bruce's face, and sure enough, "Ah! What happened?" Bruce screamed, his voice echoing throughout the entire ravine.

"You pulled the lever and we fell down here, I told you it was dangerous! Why didn't you listen to me?" Martin said, sounding angry and scared at the same time.

"Well, I thought it might be the key to finding the scrolls! We would be famous for it! It contains so much information! The first Gandharan scrolls told us about the birth of the Buddha and his early years, maybe this will tell us about the fall of the kingdom of the Buddha! No one has ever really known what happened, there's only been theories!" Bruce reasoned.

"It's not worth us risking our... Wait what's that over there?" Martin paused mid-sentence, staring at a shining yellow object at the end of the ravine.

They walked close to the stone pillar that had the object on top of it, it turned out to be three shapes, a triangle, a square, and a sphere.

"What are we supposed to do with these?" Bruce asked.

"I'm not sure... there's a little box like object in the wall, maybe it has something to do with that?" Martin said while reaching out to hold the shapes.

"I think we're supposed to choose a shape that's suitable for that box." Bruce suggested.

Martin nodded to agree with him, "Which one is the suitable one though... Oh! I think I know which one it is! There're three shapes right? I think we should pick the sphere, if my memory serves me well, the sphere is the sacred shape in Buddhism. There are a total of three shapes, and there are three spheres in Buddhism, one for the Earth, one for the sky, and one for the atmosphere. It seems perfect, three shapes, one sphere that has to be a connection!"

Bruce's eyes lit up, "Oh my word, you're right! I think we should choose the sphere, if we get it wrong, it was nice meeting you in this life. If we don't make it out of here, I'll see you in Tushita."

They put the sphere in the box, and there was a rumbling sound, the box lit up a bright shade of green, and a gust of wind blew them back up into the Mogao Grotto.

"Hey, look at this weird birch coloured thing," they both said in unison.

Skippy's Mogao Grottoes Adventure

Ying Wa Primary School, Milas, Mitch Christopher – 11

An urban legend, a dusty mystery— these are adjectives that perfectly suit the wonderfully mysterious caves of the Mogao Grottoes. Skippy, the young adventurer, would love them. ‘Who is this Skippy?’ you ask. Well let me tell you about him. Skippy is a brave and clever modern-day detective and adventurer.

One extraordinary day, Skippy and his friends, Hennesy and Farren, were relaxing at home when an old yet friendly-looking man walked up the sidewalk and over to him.

“I have a treasure map from my grandfather. It’s a bit torn, but I’ve always wanted to see where it leads to,” said the man.

Skippy looked at the ancient map. Though not knowing exactly where it led, he could see some faint letters on the scroll.

With a sense of curiosity, he searched online, and found what he was looking for—the map was of the famous and mysterious Mogao Grottoes. Skippy told the man that he accepted his request, and he would give whatever he found from the map to the man – excluding his finder’s fee of course!

They took a direct flight from their hometown, Mitchton, and not long later, they arrived at the fabulous Mogao Grottoes. Wonderfully stacked caves lining perfectly on every row of the grottoes, one upon another, colourfully illustrated pictures surrounding every bit of stone wall. Although some ancient monuments might have fallen or collapsed, some statues still looked brand new after restoration. Little did the three know that within this fabulous network of caves were a multitude of cavernous tunnels with each and every part of the tunnel walls being fully engraved with undiscovered secrets that were created long ago.

Skippy, Hennesy and Farren went in the caves and looked at the ragged map, and instantly recognized the area. The map told them about a lever found on the head of one small sculpture. Luckily, that sculpture was so small that no one had noticed the lever before. They found the statue and turned its head, and a little stone door in the tunnel wall creaked open. Nobody had noticed since all of the people were too busy sightseeing. They went into the dimly lit corridor, and the stone door shut behind them. They were in total darkness, until suddenly torches magically lit up and showed them the path onwards. Next to them were stone carvings of ancient people and faint paintings that were worn away over the years. Skippy noticed one of the paintings, and began to translate the worn letters into English – “We the keepers of this tunnel, as this is the place our true creator built himself. We built this monument to honour him.”

Skippy knew they were unearthing secrets from ancient times, so they decided to keep on trekking through the damp and murky passageway. Enormous Buddhist statues lined the walls. Soon they arrived at a room. It seemed like a magical place. All the paintings here looked as if they had never been touched before, since they were all very vibrant. They didn’t look worn out at all! Between the paintings, was a door, gold-plated, and with figurines of Buddhist monks engraved on it. They opened the door and slowly walked in, Skippy was still holding the map.

“We’re almost there, we just have to go through this room!” exclaimed Skippy.

They arrived at another room. Everything was made out of pure gold. A Buddhist statue was standing in the middle of the room, with luscious golden flowers blooming around it, and also water flowing in tiny gaps in the ground. Although they knew the treasure was ahead, something caught their eyes, a sign made out of gold, engraved in big, bold Chinese letters, telling them that onward was the library. But to get in, they needed to find a book made out of pure gold.

Somehow, Farren had the luck of the Irish, and found the golden book hidden in the base of the statue. He took it, but mistakenly, also triggered an ancient trap. Dozens of arrows shot out from the ceiling. Fortunately the trio dodged the arrows in time.

They inserted the gold book into a slot next to the door, and the library doors opened. Inside, rows of scrolls, books made from animal skin, and bamboo etchings filled the room. Torches illuminated the aisles, making it bright. Everything amazed them, though none of them decided to take anything because everything was too precious. They exited the library, and then went to find what the real treasure was.

Entering the final room of the library was going to be glorious. When they opened the final golden door, gold light flooded in. They had found the treasure: it was the creator Lè Zūn's finest work — One thousand Buddhas made of pure gold bathing in glistening gold light, which was from the gold ore hanging on the top of the caves, all illuminated by the wooden torches hanging on the walls. This treasure was priceless! Skippy couldn't wait to share it with the world.

After staring at the amazing sights, they decided to go back the way they came and go to find the man who had given them the map. When they arrived back at Mitchton, they saw the man pacing up and down the street they lived on. The man asked, "Did you find the treasure?"

Skippy replied, "Yes, and thanks for your treasure map. We unearthed a brand new place greater and grander than all of the other caves."

"What is it?" The man asked.

"It is a cave which holds the thousand golden Buddhas of Lè Zūn."

The man told Skippy to show the public to the place, and so he did. Now everybody could enjoy the newly-discovered Mogao Grottoes, including scientists and adventurers, who will be happy to help find more secrets about the wonderful Mogao Grottoes.

The Tales of Dong The Monk

Ying Wa Primary School, Sze, Long – 11

Li Dong was sent to the palace by the Genghis Khan Emperor for a secret mission. He had no clue what the “mission” could be, and why he was chosen, as he was such an ordinary farmer, who was also a widower. Dong had many wrinkles since his twenties as he worked industriously on field days and nights. Other than that, he seldom talk to others as he had a mole covered half his left cheek which made him abased of himself.

As Dong walked into the palace, the Genghis Khan Emperor greeted him with a feast, and said, “Anda! You must be Li Dong! Good to see you. Have you heard of the ‘Diamond Sutra’, which is the oldest printed book? It was told that the one who own this book will have wisdom and power! I need it to help me to unite the tribes! I think it’s in a cave, which is somewhere near the southeast of the centre of Dunhuang. Go and get it for me!”

Dong replied in confusion, “Yes my majesty, but why did you pick me? I’m nothing but a poor farmer. I don’t think I am able to complete your mission.”

The Genghis Khan Emperor replied, “You are a middle-aged man, with eleven fingers, a mole on the left cheek... Perfectly matches the description of the ‘chosen one’ from the rumour. Do not let me down! Anda!”

Dong left the palace and started heading to Dunhuang, wondering if he would ever reach there. He traversed through jungles, deserts, and he even climbed tens and hundreds of tall mountains. When he reached Dunhuang, there were scars all over his body.

With pain and tiredness, Dong entered a medieval village for a rest. Suddenly, he saw an infant cry in pain, with a lot of blood all over him, who was being attacked by a cow. Without hesitation, he rushed over there, fought the cow and rescued the baby. He did that thousands of times to stop the cows at home from escaping so it was just a piece of cake.

An impoverished lady who wore torn clothes and had no shoes, who seemed to be the parent of the baby came out in tears and said, “Thank you for saving my baby! You are so fearless and kind. Here’s my pickaxe to show appreciation.” Dong accepted the gift and continued with his journey.

Sometime later, he met a famished and skinny boy who had no arms, and was begging for money. Although Dong had little food left, he gave some of his bread to the poor boy. The boy was in tears as he was extremely thankful, gave him a gourd water bottle to thank Dong.

Many days later, Dong came across a cave which was called the Mogao Grottoes. There were hundreds of temples and a lot of Buddhist paintings and sculptures inside. It was quite creepy for him as all of them seemed to be looking at him. He searched through the temples, one after another, and in one of the smallest rooms which wrote “Library caves” on the walls, he finally found the “Diamond Sutra”! He was so relieved as he couldn’t believe he could complete the mission so easily.

When he touched the book, the walls started crumbling. He started to panic so he snatched the book and start running back the way he came. However, he saw three scary-looking shadows in that hallway. In fear, Dong ran the other way to find somewhere safe. As he was running, the art on the walls came alive and stretched their arms to catch him. He eventually reached a dead end and a huge boulder was rolling toward him. He saw a crevice in the wall so he used the pickaxe to mine through it. Luckily, it broke easily as it was almost as thin as paper. He squeezed his body through the small hole to save himself from the danger.

Dong leaned on the wall for a rest, he panted so hard and many drops of sweat were dripping down his neck. Tears flowed down Dong’s face, and his eyes were redder than tomatoes. Then, the light sob became a painful cry as he whined, “Why did the Emperor do this to me? Why did these statues come alive and hunt me down? Why...”

As he was too exhausted, he took out the gourd water bottle for a sip. Something in front of his eyes emitted a shiny light, and he saw a big Buddha. The Buddha had 108 dried snails on its head, and it sat in front of Dong with its legs crossed. A strong deep voice came out from the Buddha, “Man, the pickaxe on your hand is from the Lady of Kindness, which shows your wisdom and courage. The gourd water bottle on your waist is from the Monk of

Mercy, which shows your generosity and your willingness to sacrifice. You are the chosen one to come here to spread Buddhism. Are you willing to stay here to continue to write down the history of Buddhism?”

“Of course...”, Dong knelt down and said sincerely, he knew immediately that the one in front of him was the founder of Buddhism, the Shakyamuni Buddha.

A severe shake later, the Mogao Caves were then covered by sand and no one could find it until millennia's later. It became a system of 500 temples. Inside, thousands of Buddha caves, lots of wall paintings and massive amounts of documents were found witnessing the cultural, religious activities of Buddhism.

In the twentieth century, Monk Wang Yuanku re-found the Library cave by accident. When he opened the cave, an old monk which was believed to be Dong said to him in a weak voice, “You are finally here, please pass the treasure of Buddha to future generations”. Then the old monk lied down on the floor and transformed into a statue made of mud.

The Golden Bohdi Tree

Ying Wa Primary School, Tsang, Hau Hei – 11

Thomas woke up, starting a new day of his third year at the Dunhuang Academy. He entered the classroom at precisely eight o'clock. His teacher, Professor Fan Jinshi, smiled at him – he was not late, at least for a day!

Professor Fan started to talk about a Chinese painter called Zhang Daqian, “He was a famous painter, famous for his paintings of scenery. When he went to the Mogao Grottoes, he realized that there were two layers of paint on the cave drawings. Therefore, he scraped off the first layer of paint to see what was beneath it, causing damage to the cave drawings...” Thomas started dozing off, he found the Mogao Grottoes a very boring topic! “And under the first layer of paint, he found” Professor Fan continued, “words etched on the cave wall. According to the myths, the words were ‘Find thy child who seeks thy last cave. “I do not believe in myths, but, well, that’s what it said.” Professor Fan shrugged. At this moment, Thomas snapped awake. What was inside the ‘last cave’?

When the class ended, Thomas rushed to the library, a place that he seldom went, to search for more information about the words on the cave wall, but with no success. He decided to ask Professor Fan. However, she was very sensitive about the topic. She became frustrated in the middle of the conversation, “That is all I know! Stop bothering me! Do I seem like a superstitious person?”

The next day, Thomas finally found a dusty, leather-covered book. The author was Zhang Daqian! He borrowed the book immediately. When he went back to his dormitory, he started reading the book. The Mogao Grottoes did not seem so boring anymore! He found out from the book that there was a little hole in the Library Cave. Zhang Daqian had used a lot of ways to enlarge the hole, but failed. Thomas did some online research and realized that modern people did not know about the hole. Maybe the hole led to the ‘last cave’! There was only one way to find out about the hole – going there by himself. Thomas decided to set off at once the Christmas holiday started.

Time flies, it was already the first day of the Christmas holiday, Thomas was on the train to Dunhuang. The Mogao Grottoes were much more spectacular than what he had expected. There were over one thousand Buddha statues, and an even larger amount of cave paintings. All were crafted by the ancient people. Following the hints he got from the book, Thomas entered Cave 148 and saw the hole, for it was shaped like a hexagon. Thomas came up with a fabulous plan.

That night, to avoid the guards, Thomas snuck into Cave 148 in a flash, the hole was glowing brightly. Thomas looked around the cave; there was a statue of the Reclining Buddha. It took up most of the space of the room, being sixteen metres long. It was made of clay and lying sideways on a platform rising a few feet off the ground. Then, the minute hand struck twelve. The Buddha’s eyes snapped open, glowing gold. It was all so eerie. Thomas stood petrified, rooted to the floor. Then, a kind voice spoke in his mind, “Thomas, why are you here?”

Thomas stammered, “Who...who are you? Why do you know my name?”

The voice spoke in his mind again, with a grand tone, “I am the Reclining Buddha, and I know all and see all.”

Thomas said respectfully, “May I know more about the glowing hole?”

The Buddha replied, “That is blinded even from my vision, all I can provide you is this piece of magical stone, which I have been guarding here for decades or even millions of years.”

Thomas said, “Um...okay.” Not knowing when had the stone appeared in his hand, nor how would the stone help him. Then, abruptly, he realized that the stone was shaped like a hexagon; same as the hole on the wall.

Thomas inserted the hexagonal stone into the hole, and it fitted perfectly! At that moment, the wind calmed, soft Chinese music was heard and a golden light blinded Thomas just as the wall slid open sideways. There was a little cave. Thomas estimated the cave’s floor was four times four square metres in size. In the centre of the cave, there was a bodhi tree which seemed to be made of gold. The strangest thing was, under the tree, there was a Buddha, mediating. Thomas stood there for a long time. The Buddha’s eyes opened and said slowly, “Sit, and we will talk more.”

Thomas asked, “Sit where?”

The Buddha replied “Why? On the floor!”

Thomas sat down and the Buddha explained, “You are the ‘child’ in the prophecy. “Thomas’s jaw dropped at this moment. The Buddha continued, “Why? It’s because you are the descendent of me, Sakyamuni.” The Buddha

explained, “I once was a prince from Nepal, after mediating under a bodhi tree, I became Buddha. I want to give you and offer you something now.”

The Buddha handed him a scroll made from tree bark, which was also golden. The Buddha said, “Give this to your dear old Professor Fan, she will need it. As for you, you will become the next guardian of the Mogao Grottoes. Do you accept the job?”

Thomas replied sincerely, “Yes, I accept the job.” At this moment, the Buddha dissolved into light and vanished.

Then, Thomas fainted and found himself back in his dormitory!

He went to the staff room, clutching the golden scroll tightly in his hands. And handed it to Professor Fan. He started to explain, but he was cut off by Professor Fan. She said, “You are the next guardian of the caves, right? Then you should do your job well.” Then, she turned and walked away, leaving a bewildered Thomas in the middle of the corridor.

Secret Adventures of Wang Yuanlu – Discoverer of Mogao Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Wong, Yan Sum Ambrose – 11

There was an ancient cave in the past that has been discovered several times, and 735 caves were found, but one particular cave had been the most mysterious, and there were still many secrets that weren't discovered.

Wang Yuanlu, a Chinese Taoist and an itinerant monk, discovered this extraordinary cave while exploring the ancient Silk Road. But what we don't know is, this monk actually had an unknown adventure inside.

When he discovered the Library Cave, he found out that one of the 'residents' in this cave was Hongbian, who used this cave as his retreat in his lifetime. He found that many manuscripts and documents dating from 406 to 1002 were heaped up in closely packed layers of bundles of scrolls. Wang picked up a book on the ground, and read, 'Heaped up in layers, but without any order, there appeared in the dim light of the priest's little lamp a solid mass of manuscript bundles rising...' Suddenly, the ground below him began to move...

'Wha...' Wang said with mystification. Then everything went blank.

'Wake up, you monk,' In his ears came a muffled voice, 'Ignore him, you idiot. He is dead already,' Came another voice, which was scabrous. He opened his eyes. There were two men, planning on building a thing on a cliff.

'Finally, dude,' Said one of them, 'We were arguing about building 734 caves or 735 caves yesterday, but you came out of nowhere, and stopped us from building. I am Yuezun, and beside me is Faliang. Who are you?'

Wang was stupefied. He had been dead to the world for one whole day? In his brain was: one second prior to now, I was exploring an unknown place, and one second after, I am in an unknown place, watching two insane people bickering? He was anguished, but what could he possibly do? He said, 'I am Wang. But please tell me, where am I? I came from the twenty-fifth of June, 1900.'

'What in the...' Faliang stumbled, 'What are you talking about? Whatever. And by the way, why is it fundamental to build a thousand golden Buddhas?'

'Yeah, we need to build the cave according to my abnormal vision – the golden light to the edge of the cliff with a thousand golden Buddhas and celestial maidens singing and dancing,' replied Yuezun.

Finding out that the two monks totally ignored him, Wang asked more deafeningly, this time intentionally, 'What are you two doing, and most importantly, where am I?' But they ignored the questions, so Wang gave up and raised another inquiry, 'Can you let me see what you're doing?'

This time, Yuezun replied, 'Look behind you.'

Wang looked, and saw a very intimate view. This was the cave he was exploring just now! Wang was puzzled and bewildered. Did he travel back in time to when the extraordinary cave was built? He was only a small Taoist and he transtemporally travelled? But he found this hard to explain to two quarrelsome monks, so he simply said in wonder, 'Wow!'

Yuezun said, 'So do you know what this is related to?'

Wang said with ease, 'This cave is related to Chinese Buddhism, and there are numerous manuscripts and scrolls that are about apocryphal works, workbooks, Confucian works...'

Faliang interrupted him, 'How do you know about this? Are you a spy from other places?'

'No,' Wang said, and he thought that this was a good opportunity to explain why he was here and how he got here, 'I am from the future, and...' While he was saying, five people appeared out of nowhere, each with a katana, saying ferociously, 'Give us the Buddhism manuscripts, or we will sever you,'

Although their approach was adequate, Yuezen still said, 'No, the ones who will be severed are you.' Then, the five people fell down, each with a razor-sharp blade in their head.

'Ouch! That is excruciating!' Faliang said, guffawing, 'And by the way, what should we name this incredible cave?'

Wang quickly suggested, 'You could call the caves "Mogao Caves", because "Mogao" in Chinese means "peerless", and nothing is higher than it.'

'The first thing you've said in the whole day which is not pointless,' Faliang and Yuezun said contemporaneously. Then they started bickering again, 'Then how about the 735th cave?' 'We should not add one more cave!'

Wang was in a battlefield of voices again. 'Stop!' He shouted, without thinking how inappropriate that was, 'I think you should add the 735th cave, and name it the Library Cave, and store most of the manuscripts and scrolls there, and...'

'How demanding!' Yuezun said, half serious, 'But why not?' And they started planning to build it.

'Should we add an enchantment to it? Yuezun asked, 'I mean should we make a series of words, and that will make them travel here?'

'Great idea!' Wang and Faliang said simultaneously. And they said in sync, 'Heaped up in layers, but without any order, there appeared in the dim light of the priest's little lamp a solid mass of manuscript bundles rising...' Instantaneously and suddenly, the sky turned grey, and the ground began to move.

'What in the...' Faliang and Yuezun said extemporaneously. Then everything turned black.

Wang opened his eyes, and found himself in his original place, holding the book. He swiftly dropped the book frantically. 'This book is cursed,' He said to himself, 'I will call it the Diamond Sutra!' and he went on exploring the inexplicable cave. But what he didn't know was, the book magically added this time adventure to it as soon as Wang left, and 'signalled' its writer: Xiantong to alert everyone that the Mogao Grottoes, which had been hiding for years, was officially discovered.

The Truth of the Magao Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Yau, Cheuk Lok – 11

Many believe that a monk dug a cave which later became the Mogao Grottoes. However, nobody knows the truth. This story happened in AD 366, and no one has heard of it yet.

A monk named Yuezun sat down to rest. He'd been walking aimlessly in the desert for days. He was supposed to send a message to Dunhuang, but now he was lost. As he sat, Yuezun saw some green on his left. He squinted. It seemed like a mountain. Seeing something else than sand and sky, he forced himself to trudge on. After a million years, Yuezun got to the foot of the hill. This skinny monk wasn't keen on exercise. He had never felt so tired.

Then he looked up and saw a cave at the hip of the mountain. Yuezun ran up and stepped inside. "Who goes there?" A voice boomed out of nowhere.

Yuezun fell with fright. Afraid not to answer, he spluttered, "I...I am a...messenger...you...I..." He kept stammering uncontrollably.

"Spit it out." The voice echoed, and the tone was calm, with a tinge of amusement. Those were harsh words you would expect the shyest people to roar out.

Yuezun calmed down a bit and said, "I am a monk from—"

"The Shaolin Temple? I am one too." With that, there was a rustle behind Yuezun. He whirled around. The monk was behind him! The monk stood up and faced Yuezun. He looked as old as time, with an overflowing beard and wrinkles all over his ancient face. "Why did you come?" Yuezun told him along with his name. "I see. I don't have any name," The monk continued. "You may refer to me as The Abbot. I was once one. I will show you the way out if you promise not to say anything about the things you are going to see."

Yuezun asked, "What?" and added, "My lips are sealed." when The Abbot raised one of his eyebrows.

"Good. Come." The Abbot strode deeper in the cave and opened a door, camouflaged in the darkness. In there was cave with three passageways. They walked in the middle one, and Yuezun gasped.

This cave had murals, paintings and sculptures. Gold bars were to be seen as well. Some books were stacked neatly in a corner.

Yuezun picked up a book and opened it gently. It was coated with dust. Who knows how many years it had been there, with an inch thick layer of dust? The monk put it back and stared at a mural. The celestial fairies were beautifully sketched, although the colours were fading a bit. One was flying while playing a pipa, whereas most of the painted figures were singing. A statue of a Buddha stood, towering over Yuezun. The eyes gleamed, and as Yuezun looked closer, he discovered that they were in fact diamonds, as big as eggs.

The Abbot said, "This is priceless treasure, and I would not like the monuments to be taken away."

Yuezun agreed. "How many caves are there?"

"Five hundred. All of them filled with objects of value. Sometimes tomb robbers nose in even though there aren't any tombs. He continued. "I fight them off. Like this one here. Look, behind that statue."

Yuezun looked up, startled. He saw a masked robber skulking in a corner. The reason The Abbot saw him first was because he was experienced, and his ears were sharp. The robber held a knife as well, and he tried to kill Yuezun first. Suddenly, a hand reached out astonishingly fast and grabbed the robber by the neck and pulled him away from the frightened monk.

The robber also seemed shocked at his speed. He slashed at the monk, but he dodged it and rolled on the floor. When he stood, there was a staff in his hand. Then as they fought, The Abbot unmasked the robber. Yuezun saw that she was furious.

Yes, the robber was a woman.

She yelled a war cry and rushed forward, slashing crazily like a madwoman. The Abbot rushed to fight her. After a minute, The Abbot discovered that this wasn't an easy task, as the robber was so angry at being unmasked. Sometimes the knife would strike the wall, making cracks appear, but the woman would immediately use all her strength to pull it out and fight on recklessly. It seemed like they had already fought for an hour. When they stopped, they both gasped for breath. Both had streams of sweat trickling down their foreheads.

Suddenly the robber threw the knife, which embedded itself in the Abbot's chest. Yuezun yelled in shock and ran there to help. Blood was streaming down like a raging current. The Abbot smiled faintly. "Yuezun...you cannot go out through the maze, so keep north-east always. Remember that. Also, if you want...tell others about this place I built, you can. But do not mention me." Then the Abbot died.

Yuezun said a prayer, glared at the woman, and left. As he got down from the mountain, eight rumbles were heard, along with a scream. "Alas," Yuezun sighed. "Only four-hundred and ninety-two caves are left. The robber is dead as well."

Yuezun told everyone about the cave, but he changed the story. Most of the clay statues were Buddhas, so he said that after seeing the image at a thousand Buddhas on the hill, he built a cave and put the relics there. He said that he would like the objects to stay. He named this marvelous place "The Mogao Grottoes".

So ends the tale, and if you wonder why I know of it, it is because I found Yuezun's diary by accident and I can retell the story. Till now, we still do not know how old the caves are, since it wasn't Yuezun who built it, and Yuezun's diary did not note down how old the Abbot had been when he died.

Hidden in the Grottoes

Ying Wa Primary School, Yuen, Hei Wang – 10

Legend had it that thousands of Buddhist monuments remained undiscovered. Riddles in some Buddhist paintings were written in such mystifying ancient Indian runes that even the Dunhuang archaeologist, Paul Pelliot, could not make heads or tails of them.

Max and his archaeologist companion Michael had been cracking the riddles of the Buddhist monuments for years, and finally pieced together their destination – the Mogao Grottoes Cave 323, already visited by millions. Doubtfully, they arrived at the cave. Max found a golden lotus under a clay Buddha statue. Curiosity pulled him to touch it. They fainted in a mystic light.

Woken up by the heavenly music of Buddhist fairies, Max and Michael found themselves in a lush green landscape. A giant Buddha statue stood on a golden lotus at the center of the oasis. His right hand spread out, as if he was showering the land with a peaceful blessing. Monks of various nationalities walked around.

An old man with eyes emanating wisdom helped Max up and said, “Hi, I’m Rahula and I manage this oasis. Who are you?” he paused. “How did you get here?”

Still bewildered and frightened, Max and Michael told Rahula their experience truthfully.

Rahula scrunched his eyebrows. “The lotus in the Grottoes showed your fate with us. In the Tang Dynasty, Buddha appeared to monks Le Zun and Fa Liang in a vision, prompting them to construct the Grottoes in Dunhuang. Buddha summoned worthy people, including Buddhist craftsmen, traders on the Silk Road, and monks by his divine influence to conserve the Grottoes. Since Buddha has revealed you this place,” Rahula explained, “you can stay for one month before making up your mind – to stay permanently or never return.”

Rahula toured them around the oasis. By the crystal-clear lotus pond, a group of pious monks were practicing their mantras. Great golden temples in Tang Dynasty style gleamed under the smiling sun. Next to them stood a holy Bodhi Tree, stretching into the clouds as a bridge from heaven to earth.

“Yes, we will stay for a month first,” Max and Michael chanted, almost in unison. They were already getting jittery about making the most influential archaeological discovery of the century.

Having stayed with the monks for days, Michael met an acquaintance, Sarvajna. Sarvajna confided to Michael, “I have been here for years. The hustle and bustle of the outer world always calls for me. How I long to reunite with my family – but alas, I must stay!” Pointing at a dark cave at the west end, Sarvajna wailed miserably, “See that door? There’s an orb lodged into that door. It’s a piece of Śarīra! It seals shut the door to Naraka, the realm of hell. Rahula and we are the guards of the door.”

Meanwhile, an evil plot streaked through Michael’s mind. Whispering conspiratorially in Sarvajna’s ear, he said, “I’ll strike you a deal. You steal the Śarīra for me, and we leave together. You will get handsomely rewarded.”

Sarvajna’s jaw dropped to the floor after hearing the wicked idea. However, the demons of temptation triumphed over the angels of responsibility finally. “Outer world! I’ll be coming soon!” he murmured hopefully.

One night, it was Sarvajna’s turn to guard the Śarīra. As he plucked the Śarīra out of the door, he felt a twinge of guilt. The door rumbled, like the yawns of a titan that had just awoken.

Stealthily, Sarvajna sneaked back to the rendezvous to meet Michael – the golden lotus. Sarvajna pressed the Śarīra into Michael’s palm. He touched the lotus and a beam of light shot out from it. Sarvajna asked Michael, “Aren’t you coming?”

“Not yet. I want to witness the plan the demons cooked up.”

Sarvajna stepped into the beam of light and instantly disappeared.

Rahula rushed out from his quarter. “I had a terrible vision of the door to Naraka, the realm of hell, opening,” Rahula panted. “We must pray to avert this horrendous disaster.” A thunderous rumbling boomed.

Everybody, including Max, got to their knees and started praying. Beads of sweat lined their heads. Only Michael peered from the shadows, intrigued.

The cackling of the demons got so deafening that the monks had tears welling in their eyes. It was their end. Rahula commanded, “Keep on praying. Buddha is in our hearts.” A wave of calmness washed over the monks, like the tides of the ocean. All the sacred Buddha paintings and sculptures in the Mogao Grottoes glimmered, radiating a fearless aura. The Buddha statue in the middle of the oasis gestured the Abhaya Mudra, symbolizing fearlessness. A strong wind kicked up and slammed the door to Naraka. The rumbling stopped.

As the monks prayed, Michael suddenly saw his past lives. He was the reincarnation of Devadetta, a jealous cousin of the Buddha trying to kill him. Over the past millennia, Michael had reincarnated as hungry ghosts and cockroaches. He finally built up a store of good karma enough to become a human again. Now he threw it all away with greed... He admitted his wrongdoing and sobbed, “Please cleanse my sins.”

Rahula said sympathetically, “Your sin is heinous, but you can be purified in the rest of your life here.” Two monks carried away Michael, who was still mouthing “Thank you”.

Rahula turned to Max. “Now I must tell you the whole truth,” he said seriously. “I am a Bodhisattva, here to protect the Śarīra which keeps the door to Naraka shut. Our mission is to prevent demons from spreading temptation and evil among humans.

“Now you know our duty, I must ask the big question – will you stay or leave forever?”

“Sorry, I have other responsibilities in the outer world,” Max responded firmly.

Rahula nodded and showed Max back to the golden lotus portal.

At the entrance of the Mogao Grottoes, Max looked ahead at the azure-blue sky. He thought about the monks. They stayed loyal to truth while facing temptation. Whether to succumb or to stay true – this was the true secret of the Mogao Grottoes.
